



**The development of a theoretical framework of Organisational Rhythm**

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3 **Title: The development of a theoretical framework of Organisational Rhythm**  
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9 **Journal: Journal of Organisational Change Management**  
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11 **Abstract:**

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15 **Purpose** – The aim of this research was to develop a framework to understand  
16 organisational rhythm as a stimulus for further study into organisational change.  
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20 **Design/methodology/approach** – This paper studies the experiences the Medical  
21 Discipline Colleges in The Netherlands as they underwent significant reorganisation  
22 and transfer of Ministerial authority. The data set consists of correspondence, reports  
23 and tapes of the meetings over 14 months and interviews with 26 employees.  
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30 **Findings** – This research identified five sub-themes of rhythm (emphasis, intonation,  
31 pace, period and repetition). Putting these together, we present a framework to  
32 understand organisational rhythm during organisational change.  
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37 **Practical implications** –We argue that by unpacking and exploring in more detail the  
38 sub-themes of rhythm (emphasis, intonation, pace, period and repetition) we can help  
39 to explain why complex change management initiatives may stall or fail to gain  
40 traction. By understanding the concept of rhythm as movement we can offer  
41 recommendations to organisations about how to move forward and overcome  
42 challenges associated with progress.  
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51 **Originality/value** – In this paper, we make an important distinction between *rhythm*  
52 in terms of movement and flow of activity, which has often been overlooked by  
53 research, which focuses on temporal aspects of organisations, which we classify as  
54 *frequency* – relating to the sequencing and duration of change.  
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6 **Keywords: Organisational Rhythm, Organisational Change, Temporal Change,**  
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8 **Kairotic time, Lived Experience of Change**  
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14 **Article Type: Research paper**  
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### The development of a theoretical framework of Organisational Rhythm

More often, organisations attempt to run multiple processes of organisational changes simultaneously (Bernerth et al, 2011, Kuntz and Gnomes, 2012, Tucker et al, 2014). In the last hundred years Western society has developed a rhythm that is urging us to do more, produce more and learn more (Rechtschaffen, 1996).

Organisational change is influenced by many complex features, which take on their own rhythms of randomness and converging order that requires flexible management over time (Burnes, 2005). The concept of time in organisations has received considerable attention in the management literature (e.g. Ancona et al 2001; Czarniawska, 2004; Staudenmayer et al 2002). In managing fluid change, time is not linear and exponential as is often assumed but instead time is experienced in a social way. It is influenced by our interaction with activity, other actors and experiences: much activity can lead to the speeding up of time and less activity to the perception of slower time (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). Management approaches that anticipate the movement of these changes could be the next step in enhancing the management of change. In trying to understand these experiences of time, Czarniawska's (2004) distinction between Chronological and Kairotic time is helpful. Chronological time refers to clock time – time that can be measured in mechanical intervals e.g. seconds, minutes, hours, or years; whereas Kairotic time measures moments and refers to the right moment (Czarniawska, 2004). For Kairos (the Greek god of right time or proper time), time jumps forward, slows down, dwells over certain periods and skips over others. Most important when considering organisational change is that Kairotic accounts reveal important events in achieving progress. The notion of Kairotic time is relevant because the focus of much of this work has been on the perception of time and the experience of pace and movement. Here we build on

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3 this concept to explore the strategy, tactics, and the qualitative experience of time.  
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5 Time is not just a background against which change can be judged to have occurred  
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7 (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), rather, *organisational rhythm* is a key factor in  
8  
9 explaining organisational change. Change disrupts employee's daily routines and  
10  
11 actions and causes uncertainty (Staudenmayer et al , 2002). These disruptions and  
12  
13 movements lead to changes in the behaviour and attitudes of employees. Here, we  
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15 adopt a working definition of rhythm that Rhythm is the movement that ties events of  
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17 the change together, establishing momentum and involving all organisational  
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19 members in the change.  
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23 In this study, we focus on the experiences of employees during organisational  
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25 change. We have developed a model of organisational rhythm, which expands our  
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27 understanding of the movement of change. In identifying and explaining the sub-  
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29 themes of organisational rhythm we have identified potential features of significant  
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31 rhythm and explored how individuals might view these. We argue that by unpacking  
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33 and exploring in more detail the sub-themes of rhythm (emphasis, intonation, pace,  
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35 period and repetition) we can help to explain why complex change management  
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37 initiatives may stall or fail to gain traction. We believe that by understanding the  
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39 concept of rhythm as movement we can offer recommendations to organisations  
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41 about how to move forward and overcome challenges associated with progress. In  
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43 this paper we argue that more attention needs to be given to these experiences of  
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45 rhythm.  
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50 This paper describes the development of a framework to understand organisational  
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52 rhythm. Initially we present a review of relevant literature, from both within and  
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54 outside of the management domain, identifying a number of aspects associated with  
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56 rhythm. Secondly, experience of rhythm by the members of an organisation is  
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3 explored further in a case study, with six embedded units of analysis. We combine  
4 these aspects to present a theoretical framework for understanding rhythm in  
5 organisations.  
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### 10 11 12 13 **Exploring rhythm in organisations**

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16 The first step in our study was to use literature, which discusses rhythm aspects to  
17 guide our case study research. The focus of this research are the mechanisms within  
18 the organisation and the motion experienced by employees. These mechanisms are  
19 probably influenced by external factors, but are not included in this study as we  
20 prioritise internal mechanisms, which managers can influence and manage more  
21 directly. Our focus was on deepening our understanding of the mechanics of rhythm  
22 rather than identifying antecedents or consequences of changes in rhythm. It became  
23 apparent that a conceptually agreed meaning of rhythm did not exist. We identified  
24 eight aspects, which are described below.  
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#### 36 37 *Period*

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40 Period is time in a chronological sequence of events. Well-known periods are those  
41 of the day and night or the seasons. A more managerial view focuses on phases of  
42 development such as lifecycles. De Geus (1997) suggests that companies die  
43 prematurely because their managers focus on economic activities of producing goods  
44 and services, and they forget that organisations are a community of humans. Probst  
45 and Raisch (2005) explore 'premature aging syndrome' where stagnating growth,  
46 tentative change and weak leadership can lead to an accelerated lifecycle. Both of  
47 these studies highlight the sequential nature of phases and periods but inconsistency  
48 in the duration resulting from organisational factors.  
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3 There is a long history of work organising around the seasons of the year and work  
4 focusing on clock time. This perspective takes into account natural rhythms of the  
5 environment as they interact with organisational productivity and originates from the  
6 industrial revolution (Heffen van et al., 1996). For example, seeding, growing and  
7 harvesting; get up, eat and sleep determined the intensity of the work. With the  
8 industrial revolution, work was divided into units of time (Pearson, 2009). This  
9 created a completely different, more managerial approach to labour - the clock  
10 became important as a means to render time visible and concrete (Yakura, 2002).

11  
12 Other work considers our natural body cycles, where periods of high performance  
13 activity can be better utilised. People are in one part of a day (the day) much more  
14 active than in another (the night) and a period of inactivity is reflected in many  
15 physical functions, such as body temperature, digestion, blood pressure. Preferably a  
16 period of activity is offset with a period of inactivity (Siffre, 1984).

17  
18 The concept of time-periods demonstrates the cyclical nature of human beings at a  
19 micro level, however, if we take the view that a substantial influence on  
20 organisational behaviour comes from the members of the organisation, this can help  
21 us in understanding organisational movement at a more macro level. This research  
22 suggests that organisational activity occurs in an iterative process where the motions  
23 of the organisation repeat. We might draw from this that intervention into rhythm, or  
24 the implementation of change needs to take advantage or consider these natural  
25 phases to maximise organisational effectiveness.

