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Emotional Lag, Change Speed, and Adaptive Breakdown in Organizations

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly pursue change through compressed schedules, overlapping initiatives, rapid iteration, and recurrent restructuring, yet the temporal demands imposed by change are rarely matched explicitly to the time employees require to interpret events, regulate emotion, integrate prior experience, and reorganize action. This Original Temporal Theory Article develops the proposed Temporal Theory of Emotional Lag to explain how such mismatches may contribute to adaptive difficulty without assuming that rapid change is intrinsically dysfunctional. The theory defines Emotional Lag as a proposed temporal mismatch between change-generated cognitive-affective processing demands and the time and recovery capacity available for their integration. It distinguishes change speed from perceived pace, sensemaking delay from indecision, emotional processing from negative affect, and adaptive breakdown from organizational failure. The proposed mechanism links change-event tempo and density to appraisal and sensemaking demands, emotional-processing requirements, and conditional adaptive consequences. It also specifies temporal-schema fit, work rhythms, uncertainty regulation, prior change memory, collective-response configuration, leadership pacing, and support as boundary conditions. The article develops propositions for temporal mismatch, interference accumulation, recovery, adaptation, collective emergence, and organizational pacing. The contribution is conceptual rather than validated: it does not establish a universal speed threshold, causal sequence, or implementation protocol. Testing requires repeated, event-sensitive, multilevel designs capable of separating temporal process from workload, leadership, job insecurity, individual differences, and other rival explanations.

Keywords: Emotional lag, Change speed, Adaptive breakdown in organizations, Acceleration and human readiness, Temporal theory of emotional lag, Theoretical propositions

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Introduction

Organizational change scholarship depicts implementation and employee response as multidimensional rather than reducible to a single managerial lever, while recent synthesis continues to show substantial conceptual variation in how change responses are understood [1, 2]. This matters because organizations increasingly organize transformation as streams of initiatives rather than isolated episodes. A workforce may therefore encounter simultaneous demands to reinterpret roles, relationships, routines, technologies, and expectations. The central problem addressed here is not whether employees favor or oppose change in a general sense. It is whether the temporal architecture of change can exceed the time required for people to process what successive changes mean, emotionally absorb their implications, and reorganize action before another consequential demand arrives.



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Time is already recognized as integral to strategic change, and concurrent initiatives may interfere with one another when their demands or meanings become inconsistent [3, 4]. These findings make a temporal account plausible, but they do not establish that speed itself causes failure. Change can be rapid without being disorganizing, and slow change can remain confusing, threatening, or poorly coordinated. What requires explanation is therefore a mismatch: the relationship between the pace, density, sequencing, and overlap of change events and the evolving processing capacity of recipients. This article treats that relationship as a temporal problem rather than assuming that acceleration is simply an intensified version of workload or resistance.

Employee perceptions also complicate any objective account of pace. Subjective perceptions of organizational change have been linked to affective resistance and well-being, indicating that experienced change cannot be inferred from formal schedules alone [5]. Two employees exposed to the same calendar may experience different temporal demands because they enter the change with different histories, interpretations, resources, social environments, and responsibilities. The analysis must consequently separate event timing from perceived urgency, individual processing from collective response, and formal implementation cadence from enacted experience. It must also avoid treating visible compliance as proof that cognitive and emotional integration has occurred.

Human readiness is therefore treated as dynamic. Readiness at announcement may coexist with later temporal strain when implementation generates new meanings or contradictory demands, while initial uncertainty need not imply breakdown when resources and time permit adjustment. The relevant unit of explanation is an unfolding relation between organizational pacing and changing human capacity.

This Original Temporal Theory Article develops Emotional Lag and integrates it with Change Speed, Sensemaking Delay, and Adaptive Breakdown. Emotional Lag is not a validated scale or latent variable; it is proposed as the mismatch between change-generated processing demands and time available for appraisal, emotional integration, recovery, and adaptive reorganization. The contribution is a falsifiable temporal theory with explicit boundaries, not a claim of causal validation, exhaustive coverage, or universally safe change speed.

