

Emergent Temporal Interaction Effects in Communities of Organizations

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Introduction : Temporal Problems Amidst Temporal Plenty

“Time” is frequently invoked to explain the difficulties and disappointing outcomes of community social interventions: “Too little, too late”; “There are only so many hours in the day”; or “The timing was wrong.” These clichés suggest, respectively, that the right program arrived at the wrong moment and did not last long enough, that the right people were doing the right things, but the problem outlived the solution, or that the effort, had it occurred under conditions prevailing at some other point in time, might have succeeded. Mindful of such observations, both funders and program designers have become “temporally generous” by supporting longer projects, providing resources to ensure that new programs represent net increases in effort (rather than a mere re-allocation), and requiring more planning, timelines, and milestones, and documentation of community readiness.

But even programs with generous temporal endowments are plagued by time related problems. Participants complain about hours wasted in meetings. Project leaders cannot keep on schedule, deadlines are missed, and participants with short term perspectives feud over how long things should take with those who see things in the longer term. Some groups demand immediate action; others want more careful planning.

People involved in, or affected by, community programs, as well as those who design, fund, or evaluate them, often interpret such problems either as proof that still more time was

necessary, or as evidence of underlying personal, organizational or community pathology (Ryan Forthcoming 2004). Failure to come up with a plan during a one year planning process shows that two years are necessary. The difficulty of coordinating meeting times leads participants to question one another's commitment to the project. Those with a long history in the community call newcomers naïve, and the latter dismiss the veterans as anachronisms.

This paper suggests two correctives to this line of thinking. First, I note a tendency to view time as a quantitative resource rather than as a structural property of organizations and communities. Second, the paper argues, "time troubles" are not necessarily indicators of pathology but manifestations of ordinary interactions between normal, but divergent, organizational temporalities. Community initiatives that "bring everyone to the table" provide an opportunity for naturalistic observation of the interactions between temporally diverse entities and the unanticipated, but analyzable, effects which emerge when mismatched organizational temporalities interact. An appreciation of these phenomena may be useful for planners, participants, and evaluators of initiatives that take place in and attempt to make changes in contemporary communities.

{mini lit review here?} The argument proceeds as follows. After characterizing the case study on which the analysis is based, I argue for a basic shift in perspective from viewing communities as bounded collections of individuals to seeing them as loose networks of organizations. I then describe three conventional views of time as a quantitative resource and supplement these by characterizing a number of temporal structure dimensions of organizations. Finally, I catalog a number of ways in which connections within organizational networks permit interactions among divergent temporal structures giving rise to conflicts, misunderstandings,

operational failures, etc. These emergent temporal interaction effects are conventionally interpreted in terms of politics, personal or organizational pathology, or resource shortages when they are, in fact, "normal."

The Case : Collaboration in New Haven, Connecticut

This paper is based on a multiyear study of an effort to build a community-wide coalition against substance abuse in New Haven, Connecticut. Supporting materials are drawn from studies of parallel efforts in a number of other sites (Jones et al. 1997; Kadushin et al. Forthcoming; Lindholm et al. Forthcoming; Lindholm 2001; Ryan 1999). Research involved fieldwork, interviews, and document analysis.

In early 1989 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the largest health philanthropy in the U.S., announced a new program called *Fighting Back* (FB) that would "find out whether, by consolidating existing programs, activities, and other resources into a single community-wide system of prevention, early identification, treatment, and after-care services, a community can achieve substantial reductions in the use of illegal drugs and alcohol" (Jellinek and Hearn 1991). Fourteen communities were selected on the basis of their ability to document their drug problem and propose an approach likely to reduce demand. Each received a one or two year planning grants with the understanding that they would be awarded three million dollars over five years upon successful completion of a community plan. Several sites, including New Haven, later received additional funds allowing the project to operate for a full decade.

New Haven's program consisted of several committees and a small staff. A Citizens Task Force was composed of organizational elites from across the community. Other committees formed around prevention, treatment, neighborhoods, and youth. Staff worked

out of city hall and consisted of executive director, clerical staff, and several outreach workers and community organizers.

Fighting Back as Temporally Innovative

Twenty-five years after the community action programs of the 1960s in New Haven [Lowe, 1967 #1695; Powledge, 1970 #1306; Sviridoff, 1994 #1310; Dahl, 1961 #1173], there was, at the end of the 1980s, a desire to “get it right this time,” and the Foundation self-consciously structured the program with several “temporal” lessons of past in mind: the recognition that not all communities had reached the stage of being ready for a particular program; that the changes the program envisioned would require a net increase in effort; and that results would emerge only slowly.

First, “timing” was critical. The original request for proposals had argued that *Fighting Back’s* success would, first of all, depend on being the right idea applied at the right time. Each community was on its own trajectory, and selecting those that were at the appropriate stage would be important for the program’s success. The country as a whole, the Foundation had asserted, was ready to consider demand reduction as a strategy in the war on drugs (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 1989), but the challenge would be to identify communities that were ready to implement the “Fighting Back approach.”

Time was also seen in terms of the allocation effort (Becker 1965). Many of the initiatives in communities that had begun to “fight back” were staffed by volunteers (Falco 1992), but to be successful the Foundation believed that more person-hours would be needed than either volunteers or a mere reshuffling of existing personnel could supply. To make change, the program would need to effect a net increase in effort in FB communities.

To accomplish this, the funding would be generous and it would not be used simply to pay for existing efforts.

Finally, FB also addressed the problem of duration. In addition to raw effort, the development of a “coordinated system of prevention and treatment” would be a slow process. Even with extra temporal resources, change would not occur overnight. Too many past programs had disappeared before making a difference. Two years of planning, five years of implementation, and an evaluation that continued for several years after that were intended to overcome the problem of programs that did not stick around long enough to have any effects.

Temporal Problems and Local Explanations

Despite the attention given to temporal issues, conflicts and problems related to time were endemic in FB. Schedules were ignored, deadlines not met. Organizational crises spread through FB from one partner to another. Resident groups and planning professionals sparred about how long it should take to draw up plans. Temporal disagreements took on intensely moral tones; time decisions always offended somebody. Even meeting times turned into a hot issue: mid-day meetings excluded working residents; late afternoons slighted those with children; evening meetings required professionals to put in extra hours; the police would only meet at the beginning or end of shifts. Proposal deadlines, known months in advance, were ignored until the last minute, when “participants” not seen for months would emerge from the woodwork, demand substantial changes, and threaten to derail the project if not placated. Throughout the program’s history, it never seemed that “more” time helped them to avoid temporal problems.

