CHAPTER 6

THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Have you ever sat through a bad meeting–where one person dominates the conversation, or discussions wander away from the topic at hand, or no clear decisions get made? Have you been part of an organization in which a few leaders tend to make all the decisions without consulting everyone else? In order to act effectively, social movement participants must coordinate their actions, and this requires some degree of organization. But just how they organize themselves–the structure of the organization they create, the procedures they adopt for getting things done–can mean the difference between an organization that is efficient, collegial, and empowering for participants and one that is inefficient, boring, and alienating.

Some social movement activities are only minimally organized–for example, some rallies and demonstrations. Nearly always, though, social movements include relatively formal, long-lasting organizations of participants. What kind of organization works best has been the focus of intense debate among social movement participants, as discussed below. First, however, it is useful to start by looking at how social movements as a whole are organized.

THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT SECTOR

At the most macro-sociological level, all of the social movements in a particular society make up a **social movement sector** (Zald and McCarthy 1980). Within the social movement sector, some movements may share similar ideologies, and participants may move among them, so that we can speak of them as together constituting some larger movement–such as "the progressive movement" or "the conservative movement" or "the Right." For example, in the U.S. many of the same people participate in antiwar activities, economic justice efforts, and antiracism actions, which together may be termed progressive movements, or "the Left." Within any one social movement, we typically find a number of different organizations and groups that are connected in various ways.

Competition and Cooperation Between Social Movement Organizations

Within a particular social movement or a social movement organization, groups may compete with each other for prominence, members, and resources. Groups and organizations may also cooperate, forming coalitions in which they work together to accomplish some common task (Hathaway and Meyer 1993-94; Staggenborg 1986; Zald and McCarthy 1980).

Coalitions

Organizations form coalitions in order to pool resources, enabling them to accomplish what each alone would not be able to. We can identify three different types of coalitions (Levi and Murphy 2002).

• *coordinating coalition*: This is formed in order for different groups to work together effectively in planning some event, such as a large demonstration. An example is the coalition that planned the November 1999 demonstrations in Seattle against the World Trade Center (see the box at the end of this chapter).

• *campaign coalition*: Here, groups work together toward some social, political, or economic goal. In Indiana, several different organizations are working together to halt executions (the death penalty).

• *federated coalition*: This involves a group of organizations joining under some common umbrella to share resources, information, etc. An example is United for Peace and Justice, which was formed in 2002 in response to the U.S. military attack on Iraq and has organized a number of large antiwar demonstrations in major U.S. cities. It describes itself as "a coalition of more than 1300 local and national groups throughout the United States who have joined together to oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building."

Organizations are more likely to form coalitions when activists feel that combining resources is necessary to either face some threat or take advantage of some opportunity (Staggenborg 1986; Zald and McCarthy 1987). Also, groups that are more organized are more likely to enter into coalitions (Estabrook 2000). But as activists who have tried it know, forming a coalition can be tricky, as there are a number of potential obstacles. One is disagreements over goals, strategy, or ideology (Hathaway and Meyer 1993). Another is the potential loss of organizational identity, and the costs of diverting valuable resources for coalition building (Gould et al. 2004). Finally, unequal resources can make coalition formation difficult, as an organization that has greater resources has less need for others in the coalition, and so has more power.

The difficulty of forming coalitions has been particularly apparent in efforts of environmental organizations and labor groups to work together. These two social movements

The Green Justice Coalition is a partnership of community, labor, and environmental groups that supports energy efficiency as well as job creation and increased wages for workers in energy-efficiency businesses.

have traditionally clashed over competing interests: environmentalists typically support policies that protect the natural environment regardless of the costs for working-class people (e.g. job loss), while labor unionists tend to support policies that create jobs, regardless of the environmental costs. For example, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a labor union, supported the U.S. government's plan to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, which environmental groups strongly opposed. These competing interests have been especially salient in the Northwest, where logging is an important economic activity: environmentalists want to save the forests, while labor groups are concerned about the loss of jobs if logging is banned. Because of this history, the cooperation of environmentalists and labor groups in planning the November 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle was historic (see box).

In addition to fundamental differences in their interests, such "blue-green" (blue for blue-collar jobs, green for the environment) coalitions are difficult for other reasons (Gould et al. 2004):

• *different views of environmentalism*. While people in mainstream environmental organizations tend to subscribe to a "biocentric environmentalism" (focused on preserving wilderness and the habitats of non-human animals), the environmentalism of those in labor groups is more likely to be an "anthropocentric environmentalism"(focused on the health effects on humans of environmental degradation, like air and water pollution). .

• *differing strategies*. In particular, some environmental groups use militant tactics that labor groups may not feel comfortable with.

• *class differences* among participants (see Table 1).

• *lack of communication* between environmental and labor groups. Coalitions are much easier with "bridge builders" who are familiar with and trusted by people in both organizations or movements.

These obstacles matter because blue-green coalitions are desirable in situations where they have common interests–most typically, opposing the abuse of corporate power. One example occurred in the mid-1980s in Louisiana, when members of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union at a BASF chemicals factory went on strike. To increase their pressure on the company, they took up the cause of environmental groups that were concerned with cancer-causing toxic wastes in Louisiana (Minchin 2003, cited in Gould et al. 2004). Similarly, the movement against corporate globalization is stronger when labor groups, comprising people who have lost jobs from the movement of American industry overseas, can work together with environmental groups, which are concerned with unchecked corporate destruction of the environment, particularly in less developed countries.

The presence of social class differences is not confined to these movements. Class differences have also made it difficult for peace groups, which tend to comprise people from middle-class

backgrounds (who are predominantly white), to reach out to labor movement organizations and organizations of people of color (who are predominantly low-income and working class). Why? Sociologist Fred Rose (2000) conducted an informative study of the ways that participation in social movements differs for working class and middle class activists, and his findings are summarized in Table 1.

