NEON

Systemic Campaigns Framework

This framework has been written to help you build, refine and implement a systemic campaign strategy. We've worked it up over the course of a few years of working with different campaign groups and is probably best suited for groups who:

★ Are (relatively) new to campaigning
★ Want to make their campaign more systemic (i.e. to tackle the root causes of the problems we face)
★ Need a framework to structure conversations in their group around their campaigns

DEFINITIONS

What is a campaign, what's a movement and what's the role of strategy?

For us a **campaign** means:

The application of resources to obtain a particular goal; this can be achieved by multiple different strategies, including: mobilisation (i.e. rallying large numbers for a particular cause e.g. 38 Degrees forestry campaign) media (e.g. Taxpayers Alliance flat tax / anti-BBC campaigns) advocacy (lobbying existing power – e.g. The Big Ask MP campaign) and legal challenges. It normally has quite a specific and defined strategy, and will often deploy a narrow set of tactics. Campaigns are either defensive - they guard against the situation worsening in a certain sphere, or offensive - they seek to go beyond the status quo and make advances. As a result campaigns can be (and often are) run by a small number of people and made up of defined activities carried out over a specific time span.

This is distinct from a **movement** which is:

A large decentralised set of groups and organisations working for a change in society. It has a basic theory of change and a coherence around the types of permissible action. Power is fairly spread out, and there is no central point of control. This leads to spontaneity and a diversity of tactics. It also fosters a collective sense of identification with the wider cause the movement champions. Movements needn't be systemic or choose their tactics wisely but they are, more often than not, a necessary part of any substantial progressive change.

Examples of movements include:

15-M movement in Spain
Occupy
Civil Rights movement
Anti-apartheid movement
Iraq war movement

These definitions are a bit fluid (obviously campaigns often lead to movements, and movements often lead to campaigns) but, it's nonetheless useful for thinking about the type of change you're trying to bring about. If it's a small change, maybe a simple campaign will do, if it's a big change, how does a campaign fit into, or inspire a larger movement? If you're more interested in movements than campaigns, don't worry we have a separate framework and set of resources on movement characteristics which we will be using in Session 5.

Strategy is:

In the words of [Marshall Ganz](): "Strategy is turning the resources you have into the power you need, to win the change you want." It's also about being focused: what specifically do you want your campaign to achieve and how are you going to do that? And how will you know when you are successful? This helps you focus your resources and be accountable to the groups you are working with. Strategy is one of the most important parts of campaigning; it's what makes sure that we're not wasting our time. This doesn't mean that it always has to take ages or be laborious; sometimes the best strategy and tactics come together organically - usually when there's already a strong alignment of the core group. But don't let that fool you; thinking about your power (the ability to achieve purpose) and how to apply your limited resources in different situations is a skill that requires constant work and the clearer you are about it, the more likely you are to be effective.

SYSTEMIC CAMPAIGNING

Over the past few years we've worked with campaigners to try to distill the essence of what makes a public-facing campaign more likely to act systemically—to actually address the roots causes of the issues we face—the list below is where we're at so far:

» **Challenges prevailing power relations and systems of oppression**: either by tackling the most powerful political, social and economic forces or by building a new power base.

» **Benefits the people most affected by the issue:** working in solidarity with marginalised groups that are directly affected by the issue and helps these groups get what they need.

» **Acts as a carrier for new cultural stories:** either by weakening damaging stories (like gender is binary, humans must control nature, migrants are dangerous etc.),

strengthening alternative stories (we are nature, no-one is illegal etc.) or creating new ones (gender is a spectrum, 99% etc.).

» **Organises in alignment with the values you want to strengthen:** does not reproduce and internalise the oppressions that we seek to overcome, e.g. actively gives power to marginalised voices and communities.

» **Chooses targets which you can plausibly make progress on:** it is the 'next available step to the left' which requires that there is a cultural or political opportunity. NB: progress does not imply absolute victory, simply progress given the resources available.

» **Gives people a feeling for an alternative:** as well as calling out the problem, points to possible alternatives and inspires hope for change.

