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## INTRODUCTION

# Managing and temporality

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This special issue is the third in the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (SJM) to focus exclusively on the processual nature of managing and organizing. These three special issues offer an approximate genealogy of recent developments in process thinking in the field of management and organization. Ropo, Eriksson, and Hunt (1997) edited “Reflections on Conducting Processual Research on Management and Organizations”, where process was theorized in the midst of, but separate from, stability. Pettigrew’s paper in that issue was characteristic of this line of thought, insisting that processes (note the plural form) are framed by contexts. Concerns such as how to approach the study of organizational processes, and how to develop valid scientific theories of processes were also discussed. The second special issue, entitled “Processual Approaches in Management and Organization Studies”, was edited by Rehn, Strannegård, and Tryggestad (2007). They pointed out that the 1997 issue had tended toward extracting techniques for dealing with processes, whereas the 2007 issue marked a turn toward a processual understanding of the very phenomenon of organization. In response, some of the papers turned toward philosophy, suggesting an ontological status for process in the theorizing of organization, and offering new ways of engaging with the concept of process itself.

Somewhat curiously, both the 1997 and 2007 special issues announced the arrival of process approaches in management and organization studies. Now, in 2013, process approaches continue to be seen as “just entering” the field, so one might well ask “will they ever be fully embraced by management

and organization studies?” Answering such a question calls for greater clarification of terms since process thinking and process approaches are not a single body of thought that is trying to gain entry. It might perhaps be better to see process thinking in terms of Whitehead’s (1926) “phantastical” notions, which

“are transportable on condition that they impose their own scenery, that they set up camp there where they rest momentarily: they are therefore the objects of an essential encounter rather than of recognition” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 356).

Process thinking may be usefully understood as camping outside existing bastions, from whence it can be invited in and when it has something to offer to particular topics or problematics. In this special issue, we set camp around the notion of “managing in time”, offering a process-based understanding of time. Thus the papers included here stand somewhat apart from other, more mainstream issues on management and time as they bring an explicitly temporal dimension to the discussion. What this special issue sets out to accomplish is to better integrate process theorizing with time, to contribute to present thinking about process approaches in management and organization studies, and to enhance the wider literature on managing and organizing in time.

This is by no means the first attempt to make organizational scholars more aware of time and temporality. Most notably, in 2001 the Academy of Management Review (AMR) hosted a special issue devoted to time in management and organization studies. The papers there provided overviews of the field of management studies in relation to time and temporality, while also emphasizing the urgency of

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addressing time and temporality. The editors laid bare their conceptions in an overview of the contributions to the special issue (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001). Firstly, temporality is presented as the lens of the researcher, allowing the researcher to draw different inferences from data by viewing it through an alternative lens. Secondly, the notion of temporality is primarily limited to conceptions of time, such as speed, sequencing, pacing, and duration. Thirdly, temporality is offered as a way to draw causal inferences between events taking place at different times and at different organizational levels. The AMR special issue offered instructive reviews of how time has played a role in management research. However, we would argue that it is important to complement these views with a more processual perspective as follows.

First, temporality is not merely a lens for the exclusive use of the researcher. Rather, temporality is a feature of the world of management, experienced by managers. Researchers can gain access to this world only by engaging with the temporal experience of managing, by applying what Shotter (2006) refers to as ‘witness thinking’.

Second, temporality implies more than different conceptions of time. In a broader sense, temporality is about the ways in which the passing of time shapes the very being of things (Heidegger, 1927). To be sure, aspects such as speed, sequencing, pacing, and duration are part of the temporal experience of management, but “managing in time” is first and foremost about being *in* time, meaning in an ongoing present in which the materials at hand are continually used to project past experience upon possible futures. This work is done using what Schultz and Hernes (in press), inspired by Mead (1932), called the “materials of the present”. In a sense then, by giving a broader meaning to temporality than was the case in the AMR special issue, the inherent uncertainties and contingencies of managerial life are explicitly invited into the analysis of managing and organizing.

Third, causalities play a role in an expanded view of temporality only insofar as they are experienced as causalities by the actors themselves. In line with Weick (1995), we assume that causality between events is ascribed rather than inferred, and that it is the ascription of meaning upon past events that gives rise to a projection of future events. It is the temporal experience of actors that forces them to reconstruct past and future on an ongoing basis.

