

Development Bridging Organizations and Strategic Management for Social Change

by L. David Brown

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INTRODUCTION

Pradip Khandwalla (1988) has argued that some organizations are strategic in the sense of being critical actors in major social changes, rather than in the sense of being organized around a strategy. This paper examines "development bridging organizations" as an organizational form that is increasingly strategic to sustainable social problem-solving and development. These organizations span social gaps to mobilize cooperation among diverse stakeholders who cannot solve the problems by themselves (Brown, 1991). Consider the following:

The Savings Development Movement (SDM) of Zimbabwe was started by three men concerned with promoting more savings for investment in agricultural improvements by rural villagers, especially women. They invented a savings technology that could be used by groups of illiterate villagers, arranged for the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs to provide training, encouraged the Ministry of Agriculture to provide consultations on improving farming practices, and persuaded a fertilizer company to support training for village savings clubs. They catalyzed a movement for using local savings to improve agricultural productivity that eventually affected 250,000 poor villagers in Zimbabwe. (Bratton, 1989)

The Jamestown Area Labor Management Committee (JALMC) in New York was started by a mayor concerned about the economic decline of the region, as many corporations moved their operations to areas with less union-management conflict. After some difficult initial meetings, labor and management representatives agreed on a number of joint initiatives that transformed the climate of labor relations in the area, improved productivity in several local manufacturing operations, increased innovations on various fronts, and ultimately drew new employers to the region. (Trist, 1986)

SDM and JALMC as development bridging organizations share several characteristics. First, they are concerned with promoting sustainable social and economic changes, rather than focusing primarily on their own immediate interests. The SDM sought to increase the productive capacity of village women, and the JALMC was created to improve the economic viability of the Jamestown region. Second, they brought together stakeholders that were diverse in wealth, power and culture. The SDM coordinated action by village women, government bureaucrats, corporate managers,

and international donors to increase agricultural productivity. The JALMC catalyzed cooperation among union leaders, corporation managers, and government officials to shape the local climate for economic development. The combination of economic, political, and social differences can create chasms of misunderstanding, mistrust, and antagonism that hamper effective joint action. The possibility of significant economic, political, or social change can provoke conflict and resistance from key actors that undermine effective problem-solving. In a world of growing interdependence and blurring national and regional boundaries, organizations that bridge such differences to solve common problems are vital to the development and even the viability of societies.

Analysts of strategic management emphasize issues like setting strategic directions, implementing plans, dealing with continuous change, responding to multiple stakeholders, and creating alternative futures for organizations (Hofer and Schendel, 1978; Freeman, 1984; Gluck, 1986). Most of the work on strategic management has been done with corporations in the for-profit sector. Is strategic management relevant to development bridging organizations in other sectors? Further, does analysis of their experience have implications for other kinds of organizations?

This paper will argue that articulating strategic directions, fostering joint action, managing turbulent environments, linking diverse stakeholders, and reshaping the environmental context are essential for development bridging organizations. Their experience contains important lessons for other organizations that operate in an increasingly interdependent world, and their social change activities may create the external contexts within which many other organizations will operate.

The next section deals with the nature of bridging organizations and their importance for social change. The following section identifies strategic problems inherent in bridging roles. The fourth section describes options for handling these problems. Finally, the paper discusses implications of this analysis for other organizations and for societal development.

THE GLOBAL "PROBLEMATIQUE" AND BRIDGING ORGANIZATIONS

The last decade of the twentieth century promises to be one of extreme turbulence and challenge. The Club of Rome coined the term "global problematique" to describe the interacting problems that threaten present civilizations and even the viability of the planet (King and Schneider, 1991). The problematique involves many factors -- political, economic, technological, cultural, ecological, and psychological. Economically, for example, the discrepancy between rich and poor countries is an increasingly serious problem. The discrepancies in average incomes between the Northern industrialized and Southern developing countries *doubled* during the last three decades: residents of the richer (top twenty per cent) countries earned thirty times the incomes of residents of the poorer (bottom twenty per cent) in 1960, and *fifty-nine* times the income in 1989 (UNDP, 1992). Ecologically the twenty years since the first Earth Day have produced a substantial deterioration in environmental conditions, with serious impacts on factors like biodiversity, climate, forests, fisheries, and agricultural land (Postel, 1992), and the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio offers little hope for major changes in Northern government policies in the immediate future. Over the last decades significant political changes have ended the Cold War and the superpower confrontation,

expanded political and economic alliances such as the European Economic Community, and produced more political pluralism in Eastern Europe and many developing countries. These changes produce political uncertainties as well as improvements (UNDP, 1992). The next decade presents opportunities and risks that have few parallels in previous history as these economic, ecological, and political dynamics unfold.

Responding to these problems requires innovations on at least two fronts. First, existing institutional arrangements have proved largely inadequate to the challenges posed by the global problematique. Thus the two dominant paradigms for development -- the state-led socialist paradigm or the market-led capitalist paradigm -- are both significantly flawed (Berger, 1974; Wolfe, 1989). Both have produced institutional gigantism and lack of responsiveness to the populations those institutions are intended to serve. Increasingly, theorists of many persuasions are seeking paradigms that make use of a wider range of institutional resources and sectors (Unger, 1987; Wolfe, 1989; Esman, 1991; Wuthnow, 1991). Institutional arrangements that catalyze effective use of problem-solving talent, energy, and resources across classes, sectors, and national boundaries are desperately needed (Esman, 1991; King and Schneider, 1991; Commission on Developing Countries and Global Change, 1992).

Second, efforts to respond to the problematique are undermined by the lack of common values and visions. Increasing interdependence requires joint action by nations or regions that are very different in political systems, economic status and cultural aspirations. Joint action is extremely difficult to conceive and implement, without first negotiating agreement on a moral and spiritual base that recognizes and accepts the diversity of participants as well as their similarities (see Milbrath, 1989; King and Schneider, 1991).