» **Allows you to do something tomorrow that you can't do today**: because there are more of us, we have new skills, we have momentum etc.

» **Builds the movement**: supports the causes of other systemic campaigns, foregrounds the voices of those most affected by the issue, builds the movement's capacity and its collective story.

It's important to note that one campaign doesn't have to achieve all of this list! They are just some pointers to think about and you may well have more. In addition, some of these points exist in tension with one another. For example one campaign might seek to transform prevailing assumptions around an issue, whereas another campaign might advocate for more piecemeal reform to improve things for the people directly affected.

HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this framework is to help you plan your campaign by breaking it down into its component parts. It's a good exercise for testing our assumptions and helping us to be intentional and improve the work we're doing. For that reason, you should expect that completing this framework will take you some time.

There are five building blocks that form the basis of this framework:
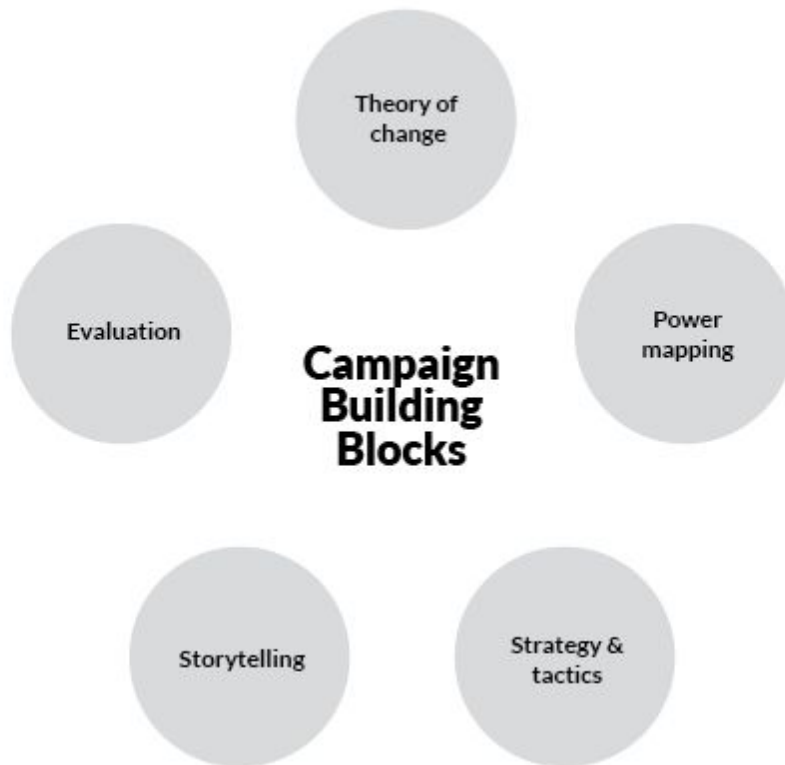
1. **Theory of change**: What is your ultimate goal and what needs to change in order to reach that goal?
2. **Power Mapping**: Who controls and can influence your issue and who can you work in solidarity with?
3. **Strategy and Tactics**: What's your actual plan to deliver your theory of change?
4. **Storytelling:** What story is your campaign telling and how can you make sure it's effective?
5. **Evaluation**: What worked, what didn't, what does that tell you about what's next?

Of course, these aren't the only things you need to run a good campaign.

You'll also need:

» A good team and the ability to sustain it

» Sufficient funds and resources

» A healthy connection with the broader movement!

HOW TO COMPLETE THIS FRAMEWORK

» Take time to chat through the questions with the others you're organising with first.

