Towards a typology of activism to inform our exploration of 'Leaderful Organising and Building Leaderful Movements'

To help us think about what a leaderful approach to organising and movement building could look like, it might help to consider the range of contexts in which this activity happens. Within our movements there are diverse ways that activism is done and understood. These different practices also give rise to diverse organising cultures. This short paper starts to unpack some of the varieties of context and organising cultures that sit under the broad umbrella term of *activism* and the plurality of practice contained within what we can call *social movements*. It aims to prompt us to think about different activist contexts and how these might need us to think differently about the role, meaning and practice of leadership within them.

I have the sense that if we were able to devise a simple typology, naming and categorising some of these diverse contexts and practices, it could help us to recognise patterns related to types of leadership and different opportunities for the promotion of a leaderful approach. Unfortunately, I don't feel in a position to offer a singular typology at this stage. Instead, what I can do is point towards a number of overlapping typologies, in the hope that this provides the basis for further discussion that could help us work towards some kind of synthesis over time.

If any of you feel like taking this as a starting point for that discussion, I would be delighted to explore this with you!

Social Movements: Diverse Strategies, Identities, Roles, and Actors

Perhaps the most generally accepted definition of a *social movement* comes from Italian sociologist Mario Diani. Aiming to offer a synthesis of the diverse range of definitions in use, he suggests that social movements are:

> "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity."

Thinking, as we do at Ulex, in terms of the *ecology of social movements*, we also recognise the networked, informal (although also sometimes formal) interactions of a plurality of actors engaged in wide range of activities as being clear characteristics of social movements. However, we don't follow Diani's suggestion that "a shared collective identity" is a necessary component of social movements. All social movements need to work with the tension between the commonality of identity, which circumscribes it as a movement, and the diversity of identity contained within it. Thinking in terms of an ecology of movements can help us to conceive of a movement as able to contain non-aligned, antagonistic, and even contradictory identities – and to acknowledge that this diversity is often crucial to the building of the collective agency needed for radical transformation.

In fact, the *ecology of movement* idea helps us to acknowledge that the movement field can contain a diversity of identities, as well as actors and roles. Some of this diversity can begin to be captured through a group of overlapping typologies of 1) transformative strategies, 2) movement roles, 3) movement capabilities, and 4) the way activism interfaces with everyday life.

Typology One: Transformative Strategies

One way we think about this is in terms of the different kinds of strategies of transformation that are found across our movements. Applying a simple typology, we can think in terms of strategies that seek to: 1) *Create alternatives within the system*, 2) *Build alternatives outside the system*, and 3) *Ruptural strategies*.

These three are based on Erik Olin Wright's work, where he relates these three to specific political traditions:

1) **Creating alternatives within the system** (*symbiotic metamorphosis*), is associated with the Social Democratic tradition. It includes strategies in which extending and deepening the institutional forms of popular social empowerment simultaneously helps solve certain practical problems faced by dominant classes and elites. These strategies can have a contradictory character to them, both expanding social power and strengthening aspects of the existing system.

2) **Build alternatives outside the system** (*interstitial metamorphosis*), is associated with the Anarchist tradition and seeks to build new forms of social empowerment in the niches and margins of capitalist society.

3) **Ruptural strategies** are associated with the revolutionary Socialist or Communist traditions and the organisation of classes through political parties in direct confrontation with the state. They envision creating new institutions of social empowerment through a sharp break within existing institutions and social structures. It implies a radical disjuncture.

Wright offers the following schematic representation in his *Envisioning Real Utopias*:

Transformative Strategy	Associated political tradition	Pivotal collective actors	Strategic logic respect to the state	Strategic logic respect capitalist class	Metaphors of success
Ruptural	Revolutionary socialist/communism	Classes organised on political parties	Attack the state	Confront the bourgeoisie	War (victories and defeats)
Interstitial metamorphosis	Anarchist	Social movements	Build alternatives outside of the state	Ignore the bourgeoisie	Ecological competition
Symbiotic metamorphosis	Social democratic	Coalitions of social forces and labour	Use the state: struggle on the terrain of the state	Collaborate with the bourgeoisie	Evolutionary adaptations

Not only do these different strategies imply diverse political practices, they also (loosely) align with different political traditions, cultures, and identities. Clearly, the historical manifestation of these strategies has often involved overlapping practice and they shouldn't be seen as completely firewalled from each other. Today the typology can help us to think about the range of approaches across and within movements, although, more often than not, contemporary practice often seeks to distinguish itself critically from the traditional forms.[i] From an ecology of social movements perspective, all three approaches are seen as capable of contributing something valuable to movement towards radical transformation.

