

Epilogue

Restorative Justice – A Movement in the Making?

by Carl Stauffer

How do we guide, nurture and grow the restorative justice movement? Generally, social movement theory points to a number of critical factors that drive successful social movements. These revolve around the following elements: the readiness to seize *political opportunity*, the ability to *mobilize resources* (both human and material), and the creation of a *framing message* (a social narrative) with populist appeal. Based on these three pillars of measurement it seems that restorative justice could be defined as a burgeoning social movement.

Political Opportunity. The United States, and indeed the world, are in a convulsive political moment in history. The status quo institutions of the modern nation-state, such as justice systems, education, economy and government, are being contested and deconstructed at the core. Competing movements with deep strains of anti-establishment rhetoric (whether from the right or the left) are calling for radical change. The restorative justice movement and its call to reconfigure our perceptions, relationships and structures of criminal, social and cultural justice is stepping into this gap with particular relevance.

Resource Mobilization. For the first time, prominent justice donors are asking questions about long-term resourcing and the systemic impacts of their funding. More than in any other time in history, the restorative justice field is experiencing a burst of energy in new theorizing, research and legislative policy development across a broad swath of professional disciplines and sectors of practice.

Framing Message. Never before have we seen such a keen interest in restorative justice coming from practitioners, educators, politicians, activists, community organizers, the media and religious leaders. New applications and the accompanying social narrative discourses are being constructed for whole-schools change, trauma-informed approaches to change, nonviolent mobilization, racial justice advocacy, community organizing and development, environmental policy, and war-to-peace transitions and reconstruction.

All of the above descriptors point us in the direction of a “critical mass” or “tipping point” moment in time where a comprehensive cultural shift is likely to occur.¹ Social transformation at this scale requires that we make a systemic diagnosis of the situation and its context, that we develop social capital networks and structures to enable the continual flow of “feedback loops” for reflective practice, and that we find personal identification and passion for the work to progress unhindered in the future. Quantum physics and the new sciences on emergent adaptive systems (EAS) are helping us understand the dynamics of social movements. Dr. Glenda Eoyang and her work with *Human Systems Dynamics* (HSD)² advises all who are looking to undergo, guide and/or channel effective systems transformation to consider three pivotal elements in the process of change. The following questions comprising the CDE model³ (Conditions Difference Exchange) can help us chart a way forward to strengthen the restorative justice movement.

¹ Gladwell, M. (2002). *The Tipping Point*. ABACUS Publishers.

² See: <http://www.hsdinstitute.org/what-is-hsd.html>

³ See: <http://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/cde-model-dissertation.html>

A. Reflect on, question and change the **Containers** (cultural and structural) that hold the system. *Sample questions might be:*

- How do we move beyond the punitive worldview so prevalent in our society and guide a critical mass attitudinal shift in the direction of a restorative worldview for the future?
- How do we continue to mobilize the application of restorative justice away from solely being defined by the criminal legal system and instead having impact in every sector of society including governance, business, education, family, religion, media and the arts and culture with which we all interact?
- How do we imagine a structural vehicle for the expansion and multiplication of restorative justice at a collective societal level that is not constrained by only the nonprofit model of organizational functioning?

B. Reflect on, question and change the perceived **Differences** that are being defined and reinforced in the system. *Sample questions might be:*

- How do we find a new language that does not restrict us to the criminal legal labels of “victim” and “offender” that present an artificial bifurcation and a political polarization between people who are harmed and who have harmed?
- How do we identify, educate and advocate for change where racialized systems of governance, education and justice have led to mass incarceration and racial disproportionality?

- How do we find ways to build coalitions between the western and non-western (indigenous) understandings of worldview, justice and even the way we name our practices (restorative justice or peacemaking circles) for the purposes of working for a unified sense of the “common good” in society?

C. Reflect on, question and change the **Exchanges** (tangible and intangible reciprocities) that are embedded and taken for granted in the system. *Sample questions might be:*

- How do communities take back the process of solving and transforming their own social conflicts and harms that have been stolen by the State and its apparatuses of surveillance and control?
- How do we resist the tendency to become dependent on the State for our needs of protection, safety and security, and instead nurture the informal networks of support that will sustain healthy relationships, healing and well-being?
- How do we break the funding-industrial-complex that insists on short 1 to 3-year project grant cycles which belie sustainability and instead challenge the donor community to support long-term and maximum impact funding mechanisms that consider growth in terms of 5-10 years or decadal thinking – 20 years plus?

Eoyang suggests that at the reflective core of any emergent Complex-Adaptive System (CAS) we need to be continually asking ourselves what is the next “wise” move? To do this we

need to engage in an iterative, *adaptive action*⁴ learning cycle that asks three critical questions presented now in Figure 1: What? So What? Now What?

Figure 1: Adaptive Action Model

What?	So What?	Now What?
What are current patterns?	So what are the tensions?	Now what will we do?
What do you observe?	So what is important?	Now what will we communicate?
What surprises you?	So what options do we have?	Now what will we measure?
What happened before?	So what does success look like	Now what will we look for next?
What are people saying?	now?	Now what . . .
What is the research?	So what . . .	
What . . .		

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In order for restorative justice as a social movement to aspire to become an authentic, vibrant social *justice* movement, there are at least six distinctive characteristics that would need to be embodied:

1. Integrating the populations most affected by injustice (the harmed and the harm-doers, family connections and community networks) and amplifying their voices and participatory liberation in the process.

⁴ See: <https://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/adaptive-action.html>

2. Resisting widespread, ‘quick-fix’ and/or politically compromised legislation that can often drive institutional co-option and forced uniformity.
3. Insisting on centering and engaging racial and ethnic justice and healing historical harms of colonization and violent oppression in this country and across the world.
4. Determining to make application to transforming personal, social and structural violence and all intersecting relationships that make up the web of human justice.
5. Committing to de-institutionalization, to decentralized organizational structures, and to “bottom-up” justice expressions and processes.
6. Exemplifying shared and emancipatory leadership models and functions.

Holding all these important elements together in tandem with each other will be essential if restorative justice is to transform into a genuine social justice movement and remain durable and sustainable for the long-term future.

Note: all citations are listed in the bibliography for the Introduction