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ABSTRACT
In this article, we review the following book:

Temporal Matters in Social Psychology: Examining the Role of Time in the Lives of Groups and Individuals


Categories and Subject Descriptors
H5.3. Information interfaces and presentation (HCI): Group and Organization Interfaces (Evaluation/Methodology).

1. BOOK REVIEW
The latest text by Professor Emeritus McGrath and his co-author Tschan, Temporal Matters in Social Psychology: Examining the Role of Time in the Lives of Groups and Individuals is enlightening to the field of social psychology because it emphasizes the much ignored role of time in studying small group interactions. This book comprehensively assimilates social psychological literature related to temporal aspects of groups. Although primarily targeted at social psychologists, this book is a trove of insight for audiences in applied disciplines related to the study of groups such as Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). Groupware designers and researchers will find this book a unique and comprehensive resource for enriching theory and research methodology in CSCW.

The 227-page book has 9 chapters and is divided into three major sections that represent domains involved in all scientific study of phenomena: conceptual, substantive, and methodological. Both individual and group levels of analysis are discussed, with the focus on four temporal forces in groups: developmental, adaptational, experiential, and operational. A consistent theme in the book is the authors’ argument that temporal aspects of groups are integral to theory in social psychology and cannot be ignored. The presentation of content is amenable to both a sequential read and perusal of specific issues in particular sections of the book. One can only praise the writing style of the authors, especially the poetic snippets at the end of every chapter that amuse the audience at a literary and intellectual level.

After a brief introduction to the book in Chapter 1, the conceptual domain is introduced in Chapter 2 with a discussion on the nature of time in people’s lives. The chapter addresses some philosophical issues of time, as well as how time is conceptualized, measured, and experienced in the Western culture and others. This chapter adequately equips the reader for the substantive and methodological treatment of time in the subsequent chapters.

Issues in the substantive domain are discussed in Chapters 3-7. Chapter 3 discusses a number of areas in which time affects the everyday lives of individuals and how individuals perceive time. Chapter 4 deals with the role of time in individual motivation, goals and action, and how temporal issues affect human cognitive processes such as decision making. Chapter 5 addresses the authors’ own area of scholarly specialization: stress and coping processes in individuals and groups. This chapter spans all four functional roles of time—as an independent, dependent, and intervening variable, and as a methodological factor in the research itself.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the most important substantive issues for CSCW. The content deals with the impact of the dynamic interplay between the group and multiple contexts—physical, social, organizational, and technological—within which groups are embedded. These chapters also address temporal matters regarding how groups change as a function of their own experience (i.e., how they learn). McGrath and Tschan construe groups as encompassing three kinds of elements: (a) people, who become the group’s members; (b) intentions, which get transformed into group projects (with tasks and subtasks) and member needs; and (c) resources, which get transformed into technology or a set of tools by which members can complete the group’s projects. As a group forms, it develops a rudimentary pattern of relations among those elements: a coordination network that is a pattern of member-task-tool relations. Because the authors advocate that different groups are formed with different emphases on the three elements and their relations in the coordination network, it becomes naturally interesting for groupware researchers and designers to leverage such theory in their exploration of how technology affects collective action. McGrath and Tschan’s holistic view of groups, which subsumes technology or tools as constituent, also seems to conceptually parallel Activity Theory (e.g., [2]).
Chapter 6 may seem overwhelming to a reader unfamiliar with social group theory, as it summarizes the major theories of group development in a few pages. The authors did not intend to present a theory of group development but wanted to elucidate the temporal factors in groups against the backdrop of their previous work. Small Groups as Complex Systems: Formation, Coordination, Development, and Adaptation by Arrow, McGrath, and Berdahl [1] provides an excellent background, but is not a prerequisite text to this book.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with methodological considerations of incorporating time into the study of social psychological phenomena. These include temporal issues embedded in the logic of causality, issues of time in relation to the assessment of validity of findings, issues of time in relation to the theory of measurement and error, and the differences in time scale underlying various research strategies. Additionally, McGrath and Tschan lay groundwork for future research issues coordinate with their resonating message on the importance of time in social psychology.

Why is Temporal Matters in Social Psychology: Examining the Role of Time in the Lives of Groups and Individuals valuable to groupware designers and researchers? This book provides fodder for enriching theory in CSCW and has implications for how to evaluate groupware in context of temporal factors and group dynamics. The book is especially relevant to readers of this special issue of ACM SIGGROUP Bulletin on Collaborative Computing Research Methodologies. For CSCW to become more sensitive to time, it is critical to pay attention to the theoretical, substantive, and methodological tools we will need from social psychological inquiry. This book considers some methodological tools and approaches that researchers need to enable future social psychology, and its applied disciplines, to take temporal factors more fully into account. Overall, the book is a rich source for understanding temporal processes in groups and will be instrumental in shaping the scientific discourse of group research.

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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3. REFERENCES
