# PART VI

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# CORE ASPECTS IN ALL CHANGE MODELS

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Dictionary: NOSD

CHAPTER 27

# TIME AND TEMPORALITY OF CHANGE PROCESSES

## *Applying an Event-Based View to Integrate Episodic and Continuous Change*

### TOR HERNES, ANTHONY HUSSENOT, AND KÄTLIN PULK

C27.P1 "Is it a revolt?" asked Louis XVI. The duke replied: "No, sire, it's not a revolt; it's a revolution."

C27.P2 Chaussinand-Nogaret (1988, p. 102)

## C27.S1 INTRODUCTION

C27.P3 AN incisive observation made by Gersick (1994: 11) is that change research sometimes fails to grasp the complexity of change because research methods are aimed at detecting whether a change has or has not happened. This, she argues, prevents researchers from understanding the obstacles faced by actors in making decisions about change. Works on organizational change have tended to assume that change takes place as isolated happenings at certain points in time. For example, new technology is introduced at a certain point in time, and the change associated with that technology is ascribed to that point in time. Underlying such a view of change is a sequential view of time, which subscribes to what time philosopher McTaggart (1908) called a "before and after" logic of time. A sequential view of time invites an understanding of change as a difference in states at different points in time. Importantly, such a view presupposes that change happens at a certain point in time and will forever have happened as "that change" at that point in time. In a sequential view of time, the primary ordering mechanism of events is that of chronological ordering (e.g., Langley et al. 2013; Van de Ven and Poole 1995). In such a

logic, an event (such as a change) that took place before another event will forever have taken place before that event (McTaggart, 1908). An often-cited theory of change, which reflects a pattern of change underpinned by a sequential view of time, is Lewin's (1947) model of change as "unfreeze, move and freeze." Although Lewin' contribution is sometimes mistakenly referred to the "unfreeze, change and refreeze" model (Cummings et al. 2016), its underlying idea of change happening at distinct times still holds and has been conducive to the search for patterns in and around change events (Weick and Quinn 1999). Lewin's model also lends itself to explaining a change in terms of antecedents and consequences, which helps explain why studies of organizational change tend to take a sequential view (e.g., Weick and Quinn 1999).

C27.P4    Conversely, works based on a continuous (process) view of change have argued against sequential views (Tsoukas and Chia 2002) argue that change needs to be understood "from within" (Shotter, 2006), as an ongoing process of becoming. Langley and Tsoukas (2010), for example, criticize episodic views of change for not being able to explain the processes by which change unfolds. In a continuous change view, change is never really settled as an event that stands before and after; therefore, there is no given state "before" that can be compared to the state "after" (Weick and Quinn 1999). Tsoukas and Chia argue for a view of change as experienced in time: "experienced by practitioners as an unfolding process, a flow of possibilities, and conjunction of events and open-ended interactions occurring in time" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: 572). The underlying idea of the continuous change view is that a sequential view of change cannot transcribe the subtle and ongoing change occurring on a daily basis. In this, Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) view of continuous change resonates with a Bergsonian view of time as indivisible "durée," in which ultimate positions in time are avoided. In taking a Bergsonian view of time, they also reject the spatialized notion of time that Bergson associated with clocks and calendars, which is considered imposed exogenously on the human experience.

C27.P5    However, although Tsoukas and Chia, as well as other scholars of continuous change (Chia 1999; Feldman 2000; Orlikowski 1996), consider actors to be in a state of experiencing change, they do not take into consideration the effect of events that lie in the actors' past or future. According to the philosophers of time, such as Whitehead (1929), Mead (1932), and Schütz (1967), distant events are immanent parts of actors' experience of time. This point is important because events that take place in actors' trajectory are sometimes expressive of episodic change along the actors' own temporal trajectory. In an event-based view inspired by process philosophy (Hernes 2014; Hussenot and Missonier 2016), however, events are not seen as fixed "bumps in the road" waiting to happen, but as reconstructed breaks in an immanent trajectory that signify past or future episodic change in the actors own time. An event-based view as defined here is different from the use of events by other scholars (Clark 1985; Reinecke and Ansari 2016). In the view taken here, events constitute the very making of time (Hernes 2014) and are always in a state of becoming as "those events that mattered". When we in the following use the term "event-based" view we really imply an "event-process" view. In our events-based view, events are not finalized sequential accomplishments but becoming phenomena. In the words of Whitehead (1929), events do not change, they *become*.

