

Achieving Social Change - Strategies, Tactics & Planning¹

Regardless of conscious effort, social change is happening all the time. It is an evolutionary process, influenced by a range of factors. *Opting out* of society (at least to a degree) is always an option. This handout is concerned with **conscious strategies and tactics that can be used to influence systems** affecting people.

A Conceptual Overview of Possible Strategies²

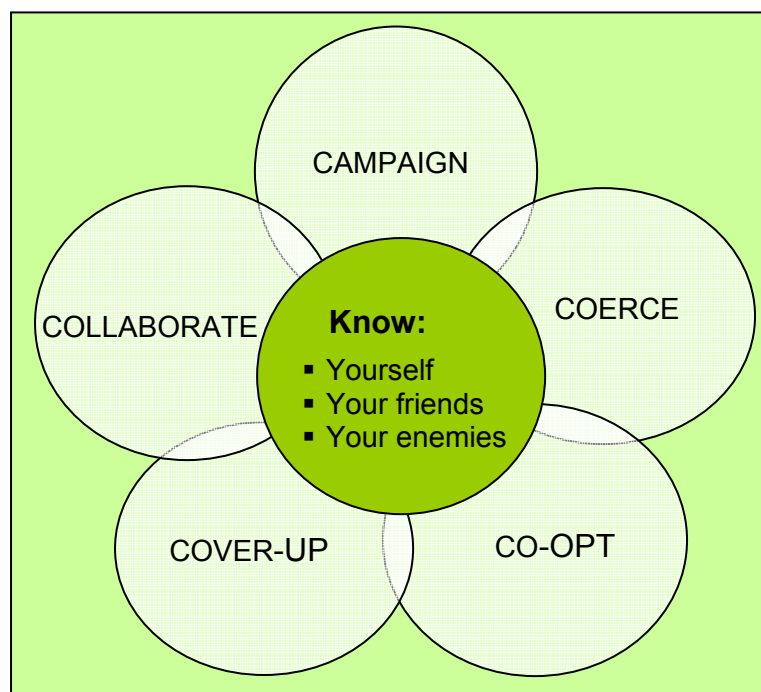


DIAGRAM 1: The 5C's of Social Change

At the Core³ of the Diagram is...

... a clear understanding of **yourself** (ie. whoever is the protagonist - an individual; a group; an organisation; a sector; a population group). This includes continual development/processing of your values/ideology and critical analysis of their

¹ © Copyright Suzi Quixley 2008 (revised). It is based on several handouts variously copyright 1987, 1995, 1996 and 1999.

² This concept builds on 3 approaches originally proposed by Butcher, Hugh *et. al.* (1980), **Community Groups in Action: Case Studies and Analysis**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. (pg.148)

³ The idea of this *Core* to the model was developed with participants in an organisational development process held at The Outlook, Boonah, Qld, in February 1996.

possible impact. *What are the possible consequences of the position you're taking - for yourself? Your friends? Your clients?* Develop clear policy/program platforms - pre-empt the need to deal with conflict later, when different members of a group have different understandings of your position (ie. don't avoid conflict - deal with it constructively NOW!) This provides a firm basis for taking a strong position and behaving consistently.

- ... **a clear understanding of your friends** (ie. any possible allies in the strategy). Ideological and practical support groups/networks can be critical to generating a successful change strategy. Be clear about whom you are linking with for what? You may have similar goals to a group, but not share agreement about tactics/process - *Can you work with them? In which areas?* You may not fully share the goals of another group, but have some early goals in common and similarity of tactics/approach - *Can you work with them? In what areas?*
- ... **a clear understanding of your enemies** (ie. the systems and/or individuals you are challenging). Research them thoroughly. *What are both your common ground and differences?* Identification of common ground is critical ... this may provide a basis for affinity/communication/trust, if not for ultimate agreement. Some focus on common ground increases the chance of achieving a win/win outcome. A thorough understanding of your differences is also important. Focus on understanding the basis (why?) of their position ... perhaps their motivation is *good*, but their conclusions *misguided*? Put yourself in their shoes - *Why are they taking this position?* Be sufficiently informed of their position to be able to argue/propose alternatives at both the functional and ideological level.

Explaining the Strategies and Possible Tactics Congruent with Each

Collaboration - *They just got the details wrong!* Collaboration is appropriate to situations where you accept the right of this system (or these individuals) to allocate resources or make judgments. You broadly agree with their overall approach, but see the need for minor/technical adjustment.

Congruent Tactics Include:

- Conducting your own research.
- Collecting existing evidence.
- Presenting information/arguments/submissions - documenting your goals.
- Offering test options (eg. pilot project).
- Telling them as much about what they're doing *right* as what they're doing *wrong*.
- Pre-empting the problem through offering an immediate solution.
- Trying quiet influence, before resorting to more public strategies.

