

Movements for Change – Methodology

Our goal in this section is to present resources that highlight common patterns, processes, and characteristics of movements for change. The literature reviewed, and conversations conducted with activists and scholars across Canada suggest that movements for change have been deliberately created in the past¹. However, we did not find any resources that would suggest there are “stages” or “steps” common to all growing movements. These systems appear to share common characteristics, strategies, and approaches, but are simultaneously unique, with a complexity that defies simplification². Indeed, a primary goal of this section is to improve our understanding of, and appreciation for the complexity of these social change agents.

Charles Dobson, a professor at Emily Carr and member of the Vancouver Citizen’s Committee, explains that a small, but significant number of sociologists have been conducting research on social movements since the 1960s³. Resource mobilization theory (RMT) and new social movement (NSM) theory emerged as two prominent sociological theories of collective action⁴. These theories provide important frameworks within which social movements can be discussed and analyzed. Several scholars have suggested that neither of these theories should be seen as a comprehensive model of social movements⁵. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, three prominent social movement scholars, explain that there is a consensus developing among movement scholars from diverse theoretical backgrounds. They suggest that three “broad sets of factors” are important in order to analyze the growth and development of movements⁶:

- 1) **Political opportunities:** The structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement.
- 2) **Mobilizing structures:** The forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available to movement actors.
- 3) **Framing processes:** The collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action.

The resources included in this section have been chosen because they analyze these complex macro-, meso-, and microprocesses involved in movements for social change. This comprehensive approach to movement dynamics will result in a more “robust” and nuanced understanding of how movements develop and are sustained over time⁷.

As we reviewed these resources and engaged in conversations with movement thinkers throughout Canada, several common characteristics of movements for change emerged. The following list highlights some of the most commonly mentioned movement characteristics and processes:

¹ Zald, 1

² Carroll, 6; McAdam et. al., 2

³ Dobson, 1

⁴ Carroll, 8

⁵ McAdam et. al, 2; Carroll, 22

⁶ McAdam et. al, 2

⁷ Zuo and Benford, 133

- A movement taps into shared core values.
- A movement requires vision. (Macdonald, 2; Norris, 309; Building Movement Project, 2)
 - A common vision helps a group develop a common identity and purpose (Zald).
 - The vision must be “framed” in a way that both motivates movement supporters and builds broad-based support among the general public. (MacDonald, 3)
- A movement involves optimistic expectations and works towards a constructive goal. (Dobson, 5)
- A movement is driven by the leadership of individuals, groups, or organizations that can articulate, develop, and frame the common vision. (De Pree; Norris, 310; Building Movement Project, 18)
- A movement for change requires the interaction and participation of all members of a group, or “sectors” of society. It is easier for a movement to grow in an engaged population. (De Pree, 22; Dobson, 2; Norris, 308)
- A movement is no singular actor, but is the collaborative work of engaged actors towards the realization of a common vision. The “whole” is greater than the “sum of the parts”. (Building Movement Project, 4 & 16)
- A movement involves conflict and conflicting viewpoints. It taps into creative and emotional tension. (Dobson, 3)
- A movement builds on existing sources of energy and motion. It learns from previous movements and does not “reinvent the wheel”. (Brodhead; Building Movement Project, 3)
- A movement for positive social change is focused on social justice. The ends desired cannot be divorced from the means used to achieve them. (Building Movement Project, 15; Maldonado, 3)
- A movement requires a wide range of resources, one of which is funds. Funders can play an important role in building movements and supporting the creativity of movement actors. De Pree, 26; Dobson, 2; Building Movement Project, 3; Zald)

Building Movement vs. Building Organization: Summary of Regional Discussions

Source:

Building Movement Project. "Building Movement vs. Building Organization: Summary of Regional Discussions" (New York: Building Movement Project). Available at: <http://www.buildingmovement.org/work/meetings.pdf>

Value: This report is based on a series of discussions in cities across the United States. The central question in their report was: "*How do organizations develop strategies and structures to facilitate the process of building momentum towards social change, and when do strategies and structures hurt this momentum?*"⁽⁶⁾ The executive summary contains useful ideas about what a movement is and how we can work towards creating social movements for change. The participants' comments contained within the report provide important insights into the dynamics and characteristics of building movements for social change and building social change organizations.

