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6. Rethinking Time in Program Management: Integrating Chronos, Kairos, and Temporal Ambidexterity

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Abstract

This paper critiques the dominance of linear time (Chronos) in program management and introduces the Temporal Governance Framework (TGF), which combines Chronos, Kairos (opportune timing), and Shi (strategic momentum). The aim is to reframe how we think about time in programs to enhance adaptability and governance. Drawing on a conceptual and theoretical perspective, the paper integrates philosophy, project management, strategy, and cross-cultural studies. It synthesizes Eastern and Western views of time, illustrated with real-world program examples. Effective program governance requires temporal ambidexterity—the ability to manage structured timelines while capitalizing on emerging opportunities and adapting to changing contexts. The TGF presents a tri-temporal model (Chronos, Kairos, Shi) for navigating complexity. The framework guides leadership, governance structures, and adaptive decision-making. It emphasizes the integration of temporal awareness into organizational processes and training. Future research should examine the practical application of this approach across various program contexts. Introducing the Temporal Governance Framework, which uniquely integrates Western (Chronos, Kairos) and Eastern (Shi, Taiji) temporal logics into program management, offering a novel cross-cultural and ambidextrous perspective on time in program governance and leadership.

Keywords: *temporal ambidexterity, governance, Chronos, Kairos, Shi, Taiji logic, program management, complexity, adaptability, decision-making.*

6.1 Introduction

Time is fundamental yet often overlooked in program management. Traditional methods emphasize Chronos—linear, clock-based time measured in plans and milestones. Recent research (Feddersen et al., 2024; L. A. Ika et al., 2025) emphasizes the importance of integrating Kairos, a qualitative and situational perspective on time. In complex or politically sensitive programs, success depends not only on the decisions made, but also on when they are made and how leaders interpret the evolving conditions. In disaster response, for example, early resource allocation and rapid adaptation to new information can determine effectiveness. Leaders who sense shifts promptly can adjust strategies and avoid pitfalls. Thus, both timing and perceptiveness are critical in navigating program complexity.

Despite increasing recognition of temporal complexity, mainstream standards (PMI, Axelos) continue to privilege predictability, control, and adherence to fixed plans. This Chronos-dominant perspective often sidelines adaptability. As Ika et al. (2025) argue, such models overlook the lived temporal realities of large initiatives, where managers must respond to shifting events and priorities. To address this gap, this paper advocates combining Chronos with Kairos. The latter emphasizes the importance of opportune timing, contextual judgment, and foresight (Lantz & Just, 2021; Orvain & Gentil, 2024). Concepts such as temporal ambidexterity, shifting between time logics, Taiji logic (Ding et al., 2020), and Jullien's idea of propensity (Jullien, 2019) enrich governance and decision-making in uncertain contexts. Rethinking time as a dynamic, strategic resource allows leaders to enhance responsiveness, improve outcomes, and steer more effectively through volatility.

Research on organizational pluritemporality (Ballard & Seibold, 2004) and temporal entrainment (Pérez-Nordtvedt et al., 2008) supports this notion of temporal ambidexterity. Similarly, ambidextrous leadership shows how leaders alternate between exploitative and exploratory modes, analogous to balancing Chronos and Kairos.

Practice illustrates these dynamics. In the UK's COVID-19 vaccination rollout, chronologic logic—national schedules, centralized supply chains, and milestone tracking—was vital for achieving broad coverage. Over time, Kairos adaptations emerged: mobile clinics, dose reallocation, and flexible booking systems, which improved equity (Mounier-Jack et al., 2023) and informed crisis road mapping frameworks (Yang et al., 2023). Likewise, in the UK's High Speed 2 program, Chronos was indispensable for managing interdependent construction activities. **Yet**, leaders also seized Kairos windows—accelerating land acquisition during favorable political conditions and adjusting sequencing to avoid seasonal constraints (Davies et al., 2009).

Eastern temporal logics further demonstrate this balance. The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics utilized Chronos through rigorous testing schedules and a closed-loop system, while Kairos enabled real-time protocol adjustments during outbreaks (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). Following the Games, PyeongChang 2018 Legacy Foundation (Byun, 2021) adopted a Taiji-inspired approach, blending structured venue governance with adaptive responses to evolving social and political conditions. These cases underscore how temporal ambidexterity strengthens governance in complex megaprojects.

6.1.1 Business Problem

Traditional project management is structured around Chronos, linear, measurable, schedule-driven time. This logic underpins frameworks such as PMI's PMBOK Guide (PMI, 2021), ISO 21500 (ISO, 2021), and PRINCE2 (PeopleCert et al., 2023), where success is mainly defined by adherence to timelines, milestones, and deliverables. However, programs and megaprojects, complex, adaptive, and politically sensitive initiatives, require responsiveness to Kairos, the opportune moment shaped by context and judgment (Lantz & Just, 2021; Orvain & Gentil, 2024). Relying solely on Chronos leads to misalignment, delayed decision-making, and value erosion. As Ika et al. (2025) argue, rigid clock-time models often clash with the fluid realities of execution, while Langley & McGivern (2023) show that traditional temporal structuring undermines adaptability. Feddersen et al. (2024) further highlight that success depends not just on what is delivered, but also when and how outcomes emerge. Without temporal ambidexterity, organizations risk delays, inefficiencies, stakeholder disengagement, and weakened long-term value.

