

SW 223 Dr. Reyes

Theoretical frameworks for
community change

Material from Homan, M. S. (2011). *Promoting community change: Making it happen the real world* (5th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, and other related sources, like Rivera and Erlich (1998)

If we are silent on the subject of oppression, we become it's partner (Homan, 2011)

Organizing the community is based on the perspectives of:

- ❖ Respect for the values of mutual support.
- ❖ A sense of dignity.
- ❖ An ideology that draws from empowerment.

Perspectives on organizing the community

- ❖ An understanding of oppression. However, refuse to define any group solely in terms of its oppression.
- ❖ Be mindful of the strengths and limitations of a community.
- ❖ Developing political and critical consciousness (conscientization).
- ❖ Work for social justice.
- ❖ Commitment to collective action.

Key Concepts in Community Organizing

- Organizing the community involve a process similar to other types of social work interventions. The main steps are to assess a problem or challenge, develop a plan or action (intervention), and carry it out.
- The amount of organizing will depend on the size and nature of the change being sought and the elements present in the situation (related to the problem or challenge).

A Framework for Action

- Provides the foundation theories and organizing models needed to shape your effort to promote change. Rather than basing your strategies and tactics as you go along, you have a knowledgebase and skill building platform.
- Helps you become a more grounded promoter of change.
- Helps you become a good theorist.

Theoretical Frameworks: Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Organisms (city, neighborhood, etc.) needs input (resources, etc.) in order to output (productive outcomes) and maintain equilibrium or social balance for survival. The concept of system within environment is also related to this perspective. According to Homan, a system will take radical action when in the imbalance has reached a level of crisis. All systems act to meet needs for survival, if not growth (p. 36).

Homan points out:

Those outside the system may recognize or point out needs, but only when those within the system adopt this belief will genuine action take place. Although action may be taken in response to another's intervention, these actions may be superficial, designed to meet the need of pleasing the other party (system) or offsetting the use of resources that resistance would require (p. 36).

Energy Exchange

The system will use the energy to the parts it needs and output the waste (it does not need). Each subsystem is part of a larger set of systems (e.g., systems, like governments, affect communities, which in turn affect the members of the community).

Healthy Communities

Healthy communities produce healthy people. We derive physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social sustenance from the membership of our communities (p. 33). The community needs resources such as capital for economic development, adequate housing, transportation, spiritual support, respect for lifestyles, etc.

Healthy Communities

- Healthy connections among its neighbors; are inclusive. The opposite would be for example, intolerance of those who are assumed to be different.
- Recognizes and values resources.
- Promote community capital. This includes physical capital (infrastructure: lighting, sidewalks, etc., libraries), political capital (policies, representatives), human, cultural, information, spiritual capital, (culture, spiritual life, human service resources).

Theory of Community Change

These include theories of power, organizing, action, culture and change.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

- The concept of **culture** is key to all organizing since cultural values will often determine what is of importance to the community.

On the subject of culture, Rivera and Erlich (1998) propose the following:

- Become familiar with customs, traditions social networks and values.
- Learn the language and subgroup slang.
- Understand leadership styles and development.
- Know who has power and recognize sources of mediating influences between ethnic communities and wider communities.

Rivera and Erlich on culture (continues)

- Review past organizing strategies and analyze their strengths and limitations.
- Acquire skills in conscientization.
- Acquire skills in assessing community psychology.
- Be aware of personal strengths and limitations.

The Idea of Close Communities

Close communities are collections of people, larger than our family and immediate circle of friends, to whom we generally relate and from whom we draw identity and meaning (place of work, school, professional associations, etc.). It's easier to engage in organizing in these communities because of the closeness of our experience and possible passion.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

Change. We cannot avoid change. Building adaptations is key (building new relationships, acquiring new competencies, assuming new attitudes, and beliefs, and rejecting conditions. It requires agreement to new structures, and allocation of new resources or reallocation of existing ones. In order for change to persist it needs to be institutionalized. In order for change to persist it needs to be institutionalized.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

- **Transformation and Praxiology:**

- The action is determined by one's perception of the issue/problem.

- What we want to accomplish.

- What we think we are capable of doing.

- What we will expect will happen.

- **Action**

Praxiology (praxis= action). Based on the social learning theory and the social construction theory. The first suggests that we learn through our interactions with others and our perceptions of the consequences of our actions. The second, informs that we perceive and attach meaning to objects, events, and processes.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

The central idea behind the concept of action is that people act purposefully to satisfy their needs and to improve their future, and that change most effectively proceeds from an interactive process of reflection and acting on something.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

- **Action:**
 - What do you understand by action in a community?
 - When and how does it take place?

Resources

These include natural elements (rivers), elements created by human intervention (bridges), and skills as the talent of members of the community (e.g., political involvement). Unhealthy communities only see the limitations imposed by their problems and faulty connections.

Inclusion and Exclusion of members of the Community

Inclusiveness (affiliations, shared problem solving, mutual growth) versus exclusivity. A community system uses formal and informal mechanisms for maintaining some people excluded.

Promoting the Interaction of Community Members

These include:

- Natural or environmental (parks with rivers), physical (infrastructures), financial or economic (capital or wealth, financial resources, and production and exchange).
- Human or social; skills, talents, and interconnectedness of the community.

- Civic engagement related to social challenges, such as high dropout rates.
- Political access to the system's policy setting, etc. and information (data, technology, media, research).
- Cultural and spiritual artistic expressions, etc.

