

MOVING TOO FAST?

Addressing temporality and acceleration in Portuguese business ventures scaling

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Abstract In recent years, Portugal has been increasingly credited as an emergent European entrepreneurial and technological hub, a rising and promising start-up nation. An ethnographic study was developed in one of the most successful start-up ventures operating in Portugal, with the goal of scrutinizing policy effectiveness in an employment creation and relations perspective. Considering the effect temporality regimes and acceleration are increasingly considered to have as new business ventures socioeconomic base, the study focus was placed on speeding-up implications, namely on how actors experience speed as infrastructural base of employment relations.

Keywords: start-up, time, temporality, employment relations, trust, conflict avoidance.

Um crescimento demasiado rápido? Temporalidade e aceleração em organizações *start-up* portuguesas

Resumo Nos últimos anos, Portugal tem sido crescentemente creditado como um centro tecnológico europeu emergente, uma nação *start-up* promissora. Visando analisar a eficácia das políticas públicas de apoio ao empreendedorismo, foi desenvolvido um estudo etnográfico numa das *start-ups* de maior sucesso a operar em Portugal. Atendendo ao papel que tem vindo a ser atribuído aos usos do tempo, à temporalidade e à aceleração como base socioeconómica de novos empreendimentos económicos, o foco do estudo foi colocado nas implicações da aceleração, no referente à forma como os atores experienciam a velocidade como base infraestrutural das (suas) relações de trabalho.

Palavras-chave: *start-up*, tempo, temporalidade, relações de trabalho, confiança, conflito.

Aller trop rapidement? Temporalité et accélération de la mise à l'échelle des *start-up* portugaises

Resumé Ces dernières années, le Portugal a été de plus en plus considéré comme un pôle technologique européen émergent, une nation *start-up* prometteuse. Afin d'analyser l'efficacité des politiques publiques de soutien à l'entrepreneuriat, une étude ethnographique a été réalisée dans l'une des *start-up* les plus performantes opérant au Portugal. Compte tenu du rôle qui a été attribué aux usages du temps, de la temporalité et de l'accélération comme base socio-économique des nouvelles entreprises économiques, l'étude s'est concentrée sur les implications de l'accélération, en termes de la façon dont les acteurs vivent la vitesse comme base l'infrastructure de (leurs) relations de travail.

Mots-clés: *start-up*, temps, temporalité, relations de travail, confiance, conflit.

Moviéndose demasiado rápido? Temporalidad y aceleración del escalamiento de las *start-ups* portuguesas

Resumen En los últimos años, Portugal se ha visto cada vez más como un centro tecnológico europeo emergente, una nación emergente prometedora. Para analizar la eficacia de las políticas públicas de apoyo al emprendimiento, se llevó a cabo un estudio etnográfico en una de las empresas emergentes más exitosas que operan en Portugal. Dado el papel que se ha atribuido a los usos del tiempo, la temporalidad y la aceleración como base socioeconómica de los nuevos emprendimientos económicos, el estudio se centró en las implicaciones de la aceleración, en términos de cómo los actores experimentan la velocidad como base de la infraestructura de (sus) relaciones laborales.

Palabras-clave: *start-up*, tiempo, temporalidad, relaciones laborales, confianza, conflicto.

Introduction

In recent years, start-ups and business venturing have been publicly and politically acclaimed as an opportunity for “Portugal to become a different country”, not as the “[...] Florida of Europe, but as the Silicon Valley of the Union” (Santos, 2016). Despite the small size and peripheral positioning that tends to characterize (and present) the Portuguese economy (Start-up Europe Partnership, 2015; CB Insights, 2016; Reis, 2020) in the European context, different factors have contributed to the country, proportionately to the size of its economy and GNP, gaining prominence as a reference in the European business venturing context (Butcher, 2017, 2021; Robinson, 2017), a model to be followed, a rising “tech tiger” (Butcher, 2021), a “start-up nation” (Oliveira, 2016). The (low) cost of living, perceived quality of life, (low) labor costs, a qualified workforce (particularly in the field of engineering and information and communication technologies), inter-cultural openness, security and institutional stability are factors overtly valued and celebrated, in terms of institutional discursive practices, operating as narrative key drivers to capture new foreign investment, and attract new entrepreneurial organizations and professionals to the country (Medeiros, 2016).

