Social Movements: Transforming Problems into Solutions

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No long-lasting large social movement can exist without problems that are a constant source of frustration. In most cases, these are problems that need to be solved or defy solution and must be lived with—after all, the whole reason that social movements are needed is because society has problems. If all society members were mindful of the problems and inclined to solve them, no social movement would be necessary. Movements always have to work against the forces that are arrayed against them and which caused them to arise.

Yet there are other problems that can be understood as ones that can be expected and normal and worked with. If we are at least aware that these are normal, and understand why they are to be expected, they can be less frustrating. At times, a good understanding can turn them to positive benefit. These include the unseen problems of other groups, a set of paradoxes that arise with progress being made, differing schools of thought in how to go about conducting the social movement, and dealing with the animosity that comes when trying to convince people to change their minds about their long-standing beliefs.

Unseen Problems of Other Groups

My observation in all the movements I've participated in is that participants have a feeling that one's own movement has so many problems, while the opposition runs so very smoothly. The impression often arises that it is only the group one is involved in that has excruciating problems inflicted on it. Other movements, by comparison, have it easy.

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However, members of opposition groups are not likely to publicize their own personality clashes, territorial squabbles, financial difficulties, and insufficient volunteers. Such things are simply not publicized. One's own movement is not publicizing its problems of those kinds either.

I suggest that this is a variant of the outgroup homogeneity effect, in which people in a different group with whom one does not have interaction are seen as being much more similar to each other than they are, or than they see each other. In this case, it is an outgroup unseen-problem effect.

The problems of one's own movement tend to weigh more heavily on the mind. The problems are also great in opposition movements, along with businesses and governments, and other social movements one might be sympathetic to but not active in. These problems are widespread and predictable. Even religious groups that stress harmony have them.

People often find it discouraging when they find such problems and I have observed many who believe their group is uniquely afflicted with them. It is actually quite encouraging to know that this is normal. This is life. This does not distinguish one movement from another. Any movement without such problems is either very small or very short-lived.

Some problems, such as a shortage of volunteers, or financial difficulties, can for all practical purposes be impossible to solve, because they are bottomless pits. If an organization wishes to simply sponsor an event or provide a well-defined service, then it can have enough volunteers and money. If it wants to help solve a major social problem, its members are unlikely to perceive that they have enough volunteers or money. The creative mind can always come up with more projects for more resources than are available. The budget could be ten times the current one and very shortly be seen as insufficient.

In those social movements that have another social movement in opposition, the tendency is to see the other side as having it easy on the finances and volunteers. It is unlikely the other movement sees itself this way. Even if they do have more money, they are likely to be more impressed with what they cannot do, and more impressed with what their opposition does do, and therefore perceive that the opposition is rolling in money while they are strapped.

The amount of problems does vary widely. The ability of a group to handle this with conflict resolution techniques can make a difference. Yet whenever frustrations arise, they can be exacerbated by a misperception that these are unusual. Conversely, knowing that these are not only normal helps, as does knowing they are undoubtedly present even though not seen in the opposition. That opposition is not nearly as powerful and smooth-running as it tries to make itself appear.

When activists express frustration about personality clashes and similar problems, my experience is that pointing out to them that their opposition almost undoubtedly has similar problems that they avoid mentioning in public seems obvious once stated. They simply had not thought of that point, and now that they do, it does help put things in perspective.

Progress and Gloom

A comparison between social indicators of the year 1900 and the year 2000 shows considerable progress in many ways. Life expectancy increased by decades for all demographic groups. High school graduates in the United States went from 6 to 85%, with similar rises around the globe. The right to vote in the United States in 1900 was limited to men 21 and older, with African American and Hispanic and Asian men being effectively blocked from the polls. All over the world, utilities and technology that were unimaginable luxuries in 1900 are commonplace now (Best, 2001).

Yet rhetoric suggesting the world is getting worse is easy to find. Medical care is insufficient in many areas, lowering the life expectancy of the poor—not over what it was, but what it could be if medical care and nutrition were up to the standards the middle class now expects. If 85% are graduating from high school, then that means that 15% are not. Voting irregularities and restrictions are still prevalent. New technologies bring pollution problems and were often produced with sweatshop labor.

These are all real problems, but the comparison of the two times still shows that there has been progress. Why is the progress unacknowledged? Is there a reason that a glass which is half-full is so often perceived as half empty?