This special issue then, aims at opening management research toward a broader conception of time and temporality that must be understood through the temporal experience of managers as they live in the flow of time. The issue comprises an invited contribution from Barbara Czarniawska and five peer-reviewed articles that each provides a different perspective on this central idea of temporal practice. As we worked with the authors on developing their contributions, a number of cross-cutting themes emerged: the various types of time invoked by process researchers; capturing the continuity of past/present/future in practice; the different contexts and methodologies for temporal research; and finally the emergence of creative action as managers manage in time. In the remainder of this Introduction, we will discuss each of these themes in turn, highlighting their treatment by the authors of each contribution.

## Different types of time

A problem with researching time in organizations has been the lack of a temporal vocabulary that can bring philosophical writings into the actuality of managing and organizing. One step forward is to do research that remains grounded in the social analysis of time, but is not reduced to that view of measurable clock time so prevalent in conventional studies of organization and management. Attempts to develop such a vocabulary include the idea of ‘railway time’, which describes the creation of discrete time zones that allow for improved timetabling and safety of trains (Zerubavel, 1981). This had fundamental effects on efficiency in interdependent activities. Another example is that of ‘banana time’ introduced by Roy (1959) to explain how people handle extremely monotonous work situations. Then there is ‘interaction time’, which indicates certain periods during the day when people are supposed to talk to each other, compared to quiet time when people are working without interruptions from their colleagues (Perlow, 1999). Shih (2004) introduced the notion of ‘project time’ to capture how people’s entire lives are organized around particular dominant ‘pacers’ in projects in which they take part, including critical milestones and releases in product development projects. By contrast, ‘beach time’ was elaborated by Evans, Barley, & Kunda (2004) to analyse how technical contractors made use of their temporal flexibility. There are, of course, many more terms used to describe different aspects of time. However, most of these are in some way rooted in traditional clock time, with few leading the way to a more elaborate and fine-grained discussion about organizational temporality.

Another step in advancing the notion of time in management and organization research involves drawing dichotomous distinctions between different types of time, such as *kairos* and *chronos* (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002), *Monochronicity* and *polychronicity* (Hall, 1984), *global* and *local*, and *diachronic* and *synchronic* time. These are undoubtedly important, and to some extent overlapping distinctions. We believe they provide good starting points for discussions of temporality, and indeed the contributors to this special issue have invoked many such distinctions in their arguments. For instance, Czarniawska (in this issue) draws our attention to the distinction between slow and fast speeds; Lorino and Mourey (in this issue) contrast the dead time of frozen forms against the creative time of dialogical development; while both Griesbach and Grand (in this issue) and Vesa and Franck (in this issue) compare objective clock time to subjective experienced time. Bakken, Holt, and Zundel (in this issue) use McTaggart’s distinction between A series and B series time to emphasize the criticality of slack resources for organizational experimentation. In addition, these authors make use of Heidegger’s sense of time – world time – to illustrate how managers experience time outside the interplay between A and B series time. World time generally, the authors remind us, is very different from conventional ideas of management rooted in a specialization and “de-situated” from themselves and others. Contributing to the idea of world time in management practice, Dodd, Anderson, and Jack (in this issue) show how the interplay between ‘clock time’ and ‘originary time’ comes out very differently in entrepreneurial and family business settings. The authors demonstrate that time is far from linear in the context of the

family firm as it stretches back into its past and the layered deposits of its heritage.

## The continuity of past/present/future

Different types of time have different implications for understanding how the past, the present, and the future are related to each other. For instance, the classical, objective view of clock time sees an endless “succession of now-points” (Joas, 1997, p. 171) in which the present is a “knife-edge” (Mead, 1932, p. 194) that separates an infinity of discrete past moments from an equally infinite stream of future moments (Capek, 1961). Thus the past, present, and future are outside of each other, and they are also outside of human experience, serving only to define an independent fourth dimension upon which to locate spatio-temporal reality. This perspective reduces the problem of managing in time to a stop–start lurching from one fleeting now to the next in which experience is represented as a succession of immobile instants, rather like the still frames that constitute a movie (see the cinematographical metaphor of Bergson, 1919). As exemplified by Zeno’s paradox of the arrow in flight, this approach to the passage of time can, at best, only approximate the experience of temporal continuity. Kundera expresses something of what is missing from this perspective in his vivid description of a man speeding on a motorcycle:

“the man hunched over his motorcycle can focus only on the present instant of his flight; he is caught in a fragment of time cut off from both the past and the future; he is wrenched from the continuity of time; he is outside time; in other words he is in a state of ecstasy. In that state he is unaware of his age, his wife, his children, his worries, and so he has no fear, because the source of fear is in the future, and a person freed of the future has nothing to fear” (Kundera, 1996, p. 3).