### 26 27 *Change capacity*

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29 The concept of change capacity is defined as “a capacity of adaptation and pro-  
30 action” (Soparnot, 2011). Widely, it refers to multiple facets of an organisation’s ability

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3 to accommodate large-scale organisational change, but in terms of rhythm it  
4 represents the properties of an organisation whereby change activities may be  
5 slowed down, facilitated or accelerated according to the organisation's resources and  
6 capabilities. These include properties such as agility, learning and development  
7 provision and innovativeness of organisations (Soparnot, 2011).  
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15 Gersick (1994) describes pacing strategic change in his evaluation of the duration of  
16 programs, plans or activities. This included a rating of quality, financial outcome, time  
17 and deadlines. This research shows that time and duration are important factors for  
18 improving strategic development.  
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25 Numerous studies on change fatigue highlight the consequences of overloading  
26 employees with too much change (Tucker et al, 2014). It acknowledges that there are  
27 limits to what can be achieved in a particular time period.  
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### 31 *Planning*

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35 Traditional time management is based on dividing the time conveniently into tasks.  
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37 Time management is also of interest with discussions of burnout and absenteeism  
38 (Sabelis, 2003). An increased workload concerns both working at a high pace and  
39 also working with tight deadlines.  
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45 In several articles, time is very important and rhythm describes how time is  
46 experienced. Yakura (2002) discusses the power of timelines and measuring time for  
47 allocating, scheduling, and synchronizing activities. Van de Ven and Poole (2005)  
48 also describe how the timing of events creates a structure to organisational life from  
49 which we can judge change (or stability).  
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3 Time is an important aspect of change progression and much research has focused  
4 on the non-linear experience of time (e.g. Ancona et al 2001; Orlikowski and Yates,  
5 2002), however, much of this research does not address the experienced movement  
6 in activities. Czarniawska (2004) discusses the interplay of Kairotic and Chronological  
7 timing that needs to be studied in organizing. Chronological time refers to clock time  
8 – time that can be measured – seconds, minutes, hours, years and Kairotic time  
9 measures moments and refers to the right moment. According to Czarniawska (2004)  
10 it is most likely that Kairotic time cannot be directly experienced; it must be created.  
11 Staudenmayer et al (2002) found that change occurred only after some event altered  
12 the accustomed daily rhythms of work and therefore positions temporal shift as a  
13 triggering mechanism for change. These rhythm-altering events appear synonymous  
14 of Czarniawska's (2004) Kairotic important events. What is not clear here though is  
15 how we can make use of these events, or predict their occurrence without the level of  
16 abstraction required to understand Kairotic time. The literature on organizational  
17 change, we argue, is not sufficient to understand the nuances of this movement.

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37 We draw from these literatures that there are external, physical principles, which are  
38 important for planning (Senge et al, 2000). One principle is that there is a maximum  
39 speed at which something can be done; for example, the time between planting and  
40 harvesting is an essential and non-compressible time. There will always be a time-  
41 line, but good planning alone is not enough to create momentum.

### 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 *Cycles*

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52 Rhythm is also discovered in the theories of the learning organisation: growth,  
53 potential and learning ability. Lievegoed (1993) and Greiner (1998) mention the leaps  
54 made by (young) organisations to adapt and grow. The model of Greiner indicates  
55 that growth depends on the continuous improvement of the quality and production in  
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3 the broadest sense as an iterative cycle of development. Similarly 'Kaizen' (Imai,  
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5 2002), is based on the conviction that organisational success depends on continuous  
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7 cycles of step-by-step improvement.  
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10 In change management literature, Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish between  
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12 'episodic change' (non-frequent, discontinuous and intended) and 'continuous  
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14 change' (evolved and accumulated). Like life cycle theories, change has an event  
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16 sequence of start-up, grow, harvest, termination, and start-up again (Weick and  
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18 Quinn, 1999).  
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### 20 21 22 *Pulse* 23

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25 In particular, growth processes are often described as following a pre-programmed  
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27 pattern, for example, heart muscle tissue moves according to a built-in rhythm of  
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29 about 100 beats per minute. This is relevant to organisations as a metaphor for  
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31 organisational behaviour. The pulse is created by the heart rhythm representing the  
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33 life-blood of the organisation. The pumping of blood is the trigger for other biological  
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35 events to occur, e.g. breathing; it is this rhythm that guides the organisation.  
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39 Namenwirth (1987) describes culture as a pendulum motion. Dominant images and  
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41 values change during the period that they are dominant. Culture is not so much  
42  
43 designed but stems from and interactions with society. Rhythm is described as a  
44  
45 cyclic motion and as variation between important and not important problems. The  
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47 concept of pulse suggests regularity and routine movement, a regular surge, which  
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49 pushes movement forward which is unrelenting and essential.  
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### 52 53 *Load (and recovery)* 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 There are many rhythms in sport, such as alternation between warming-up, activity  
4 and cooling-down. Load and recovery belong together. If the load is too large or the  
5  
6 body recovers insufficiently from physical effort, then injury may result. In addition  
7  
8 there is also a psycho-emotional aspect to relaxation and recovery. In preparation for  
9  
10 training or competition, a resting moment, is a moment of reflection. Research in this  
11  
12 area highlights the importance of recovery as well as effort (Schmiky, 2001).  
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### 16 17 *Coordination*

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20 In many sports you see controlled and coordinated work. For example in rowing: the  
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22 muscles of eight people in peak condition have at the first strokes almost as much  
23  
24 power as a small car. But if the rowers are not rowing in a controlled and coordinated  
25  
26 way, then the boat rocks and jerks and a lot of power gets lost. To prevent this, a  
27  
28 leader clocks the strokes and determines the rhythm (Poels, 2006). This reminds us  
29  
30 of the collective nature of change; the need for synchronisation in rhythm among  
31  
32 organisational members.  
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### 36 37 *Continuity*

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39 Learning occurs in a continuous cycle. People take action, observe the results and  
40  
41 draw conclusions about it, think, choose a new measure to learn and then go back to  
42  
43 the action stage (Senge, 2000). Senge concluded that there are many individual  
44  
45 learning cycles. Developmental growth occurs in phases and 'growth spurts' where  
46  
47 certain physical components of the body (e.g. height) may suddenly develop. The  
48  
49 rate of growth during these 'spurts' is not sustainable and they are followed by a  
50  
51 pause whilst other developmental processes catch up (e.g. cognitive development,  
52  
53 puberty). Similarly, we can see that most change initiatives follow a generic cycle: the  
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55 activities seem to catch up on each other for a while, numerous initiatives or plans  
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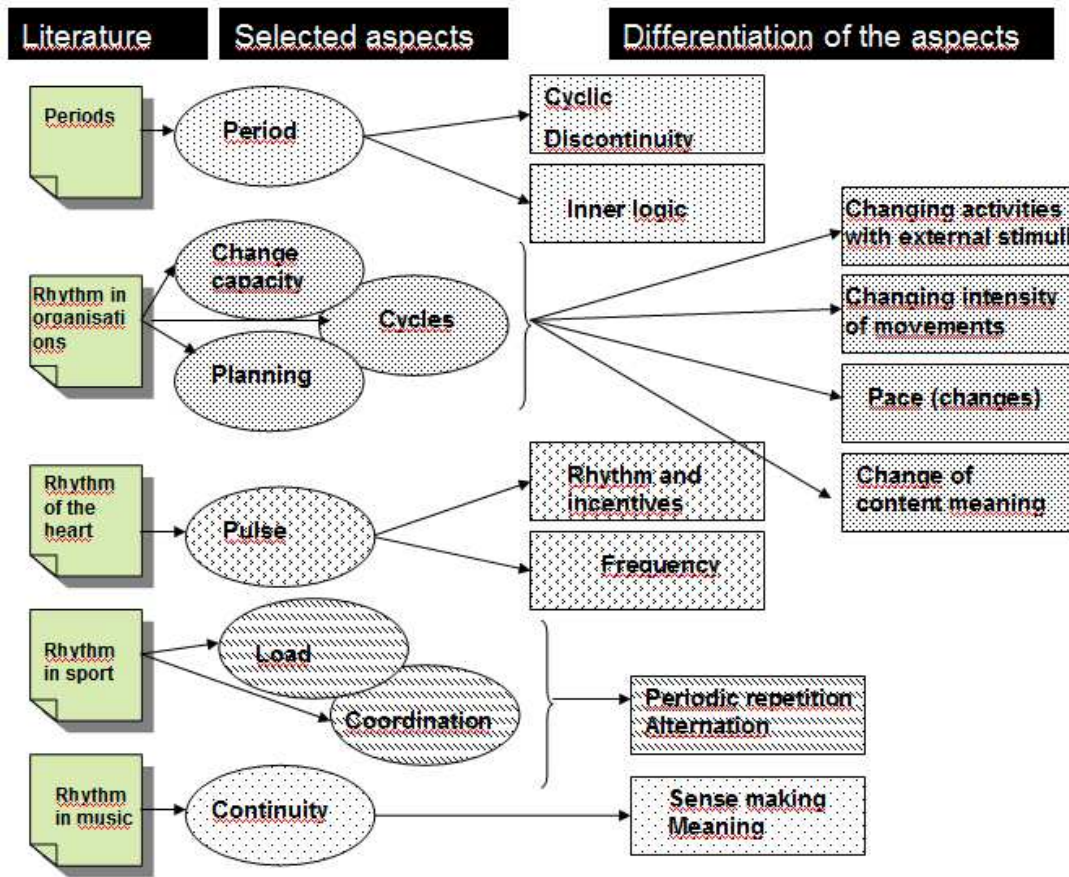
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3 come together and give the perception that a sudden leap in progress has occurred,  
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5 but then appears to stall whilst other system components realign themselves before  
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7 continuing.  
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10 In music terms 'rhythm' is the collective name for all music in motion: size, cadence,  
11  
12 pace, etc. Pace, cadence and size are pretty well describable e.g. accelerando,  
13  
14 adagio, crescendo and decrescendo (increase and decrease in strength). Music is a  
15  
16 continuous movement. A paused movement is harmful as a break in the melody  
17  
18 (Kop, 1974). This area of research shows that movements make up an overall flow  
19  
20 and momentum. Pauses in activity are part of the rhythm, not an absence of rhythm.  
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### 24 *Summary*

