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Practice Perspectives: Empowerment and Strengths-Based Approaches

Two of the primary perspectives associated with community practice are the empowerment and strengths perspectives. These approaches provide us with a generic description of how we should interact with constituents, recognizing their strengths and abilities and valuing their right to make decisions that affect their lives. The value assumptions associated with each of these approaches are easily incorporated into theoretical frameworks and practice models associated with community work. Both perspectives focus on the importance of client or constituent self-determination as specified in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics.

The Empowerment Perspective

As noted in chapters 1 and 2, empowerment produces powerful effects. The inclusion of disadvantaged members of society in organization or political decision making can alleviate the harmful psychological effects of social inequality by increasing the power of individuals to change those environmental conditions responsible for their problems. From this perspective, social problems are viewed as originating from the inequitable distribution of resources and decision-making authority (Freire, 1970; Parsons, Gutierrez, & Cox, 1998).

Empowerment also refers to the process through which people maintain control over their own lives and communities (Solomon, 1976; Staples, 1990). Empowerment decreases feelings of alienation from the dominant culture, helps individuals develop the capacity for collective action, and leads to the development of a sense of community or responsibility for and ability to resolve local problems (Simon, 1990). To be empowered, members of oppressed groups must be able to recognize the degree to which social structures limit life opportunities (Freire, 1970).

Empowerment can be defined along three dimensions. An individual is empowered when his or her self-esteem or self-efficacy is increased. At the intrapersonal level, empowerment comes through the construction of knowledge and analysis of social problems acquired through shared experience. At the community level, empowerment occurs through the development of service resources and social change strategies, which in turn help individuals gain mastery over the environment (Labonte, 1990). Involvement in community-based social change efforts is thought to provide opportunities to empower low-income people and members of other oppressed groups along all three of these dimensions.

According to Parsons et al. (1998), empowerment practice originates in the dialogue conducted among service professionals and constituents involved in the organizing effort. It has the following primary components:

1. The validation of the experiences that shape the lives and values of the constituent group
2. An examination of the self-perceptions of constituency group members in terms of their ability to gain mastery over the environment
3. A critical analysis of the impact of the sociopolitical environment on the lives of constituency group members
4. Increased knowledge and skills for critical thinking and action
5. Action taken for political as well as personal change (p. 20)

The implication of this model for community organization practice is that the organizer is to take great pains to establish decision-making processes and structures that support and encourage constituent involvement in problem identification, community assessment, goal setting, implementation of strategies, and evaluation (Zachary, 2000). However, as noted in chapter 2, the decision-making process takes place in a context of equal exchange or dialogue between constituents and the organizer.

The Strengths Perspective

The strengths perspective assumes that residents of low-income and other marginalized groups have skills, resources, and knowledge that they can utilize to transform their lives (Lum, 1996; Saleebey, 1997). The purpose of the strengths perspective is to counteract traditional approaches to social work practice that emphasize personal deficits and consequently result in the victimization of people in need.

Drawing from Freire's work (1970), the strengths perspective assumes that the person who receives the service also is the best "expert" about his or her own life. The strengths perspective emphasizes mutuality in all helping relationships, including one-on-one relationships between clients and social workers. This approach implies that the individual's culture is an asset that should be used in the change process.

This perspective can be incorporated into community practice in several ways. Saleebey (1997) describes community practice from the strengths perspective as oriented toward developing the capacities of individuals to change their own lives as well as the quality of community life. It focuses on "resilience"—the idea that people who have been marginalized and oppressed by society can persevere over hardships. Saleebey argues that the best way to do this is through forming social bonds with other individuals and community associations:

Community development involves helping unleash the power, vision, capacities, and talents within a (self-defined) community so that the community can strengthen its internal relationships and move closer

toward performing the important functions of solidarity and support, succor and identification and instructing and socializing. (p. 202)

In community organizing, the informal networks found within ethnic communities are central to the completion of successful organizing efforts (Delgado, 2000). Community residents use networks to establish a process of mutual assistance between those in need and other community residents. Such networks can also be used to facilitate community decision making. For example, an organizer interested in enrolling Hmong immigrants in Medicaid may begin the organizing process by asking local clan leaders to put the word out to community residents.

Limitations of Empowerment and Strengths Perspectives

While these perspectives contain important prescriptions for practice, they do not always link specific activities to outcomes. Although empowerment and strengths perspectives are often thought to produce improvements in self-esteem or feelings of control over one's environment, methods for measuring these outcomes are limited (Gutierrez, 1995; Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1999; Zimmerman, 1990). Consequently, little empirical evidence exists that establishes cause-and-effect relationships between practice activities and specific intervention outcomes. Though some work has been done to establish theoretical frameworks to support this empirical research, most efforts have focused on practice with individuals and small groups (Parsons, et al., 1998). The lack of empirical literature on the effects of empowerment- or strengths-oriented practice in community work may simply be due to the primary role assigned to these values. Many organizers assume that this type of practice is necessary for the success of community projects. However, it is not clear that all organizers actually incorporate such values into their practice. Some traditional models of social action–oriented community organizing involve approaches in which the organizer takes a lead role in guiding or directing intervention processes (Alinsky, 1971).

Theoretical Perspectives on Community Practice

Most of the theories associated with community organization practice help us understand the role of the social change organization within the context of the larger society. These theories also examine the role of social class and competing interests in the political process. Most importantly, these theories help us understand one of the primary concepts inherent in community organization practice: *power.* What is power? How is it obtained? What do social change organizations need to do to maintain their power base?

Systems Theory

In social work, we tend to use systems theory to examine small systems such as families or larger organizational systems. However, systems theory also pertains to the life of the community. We can examine communities in terms of subsystems comprised of individuals and groups. The community is a subsystem of the larger environment, or suprasystem, that includes other communities, the city as a whole, and other political entities (county, state, nation). Community subsystems can include organizations that serve neighborhood residents, businesses, and local institutions (schools, churches, and hospitals). The community is also affected by changes in the political, economic, and social systems (Fellin, 1995). Any action in one component of the system produces changes in all of the subsystems.

Community boundaries may be open or closed to communication and feedback from these larger systems. Communities are dynamic; to survive, organizations must be able to adapt to communication and feedback (Norlin & Chess, 1997). As with any system, the primary purpose of the community is to link individuals with the larger society and to achieve stability or a steady state. Community systems promote pattern maintenance, goal attainment, integration, and adaptation to the demands of the environment (Knuttila, 1992; Norlin & Chess, 1997; Parsons, 1971). Pattern maintenance involves socialization, the transmission of common values and behaviors throughout the community. Integration refers to the process in which people are made to adopt values and behaviors. This process is also referred to as social control. Adaptation focuses on the ability of the community's economic subsystem to acquire the resources it needs to function. Goal attainment refers to the ability to use these resources to accomplish tasks. It can be argued that all community subsystems must function at adequate levels so that community resources can be used to meet goals. While government may be the primary avenue to produce goal attainment (Parsons, 1971), community institutions, businesses, community organizations, and informal groups of residents can organize to produce results. Warren (1978) identifies a number of subsystems, which carry out basic community functions (see table 3.1).

The implications of systems theory for community practice are as follow:

1. A change in the suprasystem will produce a reaction in some aspect of community life. For example, government welfare reform legislation will have an impact on how residents in a low-income community obtain income and find employment.
2. Actions in any community subsystem affect the whole community as well as components of that system.
3. Communities perform all of those functions identified by Warren (1978). Some communities perform these functions less well than others.

4. The purpose of organizing is to restore the community to a steady state where all residents can participate in the life of the community.

Ecological Theory

Ecological theory is also known as population ecology. This approach has its roots in Darwin's biological determinism—"survival of the fittest." Population ecologists believe that social structure develops through the interaction among individuals, groups, and surrounding physical environment (Norlin & Chess, 1997). Changes in the environment occur due to natural forces such as population density or the movement of ethnic subpopulations into or out of the community. These forces will seek equilibrium or to maintain an ecological balance that allows the community to maintain regular patterns of activities.

