



Paper 4

# Theories of Social Change

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The foundation sector grows at a considerable pace and is about to entail significant changes in the three-way relationship of private wealth, public policy and non profit action. To cope with the challenges arising from these transformations the International Network on Strategic Philanthropy (INSP) was established in spring 2001. With the underlying assumption that strategic philanthropy is more effective philanthropy, the network has striven to professionalize foundation management, convene the excellent minds of the sector, clarify the guiding values behind foundation activities, and contribute to capacity building in the field. The 68 members of the INSP are representatives of foundations and support organizations, consultants and researchers from the US, Europe and other countries of the world that operate along the lines of strategic philanthropy.

The network now presents a number of high-quality papers on a range of important subjects regarding strategic philanthropy. These include topics such as the role of philanthropy in globalization, new innovative instruments for philanthropy, promoting philanthropy, the role of evaluation in foundations and effective board management. The papers are available for free download at the INSP's Web site at [www.insp.efc.be](http://www.insp.efc.be).

INSP is an initiative of the Bertelsmann Stiftung in collaboration with Atlantic Philanthropies, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Ford Foundation, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and the King Baudouin Foundation. Along with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, three institutions – The Philanthropic Initiative, Inc., The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard University, and The Center for Civil Society at the University of California Los Angeles – help to coordinate the work of approximately 70 network members.

The INSP working groups are advised and coordinated by representatives of leading academic and consulting institutions:

Prof. Helmut K. Anheier, Director, Center for Civil Society, University of California

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## ABOUT THE BERTELSMANN FOUNDATION

The Bertelsmann Foundation is Germany's largest foundation established by a private donor. In keeping with the longstanding social commitment of its founder, Reinhard Mohn, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is dedicated to serving the common good by encouraging social change and contributing to society's long-term viability. To achieve this, it maintains an ongoing dialog with all of society's stakeholders. The belief that competition and civic involvement form an essential basis for social progress is central to the foundation's work. In order to apply its expertise as effectively as possible, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is structured according to subject areas. The foundation's 280 employees focus on Education, Health, Economics and Social Affairs, International Relations, Corporate Culture and Promoting Philanthropy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to begin to lay out theories, models and applications of societal, organisational/institutional, individual and group change. Given that most foundation encouraged change takes place in or via organisations it was agreed that organisational change and implementation would be the main focus of the paper. We are also concerned not primarily with theories of how change happens 'naturally' but rather with how foundations can 'engineer' or intervene to make change happen. The goal is to enable foundations to think more clearly about their assumptions and to make better informed choices. The sort of tool we have in mind would identify key questions for foundations, including: What do we want to achieve? What is the nature of the problem we want to address/change? Who or what needs to change? In what ways? How could we achieve that change? What assets do we have to apply to that? What externally or internally imposed constraints are we operating under?

In Section Two, we briefly outline key perspectives on change at the individual, group, organisational, institutional, societal levels. In Section Three we look at approaches to planned change, from problem identification through to programme implementation. Section Four considers approaches to change via policy influence.

## BROAD THEORIES OF CHANGE

### Theories of Societal Change

Factors in societal change may be summarised under three main headings: economic, political and cultural. Marx is perhaps the most famous proponent of the notion that societies/forms of social organisation are largely determined by economic factors, and in particular the impact of industrial capitalism. Among political influences the state – government – now plays a very large role in social life and change in industrial societies. Cultural influences clearly play an important part in social change. For example, secularization and the development of science have had major effects on the way in which we think, attitudes to legitimacy and authority, and have thus also influenced social structures, systems and values (Giddens and Duneier, 2000).

If these are the key factors in societal change, foundations wanting to effect change at this level need to focus on changing economic, political or cultural structures and processes. This macro approach to social change is adopted by some international foundations aiming to change economic and political conditions. These fundamental themes of resources, power/politics, and cultural factors reappear, in a sense, in theories of organizational change.

### Theories of Organisational Change

Very broadly, there are four main approaches to organizations and organizational change: classical/early modernist, modernist, symbolic interpretive and post modern. Classical and early modernist theorists are more concerned with stability than change. Early modernists see change as planned change in which a change agent introduced change in a deliberate way. In contrast, for the modernists organisational change stems from changes in the environment and is outside the organisation's direct control. More recently, population ecology, organizational life cycle and learning organization theories have seen organizations as not just adapting to external pressures but creating their own internal dynamics.

