

THE FORMATION AND MOBILIZATION OF CONSENSUS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years several authors have described how collective actors are generated. The pictures they have drawn show striking resemblances, whether they apply to the civil rights movement (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), the United Farm Workers (Jenkins 1985), the environmental movement (Boender 1985; Mazur 1981), the women's movement (Ferree and Hess 1985), the antibusing movement (Taylor 1985), the neighborhood movement (Henig 1982), or protest cycles in general (Kriesi 1985; Tarrow 1983).

The process all these authors describe can adequately be labeled a spiral of mobilization. Broad sociocultural changes in society, such as the transition into postindustrial society; changes in the position of social categories, as of blacks and women; and the emergence of a new middle class give rise to general concerns in the public. One result of these general trends is the development of societal niches of individuals who oppose the direction of society or challenge

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the status quo. When changes occur in the political opportunity structure, changes that provide challengers with leverage in the realm of policy, the general climate becomes more conducive to insurgency. In such a climate, an open controversy among elites (Boender 1985; Mazur 1981) or a suddenly imposed grievance (Henig 1982; Morris 1984; Outshoorn 1986; Walsh 1981) can trigger a spiral of mobilization. Activists, political entrepreneurs, or indigenous leaders set out to mobilize popular support for insurgent action.

The strength of indigenous networks and organizations in a subculture is the crucial factor determining the level of mobilization that is reached initially. Successful mobilization draws mass-media attention, especially if innovative action strategies are used. Media coverage rapidly increases the number of individuals who are aware of the problem and strengthens the mobilization that is underway. As a consequence, tangential and nontangential resources available to the collective actor increase. The influx of resources makes it possible to strengthen organizations and to enlarge networks. And growing popular support makes it easier to co-opt existing networks and organizations (cf. Tierney 1982 for an example of this process). The result is a stronger collective actor capable of reaching higher levels of mobilization in the next confrontation with its opponent. Repression and counterattacks often fuel the movement because they reinforce support, especially among those who sympathize with the movement.

A complex interplay of strains, resources, and opportunities determines the structure of collective action. As Part I of this volume demonstrates, current social movement literature highlights the importance of indigenous social structures and subcultures in the mobilization for collective action. Long before actual mobilization campaigns take place, indigenous structures and subcultural networks develop and generate more or less elaborated collective identities that are the seedbeds in which future collective action can come to flower. Kriesi (1986) even argues that contemporary social movements such as the environmental movement, the peace movement, and the women's movement can afford to maintain loose structures because they are rooted in dense subcultural networks that serve as communication and mobilization channels in case of need.

This chapter emphasizes the deliberate attempts of social movement organizations to mobilize consensus among (a subset of) the population. First, I discuss consensus mobilization in the context of movement participation, and distinguish between consensus mobilization as the formation of mobilization potential and consensus mobilization in the context of action mobilization. The second part of the chapter addresses the questions of how consensus is mobilized and of what strategies and tactics are used. I will show how the characteristics of movement organizations, messages, channels, and audiences influence the success of consensus mobilization.

I. CONSENSUS FORMATION AND CONSENSUS MOBILIZATION

Much of what goes on within social networks concerns the formation of consensus. People tend to validate information by comparing and discussing their interpretations with significant others (Festinger 1954), especially when complex social information is involved. People prefer to compare their opinions with those of like-minded individuals. As a rule, the set of individuals interacting in one's social networks—especially one's friendship networks—is relatively homogeneous and composed of people not too different from oneself. Processes of social comparison produce collective definitions of a situation. Consequently, within these networks, consensus is formed and maintained. Consensus mobilization (e.g., attempts by an actor to spread its views and beliefs) has to take this social reality into account. Messages issued by an actor are not only filtered through the cognitive frames of individual receivers but also processed by reality-testing intercourse in the social networks and subcultures to which the receivers belong. So, consensus mobilization must target not only the beliefs and attitudes of individuals, but the collective definitions sustained in social networks.

Although individuals are part of networks and subcultures that often become engaged *en bloc* in collective action, it is still the individual who must make up his or her mind whether to join in collective action. Even in the case of *en bloc* engagement individuals have to consider whether they will conform to or defect from the collectivity.

Individuals behave within a perceived reality. They perceive the different actors in a social conflict; they have perceptions of actors' stands on relevant issues; and supporting these actors is perceived to be more or less rewarding. Since social reality is complex enough to allow for completely different interpretations of what is going on, a variety of definitions of the situation is available, sponsored by competing actors. In the case of social conflicts, actors try to persuade individuals to take their sides. In that way, governmental agencies, competing challengers, movement and countermovement organizations are struggling for the hearts and minds of the people (see, for example, Marshall and Orum 1987).

Attempts to spread the views of a social actor among parts of the population are what we call consensus mobilization (Klandermans 1984b). Consensus mobilization must be distinguished from consensus *formation*: it is a deliberate attempt by a social actor to create consensus among a subset of the population, whereas consensus formation concerns the unplanned convergence of meaning in social networks and subcultures. Although consensus mobilization can be practiced by any social actor, I will concentrate here on one single type of actor and its targets: social movement organizations sponsoring an ideological

package and individuals faced with the question of whether to adopt the movement organization's definition of the situation.

