

Theories of Change

Their functions and forms:

ancient and modern

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- TOCs: an ancient and pervasive feature of human life, known since childhood
- The functions they serve and the forms they take
- What we can learn from them about the task in hand

TOCs have always offered practical answers to fundamental human questions

- How do we gain more control over uncertainty--make the future better than the present?
- How do we change things for the better?
- How do we prevent or stop bad things happening?

Their functions are consistent over time

- To control nature: weather; ensure fertility of crops, domestic animals, family, tribe; health, illness, a longer life
- To be successful in hunting, battle, love and matrimony, commerce
- To gain wealth, power, or status
- To secure or enhance something valued

So too are many of their forms

Seeking favor with or placating gods/spirits;
invoking spiritual aid

- Religion: ritual, sacrifice, prayer, penance, prophecy

Enlisting the power of the natural or supernatural
world to your benefit

- Magic: spells, incantations, charms, curses, elixirs,
dream interpretation, astrology, alchemy

Physical force or valor: warfare, conquest, heroic
deeds, quests, ritual trials

TOCs often include explanatory theories

They explain why taking certain actions should work.

Explanations may or may not include evidence or logic, but often draw on personal or reported experience, beliefs, and “common sense.”

They may also explain why the method used didn't work (e.g., you didn't do the ritual properly). The theory still holds.

Luck, Fate, and Destiny

Theories about how to improve what you have been dealt in life are traditionally moderated by these concepts.

The theory is good; the methods were appropriate, but fate intervened.

Psychological importance: failure isn't (always) your fault. Try as you might, you can't ensure control/success. Allow acceptance of what can't be changed.

TOCs can be cautionary

They are used to avert undesirable consequences:

“If you do X, things will change for the worse”:

the wrath of parents/teachers, Hell, the bogey man, gypsies, divine punishment

“If you avoid doing X, you will be safe.”

Cautionary theories prevent change, discourage innovation, support conformity and inertia. But they are also important to good social behavior, social stability

The concept of Doom

Both an ancient and contemporary focus for TOCs.

What actions will bring on major disasters, even the end of the world?

And what actions will avert this? (medieval versus modern answers)

One of many issues where lay TOCs compete with scientific forms of prediction.

Also traditional: short-circuiting socially-approved TOCs about how to succeed

- Bribery: gets more reliable results than merit alone
- Gambling: gets larger results faster

Betting: the intersection of wishful thinking with mathematics

(TOCs can also be seen as “bets”)

The use of TOCs is learned from early childhood

Have special relevance as children have least control over their present and future.

Children use magic rituals to offset their impotence: to make wishes come true, make things better, prevent bad things happening, ward off punishment

They learn conventional TOCs from both adults and other children (and now the media)

TOCs are important building blocks of thinking ...

Encourage: prediction, hypothetical and causal
thinking

Lay the foundations of skepticism— adult TOCs
prove unreliable/ inconsistent

Also a major source of both trust and caution: adult
“promises” fulfilled or not

... and of social order

- Thinking about consequences—an important basis for morality
- Define what is to be taken-for-granted—just how it is. Set boundaries of viable action: what can, cannot, or should not be changed. Thus are forces for resistance to change and inertia.

TOCs crop up in every sphere of social and personal life ...

Sports: statistics (“form”) alongside superstitions; gambling

Romance: how to attract a mate
(traditional use of astrology & magic; current search for TOCs in scrutiny of the lives of “stars”)

Marriage: what makes for a successful relationship

Parenting & education: implications for future of the child and society of using particular methods

Health & illness: competition between lay and professional TOCs in diagnosis, choice of treatment, and expectations of outcome

... and in many public forms

Politics: political ideologies, “policy”, choices in taxation and spending (gambling)

Economics: discipline built on theories of change and stability; assumptions about human behavior

Statistics: focus on prediction and applied in
Insurance (based on actuarial TOCs)
Stock market and commerce

Organizations focused on change use strategies grounded in particular TOCs

Churches: missions, evangelism, education, broadcasting, christian socialism, liberation theology