Protesters prepare to be tear gassed by poilce at the 1999 demonstration against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. Notice that they appear to be overwhelmingly white.

Differences in people's racial-ethnic backgrounds can also impede working together in a social movement. For example, activists have discussed extensively why there were not more people of color from the U.S. at the antiglobalization protests held in 1999 and 2000. (People of color from Third World organizations were represented at the November 1999 protests in Seattle, for example, but U.S. people of color represented just 5 percent of protesters, whereas they make up 13 percent of the entire population (Martinez 2000).) Some reasons include the following (Martinez 2000, Raja 2000):

• *the likelihood of police repression*. Research shows that people of color are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system, and so attending a protest where clashes with police are likely is more risky for them.

• *financial issues*. People of color have, on average, less income and wealth than whites. Hence it is more difficult for them to pay for travel, meals, and lodging to attend protests in other cities; to pay for adequate care for one's children while attending protests; and to miss work to attend a protest. In some instances, majority-white groups have provided people of color with resources to help them with travel and lodging.

• *lack of interest and/or lack of knowledge of globalization*. One cause of this is that people of color have less access to the internet, where much of the organizing and publicity for demonstrations take place. Another is that they are more likely to have other, more immediate concerns, in their own communities, like income, adequate housing, and safety. Finally, few of the largely-white organizations that planned the protests reached out to communities of color.

• *distrust of white activists*, due to past experiences in which themselves, their knowledge, or their issues were not adequately respected.

• *cultural differences*. One protest participant, for example, spoke of an "insider's culture" of particular behaviors and vocabulary that pervaded pre-protest meetings. This might include ways of dressing, vocabulary, prior knowledge of nonviolence, and the like.

• *lack of people of color in visible leadership roles* leading up to Seattle protest. Majority-white organizations have tended to invite participation of people of color, rather than give them "co-ownership" (Raja 2000) in organizations and planning for events.

Why does it matter if a movement is mostly white and middle-class? Why should mainstream environmentalists, for example, care about collaborating with working-class people and people of color? First, failing to do so will limit the movement's appeal. If the concerns of other sectors of the population are not included in a movement's agenda, then the movement will not spread beyond the white, middle-class population. Second, it limits the movement's ability to grow stronger by forging alliances with other sectors of society. Imagine how powerful a social movement would be that included people of all races-ethnicities and of all social classes. Finally, a social movement's ideology will remain incomplete without including the views of those whose experiences of social class and race-ethnicity are not the dominant ones. The second-wave feminist movement, which arose in the late 1960s, fought for the availability of contraception and abortion, on the assumption that the choice to limit one's childbearing was central to women's freedom. But these mostly white, middle-class activists neglected to see that for many women of color and poor women, who have faced involuntary sterilization and the lack of financial resources to adequately raise their children, the right to *have* children and have the resources to raise them is just as important as the right not to have them. With the broadening of the feminist movement to include women of diverse races-ethnicities and social classes, the notion of reproductive rights replaced the narrow focus on abortion and contraception.

Factionalism

Sometimes factions, or competing groups, develop within a particular social movement or SMO based on disagreements about ideology, organization, or strategy, sometimes resulting in actual schisms (splits). Gamson's (1975) study found that schisms had occurred in 43 percent of the fifty-three movement organizations that he randomly selected to study. Such infighting is often held responsible for movements' failures.

A well-known example of **factionalism** occurred in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the largest New Left organization of students in the 1960s. The internal conflicts in SDS played an

Table 1. Differences Between Working-Class and Middle-Class Activists
(adapted from Rose 2000)

	working-class folks	**middle-class folks**
beliefs about why people create social movements	people organize around immediate interests	people organize to secure universal goods
beliefs about how change happens	struggle is of two parties with opposing interests	change happens through education and value change; the struggle is a moral/ethical one
type of knowledge valued	direct (individual) experience	scientific knowledge (books, etc.); see working-class people as uninformed
response to learning about injustice	"weary fatalism"	become motivated
strategic focus	action	education/knowledge
type of organizational structure and process typically used	traditional, centralized/hierarchical (e.g. labor unions)	collective (consensus decision making; rotating leadership; etc.)

important part in the organization's eventual demise. In the mid-1960s, a number of members of Progressive Labor (PL), a Marxist-oriented group focused on organizing working-class people, began to join SDS as a way to further PL's agenda. Eventually a split developed.

> As the PL faction grew within SDS, internal conflict grew over the direction the organization should take and the tactics it should use. PL wanted to place more emphasis on organizing and educating working-class factory workers. SDS, and, in particular, the National Office (NO) staff members, believed the focus should be on campus activism, fighting the war, and by the late 1960s, fighting racism. Looking to gain strength, the NO faction established ties with the Black Panther Party, a known opponent of PL and a vanguard group in the fight for black liberation and for the revolution. In the summer of 1969, at SDS's national convention, Black Panthers charged PL with having the wrong position concerning self-determination for oppressed people and gave SDS an ultimatum to break its association with PL or be considered a traitor itself. SDS chose to expel the PL members. (Balser 1997: 203)

Those opposed to PL split into further factions. One of them, the Revolutionary Youth Movement, eventually became Weatherman, an underground organization that advocated full-scale revolution in the U.S. and was responsible for a number of bombings.

Factionalism can contribute to social movement failure, but it also tends to occur when an organization is already in decline: as a movement experiences a loss of support and participants, or is rebuffed by opponents, activists search desperately for solutions and may advocate different paths for the movement. This was true for SDS: the frustration of failing to stop the war in Vietnam and the increasing government attacks on the Black Panthers contributed to internal disagreements. In addition, factionalism may be more likely in social movements with a decentralized structure, where groups and individuals are more free to express dissent (Gamson 1975, Balser 1997).

SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael speaking at a rally in Mississippi. Carmichael led the SNCC faction that eventually expelled whites from the organization and joined the Black Power movement.

A good example of the role of external factors in precipitating factionalism is SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). In the early 1960s, SNCC was focused on gaining voting rights for southern blacks who had been widely disenfranchised by discriminatory measures like poll taxes or literacy tests, or by the fear of white retaliation. After the passages of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which made it easier for blacks to register and vote, SNCC had to reorient itself. One faction within SNCC argued for an emphasis on self-determination for blacks, particularly in economic matters, without which the right to vote meant little. It followed logically that blacks needed their own organizations. Another faction, however, argued that SNCC should continue to be a multiracial organization that invited white allies to participate. Two additional factors that exacerbated SNCC activists' distrust of white liberals were the Kennedy administration's failure to follow through on promises to support SNCC's efforts and the Democratic Party's unwillingness at its 1964 convention to accept the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, organized by SNCC, to represent the state instead of the all-white Mississippi Democratic Party (Balser 1997). Ultimately, whites were expelled from SNCC, and SNCC became part of the growing "Black Power" movement.

Finally, it is important to note that schisms are not necessarily detrimental to a movement's success. A social movement may be more effective when it consists of multiple groups that use a variety of tactics, because more targets are then reached; that appeal to a variety of people, which increases

participation and diversity; and that are able to harness new resources (Balser 1997).

SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

When activists decide to organize themselves, they must adopt guidelines for group **structure** (how the group is put together–officers, etc.) and group **process** (how it operates). The structures and processes through which organizations operate are, at root, about conflict. Working together involves "decision making dilemmas" because groups must manage relationships, resources, activities, and values (Brown and Hosking 1986: 72). Organizational structures and processes are essentially mechanisms for resolving such dilemmas in order to channel the activities of diverse individuals toward a common goal.

However, SMO's differ widely in the type of structure and process they create. They can be hierarchical– with definite layers of authority–or democratic. They can operate according to formal rules, or without clear rules. They can have a well-defined division of labor–some folks write the newsletter, others fold, stamp, and mail it–or can combine tasks so everyone does some of everything. The way that activists work together within SMO's has varied greatly and at times has been a topic of intense debate for participants. This debate has focused on both the practical consequences of different organizational forms (What type of organization is most effective for achieving a movement's goals?) and on the principles that inform a group's organization (What type of organization is most consistent with movement ideology?). At one extreme are organizations like the Sierra Club that look much like other large institutions in U.S. society: run by paid professionals, organized hierarchically, operated with by-laws, and the like. At the other extreme are smaller groups–for example, a local peace group–with no paid staff and no formal rules, which meets intermittently when participants initiate it.

We can identify two primary dimensions along which SMO's differ.

- **formalization**. More formalized SMO's have "established procedures or structures that enable them to perform certain tasks routinely and to continue to function with changes in leadership" (Staggenborg 1988); more informal SMO's lack these characteristics. Formalized SMO's tend to be more stable over time. They may have memberships of either individuals and/or organizations. United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) is an antiwar organization that comprises member groups, but has no individual members.

- **bureaucratization**. Bureaucracies are organizations that are characterized by a centralized authority; formal procedures; and a division of labor (Weber 1922). Most modern institutions are bureaucracies–government, corporations, schools.

Using these two dimensions, we can conceive of three different kinds of organizations, as shown in Table 2. In contemporary U.S. society, the bureaucratic form of organization is sort of the default, such that when people form an organization they often automatically assume that there must be a president (or chair), vice president, treasurer, and secretary, as well as a constitution that specifies the purpose and procedures of the group. In some instances a group has no choice. For example, the U.S. government

requires that organizations that register as nonprofit organizations (to be exempt from taxes) submit a copy of its by laws (operating procedures). Several years ago, some students at Manchester College formed a group called the Radical Student Union. When they wanted to post signs around campus, they were told by the administration that they could only do so if they were an official student group, and as an official student group they had to have a constitution and officers. However, the students who had started the group had anarchist beliefs: on principle they had no formal rules or officers. This put them in a bind, resulting in an extended discussion among participants about whether to become a recognized student group. (They decided not to.)

Starting in the 1970s, the number of **professional social movement organizations** in the U.S. greatly increased (McCarthy & Zald 1973). These are formal, bureaucratic organizations characterized by the presence of paid staff and by membership made up mostly of conscience constituents whose primary contributions are financial ones, instead of beneficiary constituents who contribute time and skills. The hiring of paid staff has been made possible by the increased funding available for social movements, from private foundations and well-off individuals. Compared to volunteer leaders, movement professionals tend to promote more formalized structures, both because their salaries depend on a stable organization and because their career interest lies in expanding organizations and developing participants' skills.

The merits of formal vs. informal structures has been hotly debated in the social movements literature. Formalized SMO's are more stable (Staggenborg 1988), but the primary argument against formalization is that it inhibits militancy and disruptiveness, hence movement success, at least for movements of marginalized people (e.g. the poor) (Piven and Cloward 1977). The effects of SMO structures and processes on movement outcomes is discussed more fully in chapter 8.

Participatory Democracy: The Collectivist Form of Organization

As shown in Table 2, an organization can be formally organized *without* being bureaucratic. This is called **collectivist organization** (Rothschild-Whitt 1979), though among social movement scholars and activists it is more commonly termed **participatory democracy**. (It is useful to contrast this with representative democracy, in which participants choose individuals to represent them in a decision making body. In a participatory democracy, everyone takes part in making decisions.) While collectivist organization is not unique to social movement organizations, social movement activists have been pioneers in its development. Today, most social movement organizations on the Left use some variant of it. Not only social movement organizations, but many organizations of people with politically-left ideologies operate collectively: battered women's shelters, lesbian bookstores and coffeehouses, alternative schools, and worker-owned companies, for example.

