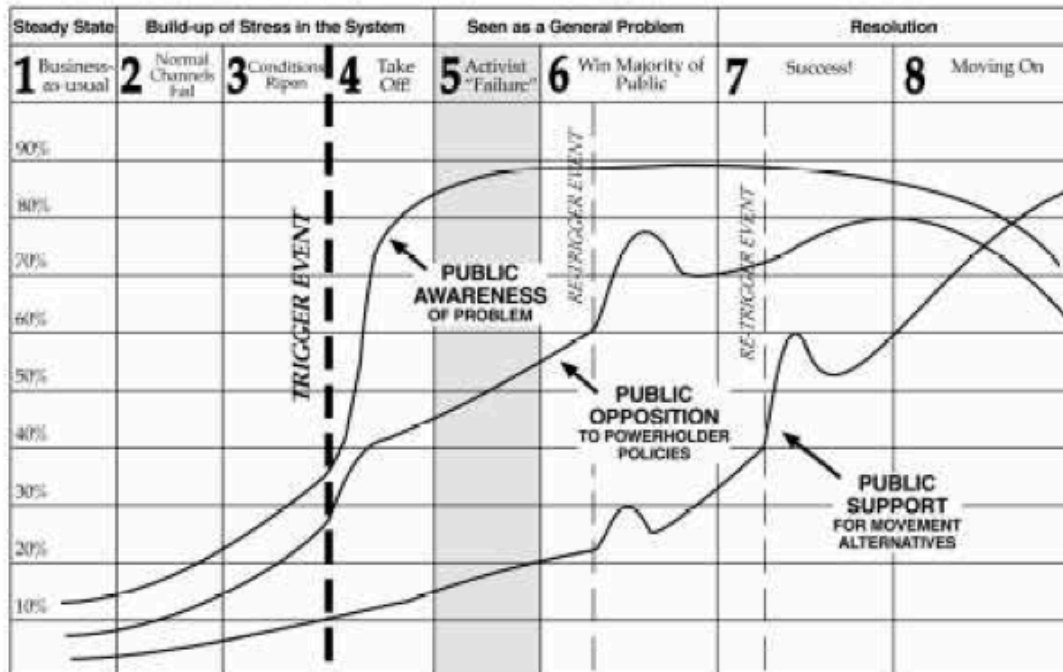


Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan

8 Stages of a Social Movement

Anna Rose's short summary of the eight stages of social movements, taken in excerpts from Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan. [Please read the whole document](#) if you're interested in more detail. More reflections on social movements at <http://annarose.net.au>



Stage One: Normal Times

In this first stage—normal times—there are many conditions that grossly violate widely held, cherished human values such as freedom, democracy, security, and justice, and the best interests of society as a whole. Normal times are politically quiet times. Some past normal times were the violations of Blacks' civil rights before 1960; the Vietnam War before 1967.

Stage Two: Prove the Failure of Institutions

The intensity of public feeling, opinion, and upset required for social movements to occur can happen only when the public realizes that the governmental policies violate widely held beliefs and values. The public's upset becomes especially intensified when official authorities violate the public trust by using the power of office to deceive the public and govern unfairly and unlawfully. Hannah Arendt wrote that "people are more likely driven to action by the unveiling of hypocrisy than the prevailing conditions."

Stage Three: Ripening Conditions

The “take-off” of a new social movement requires preconditions that build up over many years. These conditions include broad historic developments, a growing discontented population of victims and allies, and a budding autonomous grassroots opposition, all of which encourage discontent with the present conditions, raise expectations that they can change, and provide the means to do it.

For example, some of the historical forces that made the 1960s ripe for the Black civil rights movement included the emergence of independent Black African countries, the large Northern migration of Blacks who maintained their ties to the segregated South, the rising black college student population, and the 1954 Supreme Court’s *Brown vs. U.S.* decision that provided a legal basis for full civil rights.

Stage Four: Social Movement Take-Off

New social movements surprise and shock everyone when they burst into the public spotlight on the evening TV news and in newspaper headlines. Overnight, a previously unrecognized social problem becomes a social issue that everyone is talking about. It starts with a highly publicized, shocking incident, a “trigger event”, followed by a nonviolent action campaign that includes large rallies and dramatic civil disobedience. Soon these are repeated in local communities around the country.

The trigger event is a shocking incident that dramatically reveals a critical social problem to the general public in a new and vivid way, such as the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to move to the back of a Montgomery bus in 1955 or NATO’s 1979 announcement to deploy American Cruise and Pershing 2 nuclear weapons in Europe. Trigger events can be deliberate acts by individuals, governments, or the opponents, or they can be accidents.

Stage Five: Identify Crisis of Powerlessness

After a year or two, the high hopes of movement take-off seems inevitably to turn into despair. Most activists lose their faith that success is just around the corner and come to believe that it is never going to happen. They perceive that the powerholders are too strong, their movement has failed, and their own efforts have been futile. Most surprising is the fact that this identity crisis of powerlessness and failure happens when the movement is outrageously successful—when the movement has just achieved all of the goals of the take-off stage within two years. This stage of feelings of self-identity crisis and powerlessness occurs simultaneously with Stage Six because the movement as a whole has progressed to the majority stage.

Stage Six: Majority Public Support

The movement must consciously undergo a transformation from spontaneous protest, operating in a short-term crisis, to a long-term popular struggle to achieve positive social change. It needs to win over the neutrality, sympathies, opinions, and even support of an increasingly larger majority of the populace and involve many of them in the process of opposition and change.

The central agency of opposition must slowly change from the new wave activists and groups to the great majority of nonpolitical populace, the PPOs, and the mainstream political forces as they are convinced to agree with the movement's position. The majority stage is a long process of eroding the social, political, and economic supports that enable the powerholders to continue their policies. It is a slow process of social transformation that create a new social and political consensus, reversing those of normal times.

Stage Seven: Success

Stage Seven begins when the long process of building opposition reaches a new plateau in which the new social consensus turns the tide of power against the powerholders and begins an endgame process leading to the movement's success. The Stage Seven process can take three forms: dramatic showdown, quiet showdown, or attrition.

Stage Eight: Continuing the Struggle

The success achieved in Stage Seven is not the end of the struggle but a basis for continuing that struggle and creating new beginnings.