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27 Figure 1 presents a summary of the selected aspects of rhythm, which we have  
28  
29 described above. Despite a wide variety of literature, which has addressed rhythm in  
30  
31 some way, there remains, as yet, little research that has focused on the experience  
32  
33 of rhythm from the perspective of organisational members themselves, and no  
34  
35 comprehensive model, which describes organisational rhythm during change,  
36  
37 incorporating all of these aspects. In order to develop a theoretical framework of  
38  
39 organisational rhythm, we explored the experience of rhythm further in a case study  
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41 of organisational change. The different aspects of rhythm, which we have identified  
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43 here, guided our exploration.  
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### 48 **Figure 1 Aspects of rhythm from the literature**

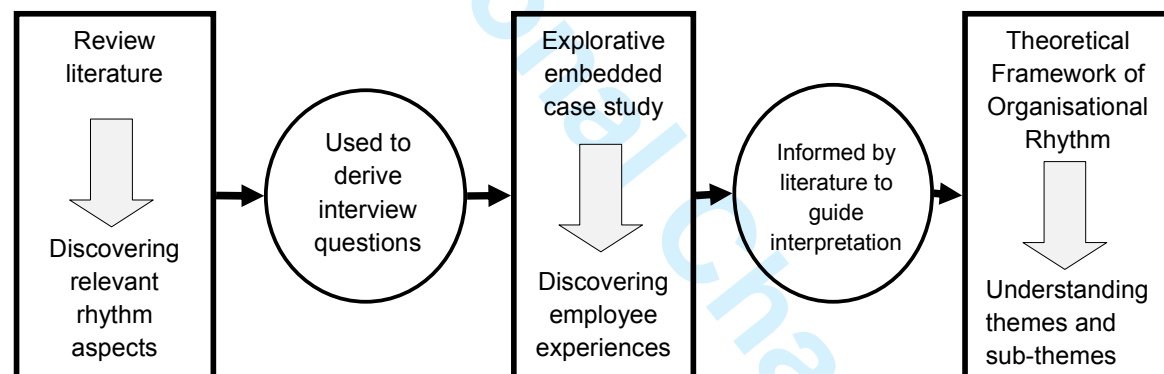


## Research design

These aspects of rhythm identified above formed the basis for conducting a case study analysis of six units of the Medical Discipline Colleges (MDCs), in the Netherlands, as they were restructured and transferred between ministerial departments, over a 14-month period (described below). Whilst our literature review above identifies lots of theorisation on the concept of rhythm, none of this adequately considers the lived experience of organisational members during organisational change. It is from this perspective that we wish to explore the concept of organisational rhythm, combining what we already know from literature with a more detailed understanding of the experience of workers, told through their own stories and narratives (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Silverman, 2013). In order to achieve this

we use the literature to inform our study design and adopt an iterative approach to the analysis of our data (Tracy, 2013). Figure 2 shows the process of developing the framework, using the aspects of rhythm identified above to derive an interview schedule and guide discussions with employees about rhythm within their organisation. We combined the findings of the case study analysis with the literature to guide interpretation, eventually resulting in a theoretical framework of organisational rhythm, which we present in figure 4.

**Figure 2 Research design for the development of a framework to understand organisational rhythm**



#### *Data collection*

The data set consists of correspondence, reports and tapes of the meetings of the transition working group, diaries from contacts related to the organisational change over approximately 14 months and interviews with 26 employees (all participants were interviewed a number of times during this period). Experiences of rhythm were discussed with all employees in individual interviews and group interviews. The

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3 interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 1.5 and 4 hours each. Roles of  
4  
5 the employees included: chairman (6), secretary/associate secretary (11), and  
6  
7 administrative employees (9). 16 were male, and 10 female; with an average age of  
8  
9 40 years.  
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11  
12 Interviews were spread across the 14-month period. A member of the research team  
13  
14 was in regular contact with the organisation and kept in touch with participants  
15  
16 between interviews to keep abreast of daily and weekly changes. From this in-depth  
17  
18 relationship with participants, the researcher was able to build trust and a collective  
19  
20 understanding evolved of what organisational rhythm consisted of. Analysis of the  
21  
22 data was therefore very much intertwined with these on-going discussions allowing  
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24 the research team constant feedback and clarification directly from participants.  
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### 28 29 *Data analysis*

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32 We adopted an iterative analysis process, which allowed us to alternate between the  
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34 inductive emergence of themes from the data (emic) and an etic use of existing ideas  
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36 and explanations from the literature (Tracy, 2013). The interviews were transcribed  
37  
38 and analysed in conjunction with the other data sources. The first stage in the  
39  
40 analysis approach was an initial coding of experiences related to rhythm or  
41  
42 descriptions provided by participants about rhythm in their organisations. We gave  
43  
44 close attention to the language used by participants to describe the movement and  
45  
46 flow of activity. A second level of analysis identified patterns and synthesised themes  
47  
48 found in the initial coding (see figure 3). During this process, we kept in mind the  
49  
50 aspects identified in the literature review and similarities, differences, and previously  
51  
52 unmentioned aspects of rhythm were noted. By combining this interpretive creativity  
53  
54 with our existing theoretical knowledge we remained close to our research objectives  
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56 (Tracy, 2013). We used analytical memos to develop a loose analysis outline (Bryant  
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3 and Charmaz, 2010; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Tracy, 2013), which we then used to  
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5 revisit the data in a more top-down, confirmatory manner. This method is a reflexive  
6  
7 process where our understanding could be progressively refined to incorporate our  
8  
9 emerging insights (Tracy, 2013).  
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### 11 12 13 14 15 16 **Empirical context**