The community ecosystem includes a variety of components: residents, housing structure, population density, land use, and social structure (Delgado, 2000; Fellin, 1995). The various groups in the community may compete for land, housing, jobs, and other resources. Those who can acquire these resources can dominate others. Those groups who do not successfully compete adapt to existing structures and processes. For example, new immigrants may move into a neighborhood with few services or convenience stores. They adapt to this problem by creating informal structures (street vendors, in-home sales) for the delivery of goods and services (Hardina, Palacio, Lee, & Cabrera, 1999).

Groups may also adapt by finding a specific niche or role in the community that allows them to acquire power or survive. Venkatesh (1997) examined the relationship between physical structures and social organization in a low-income community. He found few informal groups or organizations

Table 3.1 Community Subsystems and Their Functions

Function	*Subsystems*
Production-distribution-consumption	Economic subsystem, including businesses and employers
Socialization	Family, schools, religious institutions, peer groups
Social control	Government, judicial system, religious institutions
Social participation	Informal groups, formal organizations
Mutual support	Government social welfare programs Nonprofit organizations Informal helping networks

Source: Warren, R. (1978). The community in America, 3d ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally).

in the community that were effective in performing essential social control functions. However, local street gangs occupied the organizational void. Gang members enforced local norms, provided protection, and punished social deviants. Gangs established rules of inclusion and exclusion—for example, who belongs and who does not belong in the neighborhood. Graffiti and other physical markers (streets or buildings) were used to define the geographic neighborhood. Consequently, access to the neighborhood was controlled or limited by gang members.

Following are the implications of ecological theory for community practice:

1. Groups compete for scarce resources. The strong are able to dominate community life.
2. Other groups must adapt to the surrounding environment.
3. The physical environment has an important role in defining how social structure is created. Low-income communities are often characterized by deteriorating infrastructures and housing stock. Changing the physical environment will produce changes in the community's social life.

Limitations of Systems and Ecological Approaches

Both systems theory and ecological theory have limitations for use in community practice. Both lack specific directives for practice and may represent an inherently conservative approach because of the focus on adaptation (Delgado, 2000). Even proponents of systems and ecological theories have argued that they are not theories in the classic sense; cause-and-effect relationships have not been established through empirical testing (Wakefield, 1996a, 1996b). In addition, both theories fail to recognize the role of power in limiting the life opportunities of low-income people (Cloward and Piven, 1975).

Theories Related to the Acquisition of Power

Power is one of the most important concepts in community organization. Without power, people would have limited ability to acquire goods, resources, and decision-making authority (Alinsky, 1971; Kahn, 1991). Primary theories that link the acquisition of resources to an individual's or organization's ability to acquire power are power dependency, conflict, and resource mobilization theories. Each of these theories has a specific application to community organization practice.

Power Dependency Theory

Blau (1964) argues that power is inherent in all helping relationships between resource-rich donors and poor recipients. Blau's theory can be applied

to society in general and has specific applications to understanding the political process. However, it is most often used to examine how organizations acquire and disperse power. Its basic premise is that social service organizations depend on the receipt of funding to survive. Nonprofit organizations target their services to the poor. Although they may sell their services to consumers under a limited number of circumstances, most clients cannot afford to pay for them. Consequently, the organization must rely on grants and contracts from external donors. This is particularly problematic for organizations serving impoverished communities; it is unlikely that funds to ensure the organization's survival can be raised from sources inside the community (Hardina, 1993).

According to Blau (1964), the receipt of this money represents a free good or service and requires that the organization remain obligated to the funder, doing as the donor demands (this usually means complying with government regulations or grant specifications). The only way that the organization can avoid compliance with funder demands is to do one or more of the following:

1. Supply the donor with a good or service of equal value
2. Obtain the service from another source
3. Learn to live without the service
4. Coerce the donor to provide the service

The dependence of the organization on the donor can result in goal displacement, loss of autonomy, or limitations on the organization's ability to lobby for or against government policies. Power dependency theory can also be used to explain the relationship between those people who receive services and the organizations that provide them. People who receive free services from the organization become dependent on and obligated to the organization for the continued delivery of goods and services. Consequently, the organization plays a mediating role in implementing regulations associated with government funding; it must comply with government demands, and it must enforce government policies in its interaction with clients (see figure 3.1).

A number of implications exist for community practice associated with power dependency theory:

1. Demands associated with external funding may limit a community organization's ability to fight for social change.
2. People who receive free social services may be reluctant to advocate for themselves, believing that they may lose services.
3. Social change takes place in an atmosphere that focuses on the exchange of resources. People who receive jobs, political favors, and other resources may be obligated to vote for or support the donor.

Figure 3.1.   Power-Dependency Model
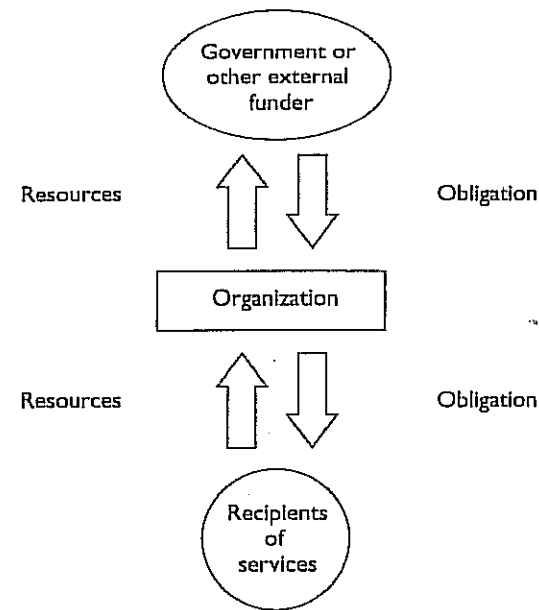
Conflict Theory

Conflict theory focuses on the interaction of groups in society. It is most concerned with groups formed through the process of social stratification—groups that are identified as different on a demographic basis from one another. Marx wrote about the struggle of workers to gain equality with dominant elites. Government, the "State," was viewed as a tool the elite used to oppress the poor to accept "wage slavery" (Knuttila, 1992). These groups form naturally as a function of both social class and ethnicity and consequently have different interests. For example, conflict theorists assume that wealthy individuals have access to most of the goods and services they need. Alternatively, low-income people are assumed to have limited access to resources. These groups are commonly referred to in the conflict theory literature as the "haves" and the "have-nots." It is further assumed that most of the interaction among the various social classes and ethnic groups involves competition for scarce resources. The haves want to hold on to wealth and the power that accrues from wealth. The have-nots want to acquire access to money, jobs, education, decision-making authority, and other power "resources" (Alinsky, 1971).

Two predominant approaches to conflict theory have influenced community organization practice in the United States. One is based on the work

of Alinksy (1971, 1974), who believed strongly that all people should have access to goods and services. In Alinsky's view, American society promotes economic well-being and should be sustained. The purpose of community organization should be to organize low-income and working-class communities so that they, as well as the rich, would benefit from capitalism:

> *The Prince* was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. *Rules for Radicals* is written for the have nots on how to take it away . . . we are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and give it to the people to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, co-operation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which man can have the chance to live by values that give meaning to life. (Alinsky, 1971, p. 3)

Alinsky's approach to organizing was to use power to force the haves to hand over decision-making authority and other resources. Power was to be acquired by building mass "people's" organizations and confrontation with authority figures.

The second approach to conflict theory is associated with Marxism. Marx, however, offered few prescriptions about how oppression operates and its effect on the various social classes (Marx, 1965). In the twentieth century, neo-Marxist theory evolved to create an explicit theoretical framework for examining how government and the capitalist elite interact to control the economy and subordinate the lower classes (Knuttila, 1992). Neo-Marxist theory has expanded to recognize gender, age, physical ability, and gender orientation as well as race and social class as factors that promote conflict among social groups.

Neo-Marxists have examined the role of social workers and the social welfare system in capitalist societies. The government, or State, primarily serves the haves, or dominant classes; it mediates competition among interest groups within the elite and relations among the social classes (Gough, 1979; Panitch, 1977). The State has two primary functions: capital accumulation; and legitimation, or the promotion of social harmony (Burghardt & Fabricant, 1987). Social welfare institutions are used to maintain social harmony but do not produce profits for private capital. Since capital accumulation is primary, social welfare expenditures are usually quite limited. If the working class is powerful, the State will need to increase expenditures for legitimation. According to Schreader (1990), "State ideological practices produce particular kinds of problem definitions, needs, and methods for dealing with them. These practices are observed to bring into existence certain types of activities and social relations to the exclusion of others" (p. 186).