Joel Best (2001) suggests four paradoxes for how greater progress leads to a sense of lack of progress. The paradoxes of perfectionism, proportion, proliferation, and paranoia are described below.

- The Paradox of Perfectionism

  The ideal of social perfectibility is grounded in optimism. It has the paradoxical consequence of fostering pessimism. Our efforts in the real world fall short of perfection. Those with a goal of perfection perceive the failure to achieve it, rather than the progress made toward it.

  "Problems," unlike social conditions, are meant to be solved. Expecting short-term, correct "solutions" to problems means disappointment when conditions are such that long-term, incremental improvements occur instead. The incremental improvements are not appreciated as progress because the ultimate goal of a problem solved has not been achieved.

- The Paradox of Proportion

  When large problems get solved, smaller problems come to weigh more heavily. When medicine prevents many deaths from infectious diseases, then killers like cancer and diabetes are no longer overshadowed. They get the worrying energy that used to go into the more egregious diseases. When we no longer have widespread lynching and women commonly have the vote, we find more subtle kinds of racism and sexism. When people in general are better educated, there is a different idea for how much education a person can have and still be regarded as insufficiently educated. All of the smaller problems are real problems, but their being ignored previously was not callousness. It was

the observation that there were larger problems with greater urgency. Once the larger problems are solved, the smaller ones become more compelling. The threshold for what constitutes an urgent problem has been lowered. Progress is made, but not perceived.

- The Paradox of Proliferation

  In the same way, social progress encourages the recognition of a larger number of problems. The contagion of successful social justice movements in one area encourages people to think in terms of social justice and rights in a wide array of other areas. Society is more receptive to listen to more claims. Activists have gained the skills necessary to promote such claims. The proliferation of cable channels, talk shows, and the internet accelerate this trend.

- The Paradox of Paranoia

  Progress not only makes us aware of new problems, but problems take on more of a fear of potential catastrophe. Doomsday scenarios abound. Social progress has led to large, intertwined institutions that we depend on, and we have ordered our lives thoroughly around certain technologies. We can feel the vulnerability to the dependence. Our higher expectations for institutions inspire greater fears about possible institutional failures.

The danger in these four paradoxes is that people who desire progress toward peace may pronounce the progress already made as trivial and past social policies as ineffective. This is not only untrue, but can thwart commitment to new policies and further progress.

I have observed many activists who believe that an emphasis on how great problems are is the best way to encourage people to take action. It may have the opposite effect. It is discouraging to think that all the effort put in by so many people in the past has led to only trivial changes or none at all. The assertion that no incremental progress was made with old policies gives ammunition to the arguments of those that oppose instituting new ones. It also dampens enthusiasm from those who might otherwise think they are a good idea. Pessimism and paranoia lead to despair, not eagerness. If people are to have a sense that it is worthwhile putting effort and energy into further progress, they are more likely to do so if it is acknowledged that the effort and energy invested in the past has born fruit. It is reasonable to think further effort also will.

For all of these paradoxes, the helpfulness of knowing about these is similar to knowing about unseen problems of other groups: understanding how these are normal can lead to better discernment rather than frustration. Most particularly, paying attention to progress that has in fact been made on any issue one is working on—and many issues of violence have long-term progress even in the face of short-term setbacks—is far more heartening and leads to greater enthusiasm in continuing the activism.

Schools of Thought

Several kinds of arguments continually appear in most large, long-lasting nonviolent social movements (MacNair, 2012, pp. 165–167). People are often distressed by these divisions, and feel that if there were more unity, the movement would be more successful. Since these show up so consistently, it may be a better approach to expect people to have differing views and work with this point harmoniously. In each case, movements are actually better off with schools of thought, since they can get the advantages of both. Sometimes one "side" will address the disadvantages of the other (MacNair, 2012, pp. 161–167). These divisions include:

- The "Old-Timers" vs. the "Newcomers"

  This is the case where it is most obvious that both are needed. Newcomers to a movement are crucial and this is rarely a controversial point. A movement does not grow without them. They bring in fresh ideas, enthusiasm, and help to avoid ruts. On the other hand, old-timers of a movement have experience of what does and does not work. They have long practice in the needed skills, and they are aware of what has happened before.

