

The Temporal Model of Social Action: Occupy

Brad Olson
National Louis University

Temporal Model and Social Action

- Temporal model focuses on bottom-up change through positive methods.
- The goal is to reduce harms and social disparities.
- One psychological aspect: national policy change can lead to individual behavior change and thereby changes in beliefs and attitudes.
- Campaigns occur over time.
- They are contextual and paradoxical.

Social-Community Psychology and Action

- Social action is often most effective when informational influence is used, particularly when it synthesizes critical and strengths-based approaches.
- Rappaport's (1977) primary goal for community psychology: *"The aim of community psychology must be to identify and change those aspects of the social structure that degrade people."*
- Social action targeting policy is one (very important) source of this change.

Waiting on the World to Change

*"Me and all my friends/We're all misunderstood
They say we stand for nothing
There's no way we ever could
Now we see everything is going wrong
With the world and those who lead it
We just feel like we don't have the means
To rise above and beat it
So we keep waiting
Waiting on the world to change
Its hard to be persistent
When we're standing at a distance
So we keep waiting on the world to change"*

Waiting on the World to Change

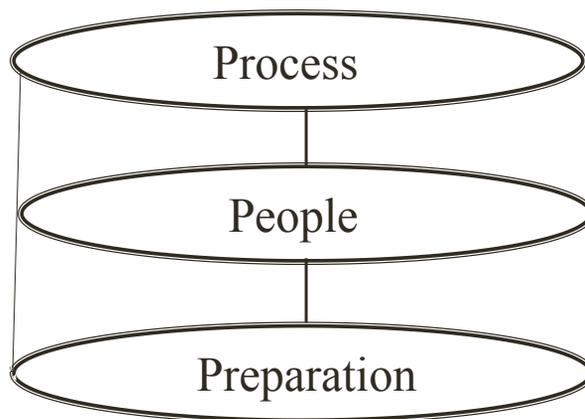
*"Now if we had the power
To bring our neighbors home from war
They would've never missed a Christmas
No more ribbons on their door
When you trust your television
What you get is what you got
Cuz when they own the information,
They can bend it all they want...
It's not that we don't care
We just know that the fight ain't fair...
So we keep on waiting/Waiting on the world
to change"*

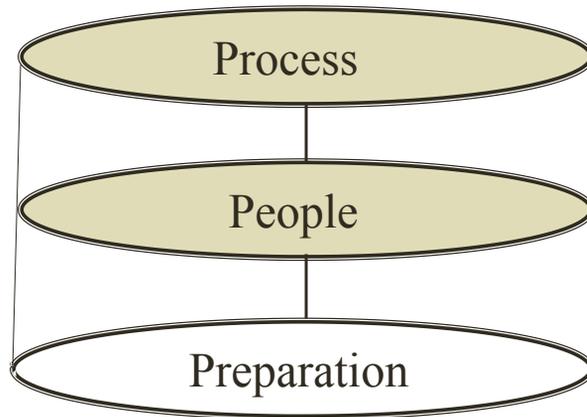
Guidance from those who understood social action



9 processes of temporal model

- *Preparation* (focusing, member-gathering, lever identification)
- *People* (self-purification, empowerment, critical kinship).
- *Process* (dissemination, discovery-oriented dialogue, iterative mobilization)





1. *Focusing*

- Finding the right level of focus. “Stopping torture”, for example, is a very broad level. Other micro changes are too insignificant. “Coming up with a statement that says, “Torture is bad.”
- Alinsky’s phrase “*Pick the target, freeze it.*”
- Policy change could be a single word change in the law, could reflect disparities and injustices that just should not exist, and it can be very local and global.
- When you clarify a desired outcome it becomes more attainable

Occupy

- Occupy has often been criticized for have a lack of focus.
- Is this accurate?
- Is there a meaningful and intentional avoidance of “focus”?
- If so, why?

