RSA
Action and Research Centre

**Releasing energy
for change in our
communities**

**Social movements in
health**

by Ian Burbidge
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About the author

Ian Burbidge is an Associate Director in the Public Services and Communities team at the RSA. He leads programmes of research and analysis exploring such issues as social capital, health and wellbeing and the future of public services. He also leads the RSA Lab which is seeking more effective ways of understanding and addressing the complex social challenges we are facing as a society. Ian has nearly 20 years' experience in social research, consultation, neighbourhood programmes and strategy within local government and wider public sector partnerships.

About the RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the power to create. Through our ideas, research and 28,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured. The RSA Action and Research Centre combines practical experimentation with rigorous research to achieve these goals.

Executive Summary

Social movements are often presented as a battle between those seeking to change the status quo and those seeking to preserve it. Indeed, Goodwin and Jasper (2015) define a social movement as "a collective, organised, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power-holders, or cultural beliefs and practices".

In this definition, interactions between those actively trying to bring about change and the institutions they are trying to change take place through a negative frame. Yet these interactions, however confrontational, are still creating energy within society. Our unique insight here is to suggest that this energy can be harnessed by actively trying to make these interactions positive ones. How can we support a shift away from such confrontational energy for change towards constructive and collaborative approaches to change? We conceive that a society characterised by such constructive interactions creates the energy required to fuel grass-roots, community-led action. A community which provides facilities for older people living alone, supports a community car scheme, gets together to help recruit a GP in the community.

To make the shift away from confrontation and towards a constructive energy for change we need to do a number of things. We need to identify the pain points that drive people and communities to act. These emerge where the existing equilibrium between what is needed and what is provided are out of balance. We need to understand how the resultant energy for change emerges and spreads. Finally we need mechanisms and approaches to actively encourage and harness the release of energy for change.

We achieve this through an approach we at the RSA call "think like a system, act like an entrepreneur". To think like a system is to understand the world in which we are seeking change, understand how well systems work for people and places, and identify the opportunities for change. We call these opportunities "social moments" - points in time where change is more likely and there is a greater likelihood of action being taken and supported. To act like an entrepreneur is to work flexibly and responsively to harness these opportunities. This requires solutions to be designed and tested with the full engagement of people, communities and those working within these systems and bureaucracies. Underpinning this is an understanding of the relationship between the power arising from the individualistic agency of people, the solidaristic power of shared values and norms within communities and the hierarchical power of leadership and expertise within institutions. When the interactions between all three powers come together in pursuit of common goals, much can be achieved.

Our hypothesis is that this is when social movements transcend confrontation becoming positive, collaborative energy for change.

Social movements are traditionally conceived of as being the mobilisation of people to achieve a defined social change, each person adding their energy and commitment to the cause until a critical mass (or "tipping point") is reached.

However, our concept of energy arising from the interactions between individuals, communities and organisations enables a more nuanced understanding to be reached. An understanding that we can achieve change in our communities by constructively building, releasing and spreading this energy for change in our communities.

Releasing energy for change in our communities

Pressure for change

For an understanding of mass-participation or crowd-based momentum for change in our communities scholars traditionally look to social movements. Yet often social movements are ground-up, organic, ultimately large-scale, community-led responses to challenge existing practice around major social issues such as civil rights, AIDS and women's rights (NESTA, 2016). They can lead to the overthrow of dictators (Popovic and Miller, 2015) to millions of people tipping a bucket of ice over themselves for the ALS (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) Charity (Quinn, 2014), the anti-tobacco movement and the banning of smoking in public places (Nyborg et al, 2016) or to the rise of new political parties such as the Pirate Party in Iceland (Falkvinge, 2013). The social movement literature tends to draw on examples such as these, relating to major social issues on a global or national scale with high profile charismatic leaders at their helm.

This leads us to ask a series of questions: is it possible to translate the principles from international and large scale social movements into this smaller scale community context? What does a social movement look like when it is grounded in our communities at a scale that seems achievable and in a way that seems constructive? What characteristics does it display, how does it generate and sustain energy for change? This is the core of our work at the RSA alongside the NHS England "Vanguard" sites (NHS England, 2016).