C27.P6   Nevertheless, such events are associated with change, not as episodic changes as dramatic changes observed from the outside (Weick and Quinn 1999), but as "breaks" in actors' experience that are associated with change. They are, in other words, a part of actors' own trajectories of episodic changes. As breaks in actors' experience, they constitute potentialities that actors may evoke from the past or project upon the future as they move through time. Past and future changes are important to actors as potential changes in the current experience as they imagine their trajectory into the past and future (Hernes 2017). Changes recalled from the past or changes imagined for the future are episodic, although not as Weick and Quinn (1999) viewed episodic change, but as breaks marked by events that are ongoing accomplishments (Feldman 2000) rather than accomplished changes. Also, in this view, events are not considered closed occasions with fixed features, but more in terms of their affordances (Gibson 1986), as potentialities for redefinition and change.

C27.P7   Drawing upon an event-based view (Hernes, 2014; Hussenot et al. 2020; Hussenot and Missonier 2016; Pulk 2016) rooted in a process ontology (Rescher, 1996), we will discuss how episodic changes in the past or future are immanently connected to ongoing efforts at continuous change. In this view, episodic change is associated with past or future events that mark "breaks" in the temporal trajectory envisaged by actors while they perform the continuous change in an indivisible (Tsoukas and Chia 2002) and ongoing (Schultz and Hernes 2013) present. Actors address events marking episodic changes, typically through problem solving activity in the present, associated with continuous change (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Such activity enables them to be selective of which changes to address. Following this view, episodic and continuous change belong to the same movement. On the one hand, this movement consists of making tangible past and future change events through ongoing continuous change. On the other hand, continuous change lived by actors is what defines episodic events of change as being in a state of becoming rather than as accomplished states. Central to this argument is that events associated with certain changes are not accomplished events (i.e., van Oorschot et al. 2013) but events in the making that are continually subject to redefinition.

C27.P8   The main contribution of the chapter is to suggest an integrative way to define and study episodic and continuous change. Rather than see change as either episodic or continuous, we suggest understanding change as an "immanent temporal trajectory." By drawing upon the concept of immanent temporal trajectory, change is here defined as the interplay between ongoing continuous change in the moment, and past and future episodic events of change. Such a contribution enables implications for organization studies by questioning the common assumption that ruptures, radical changes, disruptions, novelties (etc.) would be imposed or planned intentionally by actors.

C27.P9   The chapter is organized as follows: the first section deals with the relation between time and change and shows how the way we conceptualize change depends on the definition we apply to time. The second section introduces the classic ontological divide between episodic and continuous views of change. The third section suggests a different definition of episodic change to make it ontologically compatible with the continuous

view of change. The fourth section introduces an event-based view of change as a way to integrate the episodic and continuous view of change into the concept of immanent temporal trajectory. The last section discusses the contributions and implications of such an integrative view on our understanding of organizational phenomena.

## TIME AND CHANGE

C27.S2

C27.P10  Change and time are mutually intertwined. Aristotle suggested famously in Chapter IV in his *Physics* that without change, there would be no experience of time. In their analysis of episodic and continuous change, Weick and Quinn (1999: 362) emphasize, that "change is a phenomenon of time." Scholars of social or organizational change have used time extensively to study change. In the introduction to the first edition of this volume, for example, Poole and Van de Ven define change as "a difference in form, quality or state over time in an organizational entity" (2004: xi), a definition that goes back to Van de Ven (1987) and Van de Ven and Poole (1995). An inference to be drawn from this definition is that the observed, measured, or experienced change (difference) depends on the timespan chosen. Hypothetically, if the timespan is extremely short, say a day after a major organizational change has been announced, the actual "change" will be minimal, as people will wonder what will happen, and how. If the timespan is a year from the same announcement, and new technologies have been introduced, functions have been eliminated or established, and new markets have been defined, most people in that organization will most likely agree that the resulting change is substantial. Such examples suggest that time is inherent to the very definition of change (Reinecke and Ansari 2016) and that sequential time imposes a particular understanding of change as defined by accomplished events.

C27.P11     If we pursue the line of argument, of time being inherent to the definition of change; we are obliged to explore the definitions we apply to time and how those definitions influence the definition of change. Put crudely, what form of change is consistent with what view of time? The most common notion of time in the organizational analysis is sequential, "Newtonian" definition, characterized by equal units that provide an objective, universal measure of time. As pointed out above, it also represents what McTaggart (1908) called a "before and after" logic of time, whereby an event that took place before another event will forever have taken place before that event. This may also be seen as the type of timeless and unchanging reality that Parmenides advocated in saying, "whatever is *is*, and what is not cannot be." This means that we can move through time with a standard ordering of events in terms of their succession. In this view, change can be understood as the difference from one point in time to the next. Change that has taken place between two points in time will always be that change because the events that were used to describe that change will not change even as those events recede into the past. What makes the sequential time a powerful concept for studying change is that it enables change to be put down to a specific time, defined once and for all. Thus, an event associ-

ated with a certain change is given by the time at which it took place, which is important because it took place before some events and after some others and there is an agreement about its objective occurrence.

