



# A Dielectric-Relaxation Analogy for Institutional Response to Technological Acceleration

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| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>dielectric polarization;<br/>Maxwell's equations;<br/>time-domain model;<br/>technology adaptation;<br/>dispersion; societal<br/>systems.</p> <p><i>Article History:</i><br/>Received on:<br/>Accepted on</p> <p><i>Article Type:</i><br/>Research Article</p> <p>DOI:<br/>10.53332/uofkeh2232</p> | <p>Rapid technological acceleration driven by digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and global communication networks has not consistently produced stable institutional adaptation or sustained socio-economic development. This paper proposes a conceptual mathematical framework, inspired by dielectric relaxation, for one possible dimension of this problem: the temporal compatibility between the rate of technological change and the response times of institutional layers. The central quantity is the dimensionless mismatch parameter <math>\Lambda_i = r_T \tau_i</math>, the ratio of a layer's response time <math>\tau_i</math> to the characteristic interval between technological changes (<math>r_T</math> is the technological change rate). A first-order response model gives the magnitude and phase of adaptive response as functions of <math>\Lambda_i</math> and identifies three regimes: temporal compatibility (<math>\Lambda_i \ll 1</math>), transitional lag (<math>\Lambda_i \approx 1</math>), and temporal mismatch (<math>\Lambda_i \gg 1</math>). Four layers (individual, organizational, educational/cultural, and institutional/regulatory) are represented in parallel, and the analogy with dielectric mechanisms rests on the ordering of their response times, not on any correspondence between physical mechanisms. The framework hypothesizes that, as <math>r_T</math> increases, slower layers may fall out of the response one at a time. Four testable propositions, candidate proxies, and a research design are given. A conflict-affected setting is used only as a conceptual illustration, and no empirical measurement is undertaken. Temporal compatibility is proposed as one important, though not the only, condition for sustainable technological adaptation.</p> |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rate at which new technologies are introduced, adopted, and diffused has increased markedly across digital platforms, artificial intelligence, automation, and communication infrastructure. The institutions that regulate, train, and organize around these technologies (curricula, firms, regulatory bodies, and cultural norms) generally change on slower timescales. The resulting gap is discussed under headings such as cultural lag [1], the control dilemma [2], the gap between emerging technologies and legal-ethical oversight [3], and skills mismatch [4]. These treatments are largely qualitative and lack a common vocabulary for comparing how differently paced institutional layers respond to a shared external forcing.

This paper proposes a *conceptual mathematical framework inspired by dielectric relaxation*. Dielectric theory offers a compact, well-understood description of systems in which several response mechanisms with different characteristic times respond to a common driving field. The physical equations are not assumed to govern social systems and are not used to predict social outcomes. The framework's central proposition is a hypothesis about temporal compatibility:

*Technological adaptation depends, among other factors, on the compatibility between the characteristic rate of technological change and the response time of the relevant institutional layer.*

This compatibility is expressed by a single dimensionless parameter,  $\Lambda_i = r_T \tau_i$ , developed in Section 4. The dielectric physics is the conceptual

source of the parameter and of the layered structure, but the temporal-mismatch parameter, not the dielectric analogy itself, is the paper's main contribution.

The paper makes five contributions: (i) it defines a technological change rate  $r_T$  and a layer-specific mismatch parameter  $\Lambda_i$ , with magnitude and phase of response derived from a first-order model (Section 4); (ii) it makes the ordering of response times the founding principle of the layered analogy (Section 5); (iii) it fixes the interpretive vocabulary so that borrowed physical terms are used precisely (Section 6); (iv) it states testable propositions and an operationalization strategy (Section 8); and (v) it applies the framework conceptually, without empirical claims, to institutional disruption (Section 10).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 positions the framework in the literature. Section 3 summarizes the dielectric physical basis. Section 4 develops the mismatch parameter. Section 5 presents the layered framework. Section 6 sets out the interpretive vocabulary. Section 7 discusses identity-based and informal institutions. Section 8 gives proxies, propositions, and a research design. Section 9 treats synchronized and desynchronized regimes and institutional decoupling. Section 10 gives the conceptual illustration, Section 11 the limitations, and Section 12 the conclusion.

## 2. RELATED WORK AND CONCEPTUAL POSITIONING

### 2.1 Technology and adaptation

Ogburn's cultural-lag thesis is the most direct precedent: material culture changes faster than the non-material culture of norms, laws, and institutions, producing a period of maladjustment [1]. Collingridge described the difficulty of controlling a technology early, when it is malleable but poorly understood, and late, when it is understood but entrenched [2]. Marchant, Allenby, and Herkert document the widening gap between emerging technologies and legal-ethical oversight [3], and Goldin and Katz frame skills outcomes as a race between technology and education [4]. The present framework shares the basic observation of these accounts. It adds a frequency-dependent response, a freeze-out condition at high forcing rates, and a dissipative component, that is, a vocabulary for what may happen as the forcing rate itself rises.

