

DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHM

For a number of years, we have consulted in organizations using a framework and concepts originating from the body of knowledge known as Systems Analysis. We have continuously searched for ways to adapt that theory so as to make it a useful tool to better understand companies, organizations, and corporations and intervene to help make them more efficient.

To get more thoroughly inspired by "systems" thinking, we researched into its different applications, in biology, nuclear physics, and ultimately in quantum mechanics. This inspiration from more "traditional" scientific fields has helped us approach the study of human organizations from a very different angle. Time and again, in the field and with our clients, we have asked them and ourselves new and different questions, and have come up with original and often very performing answers. It is one or two aspects of this approach that we would like to share in the following pages.

In biology, in physics, in quantum mechanics, there is ample room for the study of oscillations, rhythms, waves and vibrations and their relation to matter. The research and reflections concerning the importance of vibrations and rhythms in nature have always intrigued me, attracted me. I often wondered if I wouldn't be missing out on something important for my consulting profession if I didn't dig into the subject a little further.

With this question motivating me, over a few years experimenting and observing, I have developed and shared with other consultants a few basic ideas on the subject. Of course these concepts are still very fresh in our experience. All we have done is opened a door a crack. The real work is far from finished. I share our thoughts and experiences here so as to stimulate research by others, so as to find new inspiration, and so as to question our approach and to provoke feedback.

To brush a quick metaphoric picture, we will quote Frijof Capra, physicist, systems thinker, and author who wrote the following on "rhythmic models" in nature: "Finding these rhythmic models can help us understand *the passages between structure and rhythm*: Rhythmic models seem to be present at all levels. Atoms are models of probability waves, molecules are vibrating structures and organisms are multi-dimensional interdependent fluctuating models. Plants, animals and human beings go through cycles of activity and of rest and all their physiological functions oscillate according to rhythms of diverse periodicity. The composing elements of an ecosystem are interrelated by cyclical exchanges of matter and energy; civilizations develop then decline in evolutionary cycles and the planet as a whole has its rhythms and its recurrences as it spins around its axis and the sun".¹

We are indeed totally immersed in a natural symphony of rhythms.

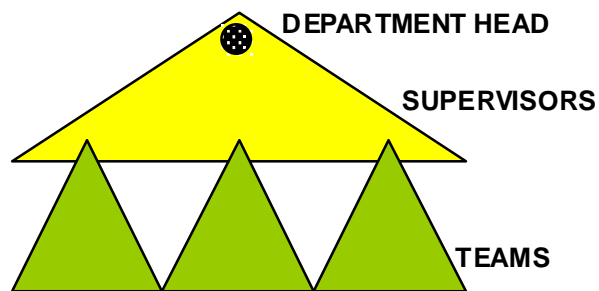
¹ CAPRA, Frijof, [A Time for Change](#) P283

If these rhythms are all around us, inside us, and if to study them can help us understand **"the passages between structure and rhythm"**, and if especially, we discover that organizational systems are rhythmic. That they are just like all other organisms, complex **"fluctuating multidimensional and interdependent models"**, then we may be onto an interesting and useful management and consulting tool.

One could imagine, for instance that to modify the rhythms of our teams and organizations could be a way of modifying their processes, structures, cultures and results. This thinking can give us an interesting hypothesis for further observation of organizational processes. To illustrate our point, we can now proceed with a few examples that originate from our practice within teams and organizations.

A DEPARTMENTAL RHYTHM

A client once asked us to coach him on a relatively limited management problem. What was wanted were some options to better develop three team supervisors that were positioned as direct reports. Each of these supervisors managed a team of approximately a dozen technicians, but all three seemed to manifest some difficulty in exercising affirmative responsibility with their personnel.