All three seem to imply different forms of organisation and distinct ways of conceptualising and working with power. In this sense the connotations and practices of leadership are likely to be quite distinct and require different types of intervention or tools to support and introduce the idea of leaderful organising.

In contemporary practice we might recognise the *symbiotic metamorphosis* approach in new municipalism or efforts at radical democratic reform; we can see *interstitial metamorphosis* reflected in practices as diverse as autonomous social centres or the ecovillage movement; *ruptural strategies* are less prevalent in practice, but the tradition still provides an important source of political identification for many activists.

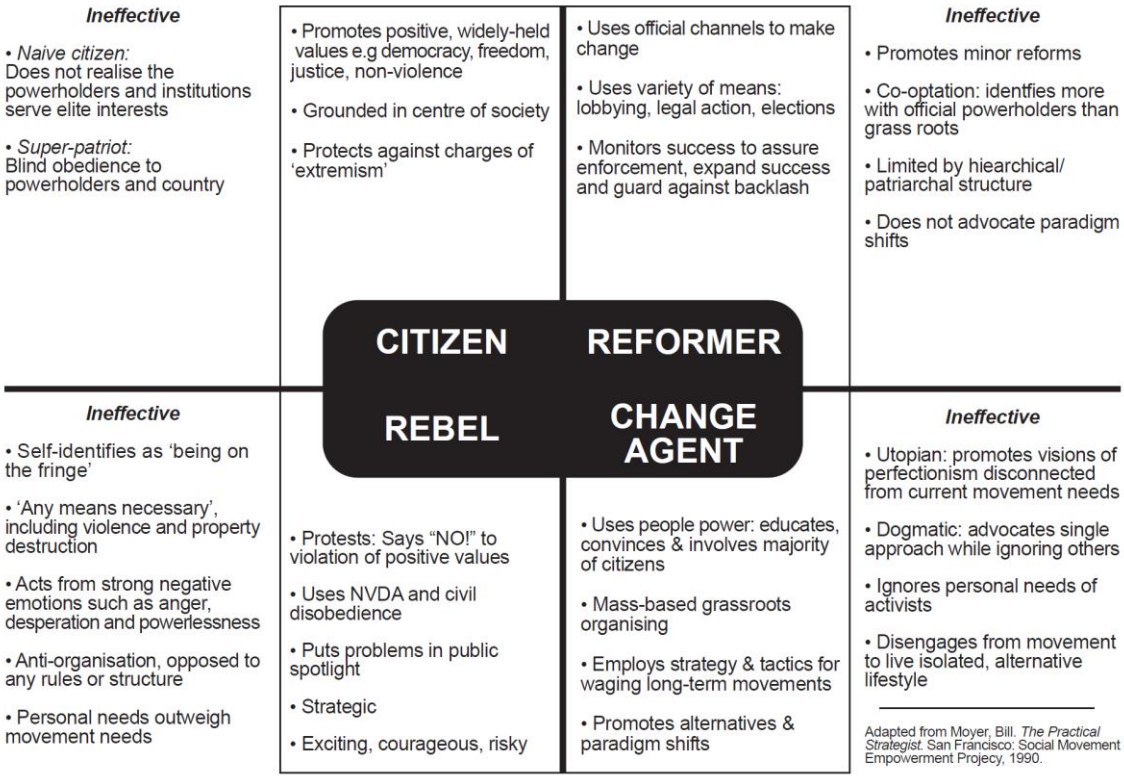
Typology Two: Diverse Roles

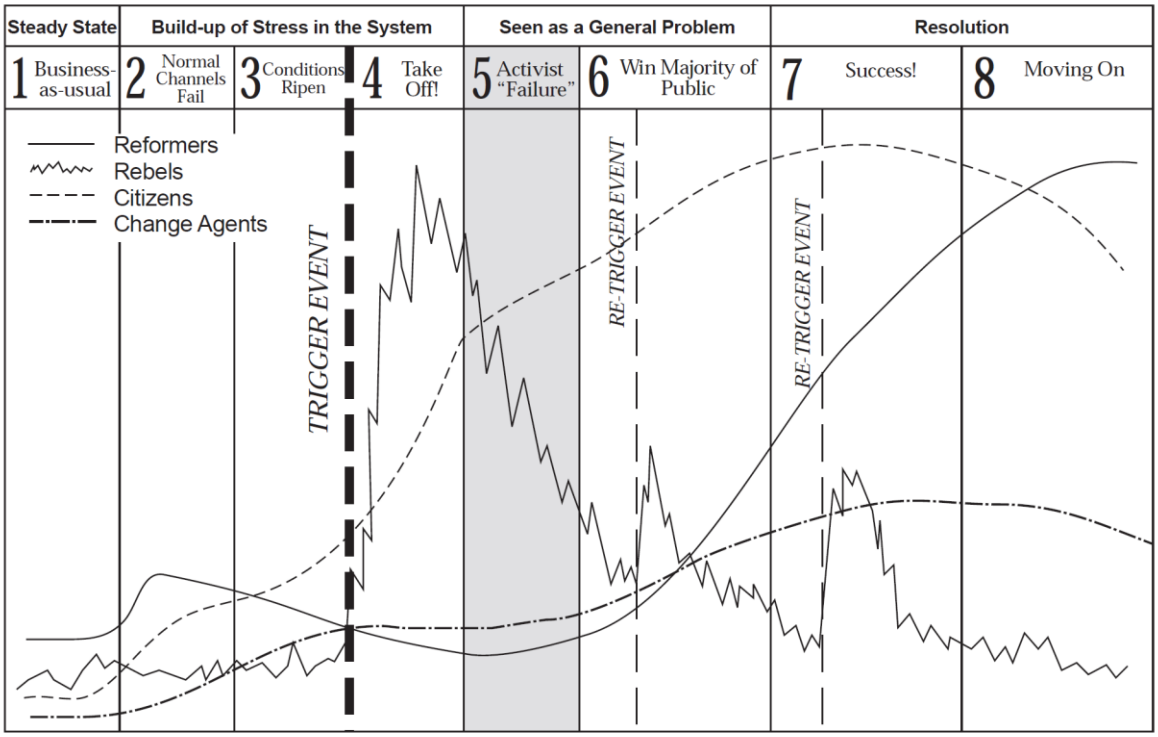
Another aspect of diversity across our movements relates to the wide range of roles involved in successful movements.

A well-used typology here comes from the work of Bill Moyer. He identifies four key roles: *rebel*, *reformer*, *citizen*, and *change agent*. These roles and their significance in the process of social change are mapped onto a timeline that suggests a specific sequence of phases in the life of a movement, running from 'kick-off' to success. During different phases the different roles take on greater or lesser prominence, but through the entire process all have a key part to play.

George Lakey offered a reinterpretation of Moyer's work here:
https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/bill-moyer-four-roles-of-social-change/

Moyer's Four Roles and Phases





The Four Activist Roles - Participation

Adapted from Moyer, Bill. *The Practical Strategist*. San Francisco: Social Movement Empowerment Project, 1990.

Again, it is worth considering the different organising cultures that characterise these diverse roles – and different ways that leadership shows up within them. It is also worth noting, that unlike Wright's typology of strategies, Moyer's typology of roles operates more or less exclusively within the framework of a liberal-democratic reform process.

Building on Moyer's work, Natasha Adams, who is one of the trainers who has been developing the Ecology of Social Movements training, generated an expanded typology based on research into the history of environmental and LGBTQI+ movements in the UK. Her extended typology adds the role of news media, thought leaders, artistic and cultural production, and the roles involved in the diverse approaches across grassroots and professional NGO mobilising and organising. It can be useful to expand our sense of who we consider movement actors to include this wide range of contributions.