### 2.2 Socio-technical co-evolution

Perez describes cycles in which a cluster of new technologies diffuses faster than the regulation, finance, and education needed to realize its potential [5]. Rogers characterizes adoption as a time-distributed process across adopter categories [6], which is compatible with, but distinct from, the layer response times addressed here. Geels' multi-level perspective offers a layered structure broadly analogous to that of Section 5, organized around governance dynamics rather than response-time separation [7]. Hughes and Castells provide complementary accounts of large technical systems and network society [8], [9].

### 2.3 Social acceleration

Acceleration has been identified as a defining feature of modern societies, linked to institutional stress and coordination difficulty [10], [11], [12]. These accounts foreground time but remain largely phenomenological. The present framework offers a compact quantitative candidate,  $\Lambda_i$ , for expressing temporal compatibility.

### 2.4 Path dependence, complexity, and timescale separation

Path dependence and lock-in [13], [14] and the persistence of institutions [15] suggest that institutional response times, once set, may not shorten simply because the external forcing rate rises. Work on critical transitions [16] offers a parallel to the regime distinctions of Section 9. Most directly relevant to the layered structure is the literature on hierarchical systems whose components evolve at different rates: Simon's near-decomposability [17] and the nested adaptive cycles of panarchy [18]. These treatments establish timescale separation as a recognized organizing feature of complex systems. They do not provide a compact dimensionless indicator of mismatch between a forcing rate and a layer's response time, which is the narrow gap this paper addresses.

## 3. DIELECTRIC POLARIZATION AS THE PHYSICAL ANALOGY

### 3.1 Relaxation mechanisms

When a dielectric is placed in a time-varying electric field, its charge distribution responds through physically distinct mechanisms: electronic polarization (displacement of electron clouds relative to nuclei), ionic polarization (relative displacement of ions in a lattice), orientational or dipolar polarization (alignment of permanent dipoles against thermal disorder), and interfacial or space-charge polarization (accumulation of charge at internal boundaries) [19], [20],

[21]. The mechanisms operate over widely separated timescales, from femtoseconds for electronic polarization to seconds or longer for interfacial polarization.

### 3.2 Sequential response

As the driving frequency rises, mechanisms with longer relaxation times fail to track the field one after another, and their contribution to the total polarization falls away. This is dielectric dispersion. **What the framework takes from this is the ordering and separation of response times, not the physics of the individual mechanisms** (Section 5.1).

### 3.3 Reference equations

The physical reference equations fix notation and are not reinterpreted as social equations in this section. The electric displacement  $\mathbf{D}$  is related to the field  $\mathbf{E}$  and polarization  $\mathbf{P}$  by

$$\mathbf{D} = \epsilon_0 \mathbf{E} + \mathbf{P} \quad (1)$$

For a single mechanism of relaxation time  $\tau$ , the polarization obeys the first-order (Debye) equation [19]

$$d\mathbf{P}/dt = -[\mathbf{P} - \chi_0 \epsilon_0 \mathbf{E}]/\tau \quad (2)$$

With time dependence  $e^{j\omega t}$ , this gives the complex susceptibility

$$\chi(\omega) = \chi_0/(1 + j\omega\tau) \quad (3)$$

where  $\chi_0$  is the static susceptibility and  $\omega$  the angular frequency. Equations (1) to (3) are standard [20], [22], [23]. Real dielectrics often show distributions of relaxation times, not a single  $\tau$  per mechanism [24], a point relevant to the limitations in Section 11.

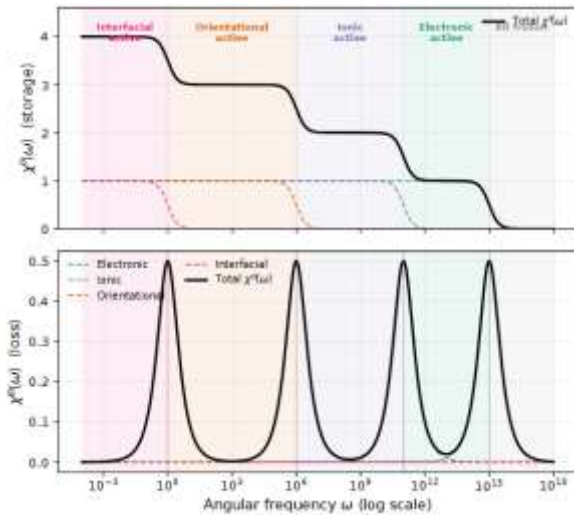


**Figure 1:** Dielectric dispersion for four mechanisms with ordered relaxation time

Figure 1 plots  $\chi'(\omega)$  and  $\chi''(\omega)$  for the four mechanisms of Section 3.1, computed from Eq. (3)

with schematic relaxation times spanning femtoseconds to seconds. As  $\omega$  increases,  $\chi'$  falls in four steps and  $\chi''$  shows four loss peaks, one per mechanism, in order of decreasing  $\tau$ . This sequential, ordered dropout is the structural feature the societal framework of Section 5 borrows; it is not evidence that social layers share the underlying physics.