Institutional Challenge

By coming together, people can challenge conventional ways of doing things. The public sector – and the health sector in particular - is characterised by a strong hierarchical set of systems that have embodied the new public management paradigm. Importantly, this paradigm is based on the use of targets and markets to drive performance, and sees patients as customers (Buddery, Parsfield, and Shafique, 2016). Yet as a way of organising and managing services new public management proves to be increasingly unfit for purpose in a world characterised by complexity and uncertainty (Burbidge, 2017).

Service providers are increasingly seeing the need for new relationships with those they serve, yet remain mired in traditional ways of doing things. The shift towards prevention and early intervention, for example, is both cost effective and common-sense, yet our existing incentive structures and systems crowd these out as an approach to achieving wellbeing and a good life. Coproduction is still seen as an emergent and jargon-laden response by many, yet the principle of involving the citizen or

service recipient in decisions about them, their life, or their community is both logical and compelling.

This hints at the emergent shift towards "new power" values of openness, trust and networks (Heimans and Timms, 2014), reflecting a need to rebalance the relationship between provider and citizen. This has to based on the recognition that whilst the service provider - GP, say, or social worker - is the expert in their field, the citizen is the expert in their own life.

Social movements are one mechanism through which this pressure for change builds. Their unique characteristic is that this is not pressure from inspectors, ministers or legislators. It is pressure from the very people public services are intended to support. And as this pressure for change grows, questions remain: what do we need to do to constructively harness this pressure for change? How can we use it to help support the delivery of 21st-century public services? And how do our institutions, the hierarchical bureacracy, repond?

Think like a system

At the RSA, we recognise that to alter the course of our modern society, we need to more fully understand the interactions between systems and the people and communities those systems are intended to serve. Our emerging account of how we understand this dynamic is a concept that we are calling: "think like a system, act like an entrepreneur". At its simplest this is an approach to seeing the wider system and identifying and testing the optimal ways to make change happen. Its uniqueness includes the use of insights from cultural theory together with our concept of social moments (Burbidge, 2017). Cultural theory (Verweij and Thompson, 2006) suggests that communities are organised according to the balance of different types of power or energy – the agency and competitiveness of individuals, the solidaristic power of shared values and norms, and the hierarchical power of leadership, strategy and expertise. Social moments are points in time where change is more likely and there is a greater likelihood of action being taken and supported.

Why is this important for social movements? These powers are held in a dynamic balance in any given community and in respect of any given issue. Critical for an understanding of how to leverage social movements for social change is to understand the interactions between these three powers and whether they are liberating energy within a community or draining it. We argue that social movements emerge in communities characterised by positive energy and collective motivation for change, and that these are therefore important preconditions for a social movement to exist. In this sense, our conception of social movements is a localised one.

How can we use this understanding to help people catalyse action in their communities? What actions, therefore, help release the latent energy for change that might benefit the daily lives of the local population in that community?

Creating system change

When people get together in communities to try and challenge existing systems or practice they tend to be seeking to achieve one or more of the following four things. The examples are drawn from the six Vanguard sites working on health as a social movement (RSA, 2017):

1. Improve service provision. This can take three forms. People might want to improve existing services when they are seen to be falling short of the required standard to meet local need. People might call for the provision of new services to meet emerging needs, often spotted by active voluntary, community and special interest groups long before the data flags the need to institutions and commissioners. People also mobilise to fight for the retention of existing services. This happened in Morecambe where community action led to the recruitment of GPs to prevent the closure of a surgery.

2. Ensure people aren't left out. People fight for social justice to ensure that those in most need, or the more marginalised in society, are not excluded from accessing the services they need. For example, social prescribing initiatives in Stockport and Morecambe are targeting loneliness in communities, and in Manchester work is tackling inequality of cancer support.

3. Challenge conventional wisdom. People bring the reality of their lived experience of a disease, illness or situation to challenge the prevailing conventional scientific and/or professional wisdom. For example, in Airedale care homes have been opened up to the wider community, improving integration and understanding within the community.