Summary: This report is based on seven regional meetings that took place in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Knoxville, New York, and Oakland. The participants were asked to address four major questions⁽⁷⁾:

- What are the links between your strategy and/or vision of social change, and the structure and/or form of your organization?
- What are the challenges you experience in keeping your organization going and in addressing the mission/vision of your organization?
- What organizational structures have you found facilitate working towards building larger momentum towards change?
- Are there challenges you face in your organization that you would like this project to address?

The executive summary provides an overview of findings from the regional discussions and outlines recommendations for future action aimed at "enhancing and supporting the vision and mission of progressive social change organizations"⁽⁶⁾. The report authors suggest that:

Social change organizations need a place where they can discuss how to develop internally and externally to become movement building organizations including political education, analysis, strategies, and constituency involvement. An important next step will be to begin the development of a center for progressive social change organizations where groups can find information, meet to discuss issues, and give voice and weight to their activities and vision. (4)

Social Movements and Counterhegemony: Canadian Contexts and Social Theories

Source:

Carroll, W.K. "Social Movements and Counterhegemony: Canadian Contexts and Social Theories" *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice, 2nd Edition*. Ed. William K. Carroll (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1997) 3-38.

Value: This article lays out a theoretical context within which Canadian social movements can be studied. Carroll describes a "dearth" of literature with a focus on distinctly Canadian movements for change (3). He stresses that Canada has a "specific social and economic formation that needed to be understood in terms of its particular, historically formed features and context." (4) As the introduction to Carroll's text *Organizing Dissent*, this article provides a detailed summary and critique of the two leading theories of social movements: Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) and New Social Movement Theory (NSM). His introduction highlights several important Canadian movements for change that are discussed by various authors featured in *Organizing Dissent*.

Summary: Carroll's article begins with an overview of trends in Canadian social movement theory. He contends that the Canadian literature on social movements is "organized less around theoretical issues – of movement mobilization, of the formation of collective identities, of strategic interaction among movements, and the like – than around substantive topic areas that include regional protest, labour struggles, and feminism." (4) His text, *Organizing Dissent* attempts to bring voices of experienced movement activists who can use the "political vocabulary of contemporary social movement theory" (8) to describe social movement dynamics from a Canadian perspective.

In this introduction, Carroll outlines two significant theories of social movements: RMT and NSM. He explains that RMT has grown out of American academia and focuses mainly on "how" movements grow and attract participants. NSM, a predominantly European theory, focuses on "why" movements have appeared in Europe and North America in the late 1900s. (8) Through an analysis of the critiques of both NSM and RMT, Carroll also explores the "complementary weaknesses" contained in these two theories (22). This article also contains an extensive discussion of hegemony/counterhegemony theory, which, as Carroll explains, has been used to analyze movements and create social change strategies in many ways. (25)

Throughout Carroll's article, he makes reference to Canadian movements for change that are discussed in more detail throughout *Organizing Dissent*. Examples include: Canadian Labour Movement, The Canadian movement in opposition to The Canada/U.S Free Trade Agreement, Aboriginal rights movement, AIDS organizing, Feminist movement, Lesbian movement, and the BC environmental movement (34-36).

“What’s a Movement?”

Source:

De Pree, M. “What’s a Movement?” *Leading Without Power* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997) 21-32.

Value: Max De Pree provides a compelling discussion of the characteristics that are involved in building movement within an organization. He suggests that there is a distinct difference between organizations that are groups of people working to serve a specific purpose, and organizations that are movements (21). He provides specific examples of organizations that are movements and suggests that these “places of realized potential” have provided leadership and vision for larger movements for social change: “Movements like these dot the organizational landscape and serve as models of energy and devotion to a compelling cause.”(22)

Summary: De Pree begins chapter two with examples of four organizations that he suggests operate as movements: Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, Willow Creek Church west of Chicago, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship in Madison, and Apple Computer in its early years. (21-22). He highlights, through discussion and personal examples, characteristics that define these types of organizations and “requirements that movements seem to meet”(22-28).

