

Time-technology

The nature of time and use of timescapes

Beyond Information Technology Series

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The societal time is a phenomenon that is vastly different from the clock time and is rarely understood and appreciated. Its existence probably is felt when we travel from one geographical setting to another where the culture and languages are different. Even within a culture there are many communities and each community has a unique timescape. For example, when an American football game is played the clock time is stopped to allow the game take additional time to accommodate its unique processes. These unique processes exist for every community of a larger culture and society. It helps to understand and map these process times to help develop norms and deviations from those norms. The technology to map process times of several communities of societies can be integrated in an infrastructure to help those communities interact with one another more efficiently and effectively. In the absence of a mechanism to understand and interpret the differences between the communal times there is a conflict and stresses develop that affect societal harmony.

When community times and community processes are clearly defined, mapped and used, they lead to “organic” systems that behave without the stresses and strains and produce more consistent quality as well as eliminate the need for external intervention.

In the absence of a time-technology infrastructure to study these naturally occurring variations in a society, societal members have to learn to discern them. Most of the effort of a child or even an adult is spent in learning these nuances. Even after its learnt once, the changes occurring in these rhythms due to the repopulation of the communities have to be considered for effective ongoing interactions. Most of a society’s time resource is spent in this readjustment activity. A well-defined time-technology infrastructure will

enable a society to perform the readjustment of its societal processes organically and free up its member's scarce resource of time to perform creative and new endeavors.

Let us examine a specific case to better understand the societal time phenomenon.

Since a society has many purposes and each purpose is met by a very specialized collection of individuals, these individuals become a unique community. Thus, for example, we have a community of lawyers, accountants or even artists. Since, the rhythm of finding justice is different from the rhythm of composing there exists two different timescapes for these two communities. Within each of these two larger communities, there are individual specialties such as managing estates or criminal prosecution in the community of lawyers and perhaps composing music or composing poetry in the community of composers, which make for more individual rhythms. What about the individual differences in the rhythms of behavior among the members of these communities? It is astonishing that we expect to produce a symphony of societal activity without having a mechanism to tune the subtle time differences in these characteristics.

While we may have a 24hour clock to help us synchronize the rhythms it is only a start. If we expect to produce an excellent symphonic performance by generations of new members of a society, it could be easily accomplished by developing timescapes that could metabolize the naturally occurring variations more predictably.

How could we develop these timescapes?

One way we could develop these timescapes is with the help of what I have named synthetic time or virtual time. We can capture the rhythms of all activities in a virtual time plane. The virtual time is an imaginary plane and can accommodate the geologic time scale to the nano time scale of subatomic particles along with the nuances of many cultures, individual behavior rhythms, and the evolution of societies.

Our societal timescapes will enable us to perform simulation studies to help integrate and improve societal processes never before attempted due to the complexity involved. In addition the virtual time or the synthetic time will enable us to transcend time by delegating all known and arranged societal activities to software bots and free individuals for introspection and reflection and become an island unto oneself.

We could produce, deliver, use and benefit from a consumer society without ever having to interact with one another individually. Since human interaction is fraught with dangers of language, cognitive dissonance, biases of various kind its absence in the societal processes will greatly enhance the efficacy of the final societal symphony.

So, how would we build this virtual time plane?

It is a very interesting process. Let me describe at least some of its steps. We begin by considering how it's done with music to create a symphony. Just as in music we could use beats to measure the rhythms of all societal activities. The virtual plane can

use 1000 beats to specify a quantum of societal phenomena. A few societal rhythms may occur in half beats and yet others at a quarter or perhaps at one and a quarter. No matter it could be measured, timed and interfaced with other activities with their own rhythms. Different cultures may have a variance of these rhythms and may interface with entirely new sets of activities¹. The important consideration in the use of timescapes is the study of the existence of these societal rhythms and its impact on the overall societal performance.

With the use of timescapes we will be able to co-ordinate the world resource of time in a manner more meaningful to the furtherance of human kind than without them. After all, time is a scarcer commodity today than any other resource at both an individual and at the societal levels. So measurement of individual time and societal time in the manner just described will greatly enhance our ability to use this resource to achieve the desired higher productivity to ensure increasing standards of living irrespective of cultural, geographical and political differences.

In the networked world of global community we will be able to interact one with another seamlessly taking into account the rhythmic differences of all activities. To gain the desired higher productivity we have learnt to use machines to augment our own human capacities. It will be easier to align the machines with timescapes than without. In fact, the crucial reason for developing timescapes is to enable the transfer of time control to the machines that will automate the societal processes to an extent that the synchronization could be dubbed “organic”. Just as the physical bodies of organisms, including humans, have evolved to perform many complex adjustments necessary to survive in any environment, the societal phenomena needs to become “organic” in the sense of being able to adapt and survive the rigors of change, especially the fast kind of change that tend to disintegrate a society before our very eyes without given so much of an opportunity to react.

References:

Zalot, Michael C., Wall Calendars: Structured time, Mundane Memories, and disposable Images, October 2001, Journal of Mundane Behavior

¹ For an interesting discussion of this cultural aspect please see, Zalot, Michael C., Wall Calendars: Structured time, Mundane Memories, and disposable Images, October 2001, Journal of Mundane Behavior