  Newcomers that are brimming with new-found enthusiasm may also have the impression that nothing has happened before. They were not there when it happened. They may think that the movement was not doing successful things because it has not been all the way successful yet. Experienced people will explain that something was tried and did not work, and the newcomers may discount that out of a sense of assurance of what ought to work. The contempt for the experience and accumulated wisdom of those who have been working hard for years can be very painful to the targets of the contempt.

- "Reform" vs. "Root Cause"

  There is a parable of the people of a village who awake to find many babies floating in their nearby river. They immediately help the babies, pull them out, dry and clothe and feed and shelter them. This happens day after day. Finally one person decides to go up along the river to find out why on earth all these babies are being thrown in.

  This story is often told as an explanation of a radical approach, that is to say, one that goes to the root. The babies are obviously better off not being placed in danger than they are being rescued. In the field of Community Psychology, this is sometimes referred to as first order versus second order change (Jason, 2013).

  Still, while the person is searching for the root cause, the babies are still in desperate need of immediate assistance. What if the person cannot find the root cause, or cannot quickly do anything once found? What if the fact that people are rushing to the rescue rather than ignoring the babies is part of the approach needed to reach the consciences of those endangering the babies?

Both approaches are therefore needed. Each can best be done by the people most motivated to take that specific approach.

- The "Purists" vs. the "Pragmatists"

  Purists say compromise is immoral and detrimental in the long run. Pragmatists argue for an "all or something" approach, believing it immoral to allow violence to continue while waiting for purity.

  These two approaches can complement each other. The purists keep the compromises from getting too watered-down. The pragmatists can use the purists to make themselves appear more moderate, making it more likely they will gain a hearing. This will be illustrated in a section below.

- The "Street" People vs. the "Straight" People

  Nonviolent "street" people argue it is immoral to wait for normal legal channels rather than taking direct action immediately. "Straight" people believe respectability is crucial to success. This is not a strict division. Both groups attend legal demonstrations, and those who may engage in civil disobedience might still lobby for a certain bill. Still, there are usually tensions, as those who are desperate for respectability think that those who opt for the priority of urgency are hurting the movement, and vice versa. This also will be illustrated in a section below.

  Again, these two perspectives provide for a more holistic movement. Those in the street who communicate urgency can be ignored if seen as crazy and not respectable. Those who are respectable can be ignored because the issue is not understood as urgent. Both together can bring about a greater likelihood of being listened to.

- The "Single-Issue" vs. the "Everything's Connected"

  A focus on a single issue has greater clarity. It allows more people to work on a specific single problem, since widely divergent views on other issues do not matter. The strategy of building coalitions is designed for this, to allow people who would argue with each other strenuously on other topics to nevertheless work in concord on one specific point.

  A focus on multiple related issues has greater coherence. It allows for a greater sense of community among people who are concerned with inter-relationships in a larger context: various peace issues, feminism, civil rights, anti-poverty, the consistent life ethic (MacNair & Zunes, 2006), and so on.

  Yet a disadvantage of a single-issue approach comes especially with elections: candidates have a package of ideas, and if a candidate is good on one issue but terrible on others, or good on nonviolent issues in general but terrible on the specific one of concern to the single-issue advocates. Credibility on how consistent are the principles that underlie advocacy on that issue can be called into question. Conversely, a major disadvantage of the multiple-issue approach is that factionalism can so easily arise as people argue about side-issues; the advantages that go with focus on one only are lost.

The different approaches are useful in different contexts. Because there are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, some discernment about what is called for in specific situations is helpful.

These are some of the common "divisions" that beset social movements. But if people in those movements are aware that these are common, and are mindful of how both can work in a complementary fashion, with the disadvantages of one approach addressed by the other approach and vice versa, then everyone can participate in the movement in the way that makes most sense to them and not be distressed that other people do things differently. "Division" becomes multiplication.

Using Cognitive Dissonance

According to the theory first advanced by Leo Festinger (1957), any bit of knowledge a person has is a "cognition" or "cognitive element." This can be a known fact or a vague concept, and everything in between.

The relationship between two of these cognitive elements is "consonant" if they agree with each other. Hugging someone is consonant if one is fond of that person. But if one cognition would imply another, but the opposite is what is actually believed, if there is a contradiction, then the two elements are "dissonant." Voting for someone one does not believe is qualified for the office is an example.

