

CECAN Webinar - Beyond the Ticking Clock: A New Way to Time Systemic Change

Tuesday 21st April 2026, 13:00 – 14:00 BST

Presenter: Dr Luke Roberts (CECAN Fellow)

Welcome to our **CECAN Webinar**.

All participants are muted. Only the Presenters & CECAN Host can speak. The webinar will start at **13:00 BST**.

Luke will speak for around 40 minutes and will answer questions at the end.

Please submit your questions at any point during the webinar via the Q&A box in the Zoom webinar control panel. You will also be able to 'upvote' questions.

Today's webinar will be recorded and made available on the CECAN website.


E Mail: cecan@surrey.ac.uk

Web: www.cecan.ac.uk

www.facebook.com/CECANEXUS

Twitter: [@cecanexus](https://twitter.com/cecanexus)





Beyond the Ticking Clock: A New Way to Time Systemic Change

Dr Luke Roberts
CECAN Fellow.

Thank you for
taking the time
to join and
participate
today.

- When I started the CECAN fellowship, I wanted to explore something that had bothered me:
- The “When” does change happen.
- Please do put comments and questions in the chat.

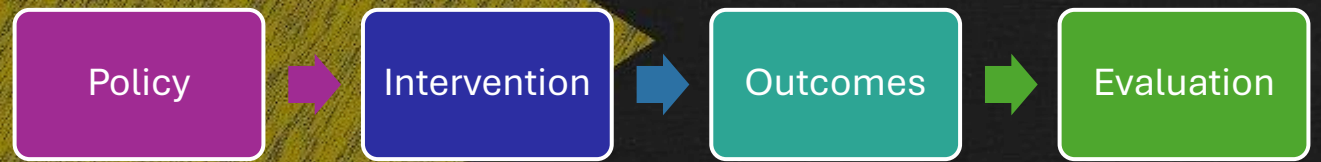
When we get the “when” wrong

When communities say “here we go again”

When change is dominated by a central system but fails to happen locally.

When we pretend we are changing or evaluating systems – the performance of change.

The challenge:-
Most Models of
change assume
time as linear,
i.e., one direction.



But when you
ask about the
lived
experience of
time

Time as a Recurring Pattern



Time as a Concertina



Time as Explosions



Time as a Dried Riverbed



Question:

- What metaphor best captures how time feels in the system you work in?

Participant Metaphors:

- Concertina at my organizations
- Fleeting (ie not enough of it!)
- Not where I work, but you made me think of time as quicksand - where things get stuck and sticky
- Cyclical & explosive
- Same s*1t, different academic year
- Controlled
- Constant movement, usually forwards
- Hamster wheel.
- circular and explosions
- Agree , scarcity metaphors
- Constant relay race - stop / start with no apparent end!
- All of them
- Urgent/time running out
- Oh yes hamster wheel!
- Agree with Nick on cyclical and explosive!
- Hamster wheel that gets faster and faster until the hamster tumbles
- time feels like an area in the garden that's sometime in shade some times in the sun
- Cyclical and fluctuating. Like you're spinning around a black hole and time gets warped as you do so depending on how close you are.
- time as relative (speed) based on the energies at work in the field at any specific point in personal and collective time.
- Relative - both too little and too slow
- Concertina compressed and expandable

What is a chronotype: The timescape for those in a particular type of system.

A chronotype is a temporal rhythm or pace that is distinct for a social timescape.

It is the institutional or community expression of a collective subjectivity of time.

Therefore: **Temporal Plurality** is multiple Chronotypes existing within a system of interest.



Dr Luke Roberts
(2024, 43-44).
Routledge.

Chronotypes and Pace- setters.

- When a system change is instigated, this is often done in a way that sets a pace.
- The pace-setter seeks to activate change in a system that fundamentally changes the system of interest.



