

# THEORIES OF CHANGE

MAD MEMBER TRAINING – MAY 2020



# WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?

A *theory of change* is a model (or strategy) that tries to predict how social and cultural change will be achieved.

There are two main types of theories of change;

- ***Structured change*** - which is when a political or legal structure is imposed on society to force certain changes.
  - E.g. redistribution of wealth, or the plot of *The Handmaid's Tale*
- ***Organic change*** - which is when underlying social forces lead to changing norms and values without government intervention.
  - E.g. intergenerational change.



# EXTREME ORGANIC SOCIAL CHANGE

Usually used by opposition teams wanting to show that a government's model of structured change is *unnecessary*, (because change will happen anyway), and *harmful* (because organic change causes less backlash).

The **most extreme versions of the argument** are teleological – which means that broad historical forces are driving social progress and can't be stopped.

E.g. Technological change (Ogburn's theory), intergenerational change, economic development solves all (Kuznet's Curve), shifting social priorities (Inglehart's 'post materialist values thesis'), notions of fundamental human nature (Fukuyama's End of History).



# WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

There are less extreme versions of organic social change which focus on the need to *actively* change minds and attitudes.

In these versions, change is not inevitable, but it's also not dependant on government leadership – you need to change the community's attitudes first, and then the politicians will follow.

If you're trying to achieve broad social change (e.g. ending patriarchy or racism) then you need a mass movement.

**Each mass movement is different, but they face common challenges.**

- **Success breeds fragmentation of priorities (some of the former 'out group' move into the 'in group')**
  - **Backlashes (every action has an equal and opposite sub-reddit)**
- **Maintaining the rage (first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they celebrate your diversity).**
- **Appealing to allies *helps* and *hurts* the movement (the price of being 'respectable' is being less radical).**

# TOP DOWN VS BOTTOM UP STRATEGIES

There is a spectrum of strategies for achieving change that span bottom-up approaches, through to top down methods.

Bottom-up is the 'mass model' of change. It's focused on building up a level of public support that is politically irresistible.

Top-down is the 'elite model' of change. It tries to convince decision makers (politicians/CEOs, etc) to 'do the right thing' even if it is unpopular.

**Each strategy has value and can be successful in the right context, and its impossible to know for sure which approach will work ahead of time.**

Real world campaigns for change often use a combination of strategies, but debates (especially 'actor' topics) force you to defend what the tactics should be of specific groups, and to understand how that group's strategy will interact with other groups pursuing different strategies

# FOUR TYPES OF TACTICS

## *Bottom-up approaches*

**Awareness raising and advocacy** (winning hearts and minds, shifting social norms, socialising new solutions and ways of thinking).

**Community-led prevention of new harms** (taking action that lessens the problem immediately – e.g. donating to homeless shelter).

**Legal intervention against existing harms** ('lawfare' – using the courts to block/reverse decisions that would make things worse).

**Parliamentary power** (trying to change who is elected to help make better laws)

## *Top-down approaches*



# GETTING BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

*Problem: We're destroying the environment and for some reason that really bothers you.*

*Exercise – You have \$50,000 to donate to ONE organisation and you want to make the biggest impact you can – which do you choose?*

There are four (completely fictitious) groups to choose from:

1. Environmental Protection Council – We educate the community and propose solutions
2. Land Protectors of Australia – We buy land to protect it from being bulldozed
3. Greenie Lawyers of Australia - We drive Barnaby Joyce crazy by suing him a lot.
4. Tim's Fantasy Political Party – Vote for me, I'll fix everything.

# CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE - *LEX INIUSTA LEX NON EST*

Civil disobedience means breaking the law. It doesn't always involve violence (e.g. what Rosa Parks did was unlawful, but not violent).

It can blur the line between organic and structured change, but mostly it's a tactic for drawing attention and creating a crisis which forces decision makers to act (e.g. a strike).

Civil disobedience is usually avoided by activists because it can alienate the public, and getting arrested isn't much fun. But in busy world, breaking the law still reliably gets media attention and that provokes community discussion.

## **Spectrum of civil disobedience:**

- Mildly shocking/irritating – blocking traffic (Extinction Rebellion), topless protest (FEMEN)
- Mildly dangerous/disruptive – chaining to trees, essential services strike
- Dangerous/distruptive – ecoterrorism, sabotage
- Very dangerous – armed resistance, terrorism



# FURTHER READING

If you prefer to start with more general theoretical analysis before getting into specifics then just google 'social movement theory'. Some more of the canonical writers include:

- Max Weber - see his concept of 'pure charisma', but also his ideas on the importance of social conflict to achieving social change (which will help when you need to advocate some sort of violence or use of force to drive bottom up change).
- Antonio Gramsci - his Theory of Cultural Hegemony is important and is also an explanation for why Marx's teleological view of inevitable revolution seems pretty clearly to be wrong.
- Vilfredo Pareto - the theory of the 'Circulation of Elites' is a great 'top down' theory of change, which says that big social changes happen when one group of elites is replaced by another group who impose their values on society. The average person in society doesn't matter very much in this worldview.

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# QUESTIONS?