

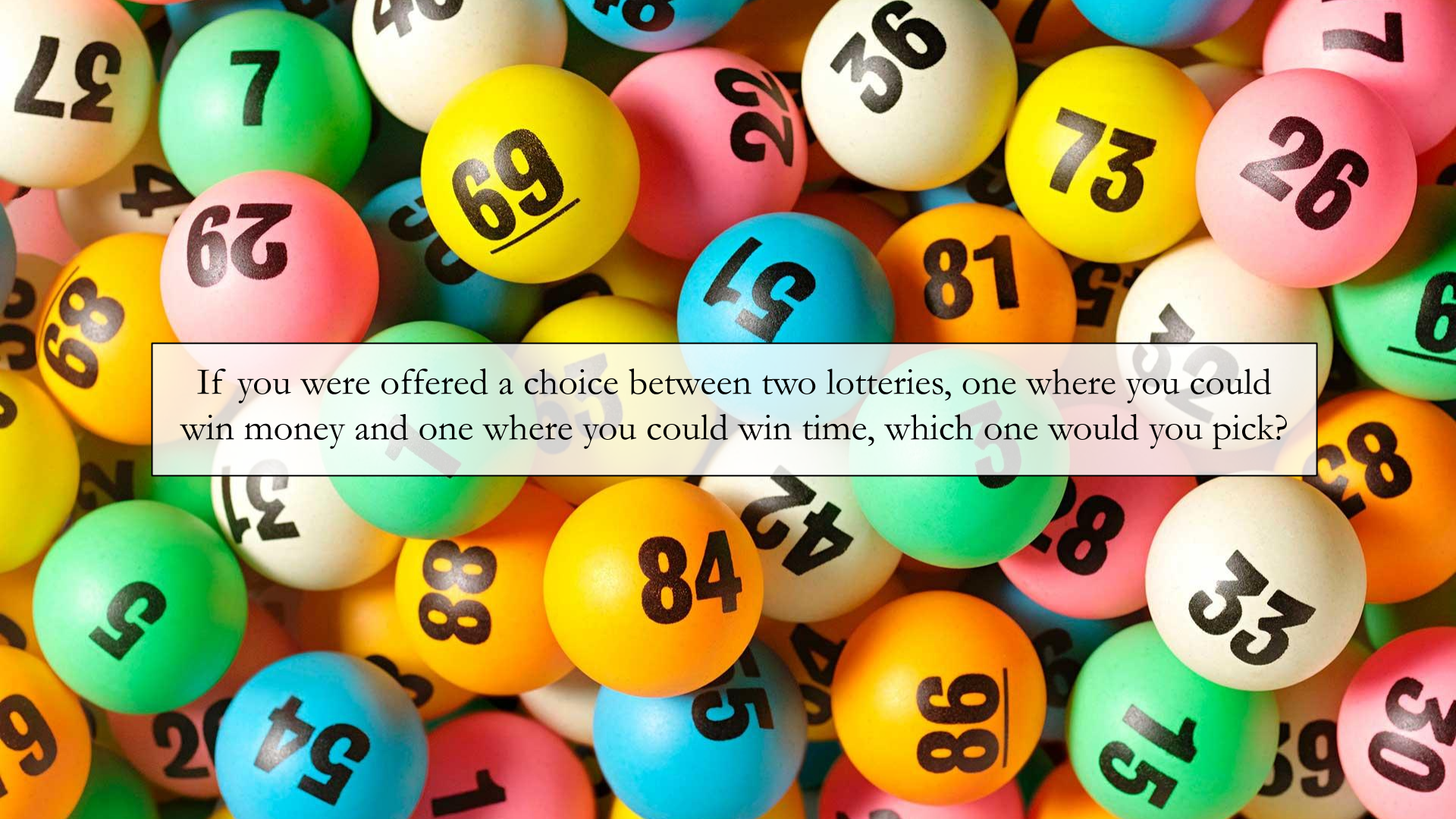
# One size does not fit all: How to choose the right **slack time** program.

*(From the Organizing Time for Innovation Pilot Project)*

New Orleans, FL, 06/09/2022



Presented by Heidi M. J. Bertels

A dense collection of multi-colored lottery balls (yellow, green, blue, pink, white, orange) with black numbers printed on them. The numbers are scattered across the frame, with some being more prominent than others. A semi-transparent white rectangular box with a thin black border is centered over the image, containing a text prompt.

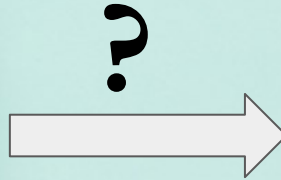
If you were offered a choice between two lotteries, one where you could win money and one where you could win time, which one would you pick?