Table 3 contrasts collectivist with bureaucratic organizations. Since authority is vested in the collectivity (the group), the structure of collectivist organizations is decentralized. Collectivist organizations cannot remove all differences in power and authority, however: inequality based on individual differences like level of commitment or verbal skills would remain. The most that collectivist organization can do is remove the bureaucratic basis for inequality (Rothschild-White 1979).

Table 2. A Typology of Organizational Types

	informal	formal
nonbureaucratic	friendship group	collectivist organization
bureaucratic	----	bureaucratic organization

How Participatory Democracy Works

Various how-to books and pamphlets written by activists describe how to operate a participatory democratic organization–specifically, how to use consensus decision making and how to run a meeting (see, for example, Coover, Deacon, Esser and Moore 1977; Lakey n.d.; Women's Information Center n.d.; Wheeler and Chin 1984). Keep in mind the distinction between formal procedures and operating procedures in an organization (Knoke 1986:11): the way an organization operates in practice may or may not be consistent with its formal policies. Studies of bureaucratic organizations have shown that informal operating procedures do significantly mollify the effect of the formal structure on interactions within the organization. In my experience, activist groups often deviate from the ideal type of participatory democratic organization described here, especially if they are small and made up of friends.

Consensus Decision Making

This is the core of participatory democracy. Think of organizational structures and processes as essentially mechanisms for resolving conflict; consensus decision making is the basic process used for resolving conflicts in democratic organizations. The guiding principle is that for a decision to be made, all those present must be satisfied with it, or at least be able to "live with it." Participants air their views and discuss alternatives until one can be found that is acceptable to all. Full agreement is not always possible, and conventions have arisen that allow for decision making in such circumstances. If someone disagrees with a particular decision but not strongly enough to stop it from going through, she or he may "stand aside," essentially abstaining from the decision but registering her or his disagreement. If a participant disagrees so strongly that she or he is unwilling to allow the group to act, she or he blocks consensus, and discussion continues or no decision is made.

Meetings are "facilitated" rather than presided over by an individual. The **facilitator's** job is not to set the agenda and make decisions for the group, but rather to help the group accomplish a common task using consensus decision-making.

In contrast to conventional norms that private life should not interfere in public life, the practice of "personal sharing" or "check-in" at the start of a meeting allows for individuals to brief others about themselves, important events happening in their lives, and their present emotional state. One purpose of

this is simply to introduce new participants to one another. Another is to provide an opportunity for those present to share events or feelings that might influence their participation in some way, to alert fellow participants to each other's "hidden agendas." For example, if I had an argument with a friend the night before, I may be carrying a reservoir of anger that could surface during discussion of some group issue during the meeting. If my fellow participants know this, they can better understand my behaviors.

Shared Leadership

Participatory democratic organizations either have no permanent leadership positions, or if they do, the positions are often rotated among members. Rather than assigning a particular task to the person who is the most skilled at performing it, responsibilities for tasks are rotated so that as many people as possible develop expertise in tasks like writing, speaking, and facilitating meetings. This encourages individuals to share their knowledge and experience with each other, rather than hoard it and use it to gain power or authority. In addition, rotating tasks insures that each person performs both the less prestigious, more menial tasks and the more prestigious ones, minimizing the differentiation of status and rewards among participants.

Many people assume that creating a democratic group means rejecting any formal structure or process at all. However, a “structureless” group can turn out to be profoundly undemocratic, as Jo Freeman (1984) outlines in her classic piece, “The Tyranny of Structureless.” While participating in the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s, Freeman found that groups that abandoned formal structures in an attempt to be more personalistic and democratic often ended up controlled by an “informal elite” that emerged on the basis of friendship, political ideology, or assertiveness. She points out that there is no such thing as a "structureless" group: all organizations have some kind of decision-making structure, whether explicit (formal) or implicit (informal), centralized or decentralized. If no formal structure is created, then the informal structure that inevitably emerges in any group will take over, giving rise to an elite. Furthermore, without a formal structure to distribute power, the rise of such an elite goes unchecked and unacknowledged. Freeman herself experienced being “trashed” in a women’s liberation group: the more powerful members of the group simply stopped listening to her, consulting with her, and socializing with her, effectively freezing her out of group decisions (Joreen 1976).

The Rationale for Participatory Democracy

The long history of participatory democracy in U.S. social movements is documented by Francesca Polletta in her book *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (2002). (Henceforth I will use the term *participatory democracy* instead of collectivist organization, as this is how social movement activists themselves more commonly have referred to such organizations.) Activists in the pacifist movement, who reject all violence, have been using variants of participatory democracy since the early twentieth century, and segments of the labor movement in the 19th century organized democratically. Participatory democracy was used by young civil rights activists in SNCC, New Left activists in SDS, and women in the feminist movement. It continues to be the guiding

principle for most peace and justice organizations in the contemporary U.S. In most cases, activists have had both ideological and practical reasons for using participatory democracy.

A general assembly at the Occupy Wall Street protests. These regular meetings were held to make decisions during the protests. They were highly structured in order to maximize the input of everyone.

Ideological Rationale

Many groups that have organized themselves along participatory democratic lines have done so in part for ideological reasons, out of concern that their means are consistent with their ends. To build a society characterized by justice and equality, they argue, we must practice justice and equality among ourselves, in how we work together and how we treat one another. This was particularly important for activists in the 1960s, who questioned the conventional bureaucratic form of organization. They argued that bureaucratic organizations created unjust inequalities of power and rewards and thwarted the development individual's human potentials and of caring human relationships. New Left activists sought a new way of working together. The Port Huron Statement, the founding document of the New Left written in 1962, makes an eloquent case for participatory democratic structures (see box at the end of this chapter). New Left activivsts insisted that in creating such structures, they were not forgoing strategic concerns for the sake of expressive ones–they had not abandoned politics to build their own utopian groups. Instead, they were practicing **prefigurative politics**, the effort to "prefigure" or model the desired future society in one's present relationships and actions (Breines 1980).