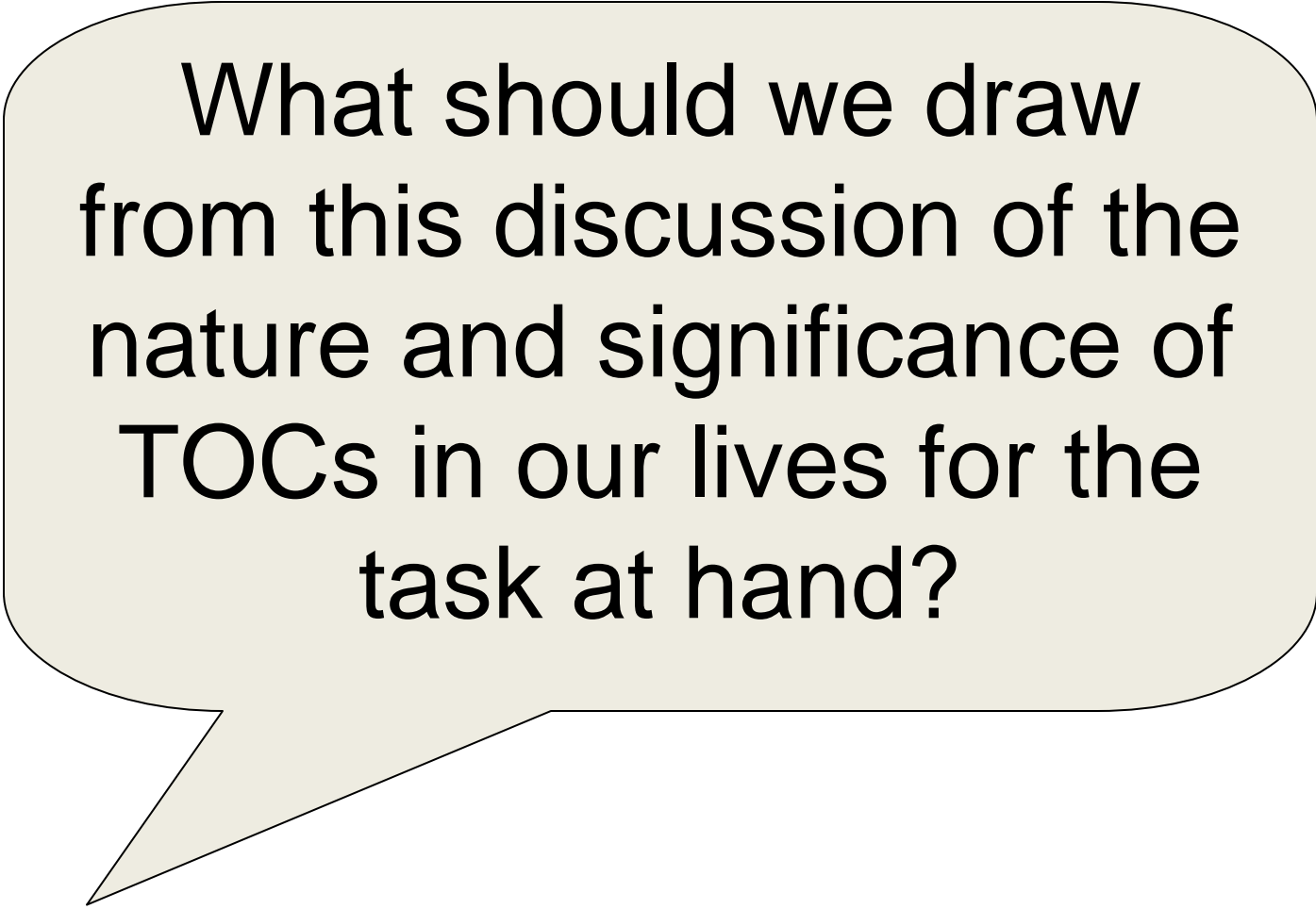
Political parties: mass organization, ideologies, campaign strategies, community action, publicity, protests, demonstrations

Trade unions: collective bargaining, change in law/regulations, marches, strikes

Governments and legislatures (both change and stability): free public education, progressive income tax, civil rights protection, public health, minimum wage, prohibition

Non profit and environmental organizations: mobilize volunteers, publicity/media use, public education

Self-help/therapy: change by self-identification, progression through stages of recovery



What should we draw from this discussion of the nature and significance of TOCs in our lives for the task at hand?

1. Are explicitly stated

TOCs in everyday and public life are largely unstated.

However, to be successful, major change efforts require explicit statements of the theory, proposed strategies, and the rationale for both.

2. Take account of power

They identify and address in their strategies relevant power sources and power relationships that operate within a targeted social system and that interact with it

Central issue: Where's the leverage?

3. Take into account forces promoting inertia

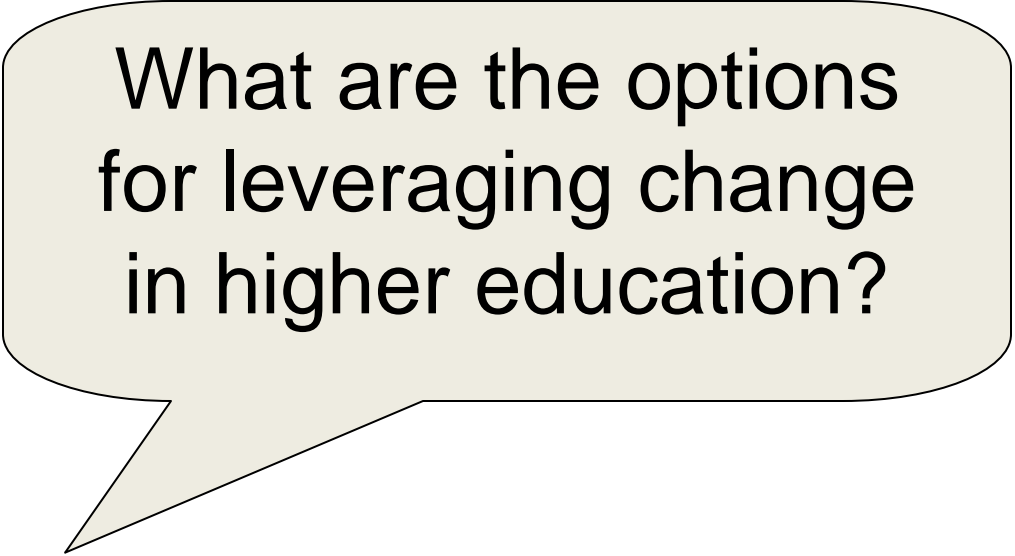
What is taken-for-granted; assumed to be appropriate/not appropriate for change (academic freedom, reward systems, limits of government or legislative intervention)