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18 The Medical Discipline Colleges (MDCs) are funded to ensure the standard of  
19  
20 professionalism and quality of practice of medical practitioners (physicians, dentists,  
21  
22 midwives). There are six MDCs in the Netherlands: five regional and one national,  
23  
24 and each deals with citizen appeals. Each MDC operates as a separate organisation;  
25  
26 however, as the change involves all six Colleges and their relationship to the  
27  
28 Ministries that empower them, we treat them as one single case study, with each  
29  
30 MDC representing an embedded unit within (Yin, 2007). By doing this we explored  
31  
32 themes as they emerged across units whilst still being able to contextualise the  
33  
34 overarching change management context.  
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39 Each MDC employs approximately 20 people with a juridical and/or administrative  
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41 role. In addition between 50-100 people work for the MDC on a voluntary basis (e.g.  
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43 physicians, dentists, midwives) and are assigned to participate when their expertise is  
44  
45 the topic of court proceedings.  
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49 The MDCs are state owned and are funded by a special law to organise people  
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51 working in professional health professions and regulate the quality of health in the  
52  
53 Netherlands by the Health Ministry. History showed that the work of the MDCs would  
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55 be more practically executed by the Ministry of Justice. Therefore the aim of this  
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57 change was to transfer the MDCs from the Health Ministry to the Ministry of Justice.  
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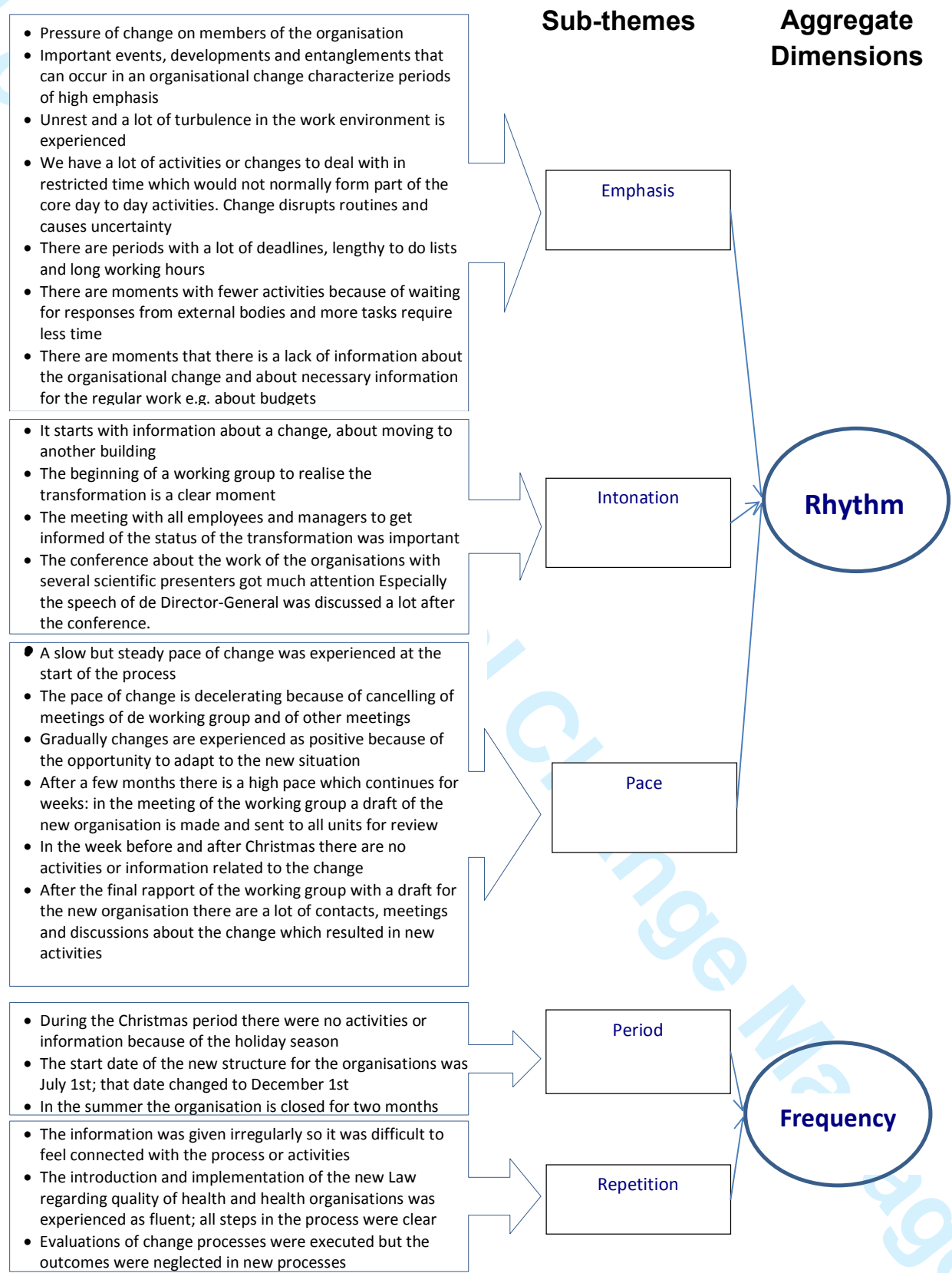


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3 The implementation of this transfer occurred simultaneously for all six units over a 14-  
4 month period in 2000 and 2001. Employees have new procedures, and new  
5 leadership. The implementation of the change was guided by a steering group, which  
6 included members of all six MDCs and members of both ministries. It was from this  
7 steering group that we were able to gain initial access to the organisations. Initially we  
8 recruited interview participants from this group and then extended to other members  
9 as the need became apparent. On-going contact with the steering group allowed us to  
10 maintain a grasp on the changing context and political climate which surrounded the  
11 change. Our focus here however, is on the internal rhythms of the organisations.  
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### 27 **Empirical findings**

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29 Our analysis of the data from this case study revealed five subthemes of  
30 organisational rhythm. Figure 3 presents the final iteration of our data structure,  
31 which arose from our analysis. It summarises the main codes, which emerged in the  
32 left-hand column and then how the relationships between these were drawn together  
33 to form sub-themes which we present in this section. These sub-themes converge  
34 into two aggregate dimensions of organisational rhythm, which will be described in  
35 the following section.  
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Figure 3 – Data Structure Initial Framework