Organizations that enable diverse stakeholders to articulate and implement solutions to complex problems can make seminal contributions to solving both the institutional and the values problems. "Bridging organizations" in the most general sense span gaps between many different organizations, and their importance as integrating mechanisms has been recognized in analyses of "referent organizations" (Trist, 1983; Gray, 1989), "intermediate structures" (Berger and Neuhaus, 1977), "coordination structures" (Astley & Fombrun, 1983), and "conveners" (Wood and Gray, 1991). Bridging organizations can be distinguished from other forms of interorganizational collaboration (such as joint ventures, multi-party roundtables, or mediations) in that they have identities and interests that are independent of the other stakeholders (Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). As a consequence, they engage in bilateral negotiations with stakeholders and they may seek to impose their own perspectives and solutions on other stakeholders. Roundtables and joint ventures in theory do not have such independent identities, though in practice and over time they are likely to develop their own identities and goals independent of their founding members (Brown, 1983).

In the last decade bridging organizations have emerged in many settings as catalysts for defining problems and mobilizing resources. For example, interorganizational cooperation by public and private agencies to solve local problems, like the Jamestown Area Labor-Management Committee, have emerged in hundreds of communities (Committee on Economic Development, 1982; Fosler and Berger, 1982;

Trist, 1983; Gray, 1989;). Many corporations have recognized that networks of specialized organizations coordinated by a "general partner," as in coalitions formed to take on large construction projects, may be more efficient and effective than large organizations with multiple divisions (Miles and Snow, 1984; Piore and Sabel, 1984; Lawrence and Johnson, 1988). Interorganizational cooperation is increasingly common for many purposes.

Development bridging organizations promote social changes that involve stakeholders with diverse economic, political and cultural interests, like the Savings Development Movement and the Jamestown Area Labor Management Committee. Bridging organizations are particularly suited to promoting collaboration when stakeholders are not motivated to cooperate and the problems are not well-organized and understood (Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). Combinations of organizations from different institutional sectors and levels of society may be able to solve otherwise intractable problems (Brown, 1988; Esman, 1991; Brown and Tandon, 1992) if they are willing to work with each other and they understand the problems. Development bridging organizations can catalyze the creation of shared understanding and solutions, and they can link different stakeholders to jointly implement those solutions. In short, they are key actors in articulating shared visions and in constructing institutional arrangements for achieving them.

Table 1 lists examples of development bridging organizations concerned with a variety of social change problems in industrialized and developing countries. The table summarizes briefly the problems and the stakeholders involved. These examples will provide illustrations in later discussion.

Bridging organizations that catalyze shared visions and coordinate joint action on complex social problems can be essential to the "resolutique" for the global "problematique" (King and Schneider, 1991). The rest of this analysis will examine strategic problems confronted by development bridging organizations, management alternatives for handling them, and some implications of their experience for other organizations and societies.

CORE DILEMMAS OF BRIDGING ORGANIZATIONS

Development bridging organizations span the gaps among diverse stakeholders to promote social change. Thus, the Jamestown Area Labor Management Committee became the link among corporations, unions, local government officials, and external consultants that enabled parties with a long history of conflict to articulate shared concerns and then undertake joint activities, like training workers, that would benefit them all. Development bridging organizations may have to span major differences in values and cultural expectations, power and political perspectives, and wealth and economic views. The Savings Development Movement worked with illiterate village women, Ministry officials, corporate leaders, and international development agency staff to increase agricultural productivity in thousands of villages.

Table 1: Development Bridging Organizations

Bridging Organization	Problem	Stakeholders	Source
Highlander Research and Education Center, USA	Mobilize grassroots knowledge, skills and organization to challenge powerful interests	Grassroots groups; Government agencies; Social movement organizations	Horton and Freire, 1990; Horton with Kohl and Kohl, 1990
Jamestown Area Labor-Management Center (JALMC), USA	Regional economic decline as companies move away from labor-management conflict	Manufacturing plants; Local unions; Municipal government	Trist, 1986
The Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information (LP3ES), Indonesia	Local management of small irrigation systems when government resources shrink	Irrigation Department; Water user associations; International donors	Purnomo and Pambagio, 1991; Bruns and Soelaiman, 1991
Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), Pakistan	Construct latrines and sanitation systems in urban slum areas in Karachi	Public Works Department; Neighborhood groups; International donors	Rashid, 1991
Relief and Development Agency (RADA)*, USA	Resources for grassroots empowerment for sustainable development in developing countries	Northern donors; Northern publics and governments; Southern grassroots groups;	Brown and Brown, 1983; Brown and Covey, 1985
Savings Development Movement (SDM), Zimbabwe	Lack of local savings to invest in improving agricultural productivity in villages, especially for women	Village savings clubs; Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture; Fertilizer corporation; International donors	Bratton, 1990; Brown, 1991
Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India	Strengthen capacities of development NGOs and grassroots groups for local empowerment	Grassroots groups; Development NGOs; Government agencies; Northern donors	Brown, 1991; PRIA, 1989

* Pseudonym

Dealing with multiple stakeholders is difficult, as indicated by many strategic management theorists (e.g., Freeman, 1984). For bridging organizations helping diverse stakeholders work better together is a primary concern, and the chasms spanned may involve multiple perspectives, clashes of value, and histories of escalated conflict. The combination of social change agendas and stakeholders diverse in power, wealth and culture creates characteristic problems for bridging organizations, including: (1) conflicting stakeholder demands, (2) internal fragmentation, (3) leadership vulnerability, (4) strategic diffusion, and (5) threats from success.

