

Understanding and Making Social Change

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.” *T.S. Eliot*

Course Summary: Skills You Have Developed for the Journey of Life

1. Where do you want to go? **Having goals**
 - ✓ You understand perspectives (your own and those of others).
Organic Conservative, Individualist Conservative, Reform Liberal, Socialist Radical
Begin with the view of human nature; work to values, view of society and social change.
2. How will you get there? **Building a workable vehicle**
 - ✓ You have developed a sociological vocabulary.
 - ✓ You can analyze social processes.
3. How will you know where you are and where you’re headed? **Orienting ourselves and planning a route**
 - ✓ You can describe the structure of opportunities as affected by class, gender, race, residence, etc.
 - ✓ You can describe and analyze trajectories of change.
4. How can sociology help you? **Knowing how to see, analyze, interpret**
 - ✓ You can use your sociological imagination.
Sociology’s Basic Insight: Human behavior is largely shaped by the groups to which we belong.
 - ✓ You can evaluate information through your knowledge of research methods.
Criteria: reliability, validity, sampling

Just by living their lives, everyone makes a difference, whether they want to or not.
We must choose what kind of difference we will make.

The Current Crisis

A crisis is a juncture when things don’t seem to work as we expect them to. Consider the Chinese ideogram for the concept of crisis:



The upper character is Wei (“way”) which means *danger* or *peril*.



The lower character is Qi (“jee”) which means a crucial or pivotal point or *opportunity*.

Thousands of years of Chinese cultural experience are distilled here into the insight that every situation contains within it both negative and positive possibilities. We can see, then, that a crisis contains the danger of a breakdown — in society, an organization, or a relationship — but also the opportunity for a breakthrough and positive transformation.

The Dialectic of Institutionalization and Socialization Revisited

In order to make constructive social change we must work on both sides of the dialectic. We must focus on the development of both opportunity *and* capacity.

Changing ourselves/affecting others: Working toward self-actualization

“We must be the change we want to see in the world.” *Mohandas K. Gandhi*

- ✓ Determine what your values are and do your best to live them.
- ✓ Deepen your spirituality – connect with forces larger than yourself.
- ✓ Seek out those who will support your basic values.
- ✓ Seek out appropriate role models and reference groups.
- ✓ Develop intimacy.
 - Deep relationships with others are important to our physical, mental, & social health.
- ✓ Be open to experience.
 - Reject all forms of homogeneity and actively seek out diversity.
- ✓ Challenge your biases.
 - Listen to and learn from others.
 - Deprogram stereotypes.
 - Recognize and reject ethnocentrism; practice cultural relativism.
- ✓ Develop empathy.
 - Celebrate your own uniqueness and that of others.
 - Recognize the fundamental humanity of everyone.
- ✓ Be sincere and authentic in your dealings with others.
- ✓ Be conscious of the language you use.
- ✓ Confront stereotypes and challenge disrespect: Be **R**espectful, **E**ducational, and **D**irect.
- ✓ Practice integrating the head and the heart.
- ✓ Raise your awareness of your “double life” – i.e., how what you know conflicts with how you live.

Changing Institutions: Taking a collective stand

- ✓ First, we must overcome disempowering beliefs.

“Almost anything you do will seem insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.” *Mohandas K. Gandhi*
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” *Margaret Mead*
- ✓ Study the history of social movements, both successful and unsuccessful.
- ✓ Use your “crap detector” on the information highway.
- ✓ Share your sociological imagination and empower others.
- ✓ Continue to learn how, why, and what people have difficulty meeting their basic human needs.
- ✓ To achieve lasting success, you must harmonize means with ends.
- ✓ Cultivate personal commitment and dedication, trust in yourself and others, love, and the ability to laugh.

There are two ways to change institutions:

- **Institutionalized means**
 - ✓ Using mechanisms available within institutions
- **Noninstitutionalized means**
 - ✓ Changing an institution from the outside because
 - you don’t have access to internal mechanisms of change.
 - the institution is changing too slowly.
 - ✓ This means creating a social movement.

AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Each of these is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to promote a social movement. They exist in a hierarchy, such that earlier conditions must be met before later ones can occur.

1. Structural Conduciveness

- ✓ Existence of objective conditions in the social structure that cause significant problems for people and afford them the opportunity for collective action

2. Structural Strain

- ✓ Recognition of a tension between group ideals and existing social reality; violation of social expectations; relative deprivation

3. Spread of a Generalized Belief

- ✓ Shared popular explanation of the cause, effects, and possible solution to the problem
- ✓ Competing explanations create ambiguity and confusion, lead to relatively unstructured collective action

4. Precipitating Factors

- ✓ An event or series of events that triggers a collective response (“the last straw”)
- ✓ Difficult to accurately predict or intentionally create

5. Mobilization for Action

- ✓ Leaders emerge and resources are mobilized
- ✓ Formal and informal patterns of social interaction are established

6. Mechanisms of Social Control

- ✓ Internal: solutions to organizational dilemmas such as mechanisms of communication and decisionmaking, establishing group boundaries, handling deviance, etc.
- ✓ External: institutional response to the perceived threat of collective action
Options: concessions, cooptation, repression

THE LIFE CYCLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Understanding the life cycle can help to set priorities at each stage.

1. Inciency

- ✓ The period when people become aware of the issue and the movement begins
- ✓ Strategies of agitation are important.
- ✓ Encompasses conditions 1 – 4 above; movement won't start until all 4 are satisfied

2. Coalescence

- ✓ The movement comes together and begins to get organized.
- ✓ Inspiring, motivating (charismatic) leadership that can articulate issues is valuable
- ✓ Encompasses conditions 5 and 6 above.

3. Institutionalization

- ✓ Movement becomes firmly established with regular, recurrent patterns of behavior.
- ✓ Bureaucratization is a danger.
- ✓ Continues conditions 5 and 6 above.

4. Fragmentation

- ✓ The movement begins to divide and break up.
- ✓ Negative aspect: due to internal problems &/or the impact of mechanisms of social control
- ✓ Positive aspect: represents greater sophistication and a division of labor in solving the problem

5. Demise

- ✓ The movement ends.
- ✓ Due to either success, changing social conditions, or institutional responses that destroy it

APPLICATION: STEPS FOR CREATING A SOCIAL PROBLEM / SOCIAL MOVEMENT

ASSUMPTIONS: Social problems are socially created.
Social problems arise out of social conflict, which can be constructive or destructive.
Social conflict involves a struggle between interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and mutual interference.

1. Identify and define a selected condition as a problem.

- ✓ Condition must be classified as undesirable, troublesome, or in some way harmful (creation of Structural Strain) – i.e., a threat – but solvable through concerted action
- ✓ Problem must be specific enough to be understood (diagnostic framing), limited enough to be solvable (prognostic framing)

2. Develop and mobilize a grass-roots organization of people with a direct interest in the problem.

- ✓ Begin with the category or collectivity or people who are immediately and obviously threatened (frame bridging to create and enhance Structural Strain; motivational framing to create Mobilization for Action)
- ✓ Provides important resources: numbers, legitimacy, experience, etc.

3. Generate large-scale public concern.

- ✓ (frame amplification and frame extension promote the Spread of a Generalized Belief)
- ✓ demonstrates that the threat is real, and that a crisis is at hand, BUT disaster can be averted by taking action now (i.e., create a context for taking advantage of Precipitating Factors)
- ✓ issue of legitimacy: who is allowed to define problems, through what means, and what avenues? (involves both internal and external Mechanisms of Social Control)

4. Propose and negotiate win/win solutions.

- ✓ (part of the Mobilization for Action stage)
- ✓ Separate the people from the problem; be soft on the people and hard on the problem
- ✓ Focus on interests, not positions – see things from your opponent's point of view, validate their concerns, reframe, find common ground
- ✓ Invent options for mutual gain; build the opposition a golden bridge, help them save face
- ✓ Propose long-range, comprehensive solutions as well as short-range, winnable solutions (frame extension)

5. Demonstrate success.

- ✓ (frame alignment to enhance Mobilization for Action and Mechanisms of Social control)
- ✓ Be generous with credit for solutions.
- ✓ Success is important to maintain legitimacy and involvement (“Everybody loves a winner.”)
- ✓ Empowers a group or movement. (Can create a “bandwagon effect.” Facilitates the next step.)

