

The Movement Action Plan

A tool for analysing the progress of your movement

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Activists often feel disempowered, although their movement is doing well and on the road to success. Understanding the way a movement works and recognising its success therefore can empower movement activists and groups. The Movement Action Plan (MAP), developed in the 1980s by Bill Moyer, is a good tool for this, as it describes the eight stages of successful movements and the four roles activists have to play.

Strategic Assumptions

MAP is based on seven strategic assumptions:

1. Social movements have been proven to be powerful in the past, and hopefully they can be powerful in the future.
2. Social movements are at the centre of society. They are based on society's most progressive values: justice, freedom, democracy, civil rights. Although they oppose the state or the government, social movements are promoting a better society not working against it.
3. The real issue is “social justice” versus “vested interests”. The movement works for social justice and those in power represent vested interests.
4. The grand strategy is to promote participatory democracy. Lack of real democracy is a major source of injustice and social problems. In the fight for the movement's goal – the right to conscientious objection in Turkey, or stopping road construction in the UK – developing participatory democracy is key.
5. The target constituency is the ordinary citizen, who gives power to powerholders by consenting to them. The central issue in social movements is the struggle between the movement and powerholders to win the support of the majority of the people, who ultimately hold the power to preserve the status quo or create change.
6. Success is a long-term process, not an event. To achieve success, the movement needs to be successful in a long series of sub-goals.
7. Social movements must be nonviolent.

Eight stages of social movements

A movement begins without knowing it. In Stage I, business as usual, the main aim of movement groups is to get people thinking, to show that there is a problem.

The next step is to show the failure of established channels (Stage II). Using hearings, legal processes, participation in administrative proceedings, and so on, the movement has to prove that these institutions won't act for the people to solve the problem – that people will have to act themselves.

This leads to ripening conditions (Stage III) for the development of a social movement. People start to listen and form new groups, small civil disobedience actions start to dramatise the problem. The powerholders get a bit irritated, but mainly go on as usual.

If the movement does its homework well (organising new groups, networking and coalition-building) it can take off (Stage IV) after a trigger event. This might be organised by the movement – the occupation of the construction site at Wyhl, Germany, in 1974 triggered the German anti-nuclear movement – or something done by the powerholders. The trigger event leads to massive demonstrations, large campaigns of civil disobedience and extensive media coverage. Although the movement has won a lot of public sympathy the powerholders usually won't give up at this stage.

This often leads to a perception of failure (Stage V) by many activists. This is enhanced by decreasing participation in movement events and negative media coverage.

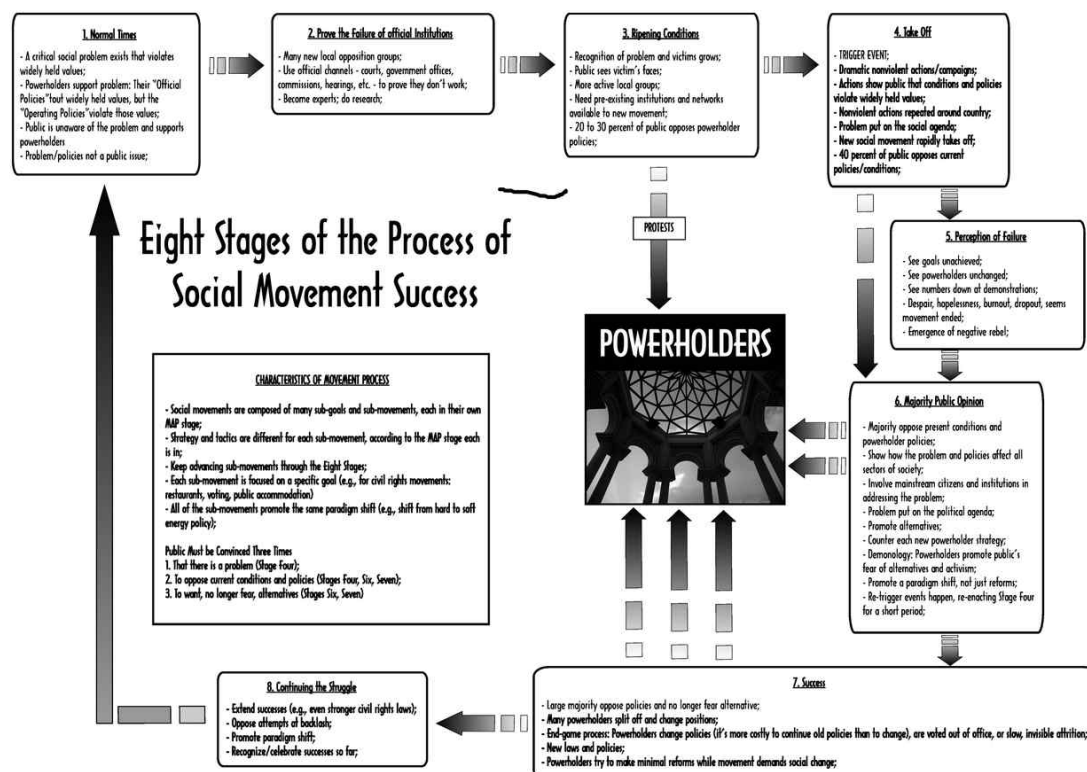
But at the same time the movement is winning over the majority (Stage VI). Until now, the movement has focused on protest; now it is important to offer solutions. Nearly three quarters of society agree that there is a need for change. It is now important to win the struggle over the kind of change to be made.