This chapter concludes with a discussion about how movements deteriorate into “mere organizations”(28-32). He suggests that it is particularly important for leaders to hold groups accountable: “Only leaders are able to hold an entire group accountable to itself and to others. If they don’t, the movement will become just another organization [...]” (32)

Social Movements: A summary of what works

Source:

Dobson, C. "Social Movements: A summary of what works," *The Citizen's Handbook: A Guide to Community Organizing* (Vancouver: Vancouver Citizen's Committee, August 2001).

Available at: <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/movements.pdf>

Value/ Summary: A significant amount of writing and thinking on movements for change has been done by academics at Universities around the world. This concise article focuses on one of the major theories of social movements: Resource Mobilization theory. Charles Dobson distills key pre-conditions, individual inducements, micro-mobilization techniques, and maintenance strategies for social movements. As the Editor of the Vancouver Citizen's Committee's *Citizen's Handbook*, and professor of art and design at Emily Carr in Vancouver, Dobson brings a Canadian perspective to his analysis of movements for change.

The *Citizen's Handbook* (<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/>) aims to increase social capital, engage local citizens, and encourage citizens to take action on social issues. As a part of this handbook, Dobson's summary is aimed at breaking down social movement theory in a way that can be easily accessed by citizens from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

Dobson's goal is to investigate the common elements that unite successful social movements from a practitioner's perspective. This list of movement characteristics and dynamics is a useful tool for individuals or organizations involved in understanding, building, or evaluating movements for change.

Social Movements and Grassroots Organizing: Lessons for Reproductive Health and Rights Organizations – Executive Summary

Source:

MacDonald, M. *Social Movements and Grassroots Organizing: Lessons For Reproductive Health and Rights Organizations – Executive Summary* (New York: Ms. Foundation for Women, 2001).

Available at:

http://www.ms.foundation.org/userassets/PDF/Program/rcof_execsummary.pdf

Value: Ms. Foundation for Women commissioned this study to investigate key components of movement structure, strategy, theory, and practice. This report identifies eight successful movement strategies and explores three key structural components of social movements. While this study seeks to contextualize and examine the reproductive health and rights movements, the lessons learned are directly applicable to a wide variety of movements for social change in Canada. This report offers insight into, and analysis of, four well known movements for change: the American civil rights movement, the contemporary conservative movement, the environmental justice movement, and the contemporary labour movement.

Summary: This report was born out of a realization that individuals and organizations involved in international social change initiatives are often constrained by hectic schedules, restricted budgets, and other internal and external challenges. These factors can make analyzing the processes associated with social change a daunting task. With the hope of providing a framework for thinking about social change, the report focuses on three questions (1):

1. What are the major structural and analytic components of social movements that are universal, cutting across ideology, politics and issue focus?
2. Which social movement strategies have had the greatest impact on advancing the agendas of U.S.-based movements for social change?
3. How can the theory and practice of social movements help advance the reproductive rights and reproductive health movements?

MacDonald uses three central movement strategies (leveraging political opportunities, creating effective issues frames, and building mobilizing structures) to analyze four American movements for change. The Executive Summary concludes with an analysis of reproductive health and rights movements and MacDonald makes specific recommendations aimed to “extend and expand this work in the coming years and decades.” (13)

“Powerful Collaborations: Building a Movement for Social Change”

Source:

Maldonado, R. et. al. “Powerful Collaborations: Building a Movement for Social Change,” *Community Research Network 2003 Conference Newsletter* (Sandstone, Minnesota: Loka Institute, October 16-20, 2003).