Neither movement organizations nor individuals act in a vacuum. A movement organization operates in a field of competing sources of information, in which its views are continually challenged. Individuals are embedded in social structures and subcultures that reinforce indigenous beliefs and values. To conceptualize movement organizations as agents of consensus mobilization we must relate movement organizations to other agents attempting to influence public opinion. In an analogous way individuals must be viewed as taking part in networks of social relationships in which incoming information is validated.

Until now the social movement literature has paid scant attention to persuasion in the context of mobilization. In this context social psychological literature on persuasive communication has much to offer to students of social movements. This paper is an attempt to apply to social movement mobilization lessons learned from the study of persuasion in general. But before we turn to our discussion of consensus mobilization, it will be useful to reiterate what the introductory chapter of this volume stated about the meaning of consensus mobilization in the context of participation in social movement activities.

II. CONSENSUS MOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION

Participation in social movements—the Introduction argued—takes place in the context of the formation of mobilization potentials, the formation and activation of recruitment networks, the arousal of the motivation to participate, and the removal of barriers to participation. In the formation of mobilization potentials, movement organizations must win attitudinal and ideological support. In the formation and activation of recruitment networks, they must increase the probability that people who “belong” to their mobilization potential will be reached. In arousing motivation to participate, they must favorably influence the decisions of people who are reached by a mobilization attempt. And in removing barriers they must increase the probability that people who are motivated will eventually participate. These four kinds of actions together constitute the process of mobilization.

The efforts of a social movement organization to mobilize support have two different ends: consensus mobilization and action mobilization (Klandermans 1984b). The former has to do with the propagation of the views of the movement; the latter with the promotion of participation in activities organized by the movement. In Gamson's terms (1975), consensus and action mobilization distinguish the creation of commitment from the activation of commitment.

It will be clear from our previous distinctions that the formation of mobilization potentials occurs through consensus mobilization. This is not to say that the formation of mobilization potential is completely determined by an organization's attempts to mobilize consensus. On the contrary, much of the mobilization potential of a movement comes from the unplanned formation of consensus. Moreover, as indicated in the introductory chapter, agents other than the organization can contribute to the consensus, and, as we will see, this external stimulus is sometimes the *only* means to create consensus, especially in the initial phases of mobilization. However, the efforts of a movement organization to create a mobilization potential in society are, by definition, attempts to mobilize consensus. The three other aspects of mobilization are a mixture of consensus and action mobilization, as will be presented in the following section.

III. CONSENSUS MOBILIZATION

Consensus mobilization is necessary for every social movement organization. In Freeman's (1983) treatment of social movements, the desire to spread the message of the movement is even considered as one of the *defining* characteristics of social movements. Given its centrality to a social movement's concern, however, it is surprising how little empirical study it received. The available literature is primarily speculative. In general it is agreed that the message of a social movement implies a redefinition of the situation, a break with the discourse justifying the status quo (Skelly 1986). In this context Gamson et al. (1982) refer to “the process of replacing a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action for change” (p.15). Like Turner (1969), these authors stress the importance, for mobilization, of defining a situation as unjust. Adopting an injustice framework is an important precondition for resistance (Gamson et al. 1982; Taylor 1986).

A social movement's message is framed by a more or less elaborated ideology. According to Wilson (1973), a movement's ideology contains a diagnosis (an indication of the causes of discontent and the agents responsible for it), a prognosis (an indication of what must be done), and a rationale (who must do the job, arguments to convince the individual that action must be taken, self-justification, and a description of the future of the movement). Individuals differ according to the degree of congruence between their belief systems and a movement ideology. Snow et al. (1986) were the first to design a theory of consensus mobilization that took this congruency factor into account. In their analyses, consensus mobilization can imply frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, or frame transformation, depending on the discrepancy between individual belief systems and movement ideologies.

In this literature the justification of the existence of a movement organization and the justification of its actions or activities are sometimes confused. From a consensus mobilization point of view, these are two rather different concerns. As will become clear in the following sections, movement organizations are faced with different problems and have to find different solutions depending on what form of consensus mobilization they seek to promote.

Consensus mobilization was described earlier as a social movement organization's search for support for its point of view. To win such support is easier said than done. In reality, it may be necessary to effect fundamental changes in peoples' views and attitudes, and mobilizing widespread consensus may take years to accomplish. For instance, the Dutch Interdenominational Peace Council (IKV) initially thought it would need ten years to gain some degree of acceptance for its motto "Stop nukes in the world, beginning with the Netherlands." It could not force when it was formed that, thanks to the cruise missiles affair, less than half this period would prove sufficient. This example illustrates as well that the results of consensus mobilization are not determined by the efforts of movement organizations alone. The rest of this paper elaborates further how social movement organizations mobilize consensus. The two questions I will examine are: "What is consensus mobilization?" and "How is it accomplished?"

IV. WHAT IS CONSENSUS MOBILIZATION?

It is necessary to distinguish between consensus mobilization in the context of the formation of mobilization potential in a society and consensus mobilization in the context of action mobilization. The former refers to the generation of a set of individuals with a predisposition to participate in a social movement. The latter refers to the legitimization of concrete goals and means of action.