## 4. THE TEMPORAL MISMATCH PARAMETER

### 4.1 First-order response: magnitude and phase

Any system responding to a forcing with a single finite response time  $\tau$  has, from Eq. (3), a response of magnitude and phase

$$|\chi| = \chi_0/\sqrt{1 + (\omega\tau)^2} \quad (4)$$

$$\phi = -\arctan(\omega\tau) \quad (5)$$

and the real and imaginary parts are  $\chi' = \chi_0/(1 + (\omega\tau)^2)$  and  $\chi'' = \chi_0\omega\tau/(1 + (\omega\tau)^2)$ . The behavior depends on the product  $\omega\tau$  alone. At  $\omega\tau = 1$  the magnitude has fallen to  $\chi_0/\sqrt{2}$  ( $-3\text{dB}$ ), the phase lag is  $45^\circ$ , and the loss  $\chi''$  is at its maximum, with  $\chi' = \chi'' = \chi_0/2$ . This structure is common to first-order relaxation systems across physics and engineering (RC circuits, thermal relaxation, mechanical damping) and is not unique to dielectrics.

### 4.2 Technological change rate and mismatch parameter

For the social domain,  $\omega$  is not an angular frequency of an oscillating field, and reusing the symbol invites misreading. We therefore define the **technological change rate**  $r_T$  for a given technology domain as the reciprocal of the characteristic renewal interval  $T_T$ , the typical time between successive major changes (platform generations, capability jumps, obsolescence events) that institutions must respond to:

$$r_T = 1/T_T [1/\text{year}] \quad (6)$$

Where a continuous indicator  $A(t)$  of technological capability or adoption is available,  $r_T$  may alternatively be taken as its fractional growth rate,  $(1/A)(dA/dt)$ .  $r_T$  is a rate, not an angular frequency: no periodicity is implied. Each institutional layer  $i$  is characterized by a response time  $\tau_i$  [years], the time the layer typically needs to complete an adaptation cycle (Section 5). The two combine in the dimensionless **temporal mismatch parameter**

$$\Lambda_i = r_T \tau_i \quad (7)$$

the ratio of the time a layer needs to adapt to the time between the changes it must adapt to.

In transferring Eqs. (3) to (5) to the social domain,  $r_T$  replaces  $\omega$  and  $\Lambda_i$  replaces  $\omega\tau$ . Only the dimensionless product enters the model. If a reader prefers the conventional relation  $\omega = 2\pi/T_T$ ,  $\Lambda_i$  changes by a constant factor of  $2\pi$ . This does not affect the analysis, because  $\Lambda_i$  is used as an ordinal indicator and no absolute thresholds are assumed (Section 8.1). For the analysis, technological forcing is modelled as a component

$$E(t) = E_0 e^{j r_T t} \quad (8)$$

with  $E_0$  the intensity of forcing, and the adaptive response of a layer as

$$P(t) = \chi(\Lambda_i) E(t), \chi(\Lambda_i) = \chi_0 / (1 + j\Lambda_i) \quad (9)$$

Here  $P(t)$  is the effective adaptive response of that layer (learning, restructuring, revision, reform), and  $\chi_0$  is its adaptive capacity under slow change. The exponential form (8) is a device for exposing gain and phase lag. It does not assert that technological change is periodic.

#### 4.3 Regimes

Equations (4) and (5) give the three regimes directly (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Regimes of a single layer as a function of the mismatch parameter  $\Lambda_i$ .

| $\Lambda_i$ | $ \chi $                   | Phase $\phi$            | Interpretation                                                             |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| $\ll 1$     | $\approx \chi_0$           | $\approx 0^\circ$       | Strong temporal compatibility: response tracks the forcing with little lag |
| $\approx 1$ | $\approx \chi_0/\sqrt{2}$  | $\approx -45^\circ$     | Transitional: growing lag; cost of adaptation is largest                   |
| $\gg 1$     | $\approx \chi_0/\Lambda_i$ | $\rightarrow -90^\circ$ | Strong temporal mismatch: layer is effectively unable to track the forcing |

Two clarifications follow. First, the boundaries are heuristic and no universal threshold for adaptation failure is assumed. Second, *response bandwidth* is used in this paper in one defined sense: the response bandwidth of layer  $i$  is  $r_i^* = 1/\tau_i$ , the technological change rate at which  $\Lambda_i = 1$ , up to which the layer tracks the forcing with amplitude at least  $1/\sqrt{2}$  of its slow-change value.