TIME MANAGEMENT

TIME PRESSURE

JUST-IN-TIME

TIME IS MONEY

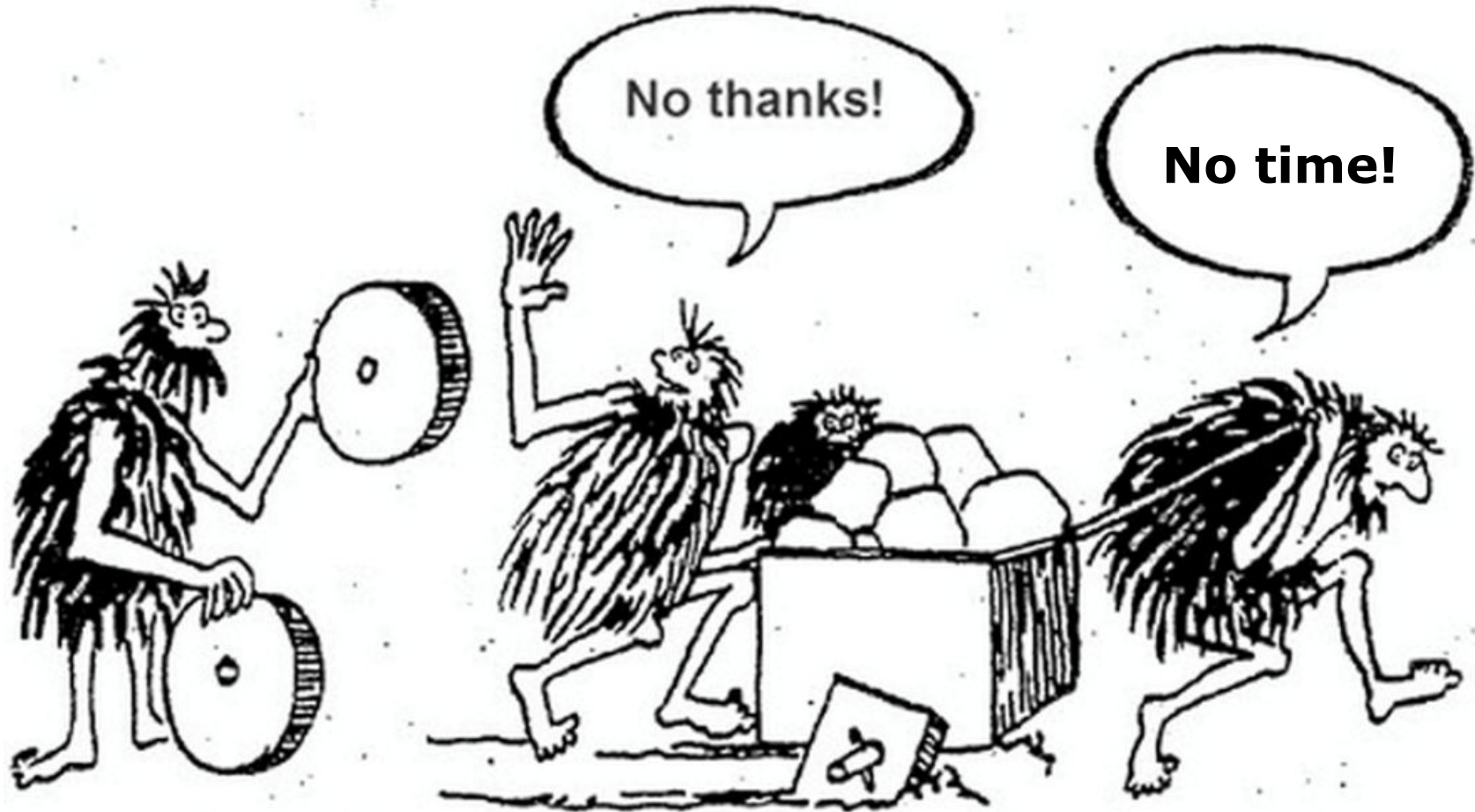




**Slack time** is defined as time  
“during which employees choose  
what projects to work on and how  
to complete such projects.” (Burkus &  
Oster, 2002, p 49)