Normatively-supported “no go” areas constrain choices of change strategies (avoidance of government intervention limits gun control, achievement of a national health service)

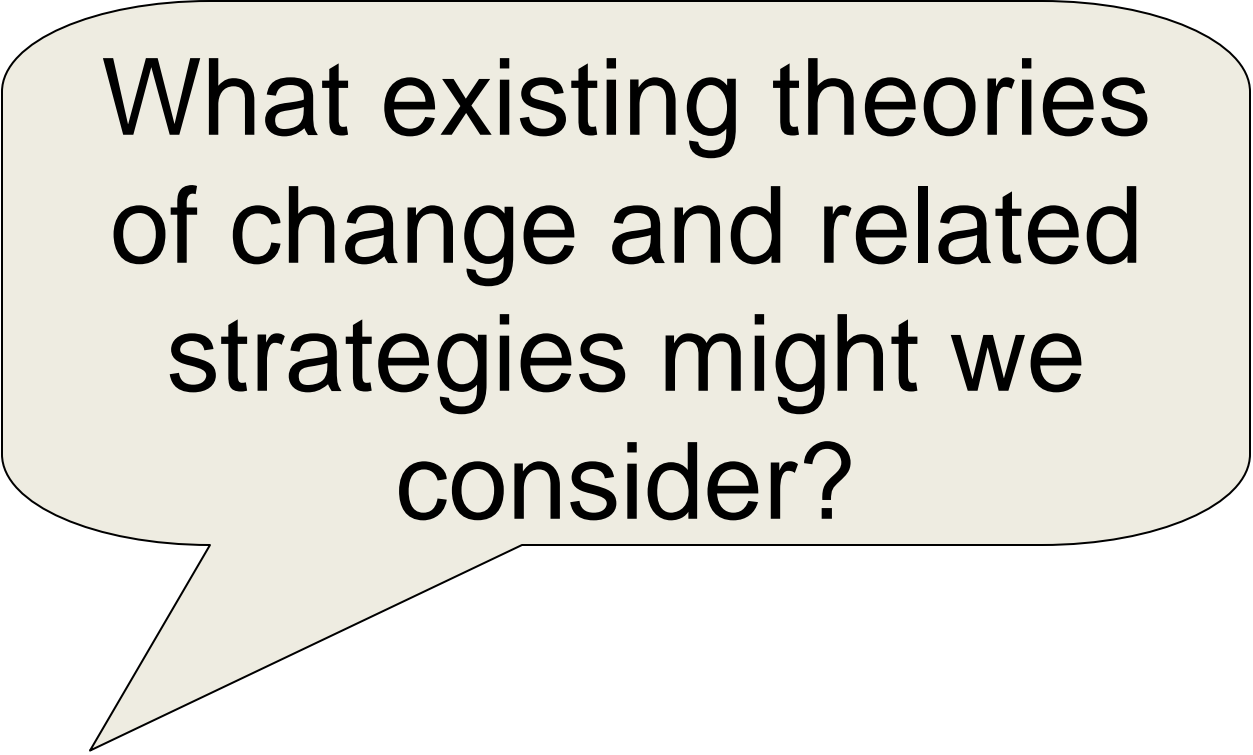
4. Explore customary and alternative avenues and methods of communication.

IHEs are loosely-coupled systems in which the power to decide about academic matters rests largely with departments that refer to disciplinary norms outside the control of their institutions.

They are, however, influenced by outside agencies that are concerned with content, quality, and access.



What are the options for leveraging change in higher education?



**What existing theories
of change and related
strategies might we
consider?**

Cultural Change:

Promote powerful ideas, visions, ideologies

Gather/present information (“evidence”)
research, evaluation, statistics

Public debate, publicity, sell the change idea,
creative use of media

Use existing communication channels
effectively; invent new channels

Targeting Structural change

Organizational/system redesign

Change governing laws, policies, regulations,
standards

Change, control, redistribute resources, money,
rewards.

TOCs involving Mobilization: use of collective forms of power

Collective action, community organization, grass-roots activism, network building

Enlist powerful people and groups, leadership, partnerships

Build coalitions/alliances of influence—inside or outside system

Other traditional uses of power for change

Use of force: military, police.

Invoke supernatural aid, prayer

Perhaps not....