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From the rational to the relational: resource mobilization, organization, and social movement networks

Individuals are not magically mobilized for participation in some group enterprise, regardless of how angry, sullen, hostile or frustrated they may feel. Their aggression may be channelled to collective ends only through the coordinating, directing functions of an organization.

(Shorter and Tilly 1974, 338)

If social movements cannot be thought of as the irrational expression of shared grievances, then how can they be conceptualized? In this chapter, we consider the answer given by resource mobilization theory (RMT), which emerged in the 1970s in the US in response to widespread dissatisfaction with collective behaviour (CB) theory. RMT remains a dominant and diverse approach to social movements. Here, we focus on one version first offered by J. D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977), whilst in the next chapter we pursue the more structural and political version of mobilization theory known as the 'political process'/'contentious politics' approach. It is fair to say, however, that they both grow out of the same set of core assumptions offered by 'rational action theory' (RAT), and both share the same set of problems because of it.

First, we will engage with RMT's alternative to CB, including tracing their main concerns to RAT and Mancur Olson's (1965) 'collective action problem'. We will look at the conceptual tools offered by McCarthy and Zald for understanding the process of resource mobilization, and consider what kind of resources are important to social movements. We will see that the idea of movements as 'multi-organizational fields' has led to a contemporary conceptualization of social movements as 'networks' rather than discrete 'organizations'. We end by considering the implications of this shift, which, I suggest, requires us to adopt a 'relational' rather than 'rational' logic of collective action.

By the close of the chapter you should understand the nature of the alternative conceptualization of social movements offered by CB's

Goals →

critics. You should be able to critically engage with RMT by comprehending the limits of their rationalist perspective. You should also become aware of the advantages of conceptualizing social movements in 'network' terms, as well as the methodological tools available for researching social movement networks.

RMT

SMT

Resource mobilization theory (RMT)

In this first section of the chapter, we consider the alternative theory of protest and social movements that was offered by RMT in the 1970s, before looking in detail at the way in which RMT drew upon RAT and applied it - through the work of Mancur Olson (1965) - to the study of collective action.

Anger, frustration, and passion do not make for a protest or social movement on their own. Aggrieved groups need more than their feelings, dispositions, and inclinations if they are going to act collectively to change things: they need the means to act as well. Resource mobilization stresses this point by pushing social movement analysis beyond the 'hearts and minds' approach of CB (Leites and Wolf, 1970; McCarthy and Zald, 1973). No matter how upset and angry people are, they vary in their ability to launch collective action in response to their grievances. RMT therefore argues that an explanation of social movements should concentrate on *how* resources are successfully mobilized, rather than *why* people are aggrieved (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983). Grievances, it is argued, are 'necessary but insufficient' explanations for collective action (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Jenkins, 1983). Grievances do not automatically lead to collective action because there has to be an intervening process that can have varying degrees of success: *resource mobilization*.

The means to ACT

In fact, grievances are 'secondary' factors when explaining collective action for another important reason according to RMT: they are a relatively constant aspect of life (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977). While structural functionalists, like Neil Smelser (1962), saw strain and conflict as rare occurrences of crisis in an otherwise smooth-running social system, RMT adopts a conflict approach pointing to the inequalities and diverging interests built in to the social system that are constant sources of conflict (McAdam, 1982). There does not need to be a 'breakdown' or crisis, then, in order for social conflicts to arise, because they are normal and frequent occurrences (Wilson, 1973). The question of why people are

aggrieved in the first place does not therefore hold much analytic interest: we do not need an analysis of some 'special occasion' but, instead, an implicit acknowledgement that most of the time society is ridden with enough conflicts to supply people with the grievances and motivation to protest. That much does not change. What does change, however, is the availability of the resources required for collective action. The emergence of protest and social movements are thus better explained by changes in the availability of resources (on the personal and societal level) and not in terms of strains, social problems, and grievances.

Resources

Groups require a variety of resources for collective action, which can be divided between 'tangible' and 'intangible' resources (see Freeman, 1979, 172-5):

- 'tangible resources': *money* (to purchase campaign materials, pay staff, hire facilities, travel); *participants* (who offer their labour); *organization* and *communications infrastructure* (to coordinate action); *leaders* (who can both administer the tasks of the movement and articulate its cause to the wider public)
- 'intangible resources': *skills and know-how* (to set up campaigns and make them successful, and interact with the public and media); *public support* (to provide the group and its cause with legitimacy and status).

The availability of resources varies for different groups. Some groups are closely knit and able to communicate easily about their grievances, others are not. Some groups are fairly rich, and able to invest lots of money in campaigning, others are not. Some groups have established ways of coordinating collective activities, others do not. Some groups are experienced in using political skills, organizational know-how, and public communication, others are not. The important point is that the uneven spread of resources among the aggrieved population means that organizing a protest or social movement is more costly for some compared to others. The more resources you have to start with, or are able to mobilize along the way, the less costly it will be to establish and sustain a social movement, and the more likely it will be that people will do something about their grievances. In order to understand the nature of this argument - which relates people's decisions and actions-

to considerations of 'costs' and 'benefits' - we need to look in detail at the theory of 'rational action' on which RMT is premised.

Rational action theory (RAT)

In turning to RAT, RMT does not adopt a *completely* different perspective on human behaviour compared to CB. Instead, it inverts the view of protesters that is presented by CB in order to cast the participants of protest in a 'rational' (rather than 'irrational') light. CB theorists thought that *in normal circumstances* (i.e. in situations free of strain or unrest) people behave rationally. Indeed, CB arguments are premised on the idea that when it comes to protest and social movements, people 'switch' from normal rational action to emotional (and hence) irrational action. Resource mobilization theorists, on the other hand, argue that the participants of protest and social movements do not make any such 'switch'. Instead, they remain 'rational actors' throughout. Individuals decide to join a protest or a social movement (or not) because of a rational process of decision-making, and, furthermore, their resulting collective action is rational in nature too.