#### 4.4 A growth-forcing remark

Technological change is closer to sustained growth than to oscillation. For Eq. (2) driven by  $E = E_0 e^{r_T t}$ , substituting  $P = A e^{r_T t}$  gives, once the transient (decaying as  $e^{-t/\tau}$ ) has died out,

$$P(t) = \chi_0 \varepsilon_0 E(t) / (1 + \Lambda) \quad (10)$$

so the layer's tracking ratio is  $1/(1 + \Lambda)$ , controlled by the same dimensionless group without any oscillation assumption. The growth form gives gain but neither a phase lag nor a loss peak, so the complex form (9) is retained as the main model and (10) is a supporting check on the role of  $\Lambda$ .

Figure 2 plots Eqs. (4) and (5) directly: the response magnitude falls monotonically and the phase lag grows monotonically as  $\Lambda$  increases, with no free parameters other than  $\Lambda$  itself. The three regimes of Table 1 are not separate equations but three readings of the same curve, and the marked point at  $\Lambda = 1$  (magnitude  $1/\sqrt{2}$ , phase  $-45^\circ$ ) is the conventional half-power point of a first-order system.

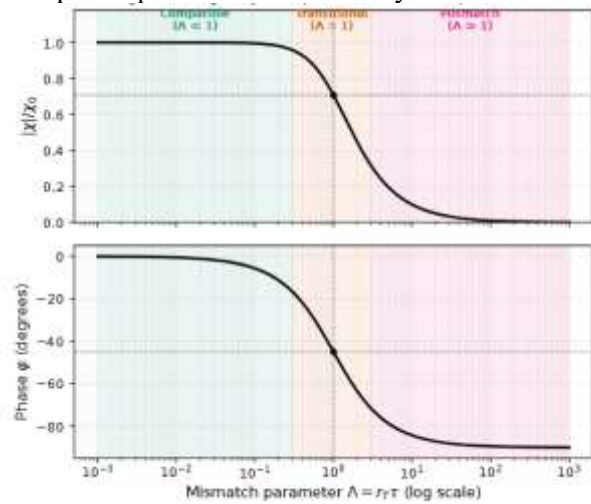


**Figure 2.** Single-layer response vs. mismatch parameter  $\Lambda$

## 5. LAYERED SOCIETAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

### 5.1 The ordering principle

**Founding principle.** The analogy rests on the ordering of characteristic response times, not on any correspondence between the physical mechanisms themselves. The four classical dielectric mechanisms (Section 3) supply a template: parallel response channels with widely separated times  $\tau_1 < \tau_2 < \tau_3 < \tau_4$ , so that as the forcing rate rises the slowest channel stops tracking first and the fastest last. The social layers below are identified by the same property, an ordered set of distinguishable response times. The labels "electronic," "ionic," "orientational," and "interfacial" are mnemonics for this ordering. They do not assert that individual behavior resembles electron-cloud displacement, or that the state

resembles charge accumulation at an interface. That social systems contain components evolving at different rates is consistent with hierarchical and multi-scale accounts of complex systems [17], [18], [25], [26].

**The layers.** Societal adaptation is represented as the parallel response of four layers: individual, organizational, educational/cultural, and

**Table 2.** Societal response layers, ordered by response time. The dielectric column indicates ordering only.

| Layer (i)                   | Relative $\tau_i$ | Coordination required | Persistence           | Candidate proxy for $\tau_i$        | Dielectric analogue (ordering only) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Individual               | Shortest          | Low                   | Relatively reversible | Training or skill-acquisition cycle | Electronic (fastest)                |
| 2. Organizational           | Intermediate      | Moderate              | Semi-persistent       | Organizational restructuring cycle  | Ionic                               |
| 3. Educational / cultural   | Long              | High                  | Persistent            | Curriculum revision interval        | Orientalational                     |
| 4. Institutional regulatory | Longest           | Very high             | Highly persistent     | Regulatory or policy revision lag   | Interfacial (slowest)               |

**Requirements.** Only two conditions are needed: the response times must be distinguishable and ordered, and they must be separated enough that layers drop out one at a time as  $r_T$  increases. Given these, the qualitative conclusions do not depend on the decomposition. A framework based on individuals, firms, markets, and states would yield the same regime structure if ordering and separation held. The four-layer decomposition is a modeling choice, retained because it is tractable and parallels the four dielectric mechanisms. Its value should be judged by explanatory clarity and empirical applicability.

**Limits.** In dielectrics the relaxation times span many orders of magnitude, so mechanisms drop out cleanly. Social response times may span only months to decades, and the layers may overlap and interact. Whether the separation suffices for distinct sequential dropout is an empirical question (proposition P4, Section 8).