2. Member-Gathering

- Chavez: *“You are never strong enough that you don’t need help.”*
- And *“The name of the game is to talk to people...You’re not going to organize everything; you’re just going to get it started.”*
- And *“There are no shortcuts. You just keep talking to people, working with them, sharing, exchanging and they come along.”*

Cohesion

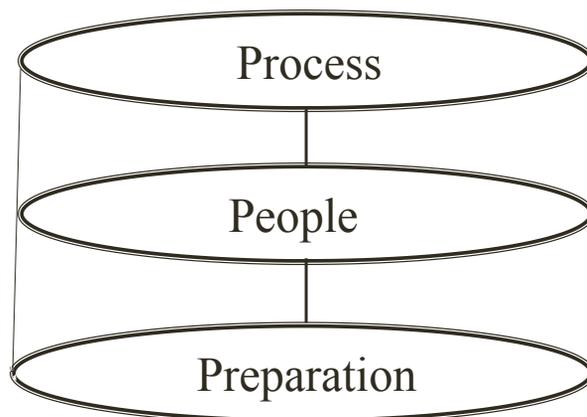
- Coalitions require the generation of commonality despite diverse interests and agendas.
- Some issues bring cohesive and concentrated involvement on their own.
- Once the networking and excitement generation gets underway, more and more people gather.

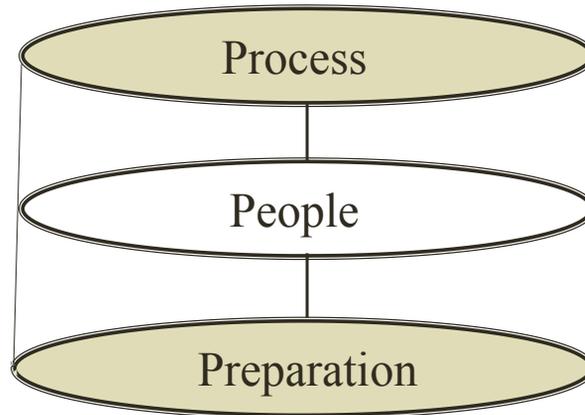
Creation of Occupy and Cohesion

- What brought about the occupy movement? What brought people together?
- Was it the Arab Spring? Did corporate harms just push things to a tipping point? Something else?
- Capitalism: A Love Story?
- Is there an entity that really represents "Occupy"? Or is it diffuse? What will hold it together over the long term?

3. *Lever-Identification*

- The primary tactics and mechanisms depend on the purposes and what is trying to be achieved. The levers channel the whole initiative.
- From tactics like Alinsky's: "Find their rules."
- To democratic mechanisms: Voting, investigations, legislation, writing a letter, a referendum
- Normative vs. informational influence is an important distinction of the tools that produce change.
- Is "Occupy" too normative and not informational enough?





4. *Self-Purification*

- Gandhi: *"One's motives must be pure"*
- Focus not on Self, but on the most vulnerable. Remove one's own ego and take a contextual stance on issues and paths; truth is most important, and guides both means and ends.
- Roosevelt: *"It is not fair to ask of others what you are unwilling to do yourself."*
- Chavez *"I'm not going to ask for anything unless the workers want it. If they want it, they'll ask for it." And "You must become the servant of the people. When you do, you can demand their commitment in return."*

Self-Purification in Occupy

- Occupy takes a lateral vs. a vertical approach to leadership.
- There is a tension between being a “leader” and avoiding being a “leader.”
- To work effectively in a truly lateral, participatory collective, we also need to take care of our own state of mind first.

Self-Purification

- Should “Occupy” be completely non-violent? Yes.
- Self-Purification is about being in the right place to be non violent.
- Part of changing role relationships involves engaging in authentically collaborative approaches.

5. *Empowerment*

- “Waiting on the world to change” is example of disempowerment.
- What are the underlying motives that influence people’s beliefs on the issue?
- Collective efficacy: community belief that success together is inevitable, and is often built through prior successes.