Despite empirical evidence of risk, uncertainty and remote hypothetical success, public investment, tax incentives and governmental endorsement of start-up ventures are rising and increasingly expressive in Portugal, namely since 2016, with the creation of a public agency (StartUP Portugal) and a national framing policy aimed to incentivize business venturing and entrepreneurial action (National Strategy for Entrepreneurship). Empirical evidence and analytical views covering the return of these public investments are still scarce, and a laudatory discourse is dominant (Ramos, 2017). Among dimensions related with the role played by new ventures in capturing foreign investment and infusing novelty in the economy, high expectations are created regarding the chance of having new jobs and employment streams generated by these entrepreneurial ventures. It has been mentioned that up to 18% of new created jobs can be directly related with new business ventures (Informa, 2017). Between 2016 and 2019, over 25,000 new jobs were created by ventures based in Portugal, and start-up GDP economic impact in Portugal surpassed 1% in 2019 (Machado, 2019).

Given the substantial public and financial endorsement of a socioeconomic activity molded by risk, uncertainty and temporariness (Graham, 2012), scrutinizing the quality and sustainability of new employment streams can be considered an analysis of quintessential relevance. In Portugal, empirical queries surveying the quality and sustainability of this new employment are still rare, as entrepreneurial activity studies have been mainly focused in macro and meso dimensions, such as analyzing the impact of public policy agendas and private agents’ industrial strategies, or the role different economic agents play as facilitators or engagement stimulators in the creation of local, regional, national and international innovation clusters (Baptista and Preto, 2011; Urze and Abreu, 2015; Rocha *et al.*, 2017).

As illustrated by different authors (Blank, 2010; Dille, Söderlund and Clegg, 2018; Drori and Wright, 2018; Wenzel and Koch, 2018; Skade *et al.*, 2020), start-up

business venturing constitutes a socioeconomic activity molded by temporality. As suggested by Ries (2016 [2011]: 23): “The aim of a start-up is to find the right thing to build — what customers want and will pay to have — as quickly as possible, in extremely uncertain conditions.” Depicting therefore a start-up business venturing as an organizational practice of a contingent and temporary nature, that imply and encourage temporal conditioning practices related with acceleration (e.g., “moving fast”, “scaling”, “fast grow”) (Rosa, 2013; Skade *et al.*, 2020), can constitute therefore a diverse perspective that allows to shed light over its social and organizational implications.

Although prior research has highlighted temporality and time regulation as key dimensions that drive business ventures creation and scaling, little is known on acceleration and speeding-up implications, namely on how actors experience and enact these as infrastructural bases of employment relations, possibly recasting their experience of time (Wajcman, 2015). Insights from the literature on time (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Reinecke and Ansari, 2017), business venturing acceleration (Skade *et al.*, 2020) and temporary organizing (e.g., Bakker *et al.*, 2016; Dille, Söderlund and Clegg, 2019) suggest that the enactment of acceleration as temporal conditioning practice, tends to invoke and come along with time-related tensions experienced by different actors. These tensions tend to be overlooked, in an institutional and managerial perspective (Kunisch *et al.*, 2017; Skade *et al.*, 2020).

Hence, aiming to complement existing entrepreneurial research strands, using a firm-level, inside-out organizational perspective, and focusing on concrete employment relations created by new start-up ventures in Portugal, a 12-months ethnographic study was developed with the following question being asked: How are individuals actors experiencing acceleration in Portuguese business ventures where temporality is arrayed as primary socioeconomic base?

Start-up business venturing as temporalized organizing process

Economic action is increasingly taking place in temporary settings and systems. For Bakker *et al.* (2016), new ways of organizing socioeconomic action are fundamentally temporary, with time and temporal organizing operating as important sensitizing concepts in analyzing the social and institutional forms characterizing the organization of contemporary work and entrepreneurial action. The growing work on time and temporality (Hassard, 2002; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Wajcman, 2015; Wajcman and Dodd, 2017; Reinecke and Ansari, 2017; Aguinis and Bakker, 2021) has led to a greater appreciation of acceleration in organizational and entrepreneurial life. In this context, temporality regimes and acceleration, *i.e.*, the performance of activities in ever-shorter periods of time, a compression of time experience (Hassard, 2002), unfold as a distinctive and dominant imperative in contemporary organizations and societies, driving actors to respond instantaneously to seemingly ever-shrinking time horizons (Bansal, Kim and Wood, 2018), and primarily contributing to the socioeconomic base of new business ventures.