Conceptual foundations of emotional lag

An adequate foundation begins with appraisal. An affect-based model of organizational change proposes that recipients evaluate change events in ways that shape affective and behavioral responses [6]. This supports treating emotional response as connected to interpretation rather than as noise around an otherwise cognitive process. Yet appraisal does not imply that emotion is uniformly negative or that resistance is the inevitable behavioral expression. Emotional Lag therefore cannot be defined as dislike of change. Its proposed object is temporal: whether appraisals and affective responses have been sufficiently integrated for adaptive action relative to the arrival of subsequent demands.

The structure of change response is multidimensional. Validation work on the change-response circumplex distinguishes activation from valence, showing that reactions cannot be represented adequately on one favorable–unfavorable continuum [7]. Emotional Lag therefore cannot be inferred from emotional intensity, positivity, or negativity alone. A future measure would need to capture temporal incompleteness while remaining discriminable from valence, activation, readiness, resistance, stress, and fatigue.

Temporal carryover also matters. Memory-based theorizing argues that previous changes can shape how current changes are interpreted [8]. Prior experience may simplify or complicate processing, so TTEL treats change history as a conditioning influence rather than evidence that memory necessarily creates lag. Stable dispositions, leadership history, occupational context, and current resources remain credible alternatives.

Finally, organizational time is not exhausted by chronological duration. A conceptual review of time as a research lens distinguishes multiple ways in which temporality organizes management phenomena [9]. This justifies separating elapsed clock time from experienced pace, sequence, rhythm, and process. Emotional Lag is thus proposed as relational rather than absolute: the same interval can be sufficient under one configuration of demands and insufficient under another. It is not equivalent to resistance, burnout, change fatigue, low readiness, or recovery need, although these states may coexist with it. The literature establishes the relevance of appraisal, affect, memory, and temporality; it does not establish Emotional Lag as a validated construct.

The proposed construct also requires level-of-analysis discipline. Emotional Lag is initially an individual-level temporal condition because appraisal and emotional integration occur through situated actors. Team or organizational lag cannot be assumed from individual reports. Cross-level theorizing requires evidence that unresolved processing becomes shared, clustered, coordinated, or consequential through interaction. This restriction prevents the theory from treating a workforce as emotionally homogeneous simply because members experience the same formal change program.

Change speed and sensemaking delay

Change Speed should not be treated as a single number. Temporal-schema theory proposes that actors may entrain to, resist, or create temporal structures when expectations and environments do not align [10]. Identical formal pacing may therefore be experienced differently. TTEL preserves distinctions among calendar compression, event frequency, overlapping initiatives, and deadline urgency; none alone establishes insufficient processing.

Work rhythms add a meso-level mechanism. Research shows that recurring patterns of work can shape strategic-change enactment and synchronization [11]. Rhythm is therefore distinct from speed: rapid transition may remain intelligible when work patterns support adjustment, whereas slower change may remain disruptive when cadence is irregular. Evidence about particular rhythms does not establish a universal cadence.

Change appraisals can themselves evolve over time. A three-wave longitudinal study found reciprocal dynamics between change appraisals and work engagement, demonstrating that recipient responses should not be modeled as static reactions fixed at announcement [12]. This temporal reciprocity is compatible with the possibility that meaning is revised as implementation unfolds, but it does not measure a discrete delay in sensemaking. Sensemaking Delay is therefore introduced as a proposed process descriptor: the time required to achieve an interpretation sufficiently coherent for adaptive action. It is not synonymous with slow decision-making, confusion, incompetence, or reluctance.

An event-based perspective suggests that everyday positive and negative events differ in their capacity to attract attention and shape change experience [13]. Frequency and strength can increase interpretive demand, but high frequency is not automatically overload. Meaning, expectedness, reversibility, interdependence, and resources may alter the burden. TTEL proposes that unresolved meaning may accumulate when consequential events arrive before prior interpretations stabilize.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for emotional lag, change speed, and adaptive breakdown in organizations.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Emotional Lag, Change Speed, and Adaptive Breakdown in Organizations

