Specific Theories of Social Change Underlying IPLAC’s Proposed Niche

2007
I. Introduction

1. Practitioners committed to promoting processes of constructive social change in which individuals, groups and societies arrive at a convergence of interests in search of mutual benefit find themselves without a broad paradigm\(^1\) that articulates how change takes place.

2. In the absence of such a broad paradigm, many practitioners have opted to develop specific mid-level theories that articulate what they believe to be the smaller causal links in the dynamic process of social change. A ‘theory of change’ is understood to mean a series of assumption and a set of hypotheses that purports to describe specific dynamics that occur in the world and that need to be tested (confirmed or rejected) in the world of concrete experience.

3. Developing the discipline to proceed in this way achieves three important objectives. Firstly, when an initiative works it allows the practitioner to understand why it worked. Secondly, when an initiative fails, a re-examination of the assumptions and the specific theories will often help identify why the initiative did not work. Thirdly, in both cases, if this new understanding is systematized and shared, it will help build the body of knowledge on how change takes place contributing to the eventual development of a broader paradigm.

4. This stands against the more familiar single-loop learning where success reinforces existing mental models\(^2\)(it is assumed that ‘we got it right and that is why we are successful’); and failure is interpreted as an implementation problem (it is assumed that ‘we need to do more of the same, only better’). Double-loop learning, on the other hand, stimulates the practitioner to ‘think differently’, not only ‘act differently’. Triple-loop learning stimulates us to ask ‘How do we know what is right?’ See figure 1 below.)

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\(^1\) While there is no all encompassing broad paradigm, many practitioners draw on a range of mid-level paradigms for critical thinking include approaches like operations research, decision theory, formal logic, informal logic, dialogue theory, bounded rationality.

\(^2\) The term ‘mental models’ comes from the field of organizational development. It is used to refer to the underlying assumptions that shape the way people experience and interpret the world around them.
5. This document lays out key assumptions and mid-level specific theories of change related to the concepts underlying AFSC’s proposed niche in Latin America and the Caribbean. It draws heavily on the work of John Paul Lederach, as well as the work of Otto Scharmer, Peter Senge, the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), Steve Waddell, Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas. The document includes the following concepts:

- Conflict Transformation
- Generative Dialogue
- Conflict, Power and Constructive Change
- Citizen security
- Multi-stakeholder initiatives
- Transformational Platform

II. Conflict Transformation

Assumptions

6. There are tensions\textsuperscript{3} inherent in all human groups – tensions that result from real or perceived differences in ideas, experience and points of view. These tensions are a normal part of everyday human experience.

7. All relational spaces are dynamic. Human societies change and evolve as a result of interaction around difference. In this sense, tension or conflict\textsuperscript{4} can be seen as the motor force of the evolution of human societies.

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\textsuperscript{3} ‘Tension’ is understood to mean feelings of hostility that are not manifest; a state of mental or emotional strain or suspense; a balance between and interplay of opposing elements or tendencies. (source: wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn)

\textsuperscript{4} Conflict is “perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously.” Parties in this case can refer to individuals, small or large groups or national geographical territories. (Pruitt and Ruben 1986)
8. Strong relationships\(^5\) are a necessary ingredient for transforming conflict and building peace.

9. Generative Dialogue is a key tool for transforming conflict and building peace. \(^6\)

10. Each culture has specific resources and mechanisms for dealing with conflict; these culturally specific resources and mechanisms have a significant impact on how members of a particular society handle and respond to conflict. (Lederach)

11. Cultural patterns can contribute both to violence and to local capacities for peace.

12. Conflict changes the patterns of group life; accumulated and shared patterns affect the way people in a given context understand and respond to conflict, thereby affected cultural patterns.

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13. Engaging conflict in a constructive manner creates a process through which it is possible to transform the consciousness, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals, groups and society, as well as the relationships within and between groups and societies.