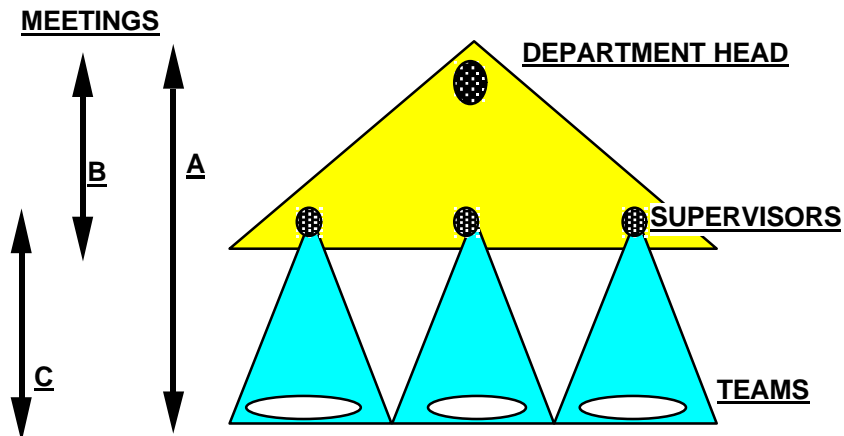


The client described the three supervisors in a relatively positive mode, adding however that some of the team members seemed to be much more dynamic creative, competent, if not intelligent than their supervisors. In the context of daily operations, of course, our client underlined the fact that great care was taken to avoid short-circuiting or undermining of the supervisors' role in any way. Although the manager took great care to be supportive of the three, there seemed to remain a slight feeling of discomfort, based on the following questions: Are the three supervisors really in their place, do they need training, or have they reached their level of incompetence?

We asked the manager if regular and formal meetings were held with the three supervisors, to give a form to the team they constituted. The answer was affirmative, these meetings taking place on a monthly basis.

We then asked if the manager knew of any regular equivalent meetings held by the supervisors within their own teams. The manager then answered that those meetings wouldn't be of any use in as much as the whole engineering department -manager, supervisors, and teams- met on a weekly basis anyway.

To give a summary, in this department and as far as meetings go, there are two types of frequencies or rhythms, as depicted in the following graph.



There is a weekly meeting (**A**) that gathers all three levels or the total department, headed by our client. There is a monthly meeting (**B**) that gathers our client and the three direct line supervisors. The supervisors do not meet directly with their teams (**C**), as these meetings are rendered useless by the weekly (**A**) meetings.

This description of the situation gives an immediate "key" to the problem probably felt by all the parties involved. In as much as the department head meets with all of the employees once a week, and with the three supervisors only once a month, it is difficult to consider that the latter add any real value in managing the information flow, or that they really participate in the decision making process.

The department head positions the three supervisors on an organizational chart and firmly believes that there are no short-circuiting processes, but the meeting rhythms in the department reveal quite a different reality. The supervisors are **rhythmically** in a practically superfluous position both as decision makers within their teams and as information managers in the larger system.

We have of course given our client the following advice: If the objective is really to change the engineering departmental dynamics by firmly positioning the three as supervisors, then there is a lot to gain by switching the frequencies (and the lengths) between the two meetings that occur (**A** and **B**). The next step would be to make sure that the supervisors hold efficient in-team weekly meetings (**C**) that were considered useless until then.

This option takes into account that 1) facilitating communication and information exchange is one of the fundamental roles of management, and 2) As F. Capra says, information "flows primarily through the synchronization and intertwining of individual rhythms"².

The same is true for collective rhythms, we can add. Modifying the frequencies of a relationship or of communication patterns, in this case of meeting rhythms, modifies the quality of that relation and communication, no matter the content.

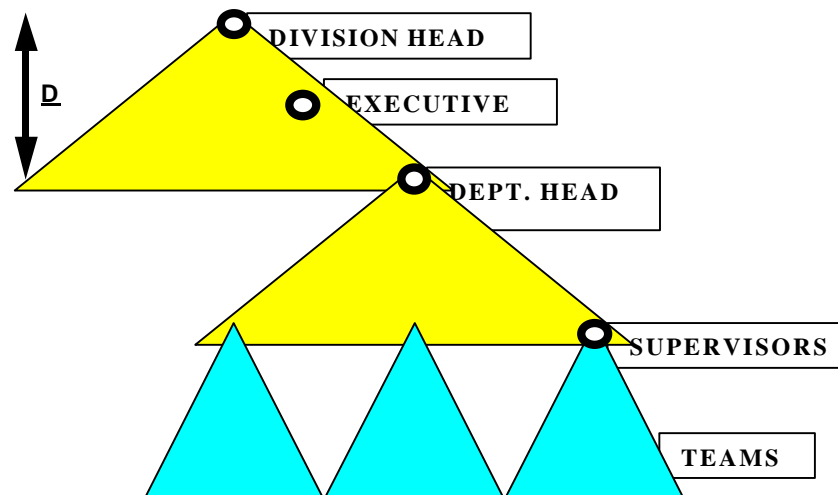
To give the supervisors their rightful place and credibility, there only needs to be a slight change in the periodicity of the department meetings, and the institution of until then nonexistent team meeting.