Instrumental Rationale

Activists have also created participatory democratic organizations because they are effective in several ways. Polletta (2002) identified three primary benefits of them: solidary benefits, innovatory benefits, and developmental benefits. (Note, however, that some studies have found that bureaucratically organized SMO's have a greater chance of achieving their goals than nonbureaucratic ones–see, for example, Gamson 1975. This debate is discussed more extensively in the chapter on social movement outcomes and their influences.)

Solidary benefits. Participatory democracy strengthens the commitment of individuals to the group (Knoke 1986). Taking equal responsibility for making decisions and carrying out group activities creates a sense of ownership among participants. They become more willing to commit their time and skills to carrying out the group's activities. Holistic social relations and non-differentiated work roles, which encourage individuals to relate in personal rather than instrumental ways, contribute to this

Table 3. A Comparison of Bureaucratic and Collectivist Organizations
(adapted from Rothschild-Whitt 1979)

	Bureaucratic Organization	**Collectivist Organization**
Dimension		
authority (power to make laws, enforce rules, command obedience)	individuals have authority by virtue of holding an office or having expertise; offices are organized hierarchically (those on top have more authority)	authority resides in the collectivity as a whole; delegated, if at all, only temporarily
rules	fixed, universal, formalized rules; decisions are made based on rules	minimal formal rules; decisions mostly made on ad hoc, individual basis, though with consideration of the ethics of the situation
social control	behavior is controlled through direct supervision and standardized rules and sanctions	behavior is controlled through personalistic or moralistic appeals
social relations	ideal of impersonality; relations are based on one's role, instrumental (means to an end)	ideal of community: relations are personal, holistic (based on the whole person), of value in themselves
recruitment and advancement	employment based on training and formal certification; advancement based on achievement or seniority	employment based on friends, socio-political values, personality, informally assessed knowledge and skills
incentive structure (how people are motivated)	pay and other material incentives	normative incentives (satisfaction of doing good) and solidary incentives (satisfaction of being part of a group)
social stratification	offices receive differential rewards; hierarchy of rewards creates inequality	egalitarian: few if any differential rewards
differentiation	maximal division of labor (separation of manual and mental labor, administrative and productive jobs); maximal specialization of jobs (specialists and experts)	minimal division of labor (everyone does both manual and mental labor, administrative and productive jobs); minimal specialization (everyone learns all tasks - no specialists or experts)

commitment.

Not only do all members of the group take part in making decisions, but in the process they hear each other's reasons and feelings, which promotes understanding and acceptance of each other (Polletta 2002). This helps prevent dissenters within the group from feeling marginalized and so maintains unity. As opposed to the win-lose model of decision by majority vote, decision making by consensus is a "win-win" process. Polletta describes a SNCC meeting at which staff debated whether individual staffers should be permitted to carry guns to defend themselves against violent attacks by white opponents. A variety of opinions were expressed: "I will not carry a gun but would use one in self-defense if needed"; "Carrying a gun is inconsistent with SNCC's commitment to nonviolence"; etc. In the end, the group decided that volunteers would not carry weapons, though the issue would be left open for discussion of specific situations. But Polletta points out that the discussion that preceded this decision was crucial in laying out a range of opinions that volunteers could hold and still remain committed to the group.

The solidary benefits of participatory democracy are especially important in cases of high-risk activism. Participating in voter registration efforts in the early 1960s in the deep South was very risky: volunteers were shot at, beaten, and killed. James Forman, executive secretary of SNCC, recalled, "The dangers that we all faced were too great to risk the possibility of someone not implementing a decision made by the group because he personally disagreed with it" (quoted in Polletta 2002: 79). Another staff member said, "People were making a decision about how they were going to use their lives. And that's not something you could vote on" (quoted in Polletta 2002: 79).

Solidary benefits are also crucial when the prospects for a movement's success are slim. The goals of peace and justice groups are often not readily attainable (stopping a war, ending racism) and even partial successes are infrequent. These organizations cannot always offer participants the satisfaction of achieving a concrete goal, but they can offer the satisfactions that come with organizing collectively. In fact, while ideological factors may initially motivate individuals to join a social movement, continued participation typically depends more on feeling committed to the group (Hirsch 1986, Knoke 1981, Knoke 1986). For example, in a study of a Chicago community organization, researchers found material self-interest to be the major factor in the initial mobilization of social movement participants, but found continuing involvement to be based additionally on the benefits felt from interaction within the group (Hirsch 1986).

Innovatory benefits. Many activists argue that by encouraging input into decision making by all members of a group, rather than a small leadership, participatory democracy improves the quality of the decisions that are made. The more that input from diverse individuals is incorporated into making a decision, the more creative and realistic that decision will be.

> In a decentralized organization, people can respond better to local conditions and can act quickly on decisions....In an organization whose members refuse the notion that political creativity is restricted to those with formal credentials, people can bring diverse skills and insights to bear on determining the best course of action. When I asked activists to describe a good meeting, they usually described one percolating with creative ideas. Open discussion made it possible to solicit numerous proposals and insights; the confidence that all ideas would be taken seriously but also carefully evaluated made

people feel that the exercise was worthwhile (Polletta 2002: 210).

Developmental benefits. Using participatory democracy helps individuals to develop their leadership skills. This is especially important when the beneficiary of a social movement is a population that has largely been denied the chance to do so.