14. If we can break down isolation, polarization, division, prejudice and stereotypes between/among groups through dialogue, we will create the conditions for building positive cooperative relationships which, in turn, create the conditions for working together on initiatives to transform destructive situations. (CDA Healthy Relationships and Connections)

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\(^5\) The term ‘relationship’ is used to mean a connection between two or more entities and their involvement with each other. Involvement refers to how these entities behave and “feel” towards each other, and how they communicate.

\(^6\) “Generative dialogue is conversation that brings forth creative energy and collective intelligence out of a personal sense of connection to the whole.” (Pruitt and Waddell 2005:8)
III. Generative Dialogue

Assumptions

15. Communication is more than transmission and reception of information; it is also about interpretation or meaning.

16. Effective communication depends upon mutual understanding of intended meaning, or the managing of meaning.

Specific Theories of Change

17. Achieving a commitment to coordinated action towards a common goal is dependent upon achieving a common language around issues of mutual interest.

18. The sooner a group develops a common language that facilitates deeper mutual understanding of areas of agreement and disagreement, the sooner it is possible to move towards coordinated action.

19. Acknowledging and legitimating the different meaning that individuals and groups give to words, actions and events (managing meaning) is fundamental to achieving a common language.

20. The greater the mutual trust and acceptance, the easier for the parties to acknowledge and legitimate the different meanings given to words, actions and events.

21. The more authentic, open and creative the conversation or dialogue, the greater the ability of a group to manage meaning and coordinate action.

22. Time invested in dialogic process\(^7\) at the front end of a social change initiative will allow the group to move more quickly to coordinated action.

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\(^7\) Pruitt and Waddell (2005:2) define dialogic change processes in the following way. The term "change establishes the overarching objective of transforming people, relationships, and systemic patterns, while dialogic captures the central role of human interaction through conversation in achieving those transformations. The term processes expresses the idea of setting in motion a number of interrelated activities that may occur across a broad geographic expanse and over a relatively long period of time, as is appropriate for the challenges that global issues present."
IV. Conflict, Power and Constructive Change

Assumptions

23. Power\(^8\) is a property that emerges out of relationship, or resides in the context of relationship.

24. There are many types of power. The two principal sources of traditional power are coercion and authority. (See Figure 2 below.)

Figure 2: M. Weber’s categorization of types of power.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Power</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal - Rational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coercion**

People forced to do as they are told under threat of punishment.

**Authority**

People obey because of the personal qualities (Charisma) of the person doing the telling. Charismatic people assume positions of authority over others on the basis of personal qualities of leadership perceived in that individual by other group members.

Those who exercise authority do so because they continue a tradition and support the preservation and continuation of existing values and social ties.

Those in authority give orders (and expect to be obeyed) because the office they fill give them the right. Anyone who fills the same position has the right to issue orders. Orders are only to be obeyed if they are relevant to the situation in which they are given.

Source: www.sociology.org.uk/wspo3.htm

25. Weber’s view of power reflected the hierarchical nature of the world in which he was living. While power is still drawn from these same sources in today’s world, the new millennium has also given birth to large scale non-hierarchical networks of organizations that are developing new currencies of power based on access to information, organizing capacity, non-hierarchical leadership capacity and relational capital.

26. In vastly unequal situations of power, demands for change are seldom taken seriously by those benefiting from the situation without some form of pressure that affects the relative balance of power.

27. Confrontation can be violent, non-violent or a combination of the two, and confrontation does not need to be violent in order to be effective.

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\(^8\) According to Weber, power is the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his (sic) will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. (source: Max Weber, Sociology 2R3 Carl Cuneo’s Notes)
28. Relationships restructured toward increased equality and justice is a possible outcome of effective confrontation, but this outcome is not an automatic result of confrontation.

29. Dialogue and mediation processes can and should facilitate the articulation of legitimate needs and interests of all concerned into fair, practical and mutually acceptable solutions and sustainable peaceful relationships between interdependent subjects.