It can be inferred from this distinction that the two forms of consensus mobilization have different time frames: the formation of mobilization potential is a long term problem; action mobilization a short term matter. The target audiences differ as well: action mobilization means the activation of commitment; it restricts itself to people who already "belong" to the mobilization potential of a movement organization. The formation of mobilization potential means the creation of commitment; in this case, the audience is much broader, usually a social category of people who share some characteristic related to the movement's cause. It follows from these preliminary remarks that the two forms of consensus mobilization should be treated separately, as the next two sections make clear.

A. The Formation of Mobilization Potentials

However successful a movement organization may be in interpreting grievances, it cannot create them. Scholars usually point to structural factors

to explain the development of grievances in a society. In the literature expositions of the structural factors that contribute to the generation of grievances abound. One well-known explanation is Smelser's (1971) distinction between structural conduciveness (circumstances that allow protest behavior) and structural strain (ambiguities, conflicts, deprivations, and discrepancies in the social order). Recent European literature emphasizes marginalization of social groups and regions, decreasing legitimacy of regimes, groups that are hit the hardest by the negative consequences of modernization processes (cf. Brand 1982 for a review). Recent American contributions stress the importance of suddenly imposed grievances (McAdam 1982; Walsh 1981) and of the "transvaluation" of existing ones (Piven and Cloward 1977).

Although they are important in explaining where grievances come from, structural factors alone will never provide a sufficient explanation of the transformation of grievances into movement demands. Between the structural factors that make it more likely that certain social groups will become the breeding ground for social movements and the rise of social movements are people and the meanings they attribute to their situation. Consensus mobilization in the form of the interpretation of grievances is an essential stage in the formation of a mobilization potential.

Recently, various authors have formulated theories on grievance interpretation (Ferree and Miller 1985; McAdam 1982; Snow et al. 1986; Taylor 1986). With the exception of Taylor's study of public opinion and the antibusing movement, no empirical research appears to have been done on this topic. The causal attributions that people make are crucial in interpreting grievances. Particularly important is the distinction between personal and system attributions (Ferree and Miller 1985, Klandermans 1983b; Snow et al. 1986): the distinction between people who hold personal or individual factors responsible for what happens to them and those who hold situational factors responsible. It is generally argued that grievances that are attributed to situational factors predispose people to participate in social movements.

But interpreting grievances requires a more comprehensive perspective. Merely attributing grievances to situational factors is not enough. To use the words of Piven and Cloward (1979), it is also necessary that people who normally accept authority and are convinced of the legitimacy of institutions come to recognize that this authority and these institutions are unjust and wrong. In addition, people who are usually fatalistic and feel that the existing order cannot be changed must start to demand changes. Lastly, a sense of effectiveness must emerge; people who generally feel powerless must become convinced that they are capable of changing their condition. McAdam (1982) refers to such changes in people's belief systems as cognitive liberation. These are radical changes, and the formation of mobilization potentials often does not take place where one would expect it to.

For this reason Kriesi (1984) distinguishes between latent and manifest political potentials. The former is the set of people who—because of a similar social structural situation—share a specific set of interests. If people become aware of their shared interests and develop a collective identity, a manifest political potential is created. Consciousness-raising is the crucial link between the two potentials. Organizations and networks among individuals play an important role in the transition from latent to manifest political potential.

Discussing this transaction, McAdam (1985) has pointed to the importance of the micromobilization context. By micromobilization he means “that small group setting in which processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action” (p.15). Melucci (1985) had something similar in mind when he emphasized the importance of “intermediate relational systems” that produce “shared definitions of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action” (p.3). The groups involved are not infrequently existing groups and networks based upon entirely dissimilar and nonpolitical goals, such as friendship circles, churches, or community organizations.

Thus interactions between individuals in friendship networks and existing organizations and alignments play an important role in the interpretation of grievances. Although movement organizations are not the only agents engaged in grievance interpretation, they take an active part (Tierney 1982). Like other social actors, movement organizations try to persuade people to accept their definition of a situation. Of course they do not always need to change people's perceptions in all respects. Consequently Snow et al. (1986) find it helpful to distinguish between frame bridging, frame extension, frame amplification, and frame transformation. Following Gamson et al. (1982), they adopted the frame concept from Goffman, who used it to indicate the frames of reference individuals employ to interpret events in the surrounding world. Consensus mobilization, or in Snow's terminology, frame alignment, links the frames of individuals and social movement organizations in such a way that “individual interests, values and beliefs and social movement organization activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complementary” (p.464).

Depending on the differences between frames, one of the four processes distinguished by Snow et al. takes place. Frame bridging occurs when the individual and social movement frames are congruent. In this case it is enough simply to point out the congruence to individuals. Frame amplification occurs when an interpretive frame is clarified and strengthened by linking it to values or beliefs held by the public. In the case of frame extension, a movement organization extends the boundaries of its primary frameworks: value and interests of potential adherents become aligned with participation in movement activities. Frame transformation occurs when individual frames need to be changed either in part or as a whole in order to make them congruent with the movement frame. It goes without saying that frame transformation

demands a great deal more of a social movement than do the other forms of frame alignment.

The degree to which a social movement is successful in creating mobilization potential determines among other factors the size of the reservoir from which a movement can draw for action mobilization. The amount of time available for action mobilization is too short to allow for frame transformation. A social movement therefore must frequently turn to forms of consensus mobilization which do *not* require changing frames: frame bridging, frame extension, or frame amplification.

