

Riddle Me This: What Does the COVID-19 Crisis, Helping Behavior, Temporality, Work Interruptions, and the Gig Economy Have in Common? They Are GOM's 2021 Best Papers!

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Started by Bill Gardner during his time as Editor-in-Chief of *Group & Organization Management* (GOM), I have decided to rekindle the wonderful tradition of writing an annual “Riddle Me This” editorial to highlight the quality and diversity of our best quantitative, qualitative, and conceptual papers. As *GOM*'s journal description indicates, *GOM*

is dedicated to publishing theoretically grounded research that addresses a wide range of issues within organizations. From individual behavior to organizational strategy and functioning, *GOM* features both empirical (quantitative and qualitative) and theoretical articles spanning various levels of analysis in organizations. *GOM*'s conceptual and empirical focus gives scholars, educators, and practitioners the tools to help them solve the most challenging problems in today's organizations. Unlike most management journals, *Group & Organization Management* moves away from the boundaries of management subfields and encourages scholarship that challenges traditional distinctions among management scholars. The journal promotes the development of new paradigms and the explorations of paradigms from various disciplines.

This year's three articles selected by *GOM*'s editorial leadership for special recognition as the 2021 Best Quantitative Paper ([Shoss et al., 2021](#)), 2021 Best

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Qualitative Paper (Feldman & Greenway, 2021), and the 2021 Best Conceptual Paper (Watson et al., 2021) once more demonstrate *GOM*'s ability and success in achieving these objectives and mission statement. Indeed, our 2021 Best Papers once again reflect *GOM*'s openness to (1) micro- (Feldman & Greenway, 2021) and macro- (Shoss et al., 2021) research with a touch of micro-level research to it as well; (2) conceptual (Watson et al., 2021) and empirical (Feldman & Greenway, 2021; Shoss et al., 2021) articles; and (3) quantitative (Shoss et al., 2021) and qualitative (Feldman & Greenway, 2021) methods. We believe that these 2021 articles offered the type of theoretical, conceptual, and/or empirical contributions to the literature that most warranted a "Best Paper" award. Below, I highlight some of the key attributes that led to our selection of these articles as awardees from a range of high-quality contenders.

The Conflicting Impact of COVID-19's Health and Economic Crisis on Helping

Starting with a worldwide event that affected all of us, the COVID-19 pandemic, Mindy Shoss, Kristin Horan, Michael DiStaso, Chelsea LeNoble, and Anthony Naranjo wrote a very interesting piece on the economic and health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on helping behavior by pitching two contrasting theoretical propositions against each other. In the one corner, we have economic crisis research which suggests that such events are associated with less helping, whereas in the other corner we have disaster research which suggests that such events are associated with greater helping. So, who will come out on top?

In their first study, the authors took a macro-level approach to this question and relied on objective country-level (US) search interest data from Google Trends for the terms "COVID," "recession," and "how to help" as indicators of interest in COVID-19, recession, and helping. Consistent with economic crisis logic, macro-level concern about recession was negatively associated with interest in helping. In their second study, they recruited a sample of employed adults working in primarily low-wage positions so that threat of a reduction in work hours would be salient. Their data collection was meticulous and through open-ended questions, they were able to demonstrate that respondents were extremely concerned about COVID-19 exposure at work and work-hour insecurity at the time of data collection. At this micro-level the authors assessed the relationships between work-hour insecurity and perceived job-related COVID-19 risk—two salient COVID-19-related economic and health threats—and helping customers and coworkers. Consistent with disaster logic, at the individual level, perceived job-related COVID-19 threat was positively associated with helping coworkers and negatively associated

with helping customers. Moreover, at the individual level, work-hour insecurity negatively predicted helping coworkers.

Overall, the findings of [Shoss and colleagues \(2021, p. 22\)](#) suggest that “both economic crisis and disaster logics are useful in explaining the dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis, and the relative attention to economic uncertainty versus health disaster elements at both macro- and micro-levels may help to explain different patterns of helping behavior seen during this initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic”; with concerns about recession following COVID-19 at the national level being negatively associated with an interest to helping others, whereas diving into these findings at a lower level demonstrated a much more nuanced picture of helping behavior (positive for helping coworkers but negative for helping customers).