Here only the present moment exists for the motorcyclist; neither the past nor the future has any relevance in this moment, so there can be no experience of temporal continuity. Arguably, if we persist in treating time as independent of human experience, we risk losing touch with that which makes us human, guides us in moral action, and gives meaning to our lives. More subjective approaches to time tend to see past, present and future as all rolled in together, with each immanent in the others (Shotter, 2006). Temporal continuity then, is expressed in the ongoing flow of present actions that draw simultaneously on pasts and futures as epistemic resources, which themselves are subject to endless reconstruction (Simpson, 2009). This dynamic is aptly captured by the metaphor of weaving time. In Norse mythology for instance, fate is understood as continuously woven by the three Norns, who reside beneath the branches of the world ash tree, Yggdrasil. Urd, the oldest of the three sisters, always looks back at the past; Verdandi, the second sister gazes straight ahead; while Skuld turns her head toward the future. Each respectively contributes the weft threads of past, present and future to the weaving of a vast web representing the unfolding story of the world. Their weaving is never stable though, as Skuld regularly tears apart their work, scattering the remnants throughout the heavens (Guerber, 2011).

It is in this weaving together of past, present and future that managers experience the temporalities particular to their own organizations (Schultz & Hernes, *in press*). Organizations live in their ‘own time’, as it were (Hernes, *in press*), as they ‘historize from their historicity’ (Heidegger, 1927). At the same time, managers caught up in these temporal flows are continuously engaged in the reconstruction of both pasts and futures. For example, the Heideggerian notion that any present is both thrown from a past and projects into a future is reflected especially by Vesa and Franck (in this issue). Their interest is in the strategic problem of anticipating what will happen in the future based on what is perceived to have happened in the past. Using vectors as an explanatory device, they map movements from the past into the present, and from the future into the present, where the present is understood as the locus of ontological reality. Griesbach and Grand (in this issue) similarly recognize that although pasts and futures are mobilized in present actions, these pasts and futures are not stable entities, but rather they are in constant revision.

Beyond the mere twisting of past/present/future threads together, Heidegger (1927) argued that temporal experience is the experience of being; that is, temporality and being are two words for the same experience, namely living. In a general sense temporality is usually taken to refer to the worldly sphere of human existence, as opposed to the godly realms, which are timeless and transcendent of secular life. Temporality is, therefore, integral to the experience of being human, as it is threaded through the practices that shape, and are shaped by our day-to-day actions. To the extent that we ignore temporality in our research then, we are arguably adopting a gods’ eye view that can never engage adequately with the complexities and messiness of human experience, and the actuality of management. Bakken et al. (in this issue) lay out a relatively detailed exploration of the implications of this Heideggerian thinking for the processes of managing in time, as managers stretch out into existential pasts and futures. Dodd et al. (in this issue) also draw on Heidegger’s existential temporality in their investigation of the trans-generational dynamics of family firms, which reach back into the shared heritage and traditions of the family in order to secure futures for the coming generations. Lorino and Mourey (in this issue) are similarly concerned with the existential nature of temporal experience, but they draw on different intellectual traditions, notably American pragmatism and Bakhtin’s notion of dialog to emphasize the intersubjective dynamics that underpin managerial actions. In this sense, their work resonates with that of Mead (1932) who positioned temporal experience within the intersubjective dimensions of sociality, by means of which we come to mutual understandings of our world.

## Contexts and methodologies for temporal research

The fundamental goal of process theorizing in organization studies is to come to grips with organizations as a continuous process of becoming, as opposed to seeing them as stable entities that change in a step-by-step fashion. Consequently, process theorists pay attention to verbs, activity, change, novelty, and expression, typically recognizing that

everything that is becoming has no existence apart from its relation to other becomings. Process theory is therefore typically engaged in ecological thinking in the sense that it seeks to embrace complexity and acknowledge the significance of the particular, the local, and the timely. Thus, process theory is “sensitive to context, interactivity experience, and time; and it acknowledges non-linearity, emergence, and recursivity” (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, pp. 5–6). In this section, we will point out specific contexts particularly suited to temporality research and the research methodologies required to produce temporal, process theories.

The first issue in conducting any process-oriented study is how to capture time empirically:

“...process scholars may study their phenomenon by tracing it backward into the past (historical, retrospective studies), by following it forward into the future (ethnography, longitudinal case studies), by examining how it is constituted, or by doing all of these at the same time.” (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 11)

The papers included in this special issue try to capture time in different and complementary ways, adding to our understanding of organizational temporality as the ongoing becoming of past, present, and future. Czarniawska (in this issue), for example, considers speed as a context affecting production and acceleration, and the resistance it generates in modern society. She specifically considers firstly news production with its attendant implications of tough deadlines and time-to-market competition, and secondly the pressures of accelerating timeframes in the financial services sector. In both cases, she shows how the implementation of new technologies accentuates the demand for ever greater speed. Thus speed has become a source of competitive advantage, and equally a significant part of organizational cultures.