² CAPRA, Frijof, A Time for Change P285

AN ORGANISATIONAL RYTHM

To continue with this case study, we would now like to move one step further and take a look at the larger organization in which the engineering department exists. Our observations brought us to the realization that our client's department may have quite some difficulty in changing its rhythms, considering the surrounding organization. That could be as dangerous as "stepping to a different drummer" in a very structured environment.

Indeed, it so happens that our department head and initial client rarely met with his own direct manager. Regular larger meetings that included the whole division's management (**D**) treated all the information necessary to satisfy operating needs. Within those larger meetings the whole managing team gave and received all the vital information, and prepared decisions. Our client could well do without ever having to meet the executive immediately in charge of the engineering department's policies, operations and results.



The communication process revealed by the meeting rhythms within the engineering department and that amounted to a short-circuiting of the supervisory level, was an echo of sorts, of other communication rhythms and processes in the higher managerial spheres within the division, and as it turned out, in the whole company. We studied the whole as an organic system that displayed information flows and ebbs, and found a quasi-systematic (if not systemic) reproduction of the engineering department's musical "beat". The study of that rhythm gave us numerous insights of some of the "cultural" problems the larger company seemed to be displaying.

The negative result in terms of management positioning was quite general. No manager in the organization felt really in the right place in as much as the information flow-chart did not seem to take into account the real need for most managerial positions. In general any person at any one point could do without the official immediate "hierarchical" supervisor, and without the official immediate

"subordinate". As far as information flow or decision-making was concerned, the official organizational chart could in fact be considered as pure "formal fiction".

As it turned out there was an excellent "reason" for this state of affairs. As usual, this organizational rhythm didn't "just happen" without a valid reason. Just as for a biological system, or animal, the rhythm corresponds to a natural need, and is well ingrained (if you don't believe that, experience an 8-hour jet-lag). In our case study, the rather "passé" European public manufacturing company in which worked our client had an extremely top-heavy structure, displaying numerous layers of "comfortably" installed managers. The "discontinuous" rhythm that "jumped levels" we had witnessed permitted a relatively efficient flow of information in spite of the archaic pyramidal structure.

All considered, the lack of recognition felt by some managers due to improper meeting rhythms could be well be considered a problem. The process can also be considered as an inventive organic solution that will accelerate the vital upward and downward flow of information in the top-heavy pyramidal structure. In spite of its apparent inconsistency, the meeting system in this organization can therefore be considered a healthy unconscious collective solution to a problem no one really wanted to solve. Indeed, the real issue or real problem to solve is "how can we lighten or flatten this inefficient to-heavy pyramidal organization?» A solution in that direction would probably automatically modify all the meeting structures and rhythms.

This case study presents a rapid, simple cut-and-dry analysis of a very large organization by just taking into account its "rhythms and blues" and may seem a little quick. Our intention in this paper, however, **is** to illustrate how much oscillations and waves, flows and ebbs are of capital importance within all human systems, and that very well includes all our teams and corporations.

One of the importance points covered in the relating of this case study concerns the coherence of organizational rhythms. The "flow pattern" of the meeting processes in the engineering department didn't just happen, "out of the blue". They exist in total coherence with the rhythms of the rest of the system or total "corporate body", if we may use these obviously redundant terms. An organ, within any "body" exists in coherence with the environmental rhythms of other organs in immediate proximity and with the general rhythms of the total body.

There is generally a very good "reason" for a body to have a specific rhythm pattern at one point in time. As shown in our case study, the engineering department, just like the rest of the system, presented a meeting pattern that corresponds to the body's specific need to accelerate upward and downward information flow, the "life-blood" of the system.

To modify the rhythm of the system or of any sub-system will most probably affect the total organizational equilibrium, for the better or for worse. It could provoke the larger system to react positively, in the same direction and change, just as it can provoke a negative or defensive "whiplash" that will cancel all temptations to implement change. Before one acts on rhythm "locally", in a team or department, there is good reason for a global analysis of the larger environment's vibration, and on the reason for the existence of the existing rhythm patterns.