RAT was partly attractive to RM theorists because of its ability from the outset to cast protesters as rational human beings rather than 'mad people with mad ideas'. This was important to the new generation of social movement theorists in the 1970s, not only because CB imported notions about the social psychology of protest that were problematic, but because the new scholars were politically attracted to, and sometimes active in, social movements themselves (like the student movement and anti-Vietnam war protests). They were insiders, not outsiders, when it came to protest, and they wanted a positive image of protesters that could break away from the negative stereotypes of emotional, irrational, deviants generated by media accounts, and seemingly reinforced by CB. Explaining the dissatisfaction experienced by new scholars in the 1970s, Doug McAdam writes that:

My first exposure to the academic study of social movements came in 1971 when, much to my surprise, the professor in my Abnormal Psychology Class devoted several weeks to a discussion of the topic. I say 'surprise' because, as an active participant in the anti-war movement, it certainly came as news to me that my involvement in the struggle owed to a mix of personal pathology and social disorganization.

(McAdam, 2003, 282)

RAT
Def

Participatory
Sociology

We saw in the previous chapter, however, that decoding what is 'rational' and what is 'mad' is not a straightforward exercise. Blumer (1951 [1946]) highlights, for example, that the difference between the two is socially constructed (i.e. the criteria for what counts as 'rational action' and what does not is established by group norms); and that these change over time (recall the 'mad women' of the feminist movement who later turned out to be more sane than the rest of society). For these reasons, it is necessary to be clear about what 'rationality' is supposed to mean according to rational action theorists; especially as they claim that it is *universal* rather than in flux. To do this, let us consider the passage below which outlines the key elements of the theory of rational action:

Consider yourself an individual who knows what you want before you enter into any situation of decision-making. When in such a situation, aim at establishing cognitive control over it; that is, provide yourself with as complete information as is available (or as much as you can afford). Systematically relate the information gathered to your preferences. Design strategies to see which preferences you can satisfy and to what degree. Weigh up your preferences, that is, make them comparable, so that you can establish a hierarchy of strategies. Decide.

(Wagner, 2001, 24)

From the statement above, we can see that, first, it is assumed that human beings are *individual* decision-makers ('consider yourself an individual...'). Secondly, they are pretty knowledgeable about the world in which they make decisions ('provide yourself with as complete information as is available'). Thirdly, they have *preferences* (desires or goals), and these are *pre-given* ('knows what you want before entering any situation'). Fourthly, individuals *strategize* in order to pursue their preferences ('design strategies to see which preferences you can satisfy... establish a hierarchy of strategies'). Fifthly, by weighing up which strategies best satisfy their preferences, they are able to *make a decision* about how to act in any given situation ('Decide').

What kind of rationality is implied by this picture of human action? Rationality appears to be exercised by individuals in relative isolation from others (they make decisions on their own) and in a consciously calculative way (they weigh up all the options). The rational individual is self-orientated (they act to satisfy their own preferences), and strategic (they consciously design the best way to get what they want). This kind of rationality is best described as 'instrumental rationality', which can

Define
rationality

be defined as finding the most 'effective' means to an end. In order to determine what an 'effective' means to an end is, rational actors must weigh up the costs and benefits associated with the different options. They are concerned with choosing strategies that bring the most benefits while incurring the least costs. It is 'rational', for example, only to incur costs if it helps you to get what you want. Subsequently, the decisions of a rational individual will always lead to actions that are personally worth their while, in other words, they are 'self-interested'.

This model of human action has been very popular in the social sciences, especially within economics, and is referred to as 'rational man' (Elster, 1989; Hollis, 1994). It has also gained currency in society at large, where assumptions of rational action operate in all sorts of everyday contexts. When it comes to elections, for example, politicians in democratic societies approach citizens *as if* they are rational actors who weigh up the costs and benefits of the different policy packages on offer and choose the party that will satisfy them the most. Rational action theorists claim that assuming people act *as if* they are rational actors, and knowing their preferences (what they want out of a situation), helps to predict what they will do.

There is also a further factor to consider, however, which brings us back to the opening point about the importance of *resources*. In order to predict accurately we also need to know the *resources* that a person starts out with. Without this information, we cannot properly assess the costs for them – costs of time are not so important if you have all the time in the world, and financial costs are not so important if you are loaded. Once we know preferences and costs we can pretty much *predict* what choices people will make and how changing the incentives or costs of action will affect their decision. RAT therefore tells us two things: first, that individual action is self-interested in the sense that people pursue their preferences in ways that maximize their benefits and minimize their costs; and, secondly, that their decisions about how to act will be affected by the changing costs and benefits in the wider environment.

Protest and social movements as 'rational action'

Both of these assumptions were incorporated into resource mobilization theories of protest and social movements. Writers like Oberschall (1973), Tilly (1978), and McAdam (1982) argue that an individual's preferences arise from their 'interests' (whether these be material, political, or moral in

(nature) and that they act instrumentally in order to further them (i.e. they choose the most effective means to their ends). Individuals who share a similar position in the social structure of a society (like a class position) come to share interests in common and therefore share preferences which can give rise to concrete political goals. Participating in protest and social movements is the most effective means of pursuing these goals when it is not possible to gain success by conventional political means (e.g. voting for a different leader, petitioning your MP). Social movements are therefore conceptualized and defined as the organized, rational pursuit of shared interests (Oberschall, 1973). In this conceptualization, we have come some way from the irrational, emotional image of CB.

Within this framework, both individual participants and social movements are viewed as 'rational actors'. Marwell and Oliver (1993) argue that whilst the assumption of rational action does not help to explain all types of action, it works particularly well when thinking about social movements. Both protesters and social movements are *forced* to be instrumental in their action because they have scarce resources (i.e. limited amounts of money, time, energy, and so forth) (Marwell and Oliver, 1993, 11). As social movements operate outside the conventional political system, resources can be especially scarce, and costs (like repression) especially high (Oberschall, 1973). Social movements must strategize in order to maximize the benefits they can achieve using their very limited resources. They want to spend as little of their precious resources as possible for the greatest return. Mobilizing resources and utilizing them effectively (through organization, tactics, and strategy) therefore becomes central to social movement success.