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6 *Emphasis* represents the emphasis/pressure of change on members of the  
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8 organisation. It is the given level of rest/disorder and/or pressure/relaxation  
9  
10 experienced. Important events, developments and entanglements that can occur in  
11  
12 organisational change characterise periods of high emphasis. Unrest is where people  
13  
14 experience turbulence in their work environment and they have many activities to  
15  
16 deal with in restricted time in addition to their day-to-day activities. Numerous  
17  
18 deadlines, lengthy to-do lists and long working hours often characterize these  
19  
20 periods. The rest period, in contrast, is characterised by fewer activities, waiting for  
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22 responses from others; tasks are less time pressured.  
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27 The employees noted several periods with no emphasis, and several periods of  
28  
29 unrest or pressure. For example, employees described a time when the position was  
30  
31 unclear on a number of elements in the reconfigured organisation. During this time  
32  
33 there was a lack of information (on budgets or upcoming plans), or action required  
34  
35 while waiting for the ministries to make decisions. They were able to continue with  
36  
37 their normal day-to-day operational activities and the emphasis of the change was  
38  
39 low.  
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42  
43 *"But I find it quite difficult overlooking that whole period, to see a real clear line*  
44  
45 *in there. It's like this every time and some things were done entirely outside us.*  
46  
47 *And I remember that at some point there was another inter-departmental*  
48  
49 *working group established, where we did not participate.... But results, I have*  
50  
51 *never seen. The result was I think that letter that they had chosen for an*  
52  
53 *organisation variant. And then everything would come on hold again because*  
54  
55 *of all the protests regarding that letter. "*  
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6 *"Contact was very difficult, indeed non-existent sometimes for half a year. And,*  
7  
8 *well, every now and then we went to The Hague, to once again discuss items.*  
9  
10 *There were no reports of what was said. And then it would be discussed with*  
11 *the competent authority and then you never heard of it anymore. Designations*  
12 *of the members-professionals lasted endless, endless, endless."*  
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20  
21 *Intonation* provides information about the moments that mark the beginning of  
22 something. Intonation is about a start and an end and the recognition of milestones.  
23 For instance, the beginning of the communication between various groups in the  
24 transition, the first meeting of a working group. The tone is then indicated and it  
25 provides accents in a change or transition.  
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33 *"It starts with a moment that probably someone says we should have been*  
34 *moving to another building, Yes, first we had to move in the summer, and then*  
35 *in February-March and then again now (Autumn). The date was pushed back*  
36 *quite a lot, so at one point I thought it will be, you know, the well-known story*  
37 *of that little boy who calls ' the wolf is there, the wolf is there ', and then after a*  
38 *while you don't pay attention to that.*  
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46 Not being aware of upcoming milestones, or the constant shifting of key events,  
47 which mark an intonation is not optimal for communication. The employees indicated  
48 that they need this kind of information.  
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3 Pace is about the speed in which actions are performed and the speed in which  
4 actions succeed one another (accelerate and decelerate, high speed or low speed,  
5 interruptions of speed).  
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10 On some occasions, employees described a slow but steady pace of change.  
11  
12 Change at a slower pace allowed employees more time to adapt to new processes  
13 and understand the changes, but they were also sometimes not aware of the  
14 importance or priority of change – there is a danger that too lengthy periods of slow  
15 paced change lead to detachment and loss of coherence in the change progress and  
16 inertia.  
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24 *"Gradually everything changes a bit, nothing remains the same.... I am partly*  
25 *aware of the changes, but it comes gradually. And of course, the introduction*  
26 *of research in the processes has also contributed to that."*  
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32 At other times, employees talked about needing to increase the pace of change, or to  
33 take swift decisions and implement changes quickly to break established patterns. An  
34 employee tasked with some parts of the change implementation talks about how  
35 following a period of slow paced change they needed to 'up the dosage' of change to  
36 avoid employees overthinking the changes and reacting negatively.  
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44 *"I myself am the initiator of a number of changes. In my opinion and with my*  
45 *experience it is necessary that you dose organisational change because*  
46 *people always are reluctant, that's just human. People strongly stick to what*  
47 *they know and are always wary of the unknown. One of my tasks is to try to*  
48 *get people to break their established patterns."*  
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55 Long periods of fast paced change are, however, not desirable, they are typically  
56 associated with uncertainty and stress for employees.  
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6 *Period* is about the period in which a phenomenon takes place, or the course of  
7  
8 events during a certain period. The change is mapped on to existing organisational  
9  
10 rhythms and daily activities must adapt to the change activities and the new way of  
11  
12 working.

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14  
15 Not every period (week, month, etc.) is equally suitable for employees to be  
16  
17  
18 adaptable for the change process.

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20  
21 *"We thought July 1st is the date. That date changed to December 1st, well,*  
22  
23 *then things were not arranged and the members were not appointed. But*  
24  
25 *during those months there were no activities... In the summer the 'tent'*  
26  
27 *[judicial court] is closed for two months. In that period organising sessions is*  
28  
29 *much more work than there are effective outcomes. Luckily you have enough*  
30  
31 *time to arrange everything, when a process is started. On the other hand we*  
32  
33 *postponed activities because some members were not yet appointed."*  
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40 *Repetition* indicates how often a phenomenon takes place during a period of time  
41  
42 and gives information about re-use of processes.

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45 Where processes are reused, there should be some continuity and consistency of  
46  
47 enactment to ensure organisational learning and reduce duplication. It was often  
48  
49 reported by employees that similar issues, raised by different groups, were tackled in  
50  
51 isolation, often following the same decision making process but achieving different  
52  
53 results. Where there is a perceived lack of awareness within the system, this was  
54  
55 frustrating and viewed as time wasting.  
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3        *"Well. I find it quite difficult to overlook that whole period to see a real clear line*  
4        *[of consistency] in there. It's like every time this was once again raised and on*  
5        *another moment this was executed without informing us of the process. And I*  
6        *remember that at some point another inter-departmental working group was*  
7        *established, but the same people were not involved."*  
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15        Repetition also refers to the frequency of evaluation or 'take stock' activities during  
16        the change process. These activities are essential for the learning and progress of  
17        the change; however, they were also viewed as 'holding up' progress when they  
18        occurred in conjunction with a period of high intonation or fast pace. Evaluation is a  
19        key repeated process, which initiates the next iteration of change but can also lead to  
20        'taking a step backwards' and 'doing things over and over'.  
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### 32        **Theoretical framework of organisational rhythm**

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35        The aim of this research was to develop a theoretical framework from which  
36        discussions and examination of organisational change rhythms can occur. We are  
37        interested in how employees experience these rhythms and how this impacts their  
38        involvement with organisation change. Five themes emerged from the data  
39        (involved above), and these become central to our theoretical model of  
40        organisational rhythm. Guided by the literature we argue that two of them (period and  
41        repetition) relate more to the sequence and order of the change, the dates, times,  
42        factual and commonly reported aspects of organisational rhythm. In our framework,  
43        together we refer to these as *frequency*. The term frequency describes the number of  
44        times that something takes place during a unit of time. Frequency aspects of  
45        organisational change are commonly considered in organisations during change,  
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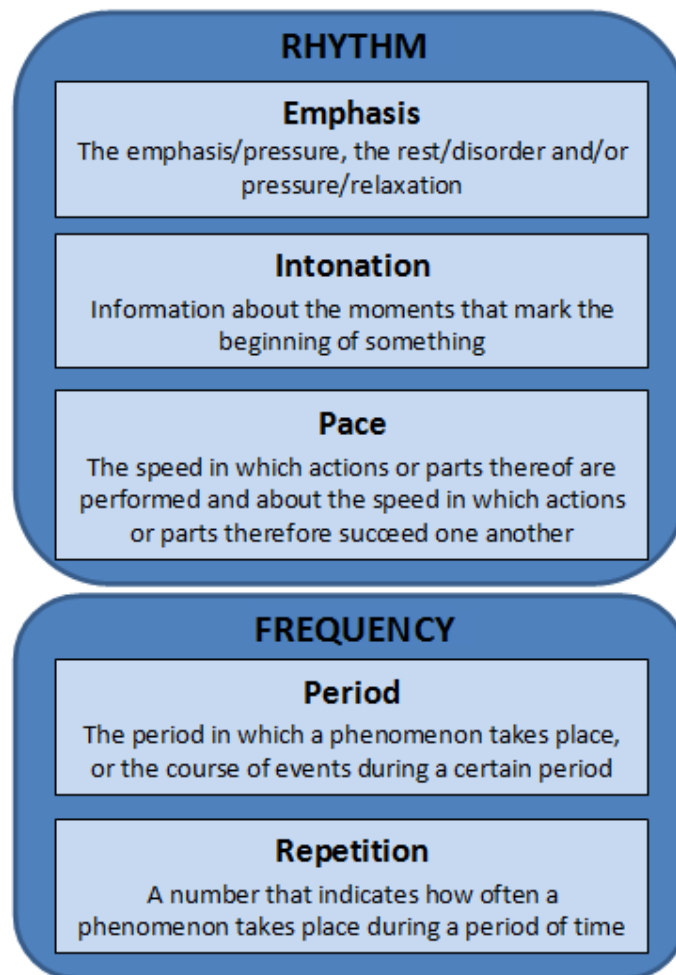
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3 dates, times, durations, the course of events, the phases we will go through, the  
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5 number of times the steering group will meet, how long it will take to move into the  
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7 next cycle of change, and so on. Whilst we consider these to be an important aspect  
8  
9 of organisational rhythm, we also argue that there is more to understanding rhythm  
10  
11 than frequency alone.  
12

13  
14 Three of the subthemes, which we identified (emphasis, intonation and pace),  
15  
16 represent a more narrative form of rhythm. These aspects of rhythm are directly  
17  
18 related to the movement of change, the changes in activity level, the intensity and the  
19  
20 focus of activity during change. About these aspects of rhythm, relatively little is  
21  
22 known. These aspects of rhythm represent the undulations and variation in getting  
23  
24 from A to B. They demonstrate that the journey is not consistent and certain, but  
25  
26 instead it is perpetuated with disorder, pressure, and acceleration, as well as restful  
27  
28 and restorative times. These sub-themes we describe together as '*Rhythm*'. The term  
29  
30 rhythm is chosen for the regularly alternating movement in a change process.  
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36 Figure 4 summarises the five sub-themes, which form our theoretical framework for  
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38 organisational rhythm. The framework for organisational rhythm can make a positive  
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40 contribution to the results of organisational change by anticipating the movement of  
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42 the change.  
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Figure 4 – Theoretical framework of Organisational Rhythm



### Discussion

In this paper we have developed a theoretical framework from which organisational change rhythms can be studied. In order to study rhythm effectively, we must first understand how it might be experienced in organisations. Our theoretical framework makes a number of contributions to the study of organisational change.