Conflicting Stakeholder Demands

The stakeholders in a specific social problem often have very different interests and perspectives, and so exert conflicting pressures on development bridging organizations. Consider, for example, the challenges to the Orangi Pilot Project:

The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) is a non-governmental development organization that worked with neighborhood associations in the urban slums of Karachi to define and carry out local improvement programs. After months of discussion with neighborhood associations, OPP began work with them to build latrines and sanitation systems. Initially, OPP kept a low profile to avoid suppression by government officials and contractors who benefitted from the status quo, but ultimately they also worked with government agencies and international donors as well as neighborhood associations to use local resources to build tens of thousands of latrines and associated sewage systems at a fraction of the going rate for latrine construction. (Rashid, 1990).

One consequence of stakeholder diversity may be challenges to the capacity of the bridging organization to establish and maintain *credibility*. The OPP had to spend six months developing relationships and credibility with slum dwellers, even though it had considerable credibility at the outset with the other stakeholders. It also chose to avoid powerful government agencies until it established a track record that enabled it to influence government policies, in part by its credibility with international donors. The more conflict there is among stakeholders, the more intense the tests of bridging organization credibility may become.

Conflicting stakeholder demands may require that bridging organizations *develop capacity for both cooperation and challenge*. Some conflicts cannot be resolved without influencing stakeholders to moderate their demands. When government agencies sought to expand the work of the OPP, they initially proposed a process that would reduce participation by neighborhood organizations. The OPP refused to accept this proposal, risking confrontation with a military regime. Deciding when to cooperate and when to challenge stakeholder demands is often critical for bridging organizations. Challenge to powerful stakeholders, like state agencies in a military regime, involves substantial risks.

Stakeholder conflicts may also require *bridging serious power differences*. Had the OPP been unwilling to challenge government agencies on behalf of the neighborhood groups, the project's ability to mobilize grassroots resources would have been

severely undermined. Significant social changes almost always have political ramifications -- often ramifications that encourage current power-holders to use their influence against the interests of other stakeholders. Bridging organizations that cannot work effectively across power inequalities are irrelevant to many critical problems.

The diversity of stakeholder demands, in short, pose dilemmas of credibility, conflict, and power for bridging organizations. When stakeholders have different values and visions, unequal power, and significant conflicts of interest, the challenges of bringing them together can be substantial.

Internal Fragmentation

Bridging organizations are often organized around values and social visions. Their staffs are often sufficiently committed to these visions to work long hours for low pay under uncomfortable conditions. But commitment to social visions and work with diverse constituencies can be an explosive combination. For example:

The Relief and Development Agency (RADA) is a private voluntary organization that raises funds from individual donors in industrialized countries and supports grassroots development and disaster relief projects in developing countries. RADA staff are strongly committed to promoting more equitable distributions of resources, local empowerment, and social justice. The organization has grown tenfold over five years, and it is now organized into departments that specialize in working with key stakeholder, such as fundraising with wealthy constituents or overseas projects with poor grassroots groups (Brown and Brown, 1983; Brown and Covey, 1985).

It is natural to organize bridging organizations into departments that work with specific stakeholders, especially when diverse stakeholders have quite different expectations and requirements. This choice can lead to *internal policy conflicts*, however, as subunits pursue the interests of the stakeholders they represent. At RADA fundraisers identified with the concerns of comparatively wealthy donors in industrialized countries, while overseas projects staff identified with oppressed and impoverished project participants in developing countries. The two departments argued bitterly over fundraising approaches and organizational policies that affected their different stakeholders.

Internal conflicts can be intensified by differences in values and ideology. When stakeholder identifications combine with ideological interpretations of disagreements, internal conflicts can escalate. RADA staff often attributed policy differences to ideologies (e.g. "Those reactionary fundraisers will say anything to get more money" or "The radicals in projects are taking extreme political positions that scare away donors.") The resulting conflicts can escalate into *value-driven "holy wars"* that are difficult to regulate or resolve.

The combination of stakeholder identifications and organization around values can fragment bridging organizations. These fragmentation dynamics can produce endless debilitating conflicts, decision-making paralysis, or organizational upheavals and changes in leadership (Brown and Brown, 1983; Brown and Covey, 1985).

Leadership Vulnerability

The leaders of bridging organizations are subject to many pressures. The demands of stakeholders are often complex and conflicting, and internal fragmentation can further complicate their lives. In addition, leaders of organizations based on values and visions are expected to embody those values and visions. Dealing effectively with demands of diverse stakeholders and embodying organizational values may not be compatible expectations.

Consider the challenges facing the founder of PRIA:

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is a nongovernmental development organization that uses funds from government agencies and international donors to provide research and training support to grassroots movements and development NGOs in India and Asia. In its first six years, PRIA provided services to several hundred grassroots groups, undertook projects for dozens of donor agencies, challenged several controversial government policies, and worked with international networks concerned with participatory research, primary health care, and adult education. The founder became highly visible as a skilled and effective leader. While PRIA recruited and trained capable staff over this period, some outsiders still believed that "the founder is PRIA, and PRIA is the founder." Some staff also acted as if no decisions could be made without the founder's participation.

Dependence on leaders is hardly a phenomenon confined to development bridging organizations. But such dependence is particularly problematic when it is complicated by stakeholder conflicts, fragmented staffs, and expectations that the leader will embody organizational values while dealing with conflicting demands. One consequence for bridging organizations is *leadership overload*, as leaders try to be all things to all people. Some stakeholders expected PRIA's founder to provide personal follow-up to its training programs, while PRIA staff felt that his work and travel demands delayed decisions too much. Bridging organizations often present leadership challenges out of proportion to their size.

A second problem for bridging organizations is *leadership isolation*. Bridging organizations often need founders who are conceptually adept, skilled at working with diverse stakeholders, and charismatic in dealing with large groups. This is a potent combination for influencing diverse stakeholders in poorly understood and loosely-organized situations, but it can also reduce staff and stakeholder willingness to challenge and stimulate leaders. The leader of PRIA explicitly encouraged feedback and discussion of his own and the organization's shortcomings, but PRIA staff and stakeholders still found it difficult to challenge him.