At this point we want underline that the above case study also seems to indicate that an organization is kin to a coherent biological or "animal" entity. As a manager of consultant, having a "systemic" approach with these organic living systems is not unlike practicing a "holistic" medical approach. Directly and intently tampering with an obvious symptom is often not necessarily the most interesting thing to do, especially not before having a wide-angle look at the global picture. In the above case, we reconsidered immediate action and deepened the diagnosis of the whole system by taking the equivalent of an organizational "pulse reading".

So organizations are living organisms. We now suggest continuing on our exploratory journey in the pages ahead, to approach organizational rhythms in different ways.

FROM RHYTHM TO STRUCTURE

Systemic biologists, amongst other scientists (such as organizational consultants) that study living systems demonstrate that rhythms, oscillations and "fluctuations are of crucial importance in the natural process of self-organization. They are at the foundation of the order of the living world: **organized structures emerge from rhythmic models**"³.

This quote also proposes that rhythms create structure, and eventually matter. Energy, in the form of vibration "creates" or gives form to the solid systems we call reality. On the atomic level, when science considers electrons, photons, protons, and the such, one cannot really determine if we are dealing with "matter" such as solids, or with energy in the form of waves, rhythms and fluctuations. No matter (oops!) how we study it, a proton behaves as much as a particle than as an energetic rhythm or wave. It seems as if matter, particles and structure are "dense" manifestations of energetic rhythms. Or, vice-versa, that solids are energy in the form of waves that have lost their "transparency".

These concepts are of the highest importance in today's organizations. If we are searching for tools that will permit the creation and development of organizational structures that model on living systems then we definitely need to study rhythm. With this concept in mind, we propose the following principle: To create a team, or better, a whole corporation, and literally "precipitate" its solid structure, one of the priority ingredients to keep in mind and develop is the organization of rhythms, vibrations, and fluctuations.

To illustrate, the following is another look at meeting rhythms as they were observed in an international "organism", another case study from our clientele.

In this organization, a cross-national European "project team" or task force was created to develop an international product that was to replace national equivalents. It so happens, of course, that the members of the task force were transferred out of those different countries, from the teams with which they were explicitly asked to compete. If the task force team succeeded, then the "original" national teams and their products would have to be "phased out".

The task force team members were for a large part in an emotional form of "double bind". If they succeeded internationally, they would in effect participating

³ CAPRA, Frijof, A Time for Change P283

in destroying their original home teams to which they were still administratively "attached". If they didn't succeed, and saved their home teams, then the European project would be their failure.

To add to the problem, so as to avoid creating another administrative structure, the international personnel's official administrative hierarchy continued being the home countries. And those hierarchies had no interest in the European project that they perceived as taking away some of the "local" initiative for "cultural difference" national independence, and of course, personal power.

Naturally, the international team had a lot of difficulties getting started. Meetings were cancelled, deadlines were delayed, information flow faltered. The different countries regularly found other national priorities that pulled the personnel away from the European project.

It became very apparent, in terms of rhythms, that to succeed, the task force would have to have a "stronger" energetic structure. That was done with a few simple steps. The international system's meetings, for one, were programmed on a very regular basis, a year in advance and were "politically" defined as high priority. All the other "European level" processes were developed in a firmer, more efficient way, making sure that their project deadlines were at least tolerated if not respected by all the national systems. The results showed dramatic improvements very rapidly.

In this case, a subtlety seems to appear in the difference of "force" in a rhythm. All parts of the system seem to function according to a similar "beat", but it seems as if one part beats louder than the rest. In our example, if the local countries are priority, then they can annul all "European" attempts to be heard.

We often observe a similar phenomenon within teams. Everyone can be consulted and usually gives a personal opinion. But it so happens that the only opinion really heard is regularly the one that comes from a very specific person in the team: the "baron" or the "old timer", or the "rebel". Do they really speak that much louder?

Similar conceptions hold, as far as rhythms go, when creating a new business. To obtain the best results, get a few committed people (easy!!). Then with these people, organize a **firm** and **regular** rhythmic series of actions, meetings, happenings and events over the following two years. Don't be afraid to overdo it, and make sure that all your chosen and very committed people are present and active at all these events.