In existing literature, business venturing processes and practices are increasingly presented as exemplary observational context, reflecting acceleration as social and managerial imperative. In this type of venture, speed up of the activities needed to attract follow-up funding more quickly than through organic growth, constitutes a salient manifestation of acceleration as a temporal conditioning structure (Drori and Wright, 2018). Existing literature (Saunders and Ahuja, 2006; Kunisch *et al.*, 2017; Bansal, Kim and Wood, 2018) is only partially helpful to explain the ways acceleration requirements are experienced by groups and individuals as consequential for day-to-day work-related relations. To this regard, Stjerne, Söderlund and Minbaeva (2019: 347) proposed that “temporal boundary spanning practices” are key mechanisms performed by actors to overcome such time-related tensions. In turn, Dille, Söderlund and Clegg (2018: 684) argue that actors rely on strategies of “temporal conditioning”, “[...] to come to terms with diverse time-reckoning systems that challenge entrained time orientations”.

Although the literature reinforces the experience of acceleration as a prevalent temporal structure of our time (Rosa, 2013), time tends to be conceived as a cognitive or passive contextual category (Skade *et al.*, 2020). In doing so, activities and practices through which actors enact and respond to acceleration as a temporal conditioning structure tend to be overlooked (Kunisch *et al.*, 2017; Skade *et al.*, 2020). To this regard, it can be suggested that theories about fast, mobile, flexible capitalism are rarely informed by how time is actually put in practice in specific social settings. Business scaling implies acceleration, as mentioned, a temporal regime demand compelled by business (rapid growth) goals, mirroring a setting of specific social determination of time uses and temporal practices. With the present study, we argue that what can be gained from the research and discussion of time uses and temporal practices in this business operating setting, is the consideration that temporality regimes primarily play as socio-material infrastructure that recasts social relations and temporal patterning of work experiences, possibly encouraging or enabling economic initiatives (*e.g.*, “growing”, “scaling”, “speeding up”). This gives room to pose questions, such as when and where people encounter accelerations and what are the consequences of this for the quality of personal lives and social relations, as social and intersubjectivity orders maybe partially or totally obscured (Wajcman, 2015) by different temporal practices and experiences.

Methods and materials

Case and context

This paper findings emerged from a 12-months ethnographic study of day-to-day work at an early-stage start-up venture based in Lisbon, Portugal, one of the Portuguese start-up ventures presenting the greatest growth and visibility in the last three years (Startup Genome, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). The key idea lying behind the start-up venture that was analyzed, emerged from a need felt by its founders in identifying accommodation alternatives in Portugal, after studying in different locations

worldwide. Their intention was to create a business together, somewhere in Europe. The difficulty in finding accommodation for themselves brought them to a market yet to be explored: long-term accommodation solutions for university students. Over the 12-months period considered for direct observation, the start-up increased its team three-fold (from 40 to 120 employees), launched two versions of its product (an electronic e-commerce platform) and extended its headquarters in Portugal (Lisbon) and in the UK (London). Its operational income increased four-fold, its international presence five-fold, along with a multiplying number of active users of the solution provided. Despite these figures and multipliers, the observed results were considered to be below the threshold seen as desirable for the period in question. In this period, the employee turnover rate was always in two figures, something found to be recurrent (and normal) in a start-up environment (Ries, 2016 [2011]). As early-stage startup venture, display of growth and activities speeding-up is understood and enacted as core business need, as mean to attract follow-up funding, thus constituting a salient manifestation of acceleration as enacted temporal pattern (Drori and Wright, 2018).