Isolation and overload can contribute to *leadership burnout* in founders of bridging organizations. Bridging organizations that depend on overloaded and isolated leaders may not survive such burnouts, since the same staff and stakeholder dynamics discourage preparing others to succeed founders.

Strategic Diffusion

Developing a strategic focus can be extraordinarily difficult for bridging organizations, given the uncertainties of social change, the commitments of staff members, and the conflicting tugs and pulls of stakeholders. But the problems of social change are immense, and bridging organizations can seldom afford to spend resources in ways that do not advance strategic goals. Over time, effective bridging organizations need to reorient their strategies regularly, particularly when they are successful in promoting the social changes they seek.

The Highlander Research and Education Center in Appalachia has been working with grassroots groups on problems of social justice and development for almost sixty years. The Center provided educational support to the union movement in the Southern U.S. in the 1930s, and then helped develop the "citizenship schools" for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, it supported grassroots challenges to strip-mining and absentee landowners, and in the 1980s it has worked closely with grassroots groups concerned with pollution and local economic development. It has worked over the years with funds from individuals, foundations, and some government agencies to support grassroots activism, to link activists with larger movements, and to build coalitions to challenge abuses of power. (Horton with Kohl and Kohl, 1990)

For many bridging organizations the uncertainties about social problems and conflicting stakeholder demands make achieving a clear strategic focus very difficult. They often experience *strategic confusion* in prioritizing alternative actions for constructive change. The Highlander Center tried many activities -- workshops, community organizing, technical assistance -- before focusing on adult education for grassroots activism and problem-solving. It has since provided educational support to a succession of movements to empower grassroots groups. The focus on adult education has allowed Highlander Center to be a bridge between grassroots groups and big unions in the union movement, and between grassroots groups, movement organizations, and ethnic groups in the Civil Rights Movement. (Horton with Kohl and Kohl, 1990)

Even given reasonable clarity about strategy, bridging organizations are often subject to *cooptation pressures* from stakeholders. Cooptation pressures may be political, as in the pressures on Highlander Center to stop challenging the power structure. Cooptation pressures may be financial, such as pressure to fit agency activities to donor priorities. Cooptation pressures may also be ideological, such as grassroots demands that Highlander Center support increasingly radical positions.

The strategies of bridging organizations may also be diffused by *obsolescence*, as changing social forces reduce the relevance or the viability of initial strategies. The entry of many other actors and the rise of the Civil Rights Movement fundamentally changed the role of Highlander Center in the citizenship schools it pioneered. Eventually, it passed on much of the citizenship schools program and staff to other agencies, and turned to applying its educational capacities to other problems. One reason Highlander Center has remained relevant for so long has been its willingness to move on to new strategic issues rather than remain mired in past successes.

Threats From Success

While most organizations make their environmental niches more secure by effective performance, success can make the environments of development bridging organizations more uncertain and turbulent.

The Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information (LP3ES) in Indonesia provides research and education services to support participatory approaches to development. LP3ES provided research and training in a long-term process of policy formulation through which Indonesian government agencies worked with universities, international donors and associations of water users to turn over management of small irrigation systems to water users (Bruns and Soelaiman, 1991; Purnomo and Pambagio, 1992). The contributions of LP3ES were recognized by many observers, but its success also created sensitivities with some government officials and NGO leaders over credit for the program.

Bridging organizations that succeed in the initial steps of a process often find themselves facing *new demands* as a consequence. LP3ES initially participated in a series of research projects on ways to improve farmer participation in local development. This led to further involvement in research and to later requests for LP3ES involvement in training water users and government officials as well. Initial success can lead to requests that bridging organizations take on projects for which they are not well-prepared unless they remain very clear about their strategies and limitations.

Sometimes success creates strong reactions in other actors and may provoke *counter-attacks* by both friends and enemies. The successes of LP3ES in the irrigation project led to both new opportunities and new problems. It raised questions from other Indonesian NGOs about whether LP3ES was "too close" to the government, and sensitivities within the government about the distribution of credit for the new programs.

Success in other cases requires that bridging organization invent *new organizational forms* that can handle expanded demand or work at new levels of aggregation. The Savings Development Movement recognized that it could not expand to meet potential demand if the necessary services were provided by a single NGO. It redefined itself as a bridging organization to link with larger agencies, like government Ministries, to serve a vastly expanded Movement.

When the bridging organization works on large-scale social changes, it may need to *coordinate with social movements* and cope with unexpected opportunities and threats. The Highlander Center made an early commitment to civil rights and to creating "citizenship schools" to prepare for black voter registration, and so became an influential actor with the Civil Rights Movement. But its association also made it a target for enemies of the Movement. The Highlander Center was accused of Communist sympathies in a multi-state advertising campaign and ultimately state authorities confiscated its land and buildings on trumped-up charges because of its Movement association. Success can be a mixed blessing for bridging organizations.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN BRIDGING ORGANIZATIONS

Strategic management has emphasized combining strategy formulation and implementation, continuing change and organizational renewal, and responding to a variety of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Gluck, 1986). This perspective is particularly useful for agencies like development bridging organizations, whose activities and environments can produce strategic diffusion, internal fragmentation, leadership vulnerability, conflicting demands from external stakeholders and threats from success.

Creating Strategic Integrity

The complexity of development problems, the conflicting demands of stakeholders, and the rapidity of social changes all challenge the capacity of bridging organizations to articulate and maintain a strategic focus and a coherent theory of social change. Without a shared understanding of their role and basic direction, it is easy for bridging organizations to waste resources and lose credibility in responding to contradictory signals.