## 5.2 Layered susceptibility and sequential desynchronization

Because the layers respond in parallel to the same forcing, their contributions add, as in a multi-mechanism dielectric [22], [24]. Eq. (9) generalizes to

$$\chi(r_T) = \sum_{i=1}^4 \chi_i / (1 + j\Lambda_i), \Lambda_i = r_T \tau_i \quad (11)$$

where  $\chi_i$  is the slow-change adaptive capacity of layer  $i$  and  $\chi_0 = \sum \chi_i$ . With the convention  $\chi = \chi' - j\chi''$ ,

$$\chi' = \sum \chi_i / (1 + \Lambda_i^2), \chi'' = \sum \chi_i \Lambda_i / (1 + \Lambda_i^2) \quad (12)$$

institutional/regulatory. Each is characterized by three criteria rather than by a physical mechanism: its response time  $\tau_i$ , the collective coordination it requires, and the persistence of its adaptation. All three increase together from the individual to the institutional layer (Table 2).

Here  $\chi'$  is the capacity to absorb and internalize technological change, and  $\chi''$  is an aggregate index of adaptation cost (Section 6). Each layer contributes a step in  $\chi'$  and a peak in  $\chi''$  at  $\Lambda_i = 1$ , that is, at  $r_T = r_i^*$ , with  $r_4^* < r_3^* < r_2^* < r_1^*$ .

As  $r_T$  increases, the hypothesis is that the institutional layer leaves its response bandwidth first ( $\Lambda_4$  reaches 1 first), then the educational/cultural layer, then the organizational layer, while the individual layer continues to respond longest. This follows from Eq. (11) given the ordering and separation of the  $\tau_i$ . It offers a candidate account of how individual competence and institutional fragility may coexist, and of the "illusory resilience" of Section 9, in which continued response at fast layers may mask loss of coupling at slow layers. The compatible, transitional, and mismatch regimes for the whole system correspond to  $r_T$  lying below, within, and above the range  $[r_4^*, r_1^*]$ .

Equations (11) and (12) are an organizing abstraction and not a predictive law. The parameters  $\chi_i$  and  $\tau_i$  are not measurable social quantities unless an explicit empirical operationalization is developed (Section 8). Figure 3 plots  $\chi'(r_T)$  and  $\chi''(r_T)$  from Eqs. (11) and (12) for four layers with illustrative response times (0.1, 1, 5, and 15 years for the individual, organizational, educational/cultural, and institutional layers). Unlike the dielectric mechanisms of Fig. 1, whose relaxation times span many orders of magnitude, these layer times are separated by only about two orders of magnitude, so their loss peaks in

$\chi''$  overlap rather than forming four distinct peaks. This is the limited-separation concern of Section 5.1 (proposition P4) made visible: the sequential-dropout structure survives, but less cleanly than in the physical case it is modeled on.

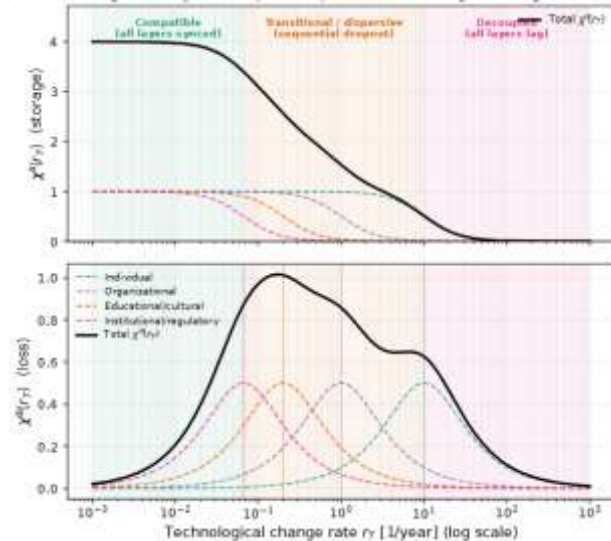


**Figure 3.** Layered adaptive response vs. technological change rate

## 6. INTERPRETIVE VOCABULARY

Borrowed physical terms are used here as relational roles, not as physical equivalents. Each term is defined once so that it is not read as a claim of physical identity (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Correspondence of physical concepts and their societal interpretation (heuristic roles only).

| Physical concept                             | Electrodynamic meaning                                            | Societal interpretation used in this paper                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Polarization</b>                          | Internal field response                                           | Institutional and cognitive alignment: reorganization of education, routines, law, and norms in response to technological forcing    |
| <b>Bound charge</b>                          | Charge at interfaces where polarization is non-uniform [21], [22] | Localized stress at boundaries between old and new institutions, formal and informal systems, global technology and local governance |
| <b>Energy storage (<math>\chi'</math>)</b>   | Stored field energy                                               | Capacity for structured accumulation: durable skills, institutional learning, sustained productivity [5], [27], [28]                 |
| <b>Dielectric loss (<math>\chi''</math>)</b> | Dissipated energy                                                 | Aggregate index of adaptation cost (see below)                                                                                       |

|                              |                     |                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Polarization collapse</b> | Loss of interaction | <b>Institutional decoupling</b> (preferred term): technology remains present but no longer generates structured accumulation |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Three precision points follow.