This simple and predictable long-term rhythm structure creates a sort of energetic "receptacle" or "virtual form" within which your business can develop. Knowing this two-year program, your team will also look beyond the short-term problems and consider the global picture. In that way you can avoid typical "crisis management" so common to new endeavors. The virtual existence of that global picture made real by rhythmic action can be seen as one of the main processes to gradually materialize the business. In this way developing business is like making music!

In all of the above examples, you have probably noticed that we have positioned team and system meetings as the obvious receptacles that contain the "form" or display the rhythm for most teams. This is (most) often the case, especially in the

larger corporate structures we have had the pleasure of messing with. If these "receptacles" are solid, that is if these meetings have an appropriate span of time and rhythm, are structured, and well led, efficient, then the team will take on its qualities.

If the receptacles are unpredictable, that is if the meetings are cancelled or postponed as often as they are urgently called under crisis, if they are poorly run and inefficient, then give up on expecting predictable positive results from that team. Seen in this context, a team's meeting structure and rhythm can be considered as its fundamental structuring matrix. It is the nucleus that carries the team D.N.A. That one of the main reasons why we believe that Team Development takes place in everyone's presence, during team meetings. It is within this receptacle that one can work at modifying team D.N.A.

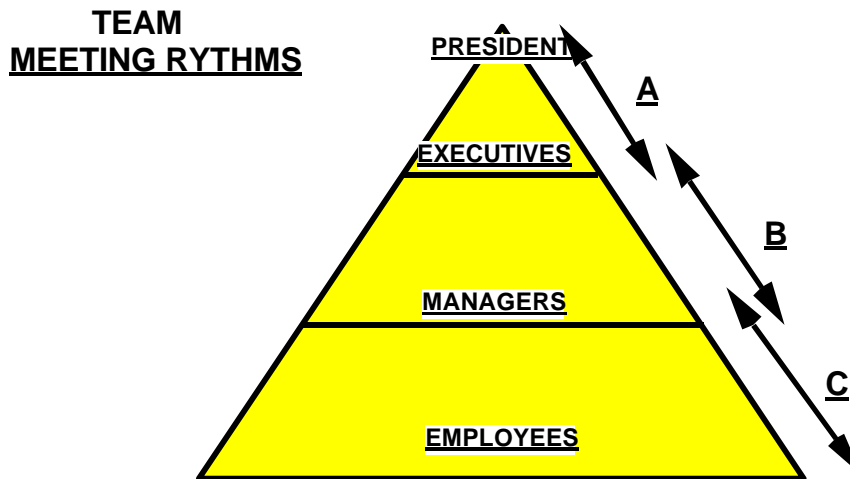
By extension, to move forward again and look at the larger organizational picture, many organizations as systems can be measured (and modified) in their efficiency by the measuring (and modifying) the quality of its information flow and decision making process as it is managed through the larger web of meeting rhythms. The question then is what is the **order**, the **rhythm**, and the **duration** in which the different meetings happen in the different systems and sub-systems, who is included in those meetings, and why?

ORGANIZATIONAL RYTHMS

Beyond our questioning and experimenting within teams, their meeting rhythms and other informational flows and ebbs, we have had numerous occasions to observe and consult with larger and more complex rhythmic systems that concerned large structures such as departments, factory sites or divisions and corporations that regrouped a large number of teams, and therefore a symphony of team meetings.

With some of these larger systems we have looked for a specific logic in rhythms that would be adapted to the specific business, size, geographical distribution and culture of each company.

The following example introduces a slightly more complex situation. (This is not yet a complex, matrix, network, futuristic type of organization, but please be patient). This case and illustration gives a visual hierarchical view of the different organizational levels that could be concerned by meetings that have a "simple" complementary periodicity.



Meetings **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)**, each concern only two levels in the organization. They are all of the same type in as much as they all concern real or "intact" teams. We have noticed, however that the lower they take place in the organizational ladder, the shorter they need to be, and the "quicker" is their appropriate rhythm (biweekly, sometimes daily).