# Examples of Slack Time Programs at Companies?



# Popular Examples of Slack Time Programs

	Term used	Description	Example	Who?
3M	15% culture	A portion of work time to proactively cultivate and pursue innovative ideas that excite employees.	Post-it notes, Scotch tape	Engineers & scientists
Atlassian	ShipIt days (quarterly)	24-hour hackathon to work on whatever you want.	Jira service	Engineers
Atlassian	20% time	Work on whatever you want as long as there is a beneficial link back to Atlassian - including work on productivity enhancements and external activities (e.g., working on Open Source projects).		Engineers
Genentech	Discretionary time	As much as 25% of a scientist's research time can be dedicated to the problem of his or her choice.	Anti-cancer drug Avastin	Research division
Google	20% time	As much as 20% of time working on what they think will most benefit Google.	Gmail, Google News, Orkut	All employees
Google	Area 120	Corporate incubator		All employees
W. L. Gore	Dabble time	All associates have about 10% of their work week free to dabble, to work on an initiative of their own choosing – assuming they are fulfilling their primary commitments. Ideas have to be “unique and valuable;” not “me too” products.”	Gore-Tex (a waterproof and breathable fabric), Elixir guitar strings	All employees

Providing Slack Time for Creativity and Innovation is **costly**

**Relationship** between Slack Time and Creativity **not straightforward**  
(Agrawal et al., 2018; Nohria & Gulati, 1996)

+

Allows employees to work on riskier projects not focused on short-term objectives, leading to **innovation**  
(Bourgeois, 1981; Cyert & March, 1963; Levinthal & March, 1981; Medase, 2020; Thompson, 1967).

-

Reduces discipline and selectiveness, leading to **resource misallocation**.  
(Jensen, 1986, 1994; Staw et al., 1981).

How should companies  
organize slack time for creativity  
to maximize creative output?



# Slack Time Archetypes



Continuous Time  
(e.g., Bootcamp)



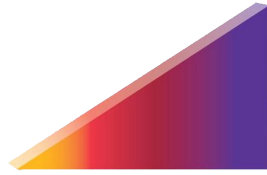
Discontinuous Time

Structured  
(e.g., Fri afternoons)

Unstructured  
(e.g., 15%)

# Relation between Time and Creativity and Innovation

<p>Time Pacing (grading versus drug discovery)</p>	<p>Time pacing is the regulation of intensity and direction of people's attention and effort (Dougherty et al., 2013; Gersick, 1994). Clock-time pacing gauges progress by the predictable passage of clock time. Event-time pacing gauges progress by the unpredictable achievement of learning events. Clock-time pacing has been related to work that is exploitative, routine, and incremental, whereas event-time pacing has been associated with work that is explorative and complex.</p>
<p>Incubation &amp; Unconscious Thought</p>	<p>Periods of incubation allow employees to think unconsciously, which provides conditions that are better suited for complex creative tasks that may require a new perspective. Organizations can schedule incubation by allowing employees to alternate between mindful and mindless work.</p>
<p>Time Pressure</p>	<p>There is a curvilinear relationship between time pressure and creativity. Moderate time pressure is ideal.</p>
<p>Opportunity Cost of Time (seasonal business)</p>	<p>Low opportunity cost of time leads to reduced selectiveness, but higher effort and easier coordination across employees to work together. High opportunity cost of time leads to reduced effort and more difficult coordination.</p>
<p>Time as Network Good</p>	<p>Collective time management is important to ensure that 1) individuals relying on interaction with others for creative work can easily coordinate time to work with them, and 2) individual time is protected from interruptions.</p>



Continuous Time  
(e.g., Innovation Week)



Discontinuous Time  
Structured  
(e.g., Fri Afternoons)



Discontinuous Time  
Unstructured  
(e.g., 15% rule)

<b>Time Pacing</b>	Clock-time	Combination	Event-Time
<b>Incubation</b>	Limited	Moderate	High
<b>Time Pressure</b>	High	Low	Low
<b>Opportunity Cost of Time</b>	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Time as Network Good</b>	Synchronized	Synchronized	Not synchronized

**Exploitative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Individual**

A yellow equilateral triangle with a thick red border. Inside the triangle, the text "n = 9" is centered, followed by "Unstructured" and "discontinuous model" on separate lines.
$$n = 9$$

Unstructured  
discontinuous model





Continuous Time  
(e.g., Innovation Week)



Discontinuous Time  
Structured  
(e.g., Fri Afternoons)



Discontinuous Time  
Unstructured  
(e.g., 15% rule)

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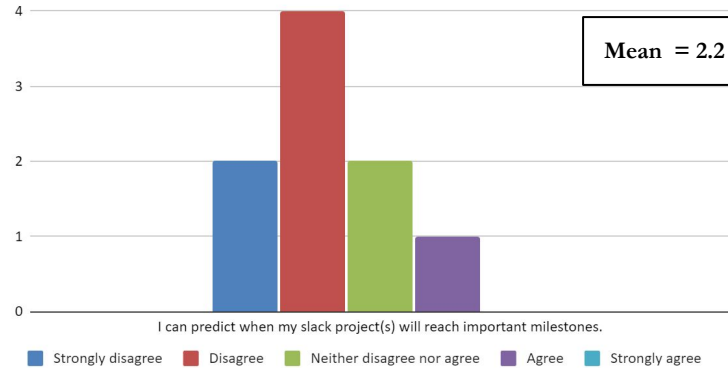
**Exploitative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Individual**