B. The Context of Action Mobilization

We have seen that dissatisfactions and aspirations and the conviction that a situation can be changed take hold among members of a society during the formation of mobilization potential. But the presence of such feelings does not in itself mean that people will actually take part in activities of a social movement, even if it tries to do something about their dissatisfactions and aspirations. For activities of a social movement have concrete goals, and it cannot be taken for granted that potential participants will feel these goals to be related to their dissatisfactions and aspirations. Nor can it be assumed that people will believe that participating in the movement's activities is effective. Action goals and means have to be legitimated and that is the challenge a movement organization faces in mobilizing consensus in the context of action mobilization.

Legitimizing Action Goals

If they are to motivate people to participate, a movement's concrete goals must be considered instrumental for eliminating the dissatisfactions or fulfilling the aspirations that are at the root of a movement's mobilization potential. To be able to form an opinion about instrumentality, people must be familiar with the action goals and their most important implications. Thus dissemination of knowledge is an important aspect of consensus mobilization. Campaigns can easily run aground on this very first requirement.

Action goals are not constants. Influenced by circumstances, and interaction with opponents, among other factors, they can and do change. The danger to social movements here is that changes in the action goals will not become adequately known. Those who occupy more marginal positions in movement networks are especially likely to be left behind. The dissemination of knowledge has its limits. The great majority in the targeted group will never have more than a general idea of the action goals, and efforts to improve this knowledge will probably not be very effective.

However important the adequate dissemination of knowledge may be, it is of course never more than a condition for the actual objectives of consensus mobilization, which create a widespread positive attitude toward the action goals. The key concept here is the perceived instrumentality of the action goals for changes felt to be worth striving for, or for maintaining a preferred state of affairs. Campaigns for the mobilization of consensus attempt to convince people of this instrumentality, often in the face of counterarguments by opponents (cf. Marshall and Orum 1987). How successful a movement organization is in convincing people determines how successful it will be in creating a positive attitude toward action goals.

In discussing action goals, we must make another distinction, one that has important consequences for consensus mobilization. This is the distinction between reactive and proactive demands (Ferree and Miller 1985). Reactive demands involve changes that fit in with this dominant ideology in a society. They are based on claims that are legitimate for a group to make according to the dominant ideology. Proactive demands involve changes that do not fit in with the dominant ideology. They involve rights, privileges, or means to which a group is not entitled according to the dominant ideology. To legitimate proactive demands requires much more effort from a social movement organization than pursuing reactive demands, if only because proactive demands arouse greater resistance—as I can illustrate with an example drawn from our union research in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands unions traditionally negotiate wages. The demands they usually make in bargaining are reactive ones. The particular wage increase demanded may itself be a matter of discussion, but the right of unions to demand higher wages is not. Because such demands fit into the familiar pattern, it is not difficult to mobilize consensus for them, first because they meet with little resistance, and second because they are easy to explain and to legitimate. But the reaction was very different when, a couple of years ago, the Dutch unions demanded manning agreements and shorter working hours. Resistance on the part of employers, the government, and even friendly economists was strong. In both cases, unions had great difficulty in legitimating demands to its own constituency (Klandermans 1984a).

In the case of proactive demands, frame transformation may be necessary in order to make them seem legitimate. Consequently, the time limits of an average action mobilization campaign will almost certainly be exceeded. Essentially, a movement is faced with the task of creating mobilization potential for the demands. A case in point is the demand for a shorter workweek, from our preceding example. With the help of skyrocketing unemployment, unions were eventually able to persuade their memberships and the government that shortening the workweek was an effective strategy to reduce unemployment. After ten years, the Dutch unions finally reached a first agreement on establishing a shorter workweek.

Legitimizing Action Means

Several authors have stressed the important role expectation of success plays in motivating people to participate in social movement activities (Klandermans 1984b; Oberschall 1980; Pinard and Hamilton 1986). With the possible exception of very low risk activities (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Pinard and Hamilton 1986), expectations of success seem to be a necessary condition for participation. The belief in the effectiveness of participation can be analyzed into three separate expectations, which vary independently: (a) expectations about the number of participants, (b) expectations about one's own contribution to the probability of success, (c) expectations about the probability of success if many people participate" (Klandermans 1984b, p.385).

Legitimizing a means of action implies convincing people that participation by others is above threshold level; that individual participation contributes significantly to success, or alternatively that nonparticipation threatens success; and by convincing people that the movement's action strategy will have an impact on the target institution. It is clear that persuasion is a delicate undertaking: too much optimism encourages people to take a free ride; too much pessimism creates concern as to whether participation makes sense at all. Thus intelligent organizers try hard to get people to believe that their contribution is critical. Sometimes it is an advantage to organizers if supporters of a movement organization tend to overestimate the number of participants (Granberg 1983; Granberg and Holmberg 1983; Taylor 1986). But overestimation can be a disadvantage as well, if, for example people decide to ride free because their participation does not seem necessary.

Collectively, expectation about the behavior of others can work as self-fulfilling prophecies. If a movement organization fails to convince people that others will participate, people are less motivated to join the movement and the prediction that few people will participate becomes reality.

