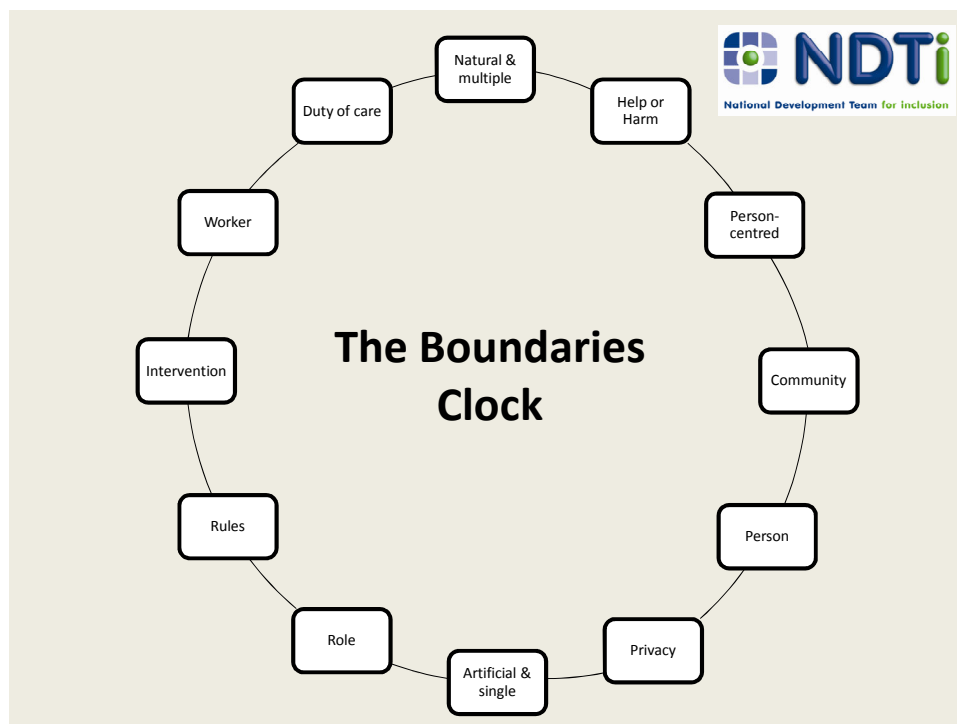


## The *Boundaries Clock* and Time Banks

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### Overview

The *Boundaries Clock* was introduced in a previous paper<sup>3</sup> to bring together the triple imperative to safeguard vulnerable people, maintain professional boundaries and advance social inclusion. It does not provide easy answers, but rather provides a systematic way to consider the issues and arrive at a defensible position. The initial paper is here followed up with a series of short papers<sup>4</sup> that apply the *Boundaries Clock* in given situations, thus demonstrating its utility, and assisting readers to develop sufficient fluency to apply the approach to new situations.



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<sup>3</sup> Bates P. 'Thinking about professional boundaries in an inclusive society', chapter 2 in Gilbert P (ed) (2010) *The Value of Everything* Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Further 'The *Boundaries Clock* and....' papers include L'Arche and a Community Circle, with others in development, such as Peer Support Workers and Befriending.

Time banks started in the USA twenty years ago<sup>5</sup> and have been flourishing in the UK for over a decade. A Time Bank is a network that connects people in the neighbourhood who help each other out, founded on the principle that everyone is an asset and has something to contribute. Through reciprocity, participants connect with each other and build relationships as for every hour you spend helping someone you will earn an hour time credit that you can spend on having someone doing something for you.

Time Banks aim to build an infrastructure of trust and caring that can strengthen families and communities, enabling individuals and communities to become more self-sufficient. Time Banks are often led by a broker who acts as a coordinator and facilitates the exchange of time and services between members.

The second author coordinates a time bank that aims to reach the whole community whilst particularly engaging with vulnerable adults, some of which have mental health issues.

Time Banks are an appropriate area for the *Boundaries Clock* to be employed, as the deliberate intention to generate informal community relationships, whilst receiving some support and perhaps funding from statutory agencies makes it a rich ground for ambiguity.