Cognitions that are neither consonant nor dissonant are "irrelevant." Eliminating dissonance does not necessarily mean making the ideas agree. It only means they do not disagree to the point of causing tension. Whenever someone has cognitions that disagree with each other, she or he experiences cognitive dissonance. This is a tension, and it motivates action. Most people try to seek relief from this instability in their thoughts. They may or may not succeed in reducing it, but most commonly, they will try. There will be some attempt to get rid of the problem by changing one element or the other to make the two either consonant or irrelevant.

Strategies for dealing with cognitive dissonance vary from person to person. But this dissonance is a strain, and people do try to get relief from it. Human beings seem to have a basic psychological need to have consistency, stability, and order in the way they see the world. When new information threatens their previous views or assumptions, they feel uneasy and resort to defensive maneuvers of one kind or another. They may screen out upsetting experiences. They may deny obvious facts. They may try to reinforce beliefs by making aggressive and belligerent declarations.

There are quite a number of otherwise puzzling events or attitudes that seem so very illogical yet can be explained with this theory. For example, some people are very reluctant to vote for someone they deem unqualified, yet feel compelled to do so under a two-candidate scenario where they hold the other candidate to be worse. If the person they voted for does win the election, then they will later justify their behavior by being far more supportive of the candidate who becomes the office-holder. That office-holder may not have improved over what made the voters

reluctant to start with, but they feel a need to make their behavior—the vote—consonant with their attitudes.

This may explain, for example, the upsurge of Republican support for Donald Trump after he took office. Republicans will claim they like his performance, and that would be another explanation. Yet when other people tried to explain what was wrong with his performance, they wondered why their logic was not seen as persuasive. They may well be working against efforts to resolve cognitive dissonance without realizing it. People who did not vote for Trump have no such problem, and therefore do not feel the same tension in hearing the arguments concerning his performance.

This is a problem each and every time a social movement is bringing to the attention of its society that there is some injustice that needs to be rectified. A common set of thinking is:

- Cognition #1: Our society is noble and virtuous and just and compassionate.
- Cognition #2: There is a problem which demonstrates this is not so.

It is common that activists will resolve the dissonance by deciding against Cognition #1. They will commonly discover that people they are trying to persuade are not so ready to do so. They will find those people instead questioning the veracity of Cognition #2, either deciding that the facts about the problem are incorrect or that those facts do not matter because it is not actually a problem. Activists keep trying and then try some more to convince people of Cognition #2, oblivious to how its contradiction with Cognition #1 makes people unwilling to hear it. The tension of cognitive dissonance is working against anything being said about Cognition #2.

The solution is clear: frame the point in a way that reinforces the positive feelings about the society rather than attacking them. The ideal way to do this is if there is any aspect in which the problem is subsiding—happening less than it used to. If it is diminishing, well then, of course it would not continue in a compassionate society.

According to the theory of cognitive dissonance, if people are given information that behavior is changing, they will then seek out information as to why this is so That is, they want to strengthen the case for Cognition #1, for positive attitudes about their society. Therefore, reasons for behavior change that have to do with people realizing that something was not as good an idea as we thought it was before will be latched onto. Activists will have such reasons readily available, of course.

As a matter of framing, instead of saying: “There is this awful problem, we are terrible to have allowed it for this and this reason, what will we do now?,” we have instead “There was this awful problem, and since we are a compassionate people it’s declining for this and this reason, but as a compassionate people we want to act to accelerate its decline.”

This also has the advantage of keeping the problem from seeming so overwhelming that action is unlikely to succeed and is therefore pointless. To make action consonant with motivation, it helps to have a strong indication that success is achievable.

I have observed many activists under the impression that the best way to motivate people to action is to explain how terrible the situation is, and those activists will actually resist efforts to show any improvement, trying to document that the situation is worse rather than better. They know what motivates them, but they are already activists. For persuading other people, it is the knowledge that behavior is changing in the right direction that is more likely to solve any tension of cognitive dissonance and therefore make persuasion—indeed, the active seeking of reasons for why the behavior is changing—that is much more likely to be effective.

In this way, the very cognitive dissonance problem that was causing a major barrier can be used to make progress in persuasion instead.

How Do We Study These Points?