Data collection

As suggested by Wajcman (2015: 22), “[...] we can best advance the understanding of the dynamics and consequences of acceleration through research that is specific, empirical and located in concrete social settings where experiences of time in unheroic sites of ordinary life [...] can be clearly observed”. In the present study, immersive ethnographic approach allowed the close examination of activities that startup managers, employees, founders and stakeholders performed collectively. In order to capture these dynamics and come close(r) to the realms of immediate experience of a specific social situation, three data sources were used: (i) direct participant observation (focused on in-situ, sensory experience of work-related aspects, events and organizational routines); (ii) interviews with managers, employees and startup founders (focus was given to views of daily tasks, company and work organization, understanding of time and time uses in the startup, and beliefs on how acceleration was consequential for day-to-day work and relations; a total of 16 interviews were performed); (iii) documents (to triangulate insights and provide additional contextual background, given the existing extensive communication work, diverse textual artifacts and documents were gathered: newspaper articles, blog entries, internal presentations and *pitch* slide decks).

Data analysis

Self-reflection notes arising from the 12-months of direct observation and the information gathered from the interviews allowed the elaboration of a field diary (Czarniawska, 2007). The empirical material contained here was subject to thematic analysis and categorization using specific software (MaxQDA v.12). Collected data was thematically ordered and coded to explore time-related tensions emerging from the enactment of acceleration as temporal organizing. Observations in the data were

juxtaposed to prior accounts on time-related tensions in organizations (Saunders and Ahuja, 2006; Krauss, 2009; Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013; Davidsson, 2015; Hanage, Scott and Davies, 2015; Singh, Corner and Pavlovich, 2015; Kunisch *et al.*, 2017; Bansal, Kim and Wood, 2018; Braun *et al.*, 2018; Stjerne, Söderlund and Minbaeva, 2019), providing a fruitful basis for further discussion. Two streams of relational effects were inductively identified as consequences of acceleration-related experienced tensions: (i) effects on the relation individuals establish *with* their employer organization; and (ii) effects on the relations established *within* the organization (immediate relations established by individuals with managers, peers, external partners and their working or project teams).

Materials

From the analysis that was made, two narratives were drawn up (Czarniawska, 1997; Cole, 2013) as vehicles to condense and illustrate observed the two dimensions of time-related tensions that were observed: (1) the relation individuals establish *with* their employer organization (table 1. *Narrative #1: "Getting sh!t done"*); and (2) the relations established *within* the organization (table 2. *Narrative #2: "Let's move on, please"*). The presented narratives are themselves considered to be a vehicle of knowledge, a condensed research empirical result available to be challenged, discussed, and interpreted. These narrative supports are used in the results presentation and discussion in the following sections, using excerpts for empirical elucidation of the argument presented at each moment.

Table 1. Narrative #1: "Getting sh!t done."

In November, the period of daily observation and intervention in the organization began. On the first days, from the raised voices, the sharpness of most matters presented, the impression of sophistication felt, I assumed I was facing a context where there was management resident experience, relatively stable practices, defined objectives, a vision off/for the future. I perceived this shortly after beginning the observation: experimentation in the management domain, was incessant, a modus vivendi which was part of the very nature of that start-up, of start-up organizations at an early stage, as was frequently mentioned. Experimenting was understood as a congenital part of the start-up's identity. It was a palliative argument, a justification for pretty much everything. "This is a start-up: start-ups experiment." Practices changed on a weekly, a daily basis, on the same day, if necessary, if someone made that decision. Definition of an activity, a project, of success itself, was essentially contingent, situated, changeable, evanescent. First observations involved the creation and presentation of a budget for the area of human resources, in two days, to account for the expected growth. The ones involved in the task were still being onboarded: they did not know the organization, its practices, its past. Quickly, it became clear that the past was irrelevant, just as History, in historical terms generally. That budget was less of an instrument of internal regulation and control, and more of an instrument to manage impressions in the eyes of investors, relevant to guarantee the legitimacy of operations and decisions to be taken internally. A budget proposal was handed in the next day. It was discussed for ten minutes with two of the (three) founders, at one end of a table. And that is where it was approved. Sending it off by e-mail (to the investors) was celebrated effusively (by the founders). In day-to-day life, many presented themselves as managers of something, the head of an area. Categories, titles, often formally non-existent and out of tune with the work carried out and defined responsibilities. Many feel they deserve a pay rise. Many hours are spent doing things ("I'm getting sh!t done" — is frequently heard). In fact, people did things. They tried, learned, experimented, things were tried out. The things to do, the very work activities were not defined, with no definition of the common objective of the organization, of each area, each person,