> For those who have been systematically excluded from political participation, participatory decision making provides skills in negotiating agendas and engaging with political authorities. It trains people to present arguments and to weigh the costs and benefits of different options. It develops their sense of political efficacy...Rotating leadership, establishing a norm of participation, and working to consensus trains people to *do* contentious politics....(Polletta 2002: 10)

Others have called this process **empowerment**. In contrast to power traditionally defined as the ability to make someone do what they would not do otherwise, empowerment means "enabling people to do what they *could* not otherwise do" (italics added) (Ferguson 1987:9). An important consequence of this is that participants experience themselves as leaders, so their behaviors and attitudes are not characterized by apathy and alienation, but by commitment and involvement. The feeling of empowerment may also extend to other arenas of a person's daily life once they experience it within a social movement.

These development benefits come not only from the practice of formulating and articulating one's own positions, but from watching and listening to more experienced activists do the same. When consensus decision making is used, participants are exposed to others' ideas and thought processes, from which they can learn.

Obstacles to Participatory Democracy

Some people–mainly those who have never been part of a particpatory democratic organization–doubt that a group can really function effectively, or for very long, without leaders and experts. These organizations can fail–so can any organization, for that matter. Still, it is useful to investigate the obstacles that activists face in practicing participatory democracy.

Heterogeneity of the Group

Participatory democracy tends to work best in a group that is relatively homogeneous with respect to individuals' interests, core beliefs, and interactional style. These commonalities facilitate trust between participants and a common "etiquette"–a sense of how to interact with others appropriately according to the group's norms. When group members come from different cultures, or from different social classes, or have different levels of education, developing such trust and shared norms can be difficult. During Freedom Summer in 1964, for example, the white, northern volunteers who traveled to Mississippi sometimes acted in patronizing ways toward the local black participants. They had more education and a

stronger sense of privilege, and their presence caused resentment among many black civil rights activists.

Size of the Group

Maybe participatory democracy works in relatively small groups, in which people can come to know and trust each other, and in which there is time and space for everyone's voices to be heard. But what of larger groups? Can an organization with hundreds or thousands of members use consensus decision making? Could a government or business work as a participatory democracy? For one thing, larger groups are typically more heterogeneous. But even if they were not, the sheer number of people makes it more difficult to operate collectively. One model for large-group particpatory democracy is currently practiced in most direct action campaigns in the U.S. (**direct action** refers to acting directly on an issue rather than relying on persuasive techniques–for example, blockading a building). Participants are organized into **affinity groups** of about 5-10 people, which act as decision making bodies during the action. (What signs will we carry? How will we act toward police?). When the larger group needs to make a decision, each affinity group sends a representative (a **spokesperson**) to a **spokescouncil**, where the issue at hand is discussed and recommendations made. Each spokesperson reports back to her or his affinity group, each group makes a decision, and if need be the spokescouncil meets again.

The news media. Finally, the media can essentially "appoint" leaders even when a social movement organization strives to operate as a participatory democracy. Todd Gitlin, an activist from the sixties, has noted that in covering the New Left, the media created movement celebrities by focusing on particular individuals, which often caused tensions within groups that were intentionally leaderless (1980).

LEADERSHIP

While some SMO's have made a conscious effort to avoid having leaders, others have not. And, even in participatory democratic organizations, some participants may still emerge as informal leaders who, based on their experience, commitment, skills, knowledge, or personality, have moral authority, if not formal power over others. This is common in social movements–think of Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, or Gandhi. In fact, leaders are sometimes crucial to the emergence and outcomes of social movements–they may form SMO's, inspire others to join, "mobilize resources," make strategic decisions, and the like.

How much leaders matter in social movements is, at heart, an issue about the relative importance of structure (social conditions) and agency (human effort) (Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Simply put, can a good leader (or leaders) create an effective social movement, regardless of the social conditions present in the larger society? Or are social movements largely the result of circumstances beyond any one person's control (like popular opinions; government policies; a population's level of education; etc.)? It is useful to look at leadership as both an independent variable– something that effects social movements–and a dependent variable–something that is affected by social structure, including both macrosociological factors and how social movements themselves are organized. (Morris and Staggenborg 2004).

Leadership as a Dependent Variable

Who becomes a leader? Social movement leaders usually come from relatively privileged backgrounds–they are typically well educated and from middle or upper-class backgrounds (Morris and Staggenborg 2004). This gives them the money, free time, social contacts, and intellectual skills (writing, critiquing arguments, etc.). Women have traditionally been less prominent among social movement leaders. For example, leaders in the civil rights movement came primarily from the churches, where nearly all pastors were male. However, women formed a secondary layer of leadership that played an important role in bringing in participants and new leaders (Robnett 1997). Social movement leaders have often been previously involved in other social movements or served as leaders in other organizations. But level of education, in particular, seems to have a strong effect on who becomes leaders.

> A host of social movement activities–framing grievances and formulating ideologies, debating, interfacing with media, writing, orating, devising strategies and tactics, creatively synthesizing information gleaned from local, national, and international venues, dialoguing with internal and external elites, improvising and innovating, developing rationales for coalition building and channeling emotions–are primarily intellectual tasks. The manipulation of language and other symbols is central to these tasks. Formal education, especially at the university level, is the main avenue through which people acquire advanced reading, writing, speaking, and analytic skills.... (Morris and Staggenborg 2004: 175).

Leadership as an Independent Variable

How do leaders, in turn, influence the social movements that they lead? First, they influence whether a movement develops at all. Even when opportunities present themselves, someone must recognize and take advantage of them by recruiting people and procuring resources to get a new movement rolling. Leaders make strategic decisions, including what goals to pursue, what tactics to use, and how to organize the movement. The particular movements in which leaders have had prior experience affects the choices they make. The leaders of the older branch of the feminist movement that emerged in the 1970s had experience in voluntary organizations and political parties that used more conventional strategies and structures. The leaders in the younger branch of the movement came from the civil rights and New Left movements, and so were used to decentralized structures and militant tactics (Freeman 1975, cited in Morris and Staggenborg 2004).