Natasha's full list becomes:

- Rebels
- News Media
- Culture, Celebrity and Transformative Thought Leadership
- Shallow Public Engagement
- Deeper Public Engagement
- Bridge Building
- Coalitions
- Policy Research
- Insider Advocacy
- Supportive Groups Inside Political Parties
- Other actors (Unions and faith groups)

Her typology suggests a broadening out of the field of a social movement to include some actors who might not usually be identified with it, but whose role, based on her research, plays a decisive role.

It might be worth reflecting that her identification of some key roles also raiases interesting questions about the diverse ways that leadership might show up within the kinds of organising or activity spaces they imply. For example, Natasha makes a distinction between *shallow* and *deep* public engagement, which is a distinction that seems to correspond to the distinction often made between *mobilising* and *organising*. If both of these approaches play their part, does this also suggest distinct types of leadership across these two areas of movement work?

Similarly, the nature of leadership in the context of *bridge building* or *coalition* is likely to be quite different to intra-organisational leadership. Again, suggesting that a singular notion of leadership or leaderful organising could fall short of accounting for the different leadership tasks/qualities required across these different roles.

Typology Three: Movement Capabilities

It can help us to understand what makes movements more or less effective to think about the range of capabilities they require to have a transformative impact. Building on a list derived from Zeynep Tufekci's book, *Twitter and Teargas*, we've devised a framework that emphasises five key capabilities: Narrative, Disruptive, Institutional, Resilience, and Prefigurative. And we use this to help us design a programme, build collaborations, and draw in skills and experience that can support capacity building in these areas.

Thinking in terms of *movement capabilities* can provide a different way to categorise diverse contributions, tasks, and roles within our movements:

Narrative capability

Movements need to be able to tell stories, especially stories about how we got here and where we want to be heading. This is about analysis of the conditions that give rise to the injustices and problems we want to address. It's also about vision and aspiration. And, importantly, what we can do to achieve that.

Narrative capability is also about telling the story of who we are. Social movements are built on a sense of empowering connection. They need to articulate a shared sense of purpose and the collective identity that underpins collective agency.

Disruptive capability

Often this is one of the most visible manifestations of movement capability, and often what the onlooking public think of when bringing the idea of more radical social movements to mind. Action that in some way creates a disruption to normal service can take many forms. Massive demonstrations that spill out of the permissible rules of the game, strike action, boycotts, occupations, the wide-ranging tactics of nonviolent direct action, and of course riots or rebellion.

At one level these actions are simply ways of saying 'no, we're not standing by as more damage is done'. They can seek to directly stop injustice and environmental damage, sometimes temporarily, but at times with lasting impact. They put the system under pressure, raising the cost of the everyday functioning of the systems they challenge in numerous ways, escalating the tension and seeking to create leverage for demands to be heard.

Institutional capability

As Tufekci usefully discusses in her analysis if the Arab Spring, where social movements that can achieve disruptive capability but lack an institutional capability, while they are able to articulate areas of resistance and achieved important victories, they mostly fail to constitute a systemic threat. Or as Chantal Mouffe writes concerning the Indignats and Occupy movements,

> Those protests were the signal of a political awakening after years of relative apathy. However, the refusal of those horizontalist movements to engage with the political institutions limited their impact. And without any form of articulation with institutional politics, they soon began to lose their dynamics. Although such protest movements have certainly played a role in the transformation of political consciousness, it is only when they have been followed by structured political movements, ready to engage with political institutions, that significant results have been achieved.[ii]

Of course, any such analysis runs the risk of exposing it's short sightedness and failing to take adequate account of the non-linear and complex nature of social change. Sometimes the legacy of these attempts and the shifts in culture and discourse they achieve can lay important foundations for new rounds of action.

Nevertheless, movements that lack what Mouffe calls a *political relay* and intentionally eschew institutional engagement find their demands hit a wall, are co-opted, or need to be taken up elsewhere. These are the kind of lessons that saw the 15M movement in Spain inform the party formations of Podemos and the new municipalism of Barcelona En Comu. And something of the realisation can also be seen to influence the flocking of radicals in the UK into Labour during the brief period of Corbynism.