Firstly, by studying the experiences of organisational rhythm from the perspective of organisational members, through our empirical data from our case study we sought to understand the stories and experiences of workers in their own words. In doing this

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3 we were able to focus on the interconnection between organisational activity and  
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5 employee experiences. We found that where employee engagement with change  
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7 was lacking or where they experienced frustration with change, these situations could  
8  
9 be interpreted as errors in rhythm. Our research showed that the rhythm aspect of  
10  
11 emphasis decreases during a long implementation of change. The research showed  
12  
13 also that intonation is especially connected with communication related to the  
14  
15 change, but also with learning or training events e.g. a conference or workshop with  
16  
17 information about the change. And the research showed that unrest or pressure is  
18  
19 connected with high speed in change activities or in combination with (negative)  
20  
21 consequences for employees.  
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25 Secondly, we argue for an important distinction between components of rhythm,  
26  
27 which relate more to the sequence and order of change, these we refer to as  
28  
29 *frequency*, and components of rhythm that describe more the movement of change.  
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32 These we refer to as *rhythm* and argue that these components are not well  
33  
34 understood in existing literature. By making this important distinction we support the  
35  
36 work of Czarniawska (2004) by exploring the concept of Kairotic time in interpreting  
37  
38 the experience of employees during change. Our literature review revealed that many  
39  
40 studies focus on aspects of chronological time or timelines to describe rhythm in  
41  
42 organisational change (Czarniawska, 2004, Van de Ven and Poole, 2005; Yakura,  
43  
44 2002). Chronological time can be a useful tool for understanding the progression of  
45  
46 change, in seeing if change is 'on track' or progressing. However, here we explored  
47  
48 Kairotic time in the form of rhythm. Our research focused on the experienced  
49  
50 movement in activities, events, and communication that can be recorded and  
51  
52 examined during organisational change. Our framework of organisational rhythm  
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3 provides a starting point for examining Rhythm during organisational change in a  
4  
5 more comprehensive way.  
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7  
8 We argue that by exploring in more detail the sub-themes of rhythm (emphasis,  
9  
10 intonation, and pace,) we can help to explain why complex change management  
11  
12 initiatives may stall or fail to gain traction. The first step to manage rhythm is  
13  
14 identifying the rhythm of the change in all its different parameters (the sub-themes of  
15  
16 rhythm). For example, where employees express a frustration at waiting for  
17  
18 something to happen, this would indicate that there is not enough emphasis, or  
19  
20 where too many announcements and updates fail to lead to action, this would  
21  
22 suggest too much intonation, effectively crowding out the importance of these events  
23  
24 which set the tone and gain a connection with people. This shows the entangled  
25  
26 phenomenon between time and rhythm as present in the concept of Kairotic time  
27  
28 (Czarniawska, 2004).  
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33 We believe that by understanding the sub-themes of rhythm we can offer  
34  
35 recommendations to organisations about how to move forward and overcome  
36  
37 challenges associated with progress. By understanding these issues you can adapt  
38  
39 rhythm of the change to the natural rhythm of the organisation (exhibited through its  
40  
41 employees), for example by increasing the emphasis you support the balance  
42  
43 between rest and unrest creating a less stressful momentum in change. Appreciating  
44  
45 organisational rhythm in this way could allow opportunities to maximise impact by  
46  
47 taking advantage of significant moments. Searching for the 'right time' in change  
48  
49 management goes against the norms of the literature which traditionally positions  
50  
51 change management as being intent on chronology: masterplans, timelines,  
52  
53 deadlines and progress meetings (Gersick, 1994; Tucker et al, 2014; Yakura, 2002).  
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57  
58 *Managing Organisational Rhythm*  
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3 One question, which remains, is to what extent organisational rhythm can be  
4 managed? In conducting this research we make the assumption that organisational  
5 rhythm can be managed to some extent but we did not examine any interventions  
6 into rhythm in this study. Learning how to cope with and react to rhythm, and having  
7 an understanding of what to expect in the course of change, we hope will be  
8 beneficial in supporting organisations that are undergoing significant change efforts.

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16 As a diagnosis facilitator, the framework of organisation rhythm can provide an  
17 assessment of rhythm and provide more sense of control of organisation change.

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21 We would argue that understanding organisational rhythm could help with the  
22 planning of organisational change. The framework of organisational rhythm can show  
23 the underlying mechanisms of change (such as the planning, delays and the  
24 positioning of communication moments) and including these aspects in the  
25 organisation activities influences the success of organisational change. From the  
26 findings of this research, we would speculate that by having a better understanding of  
27 the rhythms experienced by organisations, managers have another tool with which to  
28 make decisions about the amount of change and rate of change that the organisation  
29 might have the capacity to endure.