### **The *Boundaries Clock***

Six pairs of competing priorities are set in opposition to one another to form the twelve-point *Boundary Clock*<sup>6</sup>. Individual case studies or service arrangements can then be placed on the clockface and the twelve vantage points used in turn to generate ideas for shaping practice in an individual situation. As each of the twelve viewpoints is merely an entry point to the clockface area, the issues that arise inevitably overlap here and there, but the twelve points frame a systematic discussion.

The following pages present the issues in turn. First is a one-sentence summary<sup>7</sup> of the general viewpoint for each of the twelve viewpoints on the clockface. Then an indented paragraph offers a set of expansive questions that apply this general viewpoint to the context of Time Banks. Finally, we offer some ideas about how a Time Bank might resolve these matters into guidance.

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<sup>5</sup> Cahn, Edgar S. "Time dollars, work and community: from 'why?' to 'why not?'" *Futures* 31 (1999): 507.

<sup>6</sup> All metaphors have limited value and can carry unwanted freight. This clock is inanimate, has no hands, no power source, no machinery – it is simply a face with 12 observation points. The image of a 12-person jury might work just as well, although it suggests crime and punishment.

<sup>7</sup> The one sentence summary can also be opened out into a wide range of issues that are broadly associated with each viewpoint. These are available through workshops facilitated by the first author – contact [peter.bates@ndti.org.uk](mailto:peter.bates@ndti.org.uk) for further information.

## Applying the *Boundaries Clock* to a Time Bank



**Help or Harm.** Consider the actual or potential benefit to, or abuse of, Time Bank members in the here and now.

*What are the benefits of Time Bank participation? What has actually gone wrong and led to people getting hurt or upset? What flexibility do you have to respond to need at the moment it is identified? Are you too busy and find it difficult to meet people's needs and expectations? Is there is a risk of co-dependency? How do you safeguard people? How and when do you decide that a particular member's needs are above the needs of others?*

### Advice from one Time Bank to other brokers

Talk about and practice co-production so that members get used to seeking their own solutions and obtain help and support from other members rather than relying solely upon the broker. Remember that it is not your job to resolve every situation but rather to empower others, so take stock of your time and responsibilities, equip others to help each other out and delegate tasks.

Look after yourself by 'closing your office door' sometimes whilst remaining available to respond to urgent and genuine needs. Decide how far you are prepared and able to help people. Do not be afraid to say no when a request is beyond your role and expertise and when it would be expected of the member to co-produce their solution and or get help from another time banker.

Maintain contact with all the members so that your time is spent equitably around the membership in order to achieve balance and avoid favouritism or inconsistent expectations. Solicit feedback from members as to how exchanges have gone and identify where there is room for improvement or potential safeguarding issues that need to be addressed.



**Person centred.** Adapt your conduct and approach to the people involved and their context.

*How flexible is the Time Bank? Is it different for better educated or skilled people, very lonely people, people who can't easily get out of their house, people who are untrustworthy, or those with disabilities or mental health problems? How do you divide your time between members, and what's the balance between a person's needs and the needs of the group as a whole?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Time banking is about releasing the assets that individuals have in order to recover the trust that society has lost. This requires that adults are released from being treated as children apparently incapable of taking responsibility, and thus needing to be controlled for their 'safety'. Without risk there is no learning or progress and so brokers need to be 'hands-off' facilitators.

Special arrangements may be needed for members who have been judged to lack mental capacity, but they can still make decisions and contribute, even if they need some guidance or supervision. In general, time brokers take positive risks with individuals whose histories are not always known, and when the broker does not fully understand the person's capacity to deal with pressure, temptation, and the power that comes with increased self-confidence.

The key is to develop relationships bit by bit, get to know the members and have regular informal conversations to see how they are doing; identify the best fit for them within the time bank environment, resolve issues and explore opportunities that are good for their wellbeing and prosperity.

The broker pays attention to how members behave but is not there to dictate their lifestyle and the decisions they make in their private life. What the broker can do is create a positive and diverse environment full of opportunities to inspire and motivate them to co-produce decisions that are good for them and for others.



**Community.** Make the most of the person's informal community relationships.

*How do you build a new community that supports rather than supplants the person's existing networks? What is the aim of the time bank? A new exclusive community or one that is complimentary to existing networks?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Time Banking is designed to generate networks. The activities of the time bank should always lead members to get involved and enlarge their circle of friends in order to multiply the number of connections in the neighbourhood for mutual help, opportunities and civic engagement.