With this principle in mind, the employees and managers in meetings **(C)** need shorter meetings, in that they do not have to deal with long term strategic reflection but rather with immediate or short term operational problems and issues. An hour-long meeting on a weekly rhythm at the most, can be enough to deal with the toughest technical problems and communication needs of the team. The total time equals a half-day per month

On the other end, the executive committee will need meetings **(A)** that allow for in-depth working of the more vital political, strategic, social, and financial issues, all of which need more detailed information, sharing and debate. If the executive team needs a weekly meeting to deal with urgencies and operational concerns, it is vital that it also have a monthly one, at least four hours long if not six to really dive into the more important long term issues. The cumulated time span for the team here may range from one and a half to two full days a month.

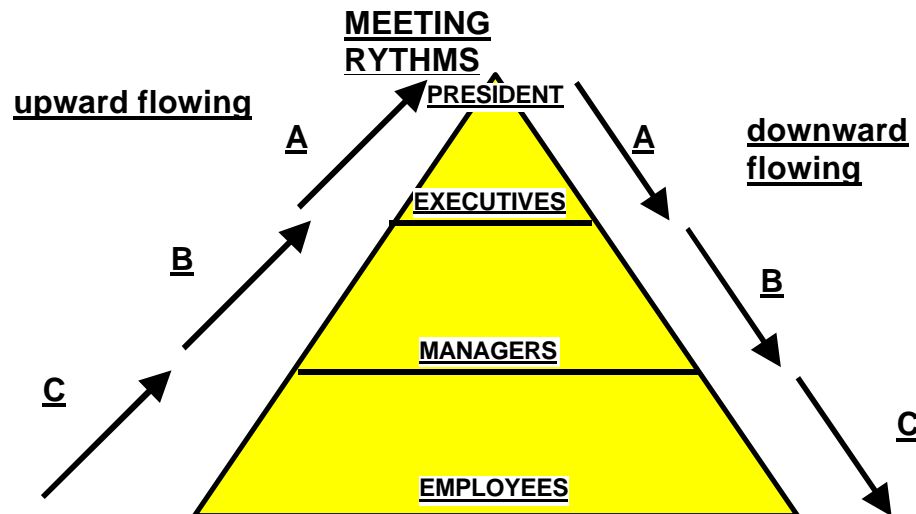
For the meetings concerning the intermediate teams **(B)**, the rhythms and time spans of the weekly and monthly reunions need to be somewhere between the two extremes, so as to fit in correctly in the structural and rhythmical progression of the whole.

The equilibrium between the frequency and the duration of monthly meetings gives a total sum that provides a certain space and presence for a team to exist and develop as a system. The more a team exists in time and space, assuming that this is done in a useful fashion, the stronger it becomes, the more weight it wields. This is why the periodicity and total time frame of the more strategic teams must be structured in a way to recognize and permit their importance, compared to the more subordinate systems in the same organization.

The order in which meetings take place in a large system also has its value. In a large number of organizations, teams decide when to have their meetings without any strategic consideration as far as the global system is concerned. It can be

extremely useful, as we have observed, to give some thought as to which level in an organization meets first and how the other meetings fit into its rhythm.

If, for instance, the lower systems (**C**) meet first, say on a Monday, then the intermediate teams, (**B**), meet on that week's Wednesday and the executive team (**A**) meets on the same week's Friday, then consulting and upward flowing information is privileged.

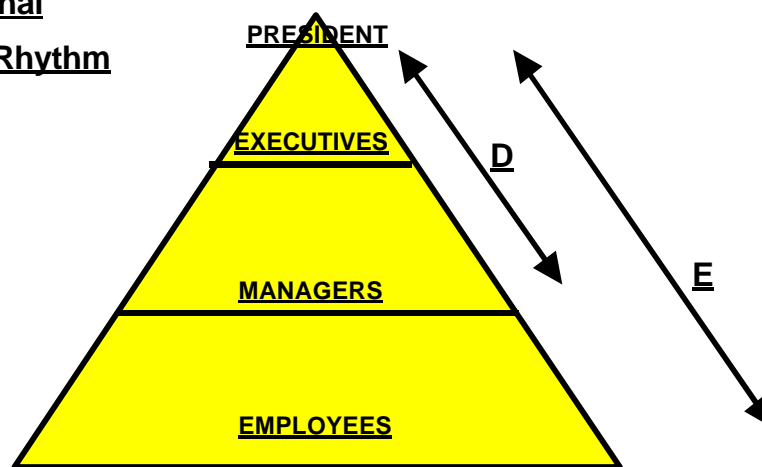


If, on the other hand and in the same organization, the executive meeting (**A**) happens first, then followed by the intermediate teams meetings (**B**), followed by the "lower echelon" team meetings (**C**), that will privilege rapid downward-flowing information and implementation of "central" decisions.