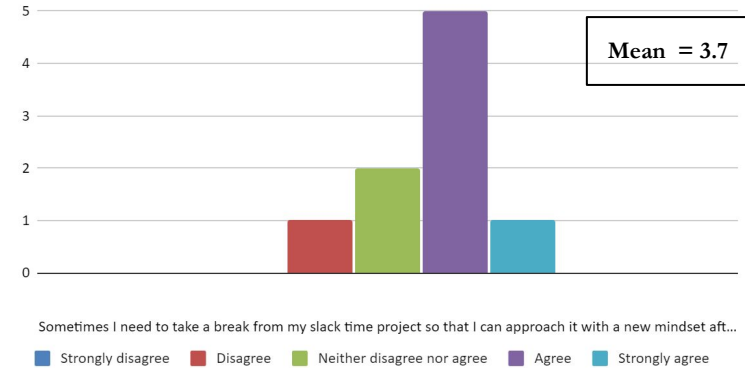
## Time pacing

I can predict when my slack project(s) will reach important milestones

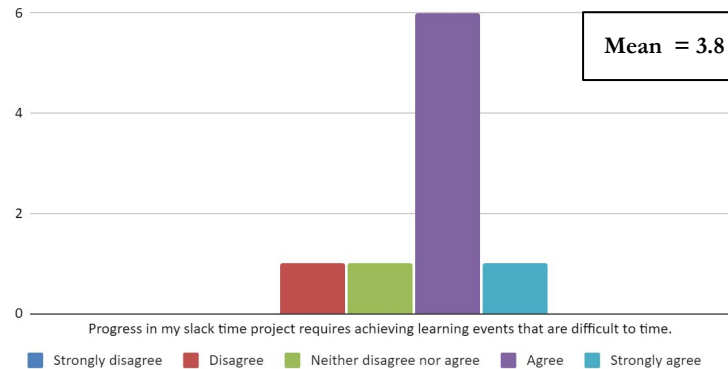


## Incubation

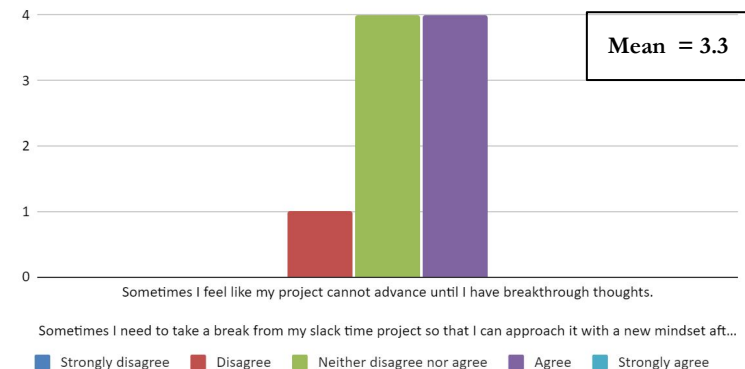
Sometimes I need to take a break from my slack time project so that I can approach it with a new mindset after some time passes.



Progress in my slack time project requires achieving learning events that are difficult to time.

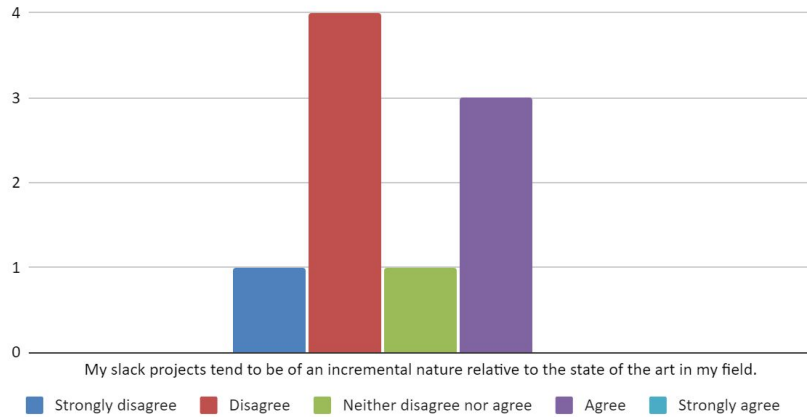


Sometimes I feel like my project cannot advance until I have breakthrough thoughts.



