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Navigating Decisions, Transitions, and Transformations: How Justice Organizers Develop and Sustain Careers



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# Navigating Decisions, Transitions, and Transformations:

# How Justice Organizers Develop and Sustain Careers

A dissertation submitted in partial

satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

by

Dustianne North

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Navigating Decisions, Transitions, and Transformations:

How Justice Organizers Develop and Sustain Careers

by

Dustianne North

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Albert E. Benjamin, Chair

This qualitative study explores decision points in the careers of justice organizers. Organizing represents a cornerstone set of specialized practices by which power and participation may be promoted among poor and disenfranchised groups. Yet organizers (especially women, minorities, and working class) face challenges that can undermine their performance and sustainability. Instability in organizing careers means frequent and difficult (and understudied) decision points for organizers.

The study relies upon an interdisciplinary framework, in-depth interview responses from 14 diverse participants, archival data, and fieldwork. Accounts of overall careers and 72 decision points were examined using case induction methodology. Findings have yielded a substantive theory that describes and suggests explanations for decision point processes and outcomes.

Results suggest that personal histories and status quo factors acted upon decision points, and that decisions can be understood in terms of concurrent processes of sensemaking, decision-making, navigation of opportunity structures, and transition and transformation. The factors organizers considered at decision points, tensions and conflicts among these, diversity themes and disparities among organizers of different backgrounds, and dialectical patterns of development emerged, along with contextual influences, organizer strategies, and descriptive and evaluative output measures. Twelve types of decision points, associated with varying phases of careers, also emerged.

I have posed hypotheses about the effects of personal characteristics and histories on status quo situations and understandings, and on variance in the process and outputs of decision points. Others address direct and indirect effects of status quo, variations in the process, contextual influences, and organizer strategies on outputs. While any one decision point did not predict long-term outcomes, the effects of short-term events and circumstances may be magnified during these junctures and have a cumulative effect.

Overall, findings supported adaptive, psychosocial understandings of organizing careers. Sustainability and efficacy of organizers may depend upon achieving satisfaction, generating and devising new pathways, cultivating and economizing resources, building identity and relationships, and being adaptable and undergoing continuous transformation. Findings revealed both continued barriers facing women, working-class, and organizers of color, as well as progress in the establishment of opportunities and safe spaces to support their careers.

The dissertation of Dustianne North is approved.

Laura S. Abrams

Stuart A. Kirk

Jacqueline Leavitt

Albert E. Benjamin, Chair

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2013

## DEDICATION

To activists and organizers everywhere, who will never get credit for all they have done. May you find the peace and satisfaction in your lives that you so richly deserve, and which you are helping to bring for all.

And to all my ancestors and relations, who survived oppression and imbued me with the values that led me to this work.

Thank you for your inspiration.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE CAREER DECISION POINTS OF ORGANIZERS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, issues of social and economic justice are currently receiving major attention worldwide in the face of staggering wealth and power inequalities, neoliberal austerity measures, and other abuses of citizens by government and the corporate sphere. *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for 2011 was "The Protester" (Anderson, 2011), highlighting the recent rise in the importance of these protests both in the United States and worldwide. This award also represents a victory for the tradition of social and economic justice organizing, an activity that values direct and highly participatory forms of democracy and deemphasizes the role of individual charismatic leaders as personifications of the movement. Every protester who was in the streets last year, in effect, shared in *Time*'s prestigious award.

Yet the recent occupations did not spring up spontaneously; those occurring in the United States have built most directly upon immigrant rights movements, antiglobalization protests, labor revival efforts, and student occupations of the 1990s and 2000s. Many of these began on the West Coast. This resurgence, in turn, follows a long retreat in mainstream society from populist and radical movements (especially those with leftist orientations) since the late 1970s.

So who are some of the most active individuals that inspire and guide today's social and economic justice movements? Movements and protest activities have become a popular subject of study, and existing works have suggested that a small, dedicated population of organizers and movement leaders remained active in justice efforts over the decades of retrenchment, joined by a new and growing generation of activists and organizers beginning in the mid-1990s. These individuals are not just inspired by a political moment, but have dedicated their lives and careers to social justice. Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) posited that such individuals are critical in to

the maintenance of movement infrastructures, ideologies, and subcultures during cycles of movement decline, allowing for a quicker and more effective mobilization when conditions next prove favorable for the movement to rise again.

This study examines 14 currently or recently active organizers who have been involved in social and economic justice movements on the West Coast. Its purpose is to examine how they developed and sustained careers. A few participants have lived and participated long enough to see the initial rise of U.S. justice movements, their long retrenchment, and their recent renewal; others became activists more recently. Some remain active in social movements, while others have moved on. All of them have contributed in some way to the present-day resurgence of social justice, and their stories promise to reveal much about how organizers become and remain sustainable and effective throughout cycles of movement rise and fall.

This is an exploratory, qualitative study of decision making and change in the careers of these organizers. As Nepstad (2004) commented, "a movement's vitality and longevity are dependent on its ability to attract *and* retain members" (p.43). Other scholars have focused on the need to build effective leadership and the strategic capacity of movement organizations (Ganz, 2000). For organizing to succeed, however, organizers themselves must be able to develop efficacy and sustain careers.

Activism and organizing can be empowering, enjoyable, and meaningful to those who participate. It can also be challenging, emotional, and full of personal costs and risks. As a result, numerous studies have addressed the habits and needs of movement activists, leaders, and organizers. Collectively, these studies have suggested that activists and organizers face significant risk and instability in their careers and personal lives. They must keep food on the table while marching in the streets; they build new organizations and infrastructures in order to

carry out their work; they may serve on a volunteer basis or do their own fundraising to cover their paychecks. They must also develop strong reputations while managing the complexities of unconventional and often misunderstood lives. A few scholars have highlighted the problem that these obstacles may be particularly daunting among would-be organizers from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004).

The challenges and instability inherent in organizing careers present organizers with complex and unpredictable decision points, or situations that demand immediate consideration of possible changes in career course, perhaps more frequently than in other careers. Past research has highlighted the importance of and attempted to explain certain decisions in the course of these careers. None, however, have thoroughly examined the details and nuances of the processes that unfold at such times.

Using qualitative interview responses from both individuals who have remained active in and those who have left the field of organizing, as well as archival data and field observations of justice movements and organizers, this study is designed to get inside the "black box" of decision points and elucidate the processes by which organizers make decisions, cultivate and implement available opportunities, and cope with change and transition. My goal is to develop a working ecological theory of these processes, in order to cast light on how activists build and sustain organizing careers. Results should be of significant value to social workers and social work scholars, since the pursuit of social justice is a core social work value. More directly, social workers may occupy organizing positions or may work closely with organizers.

## Population: West Coast Justice Organizers

Organizers are a difficult group to define, although certain characteristics stand out. In the tradition of formalized community practice, organizers are described as individuals who

engage in recruitment and training of movement members, protest and campaign planning, creative work associated with the production of literature and other media, networking, and legislative lobbying. Rather than asserting direct leadership, however, this discourse has argued that organizers usually play the role of an outsider, assisting and advising indigenous leaders and members on long-term movement development issues and short-term change goals (Alinsky, 1941, 1971; Burghardt, 1982; Rothman, 1968). Their work occurs most often in small groups of voluntary citizens and emphasizes populist concepts of shared leadership practices along with empowerment of group members. But the job title of organizer is not one-dimensional: there exist differing orientations toward social change and various levels of positions (both entry-level and leadership), and more recent practice studies have recognized that not all remain outsiders relative to the groups and movements they organize.

In popular settings, the word *organizer* is even more likely to mean different things to different people, and organizers are not always distinguished from movement leaders. Nonetheless, my own field experiences and existing literature both substantiate the fact that organizers share a recognized identity, to some extent, across movements and settings. Movement participants often agree about who is an organizer, even if the role is not always articulated in the same way. I broadly define organizers as activists who (a) recruit, train, and encourage the participation of other movement participants and (b) serve as tactical, ethical, and political strategists and advisors on behalf of movements.

Roughly four generations of organizers operate in today's social movements. There are no credible estimates of the size and demographic makeup of today's organizer population. Baby boomers and their forebears are the generations most documented in prior research, and these organizers have overwhelmingly been white, well-educated men, even when the groups

that they served were more diverse. Clearly, however, members of disenfranchised segments of society do participate and provide leadership in movements (Daloz et al., 1997; Ganz, 2000; Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000), and more recent research has suggested greater diversity among Generation X and Y organizers and activists (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Milkman & Voss, 2004). There are a few biographical studies of famous individuals like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks of the Civil Rights movement, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta of the Farmworkers movement, and Jane Addams and Alice Paul of late 19th/early 20th century settlement house and suffrage movements. Nevertheless, organizers of diverse backgrounds remain largely understudied. My research therefore examines opportunities presented to organizers of various ages and demographic characteristics, and how they respond to and manage them. The study sample consists of people who have worked at some point since 1995 in economic and social justice organizing on the West Coast of the United States.

## Organizing Careers Historically and Today

### The Early 1900s through the Mid-1990s

The historical context in which organizing has developed helps to explain the needs and interests of organizers. Practices referred to as organizing today have their roots in the settlement house movement in social work, which began in the late 19th century (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Fisher, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001), the collective activities among workers in the 1930s and 1940s (Alinsky, 1946, 1971; Fisher, 2000; Milkman & Voss, 2004), and the early civil rights movement (Delp, 2002). In the settlement houses established by Jane Addams and others, workers moved into community centers in poor immigrant neighborhoods and blended community participation activities with social services, such as English classes and naturalization assistance (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Jansson, 2005). In the mid-20th century sociologist Saul

Alinsky (1941, 1962, 1971), considered the father of community organizing, was inspired by labor victories to formalize a militant form of citizen participation and collective action, in which demands were pressed against power holders through disciplined and coordinated actions of popular resistance.

Organizing thus began with the intention to build power among poor and disenfranchised citizens via strong, citizen-driven community groups. Because these groups were composed of individuals who often lacked political skills, they needed knowledgeable people to help their members understand the social problems that affected them, demonstrate that change was possible, and guide them as they learned to plan and implement change campaigns. Thus emerged the role of organizers, often better educated than those whom they served, who promoted the leadership of indigenous community members and who served as political and social change strategists. Yet, prior to the 1960s, only a few labor leaders, settlement house workers, progressive academics, clergy, and independently wealthy individuals could make a career of activism.

In the 1960s and 1970s the successes of ideologically driven civil rights and labor organizing efforts gave birth to a generation of New Left identity and lifestyle-oriented movements and a latticework of grassroots community organizations like ACORN (Delgado, 1986). Social work, education, and other professions with social justice goals began to adopt and formally codify organizing practices. Training institutes to help organizers and activists develop commitment and expertise also began to proliferate. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, government funding was available for collectivist efforts, giving rise to a new, if low-paying, spectrum of careers available to those interested in social change. Though labor and civil rights activities originated in the eastern and southern parts of the United States, the

explosion of antiauthority youth countercultures and radical lifestyles in the 1960s was perhaps nowhere more vibrant than in the West.

The conservative political backlash of the 1980s, however, severely dampened the militant spirit of organizing and similar efforts. Many movements continued to grow, on both right and left, but the movements championing the poor and oppressed during the 1960s and 1970s were often replaced by efforts of greater interest to middle-class whites, such as the environmental movement. As government funding for social programs began a long decline and neoliberal ideologies gained hold in public debate, movement organizations became more businesslike, making greater use of insider politics and conciliatory approaches to change (Burghardt, 1982; Fisher, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001). Organizers were commonly forced to soften their militant and radical stances; by the early 1990s some scholars felt that organizing had largely lost its "political edge" (Fisher & Shragge, 2000, p.7).

Nonetheless, organizing strategies were now recognized as a major innovation that had affected all nonprofit and voluntary activities, and they became institutionalized through many policy and funding mandates aimed at improving communities. By the late 1980s, movements that transcended national borders began to appear, and the 1990s would see a resurgence of interest in activism and organizing worldwide.

**West Coast Justice Organizing Today**

Currently organizers continue to play critical roles in various justice movements, including unions, social and economic justice movements, immigrant rights movements, peace and environmental movements, and various student movements and school reform efforts. In addition, organizers are active in health and social services settings, public-private coalitions, ethnic identity-based efforts, sexual orientation movements, youth organizing, cultural

movements, women's movements, anti-globalization activities, and transnational and cross-border movements (Milkman & Voss, 2004).

As noted, many such efforts have been centered on the West Coast, ranging from small local undertakings to national or international campaigns waged by broad-based coalitions**.** In 1999 protesters in Seattle successfully prevented World Trade Organization (WTO) representatives from meeting and brought the city of Seattle to a halt (Prokosch, 2002). California has seen a massive revival of the labor movement, particularly targeting low-wage workers as well as cross-border efforts and actions on behalf of immigrants (Milkman, 2004). Many community groups and labor unions have recently joined forces to protest for immigrants rights, especially in Los Angeles. Several such campaigns and actions arguably rank among the largest protests ever on U.S. soil. Efforts toward social and economic justice may thus represent a set of related movements, or what some scholars have referred to as a movement family, wherein the confluence of various strands of activism can have far-reaching impact. Examples of such confluence have included the Seattle WTO protests of 1999, the immigrant rights actions of 2008-2010, and the more recent Occupy Wall Street movement.

This progressivist upsurge has coexisted with neoliberal trends toward government downsizing and forces of globalization, creating both new opportunities and constraints for organizers. In response to these forces, recent observers have suggested that organizing and activist careers (in comparison to more conventional careers) are highly entrepreneurial, skilled yet underresourced, stigmatized or of relatively low social status, and primarily motivated by nonmaterial incentives. Some organizers pursue their work on a paid, professional basis, whereas others are noninstitutionalized volunteers, and past research has acknowledged that individuals move often from one movement to another (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004).

However, studies have usually focused on organizers or activists in particular movements or industries. My study is unique in examining how organizers make decisions and navigate their environments when choosing among an array of available avenues.

Recent changes in the careers of all workers have also affected the nature of organizing. Whereas workers could once expect to find secure, long-term jobs with decent wages and benefits, careers today are much more variable and long-term job security increasingly unavailable. On the other hand, workers can change jobs or careers more freely than in the past. These factors have changed expectations of both workers and employers (Hall, 2002). Even in this changing job market context, however, organizing careers may remain particularly difficult.

**Barriers to Effective and Sustained Organizing**

Studies of organizers and other career activists across various settings suggest that conditions in movements and organizations often do not promote career *sustainability* (the ongoing ability and desire to persist in organizer roles) or career *development* (the cultivation of opportunities and professional efficacy) among organizers. Activism carries inherent physical, legal, and political dangers, especially when actions involve civil disobedience. Organizing presents the need for tough problem solving and the messy process of gaining agreement among actors with diverse points of view (Burghardt, 1982; Daloz et al., 1997; Rothman, 1968). The slowness of change can also be frustrating (Daloz et al., 1997; Rooks, 2004).

Other barriers and challenges relate to the lack of resources and the presence of tough working conditions in movement jobs. Low pay has been the norm across all types of activists and organizers examined, and several scholars have discussed financial and other barriers to availability for sustained participation (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Finally, instead of

receiving encouragement and recognition, organizers and activists have often felt stigmatized for their altruistic and activist intentions (Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Starr et al., 1999).

Such challenges may nonetheless play out differently for long-term activists who build their lives around "noninstitutionalized" activism (Downton & Wehr, 1997) or participation in nonprofessionalized protest groups, as opposed to those who organize professionally. Previous studies suggest that activists who remain noninstitutionalized may be hindered by interpersonal dynamics in movements, loss of belief in a cause, lack of availability for participation, being seen as unconventional in their personal lives, and the decline of their movements (Downton & Wehr, 1991, 1997, 1998; Klandermans, 2002). To some extent, the professionalization of organizing in social work, labor, and related fields has helped to provide resources as well as increased mainstream legitimacy for the field. However, attitudes toward organizing remain ambivalent in social work and many labor unions, often translating into a lack of tangible supports and opportunities, so that these workers still experience low social status and a lack of other career incentives (Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Rooks, 2004; Starr et al., 1999).

Finally, there is evidence that, despite the stated goal of justice movements to provide women, the working class, and minorities with leadership opportunities, these subgroups are nonetheless hindered more than others that desire to become organizers (Ganz et al., 2004; Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000; Rooks, 2003, 2004). For all organizers and activists, the imposing collection of barriers has led to burnout and to negative consequences for organizers' health and well-being, their careers, and their spouses and families, as well as high instability, turnover, and attrition (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Nepstad, 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004; Starr et al., 1999).

## The Present Study

### Exploring Organizer Career Decision Points

We know relatively little about what organizing looks like today, how individuals negotiate organizing careers, and how the contextual forces that bear upon organizing careers play out in individual career decisions. Prior research has indicated that these careers may be adaptive in nature (Ganz et al., 2004; Mische, 2002); that is, they are neither random nor predictable. Instead organizers must continuously adapt to changing circumstances through the decisions they make. Little research has examined how they adapt when faced with the need for decision making. To address these gaps, this study examines the experiences of organizers with regard to the following research questions:

**Question 1:** What conditions and triggers set the stage for career decision points?

**Question 2:** How did organizers negotiate these decision points? What was the underlying process?

**Question 3:** What types of outputs resulted from decision points?

In this study I have examined organizer careers, defined as the entire content, duration, and activities of paid and unpaid work, or their "entire life span" (Hall, 2002, p.208) at work. I rely upon interviews with 14 justice organizers who were active on the West Coast for at least two years between 1995 and 2010, including some organizers who have since left the field. These individuals identified a total of 72 junctures in their career histories that required decisions about their future movement participation, and that they viewed in retrospect as having had a significant impact upon their overall sustainability and development as organizers. My hope is that analysis of these cases, including more detailed analysis of a subsample of 30 decision points, will illuminate the lived experience of decision points, as told in organizers' own words.