**Loss.** In dielectric theory, loss has one precise meaning. In the social model,  $\chi''$  stands for several distinct costs: delay, conflict, fragmentation, and inefficiency. These are not equivalent, and the model treats them only as a single aggregate index of adaptation cost. Separating them would require additional layers or parameters and is left for future work.

### Energy storage and accumulation.

The correspondence is metaphorical. High technological activity does not guarantee high accumulation, which is the reason for distinguishing the two.

**Polarization collapse.** Because the phrase sounds like an established physical phenomenon, this paper uses *institutional decoupling* as the term of art and treats "polarization collapse" only as the metaphorical label of the corresponding dielectric limit ( $\Lambda_i \gg 1$ ). Bound social stress stabilizes subsystems locally while possibly increasing global tension.

## 7. IDENTITY-BASED AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS

Identity-based and informal institutions (kinship, customary, community, religious, professional, and patronage networks, among others) can provide rapid *local* coordination because they build on established trust networks [29]. Informal arrangements can also fill gaps left by formal institutions [30], and the persistence of institutions is a recognized feature of institutional change [15]. The framework raises a question about such mechanisms and does not assert an answer.

Within the framework, these mechanisms may be interpreted as slow or buffering modes. They may stabilize local coordination when formal layers have long response times, while contributing little to broader structural alignment when technological change is rapid. Increasing reliance on such mechanisms under rapid change could therefore be *one possible indicator* of temporal mismatch in faster formal layers, and it is not evidence that identity-based institutions cause adaptation failure. Nor does the framework imply that any form of organization is inherently inefficient. Their effects on coordination, innovation, and resilience are context-

dependent and are treated here as an empirical question: under rapid change, to what extent can identity-based mechanisms provide local stabilization while remaining compatible with wider institutional coordination?

## 8. OPERATIONALIZATION AND TESTABLE PROPOSITIONS

### 8.1 Candidate proxies

The variables admit candidate empirical proxies (Tables 2 and 4). These are not measurements used to validate the model in this paper. Their validity will depend on sector, institutional setting, geographical scale, and period. Because  $r\_T$  and  $\tau_i$  are defined only up to the choice of proxy,  $\Lambda_i$  should be read as an ordinal indicator, and no threshold for adaptation failure is assumed.

**Table 4.** Candidate proxies for model variables.

| Variable              | Conceptual meaning               | Candidate proxy                                                                                                           | Unit          |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| $r\_T$                | Technological change rate        | Inverse of major platform or technology update interval; or fractional growth rate of an adoption or capability indicator | 1/year        |
| $r\_d$                | Technology diffusion rate        | Annual change in adoption rate                                                                                            | 1/year        |
| $\tau_1 \dots \tau_4$ | Layer response times             | Proxies of Table 2                                                                                                        | year          |
| $\Lambda_i$           | Layer-specific temporal mismatch | $r\_T \tau_i$                                                                                                             | dimensionless |

### 8.2 Testable propositions

These are hypotheses that evidence could undermine, not predictions.

- **P1 (ordered dropout).** In a given context and technology domain, as  $r\_T$  increases, indicators of adaptive lag appear first in layers with larger  $\tau_i$ , in the order institutional/regulatory,

educational/cultural, organizational, individual. *Undermined if* lag indicators appear in no consistent order, or in reverse order, across comparable cases.

- **P2 (bottleneck layer).** For a given technology, adaptation strain (for example unresolved regulatory gaps or curriculum obsolescence) is most frequently observed in the layer with the largest  $\Lambda_i$ . *Undermined if* observed strain is uncorrelated with  $\Lambda_i$  after controlling for layer.
- **P3 (illusory resilience).** Cases combining high individual-level adoption with a large institutional  $\Lambda_4$  show weaker accumulation outcomes (durable skills, formal-sector productivity, institutional learning) than cases with a small  $\Lambda_4$ . *Undermined if* accumulation outcomes track individual-level adoption alone, independent of  $\Lambda_4$ .
- **P4 (sufficient separation).** The layer response times, as proxied in Table 2, differ by factors large enough for layers to drop out distinctly rather than overlap. *Undermined if* proxy values are statistically indistinguishable across layers; this would call for revising the decomposition (for example to fewer layers) and would not refute the ordering principle.