Construct or component	Definition	Problem addressed	Evidence basis	Distinction from adjacent concepts	Proposed role	Uncertainty	Boundary statement
Change speed	Rate at which consequential organizational changes are introduced, revised, sequenced, or replaced	Prevents change from being treated as temporally neutral	Established temporal-change literature	Distinct from workload, urgency, and change magnitude	Antecedent condition	Objective and perceived speed may diverge	Rapid change is not inherently dysfunctional
Change density	Concentration of multiple consequential change demands within a limited period	Captures temporal crowding not visible in single-project schedules	Evidence-supported adjacent construct	Distinct from speed of any one initiative	Proposed demand-intensification condition	Appropriate measurement unit remains unsettled	Density does not establish overload by itself
Temporal fit	Degree of alignment between organizational change rhythms and actors' expected or workable temporal patterns	Explains why equivalent schedules may produce different experiences	Evidence-supported temporal principle	Distinct from simply slowing change	Boundary condition	Fit may differ across roles and levels	No universally optimal cadence is implied
Appraisal and sensemaking	Interpretation of what change means, why it matters, and what action it requires	Links change events with cognitive and affective response	Established component process	Distinct from communication exposure or information volume	Processing mechanism	Interpretations may remain provisional	Interpretation does not establish readiness
Sensemaking Delay	Proposed interval during which consequential change remains insufficiently interpreted for adaptive action	Identifies unfinished meaning formation	Original temporal synthesis	Distinct from indecision, incompetence, or disagreement	Proposed mediator/process	No validated measure or threshold exists	Delay may sometimes preserve flexibility rather than indicate dysfunction
Emotional processing capacity	Available capacity to acknowledge, regulate, integrate, and recover from affective demands	Recognizes that adaptation requires more than cognitive understanding	Evidence-bounded conceptual synthesis	Distinct from positive affect, resilience, or emotional suppression	Proposed capacity condition	Capacity may fluctuate within persons and teams	It is not a stable trait or diagnostic score

	associated with change						
Emotional Lag	Proposed mismatch between change-generated processing demand and available cognitive-affective integration time	Provides the article's central temporal explanation for unresolved adaptation	Original proposed construct	Distinct from resistance, fatigue, burnout, stress, and low readiness	Central explanatory construct	Construct validity and discriminant validity remain untested	No numerical lag threshold or diagnostic cutoff is proposed
Adaptive response	Ongoing adjustment of interpretation, behavior, coordination, and role enactment in response to consequential change	Separates adaptation from immediate acceptance or compliance	Established organizational-adaptation domain	Distinct from short-term performance continuity	Outcome domain	Adaptive forms vary by context and level	Temporary disruption may reflect learning rather than failure
Adaptive Breakdown	Proposed condition in which persistent unresolved temporal mismatch weakens adaptive response capacity	Specifies the downstream consequence theorized by TTEL	Original proposed construct	Distinct from organizational failure, resistance, or burnout	Conditional proposed consequence	Temporal ordering and causal mechanism require testing	Breakdown cannot be inferred from poor performance alone
Collective lag configuration	Proposed pattern of convergence, dispersion, asymmetry, or clustering in unresolved processing across members	Prevents individual lag from being averaged automatically to the team level	Original multilevel extension	Distinct from mean team readiness or shared affect	Proposed cross-level mechanism	Emergence conditions remain unknown	Individual lag does not automatically constitute collective lag

Note. Constructs explicitly labelled proposed are original theoretical contributions of this article. The table specifies conceptual boundaries rather than validated measures, thresholds, causal effects, or diagnostic categories.

Emotional processing and adaptive breakdown

Emotional processing in change is neither purely private nor reducible to self-control. Longitudinal evidence shows that emotion regulation can be socially distributed, while workplace research indicates that responses to others' emotions vary by strategy and context [14, 15]. Colleagues, supervisors, routines, and interactions may therefore shape processing capacity, but the evidence does not show that social regulation always improves adaptation. Timing, relationship quality, power, task demands, and the emotion involved remain boundaries.

Recovery research supplies a second boundary. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that recovery from work-related effort is consequential for employee functioning [16]. For the present theory, recovery is relevant because processing requires opportunities for demands to recede sufficiently for restoration and integration. Yet recovery need is not Emotional Lag. An employee may need recovery without experiencing unresolved change-related meaning, and a person may remain cognitively or emotionally behind a sequence of changes despite appearing rested. The proposed model therefore treats recovery opportunity as one contributor to processing capacity rather than as a proxy measure.