Effectiveness is not the only criterion. Action means are also evaluated in terms of their efficiency, that is their cost/benefit ratios, both collectively (damage done to target institutions, society in general) and individually (risks and costs to be taken). Movement organizations have to convince their adherent that the costs of the means chosen stand in a reasonable proportion to the benefits to be gained. The higher the costs, the heavier the burden of legitimation, that is the more depends on the movement organization's ability to make people believe that participation will have some effect. This includes the guarantee that others will participate.

V. HOW IS CONSENSUS MOBILIZED?

As the preceding section suggests consensus mobilization may involve a wide range of changes in views and attitudes. The type of procedures used will vary

with the nature of the changes a movement organization wants to bring about. In the case of frame bridging, a written message may be enough, whereas frame transformation might require lengthy and intensive interpersonal contact. Movement organizations use a wide array of techniques to mobilize consensus. The following list is an incomplete sample from three compilations of methods of collective action (Mushaben 1986; Reckman 1971; Sharp 1973):

Public speeches; letters of opposition or support; declarations by organizations and institutions; signed public statements, signed advertisements; declarations of indictment and intention; slogans; caricatures and symbols, banners, posters; displayed communications; expositions; leaflets, pamphlets, books, newspapers and journals; records, radio, television, audiovisual presentations; art; exhibits; films; information stands in shopping centers; organizing public events featuring well known intellectuals and political figures; organizing congresses, teach-ins, hearings; publicizing the results of public opinion surveys; symbolic public acts such as prayer and worship; painting; wearing of symbols; performances of plays; music; singing; street theater; concerts; organizing dramatic events such as marches, demonstrations, die-ins, pilgrimages; arranging sports events, door-to-door canvassing.

From this enumeration it is clear that techniques vary according to the nature of the intended audience: the general public, sympathizers, or target institutions. In many cases, however, techniques directed at target institutions are indirectly aiming at a much broader audience. This overlap is what makes discussions about the success and failure of movement strategies so complicated. For a movement organization, an instance of protest may have no other function than getting mass-media attention, raising public awareness, or winning public support for its cause. Even strategies that fail to have any impact on policy making, although they were intended to do so, can turn out to be a success in terms of consensus mobilization (Morris 1984).

Essentially, anything that can be used to communicate meaning is applicable in campaigns to mobilize consensus. I will not try to map out the variety of techniques used and their respective merits. The list suggests the variety of techniques and the creativity of movement organizations in continually inventing more. An analytical approach is preferable, one using a general framework borrowed from the literature on persuasive communication: characteristics of the source of information, the message, the channels employed, and the audience are discussed in terms of their contribution to a movement organization's effectiveness in mobilizing consensus. As indicated earlier, the audiences vary depending on the context of consensus mobilization. Characteristics of source, message, and channel vary with the context as well, as will become clear in the next sections.

Movement organizations as sources of information. Credibility is the key characteristic of a source of information. Movement organizations are aware of this fact, and take serious trouble to build up credibility. They can use various strategies. Thorne (1983) compares two strategies employed by two different

draft-resistance groups in the Boston area. The first group tried to profile itself by expertise and know-how, minimizing the differences between proselytizers and their targets. The second group sought to polarize rather than to promote identification, and used theatrical, dramatic events. Risk-taking, that is, making sacrifices for the cause, was meant to signify strong commitment, which in turn was supposed to promote credibility and to give the group a right to speak.

We can find the same diversity in strategies to promote credibility in other movements as well. In the environmental movement, for example, the conservation organizations take a different approach than does Greenpeace. The factors used in strategies to promote credibility, i.e., expertise, sacrifices, and identification with the audience has been proven to be effective. In the case of the draft-resistance groups, neither identification strategy nor the polarizing strategy succeeded in building up credibility among its principal target group, working-class youth, partially because the resistance stance itself was so unattractive. Working-class youth considered it foolish to volunteer for jail. For the civil rights movement, however, Terchek (1974) observed that the strategy of risk-taking was effective in improving credibility.

In addition to expertise, the sacrifices made for the cause of the movement organization, and the perceived similarities between source and target, other factors contribute to the credibility of a social movement organization. One tactic that movement organizations frequently use is to have attractive and prestigious persons speak on its behalf. Especially if the persuasive message is not in the communicator's best interest, this strategy can be very effective. Another factor: dramatic events that put a movement organization in the right can strongly increase its credibility. Ecological accidents, for example, have considerably increased the credibility of the environmental movement (Boender 1985).

The weight of a movement organization's credibility differs depending on the context of consensus mobilization. Because action mobilization restricts itself to people who already "belong" to the mobilization potential, in this context there is less pressure to gain credibility than in the case of the formation of mobilization potential. This is not to say that credibility in action mobilization does not matter. Credibility always counts—all the more so because the goals and means of a movement organization are by definition controversial. Opponents and competing organizations challenge the arguments of the organization and advance a great many counterarguments. Under such circumstances, differences in credibility do matter even among supporters of the movement organization. The case of the campaign by a Dutch labor union to mobilize consensus about a shorter workweek illustrates this point.