Symbolic Interpretive theories of organizational change are essentially dynamic insofar as because the processes of social construction are seen as both reproducing existing structures and leading to their alteration. The post modern approach explores the paradox of stability/change in organizations. Post modernist theory sees planned organisational change as rhetoric and change processes as discourse. Both theories reject the notion of organization, as some sort of definable, discrete entity, focusing instead on organizing as an on-going dynamic process.

Depending on which approach to organizational change is adopted, a foundation wanting to effect change at this level would need to recruit top management or consultants to introduce change from within; attempt to change the organization via changes in its environment; encourage change from within by creating learning organizations; change the rhetoric and discourse of the organization/management.

### Theories of Individual and Group Change

The themes of organizational change have parallels in theories of individual and group change. According to Backer (2001), behavior is more likely to change if: the person forms a strong positive intention, or makes a commitment, to perform the behavior; there are no environmental constraints that make it impossible for the behavior to occur; the person possess the skills necessary to perform the behavior; the person perceives that the advantages of performing the behavior outweigh the disadvantages; the person perceives more normative pressure to perform the behavior than not to perform it; the person believes that performance of the behavior is more consistent than inconsistent with his or her self-image or that it does not violate personal standards; the person's emotional reaction to performing the behavior more positive than negative; and the person perceives that he or she has the ability to perform the behavior under a number of different circumstances.(Backer, 2001)

Foundations wanting to encourage change at this level might work to reduce environmental constraints on changing particular behaviors, and/or try to alter the advantage/disadvantage calculus by attempting to strengthen normative pressures.

### Theories of Social Movement

It is worth highlighting an approach to economic, cultural and political change which stresses the role of individuals, groups and organizing in effecting social change. Groups can attempt to encourage or discourage social change via social movements.

The conditions under which social movements occur have been the subject a long and vigorous debate. Marx believed that social movements/revolution occurs as a result of the contradictions or unresolvable tension in societies, in particular related to economic changes. But contrary to Marx's expectations revolutions did not occur in all advanced industrial societies. This led Davies (1962) to theorise that social protest movements are more likely to occur not when people are in dire poverty but when there is some improvement in their living conditions and their expectations start to rise i.e. relative deprivation. But Tilly (1978) pointed out that Davies' theory does not explain how and why different groups mobilize to achieve change. Tilly distinguishes 4 components of collective action: the organization, mobilization of resources, common interests, and opportunity. Collective action is a means of mobilizing group resources when people have no institutionalised means of making their voices heard, or when their voices are repressed by government.

Smelser (1963) identified six conditions for the development of social movements: structural conduciveness; structural strain; spread of generalized beliefs and suggested ways of remedying them; precipitating factors – trigger factors. These four conditions do not lead to development of social movements unless there is leadership, a means of regular communication, funding and material resources. The way in which a social movement develops is strongly influenced by the operation of social control.

Touraine's (1977, 1981) analysis differs from Smelser's principally in allowing that social movements may develop spontaneously to achieve desired social changes rather than being responses to situations. His ideas include: historicity – there are more social movements today because people know that social activism can be used to achieve change; rational objectives and strategies regarding how injustices can be overcome; interaction in the shaping of social movements i.e. movements develop in deliberate antagonism with established organisations and with rival social movements. He emphasises the way in social movements occur in the context of fields of action i.e. the connections between a social movement and the forces or influences against it.

Foundations adopting a social movement approach to achieving societal change would obviously work to foster the development of (selected) social movements. How exactly a foundation might do this depends in large part on the particular theory of social movements it favours. For example, Smelser's theory would suggest a focus on promoting leadership, means of communication, funding and material resources. Touraine's theory might suggest a focus on promoting the idea of social activism and interactions between social movements.

## STEPS TOWARD ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

### Working Step by Step

#### *Step 1. Defining the problem*

The theory of the problem is significant for two main reasons. First, it helps to explain why some issues get onto the foundation, and the public policy, agenda. Second, the way in which the problem is defined and its causal story will in effect highlight some people, groups or institutions and disregard others, or treat them as insignificant.

Problems are socially or politically constructed. The key questions then are: by what processes are problems defined? What are the generic elements of problem definition? How are some problems chosen to be on the political/policy agenda while others remain obscure or invisible? What impact does problem definition have on subsequent stages of the policy process? Rochefort and Cobb (1994) try to capture the key elements of problem definition: causality, severity, incidence, novelty, proximity, crisis, problem populations, instrumental vs. expressive orientation, and solutions. These factors in problem definition may also be used as a guide to encouraging the definition of some condition as a problem.