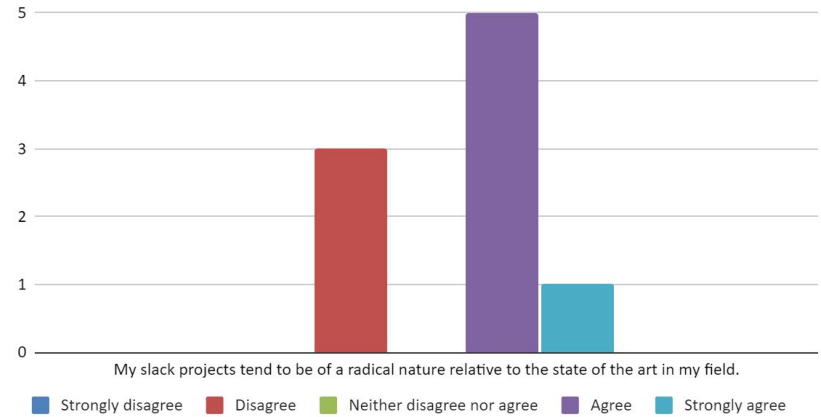
### Exploitative versus Explorative

My slack projects tend to be of an incremental nature relative to the state of the art in my field.



Mean = 2.7

My slack projects tend to be of a radical nature relative to the state of the art in my field.



Mean = 3.4



Continuous Time  
(e.g., Innovation Week)



Discontinuous Time  
Structured  
(e.g., Fri Afternoons)



Discontinuous Time  
Unstructured  
(e.g., 15% rule)

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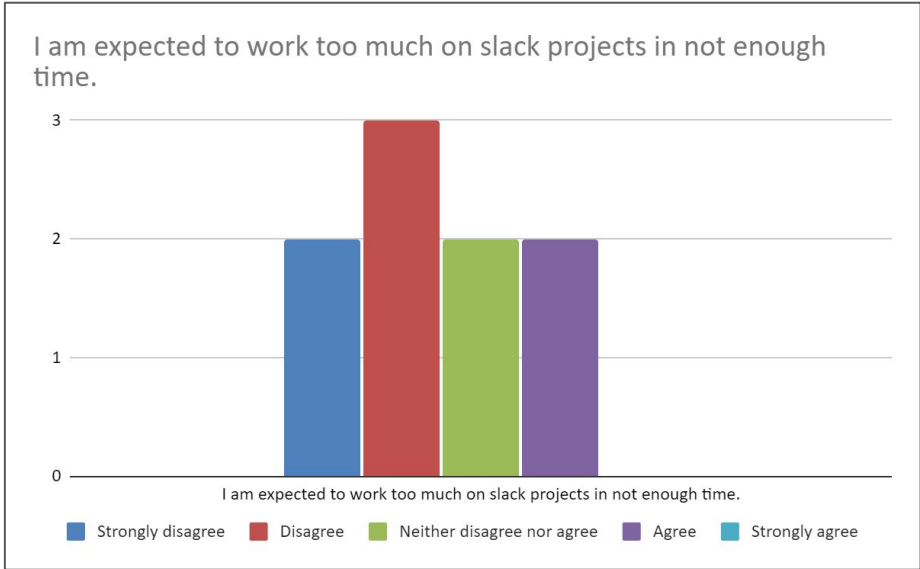
**Exploitative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Team**

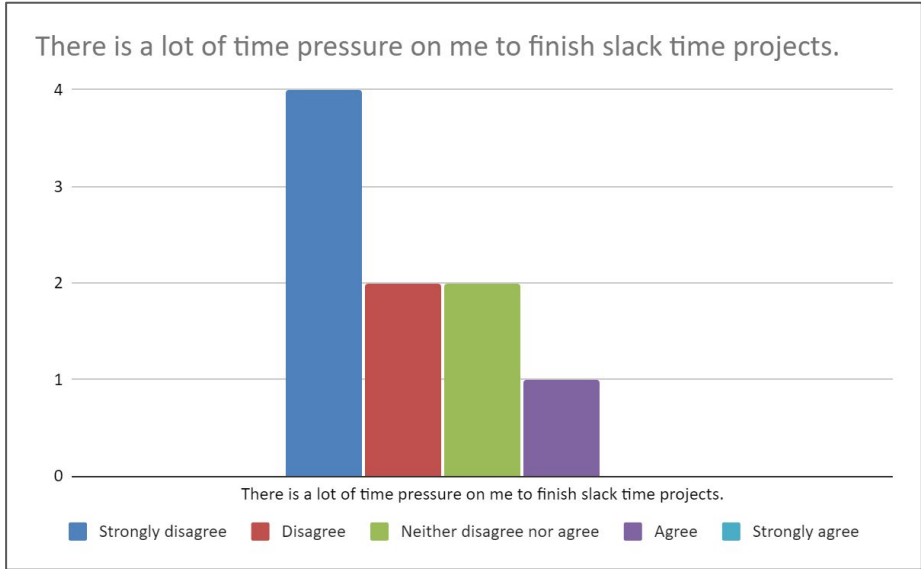
**Explorative  
Individual**



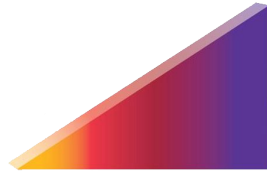
**Time Pressure**



**Mean = 2.4**



**Mean = 2.0**



Continuous Time  
(e.g., Innovation Week)



