



The Role of Resource Mobilization Theory in Social Movement

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Abstract

Resource mobilization is the process of getting resource from resource provider, using different mechanisms to implement the organization's work for achieving the pre-determined organizational goals. It deals in acquiring the needed resources in a timely cost effective manner. Resource mobilization advocates upon having the right type of resource, at the right time, at right price with making right use of acquired resources thus ensuring optimum utilization of the same.

Keywords: Resource mobilization (RM); theory; social movement

Introduction

The resource mobilization (RM) theory was developed in the early 1970s to challenge social breakdown and relative deprivation theories that identify individual grievances as the primary stimulus for collective action (Curti, 2008; Heitzman, 1990) RM theorists argued that grievances are necessary but not sufficient to stimulate the rise of a movement because grievances and social conflict are inherent and enduring in every society. Rather, the formation of social movement organizations and the ability of these organizations to mobilize resources from potential supporters, both labor and money, are the critical factors in movement mobilization (Kelly, 2011; Mann, Schreibman, Mann, & Schreibman, 2015).

Much of this tradition's attention, therefore, has focused on identifying membership network structures that favor rapid mobilization and provide the stable flow of resources necessary for SMOs to pursue their tactical and survival goals successfully. The various configurations of informal social networks- such as family, friendship and associational groupings- from which social movement organizations can mobilize resources have been referred to by scholars as social infrastructures (McCarthy, 1987) and micromobilization contexts (McAdam, 1988), while the farther-reaching terms mobilizing structures (McCarthy, 1996) and multiorganizational fields (Barolsky, 2009) have been used to describe the diverse configurations of connections between these informal social networks and formal organizations found within different social movements or societies. Tarrow (1994) captures this conception of movements well when he writes that, "when we look at the morphology of movements, it

becomes clear that they are only “large” in a nominal sense. They are really much more like an interlocking network of small groups, social networks and the connections between them.”

Discussion

Studies have generally suggested that the number of members an social movement organizations is able to mobilize for action appears to be greater when the networks from which it draws its members are dense and highly integrated. For example, scholars suggest that it is within these networks that interpersonal rewards (referred to as solidary incentives) for participation are more powerful, that chances of ideological affinity and the development of a collective identity are increased and that the likelihood of cognitive liberation and political efficacy among individuals is higher (cognitive liberation is the process by which an individual ceases to engage in self-blame, sees the “system” as unjust, and believes that political action will result in social change) (Gurr, 2000). Both McAdam (1988) in his studies on the Civil Rights Freedom Summer campaign and Della Porta (1988) in her examination of individual participation in terrorist social movement organizations in Italy during the 1970s, confirm that- far more than their ideological orientation- the social networks in which individuals were embedded played a key role in determining who would participate and who would not.

Therefore, social movement organizations are encouraged to target existing dense networks since doing so offers significant advantages: they can capture existing material and solidary incentives provided to individuals from their collective identification and they can use face-to-face recruitment strategies rather than complicated and costly mass communication techniques (Kelly, 2011). In addition, network characteristics influence social movement organizations behavior because the members within certain networks have specific knowledge and expertise that provide a familiar tactical repertoire and familiar forms of organization from which a SMO may draw (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). The number of members mobilized will also obviously impact the types of tactics available to the social movement organizations, as Zald and Mc Carthy (1987) note: “You cannot have a march with only five supporters” (see also Cable, 1984).

Besides this interest in networks and mobilization, however, RM theorists have been deeply interested in organizational survival and change over time- for part of a movement's success is that it has survived. Scholars not only examine changes in response to shifts in the economic and political environment but in response to an social movement organizations internal drive to stabilize its financial base and grow the scope of its activities (Randolph, 2009). Theorizing about organizational growth and change, however, is most developed within the field of organizational studies. In addition, because RM theory is concerned primarily with organizations that mobilize memberships, its usefulness for this study is limited because the study examines both membership P/CROs and professional P/CROs without memberships. To understand P/CRO growth and change, therefore, the framework for this study borrows from the work of organizational scholars, as it is more specific than RM theory about the structural and tactical consequences of organizational strategies to obtain legitimacy and institutional funding (funding external to their membership base). For instance, political- economy theorists suggest that the more financially dependent an social movement organizations is upon another organization within its tusk environment, the more influence that organization has on the social movement organizations goals and strategies (for reviews refer to Hasenfeld 1983; 1992). Moving beyond resource- dependence dynamics, the more recently developed institutional theory suggests that significant actors within an organization's network (funders, the public, state agencies, professional associations, and other social movement organizations) develop and enforce normative and regulatory rules for organizational behavior.