Available at: http://www.loka.org/conf2003/2003CRN_report.pdf

Value: This document summarizes a concerted effort to build a social movement in support of community-based research (CBR) and contains a wealth of insights into movement characteristics, dynamics, and strategies. The newsletter’s introduction is of particular interest. It contains a description of the Community Research Network’s (CRN) attempts to build a movement for change and a list of movement/social change characteristics and processes identified by participants.

Summary: This newsletter is a summary of discussions, analysis, and planning that occurred, as well as actions that were taken, during the Community Research Network’s 2003 *Powerful Collaborations: Building a Movement for Social Change* conference. The CRN is a project of Loka Institute and held this conference in Sandstone, Minnesota.

The theme that underlies this conference summary is that a small group of people, with a vision, can build a movement for change (3). The newsletter’s introduction explains how a small group of volunteers began the Community Research Network, in an effort to support Loka Institute’s vision, and resulted in this conference that brought together social change advocates with a wide range of backgrounds.

The conference was structured to mirror social change processes and was split into five consecutive sessions: Getting started, Tools and Barriers, Solutions and Outcomes, Moving Forward - Our Role, Call to Action – Our Commitments. A detailed summary of each of each session is included in this summary. Four workshops were conducted during each of the Getting started, Tools and Barriers, and Solutions and Outcomes. These workshops explored a wide range of topics related to, and examples of, movements for social change.

Taken together, the Moving Forward - Our Role and Call to Action – Our Commitments sessions represent a summary of the five day workshop. The lessons learned, strategies, support needed for future action, and resolutions serve as a specific example of a movement building effort.

It is also worth noting that this workshop summary contains a brief description and contact information for each of the workshop participants. It also contains a list of basic references and links that pertain to CBR.

Civic Gemstones: The Emergent Communities Movement

Source:

Norris, T. "Civic Gemstones: The Emergent Communities Movement" *National Civic Review* 90:4 (Winter 2001) 307- 318.

Available at: <http://www.communityinitiatives.com/perspjan02.html>

Value: The Communities Movement described in this article is an interesting example of a growing movement for change. However, this article is particularly useful because the movement dynamics and characteristics articulated throughout it may help to inform, and identify, movements for change that are rooted, and/or growing, within Canada.

Summary: Tyler Norris suggests that a "collaborative, participatory, multisectoral" (307) Communities Movement is evolving. He explores the key characteristics and design principles that shape the Communities movement and offers useful insights that can be applied to other movements for change. Norris' "fresh look at movements" (312) suggests these social phenomena shape our civic landscape and challenges us to create synergy across sectors that will "accelerate the personal, organizational, and public policy change sought by all." (313)

Norris describes the emerging Communities Movement and suggests that it is a manifestation of a deeply ingrained American desire to self-govern and that it may be a "natural evolution of democracy's promise." (307) He explains that a "collaborative explosion" (308) is renewing communities and fueling what may be a historically unique movement. He calls on the health care sector, environmental organizations, land use planners, social service agencies, interfaith groups, economic developers, and downtown promoters, among others, to "converge" and create synergy within the movement. (313-314)

This paper identifies broad patterns and design principles that exist in local community movements around the world. A key lesson from Norris' analysis of over 400 change efforts is that: "Successful change starts with human relationships. Success requires more than just having the financial resources or structures, though they are important." (301) Norris suggests that movements are an essential social vehicle for addressing some of the pressing social issues that face our society. He states: "Movements for change have first challenged and then later defined the civic landscape. They have driven new behaviors, practices, and policies." (313)

“How Are Social Movements Created?”

Source:

Zald, M. “How Are Social Movements Created?” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 2:1 (Summer 2004) 28.

Value/Summary: Zald is a *professor emeritus* at the University of Michigan and is a founder of the resource mobilization theory of social movements. Contained within a larger article entitled “Making Change: Why does the social sector need social movements”, this brief one-page summary provides seven strategies or circumstances that can work to create movements for social change. Zald suggests that lessons and tactics from larger social movements, such as the environmental movement, can be applied in “more limited contexts”.