This mismatch surfaces in practice. Creative and innovative projects often juggle milestones with emergent opportunities, which (Otto et al., 2024) call temporal work. Employees often create workarounds when rigid schedules conflict with evolving conditions, revealing friction between formal governance and actual execution. While frameworks stress control and predictability, programs demand flexibility, iterative value delivery, and responsiveness. Yet mainstream guidance offers little on applying multiple temporal logics, leaving practitioners without tools to manage time as a strategic resource. This gap leads to confusion, mismanagement, and recurring failures in megaprojects.

6.1.2 Research Problem

Contemporary project and program management frameworks remain dominated by Chronos, characterized by predictability and control through predefined schedules, milestones, and lifecycles (AXELOS et al., 2020; ISO, 2021; PeopleCert et al., 2023; PMI, 2021, 2024). While effective in stable environments, this paradigm falters in large-scale and politically sensitive programs characterized by uncertainty, change, and stakeholder volatility (L. A. Ika et al., 2025; Langley & McGivern, 2023)

Recent scholarship highlights the value of Kairos—timely, context-sensitive decision-making grounded in intuition and responsiveness (Lantz & Just, 2021; Orvain & Gentil, 2024). Yet mainstream standards still reflect Chronos-dominant assumptions and offer limited guidance on using time strategically (Feddersen et al., 2024; L. A. Ika et al., 2025). The result is a disconnect: formal governance designs are misaligned with execution, forcing practitioners to engage in improvisation, workarounds, or selective resistance (Bartelheimer et al., 2025; Otto et al., 2024). This exposes a blind spot in program management—the weak integration of multiple temporalities at moments where timing and adaptability are most critical.

6.1.3 Research Gap

Scholars increasingly acknowledge the dual concepts of Chronos (measurable, sequential time) and Kairos (qualitative, situational time) in project and program contexts, yet empirical insights into how practitioners apply them remain limited (L. Ika et al., 2024; Otto et al., 2024; Zidane, 2018). These studies suggest that effective leadership requires both structured planning

and the ability to act at the right moment, but the practical application of this duality is underexplored.

The concept of temporal ambidexterity has garnered attention in organizational behavior, leadership, and innovation (Lang et al., 2022; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Pérez-Nordtvedt et al., 2008; Saleh et al., 2023). While the ambidextrous leadership theory (Delisle et al., 2025; Midler et al., 2019; Rosing et al., 2011; Schindler, 2015) conceptually aligns with this interplay, within program management, the notion remains vague, untested, and absent from major frameworks such as PMI or MSP. There are no operational definitions, validated measures, or tools to capture how managers perceive and switch between temporal logics in dynamic environments (Feddersen et al., 2024). This limited understanding of how micro-level temporal judgments affect program leadership and value delivery.

Non-Western perspectives, such as Taiji logic (Ding et al., 2020; Jing & Van de Ven, 2014), offer additional promise by blending Yin–Yang dualism and dialectical unity to emphasize timing, balance, and harmony in governance. Similarly, cognitive biases, such as Kahneman's peak-end rule (Alaybek et al., 2022; Kahneman, 2012), shape how stakeholders assess program success, yet they remain overlooked in evaluation research.

Taken together, these gaps reveal that while project management standards are well-developed, program management lacks a robust theoretical foundation and practical applications. The field still needs frameworks that integrate multiple temporal logics, cross-cultural insights, and cognitive dimensions to guide leadership in complex, large-scale initiatives.

Research Question: How can integrating Chronos, Kairos, and Eastern temporal logics improve program governance and execution?

6.2 Literature Review

A growing body of literature across project management, military studies, strategy, psychology, and philosophy examines the temporal dimensions of program management. This interdisciplinary perspective highlights how time shapes decision-making, leadership, and governance, enabling cross-fertilization of insights.