Discontinuous Time  
Structured  
(e.g., Fri Afternoons)



Discontinuous Time  
Unstructured  
(e.g., 15% rule)

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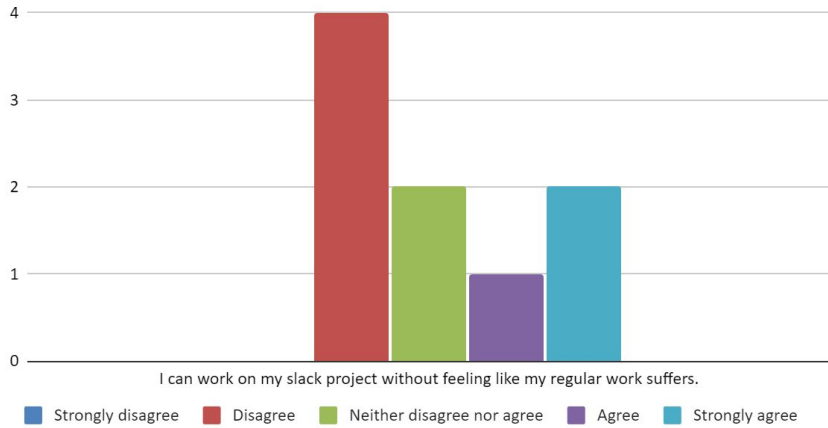
**Exploitative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Individual**

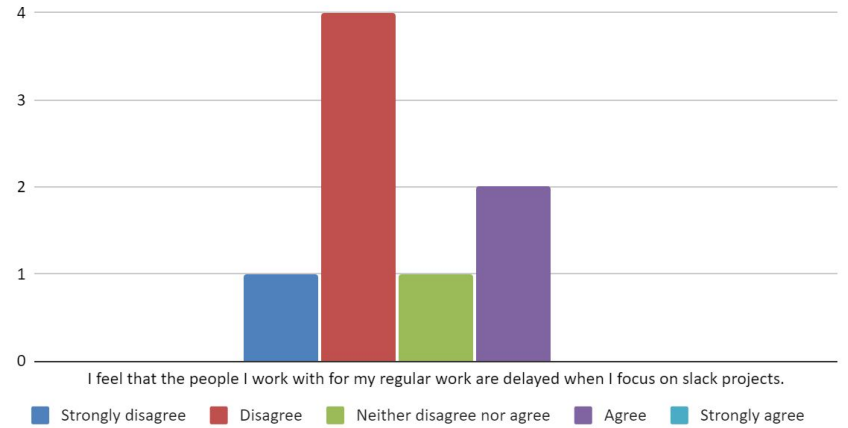
## Opportunity Cost of Time

I can work on my slack project without feeling like my regular work suffers.

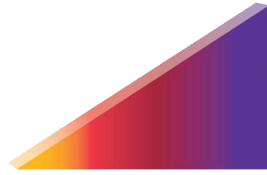


Mean = 3.1

I feel that the people I work with for my regular work are delayed when I focus on slack projects.



Mean = 2.5



Continuous Time  
(e.g., Innovation Week)



Discontinuous Time  
Structured  
(e.g., Fri Afternoons)



Discontinuous Time  
Unstructured  
(e.g., 15% rule)