» Then have a go at filling in the answers to each question

» * Starred questions are essential. Non-starred questions are recommended to get the most out of the exercise (especially those you find difficult to answer).
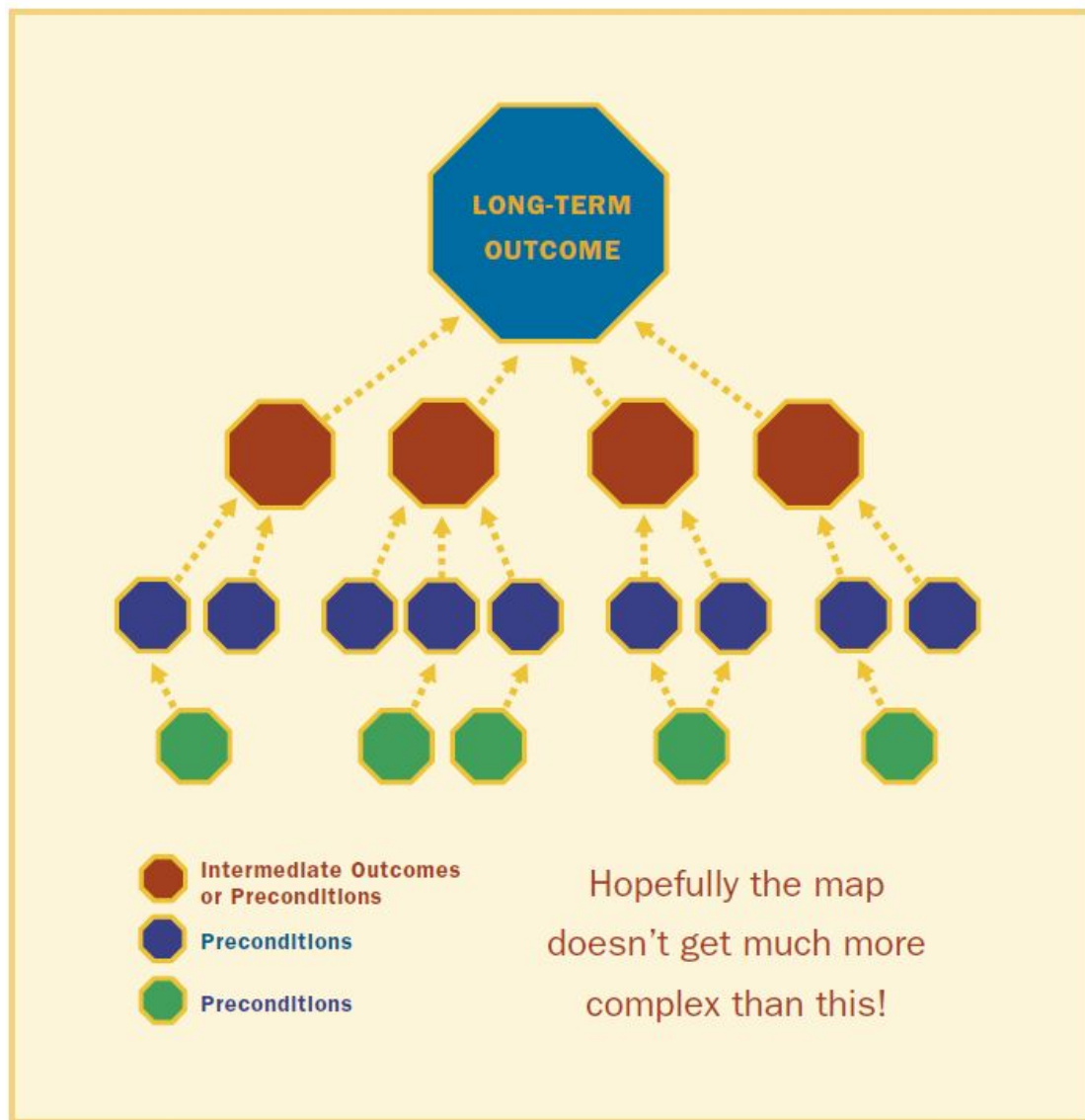
STEP ONE: THEORY OF CHANGE

Before you can build a solid strategy for your campaign and deliver it, it's important that you've tested your assumptions about what is needed to reach your campaign goal. Building a theory of change is a first step as it helps you logically map out all the changes that are required to reach your ultimate goal. The more systemic your goal, the more changes that are likely to be required and the wider the range of players involved.