In their book *Regulating the Poor*, Piven and Cloward (1971) examined social welfare policy in the United States from a neo-Marxist perspective. They argue that historically, social welfare expenditures have been increased during periods of political unrest (the Depression and the 1960s). Social welfare benefits have been reduced during periods when corporations have demanded access to a large pool of low-income labor. People without access to public assistance, who have few skills or job options, will work for very low wages if there are no alternatives.

From the neo-Marxist perspective, the State uses social workers to change the behavior and attitudes of the working class in order to reinforce support for the forces of capital (Burghardt & Fabricant, 1987). Consequently, the capacity of the social work profession to engage in social action is determined by the State. The contradictory nature of the social work profession (workers provide services to meet client needs while acting as agents of social control) can be used to explain why social workers have had some limited ability to control their work (professional autonomy) but little power to change the social welfare system (Burghardt, 1982). Social workers often experience this contradiction as role strain or burnout (Freidson, 1986; Garner & Zald, 1987). One means of coping with this contradiction is participation in social movements that promote increased welfare spending and improved social conditions for oppressed groups.

The primary assumptions of conflict theory as they apply to community practice are as follow:

1. The haves and the have-nots compete for societal resources.
2. The haves hold a resource and power advantage over the have-nots.
3. Much of the oppression that marginalized groups experience has its origins in classism, racism, ableism, ageism, sexism, and heterosexism.
4. The haves control government and other avenues of decision-making authority.
5. The purpose of community organization is to work with members of oppressed groups to acquire power and access to jobs, education, money, and other power resources.
6. Community organizers work to establish other sources of power (strength in numbers, votes, the media) that can be used to increase have-nots access to decision-making authority.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory explicitly explores the role and limitations of social movement organizations (Pfeffer & Salsnick, 1978; McCarthy & Zald, 1976). Social movements can be defined as "coalitions of loosely connected groups that attempt to change a social target" (Swank & Clapp, 1999, p. 50). Typical targets are communities, government, industries, or cultural norms and practices. There are two primary types of social movements:

(1) movements oriented toward establishing civil rights for groups that do not have full representation in political, social, or economic systems (for example, the women's movement and the civil rights movement), and (2) movements developed with altruistic motives, helping entities that can't represent themselves to acquire recognition and promote changes in legislation or policies (for example, the animal rights movement and the environmental movement) (Rothman, 1996). Recently there has also been a resurgence of social movements intended to support conservative cultural and religious values associated with the dominant culture (Fisher, 1994; Hyde, 1994).

Resource mobilization theory builds on power dependency and conflict theories to examine whether efforts to develop social movements will be effective. Specific aspects of social movements are examined:

- Where are the resources for the movement?
- How are they organized?
- How does the State facilitate or impede mobilization?
- What are the outcomes? (Muller, 1992, p. 3)

According to resource mobilization theory, organizations must be developed to recruit members, raise funds, and hire qualified staff. These organizations must also find ways to develop legitimacy with the public and with influential decision makers. They must also be able to mobilize their members to take action (writing letters, signing petitions, voting, participating in demonstrations). Member mobilization depends on the organization's ability to communicate its philosophy or ideology to potential members. The organization must be able to rely on current members to recruit others. Such recruitment usually occurs through social networks of friends, relatives, and neighbors.

It is also essential that the social movement organization foster a sense of collective identity among its members. Collective identity refers to the recognition of group members that they belong to and are committed to a social movement distinct from and more important than all others. Recognition of a collective identity promotes solidarity and group cohesion among members (Hyde, 1994). In social movement organizations with high levels of solidarity, members are more likely to participate in organization activities and to make personal sacrifices for the cause.

To successfully recruit members, a social movement organization must also be able to frame its message in ways that prospective members and the public can easily recognize as important and relevant. Jasper and Poulsen (1995) argue that it is important that these recruitment messages be presented in a way that contains cultural meaning and symbolism. For example, the animal rights movement has relied on images of animals being tortured during product or medical testing to recruit members.

Organizations that have large memberships and budgets are generally viewed as more powerful than organizations that do not have these resources. Powerful organizations also must have access to the media to promote their causes. The greater the dependence of the organization on forces outside the organization for these resources, the greater the ability of these outside forces to control what goes on within the organization. To survive, these groups must be able to recruit many dues-paying members or wealthy contributors (Piven & Cloward, 1979). Such donors may not have the same goals or motivation as the founding members of the organization. Consequently, these organizations may become less radical or less representative of their members. Government may also provide funds for the organization. Acceptance of external funds may pose problems for the organization, however:

> State aid to minority and dissident groups plays an important role in legitimation, in sustaining the view that the State is not the agency of a particular social class but rather the benefactor of all. The acceptance of this view necessarily directs political activity toward conventional channels. (Loney, 1977, p. 453)

Following are the basic assumptions of resource mobilization theory, relevant to the community organizer:

1. Social movements emerge in response to the perception that some groups or ideas are not represented in the political process.
2. Social protest is one of the primary methods for social movement organizations to gain public recognition and legitimacy.
3. The effectiveness of the social movement lies in its ability to recruit members, raise funds, and develop an appropriate organizational structure to carry out these tasks.
4. Successful social movements must create an environment that allows members to establish a collective identity, becoming committed to the cause.
5. The salience of the organization's message, increases membership recruitment.
6. The need to fund-raise acts as a double-edged sword. Money is needed to build an organization, recruit members, and influence policy makers. However, low-income people cannot contribute much in the way of resources. Using government funds or contributions from wealthy donors can lead the organization to abandon the struggle for radical reforms.

Limitations of Power-Related Theories

Power dependency, conflict, and social movement theories require that the community organizer accept that the power and influence of the social elite

has negative consequences for society. Approaching community organization practice from this theoretical perspective also requires that community organizers recognize that marginalized groups must acquire power in order to meet their needs. Therefore, strategies and tactics are needed that involve conflict with the power structure rather than efforts to establish consensus. Although these theories offer some guidance about how power functions in society and the source of competition among various constituency groups, they do not present the organizer with a full range of strategic options for resolving community problems.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a framework for the development of knowledge that is relevant to the lives of members of marginalized groups. It can be argued that most of the social science theories used in community practice were developed in accordance with Western cultural values and norms (Sohng, 1998). Consequently, this knowledge has relevance to the lives of people who are not members of the dominant culture. Specifically, they may not be relevant to the lives of people who have little or no income, people of color, women, people with disabilities, older people, and LGBT individuals. Constructionism is associated with postmodernism, an approach to knowledge that focuses on overcoming oppression by constructing new knowledge about the lives and experiences of members of traditionally subordinated groups (Chambon, 1999). According to Rodwell (1998), the concept of constructionism implies that change comes about through "linguistic negotiation generated between individuals who judge and correct until agreement is achieved regarding meaning" (p. 254). This approach requires that individuals and groups become engaged in a process of dialogue to identify meanings associated with social institutions, social customs, and everyday activities (Lee & Green, 1999). Some adherents of this approach distinguish between constructionism and constructivism. Constructionism pertains to an overall approach to generate knowledge and facilitate social change; social workers have used the term constructivism to refer to specific applications of constructionism to research and clinical practice (Rodwell, 1998).

Social constructionism also has its roots in "symbolic interactionism," the idea that people construct everyday activities with meanings associated with cultural norms, values, and the use of language (Chambon, 1999; Lee & Green, 1999). One basic assumption of this theoretical perspective is that knowledge is not objective; there is no one overall "truth." Instead, knowledge is constructed through social interaction and dialogue within the context of culture, the political structure, the economy, and historical influences. Consequently, no one version of reality can be said to be better or worse than another (Rossiter, 1996). Lee and Green argue that

because knowledge is socially constructed, it can vary historically over time and differ across cultural groups that hold diverse beliefs about human development and nature. Given that values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and practices vary from one cultural group to another, so does the social construction of knowledge. (p. 25)

Social constructionists argue that knowledge creation also varies from individual to individual, because each person experiences a different reality and interprets that reality based on his or her own values and personal experiences (Chambon, 1999; Rodwell, 1998). Existing theories are a mechanism the dominant culture uses to maintain institutional structures that oppress individuals and members of marginalized groups. Therefore, they should be discarded and new ways of understanding developed.