according to an allocated role. The “dream”: “It’s important to sell them the dream”, a founder emphasizes, about the practices being used. The “dream” omits the uncertainty, neglecting the being in favor of the event. What a start-up is or does is essentially uncertain, floating, ephemeral. It is not so important to define what it “is”, what the start-up “is”, what each area or function “is”, what matters is that things happen, that something is always happening or just about to burst. The start-up does, “moves fast”, as recurrently said as inspiring motto, therefore it exists. Effectiveness and waste are in a secondary position and are made invisible in terms of decision making and priority definitions. First comes the need to do, to grow. There is no time to think. There is action. Decision processes are often badly timed, involving a partial quorum and limited participation. On various occasions, the decision is presented as being already made and communicated by the “person in charge”. A dismissal, an international expansion to a new city, an idea a founder had (“Let’s go to China”), a recruitment decision a founder made the day before (“I hired that guy yesterday: we need to close the position, he looked amazing”). For every decision made this way, there is a distancing effect, a sense of indifference that is produced but unspoken.

Source: Extracts from the field diary — own elaboration.

Table 2. “Let’s move on, please.”

1-1s, as moments that concede attention to the individual, are especially valued. Agendas are packed with events, and among these, 1-1s tend to be particularly appreciated: “Let’s take this topic offline, to our 1-1.” 1-1s are moment of learning, of being granted special attention, a (potentially differentiating) advantage. Knowledge lies in the individuals rather than in the organization. People learn from their peers, their leaders, particularly from those thought to be knowledgeable, until they cease to be so, until the interest (the novelty) fades. Various events and practices celebrate the individual. The name and the numbers on the wall, on a screen, for all to see, instill a sense of competition. There is a transactional element, which in this context tends to give form to working relations. Under ten percent of the team has a contract for more than twelve months. New elements stay for six months, three months, one month, one week, one day. Their own choice, the organization’s choice, a choice from “the person in charge”. Who in many cases is managing the organization, a team, is doing it for the first time in his or her life. Opportunities are provided in a start-up. Turnover is high: more than 40 people left during the period of observation. Trust. Collaboration. Reciprocity. Individualism and reciprocity. Relationships particularly at management levels seem to be marked by distrust. There is an individual reluctance to assume weaknesses, vulnerability. Egos are much in evidence, a great deal of “finger-pointing”, artificial harmony, the use of aggressive language. For these reasons, collaboration and reciprocity is a problem. Trust is typically attributed, rather than emerging as a social or relational construct. Conflict tends to be avoided, neglected, deprioritized. It is an incident, a minor detail. “Let’s move on, please”, is heard at a leadership meeting. Nobody really seems to know how to deal with conflict, with bad examples, inflated egos resulting in aggression. “If I don’t do it, it certainly won’t be done well”, is often heard at leadership or project follow-up meetings. Similarly, there are problems of assuming responsibility, conciliating responsibility (for a delay in a “delivery”, an inconsequential financial expense) with the ever-latent uncertainty, with the declared intention to maintain managerial minimalism, encouraging ad-hoc organization and practices based on individual self-regulation. Relations seem to be marked by an instrumental dimension and a rationale of immediacy. People remain in the start-up if they are learning, as long as this seems to represent an (individual) advantage. The absence of clear purpose(s), its constant fluctuation, the difficulty in defining a task as completed, appear to contribute to a sense of loose, hyphenated commitment to the organization’s objectives and its future. Particularly to shared, collective objectives.

Source: Extracts from the field diary — own elaboration.

Results

Analyzing the two presented narratives, three specificities emerged as relevant research findings, as speeding-up implications empirical evidence, attempts to reconcile time-related tensions consequential to acceleration enactment:

- i) Time is used chronoscopically (Virilio, 1986), not chronologically. Time usage is hypertrophied with events, announcements, meetings, 1-1s, an overload of intensive instants: “*moving fast*” (cf. narrative #1), in the considered case and context, imply a conceptualization and use of time as chronoscopic time (Virilio, 1986), where intensity takes over extensity, and a derangement of senses can emerge, as the promise of acceleration seems to be never entirely fulfilled (Rosa, 2013). To this regard, various elements showcased the dissemination of a specific conception of time use and temporal conditioning, of an intensive and linear rather than a cyclical or circular nature (Boutinet, 1997 [1990]): “There is no time to think. Action is taken. Decision processes are often marked by ill-timing, by a partial quorum, by limited participation” (cf. narrative #1). This is an orientation that does not favor the development of a material and symbolic investment (by individuals or organizations) in social interactions or the longevity of existing employment relations: “The absence of clear purpose(s), their constant fluctuation, the difficulty in defining a task as completed, seems to contribute to a sense of weak commitment to the organization’s objectives, its future” (cf. narrative #2). To this regard, it can be suggested that social relations formed within the organization are short wired, being valued and lived with a special fervor, a finite fervor.
- ii) The prevalence of a (short-termed) task focus. Speed and action, for the sake of speed and “*getting sh!t done*” (cf. narrative #1) emerge as reassuring narrative proxy for success and accomplishment, available palliatives for the lack of stability and ever present uncertainties. As illustrated by Ries (2016 [2011]), a start-up venture should seek to develop solutions, products or services that are minimally viable, a managerial rationale that challenges the classic industrial rationale of zero defects, of total quality management. The need for agility, to be or become lean (Ries, *op. cit.*), the need for constant change and disruptive discontinuity, emerges in this context as an identity marker, is assumed as the capacity to act, to display individual agency abilities. Experimenting is doing things, doing things is experimental (McLaughlin, Bessant and Smart, 2005). Doing things, rather than taking care of doing the right things. As stressed by most of the interviewees, in early stage start-up environments the most important thing is the ability to “*get sh!t done*”: “Many hours are spent doing things (“I’m getting sh!t done” — is frequently heard). Indeed, people did things. They tried, learned, experimented, things were tried out” (cf. narrative #1). An annual budget is drawn up, validated and handed in on the same day. The focus is placed on what happens (cf. narrative #1). The focus on action, in the immediate present, operates as a palliative for uncertainty: “What the start-up is or does, is essentially uncertain, floating, ephemeral” (cf. narrative #1). Action-centered practices seem to emerge as palliative for contingent, ephemeral structuring of employment arrangements. As mentioned in narrative #1: “[...] It is not so important to define what it is, what a start-up is, what each area or function ” is, what matters is that things happen. The start-up does, therefore it exists.”

- iii) Low levels of trust and institutionalized reciprocity. The ability to produce and infuse in daily activities sudden and instantaneous change, to introduce discontinuities in the organization (*e.g.*, hiring staff, adopt a new technology, introduce diverse coordination modes), is valued as a managerial maturity symptom, as it constitutes evidence that progress and evolution are occurring, promptly used as proof of institutional existence. Changes, discontinuities are deliberate and are aimed to produce or reinforce a sense of organizational becoming. The start-up is becoming something: a new hire, the decision of “going to China” (narrative #1), an internal structural change, act as initiatives available to instill this ontological orientation. As possible consequence, trust and the feeling of belonging (to the group, to the team, to the start-up organization) tend to be assumed *in situ* by the individuals, in a sudden, instantaneous way, rather than resulting from gradual acquisition, built on continuous consolidation of social relations. Fostering existing employment relations continuance is secondary. Challenging ideas and exploring a sense of doubt is temporarily suspended as social regulation mechanism. As illustrated, it was presumed that newcomers would be able to create and present a budget for the start-up HR area in two days, considering the expected growth for the following year (*cf.* narrative #1). The reduced likelihood of a shared future tends to make a start-up devalue, as a perceived need, the regulation of internal cohesion and existing daily conflicts. Relations seem to be primarily conceived as ephemeral and disposable (Bakker *et al.*, 2016). There are fewer opportunities to reduce cognitive distances between individuals and to consolidate social and emotional bonds: “Conflict tends to be avoided, neglected, deprioritized. It’s an incident, a minor detail. “Let’s move on, please”, is heard at a meeting (*cf.* narrative #2). As mentioned in narrative #2, from the apparent difficulty of consolidating the feeling of trust and organizational belonging, due to its fluidity, employment transactions emerge as substitutes for employment relations: “There is a transactional, instrumental element that in this context gives form to working relationships. Under ten percent of the team have a work contract of over twelve months. New elements stay for six months, three months, one month, one week, one day.” This empirical evidence presents a start-up business venturing as a specific milieu of (inter)action, marked by superficial trust and possible conflicts of loyalty, with multiple, scattered and competing interpersonal connections — “If I don’t do it, it certainly won’t be done well” (*cf.* narrative #2) — where neither party is willing to comply totally to other parties’ priorities. This leads to temporary reconciliations, not to a resolution of tensions, as illustrated by Skade *et al.* (2020), and conflict avoidance or freezing (*e.g.*, managers cutting-off during meetings, conflict; disfavored course of actions being frozen) (Dille, Söderlund and Clegg, 2018).