#### *Step 2. Formulating a theory of the desired outcome*

This involves identifying a social outcome that is preferable to the current condition, including what the outcome would look like in practice, and identifying social actors who have some control over behaviour related to the preferred outcome. Note that any intervention has to be based on a theory 'that locates at least partial control over the outcome in the hands of some actors and makes causal attributions that certain actors and behaviours will make desired outcomes more likely' (Weiss, 2000, 85).

#### *Step 3. Formulating a theory of intervention*

The theory of intervention lays out the plan for exercising influence. Ideally it specifies the agents (who should intervene), the target (whose actions are to be changed), the mechanism (how to intervene) and the time and place (when and where an intervention takes place). Identifying the agents of intervention can be difficult for foundations and for governments. Agents of intervention are assumed to have the power and the capability/resources to intervene. In reality, choice of such agents may be limited, not least by existing structures and distribution of power and resources.

Selection of targets – those whose actions are to be changed – also presents problems. When targets are powerful, numerous and very different from one another it is likely to be more difficult to find a way of getting all of them to change, and the costs are likely to be higher than when the targets are small in number and/or homogeneous. Moreover, if the target actors themselves have limited control over their behaviour, developing an effective theory of intervention may also be difficult. In some cases, for example, it may be necessary to target/change structures and practices

before it is possible to change individual/group behaviour.

Foundations need to devise theories of intervention in full awareness of not just their own past, present and future actions, but also those past, present and future interventions by others including government, business and other foundations. They need to be aware of competing and complementary/reinforcing influences from everywhere and, crucially, attempt to overcome the potential effects of intervention fatigue, where participants in the process come to regard every intervention as just another passing fad of little consequence.

The theory of intervention also needs to specify the mechanisms or tools to change behaviours in line with the desired outcome. Choice of tools will depend in part on the theory of the problem and desired outcome, the agencies and the targets, as well as the assumptions about how organisations work and respond to implement or block planned change. Foundations and other policy makers are, of course, constrained by the tools available to them. We discuss intervention tools in more detail below.

#### ***Step 4. Designing effective interventions: theories of programme implementation***

If foundations are to design effective interventions they need to be aware of the often large gap between theories of intervention and implementation in practice. To begin with, Hogwood and Gunn (1984) argue that for successful implementation of policy the rational model requires: no insurmountable external constraints, adequate time and sufficient resources, required combinations, valid theory, good design, especially cause-and-effect relationships, causal connections that are reasonable, clear and direct, minimal dependency relationships, agreed objectives, correct sequence of tasks, clear communication and understanding, as well as compliance.

Similarly, Hood (1983) suggests that the dominant rational model of policy and administration assumes that the administrative system is unitary with a single line of authority, that objectives are given, clear, uniform and known to all, that implementation requires perfect obedience or perfect control, that ideally there is perfect information and communication with all tasks unambiguously specified and precisely coordinated, and that there is adequate time and resources to fulfil conditions and objectives.

Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981, 21-22) pick up many of the same variables but incorporate some system level considerations. In sum, the chances of successful implementation are maximised if the statute stipulates unambiguous objectives; if implementation is assigned to sympathetic agencies who gives it high priority; if the number of veto points is minimised and sufficient incentives are provided to overcome resistance among recalcitrant officials, if sufficient financial resources are available to conduct the technical analysis and process individual cases, and if the constituent groups have the ability to intervene actively in the process to supplement the agency's resources and to counter resistance from target groups.

Looking at implementation at the level of the organisation, there are 4 basic organisational models of social programme implementation (Elmore, 1997).



**1. Implementation as systems management:** This model assumes that programme success can be achieved via good management. Lack of clear lines of authority and limited control/influence are likely to be problems for grantmaking foundations who work via independent organisations with other accountabilities. Maximising control over implementation is one reason why some foundations prefer to operate programmes themselves rather than make grants to others to do so.

**2. Implementation as bureaucratic process:** Foundations adopting this model would have to pay particular attention to the existing coping mechanisms of those required to actually implement the programme, and the obstacles to change these may create. Again this is likely to be a particular problem for grantmaking foundations because of their distance and lack of control.

**3. Implementation as organisational development:** This approach raises questions about grantmaking foundations' application processes. If foundations were operating with this or the previous model of implementation they would pay much more attention in the proposal process and information required to the 'bottom' of the organisation rather than the top. Similar considerations would apply in the management of operating foundations.