The 'collective action problem'

Social movements, then, can be thought of as a form of 'collective action' which is defined as the pursuit of shared interests. This much is fairly uncontroversial. What is controversial, however, is how to understand the process by which individuals who share interests in common come to act collectively to pursue them. One assumption that we might be tempted to make using RAT is that collective action will happen when individual self-interests become recognized as the 'shared interests' of a wider group, and so those individuals in that group act together to pursue them. This understanding of how collective action comes about is adopted by economic theorists of organizations. Indeed,

an organization is defined as the pursuit of shared interests on the part of a group (Olson, 1965).

This understanding of how collective action comes about is fundamentally challenged, however, by a rational action theorist called Mancur Olson. Olson's book *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) gives a very different reading of the situation, and throws a proverbial 'spanner in the works' with regards to the assumption that is made by other rational action theorists (and, Olson argues, by Karl Marx): that people who share interests in common will necessarily join together in collective action to pursue them. On the contrary, in a statement that was to yield a great deal of influence over social movement studies for decades to come, Olson said that:

unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests.

(Olson, 1965, 2, my emphasis)

This creates a real quandary. Whilst we may have been unconvinced by CB theorists who cited *emotions* as the driving force of collective action, it seems that if we switch back to *reason* then no collective action should happen at all. Rational self-interest, suggested Olson, does not account for collective action. There needs to be some additional 'special device', as he puts it in the quote above, in order to compel rational individuals to act. This sounds somewhat counterintuitive with regards to RAT. If people pursue self-interests on their own, then why not adopt the same logic to argue that they pursue shared interests with others?

To answer this question we first need to consider the nature of collective action as opposed to individual action – or its peculiar 'logic' according to Olson. 'Collective action' is defined as action that is undertaken by two or more individuals in pursuit of 'collective goods' (Marwell and Oliver, 1993, 4). 'Goods' are a type of benefit gained through action. For individuals, their action can lead to the achievement of private goods – like money gained through paid work for example, which they are able to use for their own benefit (to pay their mortgage, buy food, go on holiday). Collective action however strives for different kind of goods, which are 'public' rather than 'private' in nature. To consider this difference between private and public goods let us consider a 'hypothetical scenario' involving a keen gardener.

In her own back garden, our gardener incurs the costs of planting, mowing, and weeding which are necessary to make the garden look good. These costs include giving up many weekends to work in the garden, paying for plants, and undertaking hard labour. In return, she gains a 'private' good - a beautiful garden that only she can see from her back window, and only she can sit in during sunny weather (unless she decides to invite you around). Now imagine that our gardener is doing exactly the same tasks, but not in her own back garden but in a park in the middle of our town. She invests the same resources, incurs the same costs, but now she has produced a 'public' good rather than a private one. The beautiful garden is shared with everyone in the town - they can look at it and sit in it even though they did not do any planting, weeding, or mowing themselves. This reflects the essential character of public goods: unlike a private good, a public good 'cannot feasibly be withheld from... others' who would find them beneficial (Olson, 1965, 14).

The question, then, is why our gardener - or anyone else for that matter - would volunteer to give up their time, energy, and money to produce a 'public good' for others' benefit when they could be at home producing 'private goods' for their own benefit? Surely any self-interested person would do the latter. Furthermore, doing the latter is even more attractive when people like our gardener exist, who will make the park look nice for me whilst I set up my deckchair and relax. This scenario, where rational self-interested individuals will not contribute towards the attainment of 'public goods' but will 'free ride' and let others do it instead, is known as the 'collective action problem'.

The collective action problem is a significant dilemma for social movements who pursue public goods as a matter of course. The example that Olson (1965) gives is the labour union. Labour unions are organizations established with the express purpose of pursuing the shared interests of workers in particular occupations. They engage in collective action around issues like pay, holidays, pensions, and working hours. However, because unions pursue 'public goods', workers will benefit from their actions whether or not they personally participate in campaigns. In the case of a strike for example, a worker who crossed the picket line and received their day's pay rather than going on strike, could not be prevented from benefitting from any advantages won through the strike.

Furthermore, it is hardly in the spirit of collective action to prevent benefits from being widely shared. British suffragette Emily Wilding Davidson threw herself in front of the King's horse in 1913 in the hope

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that *all women* would be given the right to vote, not just herself, or her fellow campaigners. Green activists campaigning for the protection of the environment and a reduction in pollutants strive for public goods which are to be enjoyed by everyone (give or take a few speculative builders and keen motorists). It is necessarily so - they would be hard pushed to keep a breathtaking countryside view, or cleaner air, just for themselves, and to do so, of course, would counter the *public* rather than private nature of their goals in the first place.

What this means is that a minority of people are putting all the effort in to achieving public goods for a great deal of others who are not contributing at all. In the case of social movements, the activists are always a minority of the overall population who will potentially benefit from their action, and they incur the financial, emotional, and personal costs for everyone else (including arrest, jail, loss of reputation, and even death). Collective action, it seems, necessarily involves a few people incurring the costs of participation, while a great deal more reap the benefits without breaking a sweat.

It is easy to understand the relevance of costs here. Joining the activists means incurring the costs on behalf of everyone else. Why would any sane person do this? You would have to be mad, surely, to simply volunteer to take on the costs (like a gardener who would *choose*, without some form of payment, to expend their time, energy and money making the town's park look good rather than their own back garden). What, however, if you thought that the *benefits* of contributing to collective action yourself would outweigh the costs? It could be said, for example, that I am prepared to incur the costs because I know that my contribution will help to secure a public good that I, and others, would not otherwise have. If I do not act then the public good is less likely to be achieved. I spend my weekends doing gardening in the park so that the community, and myself, can enjoy a beautiful park rather than a wasteland. This would certainly be a rational logic that could explain participation (Oliver, 1984).