In terms of social work practice, this perspective suggests that the work of social workers has been socially constructed as a function of society's need to regulate and control individual behavior (Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 1997; Moffat, 1999). Therefore, the meaning that client groups assign to the intervention process may be far different from the meaning of this process to the social worker. Members of the client group may internalize the helping process, associating it with society's need to control behavior. People seeking help come from a variety of income and ethnic groups. They often experience social oppression because of gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age. Consequently, the meanings associated with the helping process can be infinite, and the social worker must have appropriate interpersonal and research skills to examine what the helping process means to these individuals and offer assistance in overcoming oppression (Rossiter, 1996).

Epstein (1999) argues that the development of new theories and ways of understanding culture and the everyday lives of people is critical for the development of social work practice. This is necessary because "the standard history [of the profession] fails to analyze the effects of embracing social science in such a way that the dominance of men over the epistemology and purposes was given distorted power, the nature of the work 'masculinized'" (p. 15).

A social constructionism perspective requires that the social worker be able to accomplish the following:

1. Understand how the social, economic, and political structure shapes individual behavior and the meanings attached to cultural values and norms
2. Engage in dialogue with others to determine cultural symbols and meanings that influence practice
3. Conduct collaborative research in marginalized communities to gain insight on how those communities interpret reality and internalize oppression by the dominant culture

4. Develop new knowledge and theories about how social forces and power affect members of marginalized groups

Limitations of a Social Constructionism Perspective

A primary limitation of this method is the view that there is no one correct view of reality. Holding this perspective means that once one acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed, communication of theories associated with the dominant culture should be rejected as an educational method. Therefore, social constructionism requires that classroom education focus on establishing dialogue among students, exchanging ideas, and looking for meaning behind various situations and behaviors. Students must also attempt to reconcile a variety of different perspectives and examine their own value assumptions (Lee & Green, 1999).

In addition, constructionism requires that the practitioner develop situation-specific theories about appropriate practice interventions. These interventions should be specific to the needs and values of the constituency groups served. Dialogue among group members is necessary to develop a framework that constituents can use for viewing society, the power dynamics associated with social institutions, and the meanings associated with the specific strategies and tactics used in the organizing effort. The need for a situation- or population-specific framework limits the degree to which an organizer can rely on existing theories to guide practice.

Summary

In this chapter, perspectives and theories associated with community organization practice were described. Empowerment and the strengths perspectives were examined in terms of value assumptions about how social workers in community practice should regard the people they serve. Recognition that all people have strengths and skills that they can use to increase their own mastery over the environment is an important value inherent in the helping process.

Three primary theoretical approaches to community practice were also examined: approaches that look at communities as systems, approaches that look at the role of power in society, and social constructionism. This third theoretical perspective offers a criticism of previous theoretical approaches that may not be relevant to the members of groups that are often marginalized by the dominant culture. None of these approaches really provides the community organizer with an explicit guide to practice. In chapter 4, these theories are linked with specific practice models. The prescriptions for action in the models incorporate the basic values and ethics for community practice described in chapter 2. Practice models provide organizers with action protocols and practice principles that can be used in a variety of situations.

■ QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How do the empowerment and strengths perspectives link community organization to practice with individuals, groups, and families?
2. Are the systems and ecological approaches consistent with the application of these theories to practice with individuals?
3. Is the acquisition of power consistent with basic social work principles? Why?
4. Should government and private donors be able to influence the change strategies that social movement organizations adopt?
5. Do you agree with the social constructionists that knowledge is not objective? Why or why not?

■ SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXERCISES

1. Divide the class into two equal groups. Flip a coin to determine which group will assume the role of the haves and which will become the have-nots. The instructor announces that the haves will all receive As in the course. The have-nots will all receive Fs. Each group should identify strategies they will use to either (1) remain the dominant group and receive an A, or (2) acquire power to overturn the instructor's decision.
2. Write a five-page paper that compares a low-income neighborhood to a middle- or upper-income neighborhood. Collect most of your data using observational methods. You may supplement data collection with interviews with residents and information from local newspapers. Compare these two neighborhoods in terms of physical structure (condition of apartments and houses, street maintenance, parks and playgrounds, businesses and community institutions, and garbage collection). What do these physical conditions tell you about the neighborhood residents; the level of interaction among neighbors; and access to jobs, shopping, and services outside the neighborhood? How would you apply ecological theory to what you have observed?
3. Use resource mobilization theory to examine a social movement (for example, civil rights, women's, Christian right, pro-life, or pro-choice movement). Choose a movement for which a great deal of historical information sources or recent newspaper accounts are available. What factors do your sources identify as critical for the success of these movements? Describe, at a minimum, the methods a social movement organization uses to raise funds and recruit members.

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include structured surveys, program monitoring techniques, social indicator analysis, population forecasting, or time series analysis. Also included in this chapter are methods used to examine physical and spatial attributes of the community: community mapping and geographic information systems. The chapter concludes with a section on social network analysis, a method that allows the researcher to examine links among individuals and organizations.

Assessment of Need in Community Practice: Using Multiple Methods

Community organizers conduct assessments to determine what services or interventions community residents want, need, or will utilize. Generally, needs assessments are conducted to determine what services community residents need. Services that community assessments can identify may include garbage pickup, street cleaning, parks, recreational services for youths, day care, jobs, or traditional types of social and health services. Residents may also be concerned about the quality of community life: crime, street gangs, shopping facilities, parking, or getting to know one's neighbors. Consequently, in community practice, assessments typically cover a variety of issues and can be conducted using a number of different data-collection methods. Assessments can target specific constituency groups or are inclusive, reaching a wide spectrum of community residents, service professionals, businesspeople, and church leaders.

A typical needs assessment focuses on the perceptions of community residents, service professionals, leaders, and other key informants (Burch, 1996). It identifies social problems that affect the community. Respondents may be asked to identify those services that could address the perceived needs. Needs assessments can also focus on service availability, coordination of service systems, service gaps, and whether services are accessible (Burch, 1996; Royse & Thyer, 1996). An analysis of service gaps requires that the researcher explore whether services target all population groups who need them (see figure 6.1). Accessibility assessments examine whether it is easy for people to find and obtain services. Factors that can limit accessibility include location, availability of public transportation, parking facilities, hours of operation, cost of the service, waiting time for services, and length or complexity of applications (Hardina, 1993; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Lipsky, 1980).

Needs assessments may be limited to impressionistic approaches, techniques used simply to gain insight into constituent perspectives on the problem, or may involve a more formal, systematic approach to data collection and analysis. A formal needs assessment usually combines interviews or surveys with key informants and analysis of existing data, available from the U.S. Census or agency databases. Questions included in a needs assessment focus on two main categories: resident needs and services offered (see table