You might not directly work on all of these changes but it's important you are aware of all of them, as it helps you select objectives for your campaign's strategy that are most suited to your group's purpose, resources and skills (see more on this in step three: strategy). It also helps you see who might be better suited to working on other areas of the theory of change and who you can work in solidarity with (see more on this in step two: power mapping).

Many of us will know of campaigns where confusion over the theory of change only arose amongst those campaigning on it when it was too late. Don't miss the chance to really interrogate what's required to create the change you want: the time you put into this will help your team / group get on the same page early on and save time later.

Below is a simple model to map out your theory of change.

Intermediate Outcomes or Preconditions

Preconditions

Preconditions

Hopefully the map doesn't get much more complex than this!

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1. What is the goal of your campaign? *

This is labelled as the long-term outcome in the above diagram.

2. Is that goal systemic? *

Look back at the systemic campaign criteria. How does your goal meet some of those criteria? E.g. how would making this change challenge the power relations of the situation? How would it act as a carrier for a new narrative? How would the change affect marginalised groups?

3. What would need to change for that goal to be achieved?

What are the intermediate outcomes?

4. What are the steps to making those intermediate outcomes happen?
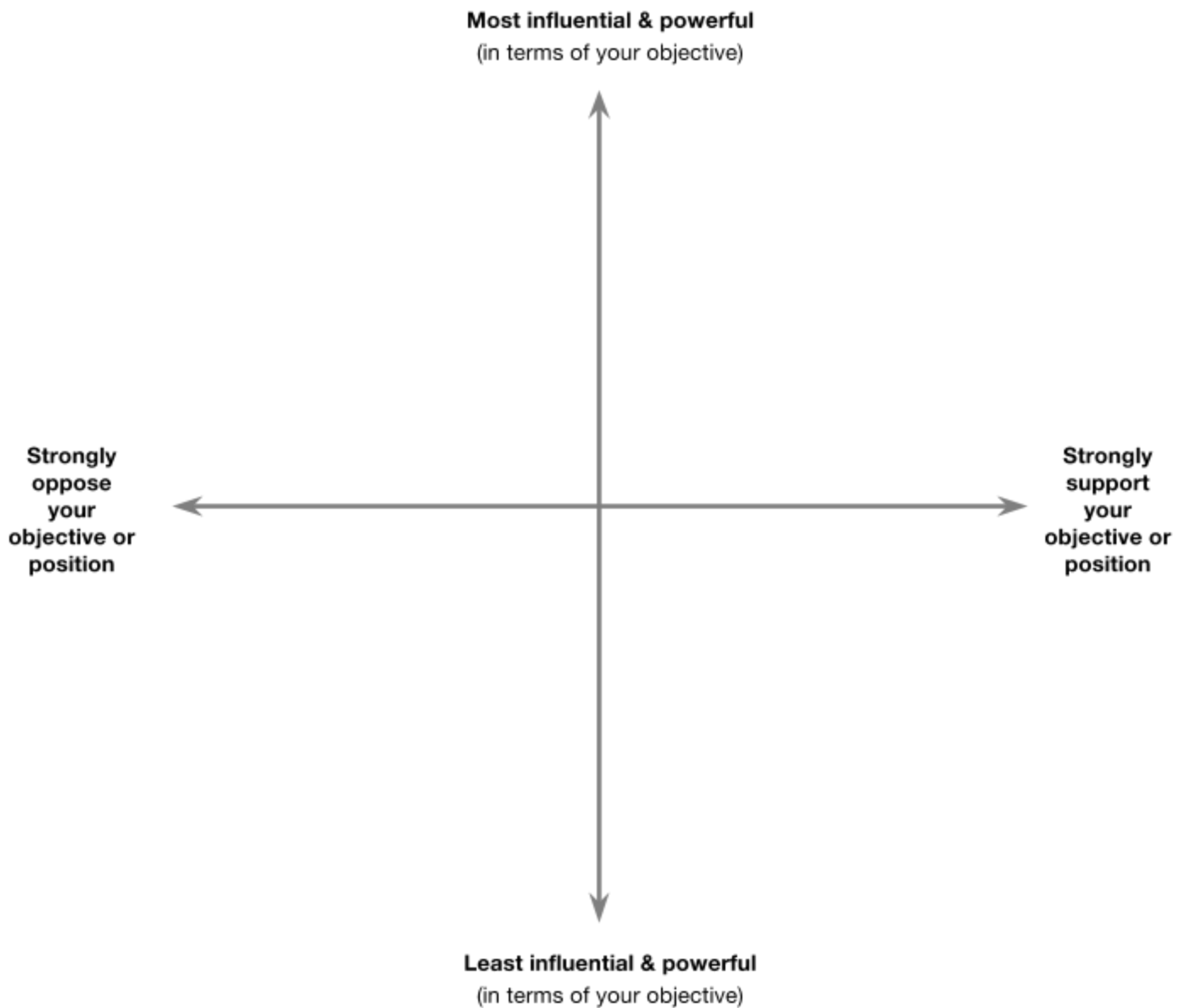
What are the preconditions?