However, Olson points out that most of the time it is very difficult for people to foresee that their small individual contribution will make any difference to the effort to secure a public good. I could spend an hour a day weeding in the park, but it would be very unlikely that anyone would even notice my efforts. The benefits, then, are minimal compared to the costs I incur. Marwell and Oliver (1993) argue that this comes down to individual feelings of 'efficacy' - namely the capacity people feel they

have for affecting outcomes through their actions. Like an individual gardener faced with a big plot, it is difficult for an individual worker in a large union to see that their own small contribution would make any *extra* difference to the outcome of the strike. There would certainly be no immediate or measurable impact of their own individual contribution, unlike when you text in a vote for an act on the X-Factor and within hours see them kicked off, or retained. With no such obvious 'added' benefit of your own action, a person can only conclude that their participation would not make much overall difference, in other words it would be futile.

If we take the assumption of rationality to its simple conclusion, argued Olson, then rational, self-interested individuals will not participate in collective action to pursue their shared interests. They will put down their spade and sit back in the deckchair; pack up the placard and have an extra hour in bed. Even when a group shares interests in common, then, it is rational for them *not* to participate in collective action. This claim offers up quite a challenge for theorists of social movements, who have to abandon the idea that collective action *necessarily* arises from the existence of shared interests alone. It also creates a problem because the empirical evidence relating to the existence of social movements and other voluntary organizations attests to the fact that *some* people at least do participate in collective action to pursue their shared interests and provide 'collective goods'. Some people *do* incur the costs for everyone else. Why?

Participation in collective action

One way to answer this question would be to invoke factors like emotion and ideology - both of which Olson (1965) argues are 'irrational' sources of motivation: This is the route that we saw Blumer (1951 [1946]) pursue in Chapter 2, when he argued that emotional commitment was the key to explaining why people participate in social movements. The free-rider problem can be resolved by the feelings of solidarity that emotionally connect participants to one another and the group, making them willing to incur the costs on behalf of others. Olson disagreed with this, however. Not because he thinks that these factors are irrelevant, but because he thinks that they only explain a minority of cases (the ideologically driven 'fanatics' who are intent on self-sacrifice). For most people, and in most cases, however, emotional and ideological commitment is not enough to secure participation. Even governments, he argues, have to

coerce us into contributing taxes to provide for public goods that we all value, like education and healthcare, and look at the vast ideological resources they have at their disposal. It is unlikely that social movements, with their comparatively miniscule resource base, would succeed where governments have failed. Instead, social movements have to appeal to people's rational side (not their emotional one): They have to find ways to make participation the outcome of a rational choice. Indeed, RMT scholars have written extensively about how social movements overcome the collective action problem by drawing upon, or creating, the conditions under which participation in a movement becomes attractive for rational actors. Three examples are discussed below.

(a) Social sanctions

One way to ensure participation in collective action would be to coerce rational individuals by removing free-riding as a possibility (Olson, 1965). Individuals can be coerced to participate through something like the union 'closed shop' that requires everyone in an occupation to join the union. Alternatively, interpersonal forms of coercion can be used, whereby non-contributors are subjected to social pressures and sanctions from others in the group (Oberschall, 1973). They may 'get a bad name' if they attempt to free-ride, or others may threaten to withdraw their friendship and favours. These social sanctions can only really work, however (argues Olson) in small groups where interpersonal, face-to-face contact is frequent, thus ensuring that pressures are exerted and sanctions enforced.

(b) Selective incentives

Many social movements are too large to employ social sanctions, however. Instead, they have to find ways to *coax* rational individuals into contributing, by offering added benefits which are 'private'. Olson calls these added private benefits 'selective incentives' (Olson, 1965, 133) which act as 'positive inducements' to participation because they are only gained through participation, and are not available to free-riders. The main incentive that participation in social movements offers is purposive in nature: it promises people the opportunity to pursue and achieve their preferences for social change (Clark and Wilson, 1961). However, Zald and Ash (1966, 333) suggest that because this promise is often difficult to fulfil, social movements rely heavily upon 'secondary' incentives. These include 'material incentives', like getting paid to participate in collective action or receiving some insurance discount

Collective
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or membership rewards. Olson also argues, however, that 'people are sometimes also motivated by a desire to win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social and psychological objectives' (Olson, 1965, 60). These kinds of incentives arise from social interaction and are referred to as 'solidary incentives' (Wilson, 1973). They point to the personal pleasures gained from the social interactions involved in participation, like socializing, having fun, making friends, and feeling important. Rather than social sanctions then, they are social rewards. We can also add to these 'moral incentives' that come from engaging in action that an individual believes is the right and just thing to do (Wilson 1973; Jasper 1997).

(c) The critical mass

Unlike Olson, Marwell, and Oliver (1993) argue that coaxing rational actors to participate in collective action in large groups is not such a problem. Paradoxically, large groups are not an issue because they have more resources, and an increased likelihood that some people within the group will be committed enough to contribute to the provision of public goods (Marwell and Oliver, 1988). Essentially, this is all that collective action really requires - it does not need *everyone* who is affected to be involved, but a 'critical mass' of 'highly interested and resourceful actors' who are up for the challenge and can find and communicate with one another (Marwell and Oliver 1988, 1). Critical mass theory assumes that rational actors are interdependent rather than isolated decision-makers (Marwell and Oliver 1993, 9). A critical mass is formed when enough of the people in some pre-existing group (e.g. a workplace or friendship group) decide to participate in collective action. The more people who decide to take part, the stronger and more able the group looks to others, and they start to think that collective action could actually work. In this way, argue Marwell and Oliver, feelings of futility can be overcome. In other words, the sense of 'efficacy' that people experience increases as the number of contributors increases.