In project management, L. A. Ika et al. (2025) argue for moving beyond linear models to event- and process-based temporalities, while Feddersen et al. (2024) or Zwikael & Huemann (2023) show that project success depends not only on delivery but also on when outcomes materialize. Military studies emphasize timing under uncertainty: Betts (1995) highlights the impracticality of maintaining constant readiness, while Strachan (2013) explores Kairos in adaptive command. In strategic management, Eisenhardt (1989) links temporal pacing to decision speed, and Brown & Eisenhardt (1997) show how synchronization supports performance in dynamic environments. Psychology contributes through Zimbardo & Boyd (2015), offering a multidimensional time perspective, and McGrath & Rotchford (1983) work on time as an organizational structuring device. Philosophy provides an even deeper grounding: Ricoeur (1984) posits that human experience of time cannot be fully grasped through either cosmological or chronological time (objective, linear, measurable) or phenomenological time (subjective, lived, experienced). Instead, our un-

derstanding of time is mediated and made meaningful through narrative. Heidegger (1927) argues that Western thought has long equated Being with “presenting” or presence in time. In this view, being is determined through the temporal horizon of past, present, and future. This linkage reveals both the centrality of time to existence and the disquiet this connection introduces into philosophy:

What prompts us to name time and Being together? From the dawn of Western European thinking until today, Being means the same as presenting. Presence speaks of the present. According to current representations, the present, together with past and future, forms the character of time. Being is determined as presence by time. That this is so could in itself be sufficient to introduce a relentless disquiet into thinking. This disquiet increases as soon as we set out to think through in what respect there is such a determination of Being by time. (p. 2).

Programs today are seen less as tools for outputs and more as strategic instruments that guide organizational transformation. Lycett et al. (2004) describe program management as connecting execution and strategy, while Carreno, (2024) emphasizes strategic alignment as key to effectiveness. Similarly, PMI views programs as vital for linking strategic vision and execution. These views underscore the importance of making careful, timely decisions to maintain coherence and achieve a lasting impact.

The review begins with Smith’s (1969) philosophical foundation of Chronos and Kairos, then moves to Kahneman’s (2012) cognitive insights into memory and timing. Ika et al. (2024) demonstrate how Kairos supports adaptive governance in megaprojects, while Armanios et al. (2025) emphasize its role in risk-critical decision-making. Zidane (2018) develops the concept of temporal agility, and Otto et al. (2024) show how Kairos-driven flexibility functions within structured systems. Military perspectives include Ames (2017), who applies Kairos thinking in the context of mission command. Finally, Eastern philosophies expand the perspective. Ding et al. (2020) and Jullien (2019) highlight Daoist concepts of timing, harmony, and situational responsiveness, while ideas such as Taiji logic and Zhong-Yong (Doctrine of the Mean) deepen the understanding of cyclical and relational time beyond the Western Chronos–Kairos duality.

6.2.1 Philosophical perspective

John Smith’s (1969) essay, “Time, Times, Chronos, Kairos,” distinguishes between Chronos, linear measurable time, and Kairos, the right moment for decisive action:

The grasp of the Kairos as both judgment and opportunity is a function of historical understanding within the context of historical action itself. As such, Kairos belongs to history as happening and not only to the domain of historical interpretation. Moreover, Kairos highlights the importance of historical understanding on the part of historical agents in evaluating the situation in which they must act. (p. 12).

Smith argued that while management systems rely on Chronos for planning, complex environments require leaders to recognize and act on Kairos moments—timing windows for seizing opportunities. This duality forecasts current discussions on temporal ambidexterity in program management, defined as shifting between time logics based on needs. Recent literature criticizes strict scheduling and emphasizes the importance of temporal ambidexterity, balancing structure with situational awareness (Feddersen et al., 2024; L. A. Ika et al., 2025). Lantz and Just (2021)

demonstrate that leaders frame Kairos through strategic positioning, while Orvain and Gentil (2024) show how professionals intertwine Chronos and Kairos to coordinate and adapt. These studies translate Smith's idea into governance models that see time as a strategic resource rather than a fixed constraint. Blending both logics enhances resilience, responsiveness, and value creation in uncertain, high-stakes situations, supporting the notion that leadership relies on recognizing timing, when to act, more than on specific actions to take. Smith's concept of Kairos underscores that success relies on timing and adaptability, not just planning (Chronos). Traditional project management emphasizes schedules and predictability, but Smith's insights highlight flexible decision-making responsive to risks, opportunities, and crises. In complex, rapidly changing environments, managers must read the moment, adapt, and seize Kairos opportunities, fostering resilience and strategic agility. These works contrast Western linearity (Chronos) with relational models (Kairos, Shi, Taiji), providing the ontological grounding for the Temporal Governance Framework, which sees time as a culturally shaped resource with strategic implications.

6.2.2 Psychological perspective

Kahneman (2012) makes a foundational contribution in his seminal book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, to understanding the role of memory in human judgment by distinguishing between the experiencing self and the remembering self. While the experiencing self lives through events in real time, it is the remembering self that retrospectively evaluates and shapes how experiences are later judged and acted upon. According to Kahneman, memory does not retain a faithful, chronological record of events. Instead, evaluations of past experiences are primarily shaped by two specific elements: the most emotionally intense point (the peak) and the final moment (end), a heuristic known as the peak-end rule. However, the implications of the peak-end rule are widespread, especially in areas such as knowledge management, program evaluation, customer experience design, and leadership reflection. If stakeholder perceptions of a program's success are shaped more by emotional peaks and endings than by long-term performance, then understanding and managing these memory anchors becomes crucial. Kahneman's framework emphasizes not only a cognitive bias but also a strategic opportunity for those managing large projects to influence how outcomes are remembered. Kahneman's peak-end rule shifts the focus of success to emotionally significant moments rather than duration, highlighting the strategic importance of Kairos in influencing stakeholder perceptions and retrospective judgments. Research highlights cognitive and perceptual dimensions of time, from biases such as the peak-end rule to orientations that shape decision-making. These insights reveal that leaders' temporal judgments are not purely rational but shaped by perception and bias, underscoring the need for reflective and adaptive temporal literacy in program governance (Horwitz et al., 2024; Scharbert et al., 2025).