C27.P12    The significance of clock-time for understanding the change is that it provides a backdrop that helps us order the sequence of changes. Thus (returning to events related to the quote at the beginning of the chapter), the beheading of Louis XVI (a change both from being head of state *and* having a head to no longer being the head of state and no longer *having* a head) is a consequence of the storming of the Bastille in the sense that we can say that it led to his execution. Although we may question the implicit causality when we use the expression "led to," we accept that there is a forward causal pattern given by sequence in time. It is possible that he might not have been beheaded if the storming of the Bastille had not taken place, just as he might have been beheaded even if the Bastille had not been stormed. Still, the causal analysis assumes that once they take place, events are "accomplished" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002), and hence their causal powers are settled. By "accomplished," we imply that the meaning given to events remains unchanged over time and especially their causal dynamics, in the sense of what those events led to.

C27.P13    But what happens if we do not define events as accomplished states? What if events are phenomena in the making and become redefined as actors move through time, as assumed by process theories of time (Hernes 2017)? What came before and what came after will then be less significant, and so will the chronological distance between events. As illustratively noted, for example, by Zerubavel (2003: 38), "In Irish time, 1651 and 1981 were only moments apart." We are still grappling with the fact that there is change, but we no longer have the sequential ordering of accomplished change afforded to us by the sequential view of time. On the contrary, in an event-based view, change takes place not as a result of the accomplished event, but as events in the making, continually redefined in terms of its meaning as actors move through time. An event may remain unchanged as having taken place, such as the storming of the Bastille, but the meaning of that event will be open to redefinition, such as what caused it and what it led to in turn.

C27.P14    The distinction between clock-time and event time is important because it enables different understandings of change. In a sequential view, events can be plotted against a fixed timeline, such as a calendar, and they can be grouped in terms of that same timeline. In an event-based view, on the other hand, the various changes leading up to the storming of the Bastille (Sewell 1996) would be linked less by chronological order and more by how they would be interlinked and redefined on an ongoing basis, from acting within the events to building up over time into more complex sets of events that would be defined and redefined by actors as they move through time. As people were storming the Bastille, they were probably conscious of events that preceded the storming and events that might follow, both of which would signal some form of change. However, the events associated with past and future change were in the making; they were not defined sequentially but relationally, and therefore their meaning would change over time. For example, the storming of the Bastille would be in response to the King's sacking of his minister of finance some days earlier and the subsequent gathering of crowds earlier on

14 July, which would in the minds of people signify a different path forward than if other sets of events had been taken into consideration. These events (and others), together with the lynching of the guards, laid the foundations for a trajectory of future changes, which eventually led to the beheading of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, which marked the end of the absolute monarchy in France. Whereas in chronological time the beheading of the king took place after the storming of the Bastille and could be seen as caused by the storming, in a processual events-based view of time his beheading could be seen as a possible future event in the minds of those who did the storming, for then to be seen as a meaningful (however appalling) part of the overall trajectory of the French Revolution.

C27.P15    Underlying an event-based view of time (Hernes 2014) is the idea that events that mark change are perpetually in the making and hence subject to redefinition as actors move through time. In this view, as mentioned above, events are seen as offering changing affordances (Gibson 1986) of re-interpretation as actors move through time. Being in the making means that events are open to redefinition as actors relate them to other events. For example, Hernes and Pulk's (2019) study of an episode in a shipbuilding company shows how a seemingly mundane meeting may turn into immediate, yet minor change, but eventually trigger strategic change, and hence become defined retrospectively as something much more important than how the actors present felt at the time. When Hernes and Pulk entered the organization several years after that event, several people kept bringing it up as an event that had marked a new era for the company. However, although those present at the actual event had an inkling at the time that it might turn into something important, they were highly uncertain as to what the implications, if any, might be from their activities at the event.

## C27.S3   The Ontological Divide between Episodic and Continuous Change

C27.P16 Episodic and continuous change (Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Weick and Quinn 1999) represent salient categories of change in organizations, although deemed ontologically incompatible by some scholars (Colville and Hennestad 2004). Despite their ontological difference, they are also complementary forms of change that may help explain how organizations can maintain a sense of continuity while at the same time pursuing radical change. As Pettigrew (1985: 1) has pointed out, "The more we look at present-day events, the easier it is to identify change; the longer we stay with an emergent process and the further back we go to disentangle its origins, the more likely we are to identify continuities." Moreover, as Pillemer notes, identified and experienced continuities are "punctuated by distinctive" and "influential episodes" (2001: 123). However, although scholars have developed convincing modes of integration between the two forms of change (e.g., Orlikowski and Hofman 1997), their ontological differences still hamper integration.