5. Check your assumptions!
At levels 3 and 4 ask why these are important and necessary. Write these
assumptions down alongside each level.

STEP TWO: POWER MAPPING

*Once you have identified and tested your theory of change, you need to understand the power
relations around this. Who has the power to help you create the change you want and who will
oppose it? Who can you work in solidarity with?*

*Fill out this basic spectrum of allies (plot ten names of people or organisations on the graph based
on where they are at present: try to include a mix of allies and those who oppose the change you
want). Even better if you can draw it out on a flipchart together with post-its to move around and
shift the key players as you get clarity on who is an ally and who is not.*

Most influential & powerful
(in terms of your objective)

Strongly oppose your objective or position

Strongly support your objective or position

Least influential & powerful
(in terms of your objective)

Once you have identified your key allies and targets, here are some further questions to help you think about how you best work with / against them.

Who are the key groups that you need to move? *

What are their names, what organisations do they work in or lead in, what titles or roles do they have? What resources do they have? Money? People? Decision-making authority?

What do THOSE people want or need to be shifted? *

The ones with the resources? What do they care about? Where does their power come from? Votes? Donations? Money from us paying our bills? Compliance?

What resources do WE have that THEY want? *

List them all at this stage.

STEP THREE: STRATEGY & TACTICS

In the words of Marshall Ganz:

"Strategy is turning the resources you have into the power you need, to win the change you want."
It's also about being focused: what specifically do you want your campaign to achieve and how are you going to do that? And how will you know when you are successful?

Think back to your theory of change and identify a small number (3-5) objectives for your campaign.
Be as specific and targeted as you can here - what specifically do you want your campaign to achieve? Also think about your group's purpose, resources and skills. Set objectives that align with these. This will help you and your group focus your resources and increase your impact.

List some tactics (specific approaches like a petition, a stunt or direct action) that can help you achieve these objectives in the order that you think they might be useful.

Here are some questions to consider for each tactic:

> *On this action are there groups/people whom we could make a strategic alliances with who wouldn't normally support this work?*
> *What's the key take away message from this action and who do you want to hear it?*
> *Does this action promote the presence and participation of those you want to be more involved?*
> *How will you strategically absorb the energy from this action (e.g. new volunteers)?*
> *If this goes really well, how will you escalate this action?*

TACTIC ONE:

TACTIC TWO:

TACTIC THREE:

What does success look like? How will you measure that?

Be realistic here! This helps you be accountable to the group you are working with and to the community you aim to serve.

STEP FOUR: STORYTELLING

Whether you like it or not your campaign tells a story. A story about what the world is like, how it (or part of it) works, what the problem is, what the solution(s) looks like, who's involved, who's not involved, who has power etc. For example, many campaigns by international development NGOs in the UK call for more aid to address global poverty. In doing so they tell a story about 'powerful generous nations' needing to give more to help 'powerless needy nations'—a story that obscures more accurate stories about the historic exploitation of many countries by the 'West' and the ongoing exploitation through unfair trade rules, corporate tax evasion, imperialist wars etc.

