

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change

In the wake of disruption and disaster, cooperation among members of a collective is refocused on matters of status, membership and the formation of coalitions. In an important contribution to sociological theory, Hendrik Vollmer emphasizes the processes through which disruptions not only affect, but also transform social order. Drawing on Erving Goffman's understanding of framing and the interaction order, as well as from a range of insights from contemporary sociological theory and ethnographic, historical and organizational research, Vollmer addresses the dynamics of disaster and disaster response within the framework of a general theory of disruption and social order. It is proposed that the adjustment of cooperation in favour of coalition-forming strategies is robust in both informal and organized social settings and transcends the 'micro' and 'macro' approaches currently favoured by theorists. Offering a systematic sociological analysis of the impact of disruptiveness, this book investigates how punctuated cooperation precipitates social change.

HENDRIK VOLLMER is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Bielefeld University. He is Managing Editor of *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, one of Europe's leading sociological journals, and the author of numerous articles on sociological and organizational theory.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:
 Punctuated Cooperation
 Hendrik Vollmer
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
 Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City
 Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK
 Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
 New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107032149

© Hendrik Vollmer 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Vollmer, Hendrik, 1972–

The sociology of disruption, disaster and social change : punctuated
 cooperation / Hendrik Vollmer.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-03214-9 (hardback)

1. Social change. 2. Disasters – Social aspects. I. Title.

HM831.V65 2013

303.4 – dc23 2012050473

ISBN 978-1-107-03214-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to
 in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such
 websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| <i>List of figures and tables</i> | <i>page</i> vii |
| <i>Preface and acknowledgments</i> | ix |
| 1 Confronting disruptions: the nexus of social situations | 1 |
| 1.1 Events and experts | 4 |
| 1.2 Social scientists facing disruptions | 7 |
| 1.3 Crises and catastrophes | 9 |
| 1.4 Punctuated equilibrium | 12 |
| 1.5 Rules and exceptions | 15 |
| 1.6 Tracing trauma | 18 |
| 1.7 The nexus of social situations | 21 |
| 1.8 Framing disruptions | 24 |
| 1.9 Conclusion | 26 |
| 2 Framing situations, responding to disruptions | 28 |
| 2.1 The framing concept | 29 |
| 2.2 Participants | 33 |
| 2.3 Disruptions | 38 |
| 2.4 Responses | 43 |
| 2.5 Keys | 47 |
| <i>Signs</i> | 50 |
| <i>Symbols</i> | 51 |
| <i>Resources</i> | 52 |
| 2.6 Practical sense and punctuated cooperation | 56 |
| 2.7 Framing, strategies and fields | 62 |
| 2.8 Conclusion | 67 |
| 3 The social order of punctuated cooperation | 69 |
| 3.1 Containing participants | 71 |
| 3.2 Involvement in punctuated cooperation | 77 |
| <i>Engrossment</i> | 78 |
| <i>Rekeying</i> | 79 |
| <i>Practical sense and private deliberations</i> | 82 |
| <i>Emergent context</i> | 85 |
| <i>Transcendence</i> | 87 |
| 3.3 Endogeneity and selectivity | 90 |
| 3.4 Normalizing disruptions | 95 |
| 3.5 Towards change in strategies and fields | 102 |
| 3.6 Conclusion | 106 |
| | v |

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| vi | Contents | |
| 4 | Organizational stress, failure and succession | 107 |
| 4.1 | Formally organized cooperation | 108 |
| | <i>Formal expectations</i> | 109 |
| | <i>Keys</i> | 113 |
| | <i>Upkeying and downkeying</i> | 118 |
| 4.2 | Upkeying and downkeying organizational stress | 120 |
| | <i>Organizational stress and emergent order</i> | 123 |
| | <i>Threat-rigidity effects</i> | 125 |
| | <i>Rekeying punctuated cooperation</i> | 126 |
| 4.3 | ‘Nothing succeeds like succession’ | 129 |
| | <i>Socializing newcomers</i> | 130 |
| | <i>Enter: the successor</i> | 132 |
| | <i>Elementary contingencies</i> | 134 |
| | <i>Keys and coalitions</i> | 136 |
| | <i>The struggle for social capital</i> | 138 |
| 4.4 | Framing organizational failure | 139 |
| 4.5 | The high-reliability challenge | 145 |
| 4.6 | Conspicuous associations | 151 |
| 4.7 | Implications for organizational theory | 155 |
| 4.8 | Conclusion | 159 |
| 5 | Violence and warfare | 161 |
| 5.1 | Violent engagements | 163 |
| 5.2 | The cohesion and disintegration of military units | 169 |
| 5.3 | Hitler’s army | 174 |
| 5.4 | The multiple normalizations of warfare | 179 |
| 5.5 | Redistribution, domination and contention | 186 |
| | <i>Totalizing warfare</i> | 187 |
| | <i>Resistance and revolution</i> | 190 |
| | <i>Contingent dynamics of centralization</i> | 192 |
| 5.6 | Associating and stratifying across situations | 195 |
| 5.7 | Conclusion | 202 |
| 6 | Elaborating the theory | 204 |
| 6.1 | Tracing disruptiveness | 206 |
| 6.2 | Theorizing change in strategies | 213 |
| 6.3 | Successful strategies | 217 |
| 6.4 | Punctuated equilibrium and the successes of succession | 224 |
| 6.5 | Assembling empirical records | 227 |
| 6.6 | Framing the relational | 233 |
| 6.7 | Conclusion | 235 |
| | <i>References</i> | 238 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 269 |