The Peak-End Rule demonstrates that stakeholders evaluate programs not by continuous progress but by defining moments and how they conclude, underscoring the Kairos dimension of program governance where timely interventions and well-managed endings outweigh linear adherence to plans. By revealing how memory compresses complex experiences into peaks and conclusions, the Peak-End Rule highlights the limits of Chronos-based evaluation and supports the need for Kairos- and Shi-informed leadership that can anticipate and shape critical moments of perception. These insights show that program success depends not only on delivery over time but also on orchestrating meaningful peaks and endings, aligning with temporal ambidexterity by balancing structured execution with the judgment to create and manage decisive moments.

6.2.3 *Megaprojects perspective*

Ika et al. (2024) study how environmental disruptions affect project governance, using the concepts of Chronos and Kairos. They combine seven case studies of large projects with seven interviews of experienced professionals to enhance validity through triangulation. Case studies demonstrate governance changes under pressure, while interviews reveal practitioners' views on the timing of decision-making. This dual method improves understanding by linking observed behaviors with leaders' interpretations. The case studies aim to confirm themes rather than representativeness. Findings indicate governance responses are often delayed or misaligned due to reliance on Chronos-based planning, fixed schedules and control mechanisms that hinder adaptation in volatile settings. Ika et al. suggest restructuring projects into flexible, benefit-focused programs and emphasize the importance of continuous, context-aware monitoring. They introduce 'temporal ambidexterity', the ability to switch between Chronos (structured actions) and Kairos (opportunistic timing), as essential for managing complexity and ensuring long-term value. Developing and integrating this capability into governance is vital for success in complex initiatives, where timing, responsiveness, and strategic awareness are crucial. Megaproject studies show why rigid Chronos structures often fail in practice and why Kairos-informed flexibility is essential. They also demonstrate how Eastern logics such as Shi (propensity) and Taiji (balance) can enrich governance approaches in politically sensitive, multi-stakeholder environments.

6.2.4 *Decision-making under time pressure*

Although Armanios et al. (2025) in their paper *Major Program Value Creation and Capture: The S³ Framework for Mitigating Risk Propagation to Maximize Opportunities*, do not explicitly mention Kairos, their proposed S³ framework—comprising Scoping, Scaffolding, and Sensing—implicitly embodies a Kairos-informed approach to program leadership and risk management.

Scoping encourages leaders to set dynamic thresholds and adjust program boundaries as conditions change, requiring judgment about the “right moment” to act. Scaffolding emphasizes building organizational and technological capacity so the program can respond quickly when opportunities or threats arise, ensuring readiness for time-sensitive decisions. Sensing strengthens situational awareness by incorporating diverse perspectives and monitoring weak signals, enabling leaders to anticipate and respond to critical moments. Together, these practices operationalize a Kairos mindset, prioritizing timely, opportunity-driven action over strict adherence to predetermined schedules.

The authors stress the need to identify critical inflection points in a program's life cycle—moments when value creation or risk mitigation efforts are most effective. This notion aligns closely with Kairos, which emphasizes acting at the opportune time rather than following a rigid sequence or schedule. The S³ framework's focus on sequencing decisions and adapting governance structures to shifting risk landscapes shows that effective leaders must exercise temporal judgment, responding to emerging events in real time rather than clinging to Chronos-based timelines.

In this sense, Armanios et al.'s model reinforces a growing body of work that questions the dominance of linear time in program governance. It advocates instead for a dynamic, situation-aware approach consistent with Kairos thinking. By framing timing as essential for aligning managers with both opportunities and organizational rhythms (p. 127), the S³ framework highlights the importance of acting at inflection points, implicitly endorsing Kairos through risk-aware,

context-sensitive decision-making in complex programs. These insights underscore the importance of Kairos judgment in program management: leaders must recognize when acting quickly is more valuable than exhaustive analysis, linking decision speed directly to temporal ambidexterity in governance.