30. If we address the underlying issues of injustice, oppression/exploitation, threats to identity and security, and people’s sense of injury/victimization, it will reduce the drivers of conflict and open up space for peace. (CDA)

31. Peace is secured by establishing stable/reliable social institutions that guarantee democracy, equity, justice and fair allocation of resources. (CDA)

**Specific Theories of Change**

32. Movement from unpeaceful to peaceful relationships involves the dynamic interaction between degree of imbalance of power on the one hand, and levels of awareness of conflict interests and needs on the other. (See Figure 2 below.)

Figure 2: Movement from Unpeaceful to Peaceful Relations (Curle 1971)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNPEACEFUL RELATIONS</th>
<th>PEACEFUL RELATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Awareness Of Conflict</td>
<td>High Awareness Of Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEGOCIATION/MEDIATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Application of conciliation and negotiation techniques to end the open conflict, reach an agreement and begin development process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Various forms of consciousness raising and organizing until there is a higher level of confrontation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Various techniques for stimulating confrontation provoking an improved relative balance of power making negotiations possible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONFRONTACIÓN</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(violent – non-violent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Development and restructuring of previously unpeaceful relations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. Increased awareness of issues, needs, and interests on the part of those negatively affected by the situation increases demands for change.

34. When the needs and interests of all those involved and affected by the conflict are not clearly articulated and legitimated, there is less possibility of reaching sustainable negotiated agreements.

35. The greater the relative imbalance of power, the less chance that negotiations will lead to a sustainable agreement or sustainable constructive or peaceful relations.

36. In contexts characterized by historical imbalances of power, change processes must lead to a restructuring of societal relationships in addition to dealing with fundamental substantive and procedural concerns in order for negotiated agreements to be sustainable.

37. The power of ‘a’ over ‘b’ equal the dependence of ‘b’ on ‘a’. \( P_{ab} = D_{ab} \) (Lederach)

38. The greater the perception of interdependence between the parties, the greater the perceived need to dialogue and/or negotiate. (Hocker and Wilmot)

39. Conditions or pressures that are outside of the control of the parties directly involved can affect their willingness to dialogue or negotiate.

40. When effective confrontation increases the awareness of interdependence of the parties, it lessens the relative imbalance of power.

41. When the weaker party gains a lot of power through confrontation, the sense of interdependence may weaken.

42. Although apparently incompatible, longer-term progression of conflict toward increased justice and peaceful relations must integrate and view advocacy, dialogue and mediation efforts as necessary and mutually interdependent in the pursuit of just change and peaceful transformation. (Lederach)
V. Citizen Security

Assumptions

43. Creating the conditions for citizen security, human security and human development requires the creation of constructive and cooperative human relationships in increasingly broader spheres of action.

44. Citizen’s who fear for their physical security will minimize any public activity that is not entirely necessary.

45. High levels of trust among neighbors, makes it easier to create and maintain neighborhood organizations that defend and promote common interests.

46. Strong social capital which results in strong local organizations facilitates citizen participation by providing the vehicle through which individuals can interact collectively with local government.

47. Local governments are increasingly recognizing that they alone cannot deal effectively with citizen insecurity. Any initiative for significantly improving citizen security must involve both local governments and organized citizens.

48. While local governments have the responsibility for ensuring citizen security through the design and implementation of policies and programs, effective policy development, program design and implementation require serious input from the citizenry.

49. Social cohesion and strong positive social capital are essential to maintaining and advancing citizen security.

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50. Increased citizen security will create conditions for strengthening social capital and for broad citizen participation.

51. The existence of strong positive social capital and broad citizen participation will make it possible to deal more effectively with obstacles to economic security, food security, health security, environmental security and political security.
VI. Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

Assumptions

52. Many of today’s problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them. (Albert Einstein)

53. The multi-causal nature of citizen insecurity in urban areas in Latin America and the Caribbean makes it an increasingly a complex problem.