The Intersection Between Collaboration & Campaigning. Some of the tactics suited to either are: hints/*30 second grabs*, subtle comment, deputations, public advocacy, petitions, mass letter writing, countering arguments through evidence rather than emotion/fear tactics, lobbying within the system, conventional community development/social planning approaches, be interested in them personally, remove threat/don't attack their self esteem, build relations prior to conflict (plan ahead), involve sympathetic power structures, make a deal (exchange of support).

Campaigning - They really don't understand! Campaigning is also based on your belief that this system has the right to allocate resources and make judgments. However, you also see the need for major adjustments in direction, implementation or policy. Or, they might be giving insufficient weight to the issue.

Congruent Tactics Include:

- Writing or sending delegations to MP's.
- Developing letter-writing campaigns.
- Organising rallies/marches.
- Holding community/neighbourhood meetings.
- Running educational processes.
- Allocating funds to the change process.
- Offering incentive to potential allies to become involved (eg. exchange of recognition, support for their priority causes, information, power sharing).

The Intersection Between Campaigning & Coercion. Some of the tactics suited to either are: pamphlets/public information/advertising, indoctrination, mild civil disobedience eg. graffiti or poster-pasting, articles/research/publishing, media education and coverage⁴, community arts/street/guerilla theatre, articulate consequences, put issues on agenda.

Coercion - They don't have the right ... and they've got it all wrong! Coercion is suited to situations where you dispute this system's right to be allocating resources or making judgments in the first place. This is a confrontational approach, generally designed to achieve a *win/lose* outcome. It is focused on the fundamental question of their powers.

Congruent Tactics Include⁵:

- Calling public workshop/forum/debate.
- Engaging in propaganda and symbolic actions/vigils.

⁴ This can be a *two-edged sword* - make sure the media you plan to use isn't owned by someone with substantial interests in common with the enemy ... ultimately you can't win a *media war*, if this is the case! Consider using only *live-to-air* media, to protect against misquoting/loss of context. Media coverage is not always a good/useful thing!

⁵ NOTE that this list only identifies strategies that would be consistent with this approach. It is not advocating use of these tactics.

- Using force, blackmail or threats eg. to go to the media.
- Organising direct action, eg. strike/*go slow*, sit-ins/hunger strikes, picketing, boycotts or bans, jamming/blockades.
- Destroying their credibility or status.
- Infiltrating their systems.
- Joining other interest groups and/or supporting other actions/campaigns.
- Using shock tactics.
- Engaging in civil disobedience eg. defying court ruling, property takeover/occupation/squatting.

The Intersection Between Coercion & Co-Option. Some of the tactics suited to either are: use/lobbying of peak bodies/other power structures, public/conference presentations, working parties/committees, focus on vulnerable times eg. prior election.

Co-option - *Let's get something on the ground and well supported, first!* Co-option is also based in the belief that this system doesn't have the right to be allocating resources and/or making judgments. However, rather than challenge this immediately or directly, you are concerned with establishing your own power base from which you can later mount a challenge. This power base is concerned with proving you have a better way of doing things.

Congruent Tactics Include:

- Developing pilot projects (eg. using short term funding to develop something too good to de-fund).
- Role modelling.
- Establishing a strong/alternate/credible social power base (eg. unions, employers, churches).
- Creating a surprise, through initial low visibility.
- Generating favours owed.
- Developing alternate/counter systems (eg. barter).
- Continuing to insist quietly (eg. broken record technique).
- Using Mission/Values/Vision statements to separate organisational meaning from funding sources' motivating purpose.

The Intersection Between Co-Option & Cover-Up. Some of the tactics suited to either are: secrecy, dual audience, credibility-building, let them think it was their idea, consultative processes/approach, credibility building with friends, forming ideological support groups, input to small forums/workshops, local networks, high level of ideological/directional accountability to interest groups.

Covering Up - *We'll do what we believe anyway ... quietly ... whilst appearing to meet their priorities!* Covering up similarly disputes the right for this system to be allocating resources/making judgments. It is concerned with using apparent legitimacy as a *front* for activities it sees as its real agenda.

Congruent Tactics Include:

- Writing great reports!; high levels of financial/functional/public accountability.
- Redirecting resources - conducting *hidden* programs whilst maintaining a public face of conformity.
- Developing policy/research/programs.
- Developing multi-functional programs.
- Using tactics designed to influence *hearts and minds*.
- Working with individuals.

The Full Circle ... Intersection Between Cover-Up & Collaboration.

Some of the tactics suited to either are: high level of overt accountability, credibility building with system, reward power figures, meet their need eg. good press, photo opportunities.