4. Help people make better decisions. People seek improved access to information, expertise and support to help make better individual health choices, including take-up of services that prevent the onset of ill-health and awareness-raising of particular conditions. For example, the Royal Free hospital is supporting work that engages with employees to improve their wellbeing and sense of community within the wider hospital. Increasingly, charities adopt this as a communication tool; Prostate Cancer UK, for example, have targeted males "on their own domain" through football clubs and personalities (Marketing Week, 2014).

These are key areas that people will mobilise behind in an emergent movement. Whilst illustrated through the lens of health they are applicable more widely, too. Crucially, as a non-institutional challenge to the status quo in a given situation they are usually confrontational. It can be difficult to see how to harness social movements in a constructive way. How can we conceive of movements for change that positively release energy for change within our communities that is harnessed in a constructive way?

Releasing energy for change

Movements for change are catalysed by an acknowledgement that the status quo regarding a particular situation or state of affairs is no longer ok. This trigger point can be reached slowly, cumulating over time, as the pressure for change waxes and wanes but ultimately reaches a critical point. Sometimes it can be reached suddenly, often as a result of a catalytic event. The trigger point is reached not only when there is sufficient pressure for change but also when this pressure builds within a context that recognises it and is prepared to act on it. There may have been greater pressure for change in the past but it is to no avail if the surrounding context was not conducive to action as a result of this pressure.

In the rural community of Millom, within the Morecombe Bay Better Care Together vanguard, the retirement of two GPs led to the closure of the community hospital. This generated a strong solidaristic response in which 2,000 people took to the streets protesting against the closure. The response from healthcare managers was to listen to the concerns of the community and include them in finding a solution, a community-led campaign to recruit doctors to the area by championing what was great about living in Millom. It required a culture shift for the NHS and a willingness of key individuals leading the protest to work together to overcome the challenge. Ultimately, collaborating on a solution tapped into and released a huge amount of community capital which in turn led to the production of a quarterly newsletter and a host of volunteering opportunities. A strong solidaristic response and an open-minded hierarchical response led to a positive outcome. This is not always the case.

Other examples may be on a smaller scale. Many GP practices are actively working with their local community to provide the general support older people need to live happily in their own homes. Helping people engage in community events tackles loneliness and social isolation; picking up a prescription can help ensure someone manages their condition; changing a lightbulb or cutting the grass can prevent a trip or a fall. Addressing these non-medical needs in a community setting can help reduce demand on the GPs time and prevent future medical demands from escalating. In this way GPs, representing hierarchical power, are trying to liberate a positive solidaristic response to support individual needs in their community. At their most constructive, social movements are fuelled by the motivation of people, communities and hierarchies to

work collaboratively to make positive change happen.

All too often, though, these interactions can become negative and drain energy. What if the community in Millom had mobilised to challenge the closure of the community hospital but ultimately failed? Critical in these instances is the quality of the process. A fair and transparent process will generate knowledge and understanding within the community and find other ways to harness that solidaristic energy. When this is not the case, however, it can feel as though the hierarchical power of the state is wielded through impenetrable processes. In these instances, the solidaristic energy within the community will either be lost, or, potentially, diverted, seeking an outlet through other, often confrontational, routes. In extreme cases this could lead to civil unrest, as was the case in the 2011 London riots (The IARS International Institute, 2011). Interestingly, these riots in turn led to the emergence of a solidaristic response in which people came together to clean up the city; this sense of meaning arrived at through a collective, solidaristic experience is an effect common in the wake of disasters (Solnit, 2009).

Interactions and relationships that create energy within social systems are all around us, from the everyday encounter with our GP or neighbour to an emergent crisis. These interactions between people (individualistic), communities (solidaristic) and systems (hierarchical) either add to, or subtract from, the collective agency and energy for change within a community. Positive interactions motivate, negative ones demotivate. We argue that both forms of energy can feed a social movement and that is is through the spread of this energy that they achieve impact.