These considerations give a quick indication of the concept of upward or downward-flowing "ripple effect" in information and decision-making flow, to which too little thought is given, as far as we have observed, in a large majority of organizations. With some thought and planning, some of our client organizations have structured their meeting systems on a global scale so as to ensure an extremely rapid "ripple effect" from the top down or from the bottom up, depending on general mood, strategy, the time of year, and the direction of necessary information flow. Besides being fun, it has proven extremely effective.

To be complete with an inventory of meeting types and rhythms in the above organizational system we need to consider another two more-or-less common organizational "happenings" (**D**, and **E** below) that have a "meeting" format.

Organizational
Meeting Rhythm



These reunions differ from the others in that they concern more than two "hierarchical levels", or that they include more than one "intact team" at a time. In this sense they cannot really be considered as real "working" or decisional meetings. They usually have an importance as information-gathering or dispensing happenings. Meetings that include three levels such as the (D), above, are often reunions that are tailored to reinforce information flow and to validate and support middle management. They are used to "draw" or "pull" that middle echelon closer to the top management and make it a stronger strategic force. The content and process of these "meetings" needs to be prepared in that there should be less room for improvisation or lengthy unframed discussion. These meetings shouldn't take more than a few hours, two or three times a year at the most.

Even more caricature-like, and farther spaced are the very conventional yearly "conventions" that include four or more levels of personnel (E). These are often closer to very well prepared theatrical shows than to meetings in the real sense of the word. Not more than a few hours, followed or preceded by a cocktail or dinner, with or without laser shows, they often underline (excellent) past results and (motivating) future challenges with a good menu of strong images and official speeches.

These conventions basically have a one-way top-down informational and motivational objective with the personnel or line employees playing the role of "target group". They are often "festive" or "party-oriented", especially when the idea is to celebrate the organization's success or launch a new product.

All these different meetings and reunions may give one a heady feeling that there is a lot of time lost, diverted from more earthly concerns. In reality they all serve their purpose, all have their time and space in the organizational rhythm or symphony. As some happen daily, others weekly or monthly, still others every three to six months, or yearly, an organizational rhythm is given, and can be followed. This often adds to developing feelings of identity, belonging, stability, predictability and security. These are necessary if one wants the organization to offer a perception of being "solid".

Inversely, if the objective is to create stress, distress, and unpredictability, a more cacophonous, hazardous rhythm of meetings that are regularly moved, improvised or cancelled is the best way to go. No matter what structured rhythm or lack thereof, the whole organization lives to these different beats, nourishes itself from the process of each of these informational "happenings" and from the way they mesh to create a larger "rhythmic system".

What seems to be useful, beyond a clear and immediate conception of the objective and content for each meeting, is the necessity to have a "master plan", of sorts, and manage the music of the whole. Structured as a symphony, the general rhythm of meetings can give the whole organization a coherent effect that keeps pressure and interest up for all the personnel.

Of course this musical analogy can be taken as such, just an interesting evocative image. We will remind the reader, however that **"organized structures emerge from rhythmic models"**, as we quote from Capra. It may just be that rhythms are one of the key creating and structuring criteria in an organization, to which we have given far too little attention.

To continue on our demonstration, we would like to propose one more case study, in which thought is given to coordinate organizational rhythm, structure and culture.

ORGANISATIONAL RYTHM AND CULTURE

With one of our clients a multinational organization that has branches all over the world, we have been experimenting for a number of years tinkering with the concept of rhythmic coherence. We have proposed that all the management teams on each production unit, each region, each country, as well as the top executive team to work according to coherent rhythms, in a sort of global complementary arrangement similar to that presented in the above paragraphs.

With this global operation, ideally, all the "local" operational management teams meet once a week to deal with the short-term urgencies, and once a month for team issues that have a longer-term strategic importance. These regular meetings, are weekly for the first, and set a year in advance for the second. The format used in a large majority of these meetings has also been worked on and rendered coherent with the objectives.