Processing capacity may also fluctuate across a change episode. A person who can integrate one demanding transition may have less capacity when several demands overlap, while social support or clearer sequencing may restore capacity without changing the formal project deadline. TTEL therefore treats capacity as state-like and context-sensitive rather than a fixed personal attribute. This claim remains proposed and requires repeated measurement rather than retrospective inference.

Adaptive response must also be bounded carefully. Meta-analytic research shows that team adaptation depends on the adaptive stimulus and context [17]. Adaptive capacity is therefore conditional rather than a stable organizational property, and individual emotional states cannot be elevated directly to team-level conclusions. Heterogeneous reactions, compensating roles, uneven information, and differing exposure mean that performance continuity can coexist with unresolved processing, while temporary disruption may reflect learning.

Adaptive Breakdown is an original proposed construct, not an observed syndrome. It refers to conditional weakening of readiness, coordination, constructive coping, or adaptive response when unresolved temporal mismatch persists and regulatory resources are insufficient. It does not follow every episode of Emotional Lag and is not equivalent to failure, burnout, withdrawal, or resistance. Workload, job insecurity, leadership, resource scarcity, role conflict, and stable individual

differences remain alternative explanations. Existing evidence makes the pathway plausible but does not demonstrate causation.

Proposed temporal theory of emotional Lag

The Temporal Theory of Emotional Lag (TTEL) begins by distinguishing clock time from experienced time. Subjective-time scholarship shows that organizational actors interpret temporality in ways not reducible to objective duration [18]. TTEL proposes that strain emerges when consequential change demands require interpretation and emotional integration faster than those demands can be processed for adaptive action. Neither rapid change nor strong emotion alone constitutes Emotional Lag; lag is the proposed mismatch between demand and processing capacity.

Uncertainty is a central boundary condition because effective functioning does not always require uncertainty to be eliminated. Theory on uncertainty regulation argues that more certainty is not invariably better and that effectiveness depends on how uncertainty is managed in context [19]. TTEL consequently does not treat ambiguity as synonymous with lag. Some unresolved meaning may preserve flexibility, learning, or exploration. Emotional Lag becomes theoretically consequential when unresolved processing remains relevant to action while new demands continue to arrive, especially when employees lack sufficient opportunity to revisit prior appraisals or coordinate changing interpretations.

Temporal pressure can also be socially enacted. Evidence linking supervisors' time urgency with autocratic leadership and subordinate well-being shows that urgency has interpersonal consequences and that its effects depend on supervisor characteristics [20]. TTEL uses this finding cautiously: supervisor urgency is not equivalent to organizational change speed, but it illustrates how formal schedules can acquire additional experienced intensity through leadership behavior. Organizational pace may therefore be amplified, buffered, or reframed locally rather than transmitted mechanically from implementation plans to employees.

The theory rejects straightforward aggregation from individuals to collectives. Collective change research emphasizes emergence and configuration rather than simple averaging [21]. TTEL therefore proposes that collective Emotional Lag, if supported empirically, must be represented through distributions, convergence, asymmetry, or network transmission. Several lagged members do not automatically constitute a lagged team, and stable performance does not establish completed processing.

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual synthesis for temporal theory of emotional lag, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