How would one study all these points empirically? Likert-response scales could be developed to assess how much people feel a deprivation of their own groups in comparison to others, how much they have the attitudes consistent with the paradoxes of progress, where they are in the different spectrums of the schools of thought, and how they see others on the opposite ends of those spectrums. These could be correlated with other measures, and most particularly, experiments could be done to see if the intervention of explaining these points changes attitudes in a positive direction.

Though there is discussion of the points in the literature, I found no studies in which such measures had been created or used. However, I do know from extensive personal experience that when the concepts are presented to activists at the time when they are making the points to which these are counter-points, the response has usually been positive. Activists tend to find immediate relief in the presentation of the counter-points, and can see the veracity of them immediately. Though not always accepted, I have never found anyone arguing against them.

The point about cognitive dissonance is harder to study; there are many studies and many approaches that might work, but there is a problem, as shown by my experience: a colleague and I spent a great deal of time designing a study, but abandoned it upon the realization that stating someone suffered from cognitive dissonance was, in scholarly terms, indistinguishable from asserting that they were philosophically wrong. That was in the nature of how that particular study was designed; in that case, the fact that people get agitated when they are disagreed with may be due to cognitive dissonance, but it also may be nothing more than that they are agitated when they are disagreed with. Any study would need to take care that it was actually measuring a cognitive process that involved dissonance.

Still, my personal experience is that when doing interviews with reporters on activist projects, if I start out with an explanation for how the problem being addressed is actually subsiding, the prediction that they will then become interested in reasons why this is so is commonly confirmed. These are much more

productive interviews than ones in which the dire nature of the problem is in the first item presented.

Therefore, most of the study of these points is yet to be done, and accumulated experience will assist in ascertaining how valuable they may be. Here I offer a couple of examples of how the "schools of thought" approach, as opposed to despairing over divisions, works in practice.

Pragmatists vs. Purists: Peace Psychology Scholars Dealing with Torture of Detainees

In 2005, in the midst of the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the American Psychological Association (APA) accepted a report of its Presidential Task Force Report on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS). The report concluded that psychologists' participation in interrogations in which harsh measures were used would enhance their safety and effectiveness. There was a rally of APA members in opposition to the report; protesters held that this amounted to participation in and legitimation of torture.

Practically all members of Division 48, which focuses on Peace Psychology, believed this to be the case. However, a stark division arose on strategy.

One group of Division 48 members worked with the APA Board of Directors to set up a task force to try to revise the report so that torture would be more clearly excluded. By virtue of working within the system in a legislative manner, to make progress rather than achieving the final goal, these can be designated as the "pragmatist" end of the spectrum.

The other group of Division 48 members was outraged that this new task force included military people, and understood it to be a compromise that amounted to selling out. They instead pushed for a petition campaign to "annul" the PENS report (Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, 2011). Hence, they are the purists.

The pragmatists explained that there was no provision in the APA by-laws for "annulment." The purists regarded this point as irrelevant. Extensive heated e-mail barrages and accusations ensued. I was an official in Division 48, including being president for the last part of it (in the year 2013), and so had a duty to intervene as best I could for promoting harmony.

I proposed to the two groups that they were experiencing a purist/pragmatist distinction, as outlined above as one of the different "schools of thought" that arise in all large and long-lasting social movements. Both sides confirmed that this was helpful terminology, that it did apply, and they knew which side was which without further explanation.

Of course, it is only a continuum. Pragmatists have to have firm principles or they are not very pragmatic, and purists have to give some thought to what strategies might actually work or else they are not very pure.

Yet the proposal that, rather than choosing which side was right, both sides were actually having a role to play, was one that several people involved in the conflict could see as sensible.

However, the pragmatists saw it far more clearly. When I proposed that the purists, rather than being any kind of competitors, were instead making the pragmatists appear more moderate by comparison, one of the people on the task force confirmed to me that she could see this clearly. They had been seen as radicals and extremists when they first proposed the task force to revise the PENS report, but when the purists came and harshly reprimanded them for it, they suddenly became the people to be worked with. As a divisional president, I saw this on the e-mail listserv for all APA division officers. The APA officials most harshly criticized by the purists, officials who harshly criticized the purists in turn, regarded the pragmatists with sympathy for being attacked—and, therefore, the anti-torture points were better made than they would have been alone.

So the pragmatists needed the purists. The purists also needed the pragmatists, in that the petition to "annul" the report was never something the APA Board would take seriously. But when the revised report came out (American Psychological Association, 2013), it officially *rescinded* the PENS report—that is how it was publicly perceived, and how it was presented by APA.