Resilience

This aspect of movement capability has been a core part of the work leading to the creation of the Ulex Project. Our first set of longer residential trainings were designed to respond to the needs of activists to make important shifts in activist culture to help avoid the repetitive cycles of burnout, the haemorrhaging of talent and skill it implies, and the disruptions it causes to the necessarily long-term project of movement building.

A further dimension that is crucial here is for movement practice to be capable of meeting and responding to repression. Activists come under direct repressive attack and suppressive strategies from state and non-state actors. Learning how to analyse risks and to deal with these threats is an important part of a psychosocial approach to activist sustainability. Skills related to various dimensions of security are also needed to compliment the softer psychosocial approaches. This kind of work can be difficult to fund, due to its longer term and preventative nature. But gradually were seeing increasing awareness amongst organisations and funders of its importance.

Prefigurative capability

Given the challenges of transforming the world, it is important that we don't lose sight of the value and power of making sure that the ways we struggle embody, as best we can, the kind of new and caring social relations we strive for. Prefigurative capacity is simply about walking the talk. Its about creating organisations that embody a culture of care, anti-oppression practice, and honour each

other's potential as human beings. We need to avoid a utilitarian approach, to develop skills in transformative collaboration, and ensure our groups challenge multiple forms of oppression within themselves.

This is about the way power functions in our groups, the ways we make decisions, the way we balance autonomy and cooperation, how we work with finance and the economic dimensions of activist organising. When we do this well, not only does this align with values, but it also serves to kindle the radical imagination. Where we can see our values embodied, even in the microcosm of our groups, it strengthens the important belief that change is possible. It nurtures our sense of the value of our vision and the potential we have to create social conditions where it comes alive.

The Interface with Everyday Life

Perhaps another set of factors that could be important in developing a specific typology of movement actors, roles, and cultures relates to the types of organisation, their economic models, and the ways people interact with them. Laurence Cox in a paper on Sustainable Activism points out that:

> Different movements interface with everyday life and social routines in different ways. Put another way, someone's movement participation can be primarily a job, an identity, a part of their everyday culture or a dimension of their working life; and these different situations affect individual activists but also shape movements insofar as most movements have a centre of gravity in one or other of these (perhaps a characteristic of a truly powerful movement is its presence across multiple dimensions).

He goes on to list different activist contexts in terms of:

- **Workplace-based movements**: Peasant and labour struggles are naturally workplace-based, while other types of activism (e.g. sabotage during the European resistance to fascism) can also be centred here.
- **Community-based movements**: Some movements naturally tend to organise within people's residential or social communities – working-class community organising, GLBTQI activism and many ethnic or religious movements, for example.
- **Professional or full-time activism**: In some kinds of movement situation (parties, unions, media, NGOs and so on) many or most activists are employed *by* movement organisations.
- **"Leisure" activism**: Some kinds of movements take place outside where most of their participants work and live, in the social space otherwise occupied by leisure activities.

These different situations represent different forms of institutionalisation (or lack of it). Institutionalisation, together with routinisation and social normalisation, has effects on many aspects of activist and organising culture. The different economic relations and dependencies (or lack of them) can have a significant affect on the power dynamics across these contexts, which inevitably bears on questions of leadership and influence.

Other contextual factors

Finally, scale will also be an important component. We've already mentioned the potential differences we should bear in mind when trying to conceptualise leadership practice at the level of coalitions or organisations, but this would also apply within organisations depending on their scale.

Very different possibilities for deeper relationship building and trust exist within smaller affinity groups or in the relatively anonymous workforce in a large NGO. How leadership or *leaderfulless* can be practiced and promoted in these situations will be necessarily different too.

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[i] See Mouffes' assertions concerning institutional transformation from within and the radical reframing. Similarly Podemos as an example. Likewise, the ecovillage movement might not easily align itself with Anarchism, even where it has picked up many of the core values of the traditions. Autonomous squats and social centres would more easily align in this way, although self-image might be more in terms of a romantic ruptural approach.

[ii] For a Left Populism, Location 244