Together, the strong theoretical foundations which bridged micro- and macro-levels of research, novel and rigorous methods (i.e., the use of Google Trends data), and practical contributions (e.g., proposing uncertainty-reducing interventions) of Shoss and colleagues’ work contributed to our editorial team’s decision to select their article as the 2021 GOM Best Quantitative Paper. It appears that our community of GOMmers were likewise impressed, as their article was one of the most frequently downloaded and cited 2021 articles.

It’s a Matter of Time: The Role of Temporal Perceptions in Emotional Experience of Work Interruptions

Next, is an article by Elana Feldman and David Greenway on work interruptions; in which they shake the metaphorical tree by arguing that our understanding of if, and when, work interruptions may trigger negative versus positive emotions is underdeveloped and under-contextualized. Introducing a temporal lens, they conducted a qualitative field study of 251 work interruption events from 35 participants over the course of a single workday. Their argument? Time plays an important role in organizational life because it surrounds us in everything we do. The most obvious way to use time is to rely on clock time as a metric to determine whether events happen on time, ahead of time, or behind schedule. However, there is another, and arguably more important, aspect of time; subjective time or temporal perceptions. In their work, [Feldman and Greenway’s \(2021\)](#) temporal lens fits with this focus on temporal perceptions which states that people’s subjective interpretations of time matter most in their everyday experiences and that people’s interpretations of interruptions, more so than the disruptions themselves, spark emotion and may have downstream behavioral consequences.

Their initial results already revealed that our assumption that most work interruptions trigger negative emotions, does not hold. From the 251 work interruption events, 34.3% were coded as negative (e.g., stressful, anxious, and frustrated), 31.1% as positive (e.g., happy, excited, and humorous), and 34.7% as neutral (e.g., no affect). Interestingly enough, at the individual level, there appeared to be large variations between participants with some recording a fairly even distribution in the type of emotions work interruptions triggered, and others recording very lopsided breakdowns. Next, Feldman and Greenway set out to identify which subjective temporal aspects would help them to explain the above-described variation in participants' emotional experiences of work interruptions. They identified four temporal perceptions that help explain this variation: (1) time worthiness (i.e., whether or not an interruption is perceived as worthy of someone's time), (2) timing (i.e., whether an interruption is perceived as occurring at a "good" vs. a "bad" time), (3) duration (i.e., whether or not an interruption is perceived as taking a lot of vs. not much of someone's time), and (4) task expectedness (i.e., whether or not an interruption involves a task to which someone already anticipated allocating time). Finally, the authors went above and beyond when trying to further contextualize their findings; they also identified that contextual factors influenced participants' emotional experiences of work interruptions. Specifically, they demonstrated that both relational (i.e., when participants had unfavorable opinions about the person interrupting them or their communication style, a negative affective experience is more likely) and work (i.e., if an interruption occurred later in the day or during high workload moments, negative affect allocation to the interruption was more likely to occur) context play a role in terms of how temporal perceptions influence the relationship between work interruptions and emotional experiences.

Together the work of Feldman and Greenway challenges the assumption that all work interruptions are created equally (and are bad). In contrast, this work demonstrates that interruptions at work can generate positive emotional experiences depending on temporal perceptions such as time worthiness, timing, duration, and task expectedness. Coupled with the further contextualization of these findings, this paper does not only add significant contextual richness to theories of work interruption but also challenges my own ways of working and makes me critically reflect about the moments when I interrupt people at work and when I am ok with being interrupted. Apparently, our community of GOMmers shares our interest in these findings, as this was another heavily downloaded article. Together, the novel insights, methodological rigor, and theoretical extension of our understanding of work interruptions lead to our decision to designate this as the 2021 GOM Best Qualitative Paper.