How could so many temporal problems arise in a program that did actually pay attention to temporal issues? Were these problems the result of temporal incompetence in New Haven? Were specific actors, whether individuals or organizations, to blame? During our fieldwork, all the usual explanations were heard: lack of political will; in-fighting and fragmentation; program design flaws; someone screwed up; lack of leadership.

Each of these diagnoses explains outcomes in terms of a pathology. If the city or project staff or specific decisions had been “normal” or “good,” all would have been well. If participant organizations had been able to put self-interest aside, successful cooperation would have been possible. Such lines of thought as these skirt the possibility that problems might have been expected as a normal part of such an effort. Despite our awareness that “these things happen like this all the time,” we tend to look to exceptional characters or circumstances for explanations. {cites to cognition literature?}

Temporal Problems as Normal in Communities of Organizations

An alternative is to borrow a page from Durkheim (Durkheim 1964 (1938)) and assume that temporal problems are normal in programs like *Fighting Back*. Durkheim’s criteria are generality and logical necessity (59); although our data do not permit us to prove universality, fieldwork and experience do informally suggest that the “time related problems” described here are common in the “average type” of community intervention that involves large numbers of organizations. The analysis below attempts to meet Durkheim’s second condition: a condition is normal if it “is necessarily implied in the nature of the being” (59).

Communities as Networks of Organizations

There is a long history of debating the definition of “community” in the social sciences (e.g., Hillery 1955; Keller 2003), but implicit in most definitions is “people” (Diaz 2000). In practice, though, when community initiatives like FB bring participants “to the table,” those participants are, by and large, representatives of organizations. And for good reason: although ostensibly undertaken to improve conditions for real people living in real places, programs like *Fighting Back* are generally more about organizing organizations than people. The arena in which they operate might well be called a “community of organizations” (Ryan 1999). In the case of FB, the premise was that many organizational efforts related to demand reduction were underway, but that they needed to be coordinated in order to be effective:

Despite the proliferation of local demand-reduction programs and activities, there has been little attempt to tie such endeavors together....There is no common understanding of the problem, no consensus regarding priorities, ... no overall strategy for deploying the community’s multiple resources in a focused, unified effort. ... it is hardly surprising that few communities, if any, have turned the corner on the drug problem (Jellinek and Hearn 1991).

The “common understanding” the program’s designers spoke about was not among the general population, but among a population of organizations. They implicitly envisioned “the community” as a disconnected network of networks of organizations. Small clusters of organizations worked together, but overall, the network was fragmented (Figure 1). The goal of the program was to forge new links in the community, turning this loose network into a connected system.

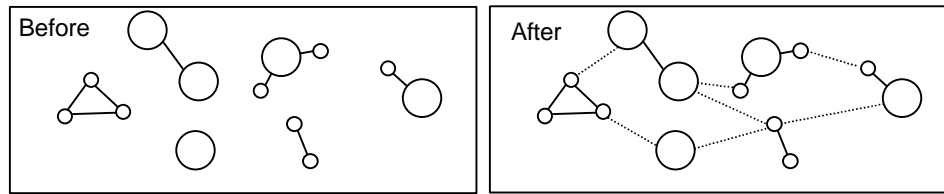


Figure 1. Community as loosely connected network of organizations

Organizations as Temporally Structured

The other half of transcending explanations based on community pathology and “not enough time” is to shift from seeing time as a quantitative resource to focusing on temporality as a part of organizational structure. Briefly put: organizations differ temporally (Sorokin and Merton 1939, Zerubavel 1981). In police and fire departments, for example, time is structured in terms of rotating shifts and response to unanticipated events. Hospitals share the cyclical shift structure, but (except for the emergency room) are less susceptible to the unexpected (Zerubavel 1979). Neighborhood groups, by contrast, build on family time with schedules dominated by the comings and goings of children to school and adults to work. Student groups come and go with semesters [Kenyon, 2000 #56]. Some organizations have neatly bounded periods of activity (such as 9 to 5), while members of others must always be “on call” (Zerubavel 1979). State agencies often have time horizons that facilitate comfort with long delays and drawn out processes whereas local activists operate in a world where windows of opportunity may rarely open for more than a few weeks.

Students of time have suggested a number of conceptual approaches to characterizing different temporal regimes of social entities (e.g., Hawley 1950; Lauer 1981; Moore 1963; Sorokin and Merton 1937; Zerubavel 1981). These include pace/speed/tempo, cycles/rhythms, socially accepted sequences and durations, time horizons, and patterns of

events. A given temporal characteristic may be functionally related to an entity's activity (as when produce is delivered in pre-business hours to wholesalers so that retailers can have it on their shelves during shopping hours (Hawley 1950)) or primarily expressive of symbolic boundaries (as with the choice of a Sabbath in a religion (Zerubavel 1982a)). In either case, communities contain organizations that exhibit a broad array of temporal properties which we can refer to collectively as "calendar." Organizational "calendar" includes an organization's internal schedules, its many periodic activities, and the stream of events inside and outside the organization that spur it to action. Within clusters of frequently interacting organizations, mutual adjustment of their calendar over time yields [Moore, 1963 #8;Zerubavel, 1981 #28] between-cluster temporal differences and within-cluster temporal similarities, effectively dividing a community of organizations into "temporal enclaves." Each enclave has its own sense of "how long is long" along with daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms. Boundaries between enclaves permit internal temporal symmetry and external temporal asymmetry (Zerubavel 1981, 64). The medical drug treatment providers in New Haven, for example, could run on "hospital time," and the prevention specialists on "school time" without bothering one another.

Communities as Networks of Temporal Enclaves

When temporally structured organizations are connected by the sparse networks that characterize communities of organizations, the result is a loose network of networks of calendar (Figure-2). Communities are marked by what Nowotny (1992) called "pluritemporalism" – "different modes of social time which may exist side by side" (424). But, important for our purposes, these are not abstract, subjective times, but rather temporal structures (Orlikowski and Yates 2002, 687). Under ordinary circumstances – that is,

without interventions like *Fighting Back* promoting community-wide participation¹ – contrasting, and potentially conflicting, calendars remain isolated in separate temporal enclaves.