I have triangulated responses with archival data and my own observations of and participation in justice movements, both before and during the study. The result is an inductively derived working theory that explains what occurs at decision points, composed of a process model, key themes, outcome measures, contextual influences and organizer strategies, as well as short term outputs of decision points and suggested explanations for these. I also make conjectures, based on the case data, about the relevance of decision points to overall career outcomes, and on the general nature of organizing careers.

**Implications**

As a movement participant and organizer, a social worker, and a researcher, I found the significance of career decision points to be eminently worth of study, and participants have consistently agreed as to the great need to understand career development, sustainability, and decision making among organizers. Without sufficient developmental supports, organizers may tend to become overly emotional in their professional work or to apply other ineffectual social change strategies (Burghardt, 1982; Ganz, 2000; Rothman, 1968). Negative working environments and turnover of key leaders and executives may also hinder continuity in organizations, particularly when successors have not been selected and trained to replace those who leave. General enthusiasm and participation in larger movements can flag when organizers and pivotal actors lose heart, are ineffectual, or do not adequately represent their membership. Rooks (2004) pointed out that, in both the literature and actual practice, the emphasis when considering organizer development and sustainability has been upon individual strategies and solutions. She has highlighted the fallacy in this view and suggested that improving workplace conditions and other organizational or movement factors may be a better pathway to improving outcomes for this population.

I hope that this study can provide useful insights to movement leaders, organizers, and social movement organizations, as well as career development strategies for organizers and other activists. In addition, a focus by social workers on organizing in today's increasingly globalized justice movements may help to move the social work profession into the new millennium. Such a focus will require a deeper understanding of organizer careers.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 2 of this study reviews relevant literature on organizers and long-term activists. Chapter 3 examines methodological perspectives driving the study, as well as theoretical perspectives underlying prior studies and other theories that add important components to the conceptual framework utilized here. Chapter 4 elucidates the methods employed, and chapter 5 reports results. Chapter 6 then provides a discussion of findings in relation to existing research, as well as implications for research, practice, and the profession of social work.

# CHAPTER 2

# MULTIDISCIPLINARY UNDERSTANDINGS: ORGANIZING CAREERS AND DECISION POINTS

Whereas extensive literatures exist on community organizing and practice, social movement participation, and careers in general, only a few studies directly address the careers of organizers and other long-term activists. These include (a) a few social work and labor studies addressing career development, retention, and turnover among paid, professionalized organizers; (b) works examining how and why some activists deepen their involvement and persist over time while others disengage; and (c) a small body of literature, from career studies and adult education, that has examined the spiritual and moral development of intrapsychic commitment in career activists. In this chapter I will first review descriptive findings about organizing activities, roles, and contexts, along with organizer demographics. I will then examine the main findings of each of the three areas of literature identified above. Finally I will summarize what the literature reveals about organizing careers, development and sustainability, decision points, and outcomes, as well as gaps that the present study fills.

## Description of Organizing and Organizers

### What Organizers Do

Organizing originated from the notion that, for groups to coordinate disciplined, citizen-driven actions, leadership, critical thinking abilities, and strategic political expertise among group members are crucial (Alinsky, 1946, 1962, 1971, 1994; Freire, 1970, 1999; Mezirow, 1955, 1991, 2000). As I suggested in chapter 1, Alinsky envisioned organizers as experts who shepherd the development of otherwise disenfranchised populations. Building noninstitutionalized, citizen-driven associations that directly confronted powerholders was central to Alinsky's original conception of organizing and remains so today (Alinsky, 1946,

1962, 1971). Practices have traditionally involved the use of innovative, militant, but typically nonviolent tactics of direct action and protest, and organizers have therefore engaged in popular education, community mobilization, trust building, organization building, and leadership development activities (Alinsky, 1971, 1994; Fisher & Shragge, 2000).

By the early 1980s community organizers were seen as increasingly professionalized expert practitioners who acted to plan and implement campaigns, broker agreements among competing and allied groups, and provide emotional, interpersonal, and other support to activists in their struggles (Burghardt, 1982; Rothman, 1968; Rothman & Tropman, 1987). Experimentation with new forms of direct democracy and an increased focus on the needs of women and people of color were characteristic of novel organizing practices that began in the 1960s and 1970s. These developments were accompanied by the emergence of mass social movements, defined as "collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge[s] to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices" (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p.4) that transcend any one group or protest and use extrasystemic tactics.

Both professionalized practitioners (often outsiders to the movement) and voluntary or indigenous leaders have used organizing strategies, though some perspectives differentiate strongly between these two groups. Community organizers and movement leaders use (and equip others to use) various social action strategies and tactics. Sharp (1994, 2003) distinguished three main types of nonviolent action: direct action strategies such as sit-ins and blockades; nonparticipation methods like boycotts and worker strikes; and symbolic protests, marches, and rallies. Violent riots and rebellions are also associated with some social movements (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

Some social work scholars have suggested that militant and radical protest approaches have fallen relatively out of favor in many professionalized circles as neoliberal perspectives have increasingly influenced public policy and debate, causing organizing practices to blend with and evolve into more conciliatory methods (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994; Starr et al., 1999). On the other hand, the organizing-friendly ideals of empowerment-based practice have been increasingly institutionalized into core social work values, funding mandates, public policies, and other influences (Mizrahi, 2001). Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994) described modern professionalized community organizing, in the years since its turn away from more adversarial, militant methods, as engaging in three activities: grassroots leadership development approaches; lobbying efforts aimed at achieving political change; and national-level, mobilization-oriented campaigns to raise public awareness. Thus the classic discipline of organizing has continued, but has become increasingly embedded within generalist social work positions and applied in clinical practice settings or with treatment populations (Balcazar, Keys, & Suarez-Balcazar, 2001; Mosher, 2010; Rios, 2010; Rogovsky, 1997).

Meanwhile, the simultaneous reinvigoration and globalization of popular protest witnessed in the 1990s and 2000s have also contributed to the evolution of movement practices (Delgado, 1994; Prokosch, 2002; Sharp, 1994, 2003). Sharp, who had identified 125 different strategies for nonviolent social action in 1994; had identified 198 by 2003. Some segments of the labor movement have seen a return to organizing strategies and worker empowerment, reemphasizing militant and disruptive tactics and campaigns driven by rank-and-file members. Activities of these organizers include recruitment and membership development, leading and coordinating campaigns, providing technical expertise and strategic research, and constructing

culturally appropriate and gender-friendly union structures (Rooks, 2003). Other current forms of action for social justice, especially anti-globalization efforts, have ranged from confrontational direct actions by small, covert teams to massive institutional campaigns by high-profile political organizations that target the public image of power holders (Delp, Outman-Kramer, Schurman, Wong, 2002; Prokosch, 2002). Some have attempted extreme, sometimes violent or dangerous direct-action strategies, while others such as the Yes Men (Smith, 2000) make innovative use of media and public airwaves via clever advertising or awareness-raising pranks. In the past few years new forms of activity, begun among students and workers in Spain and Greece and most recently epitomized by Occupy Wall Street, have staged long-term occupations of public space and experimented with direct democracy on a mass scale, such as through the use of general assemblies in which as many as tens of thousands of occupiers make consensus-based decisions.

As New Left movements began to fade, their backers came to see the need for a broad populist base to bind various progressive efforts together so that their movements could be more sustainable. Current trends in organizing have involved strategies of coalition building and partnerships, seen as central to recent successful efforts in community practice (Fisher, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001; Starr et al., 1999), labor (Delp et al., 2002; Milkman & Voss, 2004), and anti-globalization movements (Delp et al., 2002; Prokosch, 2002). The ability to organize across national borders and diverse cultural backgrounds has also gained importance (Daloz et al., 1997; Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000; Rooks, 2003). While community organizing, labor organizing, and nonprofessionalized or indigenous social movement leadership have historically represented separate but related traditions of organizing, some movements have not differentiated much among these groups or have intentionally mixed them.

Amid these changes and variations, Starr et al. (1999) suggested that professionalized organizers generally have maintained a populist "philosophy and a value-base that permeated individuals' approach to their work, and in some instances, their lives" (p. 37). Starr et al. further found that organizers understood and were comfortable with notions of power and issues of diversity and inequality, referred to "the larger picture" (p. 37), and expressed a belief in empowerment and client participation. Several researchers have reported that organizers therefore share a sense of common identity across movements and settings (Mizrahi, 2001; Rooks, 2003, 2004; Starr et al., 1999). How this identity compares and contrasts with that of indigenous leaders and others who perform organizing roles has been largely unaddressed.

**Where Organizers Work**

Scholars generally agree that citizen-driven groups, local organizations, and other collectives represent the critical context in which organizing practice, social change campaigns, and transformative learning among movement members occur (Burghardt, 1982; Goodwin & Jasper, 2003; Lofland, 1996, Rothman, 1968; Taylor, 1998). Professionalized organizing mainly occurs in the context of community organizations, human services settings, and adult education and immersive learning environments (English, 2002; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994; Rooks, 2003; Starr et al., 1999). Mondros and Wilson (1994) noted that nonprofit community organizations, like organizers themselves, vary in orientation toward leadership development, substantive change measures, or public-awareness goals. Social movements have generated different types of formal and informal social movement organizations (SMOs), sometimes described as "named associations" (Lofland, 1996, p. 11), or entities that view themselves as part of movements and implement campaigns in the name of movements (Lofland, 1996; Marwell & Oliver, 1984). These include ad hoc protest decision-making bodies, as ongoing but informal

affinity groups, or "self-sufficient support systems of about 5 to 15 people [who] remain together over a long period of time, existing as political support and/or study groups [and] participating in actions" (ActUpNY.com, retrieved November 6, 2012). Other SMOs are formalized local nonprofit organizations, labor unions, as well as large NGOs and INGOs.

Community practice studies also recognize the professions and local communities in which organizers and organizations operate as important to organizing practices and careers (Mizrahi, 2001; Rothman, 1968; Starr et al., 1999). Social movement studies have emphasized social movements as the connective tissue that binds and supports actors interested in related societal issues (Delp et al., 2002; Prokosch, 2002; Sharp, 1994, 2003). Scholars have further postulated that differences in these organizations and larger contexts are the product of varying structural, relational, cultural, and capacity-related factors, which interact to produce conditions that can be more or less conducive to participation and commitment (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Goodwin & Jasper, 2003) and leadership development (Ganz, 2000) and to the empowerment of workers and community members (Maton & Salem, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2004).

**Who Organizers Are**

On a broad scale, citizen participation theorists have shown that privileged members of society are far more likely to participate in politics than are women, minorities, people who lack education, and other disenfranchised groups (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Schlozman, 2002; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Both historically (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Delp, 2002; Fendrich, 1993; Prokosch, 2002) and in present-day movements (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Rooks, 2003, 2004), studies have reported a lack of diversity among both members and leaders. Hooghe and Stolle (2004) have pointed out that this tendency is less acute in forms of political participation outside of electoral politics, but it still exists. Prokosch (2002) documented several examples of

contemporary worker protests that have been hindered by cultural conflicts or a general lack of diversity. For example, during the immigrant rights demonstrations of 2006, which were intended to bring together low-wage and disenfranchised workers of all backgrounds, some workers of Asian and African-American descent felt that their needs took a back seat to those of the large Latino population active in the movement (Milkman, 2000).

Studies of organizers reveal a similar problem. Despite its populist and pro-diversity intentions, the tradition of organizing (at least until recently) has been carried out mainly by white, educated, married men (Milkman & Voss, 2004; Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Studies of both organizers and long-term activists are dominated by baby boomers (born circa 1945 to 1964) and individuals of the so-called Generation X (circa 1965 to 1986) (Daloz et al., 1997; Daloz, 2000; Ganz, 2000; Ganz et al., 2004; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994; Starr et al., 1999). Studies that focused primarily on World War II, baby-boomer, and older Generation X individuals were least likely to locate participants of color, even when the organizations in which they worked did have members of other ethnicities (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994).

Downton and Wehr's (1997, 1998) sample of persistent peace activists was mostly composed of privileged individuals who were willing to use their wealth for a common purpose, although they were able to include a wide diversity of individuals in terms of generation, geography, and ethnicity. Similarly, a sample of baby-boomer labor leaders of the early 2000s were mostly white, male, college-educated professionals and activists, though some were blue-collar, rank-and-file union members or other working-class individuals, including some of color (Ganz et al., 2004). In an ethnically, socially, and geographically diverse sample of long-term baby-boomer and Generation X activists, more than half had experienced stigmatization due to

their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, educational attainment, family pain, or poverty (Daloz et al., 1997).

Among Generation X and Y labor organizers, Rooks (2003, 2004) found a high number of (mostly white) women; however, she also noted that the demands of organizing work in unions and other settings often continue to present high barriers to parents, women, ethnic minorities, and members of the working class (Bunnage & Stepan-Norris, 2004; Milkman & Voss, 2004; Prokosch, 2002; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Women represented 70% of a sample of Generation X and Y social workers who specialized in organizing and planning (Starr et al., 1999), although this result was not surprising since social work is a female-dominated field; there were still more men in this specialization than in others. A few studies of feminist movements and participants have been helpful in illustrating the experiences of women activists over time (English, 2002; Whittier, 2003; one other).

Research has suggested that organizers and career activists overall are highly educated. Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994) found that most participants in their study had college or advanced degrees. The entire sample of environmental professionals examined by Kovan and Dirkx (2003) had attained at least an undergraduate degree, and even the large and diverse sample examined by Daloz et al. (1999) was 98% college-educated. Having attended college was a main predictor of engagement among union leaders (Ganz et al., 2004).

### Studies of Professionalized Community and Labor Organizers

Most studies of community and labor organizing address practice understandings and techniques. Though not the central focus of this review, practice is certainly an important element of an organizing career. The theories that drive practice also have direct relevance to

organizer careers. So I will briefly review some general practice concepts and findings before turning to studies in which the development and sustainability of organizers is a central focus.

**General Practice Understandings**

Notions about organizing as practice begin with theories about *perspective transformation*, which has explained the process of intrapsychic learning and change that individuals undergo as they become active in social change and build political skills and awareness ( Burghardt, 1982, 1995; Mezirow, 1955, 1991, 2000; Taylor, 1998). Transformation theory proposed that, as individuals become aware of societal oppression, they are confronted with disorienting dilemmas, or crises that call into question what they thought they knew about their relative freedom and ability to self-actualize (Mezirow, 1955, Taylor, 1998). While this dilemma explains why change is needed, it can also entail significant inner conflict about oppression and one's own role in it. When this dilemma occurs in a supportive group setting, the theory argues that a positive transformation of perspective, or a deep shift not only in what one knows, but in how one is sure of that knowledge, can occur. Hence Mezirow (1991) has traced a 10-step process, dubbed *transformative learning*, by which transformations occur and are facilitated in small groups. Members engage together in praxis, or a dialectic of action (social change efforts) and reflection (via group process), and they thereby resolve their initial dilemma through a process of politicization. This process allows them to see their own power through joining with others and engaging critical thinking, leadership, and political skills so as to change oppressive conditions.

Developing notions of *popular education* that utilized learning through participation also contributed to organizing practice ideas. Although popular education ideas emphasized creative forms of awareness-raising that communicate simple and accessible messages, they also

incorporated the belief that even the least educated citizens must be trusted to make their own meaning of their experiences (Daniels, 2003; Delp et. al., 2002; Freire, 1970, 1999). Finally, organizing concepts developed in conjunction with theories of *resource mobilization*, which are concerned with how movements and organizations leverage resources such as money, members, and influence to achieve their goals (Habermas, 1970; Olson, 1965; Rucht, 1996; Tarrow, 1998). Accordingly, Alinsky's notions were explicitly pragmatic rather than ideological or partisan, in order that groups of disenfranchised citizens, who may have varying political orientations, could construct locality-based community organizations to address local needs and issues (Alinsky, 1946, 1971; Fisher & Shragge, 2000).

With the emergence of community practice in social work in the 1960s and 1970s, community organizing was redefined, adopting the goal of citizen and client participation in the planning of programs and public policies while retaining a focus on militant tactics, popular protest, and noninstitutionalized power (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001; Starr et al., 1999). Since then, understandings of organizing and social action concepts have continued to evolve in practice settings, becoming increasingly folded into notions of empowerment-based practice. Empowerment is defined as the process by which individuals, groups, and communities come to solve their own problems and make their own choices (Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Speer & Hughey, 1996). Empowerment theorists have emphasized the contextual factors that can either empower or disempower individuals in concrete and manifest ways. They also have stressed the need for supportive and sustainable organizations and movement communities in making empowerment possible (Maton & Salem, 1995; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004). Current empowerment understandings reflect the fact that, within the professions, organizing and social action strategies have found the greatest purchase when they were

embedded or institutionalized into practices and services that are more legitimated in the context of neoliberalism. For this reason these strategies have been blended in various ways with theories and concepts from other clinical and community-practice modalities (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Lee, 2001), while organizers have retained an interest in resisting abusive practices that can result from a neoliberal emphasis on privatization, downsizing, and devolution of government (Mizrahi, 2001).

Outside social work, adult education scholars have continued to develop Mezirow's ideas on transformational learning (Daloz et al., 1997; Dirkx, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003), and labor scholars have also studied effective practices, often framed since the revival period starting in the mid-1990s in terms of *social movement unionism* (Milkman & Voss, 2004). These notions were contrasted with business unionism (the prevailing model by that time), which kept a narrow focus on members solely as workers, relied on highly bureaucratic and hierarchical chains of command, and increasingly focused on individual grievances of workers rather than on collective struggles. Social movement unionism instead emphasized militant tactics, campaigns driven by the rank-and-file members, and diversity concerns.

