Building Collaboration Between Grassroots Groups and Traditional Civil Rights Groups to Make Local Policy Change

A Skill-Building Mini-Workshop

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The best public policy-making integrates democratic values, relevant evidence and practical politics. SPSSI members share a commitment to developing relevant evidence, but differ in their perspectives on their role in its application. Advocacy groups also share commonalities, but differ in their organizational decision-making. In this mini-workshop, we'll learn strategies for 1) navigating the tensions among our roles and 2) helping resolve such organizational differences when we participate in the policy-making process as psychologists and citizens.

Prior Reading on inter-organizational complementarity and conflict in the Black civil rights movement

https://web.stanford.edu/~ccarson/articles/black_scholar.htm

This brief article highlights several of the framing issues mentioned in Section II below.

I. TAILORING THE GOALS FOR THE SESSION (5 min)

Provide 3X5 cards to identify participants’

A. Areas of Concern (e.g., LGBTQ, economic justice, housing, policing, environmental justice, health disparities, educational achievement gaps, voting rights, immigration, etc) and

B. Organizational Pairings (e.g., NAACP and BLM, Community Development Corporations and Community Organizing Groups; PTA and Identity-Based Groups);

II. FRAMING THE ISSUES: BUILDING CAPACITY and WILL FOR LOCAL POLICY CHANGE (7 min)

A. What history can teach us (see prior reading)
   Ella Baker’s legacy: Group-centered leadership vs. Leadership-Centered Groups
   Rejection of false dichotomies: Complementarity of MLK and Malcolm X in their final years

B. What social psychology can teach us
   Collective action/social movement/game theory/ rational choice / group identity / liberation psychology approaches
   Attempts to integrate some of these diverse approaches

III. WHY BUILD COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN GRASSROOTS GROUPS and TRADITIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS? (13 min)

A. Strengths: potential benefits (solicit input from the group)

B. Challenges: areas of tension (solicit input from the group)
IV. DIALECTICS: A METHOD FOR RESOLVING INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENT DILEMMAS (10 min)

A. From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones: Leveraging “Difference”

1. frame the 2 viewpoints as opposites at the superficial level
2. search for underlying values or needs that they actually have in common
3. reframe the 2 viewpoints as compatible at the values/needs level
4. develop steps forward / concrete actions that build on the common values/needs while tolerant of different organizational norms

B. An Example: Dueling Principles of Community Policing

1. One perspective is that some community members are sometimes profiled and stopped or harassed while walking or driving in their neighborhood.
2. The other is that the police are failing to safeguard the community because they are not proactive or responsive enough to actual criminal behavior, or they are biased in their response.
3. These appear to be opposing views. But they have a common element. An underlying theme of both perspectives is a feeling of being a second class citizen in one's own community.
4. To improve residents' partnership with the police, dialectical reasoning would then be applied to this insight. The discussion would focus on how to collaborate on achieving first class citizenship for all community members.

C. Dimensions and Anchor Points that Underlie Inter-Organizational Social Movement Dilemmas

competing goals, differing values, maturation or time (getting power vs. keeping it), different audiences, tension between means and goals, cooperative vs. confrontational approaches, hierarchical vs. heterarchical structures, consensus-building vs finding common ground vs. voting, power as expandable vs. zero-sum, power-based vs. project-based, anecdotal vs. systematic evidence, color-blind vs. color-conscious, etc.

V. EXERCISES (30 min)

Pairing off: practicing the method with sample dilemmas (or ones that participants have brought)

VI. SUMMING UP (20 min)

Sharing lessons learned from the exercise

VII. NEXT STEPS (5 min)
APPENDIX: SAMPLE INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL DILEMMAS

1. Various Forms and Degrees of Collaboration

   Occasional co-sponsorship; informal liaisons; formal coalition; integration

2 Types of Leadership

   Organizations differ in
   the need for strong, charismatic leaders who will inspire and activate people to follow them (but who tend to substitute their own goals for those of the group)
   vs.
   Need for leaders who will empower people / grow more leaders

3 Tactics

   Organizations differ regarding the belief that
   the system is so corrupt that direct confrontations / pressure tactics are necessary
   vs
   Persuasion and collaborative techniques work better in our situation, confrontation is counter-productive

4 The Outsider – Insider Dilemma

   Official Membership on appointed commissions takes a lot of time without advancing the cause much.
   vs.
   Being limited to 2 minute sound–bites at Board or Council meetings is insufficient to convey nuanced, complex critiques or even constructive alternatives.

5 The Dilemma of Diverse Audiences

   Groups differ in their Potential Audiences:
   One subscribing to a Minority Uplift Narrative, the other to a Minority Oppression Narrative

6 The Engagement Dilemma

   Moving from “building internal community” into “active engagement/collaboration with another group” brings a number of risks, such as external repression or misrepresentation and intergroup conflicts over strategy.
7. Money’s Curse

An organization’s need for money makes it vulnerable to funders’ agenda, even though accountability to funders (esp. public money) is an ethical mandate
Vs.
Organizations that eschew public funding are hobbled by scarce resources or beholden to the well-heeled in their group.

8. The Radical-Flank Dilemma

Organizations that use extreme words and actions get attention, and often take opponents by surprise, but they usually play poorly with bystanders and authorities, ultimately undermining success.
vs.
Organizations that play by middle-class rules but alienate working-class groups.

9. The Bridge-Builders Dilemma

Individuals who can mediate between groups, or different sides in a conflict, are crucial
But these people often lose the trust of their own groups.

10. Service vs. Social Change Orientations

Providing services dilutes efforts to confront power, and has also opened the service aspects of groups up to retaliation (e.g., “If you fight for more health services, I’ll shut down your clinic.”)
Vs.
many of the poorest residents in a city need services of a range of different kinds before they will have extra time to participate in organizing.

11. One Group vs a Coalition

A group-focused on one problem is more likely to produce internal agreement
vs
A coalition promotes external strength
Coalitions are often built around common opposition because it’s more difficult to get common agreement about what to replace a problem with.

12. The Information-Sharing Dilemmas

Hypocrisy: If we don’t conduct ourselves with openness and transparency, how can we hold public groups to account?
vs.
Vulnerability: If all our work is open to all and conducted in the glare of public scrutiny, we are vulnerable to having our work undermined. [relates also to inclusive vs. exclusive membership]
13. *Reaching Out or Reaching In*

Some tactics and appeals are oriented toward those on your team, others to outsiders—two very different audiences. Some leaders are popular with the group vs. leaders who interact well with outsiders.

14. *Shifting goals / shifting leadership*

As successes are achieved (or failures mount), new goals are needed; this brings dilemmas of leadership succession to the forefront.

15. *Dilemma of Success*

When grassroots groups “win” so heavily that they become the only game in town (or in the company/organization/health care system/or schools), how do they avoid becoming just another political machine?

16. *Decision-Making*

Traditional civil rights organizations tend to be Hierarchical and take orders from a central office; grassroots organizations tend to be heterarchical and strive for consensus or finding common ground or other alternative forms of decision-making other than voting.

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