It also comes from a recognition that resources are distributed widely across communities, and that community is strengthened as people bond within individual groups and bridge between groups by belonging to more than one community group. Some connections that do not shine in one setting will flourish in another, as people see each other in a new light and everyone is enriched. Time Bankers that are involved in multiple networks bring new resources and people to the Time Bank and take contacts to other groups too.

As people enter into friendship and the genuine intimacy that eradicates isolation, they feel valued, experience the Time Bank as beneficial and enhance the community's wellbeing.



**Person.** Focus on the person and their unique resources, relationships and needs.

*Is the Time Bank actually focused on the talents of individual members or has it degraded into something else (such as recruiting people or diversifying projects to meet its survival needs as an organisation)? Are you driven by targets and how to do differentiate between activity and outcomes?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

It is easy for the broker to become preoccupied with daily tasks and distractions and forget that releasing and challenging members to co-produce is the heart of the Time Bank's role. Everything that the broker does should capitalise on the assets that each member is and can bring. Brokers should have a workplan that ensures the activities are designed to draw the best out of individuals, to inspire and challenge them to become active in exchanging time with other members in a way which they find fulfilling. Being in the Time Bank should be fun and an informal place of personal development. Beware of the danger of creating numerous activities that you think are good and interesting but may not be seen that way by members. Think 'transformational' - it is the quality and relevance of the activities that produce impact and can change someone's life.



**Privacy.** Support the person's right to run their own life, participate in the community and build a home and life free from surveillance or interference.

*Do you help people leave the Time Bank and move on to other forms of community participation? Do you advise, counsel, or feel that your members' future is your responsibility. Can you let go? How do you feel when your members know better than you do, or do not ask your advice? What do you report back to others or keep confidential?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Respecting the individual and treating them as responsible beings is at the heart of time banking. The Time Bank is not about creating a fixed, pre-designed project through tightly controlled systems, but instead, it is a repository of people with ideas, knowledge, experience, assets and opportunities that must be allowed freedom in

order to generate creativity. This freedom will also lead people towards both independence and interdependence, as and when people choose it or need it, and as they grow in knowledge and self-confidence.

The Time Bank is also part of a larger community and so the broker and members have to be prepared to let people go, recognising that their circumstances, needs and aspirations can change as they connect with others and embrace new ideas that they feel will benefit them.

It is only when there is a danger to others or the person themselves that we may need to intervene. However, the goal is for the time bank to become a co-productive adult and trusting community that relies on a culture of conversation rather than rules and procedures. People should be able to express themselves and divulge their weaknesses and issues in an environment that they feel will support and equip them to surmount difficulties.



**Artificial and Single.** Keep the relationship between the worker and the person distinctive by following special rules and inhibiting other contact.

*Are brokers somehow different? Do they have to maintain some kind of distance from Time Bank members? Do brokers trade their time with members or just do the hours they are paid for?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

There is no reason why a broker cannot be a member of the time bank. In fact, it can aid the broker to find out what's going on, how some members are doing, and what their circumstances are. Indeed, informality and friendliness from the broker may draw an isolated or mistrusting person into the time bank that with rising self-esteem and self-confidence may motivate them to come out of their shell, co-produce, learn new skills, get a job, make new friends and even find a partner.

However, any friendship can veer towards being exclusive, causing a conflict of interest. The broker is not paid to be the special friend of selected members but must maintain equal rapport with all, and supervision can be a useful setting in which to check out how this is working. It can also help the broker to manage their emotions and personal needs rather than becoming over-involved, and to think through how to withdraw without hurting people or feeling hurt.

As time banks foster an environment that generates friendship, the broker needs to focus on linking members up with each other to create a network and avoid dependency on the broker.



**Role.** Watch out for setting a precedent and keep a consistent sense of what counts as an appropriate working relationship.