The three proposed solutions to the collective action problem (a-c) appear reasonable enough (although we will have much to challenge later in the chapter). One outstanding issue, however, as Roger Gould (2003) highlights, is abundantly clear: the solutions depend upon some form of collective action already being in existence. Some organization, or individual, who is already committed to the cause has got to exist because it is they who then 'coax' others into participation by providing sanctions, rewards, and incentives (Gould, 2003). Marwell and

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Oliver's critical mass theory demonstrated, however, that once a 'social movement organization' (SMO) has reached a certain size, recruiting further rational actors should not be the problem. Instead, the problem that remains is the 'start up' costs of collective action in the first place, namely finding some well-resourced people who will invest in establishing an organization that others can join (Marwell and Oliver, 1988). This is perhaps essential when it comes to aggrieved populations who are poor and do not have the resources to launch their own struggle - they need an 'angel' to help them as Suzanne Staggenborg puts it (1988, 160). Who are these 'angels', and why do they choose to incur the start up costs of collective action?

"Movement
Angels"

External elites and movement entrepreneurs

One answer given by RMT is that the individuals who establish collective action in the first place are well-resourced and skilled 'movement entrepreneurs', powerful external elites, or wealthy sympathizers. The reason why they decide to soak up the start up costs is, first, because they have an abundance of resources so collective action is not so costly for them and, secondly, because they think that they can profit in the long run from collective action (personally, financially, or politically).

According to McCarthy and Zald (1977), 'movement entrepreneurs' act a lot like entrepreneurs in the business world - they spot a 'gap' in the market in terms of grievances that remain unresolved. Remaining in the language of business economics, they recast 'grievances' as 'preferences for change' or 'demand' in the population. Rather than springing up spontaneously from some societal crisis, protest is a business, and it 'ebbs and flows' as societal preferences change (Zald and Ash, 1966, 329). The emergence of a social movement is explained, then, as a response to a fluctuating market in preferences for social change. The term 'social movement' is used by RMT to refer to these preferences (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1217). However, they draw an important distinction between 'social movements' (SMs) as preferences, and the SMOs which entrepreneurs establish in order to address them. This distinction (not unlike the one that Blumer made between general and specific social movements) is easy enough to grasp. Entrepreneurs have, for example, spotted a gap in the movements market over the last few decades for collective action around environmental issues. They have set up a number of SMOs like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, WWF, Earth First!, and so on in order to meet this demand.

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Professional SMOs

1970s → The existence of movement entrepreneurs has given rise to an interesting trend in the nature of social movements according to McCarthy and Zald (1973; 1977). They suggest that American society in the 1970s was witnessing a growing trend in what they called 'professional' SMOs established by well-resourced movement entrepreneurs who were motivated to give up their present resources in order to profit later on from collective action. Professional social movements have particular characteristics. They are bureaucratic, have centralized decision-making structures, and are staffed by paid employees. They do not depend upon participation by the aggrieved population in order to campaign; in fact, their membership base is either non-existent or exists purely on paper. An example of a professional SMO is Greenpeace. You can sign up to be a member of Greenpeace, make a donation, and in return receive a newsletter, pen, T-Shirt, and the like, but they do not depend upon your active participation. Protest itself is also 'professionalized' as money is pumped into sophisticated advertising campaigns and the production of glossy pamphlets, and even celebrity endorsements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, 1231).

Protest events as angry outbursts of frustration may not actually occur at all. Indeed, the passivity of members is expected rather than problematic. The people who are activists are following a professional career path and being paid a salary to fundraise and campaign on behalf of someone or something else. This could be a disadvantaged/vulnerable group in society (disability rights movements, domestic violence groups, children), groups who cannot protect themselves (pro-life, animal rights), or issues of public concern (environment, peace, drunk-driving). Increasingly therefore, social movements are bureaucratic organizations led by paid staff who engage in mobilizing resources so that they can pursue collective action on behalf of particular 'interest cleavages' in society.

Whilst it is important for SMOs to mobilize all types of supporters - from 'adherents' (believers in the cause who are important to public opinion), to 'constituents' (those who invest their resources), to 'cadre' (the hard core of activists who are highly committed and involved in decision-making), McCarthy and Zald argued that one group in particular - the 'conscience constituents' - were becoming increasingly important for collective action in America in the 1960s and 1970s (McCarthy and Zald 1973; 1977). 'Conscience constituents' are people who will not personally benefit from collective action, but who invest their

disposable resources in the SMO anyway because they sympathize with the cause. In McCarthy and Zald's eyes, conscience constituents were becoming even more important than the aggrieved population for initial mobilization. It was the affluent middle classes they argued who supplied essential resources for the wave of heightened SMO activity in the 1960s. Together with a buoyant student movement that had time and energy at its disposal, these 'conscience constituents' provided the injection of resources to launch, lead, and maintain an array of 1960s SMOs (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, 1224). They were the 'angels' that aggrieved groups had been waiting for.

Debate point: is outside help essential for successful mobilization?

J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow (1977) suggest that alliances with external elites are crucial for social movement mobilization and success. Their research wanted to find out why the 1960s became such a 'stormy period', as they put it, for political insurgency. In a study of farmworkers' protests, they show that before the 1960s, farmworkers' attempts to further their interests through campaigns of the National Farm Labor Union had largely failed. However, in the 1960s, through the group the United Farm Workers, they enjoyed relative success. What accounted for the upturn in their fortunes? First, they suggest that social problems and grievances are an insufficient explanation. Farmworkers experienced significant grievances in the decades before the 1960s. Grievances remained 'relatively constant' in fact. Secondly, tactics also remained the same. In both time periods the farmworkers used strikes and boycotts. Subsequently, they suggest that the farmworkers' success can be put down to an increase in resources in the 1960s, which came from middle-class liberal support organizations. In the 1960s, the government were divided over policies relating to farmworkers, and liberal groups became prepared to 'sponsor' farmworker protests because it was in their political interests at the time to forge an alliance and support their demands. They gave the farmworkers financial donations, and also supported their boycotts, thus enabling this tactic to become a successful one. Jenkins and Perrow concluded from their study that 'for several of the movements of the 1960s, it was the interjection of resources from outside, not sharp increases in discontent, that led to insurgent efforts' (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977, 226).