One necessity for preserving strategic integrity is for bridging organizations to periodically *reaffirm their strategy and social change theory*. Ambiguity about strategy offers flexibility and room to maneuver, but it also makes the organization vulnerable to conflicting external pressures and internal interpretations. Reaffirming strategy and social change theory enables the organization and its staff to predict and understand challenges in strategic terms. The Highlander Center, for example, adopted an educational strategy embedded in a social change theory that stresses grassroots organization and empowerment through collective reflection, consciousness raising, and mutual self-help (Horton and Freire, 1991). The Center has tested and reaffirmed this strategy for many issues -- organizing workers for economic justice, educating whites and blacks for civil rights, and mobilizing communities for research and action to stop pollution. Testing and reaffirming the strategies and social change theories is important for both internal and external reasons: it reaffirms staff understanding and commitment to the bridging organization role, and it reconfirms that role to external stakeholders as well.

Most analyses of strategy-making have focused on the rationality of the process, contrasting comprehensive and rational analysis for stable and well-understood contexts with incremental and adaptive processes appropriate to conflicting interests and changing conditions (Allison, 1971; Mintzberg, 1978; Hart 1992). Recent analysts have paid more attention to the organizational consequences of strategy-making, such as creating visions by which organizational members can interpret the world (Chaffee, 1985) or involving many members in the strategy-making process (Hart, 1992). Bridging organizations need *inclusive and synthetic strategy-making processes* that respond to many stakeholders by creating visions that synthesize across diverse interests. PRIA, for example, has used a process of data collection and consultation about its work with many stakeholders to develop a data base for strategy-making. These consultations validated past work and inspired a decision to build a network of regional centers -- which could meet some stakeholder demands for more regionally-specialized sources and preserve the small size and informal organization valued by others.

Since a hallmark of development bridging organizations is promoting social change, avoiding strategic obsolescence and irrelevance depends on their capacity for *organizational learning*. Organizations involved in social development need to learn from success and failure, and amend their activities and their theories of social change accordingly (Korten, 1980; Rondinelli, 1983; Brown and Covey, 1985). Bridging organizations often undertake complex activities whose outcomes are difficult to measure; it may require substantial effort to develop criteria and collect data that demonstrate success or failure. Nonetheless, learning from failure and success is essential to sustainable social change. The collection of systematic data from stakeholders helped PRIA recognize the need for expanding regional activities in response to their initial successes.

Clear and compelling strategies can provide a compass in the cyclone of pressures and uncertainties that confront bridging organizations. But articulating those strategies calls for considerable sophistication and flexibility on the part of their staff and leaders. They must grapple with complex concepts and theories about social change as well as highly-charged values and conflicting demands to evolve strategies and social change theories. Social change theories are particularly crucial, as they provide the conceptual context for setting directions, learning from experience, and changing directions when necessary.

Supporting Leaders

The problems of leadership isolation and overload can threaten the capacity of bridging organizations to carry out strategies or even to survive. Supporting leaders involves helping them limit their roles as well as find sources of support and stimulation.

Clarifying organizational strategies and social change theories can reduce the vulnerability of leaders of bridging organizations by *increasing understanding of leadership roles*. Commitment to strategies limits the discretion of leaders, but it also clarifies organizational priorities for staff and external stakeholders. When PRIA adopts a strategy that puts grassroots partner interests ahead of donor interests, leadership attention to grassroots partners is more easily understood by donors, staff, and the partners themselves. Clarifying strategies allows others to support those strategies and to hold leaders accountable. Clear strategies set the stage for staff to support or challenge leaders about strategic options and to question departures from shared plans, at once affording more support and more constraint.

The vulnerabilities of leaders can also be reduced by activities that *strengthen second-generation leadership* within the organization. Strengthening other leaders allows delegating responsibilities and encourages expressing alternative perspectives. The creation of a Management Committee at PRIA, for example, encouraged senior staff members to take more responsibility. Eventually, the founder was able to take a sabbatical, which was renewing for him and confirmed for staff and stakeholders that PRIA was more than the founder. The development of new leadership also allows old leaders to move on to new activities. New leadership at PRIA enabled the founder to take on more international and regional responsibilities.

While leadership in many organizations is a lonely role, the demands on leaders of development bridging organizations make them particularly subject to isolation. Some have *expanded networks of external support* that counterbalance the demands of many competing stakeholders. The leaders of RADA and PRIA, for example, used external consultants to provide support and perspectives on key issues. Leaders of bridging organizations with similar concerns can support one another and even develop collective strategies. The founder of PRIA helped create the Voluntary Action Network of India (VANI), so leaders of similar NGOs could support each other as well as respond collectively to pressures from government agencies and international donors. Personal networks of colleagues outside bridging organizations can also be used to support their leaders, as can advisory committees or Boards of Directors that take an advisory role.

Transcending Fragmentation

The special roles of bridging organizations often produce internal conflicts among subunits that identify with diverse external stakeholders. These conflicts are particularly problematic when staff members cast them in ideological terms and invoke value differences to explain each others' behavior. Bridging organizations can be paralyzed by "holy wars," in which the combatants accuse each other of betraying the mission of the organization.

Subunits of bridging organizations can sometimes be reintegrated across such conflicts by *clarifying shared interests in bridging goals* that require working with diverse stakeholders. This clarification may identify areas where subunit differences are exaggerated or misunderstood, but more importantly it can show why different stakeholder perspectives exist and why the bridging organization must span them. At the Relief and Development Agency (RADA), for example, tensions between the fundraising and projects subunits were reduced by joint discussions of a new program that required cooperation. The exploration of differences in the context of shared goals led to wider recognition of common interests obscured by their ideological struggles. Much of the disruptive force of "holy wars" comes from the interpretation that the "infidels" are willfully violating organizational values rather than doing their best from their own perspective. Wider understanding of the necessity for bridging stakeholder differences can moderate the zeal of internal clashes that are microcosms of larger societal conflicts.