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**Exploitative  
Team**

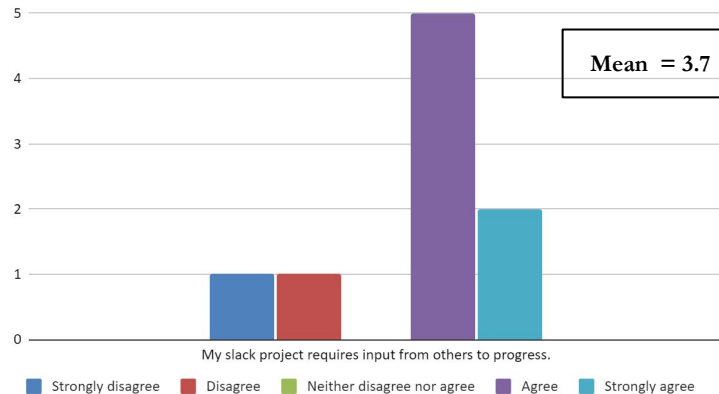
**Explorative  
Team**

**Explorative  
Individual**

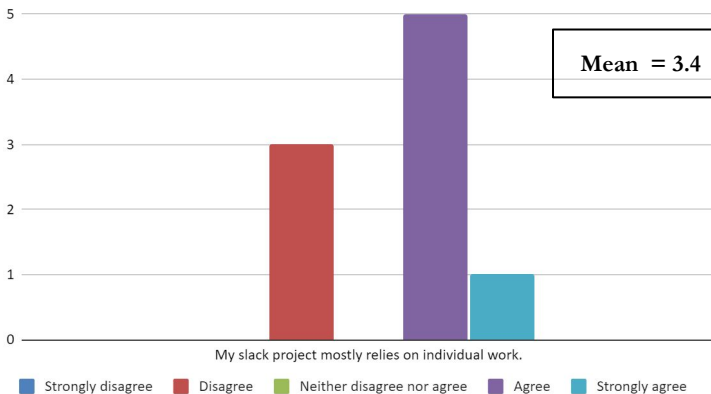


## Time as a Network Good

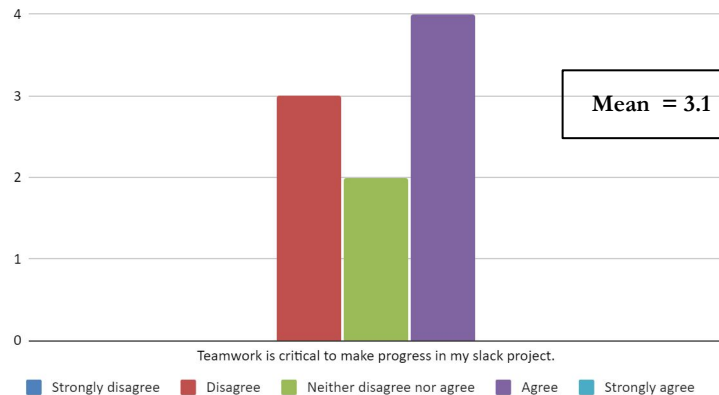
My slack project requires input from others to progress.



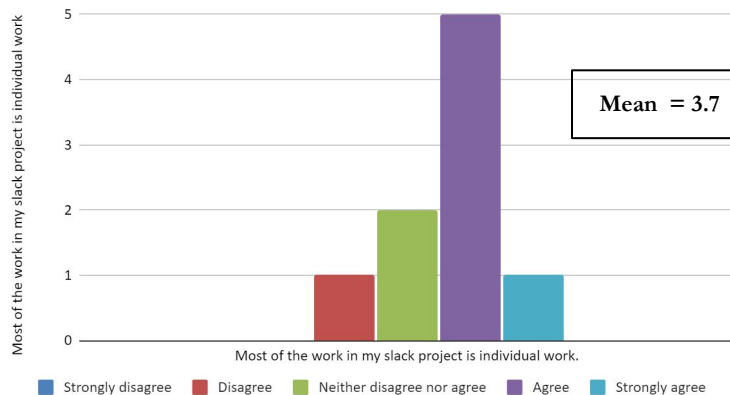
My slack project mostly relies on individual work.



Teamwork is critical to make progress in my slack project.

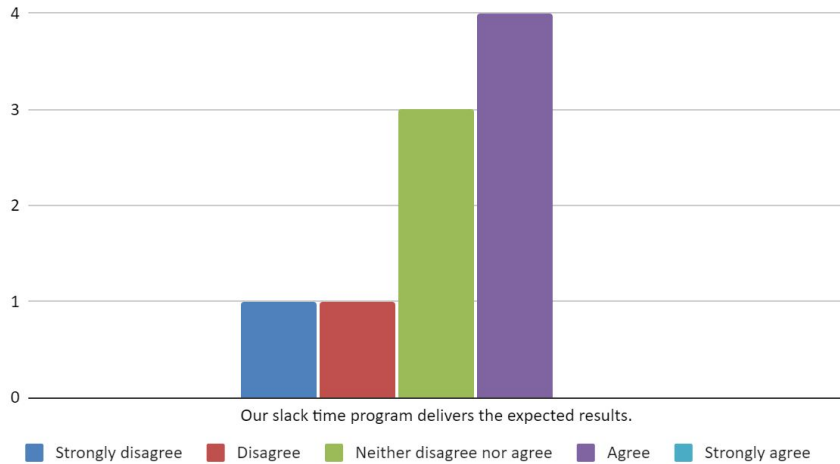


Most of the work in my slack project is individual work.