Motivation and Dispelling Fear

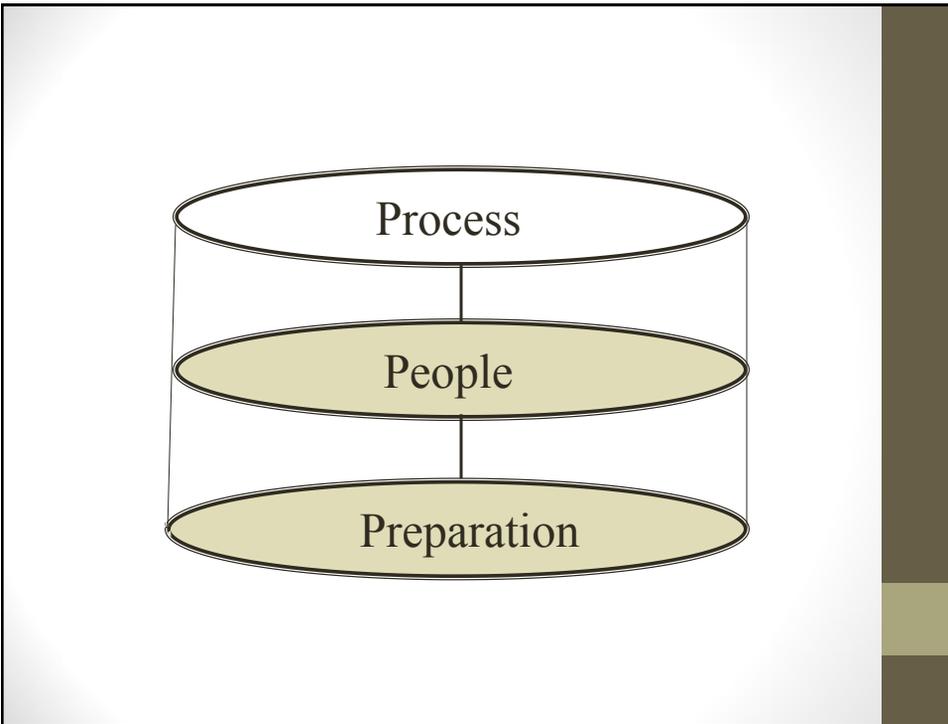
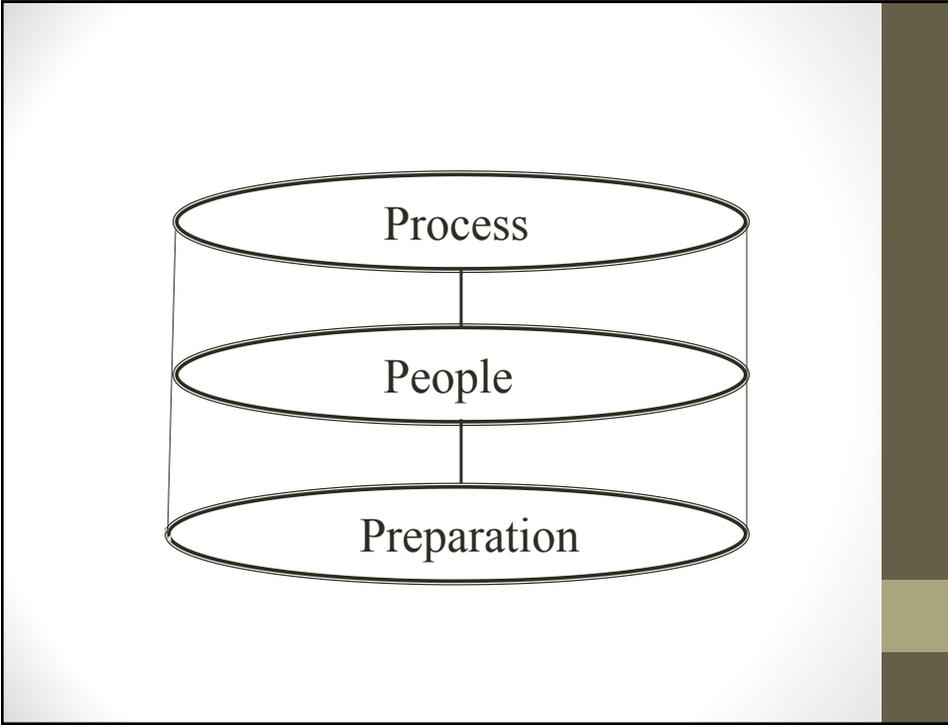
- Roosevelt: *“We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face...we must do that which we think we cannot.”*
- Gandhi: *“Non-violence laughs at the might of the tyrant” / “Given a just cause, victory is certain” / “An active resister is a philanthropist”*