Looking at the Gig Picture: Defining Gig Work and Explaining Profile Differences in Gig Workers' Job Demands and Resources

Last, but definitely not least, we have an outstanding conceptual paper by Gwendolyn Paige Watson, Lauren Kistler, Baylor Graham, and Robert Sinclair on gig work. Much like we could not escape the COVID-19 pandemic (full circle here from the first Best Paper), we cannot overlook gig work and the gig economy in today's society. Although there are many factors at play when it comes to understanding the rise in gig work, the general changing nature of work has facilitated the increase in gig work by making it appealing and accessible to everyone. Despite the surge in gig work, there remains definitional ambiguity of what constitutes gig work. Hence, Watson and colleagues (2021) pose a very important question: "What is gig work?"

Drawing on a systematic literature review on gig work and related terms, Watson and colleagues identified 70 primary studies, 61 narrative reviews, and five case studies to provide a comprehensive definition of gig work that distinguishes primary (i.e., common to all gig workers) and secondary (i.e., shared by a limited group of gig workers) characteristics. To be considered a gig worker, all three primary characteristics must be present to some degree. These characteristics include: (1) project-based compensation instead of salary, (2) temporary nature of the work being conducted versus long-term commitment to the job, and (3) some level of flexibility in the timing of work, the location or place of work, and the amount of work. In addition to the required primary characteristics, gig workers might be characterized by some of the following secondary characteristics of gig work: (1) technologically enabled networks (i.e., work is facilitated through some sort of technologically enabled platform), (2) crowd work (i.e., work is outsourced to an anonymous crowd on the internet), (3) remote work (i.e., having the ability to work from non-traditional work settings), and (4) agency-based work (i.e., using an agency as an intermediary to connect to clients).

In addition to solving the definitional ambiguity surrounding gig work, Watson and colleagues also set out to identify different types, or profiles, of gig workers and found that little attention has been given to some of these gig worker profiles. The five profiles of gig workers are as followed: (1) Gig Service Providers who provide services through a technologically enabled network and crowdsourcing such as Uber and Airbnb, (2) Gig Goods Providers who require a technologically enabled network to provide originally produced goods to consumers such as Etsy, (3) Gig Data Providers who utilize a technologically enabled network, rely on crowdsourcing, but do not necessarily sell goods or provide services to consumers such as Cloudfiresearch

and Google Surveys, (4) Agency Gig Workers who are assigned to projects through a third-party intermediary and are not solely facilitated by an app such as independent models, and (5) Traditional Gig Workers provide services and do not rely on a technologically enabled network or an agency to assign them to their gigs such as substitute teachers or independent musicians.

Finally, the authors set out to develop propositions to compare gig workers profiles based on the job demands (i.e., alienation, emotional labor, and under-employment) and resources (i.e., autonomy, social support, and task identity) they are able to experience. The resulting eight propositions in this article provide an excellent starting point for testing novel insights and theoretical ideas about how gig work demands and resources relate to health and motivational processes depending on their gig worker profile. I think I can speak for our entire editorial team when saying that we were extremely impressed by the conceptual rigor and practical importance of Watson and colleagues' (2021) work on better defining and understanding gig workers. The authors did not only solve definitional ambiguity, reviewed the literature, provided a roadmap for future research, but also demonstrated the strengths and pitfalls to organizational psychology's (limited) understanding of gig workers' experiences. Here again, our community of GOMmers appeared to agree with our positive assessment, as this was another highly read article (and several currently submitted manuscripts are citing this work). For all of these reasons, our editorial team selected this article as the recipient for the 2021 GOM Best Qualitative Paper Award.

Some Final Words

Speaking on behalf of GOM's editorial team—both the outgoing and incoming team—I wish to express our pride in recognizing this set of papers as the 2021 Best Papers. Together, they reflect the breadth of topics, disciplinary diversity, methodological creativity and rigor as well as the diverse nature of methods used in our journal, and impactful results that scholars and practitioners can expect to find when reading *GOM*. Hoping to keep up with Bill's wonderful "Riddle Me This" editorials, you can expect another Riddle Me This somewhere around the same time next year. Although the questions our community of GOMmers will be dealing with in 2022 will be different, the answer to my editorial will be the same: GOM'S BEST PAPERS!

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