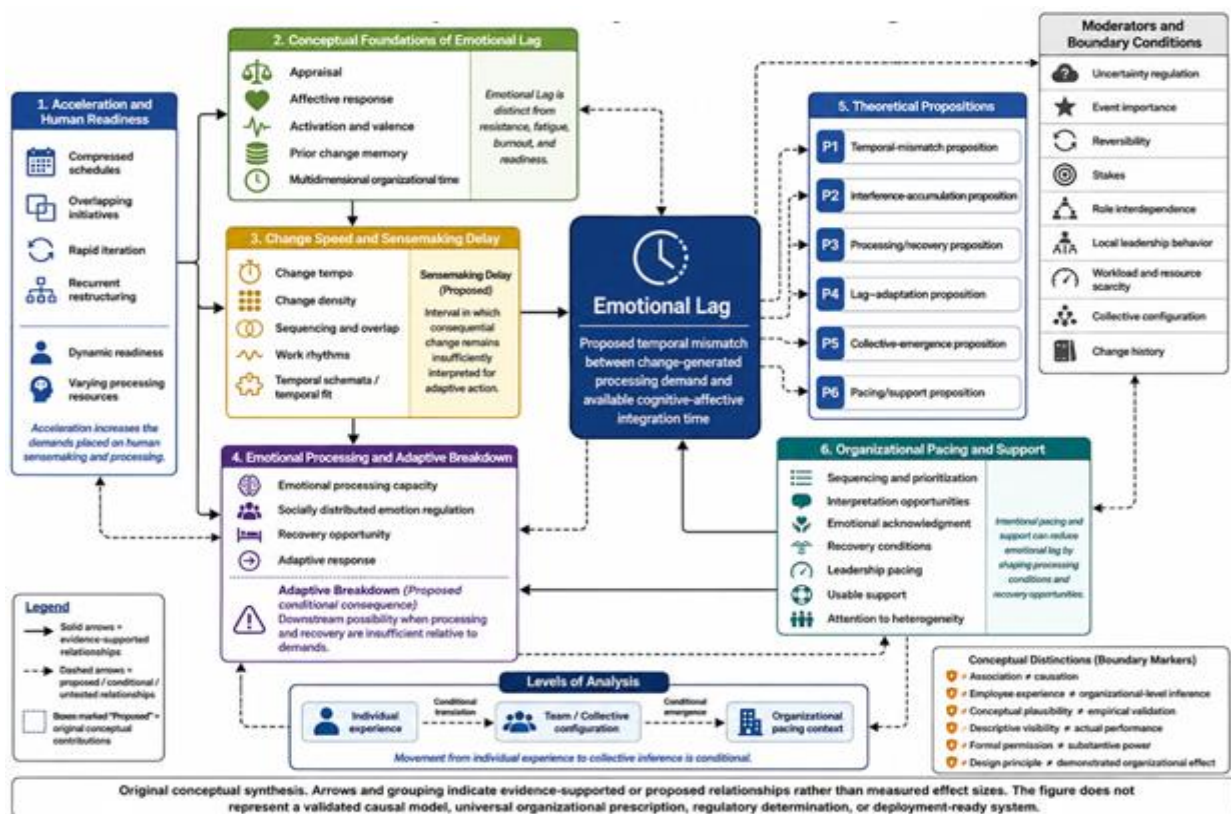


Figure 1. Temporal Theory of Emotional Lag

TTEL organizes these elements as a proposed sequence rather than a demonstrated causal chain: change tempo generates appraisal demands; those demands encounter finite processing and recovery capacity; mismatch may produce Emotional Lag;

and persistent unresolved lag may weaken adaptation conditionally. Prior memory, temporal fit, rhythm, uncertainty regulation, leadership urgency, support, and collective configuration may alter this sequence. Feedback is possible because present outcomes can shape later appraisal. Every integrated pathway requires direct temporal testing.

Theoretical propositions

The first proposition concerns mismatch rather than speed itself. Team-level evidence shows that collective readiness level and readiness diversity can have distinguishable associations with team performance [22]. This supports treating available adaptive capacity as distributed rather than uniform. **Proposition 1:** Greater misalignment between change-event tempo and the time available for appraisal and sensemaking is proposed to increase Emotional Lag, conditional on temporal-schema fit, work rhythms, and the distribution of adaptive resources. The proposition does not predict that a fixed speed will be harmful across organizations.

Change frequency supplies a second boundary. Longitudinal multilevel evidence indicates that perceived frequency of change can condition a pathway linking abusive supervision, distrust, and team behavioral resistance [23]. Frequency therefore matters without operating as an isolated cause. **Proposition 2:** Concurrent, frequent, or inconsistent change demands are proposed to increase the accumulation of Emotional Lag when prior consequential interpretations remain unresolved. Rival explanations include leadership quality, workload, resource scarcity, and role conflict, all of which must be separated empirically from temporal mismatch.

Response configuration provides a third refinement. Evidence shows that asymmetry in change championing can matter for individual- and group-level outcomes beyond the group mean [24]. **Proposition 3:** Opportunities for context-appropriate emotional processing, recovery, and interpretive revision are proposed to attenuate lag accumulation, but their effectiveness will depend on how processing resources are distributed and whether employees can use them without additional penalty or workload. Formal availability of support is therefore insufficient evidence that processing capacity has increased.