C27.P17     Episodic change (Weick and Quinn 1999; see also Feldman and Pentland 2003; Howard-Grenville et al. 2011; Pettigrew et al. 2001; Wiebe et al. 2012) represents an ontological assumption of organizations as inert systems that require the imposition of force, principally by management, in order to change (Feldman and Pentland 2003; Weick and Quinn 1999). The very term "episodic" refers to its temporally discontinuous and intermittent nature (Pettigrew et al. 2001), which is different from the Bergsonian view proposed by Chia (1999). Episodic change is, to a varying extent synonymous with other concepts of change, such as revolutionary, radical structural, or planned change (Maes and Van Hootegem 2011; Orlikowski 1996). Hence implementing episodic change is mostly assumed to be led by decision-makers in response to perceived organizational inertia in relation to "jolts" in the external environment (see Gaba and Meyer, Chapter 16 in this volume) that set off collective processes of adaptation (Howard-Grenville et al. 2011).

C27.P18     Continuous change, referred to also as an emergent change (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek 2009; Maes and Van Hootegem 2011) is rooted in an ontology of fluidity and immanence (Chia, 2005) expressed through ongoing processes in problem-solving, improvisation, practices, and routine work (Feldman and Pentland 2003; Orlikowski 1996; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Weick and Quinn 1999; see also Pentland and Goh, Chapter 15 in this volume). It expresses a view of organizations as self-organizing, emergent, evolving, and cumulative systems (Weick and Quinn 1999). Being rooted in a view considering organizations as situated practices (Orlikowski 1996), continuous change is pervasive and ongoing (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997; Feldman 2000; Orlikowski 1996; Tsoukas and Chia 2002) rather than momentary or periodic. It is an "everyday" type of change expressive of a view of organizations as emergent, gradual, and evolving. Arguing for change being inherently continuous, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) propose that change is never settled and shared between people as a "frozen" account of differences between before and after certain events. This, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argue, is how change is perceived "from within," as opposed "from without," which is consistent with a clock-time view. In this view, continuous change takes place at the practice level, involving, for example, micro-level improvisation (Moorman and Miner 1998), accommodations to and experiments with everyday contingencies (Orlikowski 1996), or executing routines (Feldman 2000). Change is here a much more situated account of differences that always opens to a reinterpretation. Rather than being seen as accomplished (i.e., van Oorschot et al. 2013), events are forever emerging either as they are left behind in the flow of time or projected upon the future for then to becoming towards actors.

C27.P19     Whereas episodic change involves, according to Weick and Quinn, so-called "triggers," which we may translate as "trigger events," Tsoukas and Chia (2002) would argue that such "triggers" never really take place. They argue against the episodic view of change on the basis of its underlying view of time (see Dawson 2014 for a fuller discussion). Relatedly, Isabella (1990) uses the term "trigger events" with reference to Lewin's (1947) model of change as freeze, unfreeze, and re-freeze, consistent with Gersick (1991), who states that periods of relative stability are punctuated by more compact periods of metamorphic change. In contrast, Tsoukas and Chia argue that change takes place, not as isolated events in or across time, but rather as a continuous experience *through* time.

C27.P20    The interplay between episodic and continuous change remains currently undertheorized (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek 2009), and attempts at bridging the divide between the views are hampered by works that see them as ontologically inconsistent through the lens of time. Chia (1999, 2005) argues in particular that the underlying assumption of movement in continuous change is what makes it ontologically inconsistent with "frozen snapshot" (Chia, 1999) logic of episodic change. Chia contrasts the episodic view with a Bergsonian view of time as a movement of "single unity" (1999: 216). Tsoukas and Chia (2002) consider the two ontologies to be inconsistent with one another, since one assumes fixity of accomplished events over time, whereas the other assumes time as indivisible movement, that is, events as emergent. They criticize episodic change as associated with accomplished events, a view largely consistent with Weick and Quinn's (1999) definition of episodic change as "occasional interruption from equilibrium" and tending "to be dramatic."

C27.P21    We would argue, however, that the ontological inconsistency between episodic and continuous change proposed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) boils down to a one-sided view of events. When they define events as being episodic, punctual, and as accomplished states, they overlook the process view of events, which sees events as emergent and open to actors' redefinition as they move through time. In this view, episodic change is experienced by the actor themselves, in their own flow of time and not as substantial change as observed from the outside. As pointed out in the introduction, events may be associated with episodic change without being attributed fixity as accomplished states. If events are in the making and not accomplished states, then nor will change associated with events be attributed to fixity.