6. Redefine the scope and character of the problem.

- ✓ (frame transformation to continue Mobilization for Action and create a context for further Precipitating Factors)
- ✓ Keeps the group active and moving; allows movement toward long-range goal
- ✓ Incorporates new information, experience, knowledge, and insights; builds on past successes
- ✓ Retains the public spotlight.

Fire: A Metaphor for Thinking About Conflict and Change

Destructive Conflict → Social Damage	<h1 style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">FIRE</h1>	Constructive Conflict → Social Change
<p>PEOPLE</p> <p>When social relations or institutional arrangements deny people access to what they need, tension is created. The potential for conflict will vary based on the combustibility of the individuals and their situations.</p>	<p>THE FUEL</p> <p>The raw material for the fire. Some of it is highly combustible; some of it is damp and flame-resistant.</p>	<p>PEOPLE</p> <p>Humans have the potential to challenge one another and to grow. Differing values, opinions, goals, and social situations exist. Awareness and education and positive communication provide tinder for the fire.</p>
<p>INCIDENT</p> <p>People experience frustration in meeting their needs. Frustration is also created by a lack of respect and a lack of centered communication skills. Some of these frustrations cause a spark that ignites conflict.</p>	<p>THE SPARK</p> <p>Friction causes sparks to fly. Some land on dry wood and it catches fire.</p>	<p>INCIPIENCY</p> <p>Growing awareness of the tension between the ideal and the real in a community or a relationship. A flash of new insight or a “final straw” can bring the issue to life.</p>
<p>BROODING</p> <p>Tensions and grievances smolder but are unexpressed. The conflict feeds off rumor and gossip. People blame the victim or look for scapegoats.</p>	<p>SMOLDERING</p> <p>The fuel catches fire and begins to smoke. People might suspect that there is fire.</p>	<p>TENTATIVE RESPONSE</p> <p>People who are passionate about the issue begin to connect with others, based on their shared concern. The issue gains visibility as it heats up.</p>
<p>AGGRAVATION</p> <p>Fear of conflict coupled with real anger and hurt increases sensitivity and results in further provocations. There is an appeal to simplistic explanations and answers. Fear expressed as intolerance.</p>	<p>FANNING THE FLAMES</p> <p>The wind blows and the smoldering fuel flickers with life. The flames begin to lick and leap.</p>	<p>COALESCENCE</p> <p>People who are concerned with the issue grow in number. Their mutual encouragement and support gives the issue increased salience. More people are compelled to pay attention.</p>
<p>ESCALATION</p> <p>The situation is intensified by the resurrection of old hurts in the spiral of conflict. Even seemingly innocent acts become pretexts for further hostility and disaffection. Hateful acts and hate crimes add fuel to the fire.</p>	<p>STOKING THE FIRE</p> <p>As the fire consumes the fuel, it demands more. The fire is stirred and grows hotter.</p>	<p>MOBILIZATION</p> <p>Response to the issue increases. Energy increases; more people join the movement as the possibility of achieving their aims grows brighter. Organizations are developed and nurtured.</p>
<p>DAMAGE</p> <p>The blazing conflict leaves no one untouched. Some people, groups, and organizations are seriously damaged. Everyone is impoverished.</p>	<p>THE BLAZE</p> <p>The fire rages into a huge blaze. It will not easily die down.</p>	<p>EFFECTIVE CHANGE</p> <p>Aims are achieved as change is accomplished. People celebrate the blazing fire, which is a beacon of light, warmth, and inspiration.</p>