**4. Implementation as conflict and bargaining:** Operating foundations need to be aware of the bargaining which goes on within the organisation and with others with whom it works to implement change programmes. A grantmaking foundation needs to be aware of both its own relationships with grantees as well as relationships within the grantee organisation and with others with whom the grantee organisation does, or does not, work.

These four approaches are not necessarily alternatives. They may help foundations understand why initiatives may fail, as well as helping them to design their structures, processes and relationships in ways more likely to achieve effective implementation.

### Tools for Intervention and Change

Attempts to classify policy instruments or tools have a long history. Hood (1983) identifies 4 broad groups of 'power tools' available to government ranked strong to weak as follows<sup>1</sup>:

**1. Effectors** (for producing changes in culture or behaviour): direct government provision; government owned corporations; regulation, mandate, permission, prohibition; rights and systems of redress; contract purchasing; loan guarantees\*; grants-in-aid, matching grants\*; tax expenditures; information delivery: persuasion\*; propaganda example, demonstration projects, education, training\*.

**2. Collectors** (for obtaining money and other resources): Taxation direct and indirect; levies; service fees and charges; appeals\*.

<sup>1</sup> Only those marked \* seem likely to be available to foundations, and even those may only be powerful under certain circumstances. However, all of the other tools may be indirectly of use to foundations

**3. Detectors** (for acquiring information): requisition; inspection; purchasing or barter\*;appeals (including rewards for information)\*.

**4. Selectors** (for managing, selecting, analysing, presenting information): audit\*; cost-benefit analysis\*; performance indicators and measurement\*; cost measurement, resource budgeting\*; management review\*; scenario-building, risk assessment\*.

A different way of looking at tools for change is in terms of authority, incentives and ideas (Weiss 2000). Authority is defined as permission from the target individuals to the authority figure to make decisions for them for some category of acts. Foundations have very limited direct authority but they may be able to operate in the context within which authority is exercised. They may also be able to work on or with those who have authority. Incentives are defined as the direct or indirect use of sanctions or inducements to alter the calculus of costs and benefits associated with given behaviour for the target individuals. Identification and removal of disincentives can be a powerful tool in overcoming obstacles to change. Incentives, especially financial incentives, are more obviously available to foundations.

Ideas are used to try to persuade target actors to change their behaviour by trying to change what they think. The key question is how this instrument can make a difference in the mix of competing constraints and influences that shape the behaviour that policy makers seek to influence. Ideas are another category of key change tools available to foundations. However, even knowledge via demonstration projects plus active dissemination may not be sufficient to achieve change. First, facts rarely speak for themselves, they have to be interpreted in the 'right' ways. Second, knowledge alone will not overcome obstacles to change including self-interest and the power of the status quo. Some argue that those required to change need to 'own' the problem and want to change; others maintain that even ownership and commitment may be insufficient without positive incentives, removal of disincentives, and sometimes penalties for lack of change.

Resources are one often powerful incentive to change, just as lack of resources can be a powerful disincentive. Again, however, it is vital to identify the 'right' targets. Focusing change efforts, via incentives and penalties, at the individual/group level is unlikely to be effective if the organisation/structure continues to encourage and reward other practices. Few foundations have the resources or tools or staying power directly to achieve major sustainable change beyond group/individual organisational level. Thus some foundations with such aims attempt to achieve change via influence over public policy. In what follows we look at theories of policy making and, picking up an earlier discussion, how issues get onto the public policy agenda.

## **APPROACHES TO CHANGE VIA POLICY INFLUENCE**

In many countries there are legal limitations restricting foundations' attempts to influence public policy. The extent to which legal limitations constrain influence on policy and implementation

depends in part on how the policy making process is seen.

### **Rational and Political Theories of Policy Making**

The dominant approach to policy making sees it as a rational process based on a series of steps from problem formulation and evaluation of alternatives through to policy implementation. The rational model sees the policy system as having clear boundaries; people identified as policy makers make policy (Gordon, Lewis and Young, 1997). One alternative model sees policy making as an essentially political process in which interests and perceptions of actors enter at all stages. Policy making involves negotiating within the organisation and with a variety of others whose cooperation may be necessary for successful policy implementation (Ibid).