Figure 6.1. Looking for Service Gaps in the Fairtown Community: Who Is Not Served?
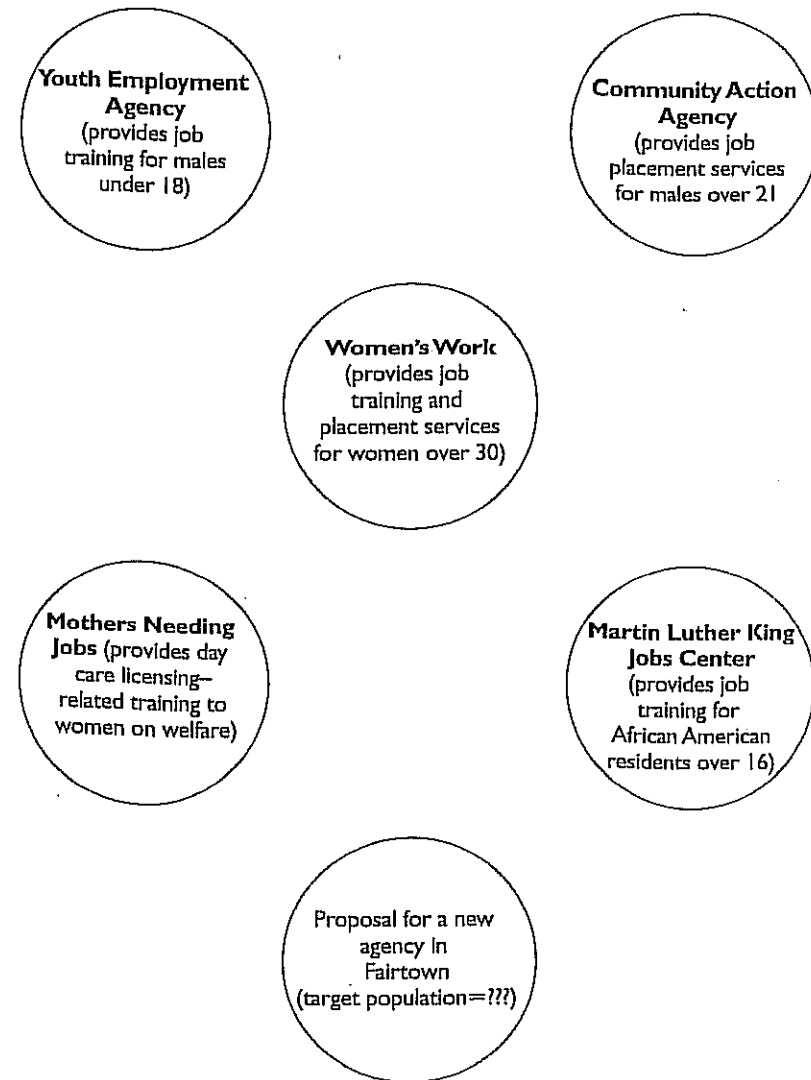
6.1). However, as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) point out, assessments that focus exclusively on community deficits mandate a service-based approach to needs identification rather than an approach oriented toward identification of community assets and the strengths of individual residents. Consequently, a strengths-based approach to needs assessment can involve a community audit, used to identify assets that can be used to facilitate social change (Delgado, 1996).

Needs assessment often requires that the organizer employ a number of different methodologies to examine the problem from different perspectives. Different groups in the community may have very different attitudes or opinions about local problems. Collecting data from a variety of sources improves the reliability of the needs assessment. If data from a number of sources point to the same conclusion, the researcher can be confident that he or she has correctly identified the problem (see figure 6.2). The process of using a number of different data sources and research methods to conduct an assessment is called triangulation or convergent analysis (Royse & Thyer, 1996).

Organizers should also be aware that the choice of methods for needs assessment depends on three factors:

1. The time allotted to conduct the study
2. The resources necessary to actually implement the study
3. The organizer's orientation toward the inclusion of constituency group members in the study (Marti-Costa & Serrano-Garcia, 1995; Royse & Thyer, 1996).

Organizers may use pre-existing problem indicators when time and money are of concern. The availability of resources often determines whether the views of more than one constituency group are included in the needs assessment.

The use of the empowerment approach or strengths perspective in community practice requires that the organizer take steps to make sure that the views of many community groups, especially those of low-income and marginalized people, are incorporated in the research study (Durst, MacDonald, & Parsons, 1999; Reisch & Rivera, 1999; Sohng, 1998). This is especially important when the organizer is engaging in cross-cultural practice. An understanding of cultural norms and values is essential to the correct interpretation of study results. In addition to surveying members of less powerful groups, it is also possible, and in many situations essential, to involve community residents in research design, data collection, and data analysis phases of the study (Johnson, 1994). According to Marti-Costa and Serrano-Garcia (1995):

Needs-assessment methodology, if it is to respond to a commitment to the powerless and to the fostering of social change, must (a)

emphasize techniques that singly or in combination facilitate grouping and mobilizing people; (b) foster collective activities; (c) facilitate leadership development; and (d) involve residents in the entire research process. (p. 260)

While many of the techniques described in this chapter are intended to foster the involvement and empowerment of community residents, other techniques involve complex technical skills. Often such analysis is best done by individuals or small groups. Although community residents may not be directly involved in all aspects of the needs assessment, they can serve to guide the project. Many experts on needs assessment suggest that a steering committee, made up of residents or other constituency groups, be established and function as the governing body for the project. The steering committee approach helps ensure that the findings are reliable and that they accurately reflect the community's needs. Steering committees also help establish the legitimacy of research efforts and ensure that the data will actually be used to facilitate social change (Warheit, Bell, & Schwab, 1984).

Using Qualitative Approaches to Gather Information from Individuals

Qualitative approaches to needs assessment focus on gathering information to form impressions about community problems and needs. The purpose of such approaches in community practice is to establish a direction for further research and to identify a problem that can be used to initiate organizing efforts. To ensure that organizing efforts are salient to community residents and that issues truly of concern to the community are raised, the organizer must use techniques that allow for the examination of needs from community residents' perspectives. It is also important that the organizer understand cultural values and norms that often determine how ethnic groups and other subpopulations outside the dominant culture view their lives and the troubles they encounter. Three of the primary qualitative approaches for collecting data from individuals are informal conversational interviews; formal interviews; and the ethnographic research approach.

Informal Conversational Interviews

Most community-organizing efforts require that the organizer develop an impression of the community and its people. The first step in this process is for the organizer to engage in informal interviews with community residents (Meenaghan, Washington, & Ryan, 1982). Rubin and Babbie (1997) define an informal conversational interview as an "unplanned and unanticipated interaction between an interviewer and a respondent that occurs naturally during the course of fieldwork observation" (p. 388). Conversational

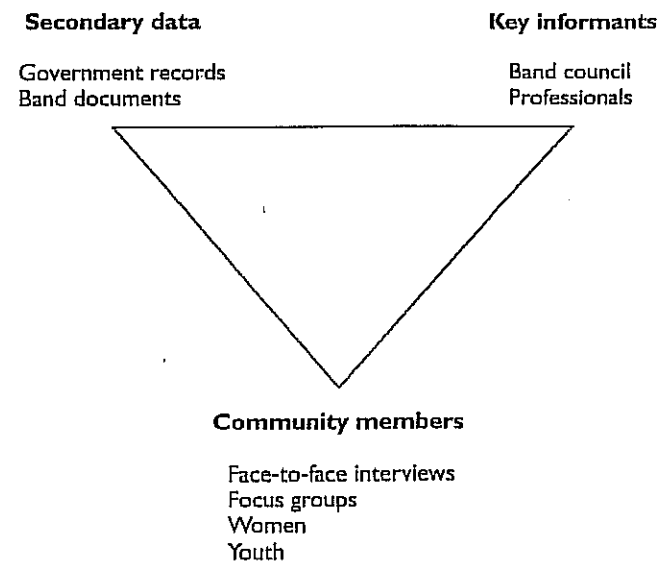**Table 6.1** Questions Addressed through Needs Assessment

Resident Perspectives on the Community	What social problems do individuals and groups in the community experience? How should these problems be addressed? What actions can residents take to address these problems? What actions should government agencies take to address these problems? What actions should local institutions and businesses take to address these problems?
Resident Perspectives on Service Needs	Are services offered in the community to address these problems? Do residents feel that they need services to address the problems identified? Do community residents use available services to address these problems? Are these services accessible to community residents? Are there some community residents who do not receive these services? What additional services should be provided? What types of services do community residents need?
Service Provider/ Key Informant Perspectives on Community Needs	What services are currently provided by local organizations? Are comparable services offered by more than one organization? Are specialized or unique services offered by some of these organizations? Are these services adequate to meet the needs of community residents? Are these services accessible to community residents? Are there some community residents who do not receive these services? What additional services should be provided? How are services coordinated among organizations (shared resources, referrals, case management, co-location)? When we look at the service system as a whole, what services are not provided?

Table 6.1 *(continued)*

Community Assets	What are the skills and resources of individuals in the community? What organizations and institutions are located in the community? What assets are associated with these organizations? What are the links among local organizations? How can they best be used in the organizing process? What are the physical attributes of the communities? Can buildings and open space be used to enhance the organizing process? What resources from outside the community can be used to enhance the organizing process?