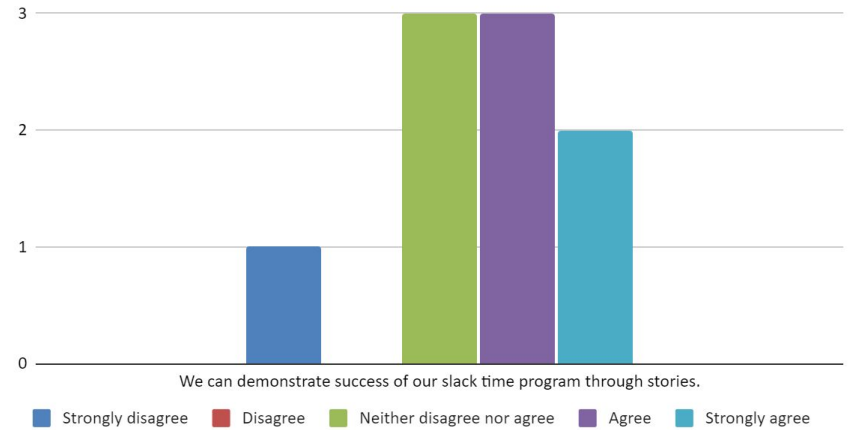
## Results/Outcomes

Our slack time program delivers the expected results.



Mean = 3.1

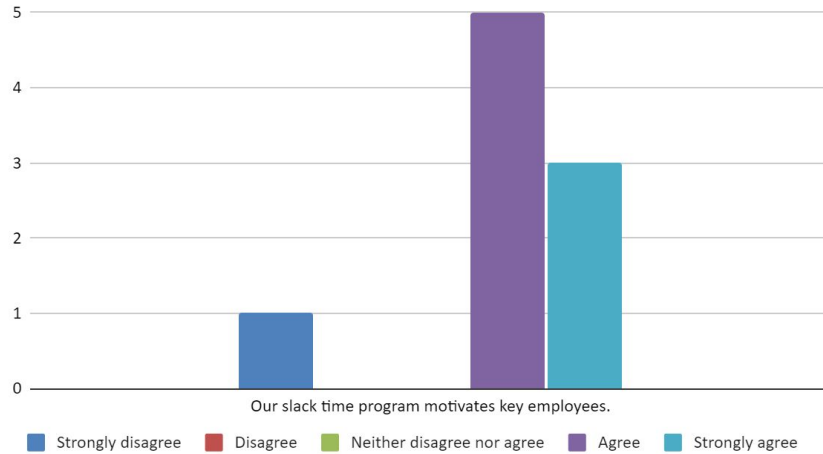
We can demonstrate success of our slack time program through stories.



Mean = 3.6

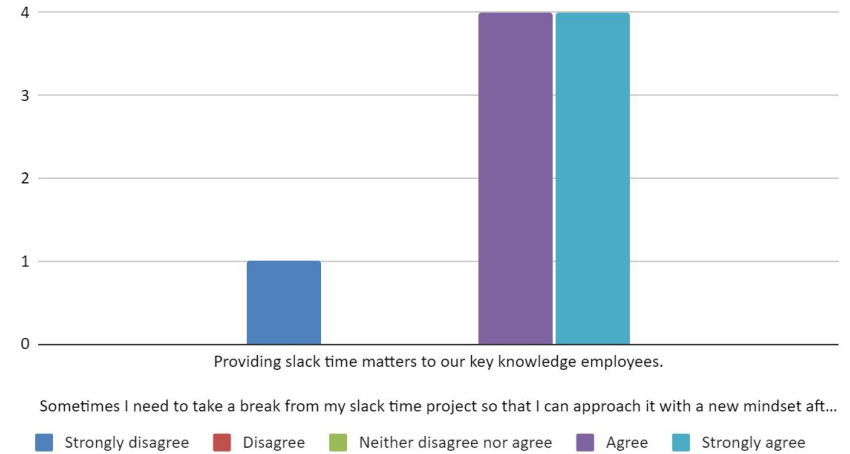
## Results/Outcomes

Our slack time program motivates key employees.



Mean = 4.0

Providing slack time matters to our key knowledge employees.



Mean = 4.1

	Results	Stories	Incremental	Radical
Our slack time program motivates key employees.	0.77	0.83	-0.37	0.45
Providing slack time matters to our key knowledge employees.	0.64	0.83	-0.41	0.48

**Thank you for your *TIME*.**

professorbertels@gmail.com

**Does your company have a slack time program? Which type?**

**Do these early-stage findings resonate with you?**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/D8223XK>



# Hybrid Time Models

20%Project

*Early-stage ideas*



Area 120

*Full-time projects*



# Hybrid Time Models



Innovation Week