6.2.5 Importance of Kairos in choosing the right moment for decisions

Scholars increasingly recognize the limitations of Chronos in dynamic and uncertain environments. In his doctoral thesis, Zidane (2018) introduces Kairos as a necessary complement: a qualitative, situational, and opportunity-driven concept of time that reflects the human ability to recognize and act on the “right moment.” He argues that effective leadership in politically sensitive or large-scale initiatives requires temporal agility—balancing the structural discipline of Chronos with the adaptive responsiveness of Kairos. While Zidane provides the conceptual foundation for understanding Kairos in complex project settings, the article by Rämö (2002) explicitly distinguishes clock-based efficiency (Chronos) from event-driven effectiveness (Kairos) in project contexts, especially noting that while Chronos helps in “doing things right,” a Kairos-informed approach supports “doing things at the right time,” which is particularly important in project management environments marked by unpredictability and the need for improvisation. They demonstrate how rigid adherence to Chronos-based governance can hinder project outcomes and how timely adaptations—guided by Kairotic insight—can improve success. Overall, their work supports a unified idea: success in complex or high-stakes projects depends not only on planning and control (Chronos) but also on leadership judgment, timing, and responsiveness (Kairos). These temporal skills should be integrated into both governance structures and leadership development.

6.2.6 Temporal ambidexterity – mixing Kairos and Chronos

Building on this perspective, Otto et al. (2024) examine, through a qualitative case study, how organizations can intentionally engage in “temporal work” to make Kairos actionable. They describe Kairos not as accidental, but as something that can be facilitated through reframing, aligning, and pacing organizational efforts. Their study highlights how creativity and strategic redirection often emerge from the tension between Chronos and Kairos, and how seizing Kairos enables flexibility within predictable systems. Both studies highlight that success in complex programs depends not only on control mechanisms but also on the ability to identify and act on key opportunities—what could be called temporal ambidexterity. From an innovation standpoint, for instance, in pharmaceutical drug development programs, consider the duality of Kairos and Chronos, which advocates for a state of temporal ambidexterity in organizations and decision-makers. The authors see Kairos not as the rejection of Chronos but as its complement, serving to bring judgment, creativity, and responsiveness into environments that are otherwise governed by fixed time logic, such as Chronos. Organizations that intentionally create conditions to recognize and act on Kairos are more likely to succeed in complex contexts. Otto et al. demonstrate how organizations can deliberately leverage Kairos through “temporal work,” enabling flexibility and innovation within structured environments and promoting temporal ambidexterity in leadership. Temporal ambidexterity demonstrates that effective program leadership requires moving fluidly between Chronos for structure and control and Kairos for situational responsiveness, showing that success depends less on choosing one logic than on balancing both. Extending temporal ambidexterity with Shi and Taiji shows that program leaders must not only balance structure and responsiveness, but also

sense underlying momentum and harmonize tensions, adding a relational and preventive dimension beyond Western dualities.

6.2.7 Military aspects: voluntary activities and mission command

A longitudinal case study of the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety program showed that complex regulatory programs in ambiguous environments cannot be managed effectively through traditional top-down planning and control, as results were neither satisfactory nor improving (Ames, 2017). Voluntary, stakeholder-driven activities yielded better outcomes, highlighting the limitations of rigid compliance approaches. Ames advocates mission command—clear strategic intent combined with decentralized, autonomous decision-making—as a more effective governance model. This approach emphasizes real-time responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive judgment, offering a practical interpretation of Kairos in program management. In military doctrine (Auftragstaktik), mission command relies on trust and initiative, privileging situational action over strict adherence to plans (Army Doctrine Reference Publication, 2012). It reflects a Kairos-based view of time, where success depends on timely, context-sensitive decisions rather than exhaustive planning. Military analogies more broadly underscore that timing often matters more than control, illustrating the value of Kairos- and Shi-informed decision-making in high stakes programs. This perspective reinforces the Kairos dimension of the TGF, showing how decentralized responsiveness operationalizes situational timing.

6.2.8 Chinese thinking for the timing of decisions

Ding et al. (2020) introduce Taiji logic, rooted in Daoist philosophy, Confucian harmony, and classical Chinese cosmology, as a philosophical view of timing that deepens the idea of Kairos in project governance. Whereas Kairos emphasizes seizing the opportune moment within a flow of events, Taiji logic provides a cyclical, harmony-focused model of temporal decision-making.

According to Ding, problems unfold through three temporal states (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). In the Wuji period, latent tensions exist in undisturbed harmony. The Taiji period marks a subtle but critical window when emerging contradictions require intuition and foresight. If missed, the situation advances into the Liangyi period, where tensions polarize into overt conflict, inefficiency, or missed opportunities. Resolving issues within the Taiji window restores

balance, returning the system to Wuji and avoiding conflict.