### 8.3 Research design

1. Select technology domains with dated introduction and update histories (for example digital payments, generative AI in education, platform work).
2. Estimate  $r\_T$  from update intervals and  $\tau_i$  from documented revision cycles, such as curriculum reform dates, regulatory amendment histories, and firm restructuring records.
3. Compute  $\Lambda_i$  for each layer and compare with outcome indicators such as compliance gaps, skills-mismatch surveys, and formal-sector share.
4. Compare across contexts, including synchronized and desynchronized cases (Section 9), treating the illustration of Section 10 as a conceptual boundary case and not as evidence.

Because proxies are noisy and ordinal, rank-based methods such as rank correlation are more appropriate than fitting Eq. (11) directly. Fitting  $\chi_i$  and  $\tau_i$  would be premature until P4 is examined.

## 9. SYNCHRONIZED AND DESYNCHRONIZED REGIMES AND INSTITUTIONAL DECOUPLING

### 9.1 Regimes

Societal responses to technological acceleration can be interpreted through synchronized and desynchronized adaptation regimes, distinguished by the temporal alignment of response layers and not by technological intensity, access, or development stage. In a **synchronized regime**,  $\Lambda_i$  is small enough across the key layers that delays are coordinated and bounded, and feedback among innovation, learning, regulation, and reform remains operative, so technological forcing may be absorbed through structured reorganization. Synchronization denotes coherence of response, not normative desirability: a synchronized system may be unequal, inefficient, or contested.

In a **desynchronized regime**, response layers diverge: fast layers (individual adaptation, informal use, short-cycle organizational adjustment) continue to respond while slower layers (education, legal frameworks, state institutions) lag or become effectively static. The result may be loss of coherence across layers and not simply delay, so that interaction with technology persists while its capacity to generate structured accumulation declines. Such systems may show intense technological activity alongside institutional fragility and coordination difficulty.

A hypothesized feature of desynchronized regimes is **illusory resilience**: continued responsiveness at fast layers may mask erosion of coupling at slow layers, leading to misreading of systemic stability. It is also hypothesized that incremental reforms may in some cases fail to restore coherence. This last hypothesis is not among P1 to P4 and requires separate study. Compared with socio-technical transition accounts [7] that emphasize co-evolution, the framework adds a candidate *response-limit criterion*: co-evolution presupposes temporal compatibility, so that institutions whose response times greatly exceed the interval between changes may be unable to co-evolve with the technology regardless of intent.

### 9.2 Institutional decoupling

Institutional decoupling (Section 6) is best understood as a progressive transition and not a binary state, characterized by declining coherence and rising adaptation cost as  $\Lambda_i$  increases across layers. In the coupled regime, adaptation strain remains confined to interfaces and manageable. As

$r_T$  rises, this "bound social stress" may persist and spread, contributing to decoupling and loss-dominated dynamics. The transition may be gradual, and its onset is expected to be context-dependent (Section 11).

**Table 5.** Synchronized and desynchronized regimes (qualitative).

| Dimension                     | Synchronized regime                        | Desynchronized regime                         |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Response timing</b>        | Aligned ( $\Lambda_i$ small across layers) | Divergent ( $\Lambda_i \gg 1$ in slow layers) |
| <b>Phase lag</b>              | Small                                      | Large                                         |
| <b>Institutional coupling</b> | Strong                                     | Weak                                          |
| <b>Stress distribution</b>    | Absorbed system-wide                       | Localized                                     |
| <b>Outcome</b>                | Accumulation                               | Fragmentation                                 |

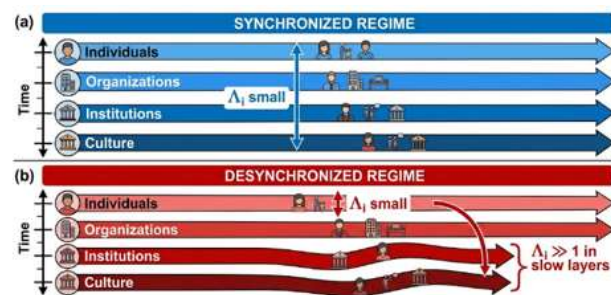


**Figure 4.** Synchronized vs. desynchronized adaptation regimes

Figure 5. Institutional decoupling as a transition from (a) a coupled regime, in which technological forcing produces a coherent collective response  $P(t)$ , to (b) a decoupled regime, in which the response is fragmented and weakly synchronized. Small boundary symbols indicate localized bound social stress at institutional and cultural interfaces, confined in (a) and persisting and spreading in (b).