The union's campaign concentrated on the argument that reducing the workweek would reduce unemployment. Employers, government officials, economists, and specialists in industrial relations vehemently denied the truth of this claim. The union failed completely to mobilize consensus for its position:

at the beginning of the campaign, 60-70% of its members believed that a shorter workweek would reduce unemployment. Within a few months this percentage dropped to 40%, and eventually to 25%. The credibility of the union as a source of information in the context of contradictory publicity played a significant role in this decline. Among members who agreed with the union, those who found the union highly credible¹ never changed their minds, whereas a large proportion of the members who found the union less credible did change their minds and came to disagree with the union. Among those members who initially disagreed with the union, a large proportion of those who found the union highly credible changed their minds in the first two months of the campaign and came to agree with the union. Those who found the union less credible, however, did not change their minds. Later on in the campaign the union no longer succeeded in persuading opponents among its members, even among members who found the union a credible source of information.

On highly controversial issues, high credibility apparently is better in fostering consonant beliefs than in transforming discrepant beliefs. If this is true in the context of action mobilization—that is, even among adherents of a movement—then we have to assume that the formation of mobilization potential on highly controversial issues will be extremely difficult. Indeed, the credibility of a movement organization among nonadherents can be so low that only indirect ways—using other organizations or media not identified with the movement—can promise some success. Especially in the initial phases of a movement organization's development, recourse to indirect means can be the only alternative available.

Examples abound. Consider the role of the churches in the civil rights movement (Morris 1984) and the peace movement (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Also traditional women's organizations (Briet et al. 1987) and traditional environmental organizations (Kriesi 1985; Rucht 1988) have played an important role in reaching subsets of the population that more radical organizations would have failed to reach.

With these examples in mind we can speculate about what can be called the "diversion of credibility." What we often see happening is that the target group's indigenous sources of information (organizations, media, opinion leaders) adopt parts of the message of the movement organization. This move is nothing spectacular; it exemplifies the two-step or multi-step flow of communication so well known from communication literature. Because of their much greater credibility, these indigenous sources are able to diffuse beliefs the organization itself would have never been able to diffuse. As this target group, or subpopulation, comes to adopt parts of the message, the movement organization itself gains greater credibility (cf. Tierney 1982). Eventually, the movement can communicate directly with the members of the subpopulation.

The message of social movement organizations. A first requirement for a message is that it be understandable. If people do not comprehend a message, attitudes will change very little. The content of the message of course varies with the nature of the campaign. If frame bridging is involved, then the message will confine itself to an explanation of the frame and/or the action goals and means, along with the request to support the organization. In the case of frame extension or amplification, the organization will attempt to link its frame to the supposed interests and values of the intended audience and call on it for support. If frame transformation is involved, then the organization will argue that a certain situation is unjust, that situational factors are to blame, and that changes can be brought about (cf. Snow et al. 1986, for a further elaboration).

Several authors have asserted that the messages of movement organizations show striking similarities irrespective of the sources they stem from (Buss and Sleeking 1980; Godwin 1984; Mazur 1981). On the one hand, similarities are due to the unavoidable dynamics of "proponents vs. opponents" and "challengers vs. establishment." Proponents promote and opponents criticize; challengers blame a powerful establishment and elites discredit challengers. Much of a movement organization's message consists of arguments for its own stands and criticisms of opposite stands, praising its allies and discrediting its opponents (Buss and Sleeking 1980; Griffin et al. 1986; Mazur 1981). Apparently, too, in their efforts to mobilize consensus, actors behave according to the rules associated with the role they occupy in the conflict.

On the other hand, similarities are due to the persuasive character of a movement organization's message. In his analysis of direct-mail campaigns from both conservative and liberal origins, Godwin (1984) detected the same general features: immediacy, that is, the assertion that the addressee can do something immediately; personalization, that is, the use of personal appeals, calling addressees by name, appealing to values they are supposed to adhere to; and concentration, for example, using mailing lists of individuals with specific characteristics and lifestyles, or using different appeals for different subpopulations. In addition, it turned out that 60-70% of the content of campaigns involved information, 20-40% an appeal to one's citizenly duty, 35-45% concerned purposive incentives for participation, and 20% consisted of appeals to guilt or fear. These proportions were the same for conservative and liberal groups alike.

Literature on persuasive communication details the factors that influence the impact of persuasive messages. Some of these factors are directly relevant to the social movement field: newness versus familiarity, one-sidedness versus two-sidedness, messages with or without conclusion, the use of threat (cf. Rogers 1983; Gergen and Gergen 1986). The newness/familiarity factor is closely related to the distinction between proactive and reactive demands discussed above. The more familiar a message, the easier it is to get it accepted. In the context of action mobilization, familiarity can be advantageous as long

as the message does not deviate from what adherents are used to. In the context of the formation of mobilization potential, however, familiarity can easily become a serious handicap, because the message of a movement organization is almost by definition new to the audience. Mitchell (1984) makes the interesting observation that the message of a movement can be better framed in terms of a collective evil (i.e., some collective good familiar to the audience is threatened) than in terms of a collective good (i.e., some good not familiar to the audience that is to be produced).

Whether it is preferable to present information as one-sided or two-sided, or with or without conclusions is immediately relevant to a movement organization's persuasive communications, which usually take a particular side in a controversy, and suggest a line of action. Research results seem to indicate that education is an important moderator: among the more educated, two-sided messages without conclusions are more effective. For the less educated, one-sided messages with conclusions are more effective. Although movement organizations often use fear appeals to make people aware of existing problems, fear appeals are not always effective. The most important factor determining the effects of fear appeals is the presence or absence of effective means of coping. If no effective remedies are mentioned in a fear-arousing communication, then people may easily engage in defensive avoidance.