By contrast, two of the other papers deal with aspects of inter-generational business and the management of a family firm, where the past is ever-present, where the past sheds light on the future, and where the present is shaped in the experience of past and future, all simultaneously. This is observed by Griesbach and Grand (in this issue) who investigate how the current manager of a family firm is engaged in the situated enactment of present issues and situations, but also seeks to transcend the present toward the future. Similarly, Dodd et al. (in this issue) present a study of twelve family firms, which they argue deal with time quite differently from other kinds of firms, deploying an effective temporal repertoire which allows them to move between their habitual world time and a more linear and calculative clock time.

The paper by Vesa and Franck (in this issue) addresses the manifestations of strategy in the present. This paper does not focus on the ex-post strategy, the detection of patterns in a stream of action, but instead the actuality and potentiality of strategy. By so doing, the authors show how managers experience strategy as in situ vectors. Vesa and Franck draw upon case-based and processual methods. Their study does not use retrospective interviews, which are a very common research method in longitudinal strategy research, but rather it focusses on observations of negotiations in a series of meetings dealing with strategic priorities. The observations were followed by interviews with key informants. Observations were made during five months where the researchers sat in at

top management meetings and in business unit management meetings. The participant observation methods generally seem to be important to be able to uncover the temporality of management and organizing – to unveil how organizing happens, in real time – the actuality of organizing and the actuality of temporality.

Lorino and Mourey (in this issue) study the dynamics of inter-organizational relations. They make use of empirical findings from a strategic change project in the French retail industry over a period of 14 months. The study is based on participant observation of the redesign of supplier–retailer relationships using a category management approach. The authors demonstrate how the process of organizing develops as a highly situated and dialogical form of inquiry between the past and the future, where the situation is rolled together in the ongoing experience of the present moment.

Of the four empirical papers in this special issue, two are longitudinal studies of family businesses, and two are studies of change processes. The qualitative, in-depth nature of the empirical data is obvious. In that respect, they underscore the value of process theorizing to understand change, but at the same time long term sustainability, for instance in the contexts of family firms. As for the latter one might get the impression that the inter-generational issues of such firms would be particularly relevant for process theorizing and temporality studies, however, it seems as relevant to suggest that family business brings to light what is apparent in most organizational contexts – the continuity of past, present, and future.

What kind of research methods and approaches would be particularly interesting for the study of managing in time? All of the empirical papers here have used qualitative approaches which are generally accepted as suitable for producing grounded process theories. Several of them rely on participant observation combined with a longitudinal approach, thereby being able to capture the actuality and potentiality of managing in time, and the changes occurring over time. The approach adopted in several of the papers could thus be seen as one of studying temporality of managing in and over time – not what happens to the managed object, firm, process, but rather, what occurs in the situation, in the process – over time. This accentuates the importance of conducting research that is capable of identifying, understanding, and analyzing the actuality and potentiality, for instance through observations of management coordination meetings, and of observing and understanding these meetings over time and being able to understand the contexts in which they occur.

## The emergence of something new

Implicit within the assumptions of process thinking is the idea of emergence, or becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), which leads us in this special issue to inquire into the changefulness and evolutionary qualities of managing in time. This perspective challenges the certainties of path dependence by asserting futures that are not, and cannot be, fully determined by pasts (Chia & Holt, 2009). In the absence of deliberate designs to guide our actions then, process thinkers such as Whitehead, Mead, Heidegger, and Ricoeur have pursued a non-intentional teleology in which futures and pasts are

continuously and mutually co-constituting. This orientation toward perpetual emergence is well reflected in the papers collected together here. So for instance, Vesa and Franck (in this issue) recognize the continual negotiation and re-negotiation of temporal dimensions as the managers in their study proceeded to strategize, while both Dodd et al. (in this issue), and Griesbach and Grand (in this issue) argue that creating sustainable futures for the coming generations of family firms requires re-constructive and innovative actions in the present. What is less evident though, is how creative action arises in managers' practices, and how situational constraints influence the emergence of novelty in organizational contexts. Drawing on Heidegger, Bakken et al. (in this issue) propose 'play' as a metaphor for practice in which players adjust to each other's moves and to shared understandings of the rules of the game through continuous improvisation. The manager's role may be understood then, more as playfully facilitative than as instrumental and controlling. From a different perspective informed by Dewey and Follett Lorino and Mourey (in this issue) see transformational world-making as an emergent and ever-changing product of the social processes of 'inquiry'. For pragmatists, 'inquiry' is an intersubjective, dialogical means of engaging abductive imagination in order to move beyond currently perceived constraints on social and interpersonal practices. Although both 'play' and 'inquiry' suggest that emergence requires an effort of toil to bring novelty into existence (Shotter, 2006), the nature of this toil continues to evade close scrutiny in much of the process literature relating to management practice.