6. Critical Kinship

- *Synthesize critical and strengths-based approaches toward the issue, the opposition, and policy change.*
- Community psychologists put values first and remain positive and professional to all.
- Alinsky: *“Ridicule is man’s most potent weapon”* and *“Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.”*

Critical Kinship and Occupy

- Gandhi: *“Non-cooperation is not a movement of brag, bluster, or bluff.”/“Conquer hate by love, untruth by truths, violence by suffering.”/“Not a negative thought or action against others. One may not respect, but do not insult or threaten”*
- Balance needed between compromise and giving in, enabling and engagement.
- What does this have to do with context? how do we assess and navigate contextual decisions? How do we get good at that?
- Changing of role relationships cannot be “just getting along”.



7. Dissemination

- The broader world must always receive the messages and information.
- The medium is a big part of the message.
- Individual and listserv emails, phone conferences, speeches, teaching, blogs, press releases, op-ed pieces all play different roles and connect to different audiences.
- The quality of the writing and the tone matter; written and spoken communications are the keys to a successful initiative.

Dissemination and Occupy

- Media, open letters, target channels, sealing the deal.
- Is the breadth of Occupy too overwhelming to communicate in a way that won't bring about a feeling of helplessness?
- What do evaluation methods suggest about planning and focus?

8. *Discovery-Oriented Dialogue*

- In addition to dissemination... We want to work toward the truth, to learn and refine arguments through research, communication and negotiation.
- Research helps foresee the next steps and challenges in the campaign.
- Misunderstandings create barriers to motivation and action.
- Resolving contradictions can free up psychological channels for action.

9. *Iterative Mobilization*

- Initiatives take time. Require a rhythm. A pattern, a pace, judgments about where to invest when.
- Four of Alinsky's thirteen rules are about intensity and sustainability: Two on pressure, two on the people enjoying the effort.
- There is a sense of urgency and expectation of "winning". Martin Luther King: "*A right delayed is a right denied.*" Chavez: "*Non violence is...the patience to win.*"
- Community psychologists have long talked about the nature of long-term initiatives.

Generating a movement that runs on its own

- Coalitions require the strengthening of commonalities—despite diverse interests and agendas.
- Some issues bring cohesion and concentrated involvement on their own.
- Ultimately relationships are everything. Camaraderie makes it all worthwhile and bearable.
- Individuals grow into an organization, organization grows into a social movement

Iterative Mobilization and Occupy

- Progress—small wins, big wins, belief in people, belief in the inevitability of success.
- In terms of Occupy, the coming month of May should tell us a lot about its sustainability.
- What is the role of evaluation in Occupy? In every step of this process?

Summary of Temporal Model

- A general model can provide a pragmatic guide to action. And a flexible theoretical framework for evaluation.
- Rules are contextual. Not static. Tactics need to be continually reinvented and recombined.
- Consistent patterns can give us expectations of what is likely to arise next.
- *A model should be able to account for seeming contrasts: reconciling strengths-based and critical approaches, and informational and normative influences.*