C27.P22    Our argument here is that the above-mentioned gap may be "de-ontologized" to allow for the continuous and episodic change to be intertwined and mutually constitutive, both being experienced "from within" (Shotter 2006). This is necessary because the gap hampers a deeper understanding of the dynamics of change. It is, therefore, not just important, but also possible, to conceive of continuous as well as episodic change from the same ontological view. The continuous change view, as championed in the past, denies the attempt of actors to temporarily consider past or future changes as tangible series of events, while an episodic view of change denies the subtle and constant change that ongoingly occurs in organizational phenomena. It is important not to forget that people in organizations talk about events in the past that they associate with the change, but that they use that talk in the present, which means that they translate episodic change that they see as significant into their ongoing processes of continuous change.

## Bridging the Ontological Divide between Episodic and Continuous Change

C27.S4

C27.P23    In this part, we will suggest a different definition of episodic change to make it ontologically compatible with the situated (Orlikowski 1996) and processual nature of the

continuous change proposed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002). We will argue that the continuous change view as proposed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) and supported by Feldman (2000) and Orlikowski (1996) can be extended to include episodic changes from the actors' temporal trajectory, defined as "breaks" in experience. A "break" is a point on the temporal trajectory that signals a difference between before and after. Although little changes go on all the time, there are, at times, what we may call a distinctive break that marks the difference between before and after that come to be seen as significant by organizational members. As Hernes and Pulk (2019) registered when they began their study of change at a shipbuilding company, numerous changes had taken place a few years earlier, but defined in terms of a particular event that was expressive of the process of change during that period. Such a redefinition of episodic change is made possible if one considers past, present, and expected changes not as defined and displayed once and for all along a timeline by actors but instead constantly redefined and reconfigured as a way to define the contingencies of the present. Research shows that this happens in organizations. For example, Hatch and Schultz (2017) relate the story of how the people at Carlsberg Group were inspired to use a century-old motto inscribed in granite to relaunch a novel brand of beer. Schultz and Hernes (2013) describe how LEGO managers evoked the past transition to LEGO bricks in order to reorient their current strategy to bring about change towards a "brick-based" future.

C27.P24 This implies an approaching episodic change from "within," as pointed out by Shotter (2006), much the way that continuous change is theorized. In this view, episodic change is not a transition from one state to another that is achieved once and for all. Instead, it is seen as an "immanent" (Chia 2005; Tsoukas 2018) experience of a difference in time, which is evoked and projected on the future by actors as they move through time. Instead of being seen as an unchanging "decisive break," episodic change becomes, consistently with continuous change, episodic change "in the making." One way to make episodic change analytically consistent with continuous change is to define episodic change as significant "breaks" that are experienced, evoked, or anticipated by actors as they move through time. Referring to various scholars, Weick (2005) offers different labels for such changes, such as interruptions, breakdowns, or shifts. Similarly, Wiebe (2010) refers to "discontinuities" that mark a difference between periods, which may lie in the actors' past or future. Such discontinuities, he argues, are changes that are defined by the actors themselves. We would add, though, that from a temporal perspective, for an interruption, breakdown, shift, or discontinuity to qualify as episodic change, it would need to leave some traces through time that the actors themselves perceive as significant. Moreover, actors may (or may not) recall such breaks differently as they encounter new situations at other points in time as well as anticipate future ones.

## C27.S5 How Episodic Change Emerges in the Present

C27.P25 Conceptualizing past, or future anticipated breaks as emerging, this view invites us to study how episodic change may emerge in the present, how it may be evoked from

the past, or how it may be projected for the future. To liken episodic changes to breaks in actors' experience is a means to arrive at a definition of episodic change that is ontologically closer to continuous change, but it leaves open the interplay between continuous and episodic change. The overall question may be posed as, how episodic events emerge and are maintained and redefined by actors while they practice continuous change? Conversely, how does continuous change enable the emergence of episodic change? How does it enable past and present episodic change to be brought forward to the current moment, and how does it enable the projection of future episodic change?

C27.P26    A question is how episodic change emerges from an ongoing continuous change in the temporal present. In the temporal present actors experience the continual process of transforming the future into the past while drawing upon the past to confront a novel future. The present, however, is not a fixed temporal entity, and a challenge is, therefore, to work with a notion of the present that follows actors as they move through time. A definition that follows the actors through time is particularly important if we wish to study how, for instance, an episodic change emerging at one point in time becomes evoked by actors at later stages in time. With its primary focus on imminent problem-solving, micro-level improvisation (Moorman and Miner 1998), accommodations to and experiments with everyday contingencies (Orlikowski 1996), or executing routines (Feldman 2000), continuous change exhibits a present-orientation, which suggests that the very acts of performing continuous change may be used as a proxy for the actors' temporal present. Mead (1932) provides a fitting definition of the present for our purpose, which is as the locus of experience; the present is the "going on", and that which is going on is never-ending continuous change.