As campaigners, activists and organisers it's easy to assume that everything would be okay 'if only people knew XYZ'—if people knew we were so dependent on nature we'd solve the environmental crisis; if people knew the truth about colonialism we'd stop imperial wars; if people knew how ineffective prisons are we'd abolish them etc.. The problem is that this way of thinking leads us to assume that all our problems stem from what people <u>don't</u> know and obscures that many of the problems we face are because of what people <u>do</u> know—that is, the beliefs, worldviews and stories that our culture supplies them. However, our culture and our minds are messy places, and these beliefs are often conflicting—multiple beliefs can be applied to any given issue.

Our job then is to get a good understanding of the 'narrative landscape' in people's minds so that we know how effective our stories are likely to be, and also whether we'll need to challenge an existing negative story (i.e. men are superior to women); strengthen a weak but positive story (i.e. cycling is for all); draw on a strongly held story from elsewhere (i.e. the Robin Hood tax) or create new stories (i.e. 1% vs. 99%). In short, it's not enough that we know *what* people think, we need to know *how* they think: how they reason about the issues we campaign on.

Here are some questions to consider:

What story is your campaign telling? *

In simple form, if it helps, imagine you're talking to an eight-year old. (Though that's probably really ageist.) Is it weakening a negative story, strengthening a positive story, introducing a new story altogether, or something else?

Who is undecided or conflicted about your issue?

I.e. those that don't feel strongly either way, whose minds might be changed? Is this group big enough to be able to make the change you want?

What do the undecided or conflicted think about your issue?

What beliefs, principles, values, metaphors, popular phrases and sayings etc. do they use to reason about your issue? (The best way to find this out is to talk to lots and lots of people).

How can your story help build alliances across groups to challenge power? *

What part of your story connects you with other groups?

Taking all of this into account, are there any changes you need to make to the story your campaign is currently telling?

Is there any language you should definitely start using, or that you should avoid?

STEP FIVE: EVALUATION

Evaluating the campaign is essential to understand what you have achieved, to be able to communicate that to supporters and others and to learn lessons that aid you in your future struggles. It should also allow you to recognise what you have built – what exists at the end that did not exist at the beginning. This could be an advanced collective understanding of a systemic issue or a better organisational attitude to equality, for example.

How regularly will you reflect on strategy of your campaign? And who is responsible for making this happen? *

What simple questions can you ask yourselves at regular intervals (e.g. every 3 months or after every key action)?

Questions to consider:
- ★ What worked?
- ★ What should we do differently?
- ★ How did we work as a team?
- ★ What did I learn about myself?

When should you complete a full evaluation of your campaign?
Questions to consider:

- ★ Have you met your objectives? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ★ What have you built that will last beyond the campaign? What do you need to be preparing to allow us to do something next?
- ★ In practice, has the campaign and the people delivering it lived up to your values? If not, why not?
- ★ How will you, you and your allies integrate the lessons learned into future campaigns?

INTEGRATING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNT:
MAKING THIS EXERCISE WORTH IT

So, you've got through the process. Good stuff. Now take 5 minutes to make sure that this whole process has been worth it. Also, set yourself a calendar reminder for 3 months' time to revisit this form and see what's changed …

What three things has filling out this template told you that you need to improve? And who will tackle them? *

If you could have help on 3 things what would they be (we'll try to source you some support)? *

Who in your team (or beyond) needs to know about this strategy but doesn't? And when will you talk to them?

Appendix

Aspen Intitute, Community Builders Guide to Theory of Change:
http://bit.ly/2cpnYCG

Marshall Ganz, Organizing Notes: Strategising (the basics of strategy and power relations):
http://bit.ly/2bV1cCr

Rules of Tactics, Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals (thinking through power):
http://bit.ly/2bFUU9k

McConnell Foundation, A Practitioner's Guide to Developmental Evaluation:
http://bit.ly/1HNNSHQ

Action Learning Associates, Case Studies and Blogs on how to use Action Learning:
http://bit.ly/2cpIP8N