Social relationships extend the theory further. Field-theoretical work indicates that friend-group reactions to organizational change can become collectively patterned and can reflect prior change history [25]. **Proposition 4:** Persistent Emotional Lag is proposed to reduce adaptive-response capacity when unresolved interpretations remain action-relevant and compensating resources are insufficient. **Proposition 5:** Collective Adaptive Breakdown is proposed to depend on convergence, dispersion, asymmetry, and network transmission of member reactions rather than mean individual lag alone. Neither proposition assumes that temporary disruption is breakdown.

Proposition 6 concerns organizational pacing. Pacing and support are proposed to reduce temporal mismatch only when they alter actual demand sequencing, interpretation opportunities, recovery conditions, or adaptive resources. Merely extending a deadline without reducing overlapping demands may leave the mismatch unchanged. Conversely, rapid implementation may remain adaptive when event meaning is coherent, rhythms are aligned, reversibility is high, and sufficient processing resources are available. The propositions are falsifiable: evidence showing no temporal-mismatch effect after credible controls would require revision or rejection of TTEL.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in emotional lag, change speed, and adaptive breakdown in organizations.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Emotional Lag, Change Speed, and Adaptive Breakdown in Organizations

Mechanism or relationship	Antecedent	Mediator or process	Moderator	Expected consequence	Supporting evidence	Rival explanation	Validation requirement
Temporal-mismatch pathway — proposed	Change tempo exceeds available processing opportunity	Sensemaking Delay and unfinished emotional integration	Temporal fit; event importance; reversibility	Greater Emotional Lag	Temporal and change-process scholarship	General workload or time pressure	Intensive longitudinal measurement of events, processing, and later response
Change-density pathway — proposed	Multiple consequential changes arrive in close succession	Competing interpretations and unresolved prior demands	Initiative interdependence; sequencing clarity	Accumulation of unresolved processing	Research on overlapping and concurrent change	Poor project coordination or resource scarcity	Multi-initiative longitudinal comparison
Interference pathway — proposed	Simultaneous initiatives generate contradictory expectations	Inconsistency detection and repeated reappraisal	Role interdependence; priority clarity	Higher processing demand and possible lag accumulation	Organizational-change process evidence	Role conflict independent of temporal factors	Event-level designs separating inconsistency from timing

Memory carryover pathway — proposed	Prior change experiences remain salient	Memory-informed appraisal of new change	Similarity to prior change; perceived fairness; prior outcomes	Amplification or attenuation of current processing demand	Change-memory scholarship	Stable dispositions or generalized cynicism	Prospective designs measuring prior experience before later change
Processing-capacity pathway — proposed	Emotional and interpretive demands remain active	Regulation, reflection, recovery, and integration	Support quality; workload; psychological resources	Greater or lower capacity to resolve lag	Emotion-regulation and recovery literature	General social support or strain	Repeated measures of processing opportunity and unresolved response
Lag-adaptation pathway — proposed	Emotional Lag persists across consequential events	Incomplete integration of meaning, emotion, and required action	Uncertainty regulation; adaptive resources	Reduced readiness, coordination, or constructive adjustment	Adaptation and change-response scholarship	Job insecurity, poor leadership, role ambiguity	Temporal mediation with strong rival-variable controls
Collective-emergence pathway — proposed	Members differ in unresolved responses	Convergence, asymmetry, clustering, and social transmission	Network structure; team composition; change history	Collective adaptive vulnerability or differentiated adaptation	Multilevel and collective-response scholarship	Selection effects or pre-existing team climate	Multilevel longitudinal and network analysis
Pacing pathway — proposed	Organizational sequencing creates adjustable temporal demands	Redistribution of attention and interpretation opportunities	Operational urgency; task interdependence; reversibility	Lower temporal mismatch where demands become processable	Temporal-change and leadership scholarship	Mere delay without reduced demand	Quasi-experimental or staggered pacing comparison
Support pathway — proposed	Leaders provide usable interpretive and emotional resources	Clarification, acknowledgment, revision, and recovery opportunities	Trust; hierarchy; workload; local leadership behavior	Greater processing capacity and adaptive response	Change-readiness and leadership scholarship	Communication quantity or positive climate alone	Intervention studies distinguishing symbolic from usable support
Adaptive Breakdown pathway — proposed	Persistent lag combines with insufficient compensating resources	Progressive deterioration in coordinated adaptive response	Stakes; duration; recoverability; collective configuration	Conditional Adaptive Breakdown	Cross-domain theoretical integration	Acute workload shock, burnout, restructuring consequences	Longitudinal tests demonstrating temporal ordering and incremental validity

Note. All mechanisms and expected consequences in this table are proposed theoretical relationships unless otherwise established independently in the underlying literature. The table does not specify validated causal effects, universal mechanisms, probability estimates, optimal pacing rules, or implementation thresholds.