Key Concepts in Community Social Work

- **Power:** the capacity to move people in a desired direction to accomplish some desired end. It relates to mobilizing resources, assets, and forces. It works more effectively when there is a planned task (goals, strategies and tactics).

Understanding Power: The capacity to move people in a desired capacity to accomplish some end

Homan suggests that power involves some sense of purpose or intention. It does not suggest dominance, but rather collaboration. The author focuses on two types of power:

- Political Power – used to make of shape policy.
- Relationship Power – the power to influence how people relate to one another.

Understanding Power (continues)

Domhoff (cited in Homan, 2011), suggests two types of power:

1. Collective: “capacity of a group to realize its common goals, which flows from its organization, cooperation, morale and technology.”
2. Distributive: “concerned with who has power over whom and what” (p.154).

Some related responses to power are:

- Confrontation; antagonistic, little or no trust.
- Negotiation; skeptical some trust begin to emerge. Recognize that the other party has important resources to offer.
- Collaboration: willingness to assist. Trust growing, sharing resources for mutual gain.
- Co-optation: Alliance formed; shared perception.

Power centers, and who holds power in our communities

- ❖ Government officials (e.g., senators, county supervisors, city council members).
- ❖ Information: Media, internet resources.
- ❖ Those with financial resources (e.g., rich people who support a specific candidate for a government position).
- ❖ Those in positions of “legal” power or hold legal action (e.g., judges, police officers).
- ❖ Economic institutions, including local economy, goods and services (e.g., business associations), and “status” occupations.
- ❖ Constituents (e.g., community organizations, religious leaders).

Understanding Power (continues)

- Clearly there are people who fear change, and don't like it, either because they like things the way they are, or because "it" (the change) can go against their personal interests. For many, change is allowed and mainly possible when that which requires the change is disruptive.
- There will always be some level of conflict when attempting to make change. Some of it may be handled creatively and amicably, but other times there is no other choice but to embrace conflict.

Empowerment depends on 5 factors:

- Personal interest and investment in the project; a feeling of being a part.
- Belief in the possibilities of a successful outcome.
- Development and recognition of resources.
- Opportunity to take action and to make a meaningful contribution.
- Recognition of common interests and risk taking.

Organizing and organizations:
Change efforts that are planned, organized, and sustained, will produce. The amount of organizing will depend on the size and nature of the change being sought and the number of elements present in the situation.

The role of the organizer

- Functioning to meet systems requirements: similar to systems theory.
- Recognizing and valuing resources (similar to strengths perspective): Knows its resources and uses them to foster growth and wellbeing.

The role of the organizer and why there might be resistance to engaging in change

Exercise:

1. When I see something that needs change, do I act on it as a social worker?
2. What issues and community problems (challenges) am I most likely to act on?
3. If applicable: Why don't I act?

Your role as a community social worker

- Provide leadership for social work within mixed teams and across agencies and organizations.
- Maintain a high profile for social work within a multidisciplinary team setting.
- Enhancing the profession. This includes providing training.
- Ensuring quality of professional service provision (evaluating programs and services).
- Develop and manage resources.
- Build and develop a care management culture that reflects the core values of social work and centers on the needs of the clients' system.

Some of Homan's Suggestions for engaging in action:

- Confront the source of concern.
- Develop support.
- Remind yourself of why the change is important.
- Take advantage of training opportunities.
- Identify a simple starting point.
- Decide to act.
- Reflect on your actions (evaluate the outcome).

Food for thought: The 5 conditions for Taking Action

1. You need to know that an action is needed.
2. You need to know what action can be taken.
3. You have to feel competent to perform the action.
4. You have to feel relatively safe to do so. This includes obtaining sanction and endorsement to act. Sanction relates to your standing: how you project yourself to others and your intention, and endorsement relates to credentials and acceptance from those involved in the change process .
5. You have to receive sufficient encouragement or fulfillment to continue to take needed action.

People are burdened
by their fears, held
back by their
prejudices, and
confused by their
myths (Homan, 2011)

Building on your assets as an organizer

- Using the support and alliance of individuals groups and organizations, especially influential community members, is a must! Extensive personal networks are important. So is joining an organization, as in: board of directors, public boards and commissions, volunteering for a special events project, and political campaigning.
- Developing credibility: your credibility, that of your information, and of your power base (e.g., will others support you? Do you have any resources?) is key to being a good organizer.

Homan's list of keys to personal effectiveness

- ❑ Don't set arbitrary limits on yourself.
- ❑ Don't make excuses.
- ❑ Acknowledge the presence of problems.
- ❑ Don't contract the disease of being right.
- ❑ Remember why you are doing what you are doing.

Homan's list (continues)

- Be on the lookout for areas of agreement.
- Acknowledge others' needs for influence.
- Hold them accountable.
- Remember that all behavior is purposeful.
- Ask forgiveness, not permission.
- Don't make excuses.

Homan's list for empowering others to act

- Ask questions and ask for input.
- Reroute questions.
- Promote access to decision making.
- Give recognition and credit whenever you can.
- Rarely accept statements of inability.
- Promote the distribution of responsibility and authority.
- Develop a strong groups or organizational identity.
- Promote the acceptance of mistakes and acknowledge your own.

Homan's list of keys to personal effectiveness (continues)

- Adopt a successful attitude.
- Be prepared follow through on your commitment.

Homan's list for empowering others to act (continues)

- ❑ Encourage the development and awareness of resources.
- ❑ Promote the relevance of action (e.g., have an understanding of the actions the person is suppose to take in the name of the organization).
- ❑ Promote the recognition of success.