The channels used by movement organizations. Snow et al. (1980) classify the channels a movement organization can use for information dissemination, promotion, and recruitment according to the dimensions face-to-face vs. mediated, and public vs. private. There are thus four different categories of channels: (a) face-to-face, private (door-to-door leafletting or petitioning, social networks), (b) private, mediated (mail, telephone), (c) face-to-face, public (face-to-face leafletting or petitioning on sidewalks, participation in public events, staging events for public consumption), and (d) public, mediated (radio, television, newspapers). It is not easy to generalize about the differential effectiveness of these four approaches. Face-to-face channels are known to be more effective than mediated channels both in the diffusion of information (Rogers 1983) and in mobilization campaigns of movement organizations (Briet et al. 1987; Gerlach and Hine 1970; Henig 1982; Mazur 1981; Snow et al. 1980). Yet direct mail (a private, mediated channel) turns out to be very effective in environmental campaigns (Godwin and Mitchell 1984), and mass media, when used by movement organizations in an intelligent way, can also be very efficacious (Gitlin 1980; Mazur 1981; Taylor 1986).

Much depends of course on the impact desired and the size of the target group. To oversimplify a little: the relationship of the impact, the range of a channel, and the size of the target group to the effectiveness of a channel can be summarized in the following formula:

$$\text{Effectiveness} = \frac{\text{Impact \& Range}}{\text{Size of target group}}$$

The effectiveness of a channel increases with its impact and range, and is inversely related to the size of the target group. If a campaign has a large target group, a channel with great impact but a narrow range is not effective. If a drastic change in thought is desired, a channel with great impact is needed. And if that message is to reach a sizable target group, the channel must have a wide range as well.

However attractive mass-media and direct-mail campaigns may be (because of their wide range), they have obvious disadvantages for a movement organization. It is never certain to what extent the target group is actually reached. Campaigns using mass media are costly if an organization has to pay for them, and hard to control if an organization makes use of free publicity (editorial space). The media may draw a biased picture of the movement and so reshape mobilization potential by attracting some people and discouraging others (Gitlin 1980). Besides, it is hazardous for a social movement organization to depend on free publicity, for the mood in the media can turn against it and the media can lose interest (Gitlin 1980; Oberschall 1979). A movement organization's failure to use mass media is primarily the result of inexperience. As soon as a movement organization develops expertise in dealing with mass media—often through the installation of specialized public relations officers—it becomes much more effective in exploiting public-mediated channels. One way it can achieve such effectiveness is by establishing relationships with people inside the media industry, such as sympathetic journalists, editors, or directors.

One strategy often employed to circumvent the mass media is the use of the organizations own media (newspapers, magazines). There is, however, one serious limitation to this strategy. Reading a movement's newspaper or magazine is already a degree of participation that many adherents, even if they are subscribers, never reach—much less people who are not adherents. This restricted impact was clearly shown in my research on the mobilization campaign of unions in the Netherlands. Only among shop stewards and union militants was the union newspaper the prime source of information on the negotiations. For the average member, radio, television, or newspapers were much more important (Klandermans 1983a). A movement organization's own media are very effective in communicating to the active core of the constituency, but much less effective outside this usually narrow circle. Provided they have a sufficient number of links to other people, however, activists can transmit information to other people in their environment and can thus expand the range of their movement's media considerably.

Often a movement organization will not be able to do without private face-to-face interaction, either because it lacks the means to use other channels or because the impact achieved through other channels is too weak. The range of a campaign based on interpersonal contact depends on how extensive a network the movement has. The network need not necessarily be within the movement. Co-optable networks outside the movement are often even more effective. For example, the peace movement in the Netherlands, which has a widespread network of local branches with ties to local organizations, was very successful in the mobilization of consensus in Dutch society. In the absence of any infrastructure, mediated channels are the best alternative (McCarthy 1983).

There are some indications that the four means of communication are differentially effective among different categories of the population. Social networks are apparently more effective channels among women, than among men (Rochford 1985). People recruited through direct mail are more committed to the goals of the movement organization, whereas people recruited through private face-to-face contact are more committed to the organization (Godwin and Mitchell 1984). Compared to other channels, direct mail seems to attract more alienated, apathetic figures (Godwin 1984).

The use of communication channels is not unrelated to the context within which consensus mobilization occurs. The two different processes—formation of mobilization potential and action mobilization—involve different requirements for communication channels. The formation of a mobilization potential requires channels with a relatively high impact but can usually employ long term strategies. Action mobilization on the other hand, is bound to short term strategies but can confine itself primarily to limited forms of frame alignment, especially in the case of low-risk participation. In both contexts the specific features of mass media and private channels lead to a mixture of the two, that operate in completely different ways. In the context of the formation of mobilization potential, the mass media publicize the message of the movement organization, while private channels—especially face-to-face contacts in social networks—take care of the necessary frame-alignment (Ganson and Modighiani 1981). In the context of action mobilization, private face-to-face channels are often the only ones that can compete in speed with the mass media. So in the heat of the collective action, we see mass media, together with private channels, taking care of the dissemination of information. In a peculiar division of labor, the media seems to concentrate on the *means* of action, and private channels deal with the *goals*. By their accounts of protest events mass media are often much more capable than are private channels of creating either belief or doubt that an effective collective action is in the making. Private channels, on the other hand, are more concerned with legitimating action goals in the face of counterargumentation. In times of collective action, a social movement's communication networks are the channels most frequently used by movement organizations and their adherents (Klandermans 1983). A

special feature is the mass meeting, which can function as an extremely efficacious communication channel during episodes of collective action (Morris 1984).