C27.P27    Continuous change in the present sometimes emerges as events that become associated with episodic change. For example, in their study of change at a mission church, Plowman, Baker, Beck, Kulkarni, and Travis (2007) show how a handful of young people at Mission Church initiated the idea to start offering Mission Church Sunday morning breakfast to the homeless, and how this idea transformed both the Mission Church and its immediate neighborhood. Within a short period after serving the first breakfast, church volunteers were offering more than 200 Sunday morning meals to homeless people. In a few months, a physician volunteer started to offer medical examination, which in turn grew to a full-scale Sunday morning medical program. The initial idea of serving hot breakfast to people in need led to a tax-exempt organization financed partly by city grants "providing a 'day center' for several thousand homeless people and serving over 20,000 meals a year" (Plowman et al. 2007: 516). Soon, in relation to these developments, the mission of the church began to shift. Although the initial group of young people did not intend any transformation either in church or its environment, they "planted the small seed of the idea that led to radical change" (Plowman et al. 2007: 539). That is to say, that although transforming the church's mission, opening a day center, or medical clinic, each of which could be viewed as an episodic change, were not intended or planned, the possibility of their emergence was established with starting to offer breakfast, which eventually became associated with episodic change events.

C27.S6 ## The Present as the Vantage Point for Past and Future Episodic Change

C27.P28 Whereas the temporal present is the locus of the emergence of episodic change, it is also the vantage point from which actors have access to more distant past and future events across varying temporal spans (Bluedorn 2002; Hernes 2014). As we define such events as an episodic change in the form of breaks, those changes are addressed by actors as they practice continuous change in the present.

C27.P29 For example, in the study of the shipbuilding company by Hernes and Pulk (2019) described above, the ship designers could recall from previous events the discussions about the rationale of the new bow design. As mentioned above, the so-called "NewBow event" was a regular meeting at which staff, together with a visiting CEO, decided to put a radically new bow design on a ship that was already under construction. The meeting was essentially an ordinary business meeting, but a number of occurrences during the meeting made them decide to experiment with a new bow-design on the new ship, which turned out to lead to consequential change for the company. During the meeting, the client CEO caught a glimpse of a mock drawing of a ship fitted with a NewBow. The NewBow was a novel design with a backward sloping bow, which was first conceived by one of InnoShip's designers in 1997 while he was working for another naval design company. That company did not want to pursue the idea; he then brought it up during one of the product development sessions at InnoShip in 2001–2003, in other words, approximately three years before the meeting.

C27.P30 Although the ongoing project had been conceived for a conventional bow, and preparations for construction were already underway, the client CEO asked the InnoShip representatives about the ideas behind the concept. The InnoShip designers replied cautiously that it was something they "had been playing around with" during their internal product development sessions. The NewBow had been selected from a number of other ideas that they had been working on during the product development sessions months and years earlier. At that time, the entry of the NewBow concept into their product development sessions represented a break in the experience, which for the designers was a change event at the time that made a difference to how they went about their sessions.

C27.P31 Moreover, they were able to envisage how the new bow could be designed and fitted. By projecting themselves into the future, they were able to work out solutions through continuous change during the meeting. The *future* episodic change foreseen at the NewBow event was the realization of the NewBow on the vessel under construction. The designers saw an opportunity to realize a revolutionary design that had simmered for several years, but the materialization of the concept was still a change event in the making as experienced in the present during the meeting. What that change eventually might become was not at all clear to them. Nevertheless, they saw the materialization of the concept as the first step of a potential process of change, and the materialization would in itself be a change event, although on a relatively small scale. The change event

they saw for themselves at the time of the meeting was the event of the first vessel complete with the new bow mounted. Still, given that they realized an idea that had been years in the making meant that this projected change event would signify a break with ongoing practices.

C27.P32    Whereas at the NewBow event past changes were brought forward, that event also turned into a change event in turn, not at the time that it took place, but retrospectively when people at the company realized that more substantial organizational change had taken place, including a change in strategy based on the NewBow and other related concepts. While at the time of the NewBow event, employees did not see it as a moment of change but perceived it primarily as an opportunity to solve an imminent challenge using an old idea, the NewBow event became later seen as representative of a discernible shift in the strategic trajectory of InnoShip. Materials, such as website postings and annual reports, show how the design defined during the "NewBow event" helped set the company in a new strategic direction. Although it was a change in the making at the time, it came to symbolize what Tsoukas and Chia (2002) and MacKay and Chia (2013) call synoptic accounts of change. However, our analysis suggests that when associated with key events in the organization's own past, synoptic change may no longer be incompatible with continuous change when it becomes an immanent part of the actors' temporal trajectory.

