THE DESIGN OF INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENTS
Stuart Umpleby
The George Washington University
Washington, DC
How I became interested

- Second order cybernetics was an important addition to the philosophy of science
- It was not being widely adopted in the U.S.
- People in Europe seemed to be more interested
- The advocates gave as a reason for their interest a consequence that is not widely challenged in the U.S.
Definitions of first and second order cybernetics

- The cybernetics of observed systems
- The purpose of a model
- Controlled systems
- Interaction among the variables in a system
- Theories of social systems
- The cybernetics of observing systems
- The purpose of a modeler
- Autonomous systems
- Interaction between observer and observed
- Theories of the interaction between ideas and society
Examples of intellectual movements

• Communitarianism in the political culture of the U.S.
• Total quality management in corporations in Japan, the U.S., and other countries
• Multi-culturalism in the humanities
• Lefebvre’s theory of reflexive control
Generalizations about intellectual movements (1)

• Cultures are influenced by climate, geography, and history

• Cultures deal with some issues subconsciously (in cultural norms) and with other issues consciously (in philosophy and education)

• The distribution of issues to culture or philosophy will be different for different societies
Generalizations about intellectual movements (2)

• Concepts that are taken for granted in some societies are missing in others

• An intellectual movement grows out of a particular culture and is an attempt to change a particular culture

• Intellectual movements which have a dramatic impact on one society may have little impact on another
Generalizations about intellectual movements (3)

• To be accepted, a new message must fit the local culture. What the new message values, the society must value.

• If we assume that societies pass through similar stages of development (e.g., pastoralism, agriculture, industry, etc.), then cultures may be ready to adopt different messages at different times.
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (1)

- Knowledge is based on an assessment of the situation
- Influenced by British empiricism and American pragmatism
- Question: What does American society need now?

- Knowledge is prior to action
- Influenced by German idealism
- Question: What do philosophy and science need now?
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (2)

• Answer: People should be concerned about their responsibilities as well as their rights

• Recommendation: Citizens should become more involved in public affairs

• Answer: The observer should be included within the domain of science

• Recommendation: Scientists should use a constructivist as opposed to a realist epistemology
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (3)

• Theories are imperfect descriptions of the phenomenon described
• Action is based on social role
• Ideas are important if they enable more effective action in the world

• The inner world has primacy over the outer world
• Action is based on philosophical position
• The free realm of ideas is preferred over the necessary realm of matter
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (4)

• The public interest is debated by the citizenry

• Arguments are addressed to educated citizens, and also academics

• Social change requires changing policies, laws, and institutions, not just ideas

• The public interest is debated primarily in a university

• Arguments are addressed to professional intellectuals

• If ideas about the nature of knowledge change, change in science and society will follow
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (5)

- Focus on certain academic disciplines -- economics, sociology, political science
- An historical experience of domination by a remote government
- The key task of society is to protect individual liberties
- Attempt to alter the conception of knowledge, regardless of discipline
- An historical experience of political chaos and disorder
- A key task of society is to control dissent
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (6)

- A high regard for practical, not theoretical, knowledge
- Tolerance is justified by respect for the individual, by empathy with others, and by the desire to ensure one’s own liberties by protecting those of others
- A high regard for philosophical thought
- Tolerance is justified by our knowledge of neurophysiology and the consequent inability of the individual to be certain of his or her beliefs
An American strategy vs. a European strategy (7)

- Intolerance is restrained by morality and law

- Tolerance and respect for others are axioms, a starting point

- Intolerance is inappropriate given the imperfect nature of our knowledge

- The appropriateness of tolerance is the conclusion of a scientific investigation; “others” are needed to confirm or challenge our beliefs
Coming to understand an intellectual movement (1)

• What do those who are advocating the new point of view believe? What are they saying?

• Why do they think that what they are saying is important? What is the problem they perceive?

• What is missing in the society such that the new point of view fills a gap?
Coming to understand an intellectual movement (2)

• What are the underlying assumptions about human nature and the role of government?
• What groups favor or oppose the new view?
• What groups within society are the advocates of the new view attempting to persuade?
• How will the political, economic, and cultural life of the society change if the new ideas are accepted?
How to create an intellectual movement (1)

• What is the problem? What is needed?
• Why is this a problem? Why is the problem important?
• If the problem is not yet widely recognized, why not? What beliefs or values prevent its recognition?
• Where is attention currently focused instead of on this problem?
How to create an intellectual movement (2)

• Why was that focus of attention appropriate in the past?

• What circumstances have changed such that a redirection of attention is appropriate/needed/required?

• Is the message adequate or complete, that is, is there a philosophy, theory, and method of implementation?
How to create an intellectual movement (3)

• Is the message being delivered often enough and through enough channels?
• What change in behavior is expected if people change their beliefs or values?
• What trends in society support the new view? What trends oppose the new view?
APA Work Groups (1)

• Using quality improvement methods within APA
• Promoting professional ethics through best practice guidelines
• Increasing public understanding of the effects of violence in the media on childhood development
APA Work Groups (2)

- Raising awareness about disparities in health care services and outcomes
- Promoting discussions of end-of-life issues