Ganz (2000) made an important contribution to the study of social movement leadership by specifying the organizational conditions under which "good" leaders emerge–leaders who increase the "strategic capacity" of organizations, or the ability to make effective strategic decisions. These are discussed more extensively in the chapter on social movement outcomes, but briefly, from his study of the United Farm Workers, Ganz concluded that strategic capacity is dependent on a "leadership team" that is

diverse with respect to background, experiences, and viewpoints; on organizational structures that permit regular input into decision making by members; on mobilizing resources from a variety of sources; and on holding leaders accountable to participants.

From ***ACT UP (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) Civil Disobedience Manual***
(http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Consensus.html)

Consensus Decision Making

What is consensus?

Consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.

Consensus vs. voting

Voting is a means by which we choose one alternative from several. Consensus, on the other hand, is a process of synthesizing many diverse elements together.

Voting is a win or lose model, in which people are more often concerned with the numbers it takes to "win" than with the issue itself. Voting does not take into account individual feelings or needs. In essence, it is a quantitative, rather than qualitative, method of decision-making.

With consensus people can and should work through differences and reach a mutually satisfactory position. It is possible for one person's insights or strongly held beliefs to sway the whole group. No ideas are lost, each member's input is valued as part of the solution.

A group committed to consensus may utilize other forms of decision making (individual, compromise, majority rules) when appropriate; however, a group that has adopted a consensus model will use that process for any item that brings up a lot of emotions, is something that concerns people's ethics, politics, morals or other areas where there is much investment

What does consensus mean?

Consensus does not mean that everyone thinks that the decision made is necessarily the best one possible, or even that they are sure it will work. What it does mean is that in coming to that decision, no one felt that her/his position on the matter was misunderstood or that it wasn't given a proper hearing. Hopefully, everyone will think it is the best decision; this often happens because, when it works, collective intelligence does come up with better solutions than could individuals.

Consensus takes more time and member skill, but uses lots of resources before a decision is made, creates commitment to the decision and often facilitates creative decision. It gives everyone some experience with new processes of interaction and conflict resolution, which is basic but important skill-building. For consensus to be a positive experience, it is best if the group has (1) common values, (2) some skill in group process and conflict resolution, or a commitment to let these be facilitated, (3) commitment and responsibility to the group by its members and 4) sufficient time for everyone to participate in the process.

Forming the consensus proposals

During discussion a proposal for resolution is put forward. It is amended and modified through more discussion, or withdrawn if it seems to be a dead end. During this discussion period it is important to articulate differences clearly. It is the responsibility of those who are having trouble with a proposal to put forth alternative suggestions.

The fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will. The fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard. Coercion and trade-offs are replaced with creative alternatives, and compromise with synthesis.

When a proposal seems to be well understood by everyone, and there are no new changes asked for, the facilitator(s) can ask if there are any objections or reservations to it. If there are no objections, there can be a call for consensus. If there are still no objections, then after a moment of silence you have your decision. Once consensus does appear to have been reached, it really helps to have someone repeat the decision to the group so everyone is clear on what has been decided.

Difficulties in reaching consensus

If a decision has been reached, or is on the verge of being reached that you cannot support, there are several ways to express your objections:

Non-support ("I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along.")
Reservations ('I think this may be a mistake but I can live with it.")
Standing aside ("I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it. ")
Blocking ("I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. It is immoral." If a final decision violates someone's fundamental moral values they are obligated to block consensus.)
Withdrawing from the group. If many people express non-support or reservations or stand aside or leave the group, it may not be a viable decision even if no one directly blocks it. This is what is known as a "lukewarm" consensus and it is just as desirable as a lukewarm beer or a lukewarm bath.

If consensus is blocked and no new consensus can be reached, the group stays with whatever the previous decision was on the subject, or does nothing if that is applicable. Major philosophical or moral questions that will come up with each affinity group will have to be worked through as soon as the group forms.

Roles in a consensus meeting

There are several roles which, if filled, can help consensus decision making run smoothly.

The **facilitator(s)** aids the group in defining decisions that need to be made, helps them through the stages of reaching an agreement, keeps the meeting moving, focuses discussion to the point-at hand; makes sure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and formulates and tests to see if consensus has been reached. Facilitators help to direct the process of the meeting, not its content. They never make decisions for the group. If a facilitator feels too emotionally involved in an issue or discussion and cannot remain neutral in behavior, if not in attitude, then s/he should ask someone to take over the task of facilitation for that agenda item.

A **vibes-watcher** is someone besides the facilitator who watches and comments on individual and group feelings and patterns of participation. Vibes-watchers need to be especially tuned in to the sexism of group dynamics.

A **recorder** can take notes on the meeting, especially of decisions made and means of implementation, and a **time-keeper** keeps things going on schedule so that each agenda item can be covered in the time allotted for it (if discussion runs over the time for an item, the group may or may not decide to contract for more time to finish up).

Even though individuals take on these roles, all participants in a meeting should be aware of and involved in the issues, process, and feelings of the group, and should share their individual expertise in helping the group run smoothly and reach a decision. This is especially true when it comes to finding compromise agreements to seemingly contradictory positions.

Sample Meeting Agenda

1. Check In (10 min.)
2. Agenda Review (5 min.)
3. Items for Discussion/Action
    a. Item A (15 min.)
    b. Item B (10 min.)
4. Announcements
5. Decide on next meeting, facilitator (5 min.)
6. Evaluation (10 min.)
7. Closing (5 min.)

Total: 56 min.

The roles for a meeting that uses consensus decision making are described above. The facilitator is typically designated before the meeting (often at the end of the last meeting), but the other roles may be designated at the start of the meeting.

Copies of the **agenda** are distributed before the meeting and/or posted during the meeting for all to see. The approximate time needed for each agenda item is written next to it. This way, participants have an idea of how important each item is and can adjust the length and content of their comments accordingly. If time runs out for an agenda item before it is completed, the group may decide to allot further time to it. By accepting the agenda, the group is also agreeing how long the meeting will last and can gain a sense of progress from moving through the agenda. This prevents meetings from running very long, in which case people get tired and may leave.