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42 Furthermore, we would proposition that where multiple changes (sequential or  
43 simultaneous) are considered by the organisation, being able to understand and  
44 manage organisational rhythm would make organisations better able to coordinate  
45 these efforts. Unlike previous studies, in this research we drew from both  
46 organisational and non-organisational related notions of rhythm as a concept (i.e.  
47 biology, music and sport) where the conceptualisation of rhythm is well developed  
48 and highlights aspects of rhythm previously not studied in the change management  
49 field. If we are to expand our understanding of rhythm to this broader notion, then we  
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3 might see that the ability to manage multiple rhythms, whilst requiring skill, might be  
4 possible. In music, we see how the individual tunes of multiple instruments come  
5 together to produce an orchestral chorus more beautiful than its constituent parts  
6 (Kop, 1974). In sport, we see how combining different rhythms in different parts of the  
7 body (e.g. swimming) can produce faster progress. Unfortunately, in this study we did  
8 not have the opportunity to study multiple change initiatives in our case study and  
9 therefore we can only offer this insight as a theoretical notion. We would strongly  
10 recommend that follow-up studies could explore this idea further with the aim to  
11 understanding how combinations of Rhythm might best be managed. Our framework  
12 provides a good basis for this work.  
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25 The subthemes of organisational rhythm determine the regularity with which change  
26 elapses. Our focus here was on identifying and describing organisational rhythm in a  
27 comprehensive way. In doing so, for clarity, we restricted our focus to rhythm as it is  
28 experienced *within* the organisation. We acknowledge that numerous external  
29 pressures will influence the experience of these rhythms— for example, shifts in the  
30 political landscape. We would encourage further research to examine this claim more  
31 fully and explore to what extent organisational rhythms are impacted by these  
32 pressures.  
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44 In this paper we have presented a framework for understanding organisational  
45 rhythm. It is hoped that by understanding organisational rhythm better, researchers of  
46 organisational change could explore how to utilise rhythm in advancing further work  
47 on understanding change momentum and promote employee involvement. We argue  
48 that studies which aim to study organisational rhythm must show an appreciation of  
49 all sub-themes of Organisational Rhythm.  
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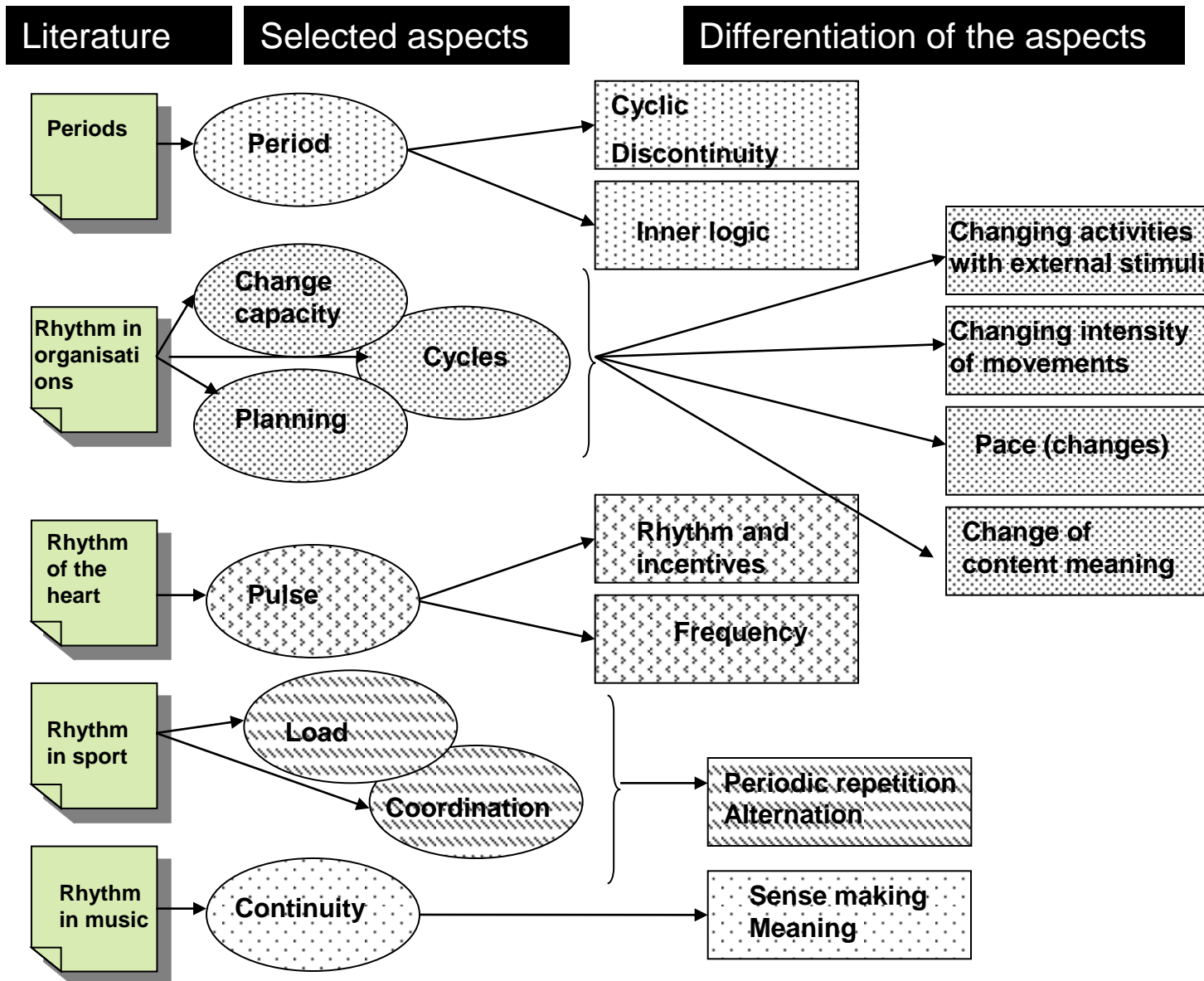
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# Figure 1 Aspects of rhythm from the literature



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# Figure 2 Research design for the development of a framework to understand organisational rhythm

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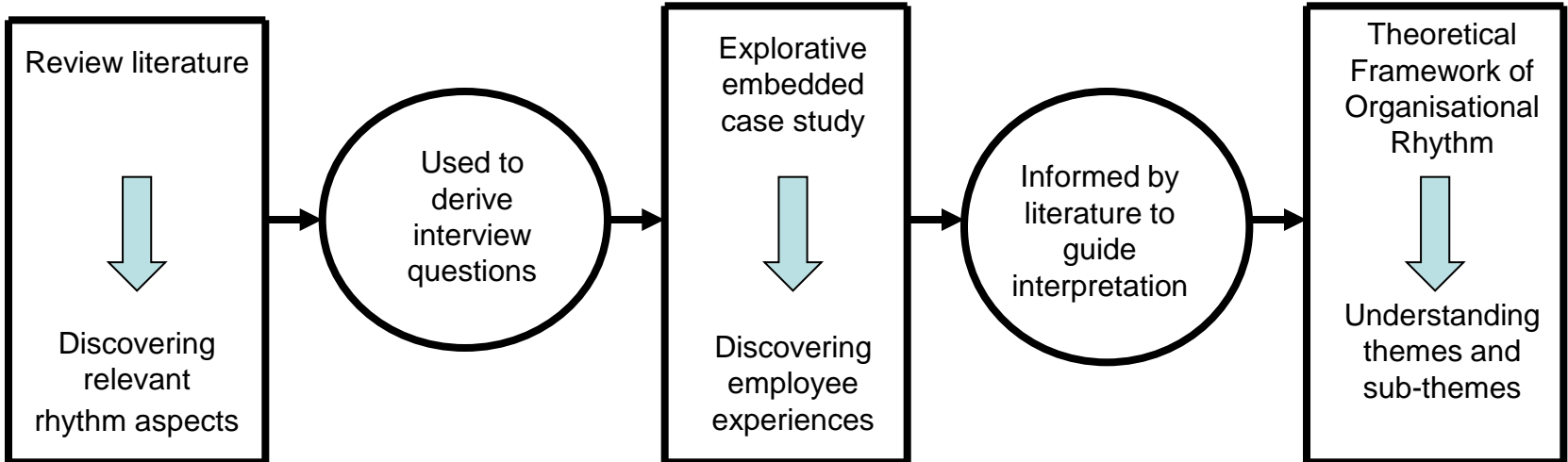
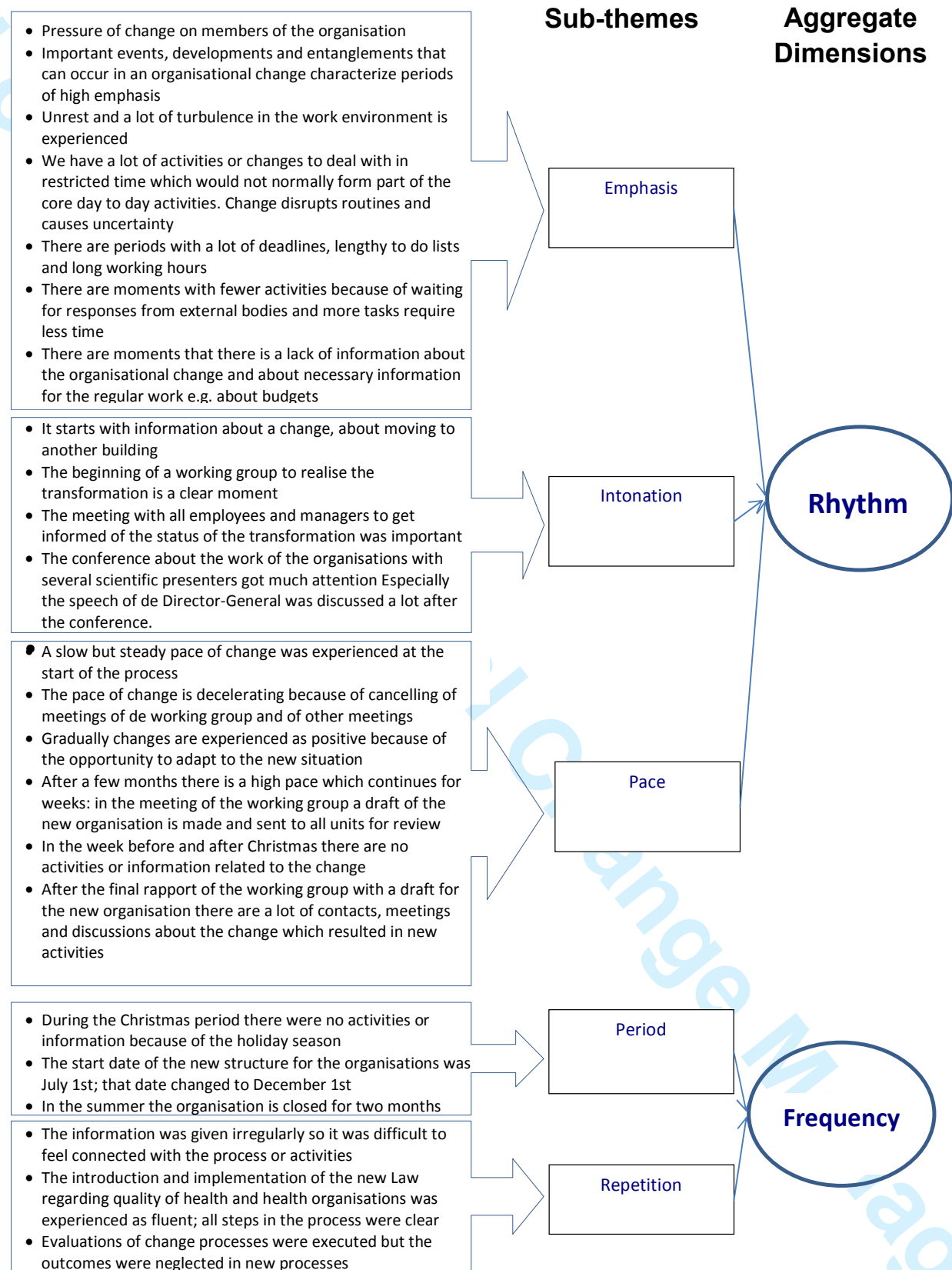