Fisher and Shragge (2000) have argued that Alinsky's original methods failed to connect local struggles to broader political and social concerns and were often difficult to sustain over time, that organizers held hidden power in groups (in a way that was antithetical to the idea of people-driven change), and that Alinsky's methods inadequately addressed diversity issues and inequalities within movements. Later methods therefore emphasized experimentation with new forms of direct democracy (Fisher and Shragge, 2000), greater consideration of the perspectives of feminists and people of color, and strategies to build a larger base and form alliances to address "wider struggles for social and economic justice" (Mizrahi, 2001).

A key issue addressed in both community and labor organizing studies is whether organizers are indigenous to movements or are outsiders. Community-practice theories of the past tended to cast organizers as outsider experts and facilitators who promoted and assisted the development of indigenous leadership and social change campaigns but strove to limit their own influence on group decision making (Alinsky, 1946, 1971; Rothman, 1968; Rothman & Tropman, 1987). More recent empowerment theorists have suggested that movement insiders may also act as leader-organizers, who step forward on behalf of group members when necessary but still strive to promote shared leadership (Checkoway, 2009; Staples, 2001; Bunnage & Stepan-Norris, 2004). Still others may function as bridge-builders (Checkoway, 2009, personal communication), operating in what Ganz (2000) called the borderlands, or the spaces between social groups and connecting multiple groups or communities. Ganz further posited that outsiders can often bring technical expertise and a passion for social change, whereas indigenous leaders offer natural network ties and cultural competency among workers.

It is thus likely that organizers may have different experiences and identities when they are indigenous to groups rather than being outsiders. Moreover, organizers themselves must undergo transformation, both in order to become organizers in the first place and to continue developing their expertise and commitment over time (Burghardt, 1982; Daloz et al., 1997). Research has also indicated that organizers cannot be effective at empowering others, and are not likely to stick with their work, if they themselves are not empowered in their work environments (Maton & Salem, 1995; Speer & Hughey, 1996; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004).

**Studies of Organizer Development and Sustainability**

Due to concerns about recruitment, retention, and efficacy of organizers in the face of difficult working conditions, uncertain material rewards and incentives, and various disincentives

and barriers, several social work and labor scholars have focused on organizing careers. First, Mondros and Wilson addressed the career selection and sustenance of paid nonprofit community organizers, given the hostile climate facing them. Participants were described as holding a contrarian stance to mainstream culture and a deep desire to achieve social change, driven by an evolving ideology that was then reinforced by organizational orientations.

These researchers found a high level of congruence, or a "good fit" (Mondros & Wilson, 1990, p. 108), among organizers' social change goals, targets, ideological stances, and activities. The few who had not achieved congruence had left their organizations or stopped organizing altogether. The authors concluded that organizers were motivated primarily by a deep personal need for social change, in keeping with Maslow's (1943) need theory, and that they selected and remained in organizing careers and organizations, even in the face of low pay and other disincentives, when they determined there was a sufficient expectation—in accordance with Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory of career selection—that doing so would meet this need.

Related studies highlighted market constraints and professional identity issues that confront organizers at decision points may necessitate entrepreneurialism in accessing and shaping positions toward organizing goals. Starr et al. (1999) conducted research in response to concerns expressed by students, enrolled in the Community Organizing and Planning track at the Hunter School of Social Work's MSW program, that organizing might no longer be a viable career. Findings suggested both value-based and career-oriented motivations for pursuing graduate degrees with a community organizing focus. Prior organizing work experience was the strongest predictor of post-MSW organizing. The authors concluded that organizing careers reflected both congruences and contradictions in these careers. In sustained careers, values-based motives were well integrated with career motives, community-organizing and social work

identities were held in tandem and compatible, and organizers' professional practices were consistent with their educational preparation. The authors asserted that these congruences should have a positive effect on organizers' ability to access and succeed in positions. On the other hand, even though jobs entailed organizing and planning activities and had organizing-related job titles, and even though participants identified themselves as organizers, they often did not perceive their work as community organizing. In addition, these practitioners felt that they had to be creative in reshaping positions to include clearer organizing roles.

One conclusion offered by Starr et al. was that "the data reflect the individual entrepreneurial nature of [community organizers'] job marketing and acquisition, rather than proactive institutional development of job opportunities utilizing organizing and planning expertise" (1999, p. 3). This notion is supported by several other studies that examined broadly the position and identity of organizers in community practice settings. These scholars have identified forces of neoliberalism that impact organizing, including downsizing and devolution of government services, privatization, and hostility or ambivalence toward militancy and radicalism (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Mizrahi, 2001). Yet these studies have also noted that globalization and the recent upsurge of interest in organizing both inside and outside social work have nonetheless provided opportunities, even in the professions. In this context, Mizrahi (2001, p. 183) suggested that community organizers "are struggling to find creative ways to provide services and create community-driven, client-centered structures and to infuse business-oriented, social entrepreneur roles with socially compassionate and socially just agendas."

Labor union organizers in recent years have also reported difficult working conditions and unsatisfying experiences (Milkman & Voss, 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Two key studies, both by Rooks (2003, 2004), examined the experiences of young union organizers who joined

the labor revival efforts of the late 1990s. In the first study, Rooks examined the challenges and demands that these organizers faced, including travel, long hours, and emotional demands. She described the "cowboy mentality" (p. 33) typical of the field, wherein organizing was viewed as (a) movement work that requires sacrifice, (b) superior to other forms of work, and (c) primarily oriented toward a boot-camp approach. Rooks reported that a certain "machismo" (p.52) perpetuated by this cowboy mentality meant that many labor organizers felt inordinate pressure to live up to an image as "charismatic, outgoing individuals with strong political, ideological and/or personal commitment to the work" (Rooks, 2003, p. 46), even when they were overworked and unhappy. She argued that this expectation strengthened the occupational commitment of some organizers, but that it also alienated and excluded many women and people of color in particular.

In her second work, Rooks (2004) pointed out that labor organizers typically learned their roles in other movements and in formal training institutes, and were then recruited because they were viewed as capable of revitalizing unions and returning them to their worker-driven roots. She suggested that organizers were driven by a strong sense of idealism, and that they had entered the field with expectations that they would be able to play an important role in achieving social change, as was advertised by labor leaders. Rooks indicated that, while there had been an infusion of resources into union organizing to accompany the recruitment of these organizers, promised changes were constrained by several issues. First, the intensity of the demands placed on these individuals was so extreme that some said they "do not have a life" (Rooks, 2004, p. 210) while others were excluded from participating altogether. Organizers were also frustrated by the slow pace of social change and often did not have the opportunity to participate in successful campaigns. And many said that they encountered a "culture clash" as they attempted

to carry out their work, since they were usually outsiders relative to the union rank and file (Rooks, 2004). Unions were often disinclined or not equipped to address issues of gender and race discrimination and failed to achieve true worker empowerment in new organizing campaigns.

Rooks (2004) has also argued that such mismatches between expectations and reality could often undercut commitment, and that some participants were struck by the irony of their situation: their charge was to unionize oppressed workers, yet they worked in unions that were oppressive to them and in which they were themselves nonunionized. She pointed out that what labor organizers were experiencing was consistent with similar dynamics documented in other justice jobs, or in professions such as social work, poverty law, and other specializations where the primary aim is to serve disadvantaged populations. At the same time, Rooks identified factors that enabled organizers to remain committed despite these frustrations: a willingness to make ideological compromises, the presence of a peer support group in the union, and experiencing a successful campaign, especially within the first three months.

Low wages and low regard for organizing in their professions may also help to explain why some social workers with an organizing or empowerment approach seek to advance over time into administrative roles and then incorporate an empowerment-oriented approach into their practices and policies (Hardina, 2003; Mizrahi, 2001; Starr et al., 1999). Mizrahi (2001) argued that it may remain difficult for organizers to clearly define an identity and service niche, again reflecting both congruencies and contradictions in organizer identities (Starr et al., 1999). Mizrahi, like Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994), suggested that attainment of congruence is essential to establishing a coherent organizer identity, as well as a key motivator. Overall, this literature provides but a few clues about decision points themselves. It suggests that organizers

are mostly motivated by a value-driven desire to achieve social change, but that they have career needs as well.

## Studies of Long-Term Activism and Movement Leadership

Numerous social movement studies since the 1930s, often building on broader ideas about citizen participation, have examined the circumstances under which people do and do not choose to participate in movements, both to enhance academic understanding of activism as a social phenomenon and to explain or make recommendations about mobilization and recruitment strategies. These works have differentiated among movement nonparticipants, active participants, and engaged observers, with the last of these groups supporting movement activities but limiting their personal involvement (Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). Leaders are usually discussed as members with special roles and abilities, though there is little discussion of the differences between indigenous leaders and outsider professionals in this literature. I will now report some broad findings about participation, followed by a review of the subset of this category of works that has examined long-term persistence and leadership development.

### General Participation Studies

Early explanations viewed social movement participation as the dangerous and irrational behavior of fringe elements in society (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Goodwin & Jasper, 2003; Piven & Cloward, 1992). More sober explanations in the 1950s suggested that, although the motives that underlie activism may not be based in rational self-interest, participants are sensible people who, though integrated into the fabric of society, have deeply held critiques of that society and see activism as a viable solution (Olson, 1965; Ruchts, 1996). Cultural-relational explanations of movements as subcultures and identity groups have also been common (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Inglehart, 1990; Snow & McAdam, 2000), and

these approaches combined with biographical and life-course perspectives (Stewart & Healy, 1989) have informed more recent psychosocial interpretations (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Goodwin & Jasper, 2003; Klandermans, 1992).

These studies have generally suggested that preadult socializing experiences lead to values that initially prepare people for participation, or what Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) called attitudinal availability. Opportunities to join movements then come about via relational and institutional ties at the micromobilization level, or in local everyday settings, as well as exposure to political and historical events at the macromobilization level. Scholars have conceptualized these ecosystems as personal opportunity structures that must be exploited for participation to occur (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; McAdam, 1986; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996).

Many inquiries into movement participation have taken a life-course approach. Stewart and Healy (1989) synthesized earlier ideas about life-cycle (Erikson, 1963, 1975), socialization (Elder, 1978), and generational and aging effects (Mannheim, 1952), which they posited as bringing about the initial decision to participate in a social movement. The transition to adulthood is considered to be a primary identity-forming phase in the life cycle (Erikson, 1963, 1975), and Stewart and Healy suggested that, as each generation comes of age, shared experiences such as major historical events (including popular social movements) affect their identity development and their choice to join a movement. Since young people have different socializing experiences during their development, the theory suggests that generations produce different *generational units* (Stewart & Healy, 1989), or segments which espouse particular ways of viewing shared generational experiences. These ideas explain the development of diverse, simultaneous youth movements with widely varying views.

University or college attendance has often predated and provided initial access to activism and citizen participation (Flacks, 1967; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Stewart et al., 1998). Life-course studies also suggest that people's participation habits change throughout their lives (Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Oesterle et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 1998). People of all generations are more likely to engage in movements during their youth or in midlife, and those who participate during their transition into adulthood are likely to repeat their activist participation later in life (Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Stewart & Healy, 1989; Van Dyke et al., 2000).

Movement experiences have also been found to have significant lasting influence on the lives even of short-term activists (Stewart et al., 1998; Van Dyke et al., 2000). Though most life-course studies examined large samples of activists and casual movement participants, two such studies looked at leaders of both right-wing and left-wing 1960s student movements, showing that these activists continued their political activities as a career, though in different ways (Braungart & Braungart, 1986, 1991), with the right-wing leaders being more likely to enter politics while the left-wing activists pursued other helping careers.

**Studies of Commitment and Persistence of Activists**

To learn more about movement sustainability, several studies have examined variations in commitment and persistence among activists, often amid movement decline or institutionalization. These studies frequently focused on notions of intrapsychic commitment, since activists tend to participate in activities that appear contrary to their own self-interest. The studies found that contextual factors may either support or undermine commitment. For example, Downton and Wehr (1991) discussed mechanisms that bonded activists to groups and sustained commitment, including shared leadership, collective ideologies, taking on clearly

defined roles, rituals to strengthen core beliefs, and circles of friends in the movement, all of which, as Klandermans (1992) pointed out, are frequently researched phenomena in movement studies. Hirsch (1990) examined commitment among students in the 1985 Columbia University divestment protest and the importance of political solidarity among protesters, or "their commitment to the cause and their belief in the noninstitutional tactics that further that cause" (p. 244). The researchers suggested that commitment is "best explained by analyzing group-level political processes … and their positive effect on political solidarity" (Hirsch, 1990, p. XX). Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) pointed out that, in addition to an intrapsychic sense of commitment, persistent activism requires the actual ability to stay involved, and they have presented the most comprehensive theory of activist persistence available thus far. They built on the work of McAdam (1986), who suggested that initial experiences in the civil rights movement inspired some activists to take on a higher-risk campaign, but that initial exposure and motivation were not sufficient to explain continued involvement. McAdam argued that students, in this case, were most likely to participate because they were available to travel and take the risks involved.

In other words, high-risk activism requires certain personal resources, or the absence of competing demands, to allow for what Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) would later call situational availability. The 1990s peace activists whom they studied had been active in a local peace and social justice network for many years, despite the slow decline that this network had experienced. Downton and Wehr developed a theory of the stages by which persistence developed, and they identified three types of influences on deepening engagement: macrolevel events and social issues, microlevel or everyday networks and settings, and personal attributes and life experiences. Developmental and current influences from within and outside the

movement (such as social problems, family, education, church, and movement leaders) socialize people toward attitudinal availability; life patterns (time, money, career flexibility, and social networks) bring about situational availability. If these availability factors come together sufficiently, initial participation is still then contingent on opportunity.

Once someone becomes active, Downton and Wehr argued, persistence depends upon various additional factors also coming into play. Whereas McAdam had suggested that individuals with an absence of countervailing responsibilities could engage in high-risk activism, Downton and Wehr countered that people with other life responsibilities could persist and deepen involvement, even in high-risk activities, if they could effectively negotiate conflicts and if family and community support allowed them the time and space to do so. Once involved, then, these activists began to increasingly "make time" (Downton and Wehr, 1997, p. 540) for deepening activism. Nonetheless, periods of burnout, described as a "sudden collapse of effort" (p.107) occurred cyclically and in response to environmental stressors throughout activist careers, even among persisters.

In another study of persistence, Nepstad (2004) found that commitment among activists in a left-wing Catholic peace movement commune was successfully promoted through very early participation in highly contentious, physically dangerous actions. Additionally, the communal living arrangement that these activists created gave them a support network, child care if they were incarcerated, and other resources enabling them to be available for very high-risk forms of activism over time. Whittier (2003) found that, while militant confrontations involving radical feminists died down after this movement's 1970s peak, all but a few core members continued to hold a radical feminist perspective and identity, kept their networks intact, and maintained their social change goals and worldviews, continuing to rely on each other for support and sustained

commitment in their personal lives and occupations. Many became professionals in feminist and women's organizations, for example, and were still involved in supporting the looser feminist progressivist coalition of the 1990s.

**Studies of Movement Leadership Development**

Concerned with how to increase the *strategic capacity* of movement organizations, or their ability to exploit policy windows to gain support for their cause, Ganz and several colleagues have studied the development of movement leaders (Ganz, 2000; Ganz et al., 2004). In contrast to the extensive community-practice literature, Ganz (2000) pointed out that few social movement studies have examined leadership development and the efficacy of the actions they bring about. A main component of his theory of strategic capacity is the development of efficacy in leaders, a topic central to this inquiry. Ganz posited that biographical characteristics of leaders and organizational factors both influence the targets that leadership teams select and the actions they take on behalf of movement goals. He suggested that the changes in organizations and in organizers' personal lives and careers brought about by their social change actions then affected their future motivations, reputations, skills, and biographies.

More recently, Ganz et al. (2004) examined labor leaders of the late 1990s, finding again that leaders built upon resources from prior activist experiences in their decisions as to which positions to accept, their agendas in those positions, and their subsequent decisions about whether to stay or leave. They demonstrated that leaders from different demographic backgrounds came into the labor movement with different *projects*, or mental narratives that they composed to make sense of their goals, motivations, and the means by which they sought to satisfy them (categorized as either social reform, union building, community leadership, or personal advancement). For example, the majority of participants were well-educated, white

New Left activists or (often Latino) clergy, who were affiliated with major social justice and political organizations and sought to colonize unions toward social reform. Other leaders of color gained access to movement leadership by first building the political base necessary to win a union election in their own ethnic communities, with community leadership projects aimed to further the needs of their constituencies and maintain political support. Once in these positions, leaders strove to adapt their projects to organizations, or to push unions to adapt to their projects; some retained the same project once in these roles while others changed orientation. Hence, arrangements between leaders and organizations didn't always work out (Ganz et al., 2004), causing them to select a different pathway. The researchers concluded that projects, more than personal characteristics, determined the choices that leaders made.

**Overall Explanations about Persistence, Development, and Decision Making**

Several researchers have concluded that early 20th-century collective behavior views of activism, as motivated by irrational and insecure individuals who lacked mainstream social ties, often did not hold true (Downton & Wehr, 1997; Hirsch, 1990; Klandermans, 1992). These theorists have instead favored rational-choice explanations to capture the cost-benefit calculations that activists make when deciding to engage in their actions. However, the data also presented some reasons to resist the conceptualization of activists' career decisions as simply rational. First, the findings provide clear support for the importance of relationships, cultural identity, and shared values among activists in their participation decisions. Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) suggested that creativity and entrepreneurialism play an important role as well, an insight that resonates with the findings of community practice scholars. They viewed activists as "exploring options beyond conventional ways of thinking and organizing" (p. 545), which

involved novelty, risk-taking, and innovation. Ganz et al. (2004) concluded that labor leaders' careers proceeded neither randomly nor predictably, but were rather adaptive.