Check in is a time for participants to introduce themselves to each other, give others a sense of their emotional/mental state which might affect their participation in the meeting, and summarize what they want the meeting to accomplish.

During **agenda review**, participants can add new agenda items or alter existing ones, including how much time to allot to each item.

Announcements is a time for anyone to inform the group about upcoming events, etc.

In a **meeting evaluation**, participants identify what worked well in the meeting and what didn't. A simple way to do this is by drawing two columns on the chalkboard or large paper at the front of the room, one labeled "+" and the second labeled "-" and writing the comments in them.

It is useful to keep all meeting agendas and meeting minutes (the recorder's notes) in a **facilitator's notebook**, which is passed on to each new meeting facilitator. This record of past business enables the group to check back if there is a question about what or when certain decisions were made. (Some of these ideas are from Lakey, n.d.; Wheeler and Chin 1984; and Coover et al. 1985.)

Ella Baker and the Process of Social Change

by Ted Glick
April 11, 2005

Source: http://ellabakercenter.org/about/who-was-ella-baker

I was immensely privileged as a young activist in my 20's to meet Ella Baker and work together with her in the same organization, the Mass Party Organizing Committee. This was in the late '70s and early '80s. At the time I knew that she was a widely-respected veteran of the civil rights/black freedom movement, and I was always impressed with her contributions to our discussions, her dignity and her clarity. I was very appreciative of her willingness to take the time to talk with young people like me....But I never fully appreciated Ms. Baker's historic contributions and the continuing relevance of her life's work until I read the excellent book by Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*....

Ella Baker played a major role in building the NAACP in the '40s, particularly in the South, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the late '50s' and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the '60s. But as Ransby explains, her leadership was of a different kind than that of many of her colleagues, particularly within the NAACP and the SCLC. Those colleagues, almost all men, didn't appreciate what Ms. Baker called "group-centered leadership," preferring instead the "charismatic individual" model. The relationship of Martin Luther King, Jr. to SCLC is a prime example.

As Ransby explains, "Baker's feeling was that even though 'I had the oratorical chords, I resented oratory. You should be able to have some speech making that has some purpose,' rather than simply dazzling an audience to boost your ego....” For Baker, “one's words are important 'only as they help people do things that are of value to themselves.'" (p. 361)

"Baker insisted that a movement was a web of social relationships. Charismatic leaders could rally an anonymous mass of followers to turn out for a single event or series of events; millions could watch television coverage of heroic actions by a brave few or speeches by mesmerizing orators; but that was mobilization, not organization. In order to be effective organizers in a particular community, Baker argued, activists had to form relationships, build trust, and engage in a democratic process of decision making together with community members. The goal was to politicize the community and empower ordinary people. This was Baker's model, and in 1961 it became SNCC's model." (p. 270)

Ms. Baker was a socialist and a revolutionary, but she was never narrow or sectarian. "Her talent for making and keeping connections, for recognizing in people more than their ideological stance or organizational position, was an important, if sometimes invisible, contribution to the movement. Although she strove to be principled and consistent in her own politics, she allowed for divergent opinions between herself and others, keeping in mind the need for broader networks and coalitions. In turn, people who knew her trusted and respected Ella Baker, even if they did not always agree with her about strategy and tactics." (p. 284)...

She didn't put herself above those with whom she was working or those being outreached to, while being

willing to share her wisdom as necessary. "She was willing to run the mimeograph machine and type letters, but she was just as determined to offer historical insights and theoretical critiques..." (p. 271).

She believed deeply in the intelligence and leadership abilities of low-income, grassroots people. "Baker appreciated the skills and resources that educated black leaders brought to the movement, but she urged SNCC organizers to look first to the bottom of the class hierarchy in the black community, not the top, for their inspiration, insights and constituency." (p. 274)

Ms. Baker's personal organizing style reflected these beliefs. "She was a consummate teacher," one SNCC member recalled, "never pounding us, 'You must do this, you must do that,' [but simply] by raising questions.' So, what are we trying to accomplish?, she would probe. Are we all in agreement? What do we really mean by that? These were her kind of questions. Her method of inquiry often helped anchor or center an unwieldy conversation. Another SNCC activist made similar observations: 'Miss Ella would ask key questions, and through the asking of the questions, certain things became revealed.'" (p. 328)

One of my most striking memories of Ms. Baker was an intervention she made at a meeting in the late '70s of the Mass Party Organizing Committee. A dynamic, articulate, radical Black leader from the South was a speaker at this meeting and at one point in his presentation he said, in describing the level of consciousness among African American grassroots people, something like, "their subjective consciousness is not the same as their objective potentiality." Ms. Baker, who had been quiet for quite a while up to this point, immediately spoke up and, in no uncertain terms, questioned what this meant. She warned of using leftist analysis or terminology in a way that would obscure the truth of things and paint "the people" as something other than what they really were.

I was very struck in reading Barbara Ransby's valuable book how much Ella Baker was ahead of her time. She was a strong, independent woman decades before there was a women's movement. She worked to advance what she called "group-centered" leadership long before a belief in the importance of internal and participatory democracy within our progressive organizations was widely shared. She was a coalition-builder par excellence. Principles were essential, but she was rarely if ever tactically rigid. She understood that the way individuals lived their personal lives could not be divorced from their political activities, that "the personal is political."

As we stay strong and keep organizing...let us learn from the inspiring life and work of the great leader Ella Baker.

Ted Glick works with the Independent Progressive Politics Network (www.ippn.org), as well as the Climate Crisis Coalition (www.climatecrisiscoalition.org). He can be reached at indpol@igc.org or P.O. Box 1132, Bloomfield, N.J. 07003.