Spreading energy for change

"People follow the lead of other people they know and trust when they decide whether to take up a new idea. Every change requires effort, and the decision to make that effort is a social process."
Gawande, 2013

We have seen that social movements are about energy for change, an that energy is shared through a common goal or shared idea for change. We know about how ideas spread through the work of EM Rogers who studied how innovations spread across society. This process of diffusion is "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system"(Rogers, 2003). This concept helps us identify a number of factors which influence the spread of behaviour and ideas throughout a social network. Critically, we need to identify the different types of individuals within a community, the nature of the networks they form, the social norms characterising the community and the narratives that prevail.

Individuals
Individual action requires agency and a sense of the possible. People who are clear about the change they want to see in the world and have the energy to start to bring that change about. They may hold a number of characteristics. We need to identify individuals who are:

- Change agents: who are the innovators who are coming up with new ideas themselves?
- Champions for an idea: who are the early adopters? A proportion of people just love new things.
- Expert opinion leaders: who has authority, status and credibility based on their expertise?
- True opinion leaders: who has credibility and status within peer groups?
- Boundary spanners: who has links to other social or organisational networks? They will bring diversity of thought to the group.
- People like me: in terms of background, culture (known as homophily). We're more likely to interact with people like us and follow their lead.

Networks
Social networks are the invisible connections between people that form

communities. There are two fundamental aspects of social networks that influence diffusion (Christakis and Fowler, 2013). Connection has to do with who is connected to whom, the pattern of ties that connect the people in a community or society. The connections determine the structure of the network. Contagion is the extent to which ideas, behaviours – social norms – spread across the network. It is naturally related to the degree of connectedness; spread across a highly-connected community will be faster than across one that is poorly connected.

Behaviour and ideas spread across our social network in ways we are not individually aware of, obeying the three degrees of influence rule. To illustrate how powerful this effect is, our behaviour is proven to impact on our friends (one degree), our friends' friends (two degrees), and even our friends' friends' friends (three degrees). Our influence gradually dissipates and ceases to have a noticeable effect on people beyond three degrees of separation. It is worth reflecting on this. Assuming someone has an average of, say, 20 relatively strong connections (friends and family), and their connections are likewise connected to 20 people, and so on through the network, at three degrees of separation they are influenced by 8,000 people, most of whom are strangers to us.

Norms

Social (or cultural) norms are the informal rules that govern behaviour within society and form powerful human motivations. These include the motivation to fit in with and gain the approval of others; we feel we are behaving correctly when we behave the same as others around us.

At its simplest we are more likely to believe information from someone like me and someone I trust (Cialdini, 2007). He has shown how we don't believe people we don't like, even if they are actually telling the truth. And the more people who believe a certain idea or behave in a certain way, the better we think the idea or behaviour is and the more likely we are to adopt it for ourselves.

The ideas or behaviours that we want to spread will also diffuse across the networks more effectively, and be adopted more quickly, if they demonstrate some key characteristics such as being a clear improvement and being easy to adopt. The extent to which an idea or practice will spread is influenced by a number of factors:

- **Relative advantage:** is the idea or behaviour perceived as better than what came before? The appeal to emotion is important here as subjective advantage is often more important than objective (facts v emotions).
- **Compatibility:** do the ideas/behaviours fit with our values, experiences and needs? An idea that is incompatible with norms of a social system will not be adopted as quickly.
- **Simplicity:** is the idea or behaviour easy to understand or adopt? Are new skills/knowledge required for adoption? Do we have to change something first? Simple ideas are more readily adopted across a social system.

- **Trialability:** opportunities to test and try new ways of doing things will reduce uncertainty and risk; users learn by doing, incrementally, not all in one go. Big bang change is for IT projects, and they don't always work out so well.
- **Observability:** are the results visible to others? Can we see the impact of the new behaviours or ideas? This makes it salient, easier to discuss and reinforces social norms. Find ways for each individual to feel they have a sense of agency, that they have control over the things in their lives that most matter to them.