A developmental or psychosocial approach, then, combines all the above angles of analysis and allows for an understanding of how activism changes over time. Downton and Wehr (1997) argued that commitment became stronger over time, but that participation and commitment also "wax[ed] and wan[ed]" (p. 150) in response to stressors and cyclical periods of burnout. Such an understanding not only considers intrapsychic phenomena but also emphasizes contextual influences, especially those purposefully implemented in movements to support commitment, such as consciousness raising efforts and the building of solidarity among protesters, both thought to bring about affective, or emotional, commitment (Hirsch, 1990). Nepstad (2004) similarly described a practice in a Catholic left peace commune of encouraging new activists to taking personal civil disobedience risks early on in their involvement, which they said encouraged continuance commitment, or commitment brought about because one has invested oneself and so now has a greater stake in social change outcomes. Ganz et al. (2004) also pointed out the tensions and interactions between individual and organizational change.

These inquiries suggest a more complex view of factors related to decision points than that provided by studies of community practice. In this view, values and identity concerns, social change goals, the relationships and resources that comprise opportunity structures, and personal life concerns all give rise to the need to integrate different life spheres and economize resources, and to manage personal relationships outside the movement. Ganz et al. (2004) posited that labor leaders did not simply fill existing positions and carry out prescribed job descriptions; career pathways were "devised rather than followed" (p. 153), by organizing one's various agendas into projects, as discussed, and then adapting projects to pathways or selecting

new ones. They suggested that it is thus unreliable to presume that personal backgrounds alone will predict career decisions, particularly in fields such as organizing where motives are often not based on personal material incentives.

### Studies of Work for the Common Good

A final body of studies has gone deeper in examining how intrapsychic commitment develops among individuals who do work that benefits the common good, often without regard to self- interest. Scholars have sought to understand what having a sense of vocation, or calling, means to the development of commitment (Colby & Damon, 1992; Cochran, 1990, 1992; Daloz et al., 1997; Hillman, 1996). Sometimes defined as "meaning in life through one's work" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 100), vocation is often conceptualized as the intersection of the deep personal self and the ability to provide a social benefit. Daloz et al. (1999) argued that commitment and vocation are closely connected, suggesting that people often feel they do not have a choice regarding whether to act; "they feel propelled into the work, even at times when their conscious rational selves seem to tell them otherwise" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 113). Various researchers have considered how the process of transformative learning interacts with the development of vocation, suggesting that transformative learning reflects a person's deepest and most central struggle, framed in Jungian terms as *individuation,* or a journey to wholeness through awareness and reconciliation of unconscious aspects of self (Dirkx, 2000a, 2000b; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

These studies support psychosocial explanations of commitment, but they also delve into the realm of spiritual and moral development. Whether religious or not, organizers and activists have frequently indicated that they feel a sense of vocation about their work (Daloz et al., 1997; Daloz, 2000; Downton & Wehr, 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Rooks, 2004). Amid studies of

work for the common good, those by Daloz et al. (1999), Daloz (2000), and Kovan and Dirkx (2003) have addressed career activists specifically.

Daloz et al. (1999) examined individuals across the U.S. who had demonstrated sustained commitment to "values-based politics in the public sphere" (p. xi). They confirmed earlier findings that personal transformation and a sense of vocation were important to the development of commitment; they also noted the presence of a global perspective as a third contributing factor. A large majority of these individuals indicated that spiritual influences in their background significantly influenced commitment, in keeping with findings by Tisdell (2000) and English (2000, 2002) about women activists in adult and higher education. Daloz et al. (1999) also stressed the importance of quality family relationships and other contextual influences in developing a perspective typified by strong concern for the global community. Transformation was seen, by these and other transformation theorists, as a continuous process, and along the way these activists developed their worldviews, ideologies, and identities, improved their practice skills, and gained a deepening sense of commitment (Daloz et al., 1997; Dirkx, 1997, 2000a, 2000b).

Kovan and Dirkx (2003) also examined the process of learning and commitment among experienced, committed environmental activists. They posited that, because activism can fulfill a calling and provide a context for learning, clarification of values, and identity development, commitment to it may develop as a key part of the broader process of psychospiritual individuation for these individuals. Jones and Abes (2004) similarly found evidence that citizenship and identity development are deeply intertwined and that adults learn by continually replacing mental frames of reference that no longer interpret reality adequately with more encompassing perspectives.

Kovan and Dirkx (2003) further uncovered three major themes reported by activists. Participants said that they learned first "from that which is not known," and second by "connecting with and working from the heart" (Kovan and Dirkx, 2003, p. 108). In other words, they developed a "spiritual knowing" in which "emotions are understood as an important source of knowledge" (p. 114) about both themselves and the world. The third theme uncovered was "learning to live through difficult periods of overwhelming stress" and burnout that brought a deep sense of "exhaustion and weariness." While some gave up their careers during these dark periods, those who persisted treated the challenges as "disorienting dilemmas" and allowed them to become "episodes of deep learning, requiring a turning inward and learning about the self … a deeply personal journey, a kind of spiritual pilgrimage through which they come to see and understand deeper and different aspects of themselves" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 113). Ultimately, these scholars concluded that what appears to sustain activists "is a continual acceptance of the passion and its meaning in their lives … a sense of the sacred and of mystery, of which their lives and work are an intimate part" (p. 113). They further suggested that the transformative learning that motivated most activists was not dramatic but gradual, taking place over a long period of time.

## Interdisciplinary Descriptions of Organizer Careers

A synthesis of these findings highlights several key aspects of organizer careers that may distinguish them from more conventional ones. First, organizing represents highly skilled work but tends to be low-paid and carry low social status; it can also involve high personal risk or be seen as nonconventional or stigmatized. Second, these careers involve great instability and uncertainty and, therefore, require a great degree of creativity and an entrepreneurial approach. Finally, the primary motivations for these careers are nonmaterial. Organizers' distinctive career

trajectories can be compared with careers at large, so as to reveal their unique rewards and challenges.

**Career Trajectories**

The characteristics mentioned in the previous paragraph appear to be common to a variety of justice organizing and activist careers, though perhaps to varying degrees. The experiences of organizers in professionalized community, labor, or environmental settings, for example, seem substantively different from those of the peace and justice movement participants reviewed here, who, as Downton and Wehr (1997) noted, persisted in noninstitutionalized roles and settings. In another example, only some of the MSW alumni examined had attained work in community organizing and planning roles; many others practiced in clinical, administrative, or teaching positions, based on job availability in the professional sphere (Starr et al., 1999). For some persistent peace activists examined, on the other hand, their lives were "transformed by total commitment to the cause. They become completely absorbed in the movement" (Downton and Wehr, 1997, p. 545). This approach appears to be highly entrepreneurial, involving much financial uncertainty and repeated efforts to launch new activist ventures, while others "commuted between the movement world and their conventional lives" (p. 545). Taken together, prior studies have suggested three distinctive types of organizing careers, each with its own set of requirements, rewards, and modes of advancement. These may be viewed as professionalized, entrepreneurial, and commuter trajectories.

**Comparison to Careers in General**

Organizers choose their paths from among other available options. In the past, careers in general were usually bounded within one or two organizations, and they usually progressed in linear fashion, as organizations provided predictable steps in which loyalty and performance

were rewarded with increased wages, autonomy or authority, and other incentives. Today, however, careers are increasingly likely to be *boundaryless*, meaning that people are freer to move from one job to another (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; Hall, 2002). Boundaryless careers require abilities that transcend a single career setting or are transferable to new environments, and they place responsibility for career management on the individual rather than the organization.

Recent theorists also have suggested that careers are likely to be episodic and portfolio-driven (Brousseau et al., 1996; Hall, 2002). In other words, workers are hired for specific projects for which they have skills from previous experiences. Since transferable skills are prized, workers strive to cultivate a strong and varied record of service and expertise. Brousseau et al. (1996) further posited that career patterns are no longer always linear, but can take a variety of patterns. Hall stated that, in response to these changes, today's careers are *protean*, in that individuals give their first allegiance to their career rather than to a particular organization and are more likely to choose a "path with a heart," or a career with meaning, rather than, "a path to the top" (p.34). As material incentives for jobs in general decrease, and as people more often seek work with personal meaning to them, some of the traditional differences between organizing careers and typical careers may be shrinking. Organizing and activism may offer the work with meaning that people now tend to seek, but these pursuits may also remain more precarious and undercompensated than most other careers.

**Rewards and Challenges**

In addition to the primary rewards of being able to effect social change, build identity, and have a positive social experience, career activists have reported other benefits. Some appreciated the opportunity to enhance their self-esteem and confidence, learn new skills and

information, and become "more alive" contributors to the world (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 111). They benefited from the personal growth that accompanies working for something larger than themselves and from the chance to fulfill their perceived calling (Daloz et al., 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

Nonetheless, challenges in organizer and activist careers appear to remain high. Even persistent peace activists, for example, reported frustrations with the slow progress of change, occasional discontent with movement or group leadership, interpersonal conflicts with loved ones, and availability constraints (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998). Personal risks and sacrifices were common, and working conditions often were very difficult or unsatisfying. Organizers often faced stigmatization or low status outside of movements because of their controversial views and nonconventional lifestyles (Daloz et al., 1997; Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Nepstad, 2004; Rooks, 2004). Many interviewed by Daloz et al. (1997) said they were able to make a reasonable living yet felt they often could not afford the small luxuries of middle class life. These issues could lead to heavy stress and physical and emotional ailments (Daloz et al., 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Rooks, 2003, 2004). It is no surprise, then, that burnout was a common theme across studies of organizers.

**Organizer Development and Sustainability**

The literature suggests that organizers' career development and sustainability issues can be divided into five main themes: (a) seeking successful and satisfying pathways; (b) generating and devising pathways; (c) cultivating and economizing resources; (d) identity and relationship building; and (e) adaptation and transformation.

**The need to achieve a successful and satisfying experience.** As discussed, most people who choose and sustain organizing careers desire deeply to achieve social change and to build

connections with others who have similar goals. Yet even among this values-driven majority, there often remained desire for a comfortable life, recognition, and other career rewards. For a minority of organizers, personal advancement or career goals were the main drivers behind their decision making (Ganz et al., 2004; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994; Starr et al., 1999).

Organizers frequently based decisions upon the expected success of social change efforts, as reflected in Mondros and Wilson's need-expectancy theory, as well as a need for congruence, or even deeper bonding, with organizations and their attached communities; some were more concerned than others with personal needs and interests (Downton and Wehr, 1991, 1997, 1998; Klandermans, 1992; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994; Starr et al., 1999). Overall, this complex array of factors supports the need for a psychosocial understanding of organizer motivation. It is thus helpful to consider their career conceptualizations as projects by which organizers make sense of these various interests and needs (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Ganz et al., 2004; Mische, 2002).

**Generating and devising pathways.** Studies of professionalized, entrepreneurial, and commuter activists have agreed that, for these careers to progress, opportunities need to be "continually cultivated … either by responding to new projects others invent or by creating their own" (Downton & Wehr, 1998, p. 547). Highly entrepreneurial activists may be more likely to launch new ventures and piece together work that allows for activism (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998), while those in the professions are also said to exercise entrepreneurialism in accessing positions (Mizrahi, 2001; Starr et al., 1999) and to be creative in tailoring existing roles toward organizing goals and interests (Ganz et al., 2004; Starr et al., 1999). Very often, then, it appears that career pathways are nonexistent or unsuitable until organizers themselves devise them.

**Cultivating and economizing resources.** Overwhelmingly, studies have indicated that organizing requires what scholars of citizen participation have called participatory resources (Oesterle et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 1998). First, as already noted, activism presumes situational availability, which may in turn require material resources, social support, and/or an absence of competing responsibilities. Second, relational ties to other activists and to institutions, or opportunity structures, are needed to connect people to movements. Third, organizers need highly specialized interactive or interpersonal abilities, public relations expertise, and technical, political, and strategic skills, for both civic and civil (i.e., extrainstitutional) avenues of social change. In the globalizing and diverse context of today's civil society, others have pointed out that working for social change increasingly requires individuals to accommodate diverse views and new experiences, understand the interconnectedness of global problems, manage groups with multicultural membership, and know transnational political and social systems (Checkoway, 2009; Daloz et al., 1997; Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000; Naples, 2002; Prokosch, 2002). Finally, micromobilization theorists have acknowledged that intrapsychic and cultural resources, described as *attitudinal availability*, are also required for participation to be possible. These include the intrapsychic values and motivation to participate, often in the face of conflicting self interests and uncertain success of efforts.

As discussed, activists and organizers typically acquire the initial resources necessary for participation by chance and circumstance, and these resources must then be continuously cultivated. Ganz et al. (2004) have argued that organizers do so by building on resources, relationships, and lessons from the past. Career activists often rely upon families and community networks for support, so persistence requires careful management of these resources and relationships. Peace activists, for example, were found to make do with very little, integrating

social change activities into their everyday lives and seeking to economize their time and resources (Downton & Wehr, 1997). And finally, while attitudinal availability is initially established through childhood socialization processes, the values that support activism and commitment, such as a sense of social responsibility, a political or activist identity, and group consciousness, must also be cultivated (Daloz et al., 1997; Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998, Hirsch, 1990; Klandermans, 2002).

**Identity and relationship building.** Much attention has been devoted to the cultural-relational aspects of organizing and activist careers. As noted already, social identity and relational benefits are key motivating factors. Notions of bonding and congruence highlight the importance of values alignment and an emotional connection to other activists, organizations, and a larger movement in the development of commitment, persistence, and career sustainability (Downton & Wehr, 1991, 1997, 1998; Klandermans, 1992; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994). Scholars have also discussed the importance of mentors, partners in social change, and solidarity with other activists in sustaining commitment (Daloz et al., 1997; Hirsch, 1990; Rooks, 2004).

Identity and relationship development are central components of career development, as they are key to motivation and commitment, practice style, political views and ideologies, and how people make sense of their situations in general. Studies from various disciplines further agree that activists and organizers develop their identity in the context of social relationships within their movement. Transformation theorists have suggested that transformative learning in a positive group context allows for the development of a sense of identity and confidence, an ideology and worldview that drive social change, and thereby a strong and effective voice in the political sphere. The fact that some organizers found their jobs by chance and then developed

strong organizing values *after* taking on these roles shows how movement contexts can provide a space to develop views and practice styles (Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994).

Reputation, professional identity, and movement networks are important factors affecting one's ability to access positions (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Ganz, 2000; McAdam, 1986, 1989; Mizrahi, 2001; Starr et al., 1999). Career decisions are also influenced by group processes and shared cultural values, including intentional efforts to encourage and support commitment and personal sacrifice (Downton and Wehr, 1991; Hirsch, 1990; Klandermans, 1992; Rooks, 2003, 2004).

Similarly, social movement studies have widely agreed that movement contexts provide emotional connections, a positive sense of community, and a forum for identity-building; activism offers people the chance to "be and become someone they not would otherwise be able to be and become" (Teske, 1997, p. 121). Social relationships also connect activists to participation opportunities. These relationships, like other resources, must be built and managed. In order to gain and maintain support from significant others for activism, organizers had to deflect conflict, manage their responsibilities carefully, and respond constructively to criticism (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998). Relationships outside the movement can either support or undermine activism (Daloz et al., 1997; Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Hirsch, 1990).

**Adaptation and transformation.** More than many other types of professionals, organizers need the ability to cope with instability and significant inner transformation. Concepts of work for the common good depict commitment and the development of activist ideologies and identities as a very personal, even spiritual process. Through working in groups and engaging in praxis, and by taking action and risking one's personal safety, participants have

often experienced a deep shift in their overall perspectives. As Downton and Wehr described it, they stepped into "a new and more ethically grounded way of living" (1997, p.141).

The process of transformation thus allows people to learn about themselves and the political realm, develop skills and identity, and sustain commitment. Scholars have suggested that this learning process is needed to overcome the high level of burnout that can accompany these careers. Burnout can occur in response to stressors, but also in periodic, repeated cycles of burnout and renewal (Daloz et al., 1997; Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Organizers may act to prevent burnout via meditation, exercise, and other self-care activities, by taking a long view of social change goals, or by balancing pragmatism with idealism (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Mondros & Wilson, 1990, 1994).

When burnout experiences did occur, persisters treated them as disorienting dilemmas and used these junctures as opportunities for introspection, probing their deepest feelings and needs and often finding a sense of renewal. In many cases, though, this renewing of commitment entailed making a change in routine or organization. Periodic change is a necessary part of even the most committed organizing careers, buttressing the notion that activists must continually make changes and grow in order to remain engaged (Daloz et al., 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

Overall, a deep sense of calling is important in sustaining an activist career. However, it may also have a dark side, as shown by the paradoxical effects of the cowboy mentality and pressure to live up to high standards of ethics and commitment (Daloz et al., 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Finally, change in organizing and activist careers is not always voluntary, since, as noted, these careers are reported to be highly unstable both in the professions and among more entrepreneurial, noninstitutionalized activists. Organizers must be able to cope

with frequent change without losing motivation and to adapt quickly to new opportunities and resources. Ganz et al. (2004) proposed that they do this by developing a plan or project, being willing and able to adapt their project to a particular avenue, and/or selecting another setting if adaptation is untenable.

## Decision Points

These development and sustainability needs described above become especially relevant when decision points, or situations that require an immediate decision, arise. Given the instability and adaptive nature of these careers, decision points may be frequent. These junctures are the central focus of my inquiry, so I will now discuss four aspects of decision points in detail: (a) key junctures, (b) relevant considerations, (c) the unfolding process, and (d) resulting outputs.

### Key Junctures

Decision points have been discussed variously as opportunities for participation, strategic and tactical decisions, staff turnover and retention, disorienting dilemmas, and cyclical episodes of burnout. Many studies have highlighted the importance of the first opportunity and decision to participate in activism, and McAdam (1986) and Downton & Wehr (1997, 1998) emphasized the importance of decisions to deepen activism or take on greater risk than before.