Discussion

The present study provides insights into time-related tensions that emerge when acceleration is enacted in start-up business ventures, while pursuing fast scaling-up of existing activities. These findings and observations are important because, as the study results suggest, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand how actors engage in activities to pursue acceleration without devoting attention to the consequences of the temporal conditioning emerging in this process.

As suggested by different authors, speed and acceleration tend to be closely identified with narratives of prestige and progress (Wajcman, 2015), exciting, action-packed lifestyles. Different all-embracing concepts — *e.g.*, acceleration of social change (Rosa, 2013), instantaneous time (Urry, 2000), time-space compression (Harvey, 1990), chronoscopic time (Virilio, 1986) — have at their core a view that life is speeding up. Existing literature presents fast growth and speeding up as salient manifestations of acceleration as temporal conditioning structures in start-up business venturing contexts (Kunisch *et al.*, 2017; Bansal, Kim and Wood, 2018; Drori and Wright, 2018). The present study explores the ways these acceleration requirements, adopted as temporal sovereignty regime tenets, are experienced by groups and individuals in a concrete social and business setting. Considering the study results, it can be suggested that “moving fast” (*cf.* narrative #1), enacted as social and managerial requirement and imperative, can carry consequences as lived experience by groups and individuals. In concrete terms, three implications are developed below.

First, dealing with temporal densification and chronoscopic time experiences (Virilio, 1986) seems to be far from uniform or straightforward, in an employee perspective: social distancing behaviours can be observed, via forms of inertia or employee retreat. To leverage overload and intensity, individuals can try to be half-present, psychologically absent, emotionally detached, avoiding conflicts. Observed high turnover rates can be related with this, and self-exclusion (people leaving by own initiative) can be an observed effect. In the considered case and research context, chronoscopic uses of time carry concrete practical and managerial implications: while enacting and responding to acceleration requirements, the discursive and praxeological focus is placed on the present moment, a hypertrophied sense of psychological present (Miles, 1964) that is mirrored in a self-propelling sense of urgency and immediate action focus (Eriksen, 2001). As factor driving psychological retreat or absence as speeding-up consequence, social relations can be experienced as overloaded and short-wired. In theoretical terms, densification and chronoscopic uses of time as temporal conditioning practices can be linked to entrepreneurial concepts of time as social entity (Mazmanian, Erickson and Harmon, 2015; Feldman, Reid and Mazmanian, 2020), time that can be owned and circumscribed, thus driven by routines and patterns of human and social engagement. As shown by the results findings, social determination(s) of time can be molded by business goals, employment relations and managerial strategic outlines, this relation between temporality and social change being dialectical, not teleological.

Second, temporal densification can be put in practice by replacing sequencing and planning practices by simultaneity, and duration by instantaneity. As consequence, action and action pace (not action purpose or goal) emerge as disembodied (e.g., speed for the sake of speed) values or practices. A noticeable empirical marker of this is the value ascribed to “*get sh!t done*” (cf. narrative #1), and not devoting or being able to devote proper attention to consider the tactical or strategic appropriateness of the activities being developed. A concrete implication of this circumstance was illustrated by the presented narratives: managing the interface and the interface quality between temporary actors and structures is deprioritized and understood as a minor concern. Within early-stage start-ups, less extensive organizational and coordination mechanisms can be observed (Reynold and White, 1997), and interpersonal and institutional trust can be presumed and imported as an idiosyncratic credit (Hollander, 1958) that emanates from previous personal and professional trajectories. In a strict sense, it can be argued that early-stage start-ups can be considered a form of ephemeral or disposable organizations (Bakker *et al.*, 2016), where structures, actors and their interplay are perceived and conceived as temporary. In this scenario, as illustrated, key management efforts can concentrate entirely on growth, on becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), while maintaining employment relations and social engagement minimally viable. In nascent entrepreneurial contexts (Reynolds and White, 1997; Davidsson, 2015), like the one considered by the research, where managerial efforts tend to follow an organic, bottom-up approach, fostering a state of experimentation (McLaughlin, Bessant and Smart, 2005) and normative impermanence constitutes a practice of symbolic control (Weick, 1996), that is deemed to be available to support the core organizational *raison d’être*, its present founding motive: *becoming* (something different, something else).