This argument about the need for external help in the mobilization process has, however, been heavily criticized by others within RMT, who have a different interpretation of how collective action is initially established. Doug McAdam (1982) argues that aggrieved groups do not have to rely upon an external injection of resources – either from external elites or movement entrepreneurs – because they possess a rich array of resources in indigenous social networks. Within communities, workplaces, associations, and friendship groups, for example, people have access to communications infrastructure, decision-making structures, leaders, and networks of trust and reciprocity (which are now popularly called ‘social capital’). They also share a ‘collective identity’ which, together with dense networks between people, has been found to facilitate collective action (Tilly, 1978). What Aldon Morris (2000) calls ‘agency-laden institutions’ can therefore be a rich source of resources and ‘ready-made’ organization. Both Morris (1984) and McAdam (1982) point, for example, to the important role played by black churches in the civil rights movement in the US in the 1960s. The churches provided leaders and mobilized congregations. Oberschall (1973) therefore suggests that social movements are highly likely to form out of indigenous social networks. In short, groups that already exist are mobilized ‘en mass’ and transformed into a social movement – a process that Oberschall (1973) calls ‘bloc recruitment’.

- Do groups who are resource-poor (e.g. lack money and political influence), rely upon outside help to mobilize? What about to achieve success?
- How might outside help be beneficial to an aggrieved population? How might it be counter-productive?
- In what ways can local communities provide resources for political mobilization?

The dynamics of social movement organizations (SMOs)

By whatever means SMOs get their initial injection of resources, they must continue to find ways to generate and increase them. RMT offers several concepts for thinking about the process of resource mobilization and the factors that shape its success, in particular the influence of cooperation and conflict between SMOs (Zald and Ash, 1966; McCarthy

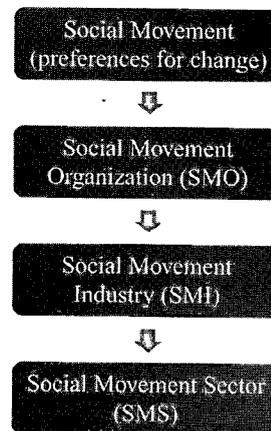


Figure 3.1

Levels of social movement activity in a multi-organizational field.

Source: adapted from McCarthy and Zald (1977).

and Zald, 1977). In Chapter 4 we will consider how interactions with the government and authorities affect the mobilization process. In this section, however, we concentrate upon interactions between SMOs, countermovements, and the media. In doing so, we must not forget that SMOs also experience conflict within their own organizations too, and that factions and splits can have important outcomes for their success (Zald and Ash, 1966, 332).

One of the strengths of RMT's differentiation between ‘social movements’ as preferences for change, and ‘SMOs’ as the vehicles that engage in collective action, is that it acknowledges from the outset that more than one SMO can exist on the same issue (Zald and Ash, 1966). More often than not this is the case. Take the environment for example: there are several big organizations that campaign around environmental issues, and hundreds of smaller ‘Green’ groups at a local level. They have their differences when it comes to ideological outlook and tactics, but essentially the same issues – carbon emissions, deforestation, road and airport building, recycling, and so on – will be common fodder for their campaigns. McCarthy and Zald argue that all of the SMOs that exist on an issue form a ‘social movement industry’ (SMI). For example, all of the SMOs that campaign on environmental issues form an ‘environmental SMI’. SMOs therefore operate in ‘multi-organizational fields’ (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973). Figure 3.1 above maps out the levels of social movement activity within this field.

If all the SMOs in an industry are able to work together on campaigns, then mobilization will be a less costly process. They can share the costs of planning, advertising, and conducting a campaign, they can pull together their various supporters to make donations and to turn out to events, and they can make bigger waves by producing one loud unified public voice. Such alliances are especially important for SMOs who, by necessity, operate outside formal politics, offering an 'alternative system of resources' that can compensate somewhat for a lack of institutional assistance (Rosenthal, 1985, 1052).

In many cases, however, SMOs within the same industry compete over resources rather than cooperate. Ideological divisions and tactical differences may be too much to overcome. Joseph Ibrahim's (2013) study of the British anti-capitalist movement points to such divisions between anarchist and socialist groups, which lead them to produce separate mobilizations around the same issues. This was evident in the 2005 protests against the meeting of the powerful 'Group of 8' nations (the 'G8') in Gleneagles, Scotland, where anarchist and socialist groups organized their own events. Both groups also argued that key resources had been diverted away from the 'real' campaign by what they saw as the co-opted, government sanctioned 'Make Poverty History' initiative, which included the Live8 music concerts organized by Bob Geldof and U2's Bono (Ibrahim, 2013).

Countermovements play a similar role in this respect. Countermovements are not rival groups within the same SMI, but movements that establish themselves in direct opposition to the goals of the SMO. Many SMOs give rise to a countermovement. Think of collective action around abortion for example. We have a 'Pro-Choice' movement that campaigns for legal access to abortion for all women as a matter of the mother's human rights, and a 'Pro-Life' movement that campaigns in direct opposition by arguing that abortion should be illegal and contravenes the human rights of the unborn child (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). It is likely as well that SMOs and countermovements have regular debates and stand-offs with one another and the result of this public war of words and deeds has a major impact on their mobilization potential. The case point illustrates this with an example of the 'resource deprivation' battle between Scientology and Anonymous. This case is important to engage with because it also raises questions about what kind of 'resources' are important to social movements in the age of the internet.

Case point: Scientology versus Anonymous

Michael Peckham (1998) studies the interaction between movements and countermovements, and the consequences for mobilization by looking at the battle between the Church of Scientology and the internet-based anti-censorship group, Anonymous. Peckham shows how the interaction between the two movements largely takes place on the internet, a space that Anonymous is keen to defend from Scientology's attempts at censoring adverse publicity. Peckham (1998, 320) argues that the interaction between the two movements is best cast as one of 'resource deprivation' - or 'damaging actions' - as each movement tries to discredit the other in order to diminish its resource base and increase the costs of mobilization. The key resource that the movements attempt to deprive one another of is the 'intangible' resource of 'public reputation'. Both Anonymous and Scientology try to discredit the reputation of the other in an attempt to deprive it of public legitimacy. Anonymous flooded the internet with highly critical stories about Scientology's treatment of ex-members, while Scientology used its huge PR machine to smear Anonymous in return. Each sought to create a negative environment in which the other lost participants, financial donations, and public support.