Adapted from Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993.

Figure 6.2. Information Sources for a Needs Assessment of Domestic Violence in a Native Community

Secondary data
Government records
Band documents

Key informants
Band council
Professionals

Community members
Face-to-face interviews
Focus groups
Women
Youth

Source: Durst, MacDonald, & Parsons, 1999.

argues that although in most situations we want to keep our strategies secret from opponents, successful campaign strategies require that organizers let opponents know what their strategy will be. This helps stimulate efforts toward negotiation. The target group can choose between finding common ground and responding to the next steps the action system says it will take.

Mondros and Wilson (1994) characterize good tactics as those that are winnable, unite people, are simple, and help build the organization. Good tactics are also fun—they are enjoyable, provide a chance to socialize with other constituents, and put people at ease. A good or effective tactic is often one that falls outside the opponents' past experience; the targets may not know how to respond to the tactic or may react in a way that the public and the media view as inappropriate or an overreaction (Bobo et al., 1991).

Congruence among Models of Practice, Strategies, and Tactics

Some organizers have difficulty linking models of community practice with strategies and tactics. In her survey of community organization instructors in schools of social work, Hardina (2000) found that respondents preferred social action to other models of practice. However, these respondents identified collaboration as the strategy they most preferred to use. Burghardt (1979) offers one reason that practitioners may be reluctant to use social action: "The relative rarity of social action is also due to the organizational difficulty of maintaining such a conflictual stance over a long period of time" (p. 126).

Mondros and Wilson (1994) argue that organizers seldom use conceptual frameworks to decide when to use strategies and tactics. Instead, their own values and personal comfort level determine practice methods. Consequently, some organizers use the same strategies and tactics over and over. The methods they use do not necessarily vary with the situation or the resources available to them. It is sometimes difficult for social workers to confront members of the power structure (Hardina, 1997). Sometimes the difficulty comes from simply feeling that confrontation is inappropriate or contrary to the principles in the code of ethics. In other instances, it may be difficult for social workers to be assertive enough to engage in direct confrontation. Although workers in some male-dominated professionals (such as business or law) may consider confrontation politics routine, social workers may not have experience in directly challenging decision makers. Consequently, social workers who engage in community organizing may need assertiveness training (Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 1997).

Reisch and Wenocur (1986) and Specht and Courtney (1994) have suggested that the process of professionalization, or achieving public recognition for the profession, has turned social workers away from social action. Reeser and Epstein (1990), in their study of social action among social workers, found high levels of social work involvement in political action, lobbying

for legislation that helps the social work profession, and agency-approved activities. However, they also found that few social workers participated in demonstrations, picketing, or other types of direct social action. It is conceivable that as the profession has given approval to some types of social action (especially activities designed to promote the profession), other types of more militant social action (demonstrations, for example) have lost legitimacy (Wagner, 1990). The rejection of social action–oriented strategies suggests a rejection of social class–based analysis of social problems (Burghardt, 1987; Rivera, 1990).

Choosing Appropriate Tactics

As discussed in chapter 2, many social workers disagree about whether some tactics fall within ethical guidelines established by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (Hardina, 2000). Some social worker educators feel that organizers should emphasize collaboration or campaign tactics and use confrontation only as a last resort (Netting et al., 1993). Others feel that social workers have an ethical mandate to produce social change. This ethical commitment includes participation in social movements and the use of a wide variety of tactics (Burghardt & Fabricant, 1987).

The only framework social work practitioners have for making decisions about appropriate tactical methods was developed by Warren (1971). Brager et al. (1987) developed this framework further. Decisions about tactics are determined by three primary factors:

- The degree of consensus among the groups involved about the ultimate goal of the social change effort
- The relationship of the change system to the target system
- Whether the goal can be achieved within the existing power structure

When all parties agree on the desired outcome of the intervention and all groups involved are members of the same system, collaboration can be used. When groups differ on their perceptions of the problem and when there is little communication among groups, contest strategies are used. Campaign strategies are used in situations when overlap exists between the target and action systems and it is possible to establish communication between the two groups.

Brager et al. (1987) have added additional criteria for choosing tactics:

- The seriousness of the issue (will people be harmed if it is not resolved?)
- The public's perception of the legitimacy of the decision-maker.
- The resources available to the change agent.

Community organizations with few funds are more likely to use dramatic or confrontational methods that can be used to get their point across to

decision-makers, the media, and the public. Affluent, established organizations often rely on flyers, press conferences, or meetings with newspaper editorial boards to make a point.

The choice of tactics also has to do with the degree of legitimacy the public affords the organization and its members (Brager et al., 1987). Some types of tactics, especially those that involve confrontation, may in the short term anger the public while doing little to persuade people to adopt the group's perspective on the cause. For example, Hardina (1997) describes opposition to Proposition 187 in California. Proposition 187 was intended to cut off access to education, social services, and health care for illegal immigrants. Students who opposed Proposition 187 carried Mexican flags in demonstrations. Such actions (viewed as "anti-American") may have been instrumental in actually generating public support for the proposition, which was approved by California voters.[1] In one instance, college students burned an American flag to protest the vote. This action generated controversy on campus and resulted in a death threat against one of the participants. Consequently, the organization should carefully deliberate the use of confrontation tactics and thoroughly discuss the possible benefits and risks.

An additional concern for organizers is the amount of time available to address the issue. Confrontation tactics may be used in situations in which the organizer has little time to get a point across and when the problem addressed has caused personal harm to individuals. For example, members of the antinuclear and peace movements have often blocked the movement of trains and other vehicles that carried nuclear weapons (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995).

Pilisuk, McAllister, and Rothman (1999) raise the issue of winners and losers in the organizing process. It may be possible for a project to benefit one oppressed group while posing a risk to another. To resolve such ethical dilemmas, organizers must define whether they are working for specific groups, society as a whole, or all disadvantaged people. They must also examine benefits, risks, and long-term consequences of each organizing effort.

Civil Disobedience and Disruption

Not all types of tactics are legal. Organizers and constituents may, depending on the seriousness of the issue and the urgency of working toward a solution, break the law. Cesar Chavez, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. all engaged in peaceful civil disobedience to gain recognition for causes. Civil disobedience can include sit-ins in restricted areas, marches that have not been sanctioned by public authorities, attempts to block the entry of others into public or private property, nonpayment of taxes, or noncooperation with police or other officials. For example, one of the most famous acts of civil disobedience at the beginning of the civil rights movement was

the Rosa Parks's refusal to move to the back of the bus (legally required of African Americans) in Montgomery, Alabama, during the 1950s (Bilden, 1983).

Appropriate use of civil disobedience as a tactic requires that participants be fully committed to the cause; aware of the impact of their actions on themselves and others; and ready to accept any negative consequences of their actions, including jail time, employment loss, and public stigma. Participants in the anti-Vietnam War, civil rights, farmworker, and American Indian movements often risked beatings by the police, were jailed, and in some extreme instances faced death (Carley, 1997). Bobo et al. (1991) argue that civil disobedience is effective when participants are comfortable with the tactic, leadership roles are available for those who do not wish to participate in direct action, and the tactic illustrates to the target that the action system has power. However, they also caution that this tactic can backfire if it limits the organization's ability to recruit new members. Intensive training in the appropriate use of these tactics is mandatory (Lee, 1986).

In some cases, social action organizations deliberately engage in disruptive activities, including direct confrontations with police, rock throwing, and destruction of private property, to convey opposition to government and corporate practices. Disruptive tactics, intended to focus media attention on environmental problems and globalization, were used during the 2000 Republican and Democratic national conventions (Chonin & Wildermuth, 2000). Some of the difficulties inherent in such activities include assignment of responsibility for violence to coalition partners who have not engaged in these activities and the inability of coalition members to control the actions of disruptive organizations or the reactions of the police, the press, and the public (Brager et al., 1987; Lee, 1986). Disruptive events involving physical confrontation or the destruction of property can result in great bodily harm to demonstrators, police, and innocent bystanders and are not recommended.