Tensions among subunits in development bridging organizations can also be moderated by *organizational mechanisms for managing differences*. A variety of organizational structures and processes have been identified for managing differences in organizations (e.g., Galbraith, 1978; Brown, 1983). When bridging organizations recreate in microcosm the conflicts among their external stakeholders, such mechanisms can be very helpful. When tensions over use of power escalated between staff and leaders at RADA, the introduction of collective bargaining reduced conflict by providing well-defined structures and procedures for dealing with differences. Sometimes tasks can be redefined so that the same subunit deals with multiple stakeholders. Tensions between fundraising and program subunits have sometimes been resolved by requiring program staff to deal with both donors and beneficiaries. Alternative organizational arrangements may reduce the frequency of internal conflicts that lump together task and ideological differences.

The challenge of internal fragmentation is often serious in bridging organizations, since they can mirror internally the social conflicts they seek to span. By the same token, however, those conflicts provide opportunities to *develop synthetic perspectives* that integrate the concerns of diverse external stakeholders. The debates among JALMC members were the basis for identifying programs, such as worker training and productivity experiments, that could be supported by all of the stakeholders. Subunit differences that reflect stakeholder differences within bridging organizations are at once a threat and an opportunity.

Influencing External Stakeholders

Bridging organizations must cope with multiple external challenges, such as establishing and preserving credibility with diverse stakeholders, influencing through cooperation and challenge, and balancing differences in stakeholder power that might otherwise sabotage joint action. Since the patterns of relationships among stakeholders change over time, especially when social change agendas are achieved, bridging organizations face ongoing challenges to maintain effective external linkages.

One critical aspect of this process is *mapping key stakeholder interests*. Given a clear understanding of those perspectives, bridging organizations can act to bridge them. Thus the Orangi Pilot Project spent six months working with a few neighborhood organizations in the slums of Karachi to learn about their concerns and interests before choosing sanitation as the focus of joint work. OPP also recognized that other stakeholders, such as officials in the Department of Public Works, might see local solutions to sanitation problems as a significant threat. Accordingly, they maintained a low profile until the success of the neighborhood program was established and the interests of other actors in cooperation was clear. The volatility of stakeholder relations may be extreme when they are separated by significant power differences (Brown, 1983), so an analysis that warns of potential problems is important to effective bridging.

Relations with external stakeholders often depend greatly on *personal contacts and informal relations*. Bridging organization staff who can build relations of mutual trust with key stakeholders are critical for creating linkages. The founder of the OPP, for example, gained initial financial support on the strength of his reputation for effective development work. He and his staff established close relationships with slum neighborhood organizations and built credibility with international donors. Personal contacts may be especially important for work on poorly-defined problems and in loosely-organized situations, where the lack of shared expectations and formal structures make the personal integrity of individual actors essential to mobilizing support for risky initiatives. The personal characteristics of individuals in bridging organizations are often given great weight by stakeholders that might otherwise be skeptical about the feasibility of joint action (Brown and Tandon, 1991).

A central issue in dealing with external stakeholders is *promoting mutual influence* among them. Effective problem-solving by diverse stakeholders often turns on two-way exchanges. Bridging organizations can play critical roles in translating communications into terms understandable across stakeholder differences and

balancing inequalities in power and information so that all the parties have some voice in decisions. It is easy for powerful parties to assume control, even without intending to exclude other stakeholders, unless bridging organizations counter inequalities that keep less powerful actors silent. When government agencies proposed to expand the Karachi sanitation program with international donor funds, for example, OPP blocked implementation until all agencies agreed to continue neighborhood participation in decision-making. Without this intervention, the expansion would have lost the grassroots energy and resources mobilized by their participation.

While the emphasis here is on cooperative links for joint problem-solving, cooperation often alternates with conflict (Brown and Tandon, 1991). A critical issue for many bridging organizations is *deciding when to challenge* rather than cooperate with key stakeholders. The OPP at first avoided contact with government agencies with vested interests in the status quo, so the project might be launched without attack from powerful outsiders; later they challenged municipal control of an expanded project; still later they cooperated with government agencies to construct large-scale drainage systems. Effective balancing of cooperation and challenge requires understanding incentives and constraints for different stakeholders, and how the interests of many parties can be dove-tailed in joint solutions.

Moving with Success and Social Change

Bridging organizations face demands for expansion or new activities that arise from initial successes, counter-attacks from actors with vested interests, and unexpected consequences that emerge from larger social movements. Bridging organizations that foster social changes may at the same time promote consequences that require increased capacity for organizational learning.

Moving with social change requires bridging organizations to engage in *ongoing social analysis* that includes evaluating their own activities as well as assessing larger social change processes. LP3ES in Indonesia, for example, assessed both the effects of water user participation in irrigation and the concerns of irrigation project stakeholders -- grassroots groups, government agencies, international donors. Its research and training activities positioned LP3ES to promote better understanding and to articulate alternative solutions relevant to all the stakeholders. Bridging organizations concerned with social change can use understanding of emerging social issues to encourage stakeholders to look at alternatives.

Bridging organizations involved in social change may also use *organizational innovation* to respond to new demands posed by changes in stakeholders or pressures to expand their impacts. The most obvious response to way to expand is organizational growth, but many bridging organizations find other alternatives more useful. The Savings Development Movement, for example, encouraged government Ministries to take over its activities and so expanded program impacts far beyond anything within its own capabilities. The Orangi Pilot Project created a center to develop and disseminate technologies appropriate for grassroots development. When pressed to expand their regional services, PRIA encouraged independent regional centers rather than expand its own operations. Alternatives to organizational growth may be essential for some bridging organizations to meet to new demands.