The purists were not satisfied. Rescinding was not annulling. APA only said the PENS report was outdated—not that it was *wrong*. More importantly, while decrying torture, it was still allowing psychologists to participate in the interrogations. This would allow the problem to arise again. Pragmatists agreed that this was a problem, but asserted that they had done what realistically could be done. This would allow for more progress later.

After a great deal of negative publicity against APA—much of it fostered by the work of the purists—the APA finally arranged to have an investigation done. Dubbed the Hoffman Report (Hoffman et al., 2015), its 546 pages documented the case that the purists had been making all along. In 2015, APA passed a new policy disallowing psychologist participation at all, thus coming close to satisfying everyone.

This is a clear case where the interplay of the pragmatists and the purists led to a better outcome than either one was likely to do alone. Some of the people involved found the analysis helpful, and found the entire conflict a little less frustrating because of it.

Straight People vs. Street People: Separating Immigrant Children from Parents

In the "schools of thought" some people think respectability is crucial, while others stress urgency. An illustration comes from the upsurge of protest that came with the June, 2018 "zero tolerance" policy that the United States administration started to enforce at the USA–Mexico border. Central American families especially were

escaping horrific violence in their own countries, and many were seeking asylum. Children were suddenly separated from parents, even very young children.

The feelings of urgency led some to take actions of protest against administration officials most noted as associated with the policy. This led to public debate as to the propriety and effectiveness of such tactics. On June 26, 2018, for example, the PBS News Hour aired a discussion from different points of view. From the transcript:

> William Brangham [interviewer]: Sarah Sanders gets asked to leave a restaurant. Protests are occurring outside Kirstjen Nielsen's home. These protesters seem very angry about what they are protesting. What do you make of all of this?
>
> Quentin James: I think it's great. It's great for our country… Listen, the administration is, you know, in the midst of working on critical issues that are affecting people's real lives. We are removing children from their parents at the borders … These are real issues that get to the core of American values. And so I think it's a great show of where the country stands, where America really is on these issues, and, you know, we want to see more of it….
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> [Former Pennsylvania Governor] Ed Rendell: Well, I think you have to draw a line. If people protest outside a governmental office, outside the Senate chamber, the House chamber, or at a town meeting where a public official is called it as part of his or her business, that's absolutely appropriate and fair. And the left should do it and the right should do it, because that's our God-given right as Americans. But to interfere with someone's private life when they're going out with their family somewhere, that is uncivil discourse…. if we keep doing this, it's going to fire up the Republican base in ways that nothing positive can. And it's going to make winning the election much more difficult. (Public Broadcasting System, 2018)

These are expressing well the differing points of view.

What would happen if protests of that kind did not occur? Proponents think the lack of a sense of urgency would be devastating, and opponents think that the protests instead interfere with achieving needed goals. Conversely: what would happen if such protests did occur, but no one argued that there was a problem with them? Would the movement be dismissed as merely over-wrought? Certainly, its opponents wish to do so.

A controlled experiment to see which one is correct cannot be done on the simple grounds that this kind of debate happens in practically all large or long-lasting social movements. It would be rare to find a social movement where no one cares for expressing urgency or no one stresses the importance of respectability. Nevertheless, they can both work in concert. They usually have to.

Conclusion

Several features of social movements are commonly seen as problems, yet when underlying psychological dynamics are understood, they can be explained and accommodated. At times, problems can be reframed and transformed into positive developments, and this has been emphasized in the fields of both social and community psychology (Jason, 2013; MacNair, 2012).

One problem is the perception or attribution that one's own social movement has many distressing problems, but the opposition movement is running smoothly. However, the opposition, similar to one's own group, is not likely to publicize its problems.

There can be a problem of a constant feeling that events are worsening at a time when they are objectively improving, resulting in unfounded and unrealistic discouragement.

Another problem is when a diversity of perspectives is seen as producing divisiveness. The solution is to understand the differences not as divisions, but as multiplications—"schools of thought" that constitute complementary perspectives.

Many problems common to social movements and which may seem intractable can become much easier to handle when the underlying psychology is understood. Reduction of unwarranted discouragement can help make movements more effective. Several aspects of participation in such movements that frustrate or discourage people are actually quite normal and can either be worked with or, in some cases, deliberately turned into advantages.

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