54. The complexity of any given problem or situation can be assessed along three dimensions (as suggested by Peter Senge, George Roth and Otto Scharmer):

- "Its level of social complexity: in a situation with high social complexity, actors have diverse (rather than unitary) perspectives and interests. Such situations cannot be addressed by experts and authorities, but only through the direct involvement of the actors or stakeholders.
- Its level of dynamic complexity: in a situation with high dynamic complexity, cause and effect are distant in space and time; causes are not obvious and cannot readily be determined through first hand experience. Such situations cannot be addressed piece by piece, but only by looking at the system as a whole.
- Its level of generative complexity: in a situation with high generative complexity, the future is unfamiliar and undetermined. Such situations cannot be addressed by applying lessons or rules of thumb from the past, but only by tuning into emerging futures." (Kahane cited in Pruitt and Thomas 2007:16)

55. Some form of multi-stakeholder consensus on the importance of dealing with the challenges of citizen insecurity and an agreement to an integrated and coordinated approach is essential to success.

56. In dealing with complex challenges, it is not possible to separate the parts from the whole.

57. Embracing complexity requires an understanding of the dynamics of change in complex systems. It requires the development of new approaches that open up space for inquiry, allowing solutions to emerge from the interaction of the system. (Westley et al 2006:138)
58. Involving competing groups and interests in effective and complementary processes is fundamental to democratic governance.

59. Involving competing groups and interests into effective and complementary processes requires skills, attitudes, behaviors and mental models that differ from those prevailing in societies accustomed to confrontation and exclusion.

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60. By bringing together key individuals who are neither ‘like-minded nor like-situated’ within a system, it is possible to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the system and more effective strategies for confronting complex challenges. (Lederach)

61. As shifts occur in how key stakeholders from the relevant sectors of society perceive their interests, they will be motivated to work together to transform the situation.

62. By supporting a dialogic change process between relevant stakeholders, it will be possible to achieve at consensus on the importance of dealing with the challenges of citizen insecurity and an agreement to an integrated and coordinated approach.

63. By creating the initial minimum conditions for citizen participation through well-designed and well-implemented multi-stakeholder initiatives, it is possible to begin to reverse the situation of deteriorating social capital and citizen insecurity.
VII. Transformational Platform

Assumptions

64. "Solutions that meet particular demands in temporally discrete time-frames provide answers to pressing problems, but are ephemeral rather than permanent." (Lederach 2005:49)

65. Negotiated agreements to major conflicts provide "an exit for symptomatic problems and an opportunity to create ways to work on repeated patterns and cycles of destructive relationships." (Lederach 2005:48)

66. In order to maximize this opportunity to work on repeated patterns and cycles of destructive relationships, a support structure is necessary.

67. Support structures or platforms "are built by supporting the constructive engagement of people who have been historically divided and who are, or many remain, in significant levels of conflict." (Lederach 2005:48)

Specific Theories of Change

68. Creating and maintaining permanent spaces where government and all social sectors, including the most marginalized, interact and jointly...
address issues of social concern can lead to more equitable and participatory democracies.

69. The restructuring of societal relationships necessary for fundamental social change requires mechanisms (transformational platforms) for supporting and nurturing the relationships between key people from the relevant sectors of society. (Lederach)

70. In order to sustain "a clear vision of the longer-term change needed in the destructive relational pattern", platforms must involve people who are not like-minded, nor like-situated in the conflict system. (Lederach 2005:47),

71. When a platform nurtures the relationships among key people from different parts of the conflict system over time, it can provide the foundation for a capacity for generating responsive change that addresses both the immediate expression of the conflict and the deeper epicenter of the conflictive relational context. (Lederach)

72. In order to generate change processes that are responsive to the deeper epicenter of the relational context, thus helping to restructure societal relations, platforms must be permanent and continuously adaptive. (Lederach 2005:48)
Bibliography