## C27.S7 Integrating the Episodic and Continuous Views of Change into an Event-Based View

C27.P33  In an event-based view of change (Hernes 2104; Hussenot et al. 2020; Hussenot and Missonier 2016; Pulk 2016), episodic change events should not be considered ontologically different from the continuous change. Events in actors' past or future experiences that are expressive of change are not inconsistent with Bergson's view of time as indivisible experience, which informs Tsoukas and Chia's time view. For Bergson (1907), life is an indivisible experience, but through its materialization (events or any other "things"), we can define a tangible and actionable reality from it (Hussenot, forthcoming). For example, decisions are made based on our ability to enact these past, present, and/or projected events in our current moments. These events forming a situated temporality enable us to make this current moment tangible in order for decisions to be made about how to move into the future. This view not only brings a theoretical explanation but invites empirical studies about how actors constantly (re)define and configure episodic events of change as well.

C27.P34    For example, organizational scholars working from a temporal view have shown how actors may draw upon distant past events (Basque and Langley 2018; Hatch and Schultz 2017; Schultz and Hernes 2013) and how they may imagine a more distant future in the present (Slawinksi and Bansal 2012). While it is common in temporality studies to study how past, present, and future events are brought into the current moment, it is

important to recognize that past, present, and future events are enacted differently by actors over time as well. The past, having been experienced, may be reached through evocation (Schultz and Hernes 2013) or invocation (Basque and Langley 2018), whereas the future is enacted through anticipation (Kaplan and Orlikowski 2013; Slawinski and Bansal 2012), projection (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), or imagination (Schnaars 1987). In such a view, past, present, and future episodic events of change are never really the same, as they are constantly re-enacted by actors. What remains relatively stable is the events associated with change, but they typically start as a future projection of a desired state of affairs. As execution unfolds through many smaller events and activities, the projected event of change becomes past, which is evidently not the same as the projected change. Although there are to our knowledge no studies dedicated to understanding how projected change becomes past, there is every reason to assume that the process of transforming from a future possibility to a past memory is a temporally challenging yet potentially very interesting study. It would be a temporally informed study of episodic change in the making, sustained by ongoing continuous change.

## IMMANENT TEMPORAL TRAJECTORY, CHANGE, AND CONTINUITY

C27.S8

C27.P35 In an event-based view, events that mark change are seen as continuously in a state of becoming; that is, they do not change, they become. In this view, events are related less by their relative positions in time than by their connecting on the basis of forming mutually meaningful interplay. Importantly, it means that past, present, as well as future (projected) events may also be events in the making, including the change associated with those events. The main difference from a sequential view of change is that here events are continuously in the making; they are temporal resources available for actors' meaning-making.

C27.P36 We have relied on an event-based view to integrating the episodic and the continuous views into the same ontological framework. More precisely, we have suggested understanding episodic change as past, present, or future tangible breaks of experience that are enacted through continuous change. This view, viewing episodic and continuous changes "in tandem" not as two different views of change, either ontologically different or occurring at different moments in time, but instead, as two dimensions of the same movement through time, allows to "overcome the natural deficiencies of each" (Evered and Louis 1981: 393). In this last section, we discuss the contributions and implications of such a view in our understanding of organizational phenomena. The main contribution of such a view is that change can be defined as an immanent temporal trajectory in which past, present, and future episodic events of change are brought continuously, redefined and reconfigured through continuous change. Such a contribution also leads to interesting implications as by defining change through the lens of immanent

temporal trajectory, it questions numerous analyses based on the assumption that ruptures, radical change, disruptions, novelties (etc.) are considered accomplished changes once and for all.

C27.P37    A trajectory is an expression of continuity in the sense that it connects events through time. It enables actors to establish a sense of continuity between different events (changes) over time, although, to an outsider, those events seem very different from one another. Every event may be seen as an occasion of episodic change because it stands out by being a break in experience, being what Bateson (1972: 459) called the "difference that makes a difference." However, although such events are changes in their own right, they also form a sense of continuity over time. This means that events are connected relationally, giving meaning to one another by defining one another. Following this, totally different events may make perfect sense to actors as continuity as well as change. Such a view is different from, for instance, Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) for whom continuous change is a succession of changes. On the contrary, in the view offered here, changes as events serve to define one another into a meaningful temporal trajectory that embodies both continuity and change.

C27.P38    The concept of immanent temporal trajectory, thus means firstly that episodic changes are forms of enactment of past, present, or anticipated events bringing a sense of continuity to the lived moment. Secondly, this constant enactment of past, present, and future events takes part in the experience of a continuous change, as the meaning or definition of episodic changes constantly evolves. Whitehead's (1929) take on events and immanence become helpful here; he used the term "immanence" to describe how events connect *internally* to one another (Hernes 2014). Consequently, the continuous change is both the result of the constant re-enactment of episodic changes and the experience of unexpected events in the current moment. The concept of immanent temporal trajectory is thus a way to express the idea that actors define a sense of direction and continuity to their activity. It is this sense of direction and continuity that also brings a sense of stability, which paradoxically also contains a sense of disorder and novelty. What this means for our framework, is that while actors perform the continuous change, such as solving unexpected day-to-day problems, they remember or imagine events of change at other times and draw inspiration from those events (Hernes and Schultz 2020). By inspiration, we mean that actors connect their current moment (e.g., solving an unexpected problem) with these remembered and imagined events.