Within less than two years, some very impressive results started surfacing, first within the different "local" branches, and then in the organization as a whole. The global system has gained in stability, solidity, and predictability. The financial results are more satisfactory, thanks to management teams that have evolved and become more and more demanding. The quality of the products and services offered by the corporation has been measurably improved, and its future, uncertain a few years ago is today ensured.

How is it possible that just organizing meeting rhythms and processes can have such an important a measurable impact on an organization, to the point of practically transforming its culture? To answer it is again useful to understand the logic of rhythms.

In most organizations, we consider that meetings are held for the wrong reasons. When a problem appears, we call a meeting with the people concerned. In this way, problems and their rate of appearance define the rhythm of our meetings. In some very conservative organizations, there are no problems; therefore there is no reason to meet! In others, the crisis-oriented culture is such that imposed, urgent, problem-solving meetings break any constructive rhythm the organization may want to develop. After a large number of dissonant and discordant meetings per week, inefficiency becomes the rule, with a very high level of energy expense. "We don't need to call a meeting for this!" can be heard from someone who judges that some issue is not important enough to be considered critical... yet! Other people yearn to find their own initiative, their own rhythm, to become efficient again.

It is obvious that managing rhythm is an important part management in the "leadership" sense of the word. Being master of your agenda is being your own master. Structuring the organizational "agenda" according to certain rhythms is structuring the organization pulse.

To get out of the vicious circle described above, the first step is to reverse the proposition. Rather than organizing meetings to deal with **urgent problems**, it is necessary for all the team members in the organization to bring their all their problems to regularly organized, expected, predictable and very **important team meetings**. From then on meetings, not problems, become the regular "metric" entities that rhythm organizational life.

In short, teams need to define their rhythm and duration, and then have mandatory meetings on a very regular basis. In this way, the team will recover its initiative by taking control of its own appropriate rhythm. During these reunions, all the team members bring their issues to have them treated before they become urgent problems.

In the healthy organization that develops real "music", unpredictable, unexpected, urgent, crisis-oriented reunions and other "crazy-acting" have to become a "no-no" way of trying to get attention and look important.

Obviously this is very difficult in organizations where the top executives have developed «crisis-management» to a fine art. These feel that their importance is derived from a high degree of stress that must immediately be delegate to everyone by calling an urgent unexpected meeting.

Getting out of that means learning how to manage one's personal rhythm in a collective orchestra that is playing a very specific tune. For the orchestra leaders, that means defining collective rhythms, objectives and priorities, and sticking to them. All in all, it is learning how to make music together.

In the above client organization, regular and rhythmic team meetings permitted a better follow up of deadlines. Rhythms are just that, a time measure. To live in a precise predictable rhythm gives a team the means to manage their time and by extension to manage their precision and quality. To keep deadlines, the pressure is put on all team members to develop professionalism. Little by little, almost unconsciously, all the team members in each one of the teams were working in a new collective rhythm that became more shared and affirmed as it became more perceptible. Beyond the achievement of better results, that collective rhythm also strengthened the sense of collective identity.

This brings us to another dimension. Indeed, beyond the **organizational** dimension of rhythm in living systems, there is also what can be perceived as an **expressional** quality to rhythm in living systems. Personal identity, for example, can be defined as a "rhythm identity". Different people, and different animals, emit different "vibrations" as we commonly call it. For a person, a cardiogram reading, gestures, rhythm of speech, breathing patterns, handwriting, digital prints, are all very personal reflections or expressions of personal identity. In much the same way, a collective organizational identity or "culture" (in the real sense of the word) develops and evolves over time.

As more and more people and systems share a collective rhythm, a corporate entity develops strength and presence of identity. In different organizations, an intuitive observer can rapidly perceive different rhythms that are the vehicles for different corporate identities. These organizations know, as a matter of fact, that their vibrations are particular, that they evolve, that they are a sort of "pulse" in keeping with what is going on, internally. Rhythm seems to be one of the key factors to understanding and developing corporate success, very much linked to collective identity.

We are not done, by a long shot, with our "rhythmic" approach of organizations through observation and tampering with their rhythms and fluctuations. We simply hope that the above examples from our practice have given you food for thought and that you will not hesitate to share your experiences with us on the subject.

Alain Cardon June 2000