By looking at movement and countermovement interactions that take place on the internet, Peckham also raises important questions about what kind of 'resources' are necessary for mobilization in an 'information age'. He suggests that the internet changes the resource environment for social movements significantly. The internet has 'a levelling effect on resources' (Peckham, 1998, 321). It provides a low-cost way of communicating and coordinating activism that means that social movements do not require a big, formal organization behind them in order to mobilize effectively. In fact, the internet raises questions about whether SMOs need to exist 'offline' at all. Peckham (1998, 320) states that 'since access to the Internet is worldwide, an individual with free access through a community freenet can potentially compete with large, well-funded organizations'. The implications of Peckham's argument create a challenge to RMT's understanding of resources. RMT, Peckham suggests, should rework its traditional idea of

resources (which include the tangible and intangible resources listed earlier in the chapter), to include 'virtual resources' (Peckham 1998, 320). Virtual resources cannot however just be 'added to the list' of potential resources because they also have the effect of making traditional resources, like money, staff, facilities, leadership, and so on, less important. Hara and Estrada (2005) support this by arguing that the internet provides resources like knowledge, credibility, interpersonal interaction, and identity support, which can improve or replace more traditional resources.

- Think of further examples of movements and countermovements. How do they go about depriving each other of resources?
- What kinds of resources do you think are most important to social movements today, and therefore most important for countermovements to attack?
- How does the internet change our understanding of resources and their importance for movement mobilization? Could a social movement mobilize entirely online and still be successful?

SMOs do not only have to compete over resources within their own industry, or with countermovements. They must also compete with other SMIs. The labour protest industry for example must compete with the peace industry, the feminist industry, the global protest industry, and so forth. Taken together, all of the SMIs in society make up a 'social movement sector' (SMS) (see figure 3.1), which again competes with other sectors - like the public, private, and charitable sectors - for people's disposal resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, 1224). This is an important point because it acknowledges that, in most cases, people have limited amounts of personal resources to invest in protest activities, and that participation in an SMO can be a great drain on finances, emotions, and time (Hirschman, 1982). This is the same with any activity we choose we do. If I am a serious member of the university hockey team, then a large amount of my time, money, and energy is invested in this one activity. There is not much left over for the volleyball team, or for going to gigs, or, presumably, for participation in any kind of SMO. Such is life. What it means is that people have to make decisions about where to spend their finite resources. One of the greatest challenges

for the SMS as a whole is to find ways to compete with people's other public and private activities in order to mobilize their money, time, and energy for collective action. Once that battle has been won, it is still up to SMIs and SMOs to persuade people that they should devote their resources to one particular issue over another.

Public opinion and the media

To recruit support, SMOs need to positively influence people's perceptions of them and of the protest sector in general. This is especially important because the mass media tend to give protest and social movements short shrift - unless sensationalizing the more violent and confrontational aspects. How SMOs interact with the mass media can therefore have a significant impact on their ability to create a public voice, build alliances, save face, damage the reputation of a countermovement, or persuade people to participate. McCarthy and Zald (1973) consider the role of the media to have power even beyond this. If they are clever about it, the entrepreneurial leaders of SMOs can use the media to manipulate potential supporters and opponents. They can, for example, 'manufacture' grievances where they did not exist, or make grievances that do exist appear more widespread, intense, and urgent (McCarthy and Zald, 1973). They can manipulate the image that opponents have of the SMO, making the group and its support base seem stronger, more vocal, more active, than it actually is (thus putting pressure on opponents to concede demands). In this respect RMT seems to come close to suggesting that SMOs do not really need the aggrieved group at all - just a clever media strategy and PR campaign that can conjure up the perception of one.

Since McCarthy and Zald first wrote about resource mobilization in the 1970s, there have been advances in communications technology that fundamentally affect the role of the media and public communication within SMOs. New media have changed the nature of mobilization processes, the tactics available, and the costs involved. They have given rise to a growing sector of 'indymedia' (independent media) for example, enabling activists to film events as they happen on their mobile phone and upload them to YouTube, or narrate them on twitter (Juris, 2005a; Pickerill, 2007). The advent of mobile communications in particular has meant that activists rely less upon the mass media because they can create their own story (Castells et al., 2006). We will come back to the role of the mass media in Chapter 4, and new media in Chapter 6.

also,
green-
washing

SMOs assessed

The idea of a social movement as an 'organization' much like a business organization that operates in a competitive environment with others, is a useful way to conceptualize certain kinds of social movements – especially those who adopt organizational structures that are much like other formal organizations. Viewing social movements as organizations does however throw up some challenges when thinking about what those organizations look like.

1) First, social movement organizations certainly do not all fit with the picture of 'professional' SMOs forwarded by McCarthy and Zald. In fact, social movements are known to be extremely diverse in the organizational structures they adopt. Historically, they have ranged from highly centralized and bureaucratic, to decentralized, informal 'networks'. Some have had identifiable leaders who exert a great amount of control over the organization, and some have had many leaders, or even express a desire for no leaders (the anarchist ideal). The nature of social movement organization also seems to affect tactics, with fairly institutionalized and moderate activities like lobbying governments associated with formal organizational structures, and more radical direct action tactics associated with decentralized networks (Staggenborg, 1988, 599).