The more closely a social movement organizations follows these rules, the greater its ability to mobilize constituents and resources and the greater its chances of survival over time. Those organizations

which survive, therefore, will come to echo dominant and powerful cultural values and norms for organizational behavior (Kemp, 2000). This process of change, referred to as institutional “isomorphism,” may occur through processes of coercion from state and legal forces, through mimetic processes wherein an organization follows the model of other successful organizations, and through organizational adoption of professional norms (Fearon & Wendt, 2002). The theory of isomorphism is similar to the Weber-Michels model developed within the social movement tradition in the 1940s, which claims that social movement organizations naturally become more formalized in their structures and conservative in their goals and tactics over time as the goals of organizational maintenance compete with, and sometimes displaces, political goals (Kriesi, 1996 Zald and McCarthy, 1987).

A few empirical studies provide evidence for these theoretical contentions. For example, a study of social movement organizations in the U.S. by McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson (1991), illustrates how institutionalized regulatory rules and resource dependence encourage social movement organizations formalization. They show how social movement organizations dependence on Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations regarding tax-exempt status for non-profit organizations “channels” SMOs toward moderate goals and tactics. To get tax-exempt status, and the legitimacy it confers, social movement organizations cannot participate in partisan campaign activities or many other forms of political activity. Social movement organizations need the non-profit status not only to obtain tax exemptions, but to get discounts from other federal institutions, such as the United States Postal Service, and to meet the eligibility requirements of most large funding institutions (Bhattarai, 2010). Some large funders may, in addition, have regulations of their own that similarly encourage moderate tactics. The United Way, for example, bars funding to any group spending more than 15% of its resources on lobbying or lawsuits. The authors suggest that these regulations not only constrain the tactical repertoires of social movement organizations in the United States, but also may favor and encourage formal social movement organizations structures because organizations will often need management, legal, and accounting mechanisms to navigate the detailed regulations and to ensure that they are complying (Javadikouchaksaraei, Reevany Bustami, Fazwan Ahmad Farouk, & Akbar Ramazaniandarzi, 2015).

Offering support to this understanding, Kriesi (1995; 1996), in his comparison of New Social Movements (NSMs)- environmental, peace, women's, and student movements- in France, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, found that the level of funding and age of social movement organizations were positively associated with level of structural formalization. The older and better-funded organizations within his sample had more paid staff, formal membership criteria, formal operating rules and procedures, and a formal division of labor. McCarthy and Zald's (1977) earlier recognition of this process illustrates the dominant understanding within the field:

It is obvious that the more money is available to an organization, the more personnel they will be able to hire. Though this is not a necessary outcome, we assume that social movement organizations will be confronted with the diverse problems of organizational maintenance, and as resource flows increase these will become more complex. As in any large organization, task complexity requires specialization The need for skills in lobbying, accounting, and fund raising leads to professionalization (Kaldor, 1976).

While the pressure for an SMO to formalize may be strong and isomorphism within an organizational field may be a natural trend, both sets of literature acknowledge that individual organizations and movement actors may act as moral entrepreneurs and extend, adapt, and change institutional rules and organizations do not always formalize over time but vary in their responses to shifting environmental conditions (Crépeau & Jimenez, 2004).

Studies about the stability and success of feminist social movement organizations during the 1970s and 1980s are particularly useful in showing that formalization was certainly encouraged but not inevitable. For instance, social movement organizations were better able to handle and survive external

and internal conflict (Gurr, 2000), were better able to maintain funding, survive periods of movement decline, and respond quickly to political opportunities (Study & Irbs, n.d.), and were more likely to survive than collectivist social movement organizations (Acker, 1995; Matthews). Nonetheless, many feminist organizations resisted institutionalization (Beckford, 1989). These studies indicate that organizational ideology- in these cases a feminist ideology that includes a commitment to egalitarianism - plays a powerful role in directing the types of structural and tactical changes made by social movement organizations over time. Although RM theory dominated the literature from the 1970s and 1980s, its failure to fully incorporate ideology into explanations of movement and SMO formation and change left it open to significant criticism.

Criticism

Critics point out that resource mobilization theory fails to explain social movement communities, which are large networks of individuals and other groups surrounding social movement organizations, and providing them with various services (Sandelowski, 2000). Critics also argue that it fails to explain how groups with limited resources can succeed in bringing social change and that it does not assign sufficient weight to grievances, identity and culture as well as many macro- sociological issues.

Conclusion

Social movement organization to which resource mobilization theory can apply because it is a platform for people to either sign a petition or start a new petition. Coupled with political process theory, a social movement theory which posits that social movements either succeed or fail due to political opportunities has been a successful tool because of its accessibility, which would make people more likely to start a petition and move toward a common goal. In other words, resource mobilization is an existing resource that is accessible to consumers of the Internet which helps mobilize the goals of the organization and is essential to success. Also, resource mobilization applies because of the fact that the people who founded the organization knew how to utilize the resources available, which implies that anyone who uses the website to sign a petition or start a petition are rational social actors who act as utility maximizers, who weigh the costs and benefits before deciding to be a part of a social movement.

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