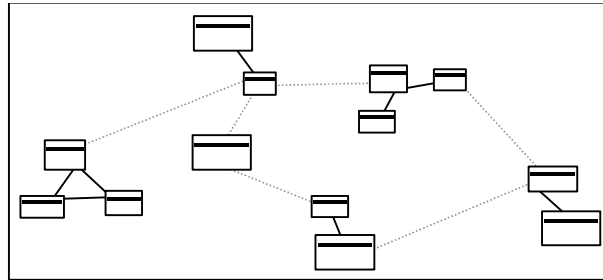


Figure-2. Community as a network of “calendar”

The *Fighting Back* strategy took these inter-enclave gaps as a problem and meant to build new interorganizational linkages in the substance abuse domain. Anticipated results of this strategy included increased social capital, enhanced information flow, and more cooperation and coordination resulting in a net benefit for the community. Among the unanticipated consequences were the temporal conflicts that emerged as temporal structures flowed across new linkages between temporally dissimilar organizations.

The body of this paper offers a typology of ways that the temporal properties of organizations interact. Insofar as these interaction effects arise when existing interorganizational relationships are manipulated in the name of lessening fragmentation, increasing the effectiveness of community interventions, and improving coordination, the effects described here might be called “programogenic” problems, that is, problems created

¹ Interventions are not the only thing that can bring this about. The “discovery” of a new problem or opportunity that elicits a response from a variety of organizations can have similar effects. Disasters are perhaps the most common example. One part of “disaster preparedness” is specifying how “emergency temporality” will replace “temporality as usual.” {INSERT REFERRNECE?}

by particular combinations of solutions (community-wide collaboration) and the properties of the things being manipulated (organizations).

Emergent Temporal Interactions

Over the long term, of course, variant temporalities do adjust and adapt to one another (Moore 1963). Most commonly, what I call the “dominant temporality thesis” holds: the dominant temporality in a situation tends to be the temporality of the dominant entity in the situation (cf. Doob 1971 as cited by [Schriber, 1986 #40, 642]). Obvious examples are the world-wide use of the Gregorian calendar (Zerubavel 1981) and the seven day week (Zerubavel 1985) or the adoption of time zones and Universal Coordinated Time (Blaise 2000; Zerubavel 1982b). In the short term, however, new patterns of connection and contact can be expected to give rise to conflicting temporal structures and what I call “temporal interaction effects.” Simple examples include professors who teach Monday, Wednesday, and Friday never getting to know those who come in only on Tuesday and Thursday, or high employee turnover in a social service agency (with cycles, perhaps, on the order of months) resulting in clients (with cycles on the order of years) forever dealing with new caseworkers unfamiliar with them except in the form of a case file.

As mentioned above, the temporal dimensions which generate such interaction effects are numerous and several authors have introduced conceptual schemes for distinguishing temporal pattern (Hawley 1950; Lauer 1981; Moore 1963; Sorokin and Merton 1937). Zerubavel offers four: sequential structure, duration, temporal location, and rate of recurrence (Zerubavel 1981). The latter corresponds to the periodicity of the various rhythms and routines of social life. Temporal location refers to points in time. Most

authors apply these to situations or events but they have also been extended to organizations (e.g., McGrath and Rotchford 1983; Schriber and Gutek 1987; Zerubavel 1979).

Less common in the literature is an examination of what happens when entities with different temporal structures encounter one another. Zerubavel describes symbolic contests over calendars (Zerubavel 1977; Zerubavel 1982a) and the beat patterns that emerge when different social rhythms overlap (Zerubavel 1979, 60ff). Others have described the temporal disorientation experienced by tourists and immigrants in cultures with temporal styles different from their own (Levine 1997). Our focus here will be neither explicit contests over temporal structures nor the personal experience of temporal conflict, but the organizational level effects which emerge when organizations with different temporal properties -- temporal cycles, event streams, and temporal styles -- rub up against one another.

Cycles, Events, and Styles

“Cycles” are repetitive patterns of activity in an organization such as funding cycles, work schedules, daily, weekly, monthly, or seasonal peak and slack times, project life cycles, staff development cycles, commonly repeated processes (e.g., grant cycles), election cycles, and fiscal years. Some cycles are internal (e.g., shifts) while the metronome controlling others is located in the organization’s environment (e.g., funding cycles). By “event stream” I mean occurrences that require an organizational response, action, or decision but that are not a part of predictable cycles.² Examples are the client arrivals, project deadlines, funding opportunities, hirings, firings, quittings, meetings, visits by evaluators or funders, political crises, deaths of people, and births of projects. Events are not necessarily unexpected, but

² These are very much like what March et al. call “decision opportunities” March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen. 1976. *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations*. Bergen-Oslo-Tromso: Universitetsforlaget..

their unpredictable or irregular timing is what distinguishes them from cycles. “Temporal style”³ refers to an organization’s general orientations toward time. Is it fast or slow paced? Does it set its own rhythm or is it driven by external clocks and calendars? To what degree are its operations temporally rationalized? Is it dominated by appointments and schedules or coverage of activity hours? Does it tend to have a long or short term view of things? Organizations can vary widely in terms of cycles, event streams, and styles. When two or more organizations with divergent temporal properties interact, temporal interaction effects emerge. The next sections sketch a taxonomy of such effects.

Cycles and Rhythms

Cycles and rhythms are characterized by their period – the time between recurrences – and their phase – when the cycle begins. If, for example, garbage is picked up weekly on Tuesdays and recycling weekly on Thursdays, both have the same period – one week, but they are out of phase with one another by two days. If garden waste is picked up every other week on Thursdays, its period is twice that of the regular recycling. Organizational cycles can differ in terms of period, phase, or both.