Once careers are established, decision points continue to present themselves, as both practice decisions and career choices. Organizers functioning within the professions frequently have concerns about or difficulty in finding and accessing positions. Jobs can disappear if funding runs out (Mondros & Wilson, 1990), and turnover is high in some organizing positions (Rooks, 2003, 2004) and throughout the nonprofit sector ( Wolfred, Allison, & Masaoka, 1999 ; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Kovan & Dirkx (2003), for example, reported that the general population of nonprofit executives turns over, on average, every six years. Organizers may also

be recruited from one movement to another (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Similarly, noninstitutionalized persisters in the peace movement appeared more committed to the movement in general than to any particular group or campaign within it (Downton and Wehr, 1997). Campaigns began and ended, groups formed and folded, and activists responded to opportunities as they arose, moving easily among various movement structures and social circles. Some decisions were made on the spot at protests, or they represented group decisions about actions and targets. Movement decline was also found to present decision points about whether and how to disengage (Hirsch, 1990, Klandermans, 1992; Whittier, 2003).

Several studies have shown that encountering new availability constraints, or being relieved of existing constraints, can be an important occasion for career decision making (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Rooks, 2004; Stewart et al., 1998). Even when stable in positions, organizers may have personal reasons to consider making a change. Some contemplated whether to leave their position or their occupation due to difficult working conditions, factors that prevented them from performing effectively and ethically, a lack of material rewards and incentives, or burnout. People may also experience a change in goals or motives, such as the labor leaders who left unions because they wanted more time with family or became involved with business enterprises (Ganz et al., 2004).

**Relevant Considerations at Decision Points**

The five development and sustainability themes discussed earlier depict the range of intrapsychic, interactional, and contextual needs that an organizer strove to address throughout their career. But *how* these themes manifest themselves and compel a decision is a different question. At this point the existing literature is less complete, thereby providing a rationale for

my study of decision points. I will suggest here that five considerations, parallel to the five development and sustainability themes described previously, are central in these decisions.

First, organizers must consider their basic *motives, needs, and goals and expectations*, and, second, they also must weigh the *potential risks and rewards* of each available pathway or option. As noted, occupational and organizational selection are thought to be motivated by a variety of factors (e.g., the likelihood of meeting social change goals, sense of fit, bonding, congruence, career goals, and personal life needs). Yet opportunities also may present serious bodily and legal risks and sacrifices in terms of finances and social status, and organizers may not be able to see all the potential risks and rewards ahead of time. Third, then, organizers facing a decision must also assess the *resources available and needed;* in many cases, personal resources must be available at just the right moment to make participation possible.

A fourth set of concerns is *cultural and relational factors*, given the importance of the identity-formation aspects of movement participation, as well as the deep emotional connections formed among activists. Finally, needs related to *personal growth and transformation* may also influence some decision points, as these may represent moments of deep questioning of worldview, personal goals, and commitment. Organizers may negotiate intense spiritual and emotional crises, aiming to turn them into transformational experiences of learning and renewal.

**The Process That Unfolds at Decision Points**

Various studies have touched on relationships among different factors and influences at decision points. Community practice scholars have highlighted how the professional identity of organizers interacts with job-market demands to affect the type and number of options available to these practitioners. Research has illustrated the cross-pressures that organizers experience when making decisions, as those within the movement urge them to remain committed while

relationships outside the movement present disincentives (Downton & Wehr, 1997, 1998; Hirsch, 1990; Klandermans, 1992; Rooks, 2003, 2004).

Studies have given little attention to the processes by which organizers actually make decisions and negotiate transitions, even as career development research has emphasized importance of effective decision-making practices and management of transition (Bridges, 1991, 2000, 2009; Hall, 2002; Schlossberg, 1989; Turner, 1992). Some scholars have examined the process that organizers go through at decision points, pointing out that they rely upon lessons and resources from the past, as well as on their understanding of the present and future (organized into their personal projects), to make decisions and to adapt to a new organizational context (Ganz, 2000; Ganz et al., 2004). Hirsch (1990) has illustrated how group processes interacted with interpersonal ties to support decisions to take risks (e.g., by participating in protests) or deepen commitment. He suggested that student protesters were convinced by a variety of group experiences over time that protest actions were worth taking.

Downton and Wehr (1997) identified points when activists personally took risks and participated in actions as key moments in the overall persistence process. The authors stated that participating in direct actions early in careers brought about initial transformation to an activist identity and lifestyle. As noted, periods of burnout may represent decision points, presenting both the possibility of giving up and the capacity for renewal. Kovan and Dirkx (2003) found that environmental activists made sure to give regular attention to the "affective, emotional, spiritual, and transpersonal dimensions of life" (p. 115) to renew and transform themselves. These activists coped by spending time in nature "to connect with aspects of themselves they found difficult to describe and intellectually understand." Decision making was often therefore less of a rational process, and more of a deep spiritual process of "letting go, listening deeply to

their being in the world and seeing what has previously been unseen and unknown" (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 115).

Finally, very few studies have examined the process by which individuals disengage from groups and movements. Klandermans's (2002) discussion of the Dutch peace movement is an exception. He suggested that people may disengage from actions, groups, or movements by passive defection or neglect, by exiting actively, or by exiting explicitly in protest—or the whole group could simply collapse. And he noted that, when participants actively announced that they were leaving, they might or might not encounter attempts to get them to stay; these interactions themselves were found to have an effect on the final decision, as they illustrated the level of commitment in the relationships. Downton and Wehr (1997) similarly noted that, when people experienced conflict within a group, they might leave or be pushed out of the movement entirely. Ultimately, the collective evidence supports the notion that the decision-making and transition processes that organizers encounter at decision points do not occur in a vacuum; rather, these factors interact with the environment to bring about change. These findings are consistent with the general body of literature on career decision-making and transitions.

**Outputs**

Given the various junctures that decision points may represent, a variety of short-term consequences, or *outputs,* may also result, such as results of actions, or change or constancy of pathways, projects, trajectories, and even careers. Early-career decisions could result in joining movements for the first time, beginning an organizing career, or deepening activism or risk level. Decisions about organization or role selection could bring about the initial choice of a pathway, as well as subsequent decisions to stay or change organizations. Decision points could also

involve externally driven outcomes, like losing a union election or losing a position due to lack of funding, which could also result in changing positions or organizations.

When activists were unable or unwilling to persist in full-time activism, they sometimes pursued commuter trajectories. For example, Rooks (2003) noted that some labor organizers switched to the "mommy track" or took on other union jobs with less demanding requirements when parenting responsibilities made them unavailable to organize. Or, in some cases, this life change caused them to leave the movement altogether. Even among persisters, it is suggested that changing organizations or arrangements could refresh one's routine, allow for new experiences, or perhaps present a situation with better congruence (Downton and Wehr, 1997; Daloz et al., 1997; Ganz et al., 2004; Kovan and Dirkx, 2003; Mondros and Wilson, 1990, 1994).

## Long-Term Outcomes

This review has suggested a number of variables that influence whether people join movements, their organizational selection, and their long-term persistence and efficacy. Some studies have provided particular insight into which factors are most predictive of long-term *outcomes*. Mondros and Wilson's (1990, 1994) need-expectancy theory may predict both organizational selection and occupational sustenance overall and finds support from other studies. I believe that Downton and Wehr's (1997, 1998) theory provides the most comprehensive understanding of persistence. These scholars observed that the activists they interviewed (all of whom had persisted for a minimum of five years) underwent similar stages of development, after which they either stayed in the movement, shifted to another movement, or dropped out altogether. Persisters felt a stronger sense of urgency about the need for peace action and felt more bonded and connected in a group than those who dropped out when they became disillusioned with activism or experienced conflict in a movement group. Personal

crises, competing responsibilities, and having a nonmovement lifestyle were predictors of dropping out, and shifting to another movement was most likely when people were disillusioned with the movement but not with activism overall.

Ganz (2000; Ganz et al., 2004) has suggested that effective tactical and strategic decisions of labor leaders were predicted by positive deliberative structures in leadership teams, adequate organizational resources, accountability of leaders and members in groups, and the presence of strong relationships within movements and looser but wider ties with a diversity of allies. These findings indicate, then, that career development and sustainability are deeply intertwined. Individuals must remain engaged in learning and growth if they are to sustain motivation and commitment; conversely, the learning and complex problem solving inherent in organizing careers require tremendous motivation. Both development and sustainability seem to be predicated on the cultivation of material resources and situational availability, networks, and relationships as well as skills and competencies. Sufficient resources are needed at the beginning of careers, while further development of resources results in increasing efficacy and the ability to persist and deepen involvement over time.

## Developing and Sustaining the Hearts, Minds, and Bodies of Organizers

In conclusion, the literature reviewed depicts organizers as passionate, sacrificial activists and mindful practitioners who, at the same time, have material needs like everyone else. Analyses of organizing practice and careers, social movement participation and leader development, and vocation and commitment have yielded helpful descriptions of who is attracted to organizing, what organizers do, and where they work. They have portrayed these careers as forms of social entrepreneurship that vary among more professionalized, entrepreneurial, and commuter trajectories. Five needs—to have a satisfying experience that meets personal and

social change goals, cultivate opportunities and pathways, generate and economize resources, build relationships and identity, and adapt and transform—were revealed as central to development and sustainability. Decision points, then, appear to represent key junctures in these overall processes, wherein an interplay of considerations related to the above themes becomes manifest and must be negotiated. Data indicate that the decision involves a process of interaction between organizer and environment, resulting in short-term outputs that may then contribute to long-term outcomes. Though decision points can result in giving up activism, this review suggests that making an organizational or role change or shifting between movement identifications can be an important way for many career activists and organizers to remain involved in social change efforts. Consequently, these actions at decision points have important implications for future engagement, may take place frequently among even the most persistent organizers, and occur in interaction with movement and organizational ecologies.

Although there are robust similarities across organizer and activist experiences, there are also important differences in the experiences of individuals with varying personal characteristics. Race, class, and gender backgrounds seem to affect whether people access movements in the first place; demographic differences among activists have resulted in differences in motivation between members of different movements (Braungart & Braungart, 1990, 1991) and among those of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Fendrich, 1993; Ganz et al., 2004). In several studies, whether activists were direct beneficiaries of movement outcomes or sympathetic supporters of others tended to affect their motives (Cole & Stewart 1996; Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Fendrich, 1993). Scholars have also attributed differences to generational characteristics, to shared historical experiences, or to the effects of aging (Duncan & Agronick, 1995). And it is harder for women, minorities, and working-class

participants to sustain activist careers over time, since individuals of different backgrounds may have access to different resources and face varying levels of personal risk (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004). Overall, despite continuing efforts to bridge this gap within progressive movements, women, ethnic minorities, and members of the working class remain at a significant disadvantage in their ability to participate.

## Gaps to Fill

Though the literature is very helpful, previous studies have provided only limited glimpses inside decision points. These bodies of work, along with the literature on mainstream careers (Hall, 2002; Hotchkiss & Burow,1986), tells us that decision-making processes are especially important to development and sustainability. Yet much remains unknown about the interplay of factors that may confront an organizer at such times, and about what people actually do to modify or terminate current arrangements and formulate new ones. As noted, several studies capture decision points as key junctures in larger development and sustainability processes. Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994) described the evolving ideology that an organizer acquires over time in the context of an organization, but did not trace how these ideologies develop. They emphasized that decisions to stay in organizing are based on a sufficient expectation of success, but they offered little explanation as to how this determination is made. Downton and Wehr (1997, 1998) captured the overall process of persistence, with some attention to certain key decisions, but results again were mainly limited to understanding what factors may be in play at such moments, not on how these factors come to be understood and acted upon.

These findings thus leave a myriad of questions unanswered. How are organizers' projects formulated? With so many unknowns involved, how does an organizer collect and process information to make a good decision? When, how, and why do availability and personal

needs sometimes trump social change motives, and vice versa? One way to answer such questions is to consider the process by which organizers interact with their surroundings at decision points. Most of the studies discussed focused simply on a choice whether or not to follow a particular path, rather on how that choice is weighed against other options. Moreover, while studies agree that career management for organizers require entrepreneurialism, they have not really examined how such an approach is undertaken or made use of existing concepts of social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998, 2008; Mort, Weerwardeena, & Carnegie, 2006 ; Pech & Cameron, 2006 ; Thompson,2002 ).

Another missing piece is how organizers manage and adjust to the process of change itself when uncertainty arises—that is, how they negotiate transition. A broad body of work on the subject of career and organizational transitions (Bridges, 1991, 2000, 2009; Schlossberg, 1989; Turner, 1992; Redington & Vickers, 2001; Wolfred et al., 1999) has convincingly shown that relationships and people's sense of identity undergo strain and change at transitions, and that how well they manage relationships and adjust to new roles during such times can have a great impact on future careers. Yet these issues remain unaddressed in existing studies of organizers and other long-term activists. A thorough review of these broad literatures on mainstream career development and planning, sensemaking in organizations, social entrepreneurship, and transitions would be excessive for the purpose here, but I will draw upon useful concepts from these works in the conceptual framework for this inquiry (chapter 3).

Unlike previous studies of organizers that have focused solely on professionalized organizers, or on long-term activists from a particular movement network, this study casts a wider net. Examining decision points faced by organizers from an array of justice movement networks should provide a more comprehensive sense of how they generally confront such

situations. Study participants are also diverse with regard to race, class, age, and gender, so as to encompass a wide range of demographic perspectives. I will illustrate in chapter 3 how this study helps to synthesize various perspectives and theories from across multiple disciplines that have contributed to our understanding of organizing and activism.

# CHAPTER 3

# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The foregoing findings suggest that we can gain a greater understanding organizer development and sustainability by exploring their decision-making processes. This chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives that informed the study, and the conceptual framework used.

## Contributing Theories for a Three-Dimensional Framework

The studies reviewed in chapter 2 addressed how organizers and similar workers develop and sustain their careers through a wide array of theoretical lenses. Social work and labor studies of paid organizers have usually viewed organizing as a form of professionalized practice. Social movement studies have viewed the activities of long-term activists as social movement participation and leadership, and studies of work for the common good have constructed understandings of engagement of both professionalized and nonprofessionalized activists as vocational work. Hence, these bodies of literature also conceptualize organizer careers in different ways, and, as previously noted, they collectively make only cursory use of broader career concepts. To encompass the various perspectives in a single framework, I have drawn on those used in previous studies of organizing and have selected some additional career-related concepts to complement them.

Table 1 lists the main theories and concepts used in existing studies of organizers and activists (the first three rows of the table), as well as those that I have added (the bottom row). Each row captures the populations studied and theoretical constructs utilized in each major body of work reviewed. It also distinguishes whether the researchers viewed organizing as a form of practice, as social movement participation and leadership, or as a career or social enterprise (though there was some overlap among these categories), and whether the organizers themselves

were viewed primarily as specialists, activists or leaders, workers, or entrepreneurs. Human development perspectives were also incorporated into several of these, and individuals were sometimes also viewed as group members. I discuss these in more detail below.

**Table 1**
***A Three-Dimensional View of Organizing as Practice, Participation, and Career***

| Body of work | Activities viewed as… | Populations studied | Theoretical constructs | Needs / interests |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Social work and labor studies** | Community/ labor organizing practice | Social worker-organizers<br>Community organizers<br>Labor organizers | Ecological empowerment<br>Perspective transformation theory<br>General practice literature<br>Nonprofit sector information/concepts<br>Work expectancy theory (careers)<br>Need motivation theory (human development) | Professionalized specialists |
| **Social movements/ micromobilization** | Participation/ leadership/ collective action | Persistent activists<br>Movement leaders | Resource mobilization<br>Cultural-relational/narrative views/ sensemaking in organizations<br>Biographical/life course concepts<br>General sociological, social psychology, commitment concepts<br>Limited general career concepts | Activists/leaders |
| **Work for the common good/ justice work** | Vocational career | Environmental professionals<br>Labor organizers<br>Other justice workers<br>Citizens of the global commons | Perspective transformation theory<br>Sense of vocation/moral development/ fate of idealism (careers, human development)<br>Nonprofit sector information/concepts<br>Turnover in organizations (careers)<br>Global commons/civil society ideas | Vocational workers |
| **Supplemental bodies of work added for this study:** | | | | |
| **Careers (broad)** | Career | Workers at large | General career concepts<br>Career planning and decision making<br>Human development | Workers |
| **Social entrepreneurship** | Social enterprise | Social entrepreneurs | Social entrepreneurship | Entrepreneurs |
| **Sensemaking in organizations** | Career | Workers at large | Sensemaking<br>Narrative perspectives<br>Organizational theories | Workers, members of organizations |
| **Individual/ organizational transition** | Career | Workers at large<br>Group members<br>Leaders | Transition theory<br>Organizational change and transition<br>Leadership succession/ executive transition | Workers, members, leaders |

## Community Practice Perspectives

Studies of organizers from a social work perspective have generally made only slight use of theory in understanding organizer development and sustainability. Because they have viewed

the work of organizers as a specialized form of community practice, they have often taken a view consistent with transformation and empowerment theories, since these are foundational to understandings of community organizing practice. Ideas about organizing practice and the transformation process have evolved in recent years into more current empowerment views (Donaldson, 2005; Maton & Salem, 1995; Speer & Hughey, 1996), which increasingly take an ecological approach. Recent transformation theorists have also recognized the need for a greater emphasis on context in transformation theory, as well as on the emotional and spiritual aspects of learning. Kovan and Dirkx (2003) offered support for the following definition as "an inclusive and integrative view" (p. 102) of perspective transformation, one that takes ecology into account:

> a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions ... of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. [It] involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; …of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

The social work studies presented have mainly considered practice concepts in relation to organizational and job-market realities of professions in which organizing takes place, in order to consider the implications of these conditions for practice and how disparities between these conditions and organizers' expectations affect their career paths. Rooks (2003, 2004) similarly relied on existing ideas about how labor organizing is posited to operate, as well as comparisons between expectations about turnover in general careers and those in justice jobs. Mondros and Wilson (1994) also drew from motivational theories related to human development (Maslow, 1943) and career (Vroom, 1984) in the construction of need-expectancy theory. The present inquiry considers each of these various perspectives.