2) Secondly, there is little agreement in the literature about where SMOs fit into these extremes, or which would lead to the most success. On the one hand, William Gamson argued in the *Strategy of Social Protest* (1990 [1975]) that centralization and bureaucracy are positively correlated with SMO success, measured in terms of winning new advantages and enduring over time. Gerlach and Hine (1970), on the other hand, argue that movements with a decentralized, loose-knit 'network' structure are more successful because more adaptable to changing environments. Gerlach (1999) refers to environmental movements, for example, as having a 'polycentric' network structure in that they are 'many-headed' (they have no leaders). Gerlach (1999) argues that polycentric networks are more flexible and adaptable compared to bureaucratic structures and harder for authorities to repress (an argument that will arise again in Chapter 6 on the structure of global social movements). It is also the case that some movements shirk away from establishing formal organizations on purpose. The environmental group 'Critical Mass' for instance, uses spontaneity as a tactic for success. They create 'flash

professional
or
no?

occupy

bureaucratic
or
no?

'mobs' (instant crowds coordinated via mobile phones) (Rheingold, 2002) – to organize protest events at the last minute – like mass cycle rides.

A further problem with the concept of a 'social movement organization' was raised in the case point, which looked at Scientology's online battle with the movement 'Anonymous'. This case raised questions about the continued importance of 'tangible' resources in particular (like facilities, offices, money, and so on) in the age of the internet. The internet has the effect of making protest a low-cost activity, providing individuals and small groups with the means to compete with large organizations. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011) therefore argue that the growth of internet based 'e-tactics' – which are low-cost and easily accessible – are making SMOs less relevant. Tactics, like online petitions, for example, are particularly quick and easy to employ, and are often used by individuals who have no connection to SMOs (Earl and Kimport, 2011). This has led to an explosion of online protest around a whole range of issues relating to consumption, entertainment, and sport, for example. Earl and Kimport's (2011) point is that this new landscape of protest challenges RMT, which tends to assume a priori that protest is a 'high cost' activity, requiring extensive resources and organization to provide appropriate incentives for participation. Instead, low-cost forms of online protest, like e-petitions, are opening up a form of activism that is not in need of an SMO. We will return to the issue of individual forms of protest outside SMOs in Chapter 8.

Whilst 'professional social movements', as formal organizations, may have been a particular mode of organizing protest at a certain time in history (America of the 1960s and 1970s), and by a particular group of people (the affluent middle classes), we should be careful therefore about identifying all social movements with this organizational form (Jenkins, 1983), or in some estimations, any organizational form (Earl and Kimport, 2011). Raising a similar objection from a different angle, Piven and Cloward (1977), for example, criticize RMT for putting too much emphasis on resources and organization in the emergence of protest because poor people often do not have the resources required to establish a formal organization. Instead, they adopt a different mode of protest which involves spontaneous, disruptive tactics, including civil disobedience and riots. This argument finds parallels with James Scott's (1985) claim that protests by poor and powerless groups employ spontaneity as the best strategy for success. For Piven and Cloward (1977),

Piven

not only are formal organizations overemphasized by RMT, but they are overrated as well. Picking up on themes first raised in Robert Michels's (1915) work about the inevitable tendency towards authoritarianism in organizations, they suggest that formal organization' could actually be counterproductive for success. Once formally organized, social movements tend to become more conservative in outlook, more moderate in tactics, and more easily co-opted by elites, essentially because they become more interested in their own survival rather than the cause.

4) There is a further conceptual problem with the idea of social movement organizations. We can get hung up on debating the characteristics of an SMO's organizational structure, but RMT has already told us that several SMOs can arise around the same 'social movement' (i.e. the same preferences for change in the population). To identify a social movement in terms of a single SMO is therefore misleading.

The boundaries are more complex than that. RMT has offered us in the very least a 'multi-organizational field' definition of a social movement (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973). It is not worth our while therefore trying to decide whether social movements are highly organized groups, or more decentralized informal networks, because they could actually contain both (Saunders, 2007).

Jo Freeman (1973) offers a useful example of this from the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Freeman argues that there were two branches to the movement which had quite different structures and styles. The 'older branch' consisted of formal organizations with democratic structures and clear leaders, like the National Organization of Women (NOW) which was at the core of the movement, and various legal, human rights, and professional organizations like Women's Equity Action League and Human Rights for Women. On the other hand, the 'younger branch' of the movement avoided formal organization. They did so quite deliberately. They thought that formal organizations and elected leaders led to confinement and lack of inclusivity, something many of the women who had been active in left-labour groups had experienced already for themselves. They therefore established small, local groups, often around pre-existing friendships, which seemingly lacked organization and coordination and did not want to identify leaders. These groups were linked by common newsletters and personnel, but otherwise 'did their own thing'. Within the same social movement therefore we find both highly organized, institutionalized SMOs, and informal, decentralized groups.

Social movements as 'networks'

The multi-organizational nature of a social movement has led to a re-conceptualization of social movements in contemporary social movement studies as 'social networks'. These social networks consist of the relationships between organizations and other actors who are engaged in collective action around a specific issue. This idea is captured in Mario Diani's definition of a social movement as:

a network of informal interactions, between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.

(Diani, 1992, 13)

This re-conceptualization is valuable for highlighting that the boundaries of a social movement are much fuzzier and harder to draw than the idea of social movement organizations suggested. For Diani (1992), the boundaries of the movement are really drawn by the existence of a 'collective identity.' Organizations can be considered part of a social movement not only because they interact with one another, but because they share a sense of what the issues are and why they are important (even if they disagree over the exact diagnosis of the situation or tactics). This idea of a social movement suggests that SMOs are not the only players in the field. Even individuals could be considered part of a social movement if they share in the collective identity. Clare Saunders (2007), for example, argues that individuals who choose to buy organic products could be considered part of environmental movement networks, even though their action takes place outside environmental SMOs. If we want to think about the structure and dynamics of social movement networks then we must move beyond SMOs and consider the pattern of alliances, conflict, and exchange that shape what a movement network looks like and how successfully it is able to mobilize resources.

Collective
identity

Interpersonal ties

It is clear that relationships of cooperation and exchange between SMOs in a social movement network are underpinned by a more informal, interpersonal, network of ties between activists. Social networks