All manner of cycles were observed among the organizations FB brought to the table. Some community organizations ran multiple daily shifts, others only one; some operated seven days per week, others only five. Service providers had a rhythm based on how long cases stayed active or how long treatment typically lasted. Detox facilities, for example, cycle people through on a scale of days or at most weeks, while “after care” and transitional housing typically works on a cycle of many months. Some organizations were on multiple

³ Merleau-Ponty (Phenomenology of Perception 422) uses this term in a different way. Schutz uses “specific time perspective” as one element of the “specific cognitive style” that characterizes a reality or finite province of meaning

year budgets, others had an annual budget and fundraising cycle. Some ran June to June, others September to September. Stage agencies' financial rhythms may be dominated by legislative appropriation cycles while non-profits set their calendars to those of their philanthropic sponsors. The schedules of youth and education agencies reflects the rhythms of the school day and year while university affiliates run on the slightly different rhythm of the academic calendar.

Two kinds of interactions between cycles and rhythms are possible: patterns which have similar periods but are out of phase with one another and patterns which have distinctly different periods. The former give rise to the familiar coordination problems and perceptions of collective busyness encountered when two people try to make a lunch date. Operating in slightly different milieus, their weekly rhythms of meetings, work, and play may have similar periodicities – both may teach two times a week, for example – but be out of phase – one teaches Monday and Wednesday, the other Tuesday and Thursday. Differences in period lead to, among other things, collective temporal blindspots and social arhythmias.

As New Haven *Fighting Back* expanded to include diverse constituencies, the simple task of scheduling meetings became a major issue. No matter what time was chosen, someone always felt deliberately excluded, and missed meetings were taken as a sign of low commitment. Eventually, the main Task Force settled for 8 a.m. meetings, the “prevention committee” at noon on weekdays, and the heads of the neighborhood committees around dinner time. Meeting times determined who participated, and the Task Force became dominated by organizations for whom morning meetings were natural – business, medical professionals, university staff, and the heads of larger social service agencies – even as they

(“On Multiple Realities” Schuetz, Alfred. 1945. "On Multiple Realities." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol.

effectively excluded parents and representatives of small organizations that kept less “business-like” hours. Lunch meetings were convenient for non-employed neighborhood activists and staff of smaller agencies and neighborhood organizations, and so the prevention committee was increasingly associated with the “grassroots.” The challenge of finding acceptable meeting times effected a sorting of participants according to compatibility of their daily and weekly cycles rather than a rational analysis of who should be involved in what.

Interactions between out of phase cycles also had symbolic effects, especially when one enclave’s rhythms were privileged over another’s. Finding “a time that is good for both of us” almost always meant one party adjusting to the other. Who does more adjusting has status implications.⁴ Discussions about good and bad times for meetings, for example, frequently became contests to see whose participation was more valuable.

Interactions among cycles with different periods can lead to a different problem : mismatched temporal scale. At a community meeting in 1996, for example, a veteran of education reform efforts in the 1960s observed that “...we had been attacking ten or twenty year problems with two and three year solutions.” Although *Fighting Back* had a longer funding period than most programs, New Haven, like many of the other sites, seemed to have only just figured out how to “fight back” as the program began to wind down. This observation tempts us to focus on program duration – longer is better, but it obscures an important temporal structure of community problems and solutions. During the time it took to figure out how to *Fight Back*, the community, its organizations, and its substance

5:533-576).

⁴ Norms may indicate that the “busier” person gets to name available times first as well as dictate how “busy” is defined (Mothers with small children, for example, are not implicitly less busy than pediatricians, but are generally expected to adjust their schedules to those of the latter. (cf Barry Schwartz? [Schwartz, 1975 #10]) A similar

abuse problem had changed. The mismatch between the cycle size of socially organized processes, entities, and problems that are brought together by programs like *Fighting Back* can make entities that are logically connected effectively blind to one another.

Foundation representatives, for example, would visit New Haven about every six months to check on the implementation. At the end of an early visit they asked “Where is the grassroots involvement?” This was a sensitive issue in New Haven since project leaders had been very careful to keep the project from falling into the hands of what they considered to be “the usual suspects” at the neighborhood level. Project leaders assured the funder that progress on the issue would be obvious at their next visit. The Task Force would meet several times in the interim and they were confident they could come up with something. In contrast to the Task Force, the neighborhood organizations who represented those “grassroots” were quick reaction machines. They learned of opportunities and quickly pounced on them, and dealt less well when issues were drawn out for long periods. When the Foundation raised the question they sprang into action with letters of protest, threats to boycott the program, and demands for immediate action. But the task force had to meet and consider options. By the time it made its offer of concessions, the neighborhood groups’ attention was elsewhere and records show little if any subsequent participation.

The three organizations – the Foundation, the Task Force, and the neighborhood groups – were linked by the issue of “grassroots involvement,” but differences in the size of their attention cycles (as illustrated in Figure 3) meant that by the time the issue came up again for

status contest can take place of space as whether the meeting is at my office or yours says a lot about where we stand in terms of relative status.

the Task Force, it was first on the neighborhood agenda, and when the Foundation next visited, the Task Force had other items at the top of its agenda.⁵

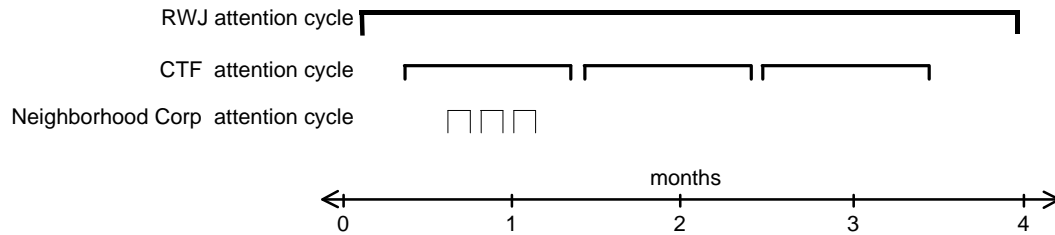


Figure 3. Three attention, decision, and action cycles

Organizations sample their environments at different intervals and for different lengths of time. Phenomena generated by organizations with much shorter or longer periods can, in effect, be invisible to such assays. And, as the old activist implied, solutions that have life cycles that are significantly shorter than that of the problems they are meant to solve may be totally ineffective on temporal grounds alone.