**Social Movement and Micromobilization Perspectives**

Studies of (usually noninstitutionalized) social movement participants have relied upon "micromobilization" perspectives. These theories generally seem to recognize notions of transformation and popular education, but have not explicitly relied upon them. Micromobilization perspectives have become increasingly psychosocial, incorporating an array of previously competing explanations of participation into a single comprehensive understanding.

Issues of recruitment, retention, and efficacy of movement members and leaders are key concerns from a resource mobilization perspective, which provides rational theories as to how individuals select particular social movement engagements. In addition to applying ideas about macromobilization opportunity structures to the individual level, micromobilization theorists consider both cultural and relational views, as noted in chapter 2. Cultural inquiries generally focus on the idea that social movements make ideological or political arguments, which are then translated into lifestyles and subcultures by which individuals begin to frame, or construct, their personal identities vis-à-vis movement values and ideals. Furthermore, these researchers argue that social movements function as social networks in which movement views and practices are developed, utilized, and disseminated.

The biographical and life-course lenses utilized in micromobilization studies have further supplemented the psychosocial view of activism. The life-course perspective highlights life-cycle, generational, and socialization processes gleaned from human development studies. In these studies, social movement participation is seen as one form of citizen participation, albeit a form more likely to be considered nonconventional or subversive than are many other forms of community involvement. Finally, micromobilization scholars have drawn in various ways from

sociological and social-psychological notions, both generally to inform rational choice, cultural, and relational views and more specifically to address particular topics of interest like motivation and commitment. In particular, cultural-relational scholars like Ganz (2000) and Ganz et al. (2004) have found narrative perspectives to be particularly useful in capturing the ways in which activists deal with the uncertainty inherent in adaptive careers. These combined theoretical resources have enabled micromobilization perspectives to develop comprehensive views of the process by which intrapsychic and ecological factors interact to promote or undermine commitment, engagement in high-risk activism, and long-term persistence.

**Work for the Common Good and Justice Jobs**

Daloz et al. (1997) and Kovan and Dirkx (2003) have made explicit use of transformation theory in interpreting commitment to activist careers over time, combined with career notions about vocation and Jungian ideas about individuation. Kovan and Dirkx also gave attention to issues of turnover as well as gender in the nonprofit sector, and Daloz et al. incorporated notions about the global commons and civil society to capture the context of the globalized voluntary and nonprofit sphere in which activists operate. These inquiries thus add to community practice and micromobilization studies a better understanding of how transformation processes bring about intrapsychic commitment and moral development, with some attention to the role of ecological factors in these processes.

**Synthesis and Augmentation of Existing Perspectives**

I now present an argument that bridging these three bodies of work, and supplementing them with some other selected literatures, is necessary to adequately address career development, sustainability, and decision making among organizers. I will explain how each set of inquiries has conceptualized careers and decision points and how they might be synthesized. I will then

outline concepts of social entrepreneurship, narratives and sensemaking, career and organizational transitions, and selected broader career constructs, as I use them for this inquiry.

**Synthesis: existing ideas of organizing and activist careers and decisions.** Each perspective discussed has highlighted different aspects of how careers are built and decisions are negotiated, and each one uses different languages and conceptual understandings. One reason for this variance is that the activists studied in each body of literature had differing types of careers, as well as different relationships between activism and careers. The studies of paid, professionalized community and labor organizers, for example, recognized that, for these individuals, activism *was* their career. Rooks's (2004) conceptualization of professionalized organizing jobs as "justice jobs" captures both the spirit and the challenges associated with this type of work and also relates these careers to other professions with similar characteristics. These jobs typically have low salaries and are often accompanied by restrictive policies that actually inhibit practitioners' effectiveness; for example, they provide insufficient training and mentoring resources and lack opportunities for advancement.

Micromobilization scholars used the concept of career to refer to how the mainly noninstitutionalized activists whom they examined earned their income, whether their paid work was movement-related or not. Cultural-relational perspectives allowed for a view of activist careers as adaptive, using a narrative approach and relying on the concept of projects as mental frameworks (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Mische 2002). Such perspectives appear to represent the most comprehensive lens for understanding organizer development and sustainability, but practice and vocational studies have added critical elements missing from micromobilization views. Prior to the present study, only Rooks (2004) has combined all three perspectives. Studies

from all three perspectives have presented evidence that sociodemographic characteristics of organizers may make for important differences in their movement experiences and outcomes.

Further, although activist careers are widely noted to be entrepreneurial in nature, no studies of activists have made explicit use of concepts of social entrepreneurship. Prior studies have also neglected to analyze career constructs in depth, and they have paid relatively scant attention to larger trends in careers. One possible reason for such omissions may be that not all organizers and scholars view organizing or activism as their career. Yet the concept of career can encompass any form of work, paid or unpaid, as well as a person's general experiences of work-related environments (Hall, 2002). Other studies have not fully explored the process that occurs at decision points and have not applied the theories and models of decision making and transition available in the literature on careers.

**Augmentation: career, social entrepreneurship, sensemaking and narrative, and transition theories.** The broad body of literature about careers contains a multiplicity of theories that have described career patterns and developmental stages; the meaning that individuals make of their work; employer-employee contracts and arrangements; ethnic, gender-based, and class-based constraints upon careers; and notions about career planning, organizational selection, and decision making. Drawing on this literature can add important dimensions to our understanding of organizers as activists, specialists, and workers. Moreover, as shown in chapter 2, it is helpful to interpret organizing within the broader scope of contemporary career development, especially since the differences between organizing and other pursuits may be blurring somewhat in this age of boundaryless careers (Hall, 2002). For example, contemporary theories of careers accommodate the increasingly episodic and portfolio-

driven nature of many careers (Brousseau et al., 1996; Hall, 2002), and thus are compatible with the experience of organizers.

Broad career constructs also help to establish the parameters that inquiries should address. Hall (2002) highlighted the need to address both agency and context in order to understand careers, and he reviewed the useful ways in which career scholars have conceptualized bridges between the two. Some studies of organizers and activists reviewed have emphasized agency-oriented phenomena; others have bridged agency-focused and contextual views, capturing the ways in which individuals, organizations, movements, and personal life contexts interact. The goal of this study is also to incorporate and bridge these perspectives, so consideration of career notions may be helpful in this way.

It is important to differentiate between subjective views of careers, which address individuals' attitudes and evaluative understandings of their careers, and objective views, or those based upon observable behaviors. Hall (2002) suggested the importance of bridging context-based and agency-focused views of careers, and he has similarly incorporated various career viewpoints into a comprehensive framework of careers that synthesizes objective phenomena with subjective understandings about meaning and motivation. Finally, it is important to consider workplace arrangements, job markets, and other contextual influences that impact career decision making.

Having established a rationale for the greater use of career and organizational concepts to interpret organizer pathways and decision points, I will now outline four career constructs that will have bearing on the framework: general career planning and decision making, social entrepreneurship, narratives and sensemaking, and individual and organizational transitions.

***Career planning and decision making.*** Hall (2002) has discussed the increasing importance of planning and decision making in today's careers. He has further classified theories about career and organizational selection into matching and process theories. The need-expectancy theory posited by Mondros and Wilson (1994) is a relevant example of a matching theory, in that it predicts what organizers will choose to do but gives little attention to the process by which choices are made. A plethora of career studies, addressing a wide variety of workers, have provided varying and nuanced models of the steps involved in career decision making (Bright et al., 2005: Hall, 2002; Watts, 1999; Wiese et al., 2002) and guided the development of the decision-making model presented in the current study. Together, they suggest that decision making must be viewed not as linear but iterative, though a series of steps (which seem to differ depending on the types of workers studied) can nonetheless be identified in the process. Finally, career studies have recognized the effect of one's sociodemographic background upon motivation, access to opportunities and advancement.

***Social entrepreneurship.*** *Entrepreneurs* are generally defined as actors who fill gaps in and add value to existing structures, generate new marketable products and services, and make new ideas sustainable (Politis & Landström; 2002; Thompson, 2002). Theorists interested in *social entrepreneurship* (i.e., the application of entrepreneurial behavior within the nonprofit sector) have been very helpful in relating concepts of entrepreneurship to social and voluntary causes (Dees, 1998, 2008; Mort et al., 2006; Thompson, 2002; Pech & Cameron, 2006). Dees (1998) suggested that social entrepreneurs are "one species in the genus entrepreneur" (p. 3), although, since social entrepreneurs work to create social capital rather than profit, market value is not the final measure of their worth. Just as business entrepreneurs create new businesses or ventures, social entrepreneurs develop new ways to solve societal problems, design public

policies, and expand existing voluntary and nonprofit structures. Social entrepreneurs, organizers, and activists are all considered to be innovators, catalysts in public debate, and generators of social ventures. A few studies have documented the work of social entrepreneurs who engage in social action and the empowerment of disenfranchised groups (Cornwall, 1998 ; Mort et al., 2006).

Concepts of social entrepreneurship are useful in interpreting not only the roles that organizers play but also their career planning and development. Just as entrepreneurs seek to exploit opportunities to fill gaps, organizers must do so in their own careers; this need has implications for the patterns that careers exhibit and how they are developed and sustained. Politis & Landström (2002) suggested that entrepreneurial careers are conceived as a series of projects, or "temporary positions with a certain task to accomplish" (p. 83). Scholars have pointed out that social entrepreneurs assume many of the personal financial risks taken by business entrepreneurs, yet ventures by definition bring, at best, low material (and high social) return (Dees, 2008 ; Paredo & McLean, 2005; Thompson, 2002). These concepts seem well suited to the examination of organizing careers and should prove useful for comparison with the findings of the present study.

***Sensemaking and narratives.*** Ganz (2000) and Ganz et al. (2004) have effectively applied perspectives about narratives and sensemaking in organizations, espoused by Weick (2003) and others, to their studies of movement leader development and career decision making. I have drawn upon these and additional sensemaking concepts from Weick (2003), who has argued that, when people make sense of their experiences in organizations, they tend to take what they think they know for granted, and that situations that call into question existing beliefs and understandings afford new occasions for sensemaking. He posited that sensemaking consists

of placing stimuli into existing mental frameworks, and that people make use of several culturally influenced sensemaking mechanisms, such as standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting.

According to Weick, sensemaking in organizations, in particular, involves an interpretive process, tied to each individual's sense of identity, of creating a shared understanding of what an organization is about—"its strengths and weaknesses, challenges and solutions" (Weick, 2003, p. 127). This understanding then affects how individuals identify and align with organizations. Weick contended that narratives play a critical role as individuals and groups in organizational settings make sense of their experiences, and that these narratives are constructed pragmatically in relation to specific projects or tasks. He also proposed that sensemaking processes are ongoing and that sensemaking entails "bracketing" and "punctuating" experiences (p.35) that are actually of continuous duration. These notions have proved helpful in conceptualizing decision points as bounded experiences and occasions for sensemaking, and in capturing narrative processes associated with decision making.

***Career and organizational transitions.*** A large body of career and organizational studies has conceptualized moments of change in people's careers in terms of transition (Bridges, 1991, 2000, 2009; Redington & Vickers, 2001; Schlossberg, 1989; Turner, 1992). Bridges (1991) asserted that transitions involve external changes and the internal adjustments that individuals make in response to those external stimuli; others have added that individuals undergo career transitions in interaction with organizational processes (Redington & Vickers, 2001; Turner; 1992). Schlossberg (1989) noted that transitions represent any change that "unsettle our lives, shake us up, and take some adjusting over time" (p.xiii ). When individuals perform certain roles at work, these roles carry behavioral expectations and responsibilities, or an

identity that exists both in a person's self-concept and in how they are perceived by others. Turner (1992) posited that "a transition is any event or *non-event* [italics mine] which results in a change in assumptions about oneself, and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Nonevents refer to moments in which plans or aspirations go unmet, resulting in internal questioning by the worker. As one arrangement comes to an end and another begins, people first experience a period of "letting go," the "neutral zone," or an awkward in-between period, followed by a series of "new beginnings," in which new roles and attachments are formed (Bridges, 1991, p. 256). Since individuals who interact with a person in transition also develop expectations, transition involves not only intrapsychic emotional coping, but also careful management of interpersonal relationships.

Several researchers have applied transition theory to organizational transitions in nonprofit settings, and to how organizational and individual transitions interacted with each other (Turner, 1992; Redington & Vickers, 2001; Wolfred et al., 1999). These usually focused on leadership succession and executive transition issues, though Turner (1992) examined transitions that individuals experienced when their organizations adopted a new practice. These studies generally have suggested that organizer decision points occur in the context of organizations, or are triggered by organizational transition, and that therefore interpreting transitions requires understanding of both the organizer and the organization.

**Organizing Ecologies: Nested and Multidimensional with Multiple and Fluid Affiliations**

All the theoretical perspectives reviewed here have moved increasingly toward ecological approaches, i.e., approaches that consider organizers in the context of their environments. Each has a different way of conceptualizing these contexts, though there are many parallels. Organizing settings have thus been framed variously in terms of organizations, informal protest

groups, workplaces, collegial workgroups, labor unions, social movement industries, subcultures, relational networks, and movement communities or families, and occupations within the job market. Constructing the three-dimensional framework described earlier in this chapter—one that brings together perspectives from community practice, social movement theory, and career and vocational studies—requires the development of an ecological framework that is compatible with all of these perspectives. These literatures, considered collectively, suggest that organizer ecologies are best seen as multilayered, multidimensional, multiplistic, and fluid.

The personal opportunity structures identified by micromobilization scholars are posited to operate much like the macrolevel structures in which movements vie for support, but at the level of local everyday structures and interactions that affect individuals' ability and desire to participate. Yet macromobilization structures also remain important in these understandings of individual participation, since macrolevel events and changes can create or destroy opportunities to participate (Downton & Wehr, 1997; Ganz, 2000). Opportunity structures are a useful way of conceptualizing the context of organizer careers, because both macrolevel and microlevel contextual factors are seen in terms of their impact upon opportunities to participate as well as upon decision making. Opportunity structures are thus presented by micromobilization and ecological empowerment scholars alike as *multilayered* or "nested" (Moos, 2003, p.7) environments. These layers consist of (a) individuals conceptualized in (b) organizational and other local contexts, which in turn are seen as embedded in (c) larger markets, communities, and professions—all of which are contained within (d) a more general geohistorical context.

The literatures reviewed also show strong agreement with notions usefully crystallized by Maton and Salem (1995), ecological empowerment theorists who emphasized the interplay of structural concerns of hierarchies and power relations, material and capacity-related issues,

cultural issues, and relational and network dimensions of one's everyday environments as primary influences upon a person's experience, sense of empowerment, and ability to carry out social change. This *multidimensional* view of organizer ecologies is based on both community practice and collective action viewpoints. Some career inquiries have addressed similar concerns in their attention to contract arrangements between workers and employers; to career reward systems, which represent structural and capacity concerns (Hotchkiss & Burow,1986); and to the increasing importance of relationships and networking in boundaryless careers (Hall, 2002).

Existing conceptualizations of organizing contexts as nested and multidimensional have also informed understandings that are more specifically focused on decision points. Studies of career decision making have further suggested that these decisions are made in conversation with various aspects of a worker's environment. Weick (2003) argued that context affects how meaning is construed, and that what individuals notice and ignore is a function of contextual filters that allow for classification and comparison of information. Noting the role of ambiguity and external influences on organizations, he concluded that sensemaking becomes more important the more open a system becomes. Finally, as shown in Table 2, Turner's (1992) ecological framework for understanding individual transitions within organizations is strikingly similar to Maton and Salem's, yet adds specific ideas about the factors most salient to individual and interpersonal dynamics during times of change and uncertainty.

Turner combined the ideas of Karlin (1967) and Taylor (1983) about universal elements of all cultures (which were generally compatible with collective action ideas) with propositions put forth by Bridges (1991, 2000, 2009) and Scott and Jaffe (1989) in order to propose a parallel set of universal elements that operate in organizational settings, which she argued often became the locus of conflict and change at times of transition. Turner operationalized structural concerns

in terms of the individual's desire for an orderly, well-governed organizational setting; material and capacity needs in terms of turf, territory, security, and control; relational concerns as encompassing social relationships and emotional attachments; and cultural concerns as related to one's perceived competence and one's sense of direction or future meaning.

**Table 2**
***Multidimensional Organizing Ecologies***

| **Maton & Salem (1995)** | **Turner (1992)** |
|---|---|
| Ecological empowerment dimensions | Elements in organizations |
| capacity-building | turf/territory<br>security, control |
| structural | governance/order |
| relational | relationship, attachments |
| cultural | competence<br>sense of direction/future meaning |

Finally, I argue that conceptualizations of organizing environments must consider the *multiplistic and fluid* nature of organizers' affiliations with organizations and networks. Organizers move between or are recruited across movements (Ganz et al., 2004; Rooks, 2003, 2004; Starr et al., 1999), and social movement theorists report much spillover across movements (Downton & Wehr, 1997). Cultural-relational theorists have conceptualized this spillover as "cross-talk" (Mische, 2002), since social change narratives and individual identities are formed in the context of conversation within and across movements. There is less existing work, however, about this aspect of movement ecologies than about their multilayered and multidimensional aspects. Still, these findings, combined with my long-term experiences in movements and pilot fieldwork, suggest that organizers are likely to perform different roles in different settings, both simultaneously and over the course of their lives. The term *multiplistic*

captures this tendency to perform many roles or more than one at a time, while fluidity refers to the unstable, frequently changing nature of social movements and organizing careers.