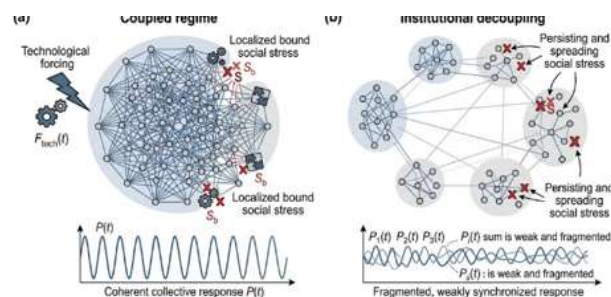


**Figure 5.** Institutional decoupling vs. transition

## 10. CONCEPTUAL ILLUSTRATION: A CONFLICT-AFFECTED SETTING

**Scope statement.** *This section uses a conflict-affected setting only as a conceptual illustration of the framework. No empirical measurement of  $r_T$ ,  $\tau_i$ , or  $\Lambda_i$  is undertaken, and the statements below are not observations or findings about any country. They describe how the framework would be read in a configuration of a particular type.*

Consider a configuration of the kind that may arise under institutional shock, post-conflict disruption, or externally accelerated technological introduction, with Sudan following the outbreak of war in April 2023 as one such context [add citation to an authoritative source]. In it, technological forcing ( $r_T$ ) is taken to remain high, for example through mobile communication and platform-based services, while the response capacity of formal educational, regulatory, and state layers is severely constrained, so that  $\Lambda_3$  and  $\Lambda_4$  would be large.

Under the framework, the configuration would be read as follows. Individuals and informal networks (small  $\tau_1$ ) may continue to adapt, while formal layers (large  $\tau_3$ ,  $\tau_4$ ) would sit deep in the mismatch regime. Technological activity could then persist but be weakly coupled to institutional structure. Informal coordination through kinship, community, religious, or local-authority networks (Section 7) might provide localized stabilization while stress accumulates at interfaces between layers instead of being redistributed system-wide (Fig. 5). Continued technological adoption under such conditions could intensify fragmentation without restoring coherence. The framework interprets this not as cultural or technological failure but as a hypothesized temporal misalignment between forcing and response.

The illustration is intended to show the explanatory scope of the framework. Testing it on this or any other case would require measurement of the proxies of Table 4 following the design of Section 8.3.

## 11. LIMITATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

The framework is intentionally conceptual. It does not reduce social systems to physical equations and does not claim that societal behavior can be predicted with electrodynamics. Human agency, political power, historical contingency, and symbolic meaning lie outside any physical analogue. The dielectric framework is a structural source for a mathematical abstraction, not a literal mapping.

**Decomposition and separation.** The four-layer structure is a modeling choice (Section 5.1). Social

response times may be less widely separated than dielectric relaxation times and may be distributed within each layer, as real dielectrics also show distributed relaxation [24]. Sequential dropout is therefore a hypothesis (P4), and P1 to P4 are hypotheses, not results.

**Heterogeneity and conflict.** Social systems are divided by class, power, ideology, and interest, and response times are shaped by political struggle and unequal capacity to adapt. The framework abstracts from these differences to highlight one constraint, finite response times, which power may shape but does not remove.

**Thresholds and non-linearity.** No numerical threshold for adaptation failure is specified, and thresholds are expected to be context-dependent. The first-order linear response is a simplification. Real regime transitions may involve non-linearity, feedback, and critical transitions [16].

**Proxies.** The proxies of Tables 2 and 4 are candidate operational measures, not established universal indicators.

**Scope.** The framework addresses one dimension of socio-technical disruption. It does not claim explanatory exclusivity and is intended to complement, not replace, existing social, political, and economic analyses.

**Extensions.** The model could incorporate interactions among layers, distributions of  $\tau_i$ , and links to indicators such as education reform cycles, regulatory lag, and organizational learning rates, and could be applied comparatively across sectors, societies, and periods.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed a conceptual mathematical framework, inspired by dielectric relaxation, for temporal compatibility between technological change and institutional response. Its central construct is the dimensionless mismatch parameter  $\Lambda_i = r_T \tau_i$ , for which magnitude and phase of response were derived from a first-order model, giving three regimes: compatibility, transition, and mismatch. Adaptation is represented as the parallel response of four layers whose response times are ordered and separated, and the analogy with dielectric mechanisms rests on that ordering and not on physical correspondence.

The framework proposes that temporal mismatch may constitute one important dimension of socio-technical disruption. Where technological change lies within the response bandwidth of the layers, adaptation may be synchronized and technological

activity more readily converted into structured accumulation. As  $r_T$  rises, slower layers may fall out of the response in sequence, giving dispersive adaptation and, in the limit, institutional decoupling. These are hypotheses, and four testable propositions and a research design were provided for evaluating them. The conflict-affected illustration was conceptual only.

Future work should measure  $r_T$  and  $\tau_i$  in specific domains, test P1 to P4 comparatively, determine whether layer response times are sufficiently separated, and extend the model to interacting layers and distributed response times.

### STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing and clarity improvement, and Claude (Anthropic) for structural review and redrafting of sections. The author reviewed, revised, and edited the manuscript as necessary and retains full responsibility for its accuracy, originality, and integrity.

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