Cycle mismatches can have symbolic effects too. As Jacque noted of bureaucracies, time spans associated with work assignments lengthen as one moves up the hierarchy from hourly or daily tasks to strategic planning on the scale of years. In community initiatives like FB, when short cycle organizations (e.g., drop-in shelters) interact with long cycle organizations (e.g., policy think tanks) there can be a trivialization of the former's activity as "not what's really important" and a valorization of the latter's as "more serious" or "sophisticated," or, alternatively, short cycle activities are seen as being more "front line," "close to the community," or "helping real people," while longer cycle activity is disdained as distant,

⁵ This is, of course, not intended to be a generic characterization of neighborhood based groups, many of which have very long attention/issue cycles. The point here is to illustrate the effects of interactions between different sized cycles.

abstract, theoretical, or bureaucratic. In either case, temporal mismatches are easily mistaken for substantive political conflict.

This phenomenon could be seen in the variety of reactions to the very temporal generosity that marked the *Fighting Back* program. Mindful of the unrealistically brief programs of the past, rushes to implementation, and premature expectations of effects (see, for example Marris and Rein 1967; Moynihan 1970; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation gave FB at least seven years. Organizations comfortable with long cycles of studying options and preparing reports and waiting for results hailed this as an opportunity to avoid the grant driven “business as usual” and to have a program “locked in” for a significant period of time. But smaller nonprofits, neighborhood organizations, and residents, with much shorter attention and action cycles, frequently proclaimed “We know what we need!” and “We don’t need to sit around for two years planning!” This conflict undermined participants’ temporal self confidence. Professionals developed an exaggerated fear of allowing anything to drag on, residents offered lip service to the need to plan, and the project developed a pattern of “talk and lurch,” never really deliberating long enough for some and never acting soon enough for others.

Interacting Event Streams

If cycles and rhythms of scheduled occurrences constitute the more or less predictable component of organizations’ temporal structure, they are complemented by “unschedule” – streams of non-cyclical and more or less unpredictable events that occasion organizational activity. Such events can be internally generated (a family needs to deal with an alcoholic parent, a firm evaluates whether it is ready to launch the new product) or come from the environment (the family needs to clean the house because relatives are coming over, the firm

needs to hurry the product launch because a competitor just launched one). Events can be “routine” in size, scope, and subject matter – those that demand only “ordinary” levels of organizational attention and that are expected to occur occasionally even if unpredictably – or “exceptional” – events whose attention demands disrupt organizational routine (a major fire in a factory, a lawsuit against a social service agency).

Events, and the corresponding imperative to “do something,” can leak across interorganizational linkages so that one organization’s unschedule supplements another’s. Under ordinary circumstances, the relative isolation of organizations within temporal enclaves minimizes such leaks. Collaborative endeavors like FB, however, can effectively merge the event streams of temporally diverse organizations, giving rise to what can be called “calendar noise.” The familiar saying, “Bad planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine,” popular on office novelty placards, epitomizes “calendar noise.” The sentiment, typically found on a poster behind on the wall over the desk of an already harried clerk, exhorting the reader to keep his or her “unschedule” to him or herself. People and organizations on the edges of temporal enclaves are perhaps the most susceptible to the disabling effects of calendar noise.

Each new link that formed as *Fighting Back* brought organizations “to the table” threatened to breach the calendrical dikes that separated the community’s temporal enclaves. Early in the project, for example, the State of Connecticut announced funding for the establishment of regional substance abuse councils. Although the funds were small and FB had other things on its agenda, when the “opportunity” was brought to the Task Force’s attention, it took very little time for a new deadline to dominate the agendas of the organizations most involved in FB. The same thing occurred when, not long after this, one

of *Fighting Back*'s participating organizations lost its state funding. As word spread, saving "X" became the top task for a group of about a dozen agencies. Both situations were later hailed as examples of successful collaboration, but they also illustrate a fundamental cost of calendar noise: each new interorganizational link exposes organizations to "the other guys" deadlines, panics, hecticness, and crises.

The leakage of ordinary events across interorganizational linkages, calendar noise, can clutter everyone's calendar; when, however, the occasional "big" event spills over, it can totally obliterate nearby calendars. In midsummer 1991, for example, the new *Fighting Back* project director in resigned abruptly after only a few months in office. Across the community, schedules in otherwise temporally segregated organizations – the Mayor's office, a leading drug treatment provider, the office of a State Senator, Yale University, a local hospital, a utility company, and the Community Foundation – were suddenly trumped by the latest *Fighting Back* crisis. Emergency meetings displaced business as usual. A replacement was quickly found, but not before the problem had become a crisis on the agenda of a far larger group of organizations than was actually involved in solving it.

The increased awareness of one another's event streams can also have symbolic effects, as increased contact leads to "the misery of calendrical awareness." A not atypical scene was a meeting in which organizational representatives learned of an array of weekend activities – car washes, tag sales, pancake breakfasts – being sponsored by others at the table and that their daily rounds would otherwise have been out of their purview.⁶ Now publicly aware of such events, they risked wasting political capital by not showing up. Another symbolic effect

⁶ Sometimes it appeared that the local groups enjoyed putting the community elites on the spot in this way. Calendar invasion can be a form of loyalty testing in a community of organizations.

that emerged with increased density of organizational connections was “crisis trumping.” Crisis trumping occurs when organizations are exposed to one another’s crises du jour (or du mois) and the other guy’s makes mine seem trivial in the larger context even though it remains critical locally. Throughout NHFB’s early history its relatively frequent organizational disasters took over the agendas in member organizations. Relations become strained as organizations become overly aware of each other’s problems and feel distracted by concerns not really their own.

Temporal Style

Cycles and event streams cover a number of the temporal characteristics of organizations that have been identified by students of time in organizations (cf. Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988), but not all. Additional characteristics can be gathered under the term “temporal style.” Temporal style is a qualitative dimension that refers to an organization’s general temporal orientation. Does it have a long time horizon or short (Ziller 1965)Ziller 1965 (cited by Bluedorn & Denhardt 1988) (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967)Lawrence & Lorsch (cited by Bluedorn & Denhardt 1988))? Is it temporally rigid or flexible? Temporally homogeneous or heterogeneous (cf. Schriber 1986, Zerubavel 1981? on doctors and nurses)? What sorts of temporal buffers does (leads, lags, delays) it employ? (Cyert and March 1963; Moore 1963; Zerubavel 1981) as cited by (Schriber and Gutek 1987, 643) To what degree is the organization temporally rationalized (e.g., does it operate in terms of “billable hours”)? What kind of deadline pressures does it face (March and Simon 1958). Is it basically “monochronic” or “polychronic” (Hall 1959; Hall 1966; Hall 1983)? How much temporal accountability do members have? (Nippert-Eng 1996, 62)

Differences in organizational temporal style that were observed in the field include the degree to which punctuality was a priority; whether “business” arrives by appointment (doctors), by events (emergency departments), at client initiative (clinics); on a fixed schedule (schools), or by detection (police); whether the organization’s activity is primarily project-based or ongoing; the density of organizational and personal calendars; and the degree to which an organization has “history” in the community. Some aspects of temporal style may be derivative of an organization’s cycles and event streams, but it is useful to treat it as a separate dimension because the conflicts which emerge are rooted in qualitative rather than quantitative differences. Like cycles and event streams, contrasting temporal styles generated effects that were frequently mis-attributed to personal, organizational, community pathology.