Bridging organizations sometimes work in the context of larger social movements that can multiply or annihilate their impacts, so *aligning with larger social forces* may become a critical issue. Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Center, compared coordinating with a social movement to catching a ride on a moving freight train: if you are not moving at the same speed as the train when you climb on, you may fall under the wheels (Horton with Kohl and Kohl, 1990). Some bridging organizations consciously work to create favorable contexts. The JALMC, for example, built a climate for labor-management cooperation and joint innovation, through regional educational programs and conferences as well as organizational innovations in specific plants. Other bridging organizations foster self-replicating innovations, such as the autonomous village clubs of the Savings Development Movement. Still others turn their activities over to larger social movements, as did the Highlander Center with several different programs. Bridging organizations are social change organizations, and so sensitive to changes -- for better or for worse -- in the larger social context. Strategic management for such organizations requires a theory that identifies opportunities for effective intervention as well as potential resistance or threats at the level of the society as well as the level of the immediate organizational context.

DISCUSSION

What are the implications of this analysis for development bridging organizations, for strategic management, and for other organizations that work with diverse stakeholders? Table 2 summarizes the strategic problems and management options discussed for development bridging organizations. Organizations that span economic, political and cultural differences to promote constructive social change are subject to a variety of internal and external challenges that can diffuse strategic focus, undermine their internal capacities, and polarize their external relations.

The array of problems listed in Table 2 suggests that development bridging organizations present strategy and organization challenges out of proportion to their size and resources. Experience also suggests that successful management of these challenges can produce constructive impacts that are equally out of proportion to their size and resources, since development bridging organizations sometimes catalyze large-scale social changes. This analysis also suggests new perspectives on strategic management concepts, on the key capacities of bridging organizations, and on the institutional makeup of pluralistic societies.

First, the experience of development bridging organizations suggest some extensions of strategic management concepts. Existing concepts of strategic analysis have focused on organizational strategies for competitive advantage in a world of many stakeholders and rapid change. Development bridging organizations, however, need *societal analyses as well as organizational strategies*. Societal analyses guide small interventions intended to have large consequences: the Highlander Center or PRIA cannot catalyze large-scale social changes that benefit the poor and disenfranchised without concepts that guide actions with large multiplier effects. Societal analyses preserve internal cohesion by explaining leader actions and subunit differences: PRIA staff can understand leadership contacts with government agencies and RADA staff can accept subunit differences given a shared theory about social change. Societal theories also predict external dynamics and challenges: the OPP used its analysis of

vested interests to protect and later to expand the sanitation project. Without such frameworks, bridging organizations are vulnerable to unforeseen challenges and defections (Westley and Vredenburg, 1991) that challenge their effectiveness and their viability.

Table 2: Strategic Problems and Management Options of Development Bridging Organizations

	Strategic Problem	Strategic Management Options
Strategy Focus	Strategic Diffusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ strategic confusion ▶ cooptation pressures ▶ obsolescence and changing needs 	Creating and Preserving Strategic Integrity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ reaffirm strategy and social change theory ▶ inclusive and synthetic strategy-making ▶ organizational learning
Internal Tensions	Leadership Vulnerability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ overload from too many demands ▶ isolation and stagnation ▶ burnout 	Supporting Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ increased understanding of leader roles ▶ strengthen second generation leadership ▶ expand external support networks
	Internal Fragmentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ policy conflicts ▶ "holy wars" 	Transcending Fragmentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ clarify shared interests in bridging goals ▶ organize to manage differences ▶ develop synthetic perspectives
External Relations	Conflicting External Demands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ establish and maintain credibility ▶ cooperation or challenge ▶ balance power differences 	Influencing External Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ map stakeholder interests ▶ build personal contacts and informal relations ▶ promote mutual influence ▶ choose when to challenge
	Threats of Success: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ new demands ▶ counterattacks ▶ organizing for expansion ▶ coordinating with movements 	Moving with Social Change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ongoing social analysis ▶ organizational innovation for new demands ▶ align with larger social forces

The need for a societal analysis grows in part from the social change missions of the bridging organizations. But any organization subject to conflicting demands from interdependent stakeholders can benefit from an analysis that explains their changing patterns of interaction and challenge. Organizations whose activities affect their environments particularly need such analyses, and more organizations will fall into this category as environments become increasingly interdependent. As environments of corporations, for example, become more complex, interdependent, and subject to rapid change, firms that focus strictly on market analyses will need frameworks that explain wider societal changes to understand their environments.

The experience of bridging organizations also suggests extending strategic management concepts to include *cooperative as well as competitive strategies*. An emphasis on free markets and economic competition pervades much strategic management theory, but the experience of bridging organizations suggests that cooperative strategy is more appropriate for some stakeholders and some problems -- even across power, wealth, and cultural differences that predispose the parties to see each other as adversaries. Cooperative activities by previously competitive union and management stakeholders in the JALMC enabled improvements that none of the parties could have accomplished alone; encouraging mutual influence and information-sharing among government agencies, universities, non-governmental organizations, and water user associations in Indonesia permitted local management of small irrigation systems that served many different interests. The rise of interorganizational cooperation over the last decade has catalyzed research on cooperative strategies (e.g., Astley and Fombrun, 1983; Trist, 1983; Gray, 1989; Gray and Wood, 1991). We particularly need to understand shifts from competition to cooperation (e.g., Axelrod, 1984; Dollinger, 1990) that enable organizations to focus on the interdependencies that characterize many social problems. Under what circumstances, for example, does a Merck and Co. decide that it will finance a campaign against river blindness when there is no obvious and immediate competitive advantage in doing so? We need more theoretical and practical attention to cooperation as a strategic management option.

Second, this analysis suggests that we need more understanding of the core capacities of development bridging organizations. They are often called to balance serious tensions between internal and external forces. Because they work closely with different stakeholders on conflict-ridden issues, bridging organizations often mirror internally the societal fragmentation they seek to span. It is in balancing these forces that bridging organizations make their special institutional and conceptual contributions, forging new ideas and new organizational arrangements that enable joint action by stakeholders who would otherwise fight or avoid each other.