Brager et al. (1987) offer guidelines for participation in various types of protests (see table 10.2). If the goal of the organizing effort is for both the action system and the target system to make mutually agreed upon adjustments in policies or the manner in which resources are distributed, then the parties can engage in collaboration. If the purpose is to actually transfer resources from one party to another, then campaign is required. If, however, the purpose of the action is to change the status of disadvantaged groups in society (enable them to acquire voting rights, jobs, improvements in education or economic status), then contest or disruption is required. In extreme cases, where the entire system must be restructured, insurrection (which may involve violence or mass civil disobedience) is required. A recent example of effective organizing to restructure the system was the termination of apartheid in South Africa. Tactics used included an international boycott of corporations doing business in South Africa, the campaign to

Table 10.2   Confrontation and the Escalation of Tactics

Goal	*Response*	*Mode of Intervention*
Mutual adjustments or rearrangement of resources	Consensus	Collaboration
Redistribution of resources	Difference	Campaigns
Change in social, cultural, economic, or political status and power	Dissensus	Contest or disruption; civil disobedience
Reconstruction of the entire system	Insurrection	Nonviolent, civil disobedience; violence

Source: Adapted from Brager et al., 1987.

free Nelson Mandela from prison, expansion of voting rights to members of oppressed groups, civil disobedience, and use of some violent tactics (African National Congress, 2001). Mass civil disobedience and disruption were also extremely effective in bringing about changes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe without violent resurrection.

Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Constituents and beneficiaries should always be involved in planning interventions (Netting et al., 1993). As described in chapters 2 and 4, this is particularly critical in situations where the intervention may have harmful consequences, such as jail time, potential loss of employment, or social stigma, for participants. Mondros and Wilson (1994) believe that discussing strategies and tactics with constituency group members is critical to the success of any intervention plan because the organizer, left to his or her own devices, may prefer to use those tactical methods consistent with his or her own values rather than those that are situation specific. In addition, through discussions about tactics, "Members have the opportunity to discuss their fears and reservations about a particular activity" (p. 157). Kahn argues that when participants are involved in the planning process, "They will have much more of a sense of participation and ownership" (p. 178).

It may be difficult to include everyone in decision making. In many organizations, historic patterns of institutional relations exclude women, people of color, persons with disabilities, or LGBT individuals from decision making. Pilisuk et al. (1999) describe dilemmas organizers face as they attempt to include participants in decision-making processes:

> Men may try to speak for women or to withdraw from action led by women. Long-term residents may resent immigrants, who are seen as competition for jobs and services. Most American working people

have never experienced a multiethnic framework of political solidarity, and workers have traditionally belonged to unions and political machines based upon ethnic solidarity and exclusion. (p. 114)

True participation requires preparation and resources (Hardina & Malott, 1996). It also requires that organizers maintain a multicultural perspective. They should also adhere to the social work value of empowerment, promoting inclusion (Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000). Beresford and Croft (1993) identify the following attributes of an inclusive decision-making process:

- Resources (places to meet, clerical support, publicity, and travel expense coverage)
- Information about the scope of the problem at hand, resources available for remediation, and possible solutions
- Training in participatory processes
- Equal access to services and opportunities to participate
- Appropriate forums and structures that enhance involvement
- Use of language and terminology that is accessible to all participants, including appropriate translation services
- An evaluation mechanism that includes opportunities for constituency group members to participate in research design, data collection, and analysis

Fostering participation in intervention planning also requires that the organizer develop appropriate interpersonal and group work skills. Such skills include leadership development; group facilitation; development of group cohesion; task assignment; volunteer motivation; and ability to work with constituents to identify, attain, and evaluate group outcomes (Burghardt, 1979; Zachary, 2000). Group work styles will vary depending on the strategies used to attain outcomes; community development efforts will employ collaborative approaches that focus on consensus building, group cohesion, and process. Social action–oriented groups are more likely to focus on outcomes as well as specific task accomplishment by members.

Multicultural Organizing and the Choice of Tactics

The choice of tactical methods should include consensus-oriented approaches to organization that are appropriate for working with women or members of Asian, African American, Latino, American Indian, and other ethnic communities. Methods that incorporate traditional cultural values are viewed as more effective than confrontation-oriented tactics used within hierarchical decision-making structures characteristic of white, male-dominated institutions (Rivera & Erlich, 1998; Weil, 1986). Organizers must be

(the exception is often limited to personal demographic indicators or yes/ no questions), with respondents encouraged to describe feelings, reactions, and perceptions about the questions posed in the research instrument. Consequently, the researcher has imposed no structure on these responses and has not solicited certain types of responses. Qualitative researchers argue that this method is preferable to quantitative, structured approaches because the researcher will not have imposed his or her own perceptions about the "correct" responses on the participants (Patton, 1997; Rodwell, 1998).

Manipulation refers to the introduction of an intervention to the research setting. In classical experimental design the researcher assigns respondents to experimental and control groups (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). In control groups, no intervention is introduced. Experimental group members will receive an intervention that is intended to change their behavior, feelings, or attitudes. Consequently, the impact of the intervention also can involve some degree of actual manipulation of research subjects (obviously this requires that subjects be informed about possible risks inherent in the intervention).

In some quantitative studies, the researcher creates two or more different experimental groups. In each of these groups, a slightly different type of intervention is used. Effects are compared between these groups and the no-intervention control group. In qualitative research, no intervention will be introduced. No attempt will be made to alter the behaviors, feelings, and perceptions of respondents. One term often used to describe the application of qualitative methods to evaluation of practice is naturalistic observation, meaning that research is to take place in settings that naturally occur without the manipulation of subjects or the imposition of structure and meaning (Guba, 1987).

Measurement: Validity and Reliability in Evaluation Research

The concepts of validity and reliability in evaluation research also differ by research paradigm (Patton, 1997). Quantitative evaluators concern themselves with whether instruments used to collect data accurately measure the concept under study, whether the concept measures can be correlated with other measurement techniques for assessing that concept, and whether the interrelationship between the variable measured and other related concepts can be substantiated (validity). Quantitative researchers also examine whether the measure consistently provides the same assessment using repeated measures of that concept (reliability). Procedures commonly used to establish validity and reliability include the following:

1. Administration of a pretest of the instrument to several members of the intended target group to determine whether participants will recognize the concepts and can respond to each question.

2. Review of the instrument by experts in the field to assess whether the intended concept is measured accurately.
3. Correlation of the test results with other instruments that measure the same concept or with instruments that measure concepts that are theoretically related to the first variable.
4. Using multiple measures of the same concept and assessing whether responses to these items are consistent with one another (internal consistency).
5. Repeated testing of the instrument using the same participants or replicating the study to examine similar problems or research settings (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999; Rubin & Babbie, 1997).

In qualitative evaluation, the researcher is most interested in establishing the trustworthiness of the data collected and the manner in which the evaluator has interpreted the data (Reinharz, 1992). Consequently, most qualitative evaluations contain a feedback component in which the researcher consults with the research subjects to ensure that the findings are consistent with the participants' perceptions. One additional method used to establish trustworthiness is to include research subjects and beneficiaries in the identification of the research problem, research design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing phases of the study (Smith, 1997; Telfair & Mulvihill, 2000). Another method evaluators use to establish the validity and reliability of measures and results data is to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. As noted in chapter 6, this is known as the process of triangulation. If both types of data produce similar results, the evaluator can establish that the data collected is both trustworthy and reliable (Cherry, 2000).

Evaluation of Community Interventions

Although the methodology used to examine community interventions is not as well defined as that of program evaluation, practitioners commonly use a number of techniques to examine outcomes and processes:

- Goal attainment
- Social indicator analysis
- Field interviews
- Critical incidence analysis

As used in this chapter, the concept of evaluation of community intervention pertains to the outcomes and processes associated with the actual implementation of strategies and tactics used to facilitate community change: community development, planning processes, social action, and transformative models of practice. It does not pertain to evaluations of out-

comes and processes associated with the delivery of a specific program or service to community residents.

Goal Attainment

As described in chapters 10 and 11, evaluation of intervention outcomes can be conducted at the most basic level through the assessment of whether goals and objectives have been achieved. As described in chapter 12, the evaluator and program participants must have a clear understanding (and be able to communicate verbally and in writing) about how programmatic needs are linked to the program's theory of action (or interventions used to address the problem). Components of this intervention plan should include specification of participant and programmatic needs, constituent expectations, activities required to implement the program, resources needed for operation, and identification of programmatic stages of development.