*Are there occasions when you resist doing something different because it might set a precedent? Are you too involved with members? Are there unwritten 'rules' about what is appropriate conduct?*

*Do you deliberately and constantly promote equality and ensure that issues of power and prejudice arising from gender, ethnicity, class, mental health, political or religious beliefs, are not allowed to fester to discriminate, undermine and disempower members of diverse identities?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

The broker's role varies from one time bank to another. If it is simply to link people up to exchange services then it can be mechanistic, transactional, and limited to a number of regulated interventions. In contrast, a more intuitive broker may do something extra to motivate the reluctant or shy member. Some time banks exist specifically to create strong bonds that generate healing and a sense of family - and a lot of this will derive from the charisma, warmth and caring personality of the broker.

While spending time with one other person, keep your door open and have other members around if this is a person you are not sure about (or when you are not sure about yourself). When uncertain, ask members to use their time in pairs and do not always pair up the same people. This makes all your relationships visible to others and helps to safeguard you and others from mischievous allegations.

In a diverse and transient environment a time bank can be a melting pot of identities with people coming from all sorts of diverse backgrounds, views and beliefs. Do uphold and constantly promote values of equality, access and respect. Deliberately cultivate a culture that challenges and confront practices and behaviours that foster unequal power and prejudice on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, class, mental health, political or religious beliefs. Take positive action and measures to ensure no one is ever under represented, sidelined, silenced or forgotten because of their identity

Brokers must be able to show evidence that their actions are not for self-interest or favouritism and that alternative approaches to any contested course of action have been explored and discussed with members and colleagues.

Whilst brokers are accountable for their own activities, they must avoid using the time bank as a demonstration of their own skills or effort on behalf of members, but rather foreground the individual and collaborative effort of members.



**Rules.** Apply law and regulation to all people and all relationships at all times to keep things fair.

*What explicit regulations impact you, such as Time Bank rules, funding criteria and vetting requirements? What about unspoken expectations? What happens when people fail? How do you deal with gossip or breaches of confidentiality?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Organise an opportunity for members to co-design a fair and uncomplicated set of common-sense value statements that declare that everyone's status, personal space, privacy and property are valued and respected - including the people outside the time bank. Instead of rigid, standardised and penal rules, form a flexible framework that supports compassion, creativity, problem-solving and learning amongst adults who can occasionally act out of ignorance, naivety or selfishness.

On rare occasions, a general rule may be set aside, but this must be for the common good, defensible and based on exceptional circumstances that would be equally applied to any other member facing the same situation. This is not to favour or punish one person, but to seek a solution for the person in that particular situation, to the benefit of all and with a procedure that has integrity and is trackable. Watch out for favouritism, such as offering special treatment for members that are more active than others and thus may be deemed more worthy or excusable.

Like a thriving and loving family unit, encourage a non-judgemental climate of learning where it is possible to more easily come clean, where 'mercy triumphs over judgement', and where also solutions and alternatives can also be sought outside the group.



**Intervention.** Make the most of the relationship between the worker and the person.

*Are there occasions when you sacrifice other kinds of community participation in order to protect the roles and relationships within the Time Bank? How do you respond to an 'awkward' member? Is the time bank the best environment for this person?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Time bank values are the bedrock of any solution – the conviction that everyone has assets and is valued for having the capacity to be responsible, change and make their own decisions. Work together with members to invent sustainable solutions instead of falling into risk averse, short term or ineffective responses. Foster two-way



conversations and bring others into them so that connections are made to generate a creative flux of ideas that are mutually supportive, community based and fun.

Admit you do not have all the necessary knowledge, so seek out training and build a circle of friends and advisors who can help generate a decision making approach that it is not top down but rather co-produced by those involved.



**Worker.** Value the worker and their unique resources, relationships and needs.

*What needs do brokers have? What gifts do they bring – are they being harnessed? Are there things that they cannot do or places they cannot go because of their role? Does the broker have power and how is it used? Can a broker spend more time with one member than with others?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Most time banks are about creating a thriving community and neighbourhood made up of interconnected people. Time banking is also about generating trust when compartmentalisation and mistrust have fragmented our society. Like the church pastor who lives in the parish, brokers who live within the neighbourhood of the time bank community will find that their private life overlaps with members' activities. And if the broker's role is to connect people to each other and introduce them to other people to grow the community then there should be no fear about the overlap which may occasionally happen. For genuine reasons (to facilitate the connections) or incidentally ( the broker and member frequent the same venues or have mutual friends) this may lead to the broker being seen to be spending more time with one person than another. However, the key is to not neglect other members who would equally benefit from the same attention and have indicated that they need it, if the broker is actually able to provide it.