Finally, being anchored in experimentation, temporal conditioning and normative impermanence, the social inclusiveness potential of start-up business venturing can (or should) be questioned: as mentioned in an interview by an HR representative, “start-ups aren’t an experience for everyone”. As mentioned by Wajcman and Dodd (2017), in business terms, it is frequently argued that the powerful and successful are fast, and the powerless are slow, thus presenting acceleration as unquestioned good, a pivotal designing notion of temporal sovereignty and desirable organizational identity driver (Feldman, Reid and Mazmanian, 2020). Ultimately, “moving fast”, acceleration and speeding up seem to carry divergent and non-linear consequences as possible politics of organizational time, hardly emerging as totalizing, integrative, unquestioned narrative (Braun *et al.*, 2018). For some, can be emancipatory, for others, detrimental, instilling retreat behaviours. Contingencies of organizational belonging seem therefore to introduce specificities in day-to-day relations, a circumstance that represents a managerial vulnerability in the ability to share knowledge, to form a sense of interdependence, trust and social continuity. This can be linked to an atmosphere of disembodied and nihilist fervor (Virilio, 1986) that tends to favor intense individual experience of existing work conditions and social relations, of social relations experienced as being fundamentally temporary, similar, in their appeal, to “one night stands” (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996: 168).

These insights extend the nascent work on time-related tensions in entrepreneurial organizing (e.g., Krauss, 2009; Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2013; Davidsson, 2015; Hanage, Scott and Davies, 2015; Singh, Corner and Pavlovich, 2015; Braun *et al.*, 2018; Stjerne, Söderlund and Minbaeva, 2019), namely in emerging contexts as Portugal, by providing a nuanced understanding of the emergence of such tensions in the enactment of acceleration as temporal conditioning practice.

Conclusions

As illustrated by the research, temporal conditioning and acceleration play a key role as primary socioeconomic base of start-up business venturing processes. Observed social and managerial practices seem to be significantly restricted by time uses, and the enactment of time as a finite resource (Boutinet, 1997 [1990]). This is one of main contributions of the study that was made, complementing existing research on contemporary entrepreneurial action in Portugal (Baptista and Preto, 2011; Urze and Abreu, 2015; Rocha *et al.*, 2017): the portrayal, from an inside-out perspective, of the role temporality plays in defining the nature of the relations that individuals can establish *with* and *within* entrepreneurial organizations, such as the one considered by the research.

Actor and action-centered practices, normative impermanence, temporally conditioned employment relations where conflict is considered a minor concern, signal the existence of practices and cultures in early-stage entrepreneurial operating environments that mirror potential for employee attrition and detrimental employment relations effects. For emergent entrepreneurial national economies like the Portuguese, or isomorph ones (e.g., Spain, Ireland, Italy) (Startup Genome, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), this constitutes a significant fact, as it can shed critical light over existing governmental endorsement effectiveness and expectations regarding employment creation emanating from nascent venture processes.

Limitations can be identified in the research design that was followed. The reported study focused on the analysis of a single business context — a start-up venture in the early days of development — with empirical scrutiny being mainly based on qualitative empirical materials, and analytical work results being displayed in a specific way — a narrative. It is important to confront and expand the analytical and interpretative directions that were taken, by carrying out multiple case comparative studies, including different sectors and geographical regions, and articulating mixed techniques of collecting empirical data (e.g., quantitative surveys, individual diary of critical incidents, practitioner shadowing). Expanding research to include start-up organizations of a greater size and maturity (e.g., scale-ups) is a fruitful stream to pursue.

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