Conflicting demands can stimulate bridging organizations to produce *institutional innovations* that at once encourage joint problem-solving by their external stakeholders and reduce their internal fragmentation and diffusion. Bridging organizations create the organizational contexts for convening stakeholders who would otherwise avoid each other and for identifying goals that cannot be accomplished without cooperation. For example, the JALMC created a forum that pressed union and management representatives to recognize their joint stake in Jamestown's economic decline. Bridging organizations create structures and practices to coordinate stakeholder expectations and actions, as in the training of government officials and water users on the management of irrigation systems by

LP3ES. In still other cases, bridging organizations create the systems to institutionalize new solutions. The Savings Development Movement, for example, helped create new policies of Ministry technical support for village savings clubs. Bridging organizations may be critical to inventing the institutional arrangements when the parties resist coming together and few institutional arrangements for joint action exist at the outset (Westley and Vredenberg, 1991). We need to understand more about how and when they carry out this institutional innovation role.

Conflicting demands can also stimulate conceptual debates within bridging organizations, as subunits identified with different stakeholders press conflicting interpretations of problems. New syntheses that emerge from these debates can *redefine problems and meanings* that fundamentally alter stakeholder understanding and action. The process may promote exchange of resources or information, as in RADA's efforts to increase communications between and educate donors in industrialized countries and project holders in developing countries. Such exchanges can redefine problems and provide the basis for new solutions (e.g., Westley and Vredenberg, 1991; Nathan and Mitroff, 1991). Sharing information and grappling with value differences can lead to even more fundamental redefinitions of the meaning of problems and of stakeholder involvements. Discussions in the JALMC, for example, altered significantly the orientations of union and management representatives in Jamestown. Changes in the "negotiated social order" can catalyze radically different actions by stakeholders (Strauss, 1979; Gray, 1989; Pasquero, 1991). We need to understand more about how development bridging organizations facilitate basic redefinitions of problems, values, and meanings in the course of their work.

Bridging organizations by mission and function are poised at the epicenters of societal turbulence. They mirror internally the conflicts among their stakeholders, and their institutional and intellectual responses can be the basis for bridging societal chasms. Do their experiences with institutional and conceptual innovation hold lessons for organizations with less ambitious missions and less adversarial constituencies?

More and more organizations are struggling with rapid external change (Vaill, 1989) and demands for internal "framebreaking" in response to new challenges (e.g., Nadler and Tushman, 1989). They often need more capacity for inventing conceptual and institutional arrangements that moderate internal tensions and provide creative options for dealing with external pressures. The experience of development bridging organizations offers clues for explaining and managing change to many organizations, even if they are committed to very different goals.

Bridging organizations of necessity work with diverse external constituencies. In an increasingly interdependent world, most organizations face increasing pressure to deal with many stakeholders even if they do not define bridging as a core activity. The experience of development bridging organizations in coping constructively with external demands may offer clues to many organizations with quite different missions and concerns.

Finally, the bridging organizations discussed here have made significant contributions to solving difficult social problems. They have focused on problems at the grassroots rather than at the level of the global "problematique." But their success in mobilizing

diverse and conflicting constituencies has important implications for societal problem-solving and for the institutional composition of many future societies.

The constellations of intractable problems that constitute the global "problematique" loom ever larger: we face expanding discrepancies between the rich and the poor, ecological limits to economic growth, widening demand for more equitable distributions of political and economic power, and rapid technological changes that increase the inequities that presently threaten global stability (UNDP, 1992; King and Schneider, 1991). Although events in East Europe and the former Soviet Union have often been described as a victory of market over state institutions, some thoughtful analysts (e.g., Wolfe, 1989; Esman, 1991; Wuthnow, 1991) have suggested that societies need several kinds of institutions, including efficient markets and firms for the production of goods and services, reliable state agencies for the maintenance of public order and the production of public goods, and responsive voluntary organizations that embody and protect core values of the society. Too much dominance by one sector leads to institutional giantism and non-responsiveness, whether in the form of giant state bureaucracies, large corporate monopolies, or theocratic religious institutions. Pluralistic societies are characterized by strength in several sectors -- state, market, and voluntary -- and a variety of institutional mechanisms for solving problems and taking initiatives.

Pluralistic societies need agencies that can articulate visions and create institutions for cooperation across institutional sectors and societal levels. The bridging organizations described here worked effectively across sector differences, conceptualized problems in ways that allowed multi-sectoral action, and fostered capacities for working with other sectors among their stakeholders. Bridging organizations may be prerequisites to the development, maintenance and renewal of pluralistic societies that are characterized by effective cooperation across societal sectors and levels. If so, the current trend toward increasing societal and international pluralism will raise the stakes for building effective bridging organizations and for increasing bridging capacity in other organizations in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Development bridging organizations that span economic, political, and cultural differences are strategic to constructive social change in pluralistic societies. Their position at the nexus of social conflicts, however, requires them to deal with strategic diffusion, leadership vulnerability, internal fragmentation, conflicting external demands, and threats from success. This paper has explored some options for strategic management in such bridging organizations drawn from experience in several settings.

The analysis of strategic management options has focussed on the conceptual and organizational contributions of development bridging organizations. They can foster new visions and reconceptualize problems by facilitating debate and synthesis among diverse stakeholders. They can provide the institutional contexts for identifying shared interests and goals, redefining problems, articulating alternative solutions, and implementing joint action. Carrying out these roles requires that bridging organizations formulate strategies and social change theories that explain the

interests and interactions of many stakeholders. Their roles also press bridging organizations to develop cooperative as well as competitive strategies. Bridging organizations will become even more "strategic institutions" as global problems increasingly demand joint action across political, cultural, economic, and ecological differences. By the same token, organizations from many sectors -- state, market, voluntary -- will need more capacity to work with diverse stakeholders, whether or not they act as bridging organizations themselves.

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