There are also occasions when the broker needs a member with specific skills and time to help them. One way of safeguarding from allegations of favouritism or other insinuations is to enlist other members with similar skills to help the broker on other occasions

Brokers do need a life outside the time bank so that they keep a sense of balance, are refreshed and able to work in a challenging environment. The broker, steering group and board of trustees need to ensure that the broker is able to rest and have a private life, and is also trained and able to pursue learning and development activities outside the workplace.



**Duty of Care.** Take action, and sometimes even over-ride the person's preferences in order to keep everyone safe.

*How do you define what is 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable'? When would you report something to others? When would you refuse to trade time with someone? Under what circumstances would someone lose their membership?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

Create, promote and review with members your written time bank values that explain members' responsibilities. Include a statement declaring that the time bank is a community where members are accountable to each other and no one is more special than anyone else. This will form the basis of decision making in the time bank.

Talk to new members who are supported by mental health or other services and ask them for their consent to contact their care worker if this is necessary in the future. It may help some members to have occasional meetings between themselves, their broker and care worker to review progress, sort out misunderstandings and design co-produced solutions.

Ejecting a member should be the last resort, and only considered when respect, confidentiality and trust have been breached and been very damaging, and where the member is not prepared to apologise or change.



**Natural and Multiple.** Use the worker's ordinary humanity, citizenship and experience of life to engage with the person.

*Do members of the time bank have multiple overlapping roles with one another, and does this need to be managed? Does membership commodify informal community? Is the goal some formal outcomes or the development of a group of people who help each other and become real friends in the process?*

### **Advice from one Time Bank**

People in formal roles with one another, such as a doctor and her patient, may be members of the same time bank. A doctor may abuse an individual in the surgery as well as outside of it, and so Time Banks do not delude themselves that a simple bar on membership would somehow keep everyone safe. On the contrary, meeting in multiple settings, such as the surgery, the time bank and the supermarket, will

usefully release knowledge about each other's needs and capacities that would not have been otherwise known<sup>8</sup>.

Clarity of purpose will help the time bank as a whole and focus the roles of the trustees, steering group, broker and individual members. Through this clarity the time bank community authorises individuals to take action. Secondly, it provides a framework for reviewing success, checking that the time bank is responding to both individual members and the situations they find themselves in, and monitoring the growth of a nurturing climate of values and relationships. Despite clarity of purpose and role, unexpected members, the emergence of previously undisclosed talents, friendships and solutions may lead the time bank in an unanticipated direction. Rather than following frozen rules and risk averse practices, such creative and mutual accountability will mean that participants thrive (but not at the expense of others) and have a sense of wellbeing as a result of deeper friendships and a shared humanity.

Brokers and members are expected to be self aware and responsible for keeping everyone safe. The time bank encourages a non-judgmental culture in which questions, openness, uncertainty and challenge can be offered in a constructive way that doesn't denigrate or undermine anybody and which leads to better decisions.

## Conclusion

Applying the boundary clock to time banking provides a useful framework that helps understand the fluid rapport between the broker and members of a time bank. Strict rules and surveillance are less effective in managing the boundaries between staff and members – it is more effective to form than a cohesive community that consistently lives by its values of respect, mutual accountability, trust and openness in order to help people be safe, able to talk and feel valued and supported.

The abundance of formal and informal connections in a tightly knit community keep knowledge and news circulating, and this in turn helps make the activities of the time bank and relationships transparent. A challenge remains for time banks to communicate this ethos to some external stakeholders who may not entirely understand the goals, scope and track record of time banking. The parallel challenge for staff is to be self-aware and regularly reflect on their practice in order to take remedial action as and when necessary. Where common sense, equality and fairness drive the conduct of staff, and as no less is required of every member of the time bank, the whole time bank works together to keep everyone safe and thriving.

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<sup>8</sup> Pugh R (2007) Dual relationships: personal and professional boundaries in rural social work *British Journal of Social Work* Vol 37, pp 1405–1423.