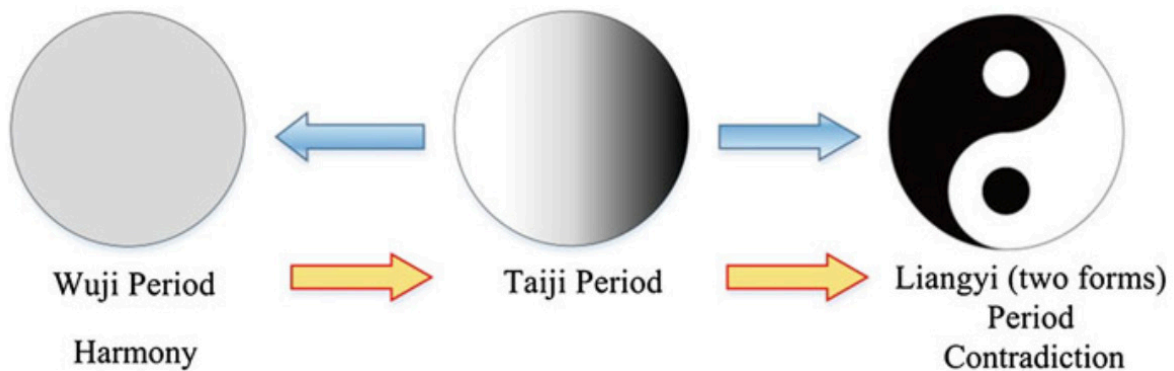


Fig. 1.3 The relationship between Wuji, Taiji and Liangyi

(Ding et al., 2020, p. 10) This model views time as anticipatory and ethically significant: the most skilled leaders recognize disturbances early and act before crises arise. It contrasts with the reactive bias of many Western methods, instead offering a relational, preventive, and intuition-based approach. For program management, Taiji logic shifts focus from interventions triggered by milestones or metrics (Chronos) toward foresight-driven leadership that is sensitive to context and stakeholder dynamics. When combined with Kairos and temporal ambidexterity, it broadens the temporal toolkit for program leaders, especially in cross-cultural and globally connected environments.

6.2.9 Chinese and Western pairs of paradigms

François Jullien's *From Being to Living* (Jullien, 2019) offers a cross-cultural reflection on time, contrasting Western linear models with Chinese situational thinking. He does not use Greek terms but parallels Chronos as sequential, external, and objective time, and Kairos as situational timing. Central to Jullien's view is shi (勢), the propensity or latent potential within a situation. Instead of rigid planning, effective leaders attune to unfolding dynamics and act at the right moment. This approach rejects fixed structures, emphasizing decision-making grounded in situational flow. By shifting "from Being to Living," Jullien frames time as relational and dynamic, suggesting success depends less on control and more on sensing, interpreting, and leveraging evolving circumstances. This can be seen as an extension of Heidegger's Being that defines time. His philosophy enriches the Kairos–Chronos debate by adding a non-Western perspective that privileges potential and responsiveness over prediction and control: "The master of solving conflicts is good at solving problems before ordinary people feel them" (p. 11). These sources introduce Taiji logic, Yin–Yang dualism, Zhong-Yong, and Shi as non-Western temporalities, broadening the temporal toolkit beyond Western models for globally relevant governance, emphasizing balance, propensity, and situational harmony.

The Temporal Governance Framework (TGF)

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, programs

need more than traditional, linear views of time. Conventional program management focuses on Chronos time, which is sequential, measurable, and organized by calendars, milestones, and deadlines. While Chronos supports planning, control, and accountability, it often falls short in situations requiring adaptability, strategic responsiveness, and contextual judgment. To close this gap, this chapter presents the Temporal Governance Framework (TGF), which combines four interconnected temporal dimensions: Chronos, Kairos, Taiji, and Shi.

Table 1 Constructs of the Temporal Governance Framework (source: Author)

Construct	Definition	Sources
Temporal Ambidexterity	The ability to manage both structured timing (Chronos) and adaptive timing (Kairos) simultaneously, applying the frames of Shi and Taiji logic	Based on organizational ambidexterity ((O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013))
Temporal Judgement	The capacity to recognize and act upon Kairotic opportunities in real-time	(Rämö, 2002)
Temporal Governance	The design and operation of decision frameworks that balance predictability with responsiveness	Adapted from various project governance literature (Müller, Ika, PMI)
Temporal Signatures	Organization- or leader-specific preferences for time orientation (e.g., urgency vs. patience)	(Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988); (Eisenhardt, 1989)
Temporal Harmony	Ability to reconcile contradictions, anticipate tensions, and restore balance before crises emerge, grounded in Yin–Yang dynamics and relational timing	(Ding et al., 2020); (Jing & Van de Ven, 2014)

6.2.10 Chronos: The Structure of Time

Chronos represents linear, clock-based time, objective and quantifiable. It is embedded in project schedules, Gantt charts, work breakdown structures, and phase gates. Chronos provides the essential scaffolding for forecasting, sequencing, and monitoring. It supports predictability, efficiency, and performance measurement. However, rigid adherence to Chronos can result in temporal myopia, obscuring emerging risks, windows of opportunity, or contextual shifts.