## Conceptual Framework

Based on the insights from these varied but complementary perspectives, I designed a conceptual framework to direct this study prior to initiating data collection and analysis. Analysis then compared the data obtained from participants to this conceptualization, leading to development of a more refined and elaborated framework (presented in chapter 5). Before detailing the model itself, I will discuss the basic parameters of the organizer experiences that it addresses and the assumptions upon which it rests. In reporting results, these parameters and assumptions are taken as given; how well they lined up with the data collected in this study will be discussed in chapter 6 (See Appendix A for a glossary of key terminology for this study).

**Parameters.** The study focuses solely on phenomena related to the career development and sustainability of justice organizers. It includes both the subjective views and experiences of organizers, and objective patterns and behaviors. It also addresses both the agency of individuals (i.e., their personal choices, intentions, and ability to act) and the ecological factors that constrain agency. The main focus, then, is on experiences in movement settings, both paid and voluntary; personal life issues and factors, as well as nonmovement work, are considered only as they pertain directly to participation in movements. Specific attention is given to differences and disparities affecting women, working-class and ethnic minority organizers, and others who experience disadvantage, though I avoided making specific suppositions ahead of time about how these factors might affect decision points.

**Assumptions.** The framework rests upon several assumptions about organizers' careers and decision points. I believe these premises are valid because they are clearly supported across the bodies of literature reviewed, pilot fieldwork, and my long-term experiences in the field.

***Definition and conceptualization of "organizer."*** Organizers were initially defined as participants in social movements who self-identify as movement organizers, are identified by their peers as movement organizers, and perform pivotal roles in movements. These actors (a) recruit, train, and encourage the participation of other members and/or (b) serve as tactical, ethical, and political strategists in popular mobilizations. In order to capture the needs and interests of organizers comprehensively, I view them in three ways—as activists, specialists, and workers—because their careers reflect aspects of all three descriptions.

***Career characteristics and decision point properties.*** Based on the findings discussed in chapter 2, organizing careers were presumed to have a tendency (relative to other careers) to be unstable and entrepreneurial, skilled yet underresourced, nonconventional or stigmatized, and driven by nonmaterial incentives. As for organizers' decision points, I treated them as moments in careers that can be identified and understood by organizers as bounded experiences—that is, conducive to being "[chopped] from continuous flows" (Weick, 2003, p. 43). I also assumed that decision points would be frequent and could happen at any time, due to the instability of organizing careers.

**Preliminary expectations about organizer careers and decision points.** Beyond these assumptions, I present below my initial expectations and conceptualizations of organizer careers, the contexts in which they operate, themes related to development and sustainability, and ideas about decision points. These are suggested by the foregoing literature review and are explicitly tested in this inquiry.

***Careers and context.*** Careers were expected to be adaptive and driven by narratives, in keeping with scholars who take a cultural view of movements (Emirbayer and Mische, 1996; Ganz, 2000; Mische, 2002). It was further expected that careers would vary among professionalized, entrepreneurial, and commuter trajectories. A career *trajectory* is defined as an intended career direction along which an organizer hopes to advance. Each trajectory has an inherent set of requirements and investments, as well as potential rewards and incentives. Specific roles in particular contexts that organizers undertake are conceived as *pathways*, and these were also initially categorized as professionalized, entrepreneurial, or commuter.

Downton and Wehr's (1997, 1998) conceptualization of opportunity structures at both the micro (personal networks, local organizations) and macro (political and historical events, changes in policy debate) levels allowed for conceptualization of contexts in terms of how they affect access to opportunities and organizers' ability to secure and implement them. Opportunity structures, then, are conceptualized here as the unique constellation of opportunities, resources, and barriers that operate on an organizer at a decision point. Following Maton and Salem's (1995) framework, described in Table 2 above, I identified the main contextual dimensions of interest as structural, cultural, relational, and capacity.

***Development and sustainability themes.*** The findings presented in chapter 2 suggested five themes related to development and sustainability of organizers. Specifically, they could be expected to (a) seek satisfying personal and social change experiences in the movement; (b) be concerned with generating and devising career pathways; (c) seek ways to cultivate and economize resources (with *resources* interpreted broadly to encompass personal or situational availability for engagement, professional competencies and skills, access to opportunities, and values, attitudes, and motivations that would support development of organizing careers); (d)

focus on identity- and relationship-building issues; and (e) strive to remain adaptable and undergo periodic transformations.

***Decision points.*** Decision points are viewed as forks in the road, or times of potential change in pathway or trajectory. I defined them as situations that necessitate decisions and thus become likely occasions for sensemaking and adaptation. Decision points may or may not result in actual changes in pathway, but they involve a period of uncertainty and transition, along with consideration of both present pathways and possible alternatives. Most importantly, decision points involve processes of interaction between organizers and their environment.

Factors organizers would consider at decision points were expected to include (a) organizers' motives, needs, and expectations; (b) potential risks and rewards of available opportunities; (c) available and needed resources; (d) cultural-relational issues; and (e) issues of emotional coping, personal growth, and transformation. Across these categories, the ecological issues identified by Turner as arising at transitions (structural concerns about governance; capacity issues of turf or territory, security, and control; relationships and emotional attachments; and cultural issues of competence and sense of direction or future meaning) were expected to appear.

In this qualitative inquiry, the intent is not so much to predict the effect of specific independent variables upon dependent variables as to illuminate the nuances of complex social interactions. To explain these nuances and how they come to produce decision-point outputs, I have divided the inquiry into three chronological stages: pre-decision point (i.e., the antecedents and conditions that give rise to decision points); the decision point itself (and the processes of interaction and change involved); and post-decision point (i.e., the consequences or outputs of

these junctures). My three research questions, to be presented in chapter 4, will be organized in the same chronological (pre-, during, and post-) arrangement.

At this stage, suppositions about the process were left in general and purely descriptive form, to allow relevant factors and processes to emerge from the data. It was posited that, prior to a decision point, a certain status quo exists with regard to an organizer's career and his or her roles and relationships. A narrative view suggested that organizers hold a mental conceptualization of their status-quo situation, born partly out of past experience. Decision points are then reached when some chain of events triggers the need to question the status quo and make decisions. I expected that triggers may arise from within organizers' personal lives, their organization, or the broader movement in which they participated. Thus prior factors, status-quo situations and narratives, triggers, and the context in which decision points unfolded were all posited to be key domains in decision point processes. Organizers were then expected to interact with their environments in the central domain of the process, in which they would (a) seek to make decisions that would promote their development and sustainability as organizers; (b) manage the emotional and interpersonal process of change, letting go of old routines and arrangements and maintaining daily functions as they manage change and adapt to new situations; and (c) recognize, select, exploit, and implement opportunities.

In the final domain posited in this process, these activities and interactions were posited to bring about short-term outputs. Existing ideas regarding sensemaking, as well as those about adaptive careers in movements, suggest that it is most appropriate to treat outputs as outcomes for now, or as Weick put it, "relatings" rather than "results" (2003, p.33), since activists must continually adapt to changing circumstances and because people continually make new meaning of past experiences (Ganz et al., 2004; Weick, 2003). This study therefore focuses mainly on the

short-term outputs of decision points; the farther one proceeds chronologically away from a decision point, the more likely it is that new factors have entered the picture, thus limiting the long-term consequences of any given decision. In chapter 6, I will present two tentative hypotheses about how immediate results may translate into longer-term patterns and outcomes.

Expected *descriptive outputs* included those related to the selection of (or adaptation to) pathways and intended trajectories, along with decisions about whether to begin, continue, or cease organizing. I also sought to remain open to the possibility that other outputs might emerge inductively from the data. Some decision points were expected to represent nonevents as well—that is, decisions to remain in one's present position. Finally, I intended to construct a way to measure *evaluative outputs*, or changes with respect to development and sustainability as a result of decision points; defining such measures was an objective of the inquiry, since few such measures already exist.

# CHAPTER 4

# METHODOLOGY

As noted in chapter 1, the inquiry is designed to examine the following research questions:

**Question 1:** What conditions and triggers set the stage for career decision points?

**Question 2:** How did organizers negotiate these decision points? What was the underlying process?

**Question 3:** What types of outputs resulted from decision points?

This study uses the analytic case induction methodology, a qualitative approach that relies on grounded-theory coding methods along with the posing and refuting of hypotheses and an emphasis on contrasting or negative cases (Gilgun, 2007; Katz, 2001b, 2001c, 2004). I discuss below why this methodology is suitable for this study.

## Overall Methodological Approach

Researchers in social work and other applied fields (Gilgun, 2007; Kaplan, 2005; Padgett, 2008; Yin, 2009) have noted that qualitative methods are of particular utility in research that is meant to inform practice, because in-depth interviews give human faces and life stories to the phenomena studied and therefore better capture the nuances of situations that practitioners might encounter. Qualitative methods are also recommended for the study of complex processes that involve multilayered and complex human phenomena. Since this study attempts to understand how numerous human factors interact at decision points, qualitative methods are clearly most appropriate.

Another way of thinking about the perspectives that qualitative data capture is that they yield a greater degree of detail, or *granularity*, than quantitative approaches generally can.

Schegloff (2000) defined the granularity of a description as its "degree of resolution," or to what extent it "zeroes in" on or "pans out" from a target (p. 715). As Chimi and Russell (2009) pointed out, Likert scales and similar quantitative rating methods can provide only a coarse (low) level of granularity. Heath and Hindmarsh (2002) noted that failure to achieve sufficiently fine granularity in ethnographies addressing organizational phenomena can be particularly problematic: "The issue is not simply one of detail … but rather that the emergent, practical and contingent accomplishment of work and occupational life disappears from view, from analytic consideration" (p. 6 in online version).

To achieve a high level of granularity in this study, I have traced detailed personal accounts of decision points at the center of analysis. Like most qualitative inquiries, it is broadly grounded in phenomenological perspectives, focusing on the meanings that individuals make of their experiences and on the "lived experience" of social phenomena (Creswell, 1998; Katz, 2001a, 2002, 2004; Gilgun, 2007). The intention is to build theory inductively, letting it arise directly from data rather than *a priori*. The narratives collected from participants are "simply there like life itself" (Barthes, 1977, p. 79) and hence a rich source of data. Findings must inevitably be less detailed than narrative data, of course, and the data themselves vary in amount of detail (Pentland, 1999).

Because this study is the first to capture a fine-grained view of organizer processes at decision points and is one of only a handful on inquiries that have theorized about long-term activism and organizing, it is exploratory. For this reason I first conducted pilot fieldwork, in the form of observation in movement forums, online research, and informational conversations with colleagues in the movement. In their pure form, grounded theory methods cleave closely to an inductive ideal: researchers "try to the extent possible to put aside their own points of view and

listen and hear and notice what informants' words and actions could mean within their own contexts" (Gilgun, 2007, p. 25). These studies either use no initial framework or theory, or, if there is one, the researcher sets it aside after developing it until after all data have been analyzed inductively (Corbin & Strauss, 1997; Glaser, 2004).

Case analysis is also intended to build theory inductively rather than from preexisting concepts. Gilgun (2007) argued, however, that another's point of view can only be approximated at best, because researchers can never truly get away from the influence of their own presupposed ideas. Analytic case induction therefore makes the researchers' initial assumptions and concepts explicit prior to collection of data (a deductive aspect), while retaining the ability throughout the study for findings to change the theory (an inductive aspect). This is done, in part, via a reflexivity statement in which the researcher presents information about his or her personal background and biases that may impact the analysis. A preliminary framework (as presented in chapter 3 of this study) is then derived from these personal experiences, sometimes preliminary fieldwork, and existing literature. It then utilizes the inductive coding processes of grounded theory. Both methodologies are compatible with the study of complex processes. Both involve progressive sampling, data collection, and analysis so that early findings can inform later decisions, as opposed to a more rigidly deductive process designed to confirm or disconfirm a predetermined null hypothesis. The two methods also rely upon both within-case and across-case analyses.

Katz (2004; personal communication) recommended that hypotheses in the case analysis method should be formulated via the provision of a multitude of micro-hypotheses that arise directly from data, are tested on contrasting or negative cases, and are then further modified and finally synthesized into main hypotheses. He further suggested that this method is useful for

studies, like this one, that seek to make sense of a common process experienced by a highly variable population.

Because Miles and Huberman (1994) offered highly practical and detailed methods and tools for all types of qualitative research (including both grounded theory and case induction methods), their recommendations were especially instrumental in the coding process and in constructing analytical models. I used grounded theory coding methods but placed great emphasis upon negative and contrasting cases in this study, and I often posited micro-hypotheses throughout the analysis. However, because of the exploratory nature of the study and its emphasis on process more than outcomes, as well as the high among of variability among cases, my main conclusions do not consist of a set of hypotheses to predict the outcomes of decision points. I offer instead a descriptive theory of the process that produced these outcomes, which has been strengthened and modified by each case examined. Additionally, micro-hypotheses proposed for this study have helped in the identification of factors that may be tested in future studies as predictors or influences upon outcomes. Finally, though they were not the central focus of the study, two tentative hypotheses did emerge regarding the relevance of decision point processes and outcomes to long-term outcomes.

## Reflexivity Statement

I was inspired to undertake this study by my own movement organizing experiences. For 17 years, my main career has been in prevention and community-based services for youth, especially child welfare populations. But during the 1990s, in my twenties, I was impacted by several historical events and social movement experiences, some of the most famous of which I mentioned in chapter 1. So I half-unexpectedly found myself, by the late 1990s, with a sort of

second career organizing conferences, retreats, educational workshops, and online forums for a coalition of underground political and artist groups and communities.

Although I did not set out to make a career of organizing, I do fit a typical organizer profile in many ways. I have relatives and mentors who are activists, and I was raised by parents who encouraged me toward leadership and believed in collaborative group decision making, personal freedom, and expression. As a Jewish-born woman of a middle-class background I am also in a likely demographic for progressivist movement leadership (Braungart & Braungart, 1986, 1991). I am like the participants interviewed for this study in that my career requires complex planning and management. I have sought here to find not just answers to my own challenges, but guidance that may strengthen the supportive fabric of social movements, so that those who dedicate themselves to these efforts may succeed in their goals while living balanced lives.

Despite my prior organizing and activist experiences and my direct services work with justice populations, I purposely chose to examine in this study social and economic justice movements in which my involvement had previously been only peripheral, so that I would be better able to identify what was unique and different about these careers. Still, I have been pleased to find organizers quite willing to talk with me, and I have found that I can quickly and easily relate to their perspectives. Because I am emotionally connected to the topic, I have had to monitor closely my maintenance of professional distance. I sometimes feel indignant or protective about the challenges that people face when working for the common good. Moreover, my pursuit of this study has coincided with an especially challenging career transition for me, as I incorporate my activist focus more fully into my social-work practice and research; undertaking the study has itself been a transformative experience for me. These self-reflections, along with

the review of the literature already presented, formed the foundations of the framework presented in chapter 3; that framework then drove sampling, data collection, and analysis.

## Data Sources

One key advantage of case induction methods is that they can accommodate a much larger and more diverse sample than can most qualitative methods (including grounded theory), thereby strengthening the results. Katz (2004) recommended that a case induction study should include 60 to 120 cases. The unit of analysis (the "n" or the "case") for this study was not the individual, but the decision point, although I have set these in the context of overall careers. I conducted *coarse-grained* analysis of all 14 organizers' careers overall, and of all 72 decision points identified by participants as worthy of investigation. Decision points were considered for inclusion among the 30 that received more in-depth analysis only when respondents gave sufficient data to reveal the process that transpired at the decision point. As decision points could last from a few weeks to over two years, and as participant narratives also varied in style, there was wide variance in the granularity of data within the 30 cases selected. When analyzing these cases I have distinguished between *fine-grained* and *medium-grained* levels of data when necessary.

The data came primarily from handwritten notes and transcriptions of multiple open-ended interviews with organizers during the years 2009-2011. I also collected archival data about organizations in which participants worked or sought work, and I asked participants to provide personal scrapbooks, journals, and other artifacts that helped to document their experiences. Finally, I drew upon my own experiences in justice movements prior to, in preparation for, and during this study in order to frame the issues and key themes. Study

participants also had the opportunity to review findings and provide feedback about accuracy and about whether my understanding of issues reflected their experiences.

**Participant Recruitment and Screening**

The study used multiple snowball sampling procedures to identify potential study participants. Following approval by UCLA's Institutional Review Board in April 2009, I began by contacting several prominent participants in justice movements with whom I was personally acquainted, and I asked them to recommend and to assist me in contacting potential study recruits. I also attended various events and meetings for the purposes of recruitment and observation. I provided professional colleagues with recruitment letters and asked them to share these letters with up to five organizers. I also asked them to complete recommender questionnaires for each organizer whom they referred. I established the following required criteria for participant inclusion:

- Must report that they have engaged in pivotal roles in justice movements, in which they undertook to recruit, train, and encourage the involvement of other activists, and/or in which they participated or advised in strategic planning of social change campaigns
- Must be nominated by known justice movement participants as organizers, or must have been directly observed performing the above organizing duties
- Must self-identify as justice organizers
- Must have been active in a West Coast justice movement during the period from 1995 to 2009, for a minimum of two years

Even if they met these criteria, candidates were excluded if they declined to provide written consent; if, due to their demographics or special needs, they were considered vulnerable populations by UCLA's Institutional Review Board; or if I felt I was so well acquainted with the person that he or she might not speak freely in a research interview context.

When candidates contacted me (or gave me permission to contact them), I explained the study, addressed any questions and concerns, and secured informed consent from those still interested. Participants then selected pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality; they were identified solely by these pseudonyms from that point forward. Recruits completed screening questionnaires, either in writing or by telephone, which I used to determine eligibility; both screening and recommender questionnaires also provided data needed for sampling. Participants were invited in turn to recommend fellow organizers for the study.