The powerholders will try to cheat the movement, increase repression, play tricks (the German government now trying to send nuclear waste to Ahaus instead of Gorleben: see page 6). The movement must aim to stop the tricks and promote an alternative solution.

Actual success (Stage VII) is a long process and often difficult to recognise. The movement's task is not just to get its demands met, but to achieve a paradigm shift, a new way of thinking. Just to turn off all nuclear power plants without changing our view on energy only moves the problem from radioactivity to carbon

dioxide (but is a success anyway). Just to get some women into the office doesn't change the structure of a patriarchal society.

After the movement wins – either by confrontational struggle or a long-term weakening of the powerholders – the movement needs to get its success implemented. Consolidation of success and moving over to other struggles (Stage VIII) is now the movement's task.



Four activist roles

Activists have many different tasks at the eight stages. They cannot all be done by one kind of person, and typically you can identify four main types of activist. All need to be present and work efficiently for the movement to succeed.

The rebel is the kind of activist many people identify with social movements. Through nonviolent direct actions and publicly saying "no", rebels put the problem on the political agenda. But they can be ineffective by identifying themselves as the lonely voice on society's fringe and playing the militant radical. Rebels are important in Stages III and IV and after any trigger event, but they usually move over to other ripening movements in Stage VI or later.

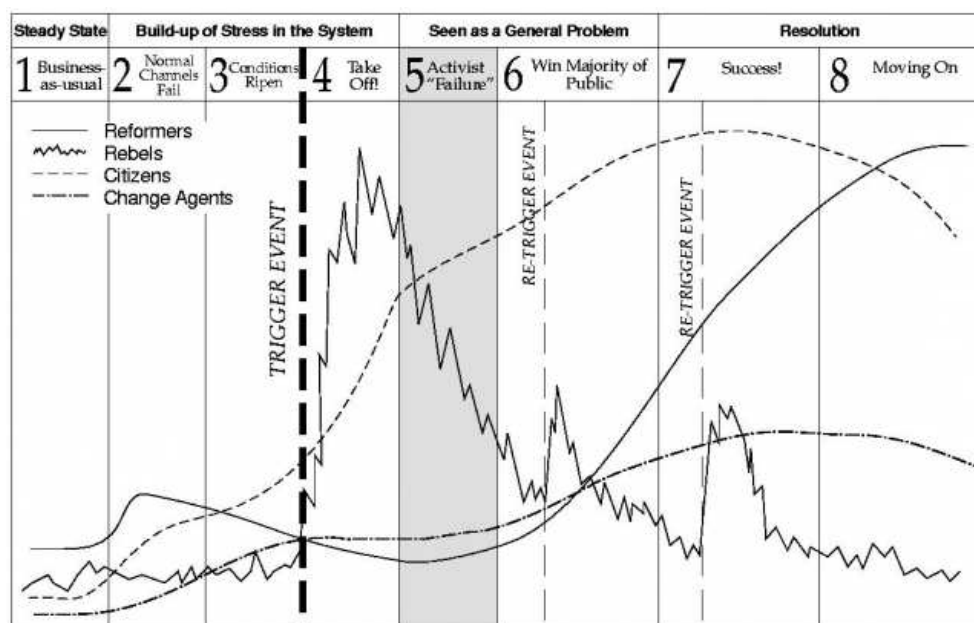
Reformers are often badly valued in movements, but they are the ones who prove the failure of existing channels or promote alternative solutions. However, they often tend to believe in the institutions or propose reforms too small to consolidate the movement's success.

Citizens make sure the movement doesn't lose contact with its main constituency. They show that the movement acts at the centre of society (teachers, physicians, and farmers participating in the Gorleben protests), and protect it against repression. They can be very ineffective when they still believe in the powerholders' claim to serve public interests.

The change agent is the forth and somehow key role in any movement. They promote education and convince the majority of society, they organise grassroots networks and promote long-term strategies. They too can be ineffective by promoting utopian visions or advocating only a single approach. They also tend to ignore personal issues and needs of activists.

What's up now?

Social movements are complex phenomena: they don't follow the MAP like a road on the map. But trying to identify the stage of your movement and the kind of activists involved helps a lot in recognising success and in developing future. If you are lost on the track – check the MAP!



The Four Activist Roles - Participation

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