

Contextual Models of Process

Academy of Management Conference,
Philadelphia, August 2007

Professor Andrew M. Pettigrew, FBA

Dean

School of Management

University of Bath

Tel: +44 (0) 1225 383052

Email: a.m.pettigrew@bath.ac.uk



Structure of Presentation

1. What is Process?
What is a Processual Analysis?
2. Some generic process questions
3. Studying processes in a contextualist manner
4. Process research designs
5. Truth is the daughter of time
6. Varieties of research output from longitudinal comparative case research

CATCHING REALITY IN FLIGHT

What are Processes — VAN de VEN (1992)

1. A logic used to explain a causal relationship in a variance theory
 - Processes not observed
 - Process story used to explain relationship between dependent and independent variables
2. A category of concepts that refer to actions of individuals or organizations
 - Processes not observed
 - Process constructs operationalised as variables
3. A sequence of events that describes how things change over time
 - Processes observed over past, present and future time
4. A historical developmental perspective which focuses on the sequences of incidents, activities, and action unfolding over time.

Society in Action – Piotr Sztopka

- Agential and historical Postulates
- Social reality is not a steady state, but rather a dynamic process; it occurs rather than exists
- The social process is constructed, created by actors – individual or collective, social life is a process of structure emergence via actions
- Action occurs in the context of encountered structures, which it shapes in turn

Structures	Shaped and shaped
Actors	Producers and products
- The interchange of action and structure occurs in time and is cumulative such that the legacy of the past is always shaping the emerging future

What happens, how it happens, why it happens, what results it brings about is dependent on when it happens, the location in the processual sequence, the place in the rhythm of events characteristic for a given process

Some generic process questions (1)

Process questioning involves the interrogation of some phenomena over time using the language of:

What, who, where, why, when and how

- Antecedent questions
- Context questions
- Evolution and development questions
- Sequencing questions
- Pace questions
- Consequence and output questions

Some generic process questions (2)

- What are the outer-contextual pressures on this organisation and how are they changing over time?
- When and how were these pressures for change perceived, by whom and with what responses?
- Did actions for change arise simultaneously or sequentially? Why and how were the initial set of actions chosen? What followed these initial actions, why and how?
- Was there variation in the pace of change in different parts of the same organisation or between comparator organisations. What features of context and action explain this differential pace?
- What are some of the consequences of the changes for the performance, power relations and capabilities of the organisations?

Studying Processes in a contextualist manner: six requirements

1. Embeddedness: the importance of multiple levels of analysis
2. Temporal interconnectedness: the importance of past, present and future time
3. The role of context and action
4. The search for holistic explanation
5. Locating and explaining processes and outcomes
6. Involvement and distance in the research process

Process Research Designs

The central aim is to expose:

1. Patterns in some process
e.g. changing or decision making
2. Variations in some process
e.g. incremental process here
revolutionary process there
3. Variations in some outcome linked to patterns of context and action
e.g. how and why some mixture of context and action explains the differential performance of 2 firms or the relative pace of change between 2 firms.

Choice of research sites

- Extreme situations
- Polar types
- High experience levels

“Truth is the daughter of time”

1. Time and perspective
 - Analysing today we see change
 - Analysing yesterday – today – tomorrow we see continuity
2. Choice of time series
 - Beginning
 - End
3. Time perspective and outcome evaluation
4. Time as events and chronology
5. Socially constructed time frames which influence behaviour
6. Longer time cycles at other related levels of analysis
7. Time and the appreciative system of the researcher

Varieties of research output from longitudinal comparative case study work

-
1. **Analytical Chronology**
 - The Narrative
 - Across Levels of Analysis
 - With causal linkages
 - Establishing early analytical themes
 2. **Diagnostic Case**
 - All of the features mentioned in 1. above
 - Plus a listing and analysis of the organisations current strategic concerns
 3. **Interpretative/Theoretical Case(s)**
 - Theoretical placement
 - Narrative and Interpretation
 - Stronger analytical themes
 - General empirical placement
 4. **Meta Level Analysis Across Cases**
 - Broad thematic presentation
 - Theoretical and empirical placement in comparative terms
 - Loss of case integrity
 - Case data used for thematic illustration

CATCHING REALITY IN FLIGHT