C27.P39    Defining change as breaks that are experienced, evoked, or projected by actors, enables the very interplay between the continuous and episodic change to be analyzed. In a way, this view reconnects and extends the idea of the life cycle motor of change suggested by Van de Ven and Poole (1995: 531): "The immediate process of organizing is driven through a life-cycle motor and influenced by a teleological motor of participants' choices of adaptations and retentions. However, over the longer run, these short-term actions contribute to an evolutionary process through which different practices, structures, and ideas are selected and retained." The life cycle motor is similar to the idea of an immanent temporal trajectory. Although trajectories seem at first linear, they are arguable made up of multiple interconnected recursive cycles (Hernes and Bakken 2003).

The event-based view also connects with Van de Ven and Poole's idea of "choices and retentions." As actors move through time, they retain certain epochal breaks represented by events in their trajectory from their past, present, or future (as projected or expected) while adapting or ignoring others. Which ones they retain and how they connect the ones they retain, come to form temporary causal maps that are brought into the present and extended to the future through a continuous change in the present.

C27.P40    The idea of immanent temporal trajectory means that change and continuity are not two different states occurring at two different moments in time, but rather are two dimensions of the same movement (Pettigrew 1985). The implication of this view of change is that organizational change should be studied as attempts to define a sense of continuity in their activity by chopping up the continuous change in episodic events considered as either novelties or stabilities. More precisely, the sense of continuity constantly reconstructed by actors means that neither change nor continuity is given but rather are always in need of enactment. What actors consider as states of change and continuity are primarily the temporary result of their representation of their continuous experience of change. This materialization is supported by actors' narratives, or through management tools and artifacts at large.

C27.P41    Studying organizational change as an immanent temporal trajectory that actors constantly redefine as a way to define the continuity of their activity means that researchers have to focus over time on the way actors redefine this continuity; that is, how they constantly redefine and reconfigure past, present, and future events as similar, different, radically different, etc. As such, the nature of change (or not change) lived by actors is not given to researchers as exogeneous categories, but rather it is defined by actors. Considering episodic events of change as representations made by actors means that the researcher cannot impose predefined categories of change but rather let the actors express the way they (re)define and (re)qualify episodic events of change. The event-based view of change claims that the nature of change lived by actors is always situated, analytical, and immanent.

# Conclusion

C27.P42 Theories of organizational change have been strongly influenced by assumptions about time. The Bergson-inspired view of time as "natural duration," or as "permeated whole" (Abbott 2001: 216) is a view that does not let actors escape from the continuous flow of time. By locking actors into the flow of time, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) did not invite episodic change to avoid the spatializing of time that Bergson's "natural duration" was meant to avoid. We have introduced an event-based view as an alternative to allow for the fact that actors actually do take past and future events into consideration *through* their continuous change activities. Our view extends from a Bergsonian view of time as a "permeated whole" to include how they address events that are distanced from the present (Mead 1932). By defining episodic changes as past or future "breaks" that actors

address from present, we have been able to bridge the ontological divide between episodic and continuous change. In doing so, we also invite conceptual as well as empirical challenges.

A conceptual challenge is to identify what counts as a change. By introducing the notion of "breaks," we have taken an endogenous view and departed from Weick and Quinn's (1999) clearly formulated definitions of episodic change, which include terms, such as radical, intentional, macro, and discontinuous. In our definition, we have left it to actors' own subjective views of what counts as an episodic change. In the absence of external criteria for episodic change, what counts as episodic change becomes more of an empirical question. It also means that any change is idiosyncratic and cannot be generalized to other organizations. The NewBow event, from Hernes and Pulk's rendering, was considered unique to the members of InnoShip. This does not mean that it cannot be translated into other studies. For other studies to be related to that change, the translation would be done by the use of the concept of immanent temporal trajectory. All organizational actors have an immanent temporal trajectory that is continually in the process of enactment, and some breaks may be shared by different actors across trajectories. Zerubavel (2003), for example, provides numerous examples of breaks along historical trajectories. Our concept of immanent temporal trajectory departs from Zerubavel's by including future imagined breaks. However, what we share with Zerubavel's work is that although actors attach dates and locations to events, the meanings of those dates are constructed in the present and are therefore likely to change as actors move through time. What changes is not their date but how the events are related to one another. We recall his perspicuous observation, that "In Irish time, 1651 and 1981 were only moments apart" (Zerubavel 2003: 38).

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