It is on this point, we propose, that Mead has something to offer. For him, change can happen only in the present, as it is here that agentic action is manifest (Mead, 1932). However, this raises the question, what do we actually mean by the present? Psychological studies have demonstrated that there is a minimum temporal extension required for perception to occur and conscious awareness to arise (Joas, 1997) This psychological time span was originally referred to as the 'specious present', to indicate a spurious pseudo-now not to be confused with true, or universal time. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries however, this term morphed into exactly the opposite meaning, so the 'specious present' came to refer to the true present of conscious experience. This specious present may have varying lengths, and indeed may be extended indefinitely into both past and future. Thus the passage of time becomes a succession of epochs, which arguably still leaves the question of continuity between epochs unaddressed. In Mead's (1963–4) view, this notion of a specious present denies the possibilities for unanticipated emergence by inextricably binding the future and past together within the same specious present. "[T]he world that will be cannot be different from the world that is without rewriting the past to which we now look back" (Mead, 1932, p. 37).

Mead characterized the passage of presents as emergent becomings. While Whitehead and James shared his emphasis on passage as the essential temporal experience, Mead, with his socio-psychological focus, developed the notion of the socially constructed present and its role in redefining the past so that "from every new rise the landscape that stretches behind us becomes a different landscape" (Mead, 1932, p. 42). At the same time, each new past opens up new

possibilities for futures, and these in turn condition, but do not fully determine, the actions of the present. By contrast with the notion of the specious present as the span of time required for a person to be herself, Mead's concept of the present is the time required for something new to emerge. He defines an event as an interval during which there is something unique that arises, a becoming. An event occurs in a present that "is not a piece cut out anywhere from the temporal dimension of uniformly passing reality. Its chief reference is to the emergent event, that is, to the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have lead up to it and which by its change, continuance, or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed" (Mead, 1932, p. 52). Whereas classical clock time is structured by an infinite succession of instants that are entirely independent of human experience, for Mead temporal passage is structured by events that thrust themselves into the otherwise undifferentiated flow of time, providing a mechanism for ordering and making sense of experience. Passage then, becomes a succession of distinguishable emergences each of which arises in a present as the past is reconstructed to support an anticipated future. This perspective invites new ways of approaching empirical research that attend to the confluence of movements and the punctuating events that constitute the passage of lived experience. For instance, Carroll and Simpson (2012) have used Mead's ideas to focus specifically on movements and events in the practice of leadership. By developing methods that can better engage with the dynamic qualities of everyday experience, the creative and generative aspects of managing in time will be brought to the fore as a necessary complement to the habits, routines, and standard operating procedures that are the more usual fare of management research.

Returning to playfulness and inquiry, discussed by Bakken et al. (in this issue) and Lorino and Mourey (in this issue), it is by elaborating on the present and its emergent nature that managerial work in time can be understood better. Not only does the present emerge, but it also passes away, thus making existence a series of contiguous presences (Mead, 1932, p. 53). The evanescent nature of the present does by itself influence how actors in the present keep past and future alive. While Emirbayer and Mische (1998) were right in pointing out that 'the contingencies of the moment' (p. 963) frame social processes informed by the past while oriented toward the future, we suggest that understanding the emergent, passing or evanescent nature of the present adds depth to the understanding of the present. In other words, there is a need for increased attention to the various encounters in organizations characterized by emergence, playfulness and inquiry, and the dynamics by which such events reach back into the organizational past while at the same time weaving the fabric of the future. While the majority of encounters serve to reproduce organizational arrangements, some turn out more decisive in letting new perspectives emerge and thus redefining both past and future.

In conclusion, we suggest that as we continue in our efforts to better theorize dynamic experience and to develop better empirical ways of understanding management practice, it is timely to bring emergence forward in the management research agenda so that it can take its rightful place

alongside the deterministic assumptions that tend currently to dominate our field. A more fully developed theory of time and management cannot avoid the implications of agency in the emergence of presents, and neither can it neglect the embodied experiences of managers as they go about their work. We hope that this special issue will serve as another brick in the road that will stimulate ongoing debate and inquiry, which in turn will enrich understandings of time and temporality in the management and organizational literatures.

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