Organizational pacing and support

Organizational implications should remain restrained. Change leadership research identifies multiple influence pathways and methodological fragmentation [26]. TTEL therefore does not convert leadership into a simple pacing control. Leaders may shape temporal experience through sequencing, priorities, communication, availability, and permission to revisit unresolved issues, but the same intervention may function differently across occupations, hierarchy levels, tasks, and change phases. Organizational pacing is proposed as arranging temporal demands relative to processing opportunities, not merely slowing change.

Appraisal is important for determining relevant support. Evidence indicates that challenge and threat appraisals relate differently to compliance and championing [27]. Apparent participation therefore cannot be interpreted without considering how employees understand change. Reducing event frequency while leaving contradictory meanings unresolved may not reduce Emotional Lag, whereas demanding periods may remain manageable when priorities are intelligible and coordinated resources are available. TTEL treats support as relevant when it changes usable processing conditions.

Cognitive beliefs and positive emotions contribute to change readiness and supportive behavior [28]. This reinforces the distinction between informational support and emotional readiness. More communication is not necessarily more sensemaking when priorities conflict or explanations change repeatedly, and positive emotion does not prove integration. Proposed support should therefore combine temporal clarity with opportunities for questions, emotional acknowledgment, recovery, and revision without implying that any practice guarantees adaptation.

Three design principles follow. First, temporal load should be considered as a portfolio property rather than the speed of one project. Second, pacing should preserve opportunities for interpretation and coordination when stakes or irreversibility are high. Third, leaders should attend to heterogeneity because groups may encounter different temporal demands. These are theoretical implications, not validated prescriptions, and remain conditional on urgency, resources, and operational costs.

The pacing lens also changes what organizations would need to observe. Formal milestones alone reveal schedule progress, not whether employees have integrated the consequences of earlier changes. Relevant indicators would need to distinguish unresolved interpretation, competing priorities, recovery opportunity, and coordination difficulty from simple dissatisfaction or low performance. Such indicators should be treated as research constructs rather than management scores until measurement validity and decision consequences are established.

Future tests should compare TTEL against alternatives rather than seek supportive correlations. Event-contingent sampling could examine whether unresolved appraisals persist across successive events; multilevel studies could test convergence within teams; and staggered rollouts could compare sequencing conditions. Construct development must distinguish Emotional Lag from resistance, stress, fatigue, readiness, time pressure, and recovery need. TTEL should be revised or rejected if temporal mismatch adds no explanatory value once credible rivals are measured.

Conclusion

This article proposes the Temporal Theory of Emotional Lag as an original account of how organizational acceleration may become problematic when the timing of change demands and the timing of human processing become misaligned. Emotional Lag denotes a proposed mismatch between change-generated appraisal and emotional-processing demands and the time and capacity available for their integration. Sensemaking Delay and Adaptive Breakdown are likewise proposed constructs intended to specify unfinished interpretation and conditional weakening of adaptive response.

The theory does not imply that rapid change is inherently harmful, that emotional intensity indicates lag, or that temporary disruption demonstrates breakdown. Temporal-schema fit, work rhythms, uncertainty, prior experience, recovery opportunities, leadership behavior, social relationships, and response distributions may alter the proposed pathway. Individual experiences also cannot be elevated automatically to team or organizational conclusions.

The contribution is therefore a testable temporal architecture rather than a validated causal model or managerial formula. Its value depends on future evidence demonstrating construct distinctiveness, temporal ordering, incremental explanatory power, and multilevel validity while ruling out credible rival explanations. If those conditions are not met, the theory should be modified or rejected. By locating adaptive difficulty in the relationship between organizational pace and human processing time, TTEL provides a bounded conceptual vocabulary for examining when acceleration remains manageable and when unresolved change may begin to compound.

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