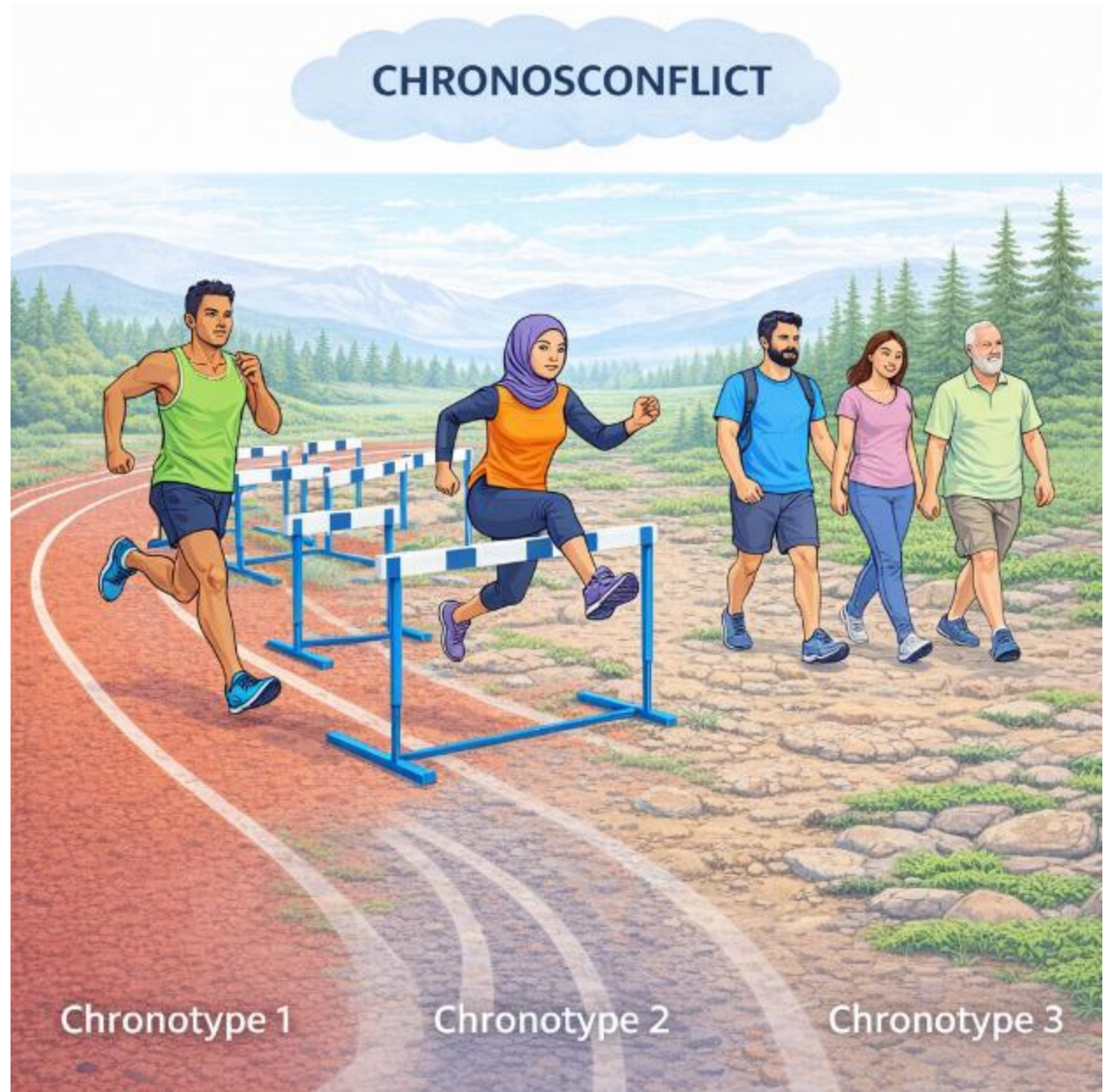
A chronsconflict

A Chronosconflict occurs when a chronotype exercises power pace-setter who's rhythm dominates other chronotypes within the system of interest.

This can include the dominating the subjective experience of time for different actors in the system.

Dominating the past, the present or future of other chronotypes in the system of interest.

The power of the pace-setter: Chronosconflict occurs when one chronotype becomes the pace-setter, and its rhythm defines what counts as success, urgency, or failure.



What happens
as a result of a
Chronosconflict:

Synchronous Emergence

Asynchronous Adaptation

Discreate Decoupling

Synchronised Emergence:

- is the state of Temporal Integration where the Pace-Setter's demand, the Evaluator's focus, and the system's internal Chronotypes are in synch.
- It occurs when the chronoconflict has been resolved—allowing the system to reach its Activation Threshold. In this state, the energy is fully available to power a genuine, self-sustaining transformation with the emergence of new possibilities.