Meetings. The most obvious temporal style interaction effect emerged in the course of routine meetings. Participants clashed over whether meetings should start and end on time, how long meetings should take, and how much time should be devoted to small talk. For residents and representatives of neighborhood organizations meetings were a chance to catch up and interact informally. Sometimes this was less the case for professionals but even when they were doing it too it was a completely different realm of informality (what does this have to do with temporality?).

Agenda Logic. An interesting effect emerged when organizations accustomed to planning sequences of actions tried to work with others more comfortable with single events. After discussing what needed to be done to implement some idea (e.g., to hold a day-long parenting seminar), attendees would list various tasks and the sequence in which they needed to happen, and then, just before the meeting broke up someone would say “so, what do we do?” In the absence of a collective sense of temporal sequence, the sequence of

steps would transform into a list of alternatives some of which would get done and some not.

How Business Arrives. One aspect of organizational event streams have a big impact on organizational temporal style : how “business” arrives. The temporal has a very different feel in organizations where business arrives by appointment (e.g., doctors), by events (e.g., emergency departments), at client initiative (e.g., clinics); on a fixed schedule (e.g., schools), or by detection (e.g., police). This feature of organizational temporal style affects when representatives can meet (see above) and who can be an organizational representative (e.g., without schedule control only those who do not deal directly with “business” can meet). There seems to be a sort of temporal camaraderie among professionals with similar activity origination styles (EMTs, cops, ER doctors; social workers and clinic docs; lawyers, accountants, medical specialists). EZ on it being one of things that nurses understand about one another. The inability of the police in New Haven to block out time during shifts meant that they were only willing to meet at the start of a shift but this was often interpreted by residents and representatives of other agencies as their needing to “get their way” as the price of their participation at all.

Punctuality. Standards of punctuality vary widely among the organizations in a community as they do between cultures (Lauer 1981; Levine 1997). Within organizations and temporal enclaves repeated interaction and organizational or professional cultures tend to produce homogeneity. But community-wide endeavors yield frequent conflict over this issue. Professionals with rigid timetables had to make symbolically tough choices when more informal colleagues were so late to a meeting that completing the business at hand meant missing a subsequent appointment.

Timing and Legitimacy. Punctuality and related issues were frequently bound up with contests for organizational and personal legitimacy. The need for “street credibility” sometimes put professionals in the position of compromising their standards of professional temporality. On one evening occasion, representatives of a lending consortium were observed to wait over an hour in a dark neighborhood meeting hall for community representatives to saunter in unapologetically after 7:15 for a 6:00 p.m. meeting. As easy as it would have been for someone to say, “let’s just proceed with the folks who are here,” no one dared. In the other direction, community representatives were frequently seen imitating their more professional counterparts adopting sophisticated calendars and such. And fledgling non-profits sometimes distinguished themselves by their commitment to act temporally professional.

Booking Density. Punctuality issues spill over into another realm. In “punctual realms” people can schedule themselves tightly and, for example, make meetings at 9, 10, and 11. Representatives of organizations where people typically “overbooked” themselves were resented as “self important” by those who never had more than a few meetings per week and no need to run off to another meeting every hour.

Horizon. Divergent time horizons was another problem. Neighborhood organizations, for example, as has been mentioned, were often short time horizon organizations relative to, say, policy research groups. Interaction between such entities often resulted in clashes over time in which questions of whether the latter were really committed to action and whether the former were capable of seeing beyond the moment or considering the big picture would be raised. Locals’ style had been influenced by seeing one program idea follow another

without effect, while that of the “planners” was instructed by history of rushed, thoughtless implementations.⁷

History. A final manifestation of temporal style that can emerge in interorganizational interaction is the degree to which an organization carries its history in the community. At one level there are simply new and old organizations, the latter of which may either enjoy a legitimacy bonus derived from its longevity or it may bear the burden of association with failures of the past. Interaction among all old or all new organizations plays differently sometimes than interaction between old and new. Groups and agencies that had been around since the 1960s shared large amounts of taken-for-granted and settled claims and practices. And they recognized one another’s legitimacy. Likewise, interactions among newer players shared one another’s sense of freshness, not being locked in the past, ready to make new beginnings and so on. But when the old and the new got together the former had to remind the latter over and over “we’ve tried that before” and “that did not work last time.” Interpersonal dynamic that undercuts new ideas. Delicate balance. Playing the history card. Or playing the “time for a change” card.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to draw a connection between time, organizations, and urban community initiatives. It began with a simple question: Why were there so many temporal problems in a program which had a generous temporal endowment? The short answer was that “temporal plenty” addresses only one aspect of time, its unidimensional and quantitative side. Time also has a structural side: organizations are temporally structured, and

⁷ A similar phenomenon occurs on a more macro scale when the globalization of the economy brings to the fore the issue of Japanese or German industries taking a much longer term view with respect to investment and product

communities of organizations emerge as loosely connected networks of “calendar.” Many of the temporal problems common in community initiatives arise from interactions among temporally different organizations rather than from the personal, organizational, or community pathologies to which they are often attributed.

Three categories of organizational temporal properties – cycles, event streams, and temporal style – and the interaction effects they give rise to were described. Out of phase cycles interact to produce social arrhythmias that inhibit coordination. Interactions between cycles with different periods lead to temporal blind spots in which effects are looked for before they appear or after they have dissipated. When new inter-organizational links are forged in a community of organizations, calendar noise leaks across inter-organizational boundaries, distracting and diverting organizations from their priorities. Finally, differences in temporal styles lead to conflicts of organizational cultural that get in the way of cooperation. Although all commonplace, these structurally-based temporal problems are frequently mis-interpreted in terms of local pathologies.