Avoiding the Tactical Pitfalls

Inappropriate use of tactics, in general, can undermine your cause. A particularly misplaced tactic can even lend weight to the position of those you are challenging. The following have been notoriously unsuccessful, and even damaging, tactics:

- **Form letters/emails** - You know how you feel when you receive a form letter - like you are a number, rather than a real person. If you use form letters with supporters, they may feel unimportant. If you use form letters with the people you are trying to change, the receiver will see each form letter as a number. It is therefore important that you only use form letters only for mass campaigns ... that is, using them to demonstrate that you have the numbers. If a decision maker receives a small number of form letters, this may be seen as an indication that you have very limited support for your cause.
- **Unannounced delegations/ambushes/door stopping** - *How would you like it? You're racing to go and pick up the children from school or are late for an appointment, and you are trapped by a group of threatening people for whom you are unprepared.* Use of these types of tactics is likely to force the receiver into fight or flight mode. They suggest that you see the person as a role, rather than a real person. Don't expect to have any useful impact. In particular, don't expect to be able to return to any kinder tactics in the future. Once you have used these types of tactics, you have *burned your bridges*.
- **Using (or being perceived to use) children** - It is widely believed that children are incapable of fully understanding social issues. Therefore, their apparent use as *emotional pawns* in social action situations can easily work against your cause. In particular, presence of children in risk situations, such as civil disobedience, is likely to be seen as socially irresponsible, and undermine the very position you are arguing.

- **Using unreliable information** - If you use data from *contrived polls*, or make up statistics, your entire argument will be discounted if you are caught! It simply isn't worth the risk!
- **Making threats you are unwilling or unable to keep** - Threats should be used very sparingly, and as a last resort. Once issued, a threat cannot be withdrawn. If tested, you are likely to add fuel to your opposition's position if you are unwilling or unable to carry out your threat! Always consider your relative power in a situation, before resorting to threats.

The *Do unto others* principle can be a useful guide to potentially effective, and less effective, tactics. Decision makers expect to have their ideas challenged. But it is also reasonable for them to expect that this will occur with respect for their humanity, privacy and intelligence.

The Context for Social Action

How viable is the change you are seeking? What is the likelihood of achievement? What would it take to increase the likelihood? How might the answer to these questions affect your strategies and tactics, and the order in which you apply different tactics?

One theory defined five essential steps in achieving behavioural change in others⁶:

- The person has to perceive what they're currently doing as a threat.
- The person has to perceive that a change will alleviate that threat.
- The person has to perceive that the change will result in an outcome that is at least as satisfying as the outcome from their previous behaviour.
- The person has to have the internal (personal) and external (environmental) capacity to change.
- The person has to perceive that their peers will support their change.

These steps can usefully guide planning to change systems, as well as individuals. In particular, it is critical that wherever possible, social action strategies and tactics address these motivational questions, in order to increase the likelihood of success. *Standing in the shoes* of those you are challenging, is an essential part of developing viable change strategies.

Changing yourself is difficult. Changing other individuals is even harder. Changing systems is a hugely difficult and complex undertaking. Recognising the possible magnitude of the change you are seeking is essential to distinguishing between *goals* and *fantasies*!

⁶ Paul Van Reyk, at an SERDOC Meeting, Canberra, 1984.

Planning for Social Action

The following 3 stages (with sub-steps) are by no means a comprehensive guide to planning for social action. They are simply a starting point.

1. Define the Issues

- Define your aims - the *big picture* meaning for engaging in social action.
- Define your goals. Avoid goals which are single issue causes, divisive causes, excessively narrow causes, or causes based solely on personal/individual opinion/preference.
- Clarify group support of goals.
 - Narrow immediate action targets to one or two goals
 - Define campaign parameters. Think about legal issues, information needs, resource people, power figures, other affected groups, length of campaign and your right to undertake the campaign.
 - Define working principles/approach/group norms.
- Clarify group support of process. Sometimes the way you manage the process of social action has as much to do with whether supporters remain involved, as the ultimate goal. This includes issues such as - Who makes decisions? How? Under what circumstances?

2. Define Your Access to Required Resources

- Money - current and potential.
- Allies - current and potential.
- Community support - current and potential.
- Facilities - current and potential.
- Information - current and potential.
- Informants - current and potential. (Also consider how to keep your information channels open.)

3. Develop Action Plans⁷

- What should the outcomes of the social action be? Are the behavioural change expectations you are seeking viable? Who, or what, are the target of your plans?
- Who needs to understand and support your point of view to ensure that the necessary action occurs? How will they contribute to the process of getting action taken? In particular, what influence will they have over choice of tactics? What information should be provided to these people? How, when and where should the information be presented to these people?

⁷ Some of these ideas are from Wadsworth, Yoland (1984) **Do It Yourself Social Research**, Victorian Council of Social Service and Melbourne Family Care Organisation, Melbourne. They are based on her five steps for developing an Action Plan based on community research findings (p.68).

- How will you include a wider group of people, whilst at the same time build in flexibility for tactical change, immediate response capacity and/or campaign expansion?
- How will you clarify group support of your Action Plan, explore possible weaknesses/strengths and positive/negative consequences of the plan, and build in alternate strategies at weak points in the plan?
- How will you maintain group support of the plan?
- Does your plan include all the necessary practical elements, such as timeline and task allocation? How will you access and maintain the necessary resources to implement the plan?
- Does your plan include a way of thanking/acknowledging supporters of all types?