PACE SETTER



EVALUATOR



CHANGE AGENT



COMMUNITY



Temporal
Integration

Synchronous Emergence

might

emergent

Asynchronized Adaptation

- **Asynchronised Adaptation** is the state of **Temporal Lag** created by the gap between the Pace-Setter's demand and the system's internal Chronotypes.
- It is a state in which the system is attempting to adjust, but the friction caused by this temporal gap consumes the energy needed to initiate a genuine transformation. The "Adaptation" consists of small changes made in an effort to bridge that gap; however, because it is asynchronized, the results are dislocated:
- They exist in the **Pace-Setter's Past,**
- The **Evaluator's Present,**
- and the **Chronotype's Future**

ASYNCHRONISED EMERGENCE:

Forward Momentum of Unbound Elements

PACE SETTER

Pace-Setter's Past
→ Future Vision



Pace-Setter's Future → Unbound Emergence

Evaluator's Present
(Assessment, not weaving)

EMERGENCE

Evaluator's Chrono
(Halted Assessment)

Change Agent's
Chronotype (Dissolved Attempt)

CHANGE AGENT

Community
(System internal Chrono)

COMMUNITY (System internal Chronotype)

Community

Evaluator's Present
(disconnected, but clear assessment)



Discrete Decoupling

- **Discrete Decoupling** is a systemic "masking" characterized by **Performative Compliance**.
- It occurs when an organisation or community creates a formal, visible layer of activity—**Information Pacing**—to satisfy the Pace-Setter's timeline and KPIs. Meanwhile, the actual, internal **Chronotype** remains unchanged. This is a survival mechanism designed to protect the system's internal energy from being destroyed by an incompatible external rhythm.

DISCRETE DECOUPLING:

NO SHARED VIABLE FUTURE

PACE SETTER

A Systemic "Masking" Characterized by Performative Compliance
A Survival Mechanism protecting the System's Internal Chronotype

Pace-Setter's Past
→ Demanding Compliance
with incompatible
External Rhythm



Decoupled Chronotypes exist as parallel
streams or loop back to re-emerge
at origin, no shared future

Pace-Setter's Future → Masked Information Pacing
(Visible Activity Layer)

Isolated Vortex

Evaluator's
Thread

**DECOUPLED
CHRONOTYPES**

Performative Compliance:
Visible Information Pacing Activity



MASKING LAYER

Evaluator's Chronotype
(Halted Assessment)

EMERGENCE

Discrete Decoupling

Change Agent's
Chronotype (Dissolved Attempt,
but Masked efforts)



CHANGE AGENT

Incompatible External Rhythm
is isolated to the Information
Pacing layer, protecting internal
energy from destruction.



COMMUNITY (System internal Chronotype)



ACTUAL INTERNAL CHRONOTYPE
(Unchanged, hidden layer for
energy preservation)

Thinking about
one system
you are
working in at
the moment?

- **When working on system change, which feels most familiar?**
- A. We're constantly being asked to move faster than feels possible
- B. The timing of change feels misaligned across different parts of the system
- C. Change is happening, but it's hard to make it visible or recognised
- D. Things feel broadly aligned and moving at roughly the right pace

Responses to Poll:

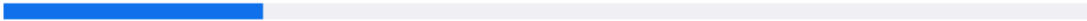
Webinar Poll

Webinar poll | 1 question | 37 of 48 (77%) participated


1. When working on system change, which feels most familiar? (Single choice)

37/37 (100%) answered

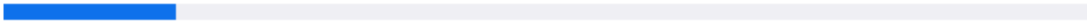
We're constantly being asked to move faster than feels possible (9/37) 24%



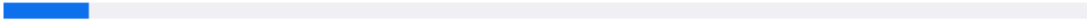
The timing of change feels misaligned across different parts of the system (19/37) 51%



Change is happening, but it's hard to make it visible or recognised (6/37) 16%



Things feel broadly aligned and moving at roughly the right pace (3/37) 8%



What does this mean for the way we think about change in systems?

System change fails less often because of *what* we do — and more often because of *when* we expect it to happen.

Power in systems is exercised not only through decisions, but through **pace-setting**.

Evaluation that ignores temporal plurality risks mistaking **misalignment** for **failure**.

Closing thoughts:

- *What I hope this has done is offer some insight into what many people experience, but often struggle to name, when engaging with the reality of change in complex systems.*
- *I don't see this as a finished model — I see it as a way of noticing patterns across systems, where timing quietly shapes effort, burnout, compliance, and change.*
- *The level of interest in this session suggests there is real potential for further development and application.*
- *So I see genuine opportunity here — across disciplines, sectors, and practice — to keep exploring how the timing of change affects what actually unfolds.*
- *I'm immensely grateful to Emma and to CECAN for this opportunity, and I'm very much looking forward to the conversation.*



Thanks for listening:

Email: Lukeroberts@Resolve-consultants.co.uk

Case-studies:
<https://www.resolve-consultants.co.uk/case-studies/>

- <https://www.cecan.ac.uk/blog/beyond-the-ticking-of-the-evaluation-clock-navigating-the-temporal-eco-system-of-policy-change/>
- <https://routledge.pub/Leading-Schools-and-Sustaining-Innovation>