One fundamental determinant of spread is therefore the tendency of humans to influence and copy one another. Each connection between people offers opportunities to influence and be influenced, thus reinforcing the power of social norms.

Narratives

Stories are an important method of spreading ideas (Cialdini, 2007; Ganz, 2011; Wizemann and Thompson, 2015). We have already seen that we are heavily influenced by who communicates the message. We are more likely to trust information from someone with perceived authority or expertise (eg a GP), from someone like me (which is why celebrity messengers often don't work) and from someone I trust and like.

What they communicate is also important. Stories will spread more effectively across social networks than facts and figures because they elicit an emotional response. The social animal within us all wants to connect and be connected, and stories provide the glue that join us together and enable us to build shared experiences, values, and customs. Stories bring the rather dry facts and figures to life and make them real. As Stalin was paraphrased as saying, one death is a tragedy, a million is a statistic; we feel an emotional response to one person's death but we tend to be psychologically numbed by large numbers (Slovic, 2010).

Marshall Ganz (2011) identifies three types of narrative; story of self is the individualistic story, story of us is the shared solidaristic narrative of community and the story of now is the hierarchical story of strategy and action.

In other words, in respect of a specific issue are there different narratives being told? Consider for example obesity. Political leaders may be saying that obesity is an epidemic that needs immediate action (the hierarchical story of now); community groups may be bemoaning the challenges of getting people actively involved in the local sports club (solidaristic story of us) whilst individuals may not recognise obesity in themselves of their family (story of self).

One of the key challenges for individuals and those providing services is to enable people to tell their stories and, in turn, listen to them. Giving voice to these narratives is a vital task to help spread and sustain movements for change.

Harnessing energy for change

We imagine a community characterised by positive interactions between individuals and organisations. The assets, energy and actions that enable these interactions to happen in ways that add value form the building blocks for a strong community. This is a community in which a social movement for change could emerge. To do this, we need to:

1. Find ways for each **individual** to feel they have a sense of agency, that they have control over the things in their lives that most matter to them.
2. Support **communities** to develop a collective sense of agency so that they are able to respond to local issues.
3. Help **organisations** to recognise what they need to do differently to support emergent social movements.

We argue that to achieve real "grass-roots", community-driven change we need to align activity across all three dimensions in what we call a social moment. Social moments are opportunities for change where the existing equilibrium of people's everyday lives, and that of their family, community and/or institutions are all disrupted through an event or events.

If a community is locked in a particular equilibrium, a balance between the needs of the individual, the community and the hierarchy, a social moment represents an opportunity to shift this balance to a new dynamic, a new equilibrium. This is well understood in the natural sciences where biological systems such as a forest will exist with a balance between the flora and fauna living within it and the forces that impact on them, such as sun or rain. An equilibrium arises between the component parts. When that forest is partially destroyed by fire, there is the opportunity for new plants and animals to emerge at first, those most adaptable to the new circumstances. A new equilibrium emerges through this dynamic change. This is the opportunity for change that social moments present in our social systems.

An individual recovering from a heart attack due to an unhealthy lifestyle has an opportunity: to change or not to change? A community reeling from a spate of muggings of older people has an opportunity: to mobilise collective action or turn away and ignore it? An organisation reeling from scandal or service failure has an opportunity: to reform or to turn a blind eye? Social moments are therefore points in time when the

status quo is being challenged:

- In individual people's lives.
- Within a community.
- Within systems and hierarchies.

This is important because social moments are sources of energy for change. We then need to support the mobilisation of a collective effort to take advantage of these opportunities.

What does this mean for hierarchies and bureaucracies such as the local public sector, public health and the wider NHS? There is a paradox inherent in hierarchical organisations seeding and encouraging the emergence and growth of social movements. Not only are social movements organic, unpredictable, often chaotic, always complex mechanisms for change, the impulsive bureaucratic response is to attempt to control, manage, monitor, evaluate and risk-assess.