Kairos: The Opportune Moment

Kairos refers to qualitative time—the “right moment” to act, deeply tied to context, intuition, and judgment. Rooted in rhetorical and philosophical traditions, Kairos emphasizes the importance of making decisions based on situational awareness rather than predetermined schedules. In program management, Kairos is evident in well-timed interventions, strategic pivots, and the ability to recognize when external circumstances necessitate a deviation from the plan. Unlike Chronos, Kairos cannot be managed through routines but must be sensed and seized.

Shi: The Configuration of Strategic Potential

Shi, drawn from classical Chinese philosophy and military theory, refers to the latent ener-

gy, configuration, or momentum embedded in a situation. Shi is less about timing itself and more about discerning the evolving structure of forces and tendencies that create or constrain opportunities. In a program context, Shi might be understood as the alignment of stakeholders, political will, organizational readiness, or market sentiment. Sensing Shi requires holistic awareness, contextual intelligence, and the ability to anticipate inflection points.

Taiji Logic: Balancing Opposites in Timing

Complementing Chronos, Kairos, and Shi, Taiji logic (Ding et al., 2020) offers a relational and cyclical view of timing. Rooted in Daoist and Confucian traditions, Taiji stresses the dynamic interaction of opposites (Yin–Yang) and the importance of acting during subtle transitions before tensions escalate. While Kairos highlights the right moment and Shi emphasizes the arrangement of forces, Taiji logic provides the method for balancing these dynamics—identifying when contradictions can be reconciled and when balance needs to be restored. In program management, Taiji logic encourages leaders to view timing not just as linear or situational, but as part of a broader relational flow, where wisdom lies in detecting disturbances early and resolving them before they escalate into conflicts. This adds an ethical and preventive dimension to temporal leadership, especially in politically sensitive or multi-stakeholder programs.

Temporal Ambidexterity in Governance

Effective program governance requires temporal ambidexterity: balancing structured timelines with responsiveness to changing cues. It involves designing mechanisms that sustain Chronos-based controls (phase reviews, audits), enable Kairos-sensitive discretion (decision checkpoints, pivots), and utilize Shi-informed foresight (stakeholder sensing, environmental scanning). This is crucial for large-scale or politically sensitive programs amid rapid change.

Multi-Level Application of the Framework

Table 2: Time Concepts per Levels of Agents (source: author)

Level of Agency	Chronos	Kairos	Shi	Taiji Logic
Individual	Task scheduling, personal deadlines	Intuitive judgment, readiness to act	Strategic perception, situational fluency	Balancing personal priorities, reconciling inner tensions before they surface
Team	Sprint cycles, milestone tracking	Retrospectives, adaptive collaboration	Team cohesion, informal influence dynamics	Harmonizing diverse viewpoints, mediating emerging conflicts
Organization	Portfolio reviews, governance cycles	Strategic pivots, reallocation decisions	Ecosystem sensing, political alignment	Integrating contradictory pressures (e.g., efficiency vs. innovation) into a dynamic balance

Agent group levels in programs include individuals, teams, and organizations, each of which is affected differently and affected by the time logics.

A study by Callegari & Rai (2021) delves into the transformation of DNB, Norway’s largest financial services provider, from a traditional banking institution to a digitally driven entity. DNB employed a sequential approach to ambidexterity, initially separating exploration and exploitation, and subsequently integrating them into an integrated strategy. This evolution demonstrates transitional ambidexterity, which can be interpreted as a form of temporal ambidexterity, where the equilibrium between innovation and efficiency fluctuates over time rather than being constant. DNB serves as an illustrative example of how organizations must perceive and respond to shifting strategic momentum (Shi) and transition between temporal modes, structured (Chronos) and adaptive (Kairos, Shi), as context changes.

6.2.11 Implications for Program Leadership

Program leaders must develop competencies beyond operational control. Temporal leadership involves cultivating Kairos awareness, recognizing inflection points and responding with agility. It also involves interpreting Shi, perceiving underlying momentum and potential in dynamic environments, and leveraging Chronos by applying time structures as flexible frameworks rather than rigid constraints. Leadership development should incorporate reflective practices, simulation-based training, and intercultural perspectives to enhance temporal literacy over time.

6.3 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that time is not merely a backdrop to program management but an active force shaping governance and leadership. The Temporal Governance Framework (TGF) advances the field by integrating Chronos (structured time), Kairos (opportune timing), Shi (strategic propensity), and Taiji logic (temporal harmony). Together, these logics highlight the need for temporal ambidexterity—balancing discipline with flexibility—to navigate uncertainty, political sensitivity, and stakeholder complexity.

The originality of this research lies in merging Western and Eastern perspectives into a unified framework for program governance. This synthesis provides both conceptual depth and practical guidance for leaders seeking to “think in time,” enabling more responsive, strategically aligned, and resilient outcomes. In practice, this means embedding Kairos- and Shi-sensitive checkpoints into governance alongside Chronos-based controls, cultivating temporal literacy and foresight in leadership development, and designing adaptive structures that reconcile stakeholder priorities through Taiji-informed balance.