Whereas the rational model of policy making assumes that policy makers have clear objectives, the political/bargaining process approach suggests that governments rarely have clearly defined objectives. Furthermore, the rational model assumes that necessary and sufficient information is available to the decision maker. In reality, however, information is often not available. In addition, information may be seen as a resource to be used and manipulated. According to the political process approach, too much information may be an embarrassment because the system needs ambiguity if bargains are to be negotiated. Besides, the rational model assumes that choices between competing objectives can be made on the basis of accurate knowledge. However, people who have the direct first-hand knowledge of problems don't have power to make decisions and vice versa. In contrast, the political process theorists argue that most choices are political not rational. Such choices are made through bargaining and trade-off. Information is useful, but only if it accords with some strong interest in the decision-making arena.

Even if policy making were a rational process, Hood and others argue, that rational implementation systems do not and could not exist. There are limited resources, ambiguous objectives, internal and external organisational competition, as well as political limits... (Minogue, 1997) Moreover, it could be argued that the time scale required for the construction and operation of major policy is so great that it is highly likely that the problem to be addressed has already changed – and policies are likely to have unintended consequences. Taken together, if policy making is seen as something done by politicians, foundation influence may be more constrained. If policy is viewed as a bargained outcome of the interactions of a wide range of actors and factors, then the space for foundations to operate may be greater.

### **Re-Thinking the Policy Process**

Kingdon (1995) portrays the policy process as involving three largely independent streams: problems, politics and policies. The problem stream concerns how and why states of affairs come to be considered problematic and involves factors such as the availability of systemic indicators, focusing events including crises and disasters, and feedback from the operations of current programmes. The policy stream is analogous to biological natural selection: ideas float between

communities of specialists and those proposals which meet certain criteria including technical feasibility and budgetary workability, are ones that survive. The politics stream is affected by swings in the national mood, turnover of elected officials and interest from pressure groups. For Kingdon the all important coupling of these streams 'is most likely when policy windows – opportunities for pushing pet proposals or conceptions of problems – are open. Policy entrepreneurs... are responsible not only for promoting important people to pay attention, but also for coupling solutions to problems and for coupling problems and solutions to politics' (Kingdon 1995, 20).

Adopting this approach gives foundations various points of intervention in the policy process. They may attempt to influence the problem stream by carrying out and publicising research which highlights particular issues, re-conceptualises them, presents them as at crisis level, and/or provides feedback from operations of current programmes. They may attempt to influence the policy stream by promoting ideas and discussion, bringing together communities of specialists and others, and demonstrating the feasibility and workability of particular proposals. They may attempt to influence the politics stream by working on the national mood and/or by working directly or indirectly with other coalitions of interests. Besides, foundations need to have a set of issues which are long-term, and retaining sufficient spare capacity to be opportunistic in responding to policy windows as and when they open.

#### **Working On and With Others: Conceptualising Interests in Policy Making**

Foundations need to work on and with other interests to influence policy. The following list (adapted from Pal, 1997) outlines the variety of ways in which interests in the policy process have been analysed in the literature<sup>2</sup>. The Iron triangle sees interests in the policy process as a stable and cosy relationships among congressional committees, executive agencies (primarily regulatory), and economic interest groups, insulated from the rest of the policy process. By contrast, Issue network approaches see political systems as fluid, with actors coalescing as necessary around issues, not policy sectors. More generally, the notion of Subgovernment emphasises the idea that policy does not get made in a single system but in subsystems that consist of microcosms of all the relevant political and institutional actors.

Advocacy coalition approaches see policy fields as marked by competing advocacy coalitions, made up of a wide range of actors, who share a belief system about a policy area and over time demonstrate some degree of coordinated activity. Discourse coalitions are similar but there is a stronger emphasis on language and meaning. Again the notion of a Policy community is similar but includes everyone active in a field who share at least some common language, but who may be opponents on the issue. Policy Network approaches emphasise the particular pattern of interactions and relationships that have consequences for the development and delivery of policy. The notion of an Epistemic Community was originally developed in the field of international relations,

<sup>2</sup> For detailed references regarding these approaches please read the complete version of this article.

emphasising the power of ideas and expertise, as expressed through professional organisations or individuals.

Other key ways of analysing interests in policy making include Public Interest Groups that advocate for 'causes' and the public interest rather than economic lobbying and Social Movement Organisations discussed above. In attempting to influence (Kingdon's) policy and politics streams in particular foundations need to be aware of groupings of potential policy interests and partners, as potential obstacles to and allies in change.

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