“Structural” time is understandably harder to see than “quantitative” time. In line with Franklin’s aphorism “time is money” [Franklin, 1997 #80] and the rationalization of resource utilization which characterizes Western capitalism [Weber, 1976 #1458], conventional views of time are dominated by the goals of obtaining more time and getting more out of the time we have got. In the context of urban communities and community initiatives, the default logic is more time means more program which means more effect. This paper has argued, to the contrary, that it time is a relevant consideration for understanding the dynamics of community programs not so much in terms of the amount of

development than do American firms concerned about quarterly earnings reports.

time that is poured into a community as in how different “shapes” of time interact in communities of organizations.

The alternative to appreciating this is the tendency to pathologize persons, organizations, and whole communities. The pathologies that participants offered as explanations for the problems encountered by FB are an example of what social psychologists call the fundamental attribution error: the tendency to over-emphasize individual or personality-based explanations for observed behavior at the expense of situational or structural explanations [Heider, 1958 #1895]. But while psychologists focus on individual vs. situational attribution, what we see in the community context is simplified community exceptionalism. To talk with local residents, activists, and FB staff, New Haven was a unique community beset with problems that made it “not like other cities.” Nothing could get done because of turf wars, fragmentation, age old rivalries, a long history of corruption, the incompetence or dishonesty of specific individuals, or the conflict orientation of particular organizations. To be sure, some of the diagnoses hinted at structures, but the emphasis was on what was wrong with the community. It was the rare observation that suggested the difficulties the program encountered might be normal features in a community of organizations.

“Trouble” as “normal” in communities of organizations

Even in the intellectually most sophisticated minds, the term “community” is often tinged with a false romanticization of *Gemeinschaft*: in “healthy communities” people recognize the common good and the value of cooperating to achieve it. Perhaps the most sociologically naive aspect of the way community programs are usually designed, implemented, and evaluated is that problems, disorganization, and lack of success are

assumed to be deviations from this norm and in need of an explanation. When programs falter or fail, researchers ask “what went wrong?” but when things go well, no one asks “what went right?”

In fact, successful community-wide cooperation may in fact be the unusual case in need of explanation [Kadushin, 2004 #1897]. In “normal” communities bring together temporally diverse organizations creates the potential for the kinds of temporal conflict described here. The likelihood of such conflict increases, possibly non-linearly, with the number of entities involved and their temporal diversity as shown schematically in Figure 4. Low levels of conflict can be expected in collaborations among temporally homogeneous entities or when the number of participating entities remain small.

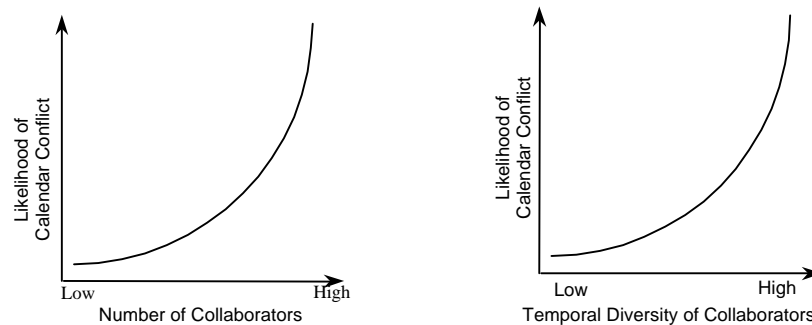


Figure 4

Combining these two relationships yields the structural picture illustrated in Figure 5 in which isolines connect sizes of collaborative efforts and levels of temporal diversity among collaborating organizations which yield similar probabilities of temporal conflict. Lower levels (lower left) occur in small collaborations between temporally similar organizations (say, a drug treatment center and a community health clinic) and in so-called “categorical”

collaborations (upper left) that bring together organizations that are in the same “business” (and are thus assumed to be temporally similar or at least complementary) yielding intermediate levels of temporal conflict. The worst case scenarios is in the upper right: large numbers of organizations from many different temporal enclaves.⁸ The trends we can expect to see are straightforward : with increasing number of collaborators or increasing temporal diversity of collaborators, calendar conflict can be expected to grow. At the extreme, there is the possibility of what might be called “temporal gridlock.”

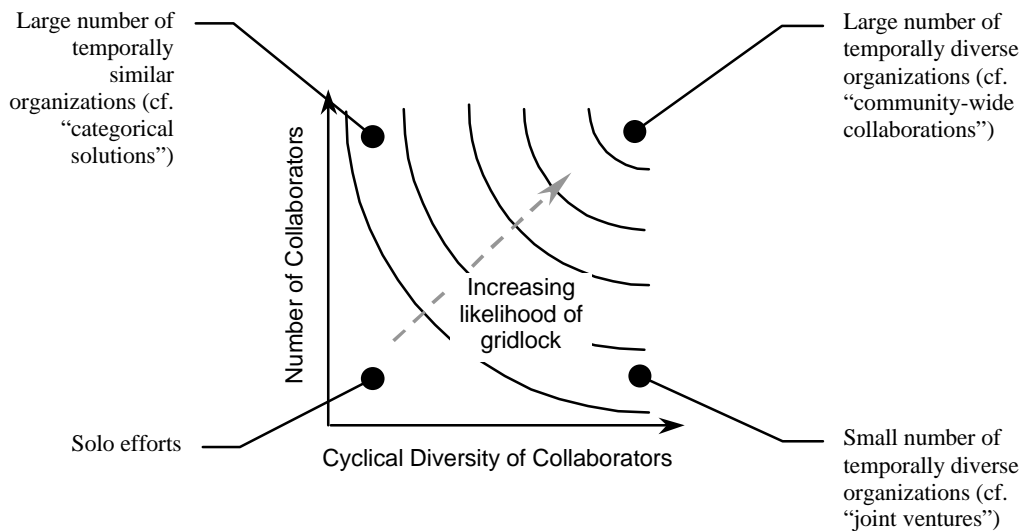


Figure 5 . Temporal Gridlock and Modes of Collaboration

Temporal gridlock is a latent possibility in any community of organizations.