Evaluators must also be able to specify the logic behind program operation. A set of specific program activities must be linked to outcomes. In other words, the evaluator must be able to describe what happens in the program and to link these activities to programmatic outputs and long-term outcomes associated with the program. A relationship between the program (independent variable) and outcomes (dependent variables) must be made explicit (Chambers et al., 1992; Royse & Thyer, 1996). Sources of information about these relationships can be found in the theoretical, empirical, and best-practices literature.

Specification of a theory of action requires the identification of immediate objectives, intermediate objectives, and ultimate program goals (Meier & Usher, 1998; Patton, 1997). The theory of action must also be clearly linked to evaluation criteria. These criteria should also be linked to the identified problems to be addressed by the program or project (see figure 14.1). In addition, the data collected should make it possible for the evaluators to derive clear information about how the program should be modified in response to the research findings. Consequently, an effective evaluation should contain a feedback loop, allowing the organization to engage in continuous efforts at formative as well as summative evaluation.

Chambers et al. (1992) report that correlations between goal attainment scores and other outcome measures are low. Consequently, goal attainment alone may be insufficient to address whether the intervention itself (exclusive of factors in the external environment) has actually produced the outcome intended. As Krause (1996) points out, program designers often forget to include important components of the program in lists of goals and objectives compiled for funding proposals. Consequently, evaluations conducted by external reviewers may be essential in helping organizations identify primary program goals. Sometimes these goals may be implicit, evolving through the interaction among staff and other par-

Figure 14.1. Linking problems, outcomes, and evaluation criteria to the program's theory of action.
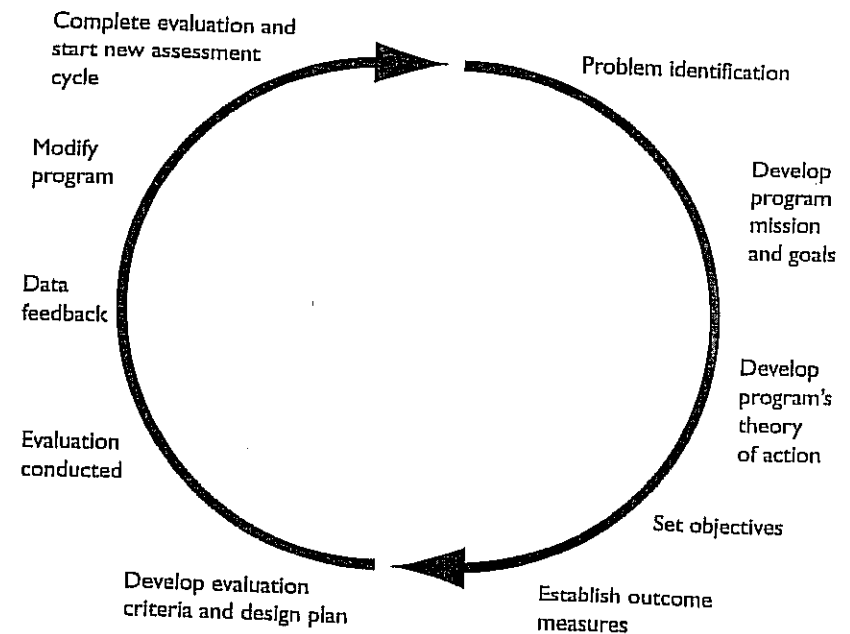
ticipants, or attempts to make do with resources and guidelines provided by funders (Patton, 1997).

Social Indicator Analysis

In addition to goals outlined in intervention plans and program proposals, an evaluation can focus on social indicators (see chapter 6), data collected from records compiled by public and nonprofit social service organizations or health care providers. For example, if our intervention is intended to reduce crime in the Fairtown community, we would at a minimum obtain data from local policing agencies about crime rates in this area both before and after the implementation of the intervention. You can also use case record data from your own organization to establish benchmarks for goal attainment (Royse & Thyer, 1996). If the intervention's goal is to reduce hunger in Fairtown by increasing enrollment in the food stamp program, one indicator could be the decrease in demand for emergency food from people who are served by the Fairtown Community Organization. It is critical, however, that organization participants establish levels of desirability for increases or decreases in these measures before the implementation of the intervention (Patton, 1997).

If available, secondary data (case record information and social indicators) can be obtained at regular intervals throughout the implementation stage of the project. Statistical techniques described in chapter 6 can be used to control for random error in time series data. As noted previously, social indicators are only as reliable as the concepts and tools used to obtain measurement. Hence, evaluators using these standardized indicators to measure community health, safety, hunger, or unemployment should note any limitations associated with the measure and supplement the data with information from other sources (Royse & Thyer, 1996).

Field Interview

MacNair (1996) describes two methods that can be utilized to obtain information about the organizing process: field interviews and critical incidence analysis. Field interviews are used to gather information about how participants view the organizing process. Information is collected about how these participants have constructed meaning about their experiences, actions, and the outcomes produced. The purpose of conducting field interviews is to help the organizer develop practice knowledge that can be used in the future. Sometimes these interviews will be conducted with key informants, or leaders who have been highly involved in the organizing process. Sometimes, key informants may include observers who are in the know about particular issues: members of the media, experienced organizers, local clergy, politicians, or businesspeople. Obviously, including the perspectives of intended beneficiaries and constituents is very important as well. Interviews may be conducted using standardized questionnaires or ethnographic approaches described in chapter 6.

Critical Incident Analysis

Critical incident analysis requires that the organizer record observations that pertain to specific events or confrontations that are intended to produce social change–related outcomes (MacNair, 1996). These observations are used to assess the process of organizing. Characteristics of the incident measured include specific strategies, tactics, reactions to strategic maneuvers, targets, constituency group members, the feelings or values expressed by participants, group behavior, leadership qualities, the strength of collaborative relationships, and outcomes. Such observational studies require that the evaluator/researcher take detailed field notes (Fetterman, 1998). Field notes include the following components: observations of nonverbal behavior, physical traces or residues that indicate patterns of human behavior (for example, garbage and other evidence that people attended a picnic or a rock concert), and a written journal used to record the researcher's feelings and perceptions about what he or she saw and heard (Chambers et al., 1992).

Program Evaluation

The term program evaluation is generally used to describe outcomes and processes associated with the delivery of a tangible good or service to a specific target population. Evaluation criteria are typically integrated into program plans and funding proposals; successful evaluations make it necessary to prespecify measurable goals and objectives before rather than after project implementation. However, as described in chapter 11, it is not uncommon for evaluators to conduct formative evaluations that are used to make changes in the program during the implementation process. Program evaluation techniques may be quantitative or qualitative (Chambers et al., 1992; Patton, 1997). In many cases, the evaluator will use measurement tools that combine qualitative and quantitative methods or choose to conduct an evaluation that examines both outcome (using quantitative measures) and program processes (using qualitative data) (see table 14.1).

Quantitative Approaches

Traditional types of program evaluation focus on goal attainment as well as outcome evaluation using group designs. It is critical, as in community intervention evaluation, that the evaluators understand the program's theory of action and be able to link programmatic activities to objectives and evaluation criteria. Social indicators and case record information may also be used as outcome measures in program evaluation.

The use of experimental and control groups or pre- and posttest measures help the evaluator establish whether the program, rather than confounding or extraneous variables, has produced changes in individuals or groups. Quantitative research designs (as feasible) should control for threats to internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to extraneous variables that limit the degree to which we can determine whether the independent variable (program) influences the dependent variable. These variables may be either confounding (variables such as demographic indicators that may co-vary with the intervention) or completely spurious—that is, while their value can seem to co-vary with that of the outcome measure, there is no direct relationship between the variables. Threats to internal validity include history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, mortality (study dropout rate), bias in the selection of participants, and statistical regression (the degree to which extreme pretest scores move closer to the mean upon repeated testing). Also of concern are situations in which the evaluator has failed to identify which of the measured variables has produced a direct impact on the other (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999; Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

External validity refers to whether findings from the study can be generalized from the sample to the larger population from which the sample was selected. Specific threats to external validity include interaction between