Figures and tables

Figures

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 6.1 Varieties of disruptiveness | <i>page</i> 207 |
| 6.2 Tracing disruptiveness | 209 |
| 6.3 Disruptiveness and beyond | 210 |

Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2.1 Expectations and keys | 55 |
| 4.1 Formal laminations | 115 |
| 6.1 Expectations, keys and focus of strategies | 216 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:
Punctuated Cooperation
Hendrik Vollmer
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface and acknowledgments

My engagement with the topic of this investigation began with an intuition which, at that time, appeared to be simple enough: in responding to disruptive events, people award special attention to what other people do. When you do not know what you are facing, when you are uncertain about what to do and what to expect to happen next, following the lead given by others appears to be an almost natural and also somewhat reasonable response. I began to look for sociological intelligence supporting, specifying or, possibly, refuting this intuition.

In an initial collection of empirical material, I was primarily looking at organizations in critical situations, and, more particularly, at military organizations on battlefields, thinking that my general interest in the impact of disruptiveness could most effectively be pursued through an investigation of collectives at war. I was struck early on by how personal relationships among members of the organizations I was studying unequivocally appeared to win precedence over more formal aspects of organizational structures and processes. There appeared to be something structural about this kind of change, as organizations confronting disruptions became aggregations of primary groups, coalitions and networks, working much less like bureaucracies governed through formal rules and regulations. Members seemed to effectively redistribute their attention under disruptive circumstances, withdrawing attention from formal regulations, norms or roles and reinvesting attention into one another. This pattern promised to account for a good amount of the empirical findings. Accordingly, I was hopeful to translate, on this basis, my initial intuition about people's responses to disruptiveness into a more systematic sociological treatise.

The present work is the result of a sustained effort to bring about this translation and to accommodate a good deal of empirical intelligence available in prior sociological research about how collectives respond to disruptiveness. I found a wealth of interesting case studies and a multitude of conceptual leads, but ultimately no prior account would have allowed me to trace the effects of disruptiveness from people's

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:

Punctuated Cooperation

Hendrik Vollmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x Preface and acknowledgments

temporary responses and adjustments to mid- to long-term collective outcomes without an extensive use of theoretical extrapolation. As a consequence, what started out as an attempt to utilize an apparent convergence of observations in order to develop some seemingly obvious conceptual and empirical extensions quickly turned into a wrestling match with various theoretical concepts and approaches, none of which seemed by its own devices to do justice to the topic, to my initial intuition or to the empirical data which I confronted. Most importantly, I seemed utterly unable to systematically relate the individual and structural aspects of how collectives respond to disruptions and to articulate both kinds of aspects within a single sociological framework. As I was struggling with tentative solutions and with various packagings of theoretical and empirical narrative, trying to stick as much as possible to the exploratory style of discussing empirical cases which I had originally envisaged for the project, the result was more and more turning into an exposition of theory. Through all my efforts to address ‘bigger’ collective outcomes, this theory remained surprisingly ‘micro’, whether I was exploring single social situations, organizations or collectives in a state of war. Despite an academic training to the contrary, I became stuck with a sociology of disruption, disaster and social change that addresses both the small and big collective outcomes of exposure to disruptiveness in largely microsociological terms. I had not anticipated this and it took me a while to accept it.

Finalizing this text for publication, I have gained some confidence that the kind of sociology which the study has to offer improves on what, to me, has remained a very suggestive but disconcertingly dispersed set of sociological evidence, a scattering of diverse ideas and findings. The run of the project has played havoc with a good share of my academic socialization but it has, somewhat ironically, left my initial intuition intact. Any progress I now feel confident to claim depends on whether the study more robustly spells out the implications of the initial sociological intuition, whether it appropriately qualifies the convergence of empirical indications and, ultimately, on whether it renders the sociological intuition and the systematic issues associated with it more researchable.

Many people have commented on the project over the years and have provided valuable comments and directions. First and foremost, I would like to thank Jörg Bergmann, Bettina Heintz and Alex Preda for seeing this through as a post-doctoral thesis, my ‘Habilitation’. Andrew Abbott, Ruth Ayaß, Klaus Dammann, Wolf Dombrowsky, Jens Greve, Thomas Hoebel, Sven Kette, André Kieserling, Volker Kruse, Stefan Kühl, John Levi Martin, Christian Meyer, Sven Oliver Müller, Klaus Nathaus, Ole Pütz, Rainer Schützeichel, Annette Schnabel, Ulrike Schulz, Veronika

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-03214-9 - The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change:
Punctuated Cooperation
Hendrik Vollmer
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface and acknowledgments

xi

Tacke, Hartmann Tyrell, Harrison C. White and Hendrik Wortmann all provided helpful inputs at various points. I greatly benefited from interaction and engaging discussions among colleagues within the interdisciplinary research group Communicating Disaster located at the ZiF Centre for interdisciplinary research, Bielefeld University, for over twelve months in 2010 and 2011. This research group was organized by Jörg Bergmann, Heike Egner and Volker Wulf. Sarah Hitzler and Marén Schorch contributed immensely to making the group work on a day-to-day basis.

Christof Wehrsig read and discussed with me all parts of the manuscript through various stages of the project, and to him I am particularly thankful.

I would like to dedicate this work to Mars, who was born around the time that I started the project and who died two years before I was able to finish it. I miss him.