Unperturbed by initiatives aimed at increasing social capital, a community of organizations is

⁸ An everyday example illustrates this point. As children grow up it is socially sanctioned to get them involved in multiple activities. If families have more than one child and activities are extra-curricular (that is, not taking place within the bounds of school and the school day) this generates temporal externalities. The soccer practice at 4 at the high school field does no damage by itself, but when it combines (through the multiple participation of siblings) with

a partially connected network of organizational cycles, event streams, and temporal styles. As a community initiative brings together previously disconnected organizations, cycles overlap, event streams “broadcast” calendar noise through the network, and styles conflict. The trajectory from a more loosely connected to less loosely connected community of organizations will generally involve increases in temporal conflict as illustrated in Figure-6. The increase may be temporary – over the long term a community could in theory become a single temporal enclave (see the drop-off in conflict to the right in the figure) – but few initiatives last long enough or have enough clout to completely dominate the divergent temporalities within a community of organizations. Both highly fragmented communities and those that are fully coordinated or centrally controlled can expect minimal levels of temporal conflict. Initiatives which seek to solve problems through increased connections, though, can expect to see an increase in temporal conflict.

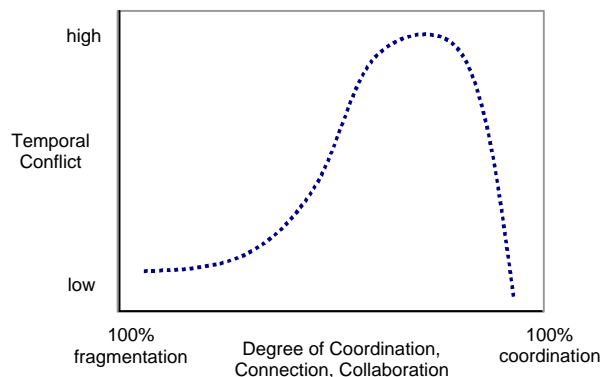


Figure-6. Increases in temporal conflict on the way to increased coordination

It is notable that these were especially visible in an experiment based loosely on the idea of social capital as solution to urban community problems. A premise of programs like FB

ballet practice at the community recreation center, mom gets harried, traffic heavier, she can't do “parent participation” as well as she might.

which focus on “getting everyone to the table” and forging “a unified community-wide system” is that more social capital is always good for a community and is the solution to urban problems. The concept of social capital was first described by Loury as “resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the organization or social development of a child or young person” [Loury, 1977 #1325; Coleman, 1990 #1292, 300]. When applied to communities of organizations, social capital refers to those collective human resources that are made available through personal and institutional networks in a community (Lin 2001; Kadushin 2004). Collaborative solutions can be seen as attempts to supplement social capital in a community of organizations on the hypothesis that more social capital will enhance the community’s capacity to solve its problems.

This points to an interesting concept: the “dark side” of social capital⁹. The temporal interaction effects described in this paper increase with the density of connections in the community of organizations. This suggests, somewhat counterintuitively, that more social capital yields more temporal conflict. In effect, temporality flows through newly forged network linkages, often wreaking havoc when it arrives at the next node. This is certainly true in the short term, but may, of course, be reduced in the long term as temporal structures re-align and mutually adjust. However, two things make an optimistic long run assessment less promising. First, most programs like FB are relatively short-lived; organizations participate in them, more or less actively, and then go back to business as usual. Second,

⁹ This phrase is used here in a different way than in Robert Putnam’s chapter of the same name [Putnam, 2000 #1898, 350-63]. He asks whether uniformity and connectedness among individuals might threaten liberty and tolerance, allowing civic society to regress to the parochialism of the village. Here the point is that because organizations are structured entities, and for the purposes of this paper, temporally structured, across the board engagement, community-wide systems, and other arrangements calculated to improve community welfare by reducing fragmentation and eliminating duplication, may generate increasing costs even as they increase social capital. In the

diminished temporal diversity may not, in the long run, be a good thing for a community. Temporal standardization can undermine the adaptive advantages provided by temporal diversity.

These emergent costs of social capital result from interactions among organizations with discordant temporal structures. Similar effects can be expected from interactions between other properties of organizations (e.g., size, mission, organizational structure) brought together “for the good of the community.” They are one component of why community coalitions and other social capital based strategies are so difficult to use effectively in urban communities [Kadushin, 2004 #1897].

My purpose here is neither to argue for a one-sided structural view of communities and community initiatives, nor to promote the primacy of temporal effects over other structural dimensions. Rather, the point is to argue for a multi-layer view of the causes of problems encountered in attempts to repair or revive communities using organizations. The effects described in this study can be located at the bottom of a hierarchy of “causes” or “explanations” for such problems. I call them “generic organizational effects” to emphasize that they derive from organizational structures, independent of substantive content [cf., \Simmel, 1971 (1908) #1373]. Next come generic institutional effects. Here we have organizations being “normal” political actors, reacting to (or creating new) incentive structures and deciding how much they want to act in their own or the community’s interest. Even if these two sources of influence do not give rise to problems, there is always the possibility that participants will “play dirty,” producing effects on the level of “corruption,

context of communities of organizations there may be distinct disadvantages to “getting all the stakeholders to the table.”

guile, and scheming.” And lastly, we have idiosyncratic “personal” effects – bad leaders, lack of talent or management skills, resource deficits and so on.

Idiosyncratic individual effects
Corruption, guile, scheming
Generic institutional effects
Generic organizational effects

Figure 7. Hierarchy of explanations.

The vertical dimension in this diagram might be labeled “trumping” or “leverage.” As we move down the hierarchy, the effects produced at each level are overwhelmed by those below. One might, for example, identify bad management as a feature of a failed program and suggest that management training for program staff would improve outcomes. If, however, these management practices take place in an atmosphere of corruption and scheming, it may be entirely irrelevant whether they are good ones or not. In other words, corruption trumps good management. In the typical urban community improvement effort there are such ample supplies of potential explanations at the levels of individuals, corruption, and institutions, that generic organizational effects can be all but invisible “to the unaided eye.” The utility of examining programs like *Fighting Back* at this level lies in seeing the vertical dimension in the diagram in terms of “leverage.” Since lower level effects can overwhelm higher ones, small changes, or interventions based on an understanding of, these lower level effects may be more efficacious than large investments made at higher levels which are then washed over by lower level effects left unattended.

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