Making oneself predictable: Reduced temporal variability facilitates joint action coordination

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Abstract: Performing joint actions with others often requires precise temporal coordination of individual actions. So far, little is known about how people achieve interpersonal coordination at discrete points in time when continuous information about others' actions is not available. Here we tested the hypothesis that coordinating actions without continuous information exchange may require the use of coordination strategies. A reaction time study, in which pairs of participants were instructed to act in synchrony or in close temporal succession, provides evidence for a strategic reduction of the variability of one's own actions. Specifically, the less variable co-actors' actions were, the better was interpersonal coordination. The relation between predictability and coordination performance was not observed when co-actors performed independent tasks without intending to coordinate. These findings support the claim that making oneself predictable is used as a coordination strategy. Identifying coordination strategies contributes to the understanding of the mechanisms involved in real-time coordination.