

Strategy for Citizen Advocacy

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A strategy is essentially a plan of action for getting from a current situation to a desired future situation. So a strategy for citizen advocacy is

- a plan of action compatible with CA principles;
- for transforming society into an alternative, also compatible with CA principles and with its underlying theory, social role valorisation (SRV).

Note that strategy is something in the realm of ideas. Its implementation involves action.

To think about strategy, it can be helpful to distinguish between the realm of actions and the realm of ideas, though in practice they are interlinked. Consider first the realm of actions. Figure 1 shows society — itself composed of actions such as cooperation and neglect — becoming something else: an actual inclusive alternative. The means for this transformation is action.

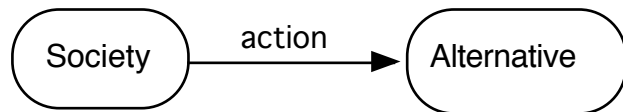


Figure 1. Society being transformed into an alternative system through CA-compatible action

Figure 2 shows how the realm of ideas applies to this picture. Analysis is a way of conceiving or thinking about society, while a goal is an imagined and desired alternative. Strategy is the way of planning a way to get between the current reality and the goal. To develop a strategy, it is necessary to have some analysis of reality as well as some goal. To implement the strategy, methods are needed.

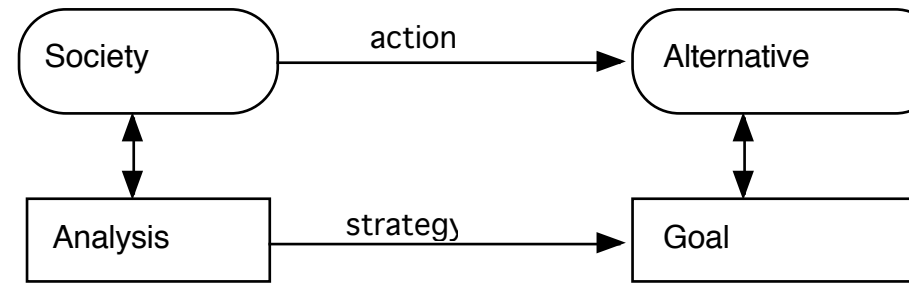


Figure 2. Strategy for CA. The top level portrays society being transformed into an alternative system through CA-compatible action. The lower level portrays thinking about this transformation.

To develop a strategy for CA, it makes sense that all components of this process are consistent with CA principles. The analysis of society should be one developed from a CA perspective. The goal — an inclusive society, for example — should be a realisation of CA and SRV principles. Finally, of course the methods should be compatible with CA and SRV principles.

Figure 2 shows a static picture, but actually all components are subject to change. The analysis can change due to new information or new perspectives. Also, the analysis depends to some extent on the goal: if the goal is an inclusive alternative, the analysis should be from an inclusive point of view. Similarly, the goals depend in part on the analysis. By examining what works and what goes wrong, goals can be revised or rejected.

Most importantly, the strategy needs to be constantly re-examined and revised as the analysis and goals change and as more people become involved and contribute.

A strategy is much more than a collection of methods. It involves organised goal-directed activities, typically having roles for groups, campaigns and visions, tied together to some extent.

How can strategies be assessed? One way is to use the principles for assessing nonviolent alternatives, applying them in this case to strategy for CA. Here are four principles, adapted to deal with strategy. These principles can be applied to both the formulation and

implementation aspects of strategy, namely both the thinking and doing aspects.

Principle 1: Cooperation, rather than competition, should be the foundation for the strategy.

Principle 2: People with the greatest needs should have priority in the strategy.

Principle 3: A satisfying role in developing and using strategy should be available to everyone who wants it.

Principle 4: The strategy should be designed and run by the people themselves, rather than authorities or experts.

Principle 4 is very important. There can be no presumption of formulating a grand plan for bringing about an alternative, since that would be incompatible with the full participation of those involved. The actual strategy has to be worked out by participants. Therefore, any discussion of strategy by an individual can at most be a small contribution to a much wider process.

Indeed, any overarching plan is vulnerable to attack or cooption, precisely because it is something that can be observed and targeted. Far more threatening to oppressive systems are diverse challenges and alternative practices, each contributing to a general change of belief and behaviour.

Nevertheless, it is not wise to leave everything to spontaneous and uncoordinated initiative. Thinking strategically is essential so that actions are effective. The goal should be that strategy is democratised. All sorts of individuals and groups need to think about and debate visions, methods and paths, so that the “big picture” is not left to a few high-level theorists or key activists.

Principle 3 — providing satisfying roles in developing and using strategy — can be interpreted as an extension of principle 4. Not only is strategy democratised, but satisfying participation is available to all. That means that the prestige roles and tasks should not be monopolised by a few intellectual elites, experienced activists or pioneer organisers. On the other hand, it is essential to recognise that skills and experience are crucial in every aspect of social change, including direct action, engaging in dialogue with strangers, organising

meetings, writing media releases and analysing institutions. To achieve principle 3 requires a process for involving interested people in thinking and doing, developing their skills and experience while not succumbing to the illusion that every committed person can do everything equally well.

Principle 2 is a useful reminder to keep the focus on those most in need. There have been many revolutions made in the name of “the people” that only ended up replacing one elite group by another.

Finally, principle 1 is that the strategy should be developed and implemented cooperatively. That seems obvious enough but the reality is that social movements and action groups can become involved in competitions of various sorts, including for recognition, priority or purity.

For a society with devaluation to be replaced or transformed into a better social system will take decades or centuries. To imagine that a brief campaign can bring about lasting change can be a dangerous delusion. It is far better to develop strategies that bring short-term improvements while contributing to long-term change. If things proceed more quickly than expected, so much the better. But it is quite possible that devaluation of people with disabilities will become more pervasive in spite of all efforts to the contrary. A strategy needs to be viable in that circumstance too.

This is a modification of a portion of chapter 6 of *Nonviolence versus Capitalism* (London: War Resisters’ International, 2001), <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/01nvc/>. The ease by which this modification can be made reflects the compatibilities between nonviolence and CA.

Brian Martin circulated this handout as part of his session “Strategy for Citizen Advocacy” at the National Citizen Advocacy Conference 2003, Wollongong, Australia, 16 March 2003.