Figure 3 – Data Structure Initial Framework



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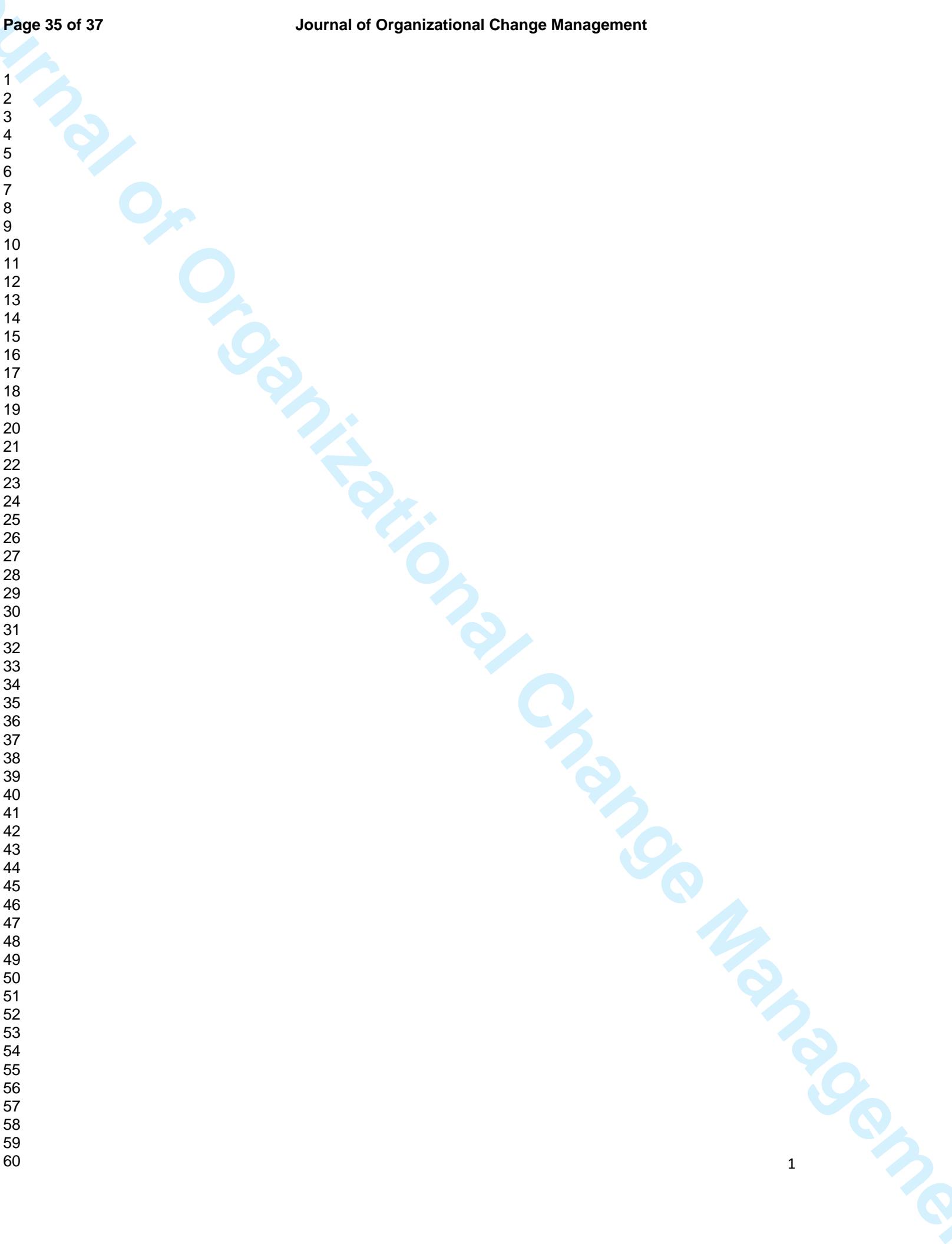
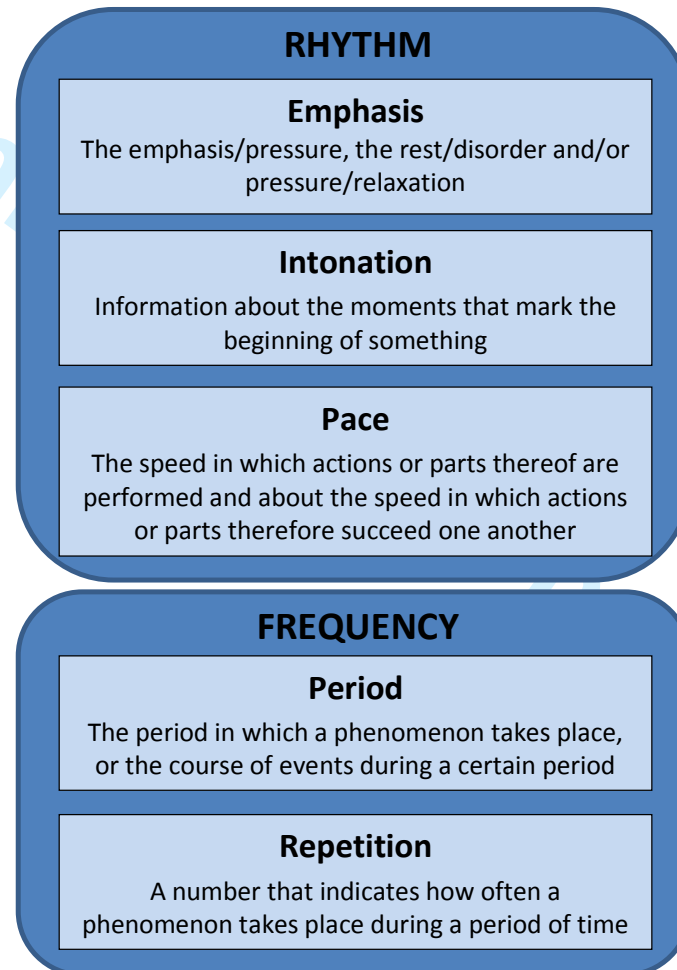


Figure 4 – Theoretical framework of Organisational Rhythm



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