Crucially, the pressure for change created by social movements represents major challenges to the existing processes and systems within bureaucracies. Organisations need to work out how they might respond to this pressure, creating new, adaptable processes and ways of working. For an organisation or bureaucracy to seed social movements is to recognise the likelihood that the resulting social movement will demand change within the organisation or bureaucracy itself. This challenge requires the organisation to overcome its immune response to change (Conway, 2017), the response that prioritises existing processes, systems and services ahead of the new ones demanded by the movement. This pressure for change can either trigger the immune response or be the catalyst to overcome it. United States President Roosevelt was supposed to have responded to an activist by saying: "You've convinced me, now go out and make me do it."' He recognised that change often needs an imperative for change, a pressure that can't be ignored. This is what a social movement can provide for those trying to make change in their communities.

Collaboration not confrontation

Social movements for change can be defined on a different, more localised scale to that which is traditionally conceived. Our definition is therefore not just about large scale, mass participation or uprising in response to specific issues, which can be seen as a failure of communities, systems and individuals acting together, although it is worth acknowledging that social movements have consistently presented the biggest driver of systematic change in health. Rather, they need to be defined on a scale that capitalises on local assets and energy – the full range of resources available within a community – with actions that are identifiable and then doable.

Collectively these actions might add up to more than the sum of their parts, locally and nationally. We've seen this already with Greater Manchester's Cancer Vanguard's bid to develop 5,000 cancer champions, trained to organise communities affected by cancer to prevent the disease. If they do, then we may be seeing the impact that social movements in health can have by challenging health inequalities, provision and conventional wisdom at a local level.

We believe this is a more nuanced account of how to achieve change within community settings that can be of practical, relevant use to people and communities working in this field, and can enable them to share and scale good practice. The RSA believes that we need to continue to find ways of harnessing the momentum of movements to spur people to further action. This is informed by an account of how systems, communities and individuals can come together to drive and support social change.

Social movements are fuelled by the dynamic energy arising from interactions between people, communities and systems. Their impact can be achieved through confrontation, harnessing negative energy for change, or collaboration, harnessing positive energy for change. Both can be maximised by leveraging the opportunities of social moments.

What might their impact be if this energy for change in our communities was harnessed in a constructive, collaborative way, as opposed to being a confrontational, combative mechanism for change?

1. Grounding social movements in our communities mobilises people to take action locally. By translating individual agency

into collective action, social movement can increase community capital, strengthening the networks that bind people through communities of place or interest,

2. Social movements can ultimately turn from being movements that seek social change by opposing existing systems to movements that achieve change by working with existing systems. At their best they are non-confrontational mechanisms for change. In this way they can best be adopted and utilised for social good. The energy that emerges from individuals, groups and organisations working collaboratively will achieve more because the motivations and incentives are aligned.

3. Social Movements can release energy for change within a community or social system by identifying interactions and events that can add to, or drain, the energy in a social system.

4. Social movements can draw on the renewable energy for change from people and communities. Rather than being a zero-sum game – you're either engaged in the movement or you are not – individuals could have numerous positive interactions in their community. Once you've experienced a few such positive interactions, your sense of individual agency grows and with it your sense that you can make change happen. This becomes more powerful when added to the collective agency of the community. This 'upward spiral' of engagement, action and impact is sustainable yet, often, all too fragile, easily destroyed by interactions that disempower.

This approach challenges the idea that we should focus on the change we want and assume that it is a mirror image of the problem we face. Instead, it allows us to focus on the change that is possible. This opens up the scope for further actions that address our broad goal. For example, perhaps a street party is held which brings the community together with the intention of engaging people around healthy eating and obesity. By bringing people together and creating new relationships and a sense of solidarity it might also create the space in which a community-led conversation about tackling loneliness can start to develop.

This liberation of energy for change in our communities can create and sustain social movements. For those movements to have maximum impact our public services need to be more entrepreneurial and responsive to such opportunities. After all, social movements are fundamentally about system change. This is the move from old power to new power, to new ways of working that share power and are enabling for communities. Social movements can play a role in stimulating the change that is required to rebalance this relationship. We believe this approach will create and support social movements that drive positive change for more sustainable, preventative and responsive public services.

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