Timing is especially critical in complex settings such as megaprojects and transformation efforts, where success depends not only on planning but also on knowing when to act. Concepts such as propensity, mission command, and temporal ambidexterity illustrate that effective leadership requires both structural control and the judgment to seize the right moment. Rather than rejecting Chronos, these perspectives promote a dual approach that combines structured progress with situational responsiveness. Figure 2 illustrates this integration of temporal concepts for programs.

Temporal Logics in Program Management: Integration of Chronos, Kairos and Shi

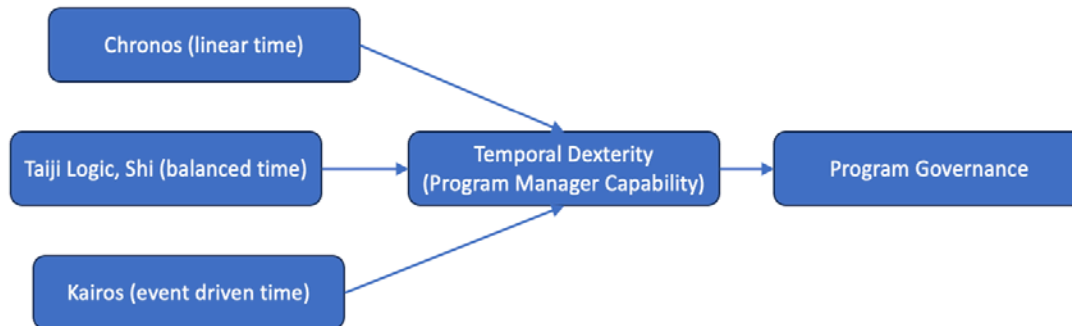


Figure 1 integration of temporal concepts in the Temporal Governance Framework (Chronos, Kairos, Shi, Taiji) for program management (source: Author).

Even established standards such as the PMI Standard for Program Management (PMI, 2024) reflect this shift: while grounded in Chronos-based life cycles and schedules, they increasingly emphasize benefits realization, adaptive governance, and strategic alignment. This evolution implicitly acknowledges temporal flexibility—the capacity to balance planned control with context-sensitive action—even if it has not yet been theorized explicitly. Future program standards may therefore benefit from adopting a more explicit integration of Chronos, Kairos, Shi, and Taiji logic, strengthening both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for program leaders. Adopting these temporal logics could help redefine not only program standards but also leadership development across global organizations.

6.4 Methodology

The reviewed literature uses various methods that collectively offer a multidimensional view of time in program management. Empirical studies (Ika et al., 2024; Ames, 2017; Otto et al., 2024) use qualitative, case-based approaches to show how governance adapts to real-world complexity, highlighting both the limitations of Chronos-based planning and the importance of Kairos-driven responsiveness. Conceptual frameworks (Zidane, 2018; Armanios et al., 2025; Ding et al. 2020) expand theory by introducing decision logics like temporal agility, the S³ model, and Taiji logic, which go beyond traditional project paradigms. Philosophical analyses (Smith, 1969; Jullien, 2019) deepen ontological understanding of time by contrasting Western linear models with Eastern relational perspectives and introducing concepts such as propensity (shi). Psychological research, especially Kahneman’s (2012) work on the peak-end rule, adds a cognitive perspective by illustrating how stakeholders perceive and evaluate time-bound decisions.

Together, these approaches reveal different aspects of temporal complexity and serve as the

basis for integrative models, such as the Temporal Governance Framework, which incorporates empirical evidence, conceptual logics, and cross-cultural insights to reconceptualize time as a strategic resource in program leadership.

6.5 Further research

The literature shows growing recognition of multiple temporal logics, Chronos, Kairos, Shi, and Taiji, in program contexts. However, significant gaps remain. While conceptual advances highlight the importance of temporal ambidexterity, empirical insights into how practitioners perceive, interpret, and act on time are still limited. Program management standards tend to favor Chronos-based control, offering little guidance on how to incorporate situational timing, strategic tendencies, or harmony-oriented logics into governance. Moreover, cultural and cognitive factors related to timing—such as Eastern philosophies or biases in temporal judgment—are still underexplored. These gaps present many opportunities for future research. To push the field forward, this study suggests three key questions:

RQ1: How do program leaders recognize and act upon Kairotic opportunities within Chronos-based governance structures?

(examines the micro-level judgment of leaders navigating between plans and emergent opportunities)

RQ2: In what ways can Eastern temporal logics, such as Shi and Taiji, enhance program governance and decision-making in politically sensitive or cross-cultural contexts?

(broadens the inquiry beyond Western perspectives, linking to global practice and intercultural leadership)

RQ3: How does temporal ambidexterity—balancing structured control (Chronos) with situational responsiveness (Kairos, Shi, Taiji)—influence program outcomes such as adaptability, stakeholder alignment, and value creation?

(evaluates the overall impact of integrating temporal logics into program performance)

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