The audience. Systematic empirical research on the interaction of characteristics of different audiences of movement organizations and campaign characteristics is completely lacking. Moreover, it is known from the literatures on attitude change and the diffusion of innovation, that the same characteristics have contradictory effects depending on the situation and the criterion. For example, education helps people to understand better complex messages, but makes it more difficult to persuade them (see Hall et al. 1986, for results along that line in the social movement area). It can be expected from the same literature however, that attitudes toward the movement organization and its goals and means clearly influence the effectiveness of attempts of movement organizations to persuade individuals in the audience. A negative attitude toward a source of information rapidly reduces that source's credibility (Jaspars 1978). The discrepancy between the individual's attitudes and a message together with the credibility of the source, determine whether a message has any impact. The higher the discrepancy and the lower the credibility, the lesser the impact. The work of Snow et al. (1986) on frame alignment can be seen as an elaboration of this assertion.

CONCLUSIONS

Consensus mobilization (the deliberate attempt by an actor to create consensus among sectors of the population) has been distinguished from consensus formation (the convergence of meaning within social networks). This is not to say that the two are not related. On the contrary, attempts by movement organizations to mobilize consensus give impetus to processes of consensus formation; and consensus formation prepares the soil for consensus mobilization. Despite this reciprocity, in this chapter I have chosen to concentrate on the mobilization of consensus. Much of the impact of the movement organizations is rooted in numbers; most of their resources stem from individual supporters. In short, movement organizations are largely dependent on their capability of generating mass support. Social movement literature has concentrated largely on actual participation. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to organizations' attempts to propagate their views.

Perhaps as a consequence of the neglect of consensus mobilization as a separate process, an important distinction in the study of convincing and activating people has escaped the attention of scholars of social movements: namely, the difference between consensus mobilization in the context of the formation of a mobilization potential and consensus mobilization in the context of action. Legitimizing the existence of a movement organization is

rather different from legitimating its strategy: different arguments are used, different time frames are pertinent, different audiences are targeted, and different communication networks are put into operation.

Focusing on consensus mobilization brings to the fore the problematic position of movement organizations in regard to their credible sources of information. We might expect the credibility of a movement organization to be minimal in those situations in which credibility is needed most, that is where the discrepancy between the views of the organization and its audience is greatest. In those situations, a movement organization might hope that indigenous organizations, networks, or leaders would be willing to transmit its message, and that is the way it sometimes works. The diversion of credibility—that is, the role that indigenous organizations, networks, or leaders play in making movement organization more credible—is rather neglected in the literature.

It may be assumed that attempts to create consensus among a population have a diminishing return. After some optimum point has been reached, it becomes more and more difficult to enlarge a mobilization potential and/or the pool of adherents who agree with the action strategy. Under these circumstances, in the context of the formation of mobilization potential, movement organizations would do better to spend their resources on the maintenance and activation of commitment instead of on enlarging their mobilization potential. In the context of action mobilization, the movement organization reaches a point where it no longer makes sense to use any more of its resources for the mobilization of consensus. Resources are better used in providing incentives to wavering adherents.

In the social movement literature little attention is paid to the different kinds of audiences to which movement organizations must address themselves. Although movement organizations are not unaware of the heterogeneity of their audience, they usually lack systematic information on audience characteristics. These characteristics range from rather simple ones, such as what media different members of the audience use and what organizations they belong to, to more complicated qualities, such as beliefs, attitudes, and values. But, relevant distinctions such as frame bridging, frame extension, frame amplification, and frame transformation are of no use if profiles of a movement organization's audience are not available. Research that could provide social movement organizations with information on audience characteristics is rarely done. Such research should compare the way a movement organization approaches different audiences, and figure out what differences and similarities appear in terms of credibility, message, and most frequently used channels.

Indigenous social networks appear to be of crucial importance in the mobilization of consensus. In an intriguing interplay, mass media, movement organization, and competing and opposing sources of information supply the information that is processed inside the social networks to which individuals

belong. From this observation it is plausible to conclude that opinions alter collectively. Consensus is not created by convincing individual after individual; rather, groups of individuals linked by social networks learn to move together in the direction of the movement organization. Individuals must choose whether to go along or deviate from the groups they are involved in. Altogether, this element of collective change makes the task of social movement organizations and students of social movements in the performance and investigation of consensus mobilization rather complicated. With this chapter I hope to convince organizers and scholars alike of the relevance of this aspect of the mobilization process, and to urge them to generate the research necessary to arrive at a clearer understanding of how it works.

NOTE

1. The credibility of the union as a source of information was assessed in a separate measurement at a different point in time.

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