I asked approximately 40 known justice movement participants to recommend organizers, and 57 individuals were invited to participate (with some overlap between recommenders and potential participants). Of these, 31 indicated willingness to participate. Six of these were quickly identified as not meeting the inclusion criteria and thus were not enrolled or screened. In order to be able to go in-depth into multiple decision points for each career, and yet also to capture a diversity of organizers, I determined to include in the study between one and four decision points for each of approximately 15 organizers. Using the theoretical sampling methods I describe at length below, I selected 16 of the remaining 25 recruits to be enrolled and screened, based upon their continued availability for participation and theoretical sampling needs. Two of these 16 were screened out, one because he had stopped organizing in the 1970s and the other because he had not organized on the West Coast, resulting in 14 total participants.

**Sampling of Individuals**

Reliance on a snowball sampling process with prominent movement participants as recommenders meant that an insider perspective drove the sampling process. Sampling was conducted progressively throughout the study, allowing early findings to inform later sampling and data collection. In general, an effort was made to maximize contrast among participants and

cases, in keeping with the recommendations of Gilgun (2007) and Katz (2004). Ultimately, 14 participants were included in the inquiry. This group size was small enough to permit in-depth understanding of each career, and often of several decision points from a single career, but still large and diverse enough to capture considerable breadth of organizer experiences and demographic characteristics.

As discussed in Chapter 2, prior studies have generally suggested that men are more likely to organize than women, and that paid organizers are usually white and from middle-class or wealthier backgrounds; privileged white male organizers have certainly received far more attention in past studies than other groups. Given this skew, I made a particular effort to include a balance of organizers from both overrepresented and underrepresented groups. On the other hand, given the relatively small number of organizers participating, too much diversity could make cross-case differences difficult to understand. For these reasons I attempted to construct the sample so as to contain approximately equal representation of four categories: men of color, women of color, white men, and white women.

Table 3 shows basic descriptive data about the eight men and six women who participated. Eight self-identified as either Caucasian, white, Irish Catholic, or Jewish, and six were individuals of color, including two Latino men, an African-American man, a South Asian woman, an Arab/Caucasian man, and a Mexican/German woman. Regrettably, women of color were the least represented group, with only two participants. Individuals were fairly evenly distributed in terms of family socioeconomic status, ranging from working-class to upper-middle-class backgrounds, although they were all highly educated. Since the sociodemographics of organizers and their environment are changing, I selected participants who ranged, at the time of their interviews, from age 24 to 80 and spanned five generational cohorts. I divided their

**Table 3**
***Descriptive Information on the Participants (N=14)***

| Characteristic | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender: | | |
| Male | 8 | 57.1 |
| Female | 6 | 42.9 |
| Self-Identified Ethnicity: | | |
| Caucasian/White | 8 | 57.1 |
| Caucasian/White | 5 | 35.7 |
| White/Jewish/Irish Catholic* | 3 | 21.4 |
| Of color | 6 | 42.9 |
| Latino | 2 | 14.2 |
| Biracial (Arab/Caucasian; European/Latino) | 2 | 14.2 |
| South Asian | 1 | 7.1 |
| African American | 1 | 7.1 |
| Family SES: | | |
| Working class | 4 | 28.6 |
| Middle class | 5 | 35.7 |
| Borderline between working and middle class | 3 | 21.4 |
| Upper middle class | 2 | 14.2 |
| Education and training | | |
| Training from within movement settings | 14 | 100 |
| Postgraduate degrees (completed or in process) | 8 | 57.1 |
| College-educated | 4 | 28.6 |
| Blue-collar apprenticeship | 1 | 7.1 |
| Pastoral training | 1 | 7.1 |
| Age range: 24-80 years (mean age of 35) | | |
| Generation: | | |
| Generation X/Y overlap | 5 | 35.7 |
| World War II | 2 | 14.2 |
| Baby Boomer | 2 | 14.2 |
| Generation X | 3 | 21.4 |
| Generation Y | 2 | 14.2 |
| Location at interview | | |
| Southern California | 7 | 50 |
| Northern California | 6 | 42.9 |
| Organizing in multiple West Coast locations | 6 | 42.9 |
| East Coast | 1 | 7.1 |
| Social workers/human service providers | 7 | 21.4 |
| Organizing status at time of screening | | |
| Actively organizing, or supervising organizers | 9 | 64.3 |
| Not organizing | 5 | 35.7 |

*Some Caucasian participants specifically identified themselves as "Jewish" or "Irish Catholic" when asked for their ethnicity, which I differentiate from the religious or spiritual orientations reported (as shown in Table 6 and Appendix B).

experiences into five phases of the life course: preadult (up to age 16), transition to adulthood (17-22), young adulthood (23-40), midlife (40-60), and late life (61-80). These designations

accommodated the fact that these time periods seemed to entail different needs and concerns yet were broad enough to allow for the fact that career courses were highly variable (other life course theorists have recommended such an open-ended approach, for these reasons).

In order to ensure that the sample would be of high relevance to the social work profession and social welfare systems, I purposefully included in the sample seven individuals who were social workers or human service providers and were also organizers. Two held MSW degrees, a third had held the official title of "social worker" in nonprofit organizations, and a total of seven had worked in human services, either in addition to or in conjunction with their organizing activities (2 others had engaged in pure organizing roles in organizations that also provided services). Overall, nine individuals were organizing when screened or were directly supervising organizers; five had dropped out of the movement or retired.

**Data Collection and Identification of Decision Points**

I began by conducting a face-to-face open-ended interview with each participant. Wengraf (2002) and Gilgun (2007) recommended that researchers interview participants three times: once to get acquainted and begin to excavate a topic, a second time to delve more deeply, and a third interview to resolve discrepancies and fill in gaps. For all but two participants (Samora and A.F.S., with whom only single meetings were possible), I conducted between two and four full interviews, as well as follow-up interviews to resolve discrepancies with seven participants. The number of interviews depended on participant availability, the length and complexity of careers (Irving granted four especially long interviews, to cover fully the complexity of his 75-year career, for example), and also how many decision points identified by each for possible discussion were determined to meet sampling needs, as I discuss below.

Sessions beyond the first interview were sometimes conducted by telephone or Skype rather than in person. Most interviews lasted between one and two hours.

I audiotaped and transcribed interviews and also took extensive handwritten notes, which proved particularly valuable in the two cases where the audio recordings were corrupted. First interviews aimed to collect participants' entire career histories, and to identify potential decision points to discuss in more detail (these became the 72 decision points coarsely analyzed). More detailed accounts of selected decision points were covered in subsequent interviews. Since the goal was to trace a process, I allowed participants to tell their career and decision point stories in their own words. Individuals often described what they were thinking at the time and their interpretations of events, both then and in retrospect. I also probed for objective information about what had actually occurred: what brought about the need for a decision, what actions people took, what external factors interacted with their decision-making process, what alternatives were available to them, and how organizers set about exploiting the avenues they pursued. For both career and decision point accounts, I encouraged participants first to give overview descriptions that identified main signposts and events; I then probed further to gain additional detail and clarify discrepancies. This approach helped me to differentiate major happenings from more minor ones: events identified when participants gave overview descriptions were given more weight as milestones than were details that came up when participants were probed for depth.

Participants identified between three and 12 decision points each. Those to be examined in greater detail were selected in collaboration: I typically asked participants to indicate which decision points they thought would be most interesting or helpful, though some of them insisted they preferred to have me select among those they had identified. For theoretical sampling

purposes, I suggested organizers select decision points at varying stages of organizers' careers, since the focus of study was long-term sustainability and development. The 72 decision points initially identified were decisively skewed toward early careers. This skew resulted for several reasons: (a) all participants passed through their early careers, yet only some had reached mid- or late career; (b) early-career decision points were considered especially foundational, even among organizers who have been active for decades; and (c) many organizing careers, including some within my sample, are youthful and short (McAdam, 1989; Rooks, 2003, 2004). In keeping with grounded theory and case induction methods, sampling of decision points became more selective as the study progressed, based upon what kinds of cases had already been included and what new ones would provide key contrasts or missing information. So I sometimes suggested that inclusion of a particular decision point might be especially helpful to fill in gaps, but participants ultimately retained the final say over which decision points were examined in detail.

I collected more detailed accounts from each organizer, selecting at least two and no more than four decision points from any one organizer so that the experiences of a few would not overly dominate the findings. From the 14 participants I ended up collecting 40 decision points, from which I could use a purposive sampling method (to be discussed below) to select 30. Surprisingly, some individuals identified two different situations that they considered separate decision points, but which significantly overlapped chronologically. I considered encouraging participants to consider these as single turning points. However, participants consistently identified them separately, and further analysis confirmed that organizers commonly experienced more than one distinct set of decision-making and transition processes at the same time. Overlapping decision points were therefore treated as separate cases.

To supplement interview data, I collected basic information about the organizations involved in the decision points that would be analyzed in depth. Beyond what the participants themselves provided, this information was found on organization websites, in news articles, or through Internet searches. These data allowed me to ascertain or verify the types of organizations involved (e.g., nonprofit, labor union, or voluntary group); the social issues and populations they addressed; their geographical locations, size, and scope; and the general stability and longevity of the organizations. In addition, a few participants provided historical documents related to their career experiences or particular decision points, such as news articles about situations that they discussed or articles that they had published.

Once the study began, I immersed myself in an array of justice movements, as much as possible, and I kept a record of my experiences and reflections in doing so. I did this in order to better learn the culture and language among organizers, and to myself experience the trials and tribulations of the work I was writing about. I attended various events, both to recruit participants and to observe the movements in which they were directly involved. These included a wide range of events, including immigrant rights campaigns, labor actions, and a variety of nonviolent protests and occupations against banks, corporations, university and city officials, and police who had allegedly brutalized or falsely arrested protesters. I also attended job fairs, activist training workshops, and other events and resources aimed at organizer development.

The study took place at a time when various leftist movements were converging and when students in California and elsewhere were raising their voices against privatization and austerity measures in public education and social services. My own involvement in student movements helped me to understand and relate to the wide array of justice movements, groups, and campaigns in which study participants were engaged. I joined listservs of leftist radical

groups and coalitions and mailing lists of national- and (California) state-level liberal organizations like MoveOn.org and The Courage Campaign. I gathered petition signatures, attended meetings, organized actions, and participated in coalitions that formed bridges across movements and groups. I took an active part in the unfolding debate around social and economic justice. As a graduate student worker, I also joined with my fellow union members in taking control of the UAW Local 2865, which we felt was not acting in our best interests. I was careful, however, to avoid direct involvement with the specific movement groups of which participants were a part, as my goal was to strengthen my understanding of organizers from an inside perspective but not to become entangled in participants' lives directly. These experiences gave me a much deeper familiarity with the cultural context in which West Coast justice organizers operate, helped me to identify critical contemporary justice issues, and therefore assisted me in interpreting interview data and drawing conclusions.

### Sampling and Analysis of Collected Decision Points

Analysis began early in data collection and was conducted iteratively, in keeping with recommended grounded theory and case induction processes. The first cut of decision point sampling was in the hands of participants, who identified 72 such junctures. I then conducted coarse-grained analysis of all 14 careers and all 72 decision points. This included what grounded theorists call *open coding*, as well as other preliminary analyses of the first 21 of the 40 decision points collected in detail. The grounded theory coding process has three levels (Corbin & Strauss, 1997; Gilgun, 1994, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Open coding involves the simple line-by line labeling of data for descriptive meaning. *Axial coding*, which establishes relationships among open codes, follows. Later in analysis, particular notions may emerge as potential "core concepts… that can order many of the concepts and result in an organized

theory" (Gilgun, 2007, p. 17). Finally, *selective coding* entails re-coding data, "looking for specific instances that provide evidence that the concept is indeed core".

So, using this approach, I allowed the open coding process and the other preliminary activities described to generate a formal set of structured codes and categories and some key themes, which then allowed for further axial coding. I also developed a process model, based upon these findings, without comparing them to the prior framework that I had proposed. I then used these inductively derived tools to inform the purposive selection (to be explained shortly) of 30 cases for inclusion in fine-grained analyses. I ultimately sorted cases into three analytical cohorts, utilizing the recommendations of Gilgun (2007), as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**
***Analytical Cohorts***

| **Cohort 1: typical (n=8)** | **Cohort 2: atypical (n=7)** | **Cohort 3: haphazard (n=15)** |
|---|---|---|
| Ace DP3 | Barbara DP1 | Ace DP4 |
| Amy DP2 | Irving DP1 | AFS DP1 |
| Barbara DP4 | Kara DP1 | Amy DP1, DP3 |
| Kara DP2, DP3 | Jacobo DP2, DP3 | Barbara DP2, DP3 |
| Rachel DP1 | Rachel DP2 | Irving DP3 |
| Ramon DP1 | Samora DP1 | Jonathan DP2 |
| Skyler DP2 | | Natalie DP1, DP2 |
| | | Ramon DP2, DP3 |
| | | Samora DP3 |
| | | Sara DP1, DP3 |

Note: DP = decision point

These classifications were not made all at once, but were the products of an iterative process involving both sampling and analysis as well as continued data collection, which allowed me to test hypotheses and concepts from earlier cases on negative cases and contrasting examples later on. I first selected eight cases that seemed "typical" of the sample, as recommended by Gilgun (2007). Using procedures taken from Miles and Huberman (1994), I then conducted within-case and cross-case analysis of these decision points, which further modified codes and began to establish categories.

Next I selected an additional seven cases with extreme or atypical (Gilgun, 2007) characteristics, or that highlighted some characteristic of interest (such as involvement with the profession of social work). I conducted abductive analysis (involving both inductive and deductive elements) of these cases, and I then used data from both the typical and atypical cohorts (referred to as Cohorts 1 and 2) to more fully develop the process model, key themes and issues, important dimensions of variance, and emerging types of decision points. Contextual influences and organizer strategies that influenced the process also began to emerge, as well as descriptive and evaluative outcome measures. Finally, I selected a haphazard sample of 15 additional cases for purely deductive analysis. This step helped to generalize findings to a larger array of cases, allowed for certain comparative analyses not possible in a smaller sample, and ultimately added new dimensions to the emerging theory, including potential predictors as well as ideas about the relevance of decision points to overall careers.

**A Balanced Sample**

Decision cases were selected, in part, to represent diversity in terms of the personal characteristics of organizers involved, the stage in an organizer's career when they occurred, their geohistorical context, and whether participants had ultimately sustained careers or not. This diversity was important both because I wanted to make the resulting findings applicable to diverse populations and situations and because these factors were theorized to be important to processes and outcomes.

As noted, the sample was mildly skewed in favor of Caucasian participants and male organizers. Although I was not able to remedy the underrepresentation of women of color in the sample, I included every decision point that Amy and Rachel provided and made sure that three of their cases were included in Cohorts 1 and 2, so that these women were prominently featured

in the fine-grained analysis. Overall, white participants presented 49 decision points, 17 of which were included in the full analysis (10 from women and seven from men). Organizers of color produced 23, of which I included 13 (eight from men and five from women). Gender balance was achieved (in general and within each generation), and family socioeconomic status was distributed fairly evenly across categories for all ethnic groups and both genders. These tallies reflect my purposeful oversampling of decision points from underrepresented groups, as shown in Table 5, which provides personal characteristics of each participant, the number of decision points identified by each person, and the number included in the final analysis.

Table 5 also illustrates the distribution of decision points available, versus those analyzed in detail, from each generation of organizers, another aspect of the sample I sought to balance. I included the greatest number of cases in the final sample from Generation X (born 1964-1976; nine cases) and those born on the border between Generations X and Y (born 1977-1980; seven cases), as well as five each from World War II (born before 1945) and Generation Y (born 1981 or later) cohorts, and four baby boomers (born 1945-1963). The decision points identified by organizers occurred at ages ranging from 14 to 73. Only four occurred during childhood or teenage years, and these were described as less relevant to later development and sustainability than the participants' later decisions; therefore none of the three were selected for detailed analysis. Among the adult decision points selected, stage of career emerged as an important variable in decision point processes. In order to make sense of this factor, I have divided the career span into phases. Since the sample was strongly skewed toward decision points in early and middle career phases, I had to accommodate both the short-lived nature of some participants' careers and the fact that other organizers had remained active throughout their lives. Early

**Table 5**
***Distribution of Demographics across Decision Points Identified and Analyzed***

| Participant | Socioeconomic Status | Generation | Organizing* at time of screening? | Number of decision points identified N=72 | Number of decision points analyzed N=30 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women of color** | | | | **7 total** | **5 total** |
| Amy (South Asian) | working class, advanced degree | Gen X/Y | No | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=3 | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=3 |
| Rachel (Mexican/ German) | working class, MSW | Gen X/Y | Yes | 2 early career<br>2 middle career<br>=4 | 1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=2 |
| **Men of color** | | | | **15 total** | **9 total** |
| Ace (Arab/Caucasian) | borderline working to middle class, college | Gen Y | Yes | 1 preadult<br>3 transition to workforce<br>1 early career<br>=5 | 2 transition to workforce<br>=2 |
| Jacobo (Latino) | working class, MSW | Gen X | No | 2 early career<br>2 middle career<br>=4 | 1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=2 |
| Ramon (Latino) | middle class, college | Gen Y | Yes | 2 transition to workforce<br>1 middle career<br>=3 | 2 transition to workforce<br>1 middle career<br>=3 |
| Samora (African-American) | middle class, college | Gen X | Yes | 2 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=3 | 1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>=2 |
| **White women** | | | | **32 total** | **11 total** |
| Barbara (“Jewish-American”) | middle class, advanced degree | Baby Boomer | Yes | 3 transition to workforce<br>4 middle career<br>1 late career<br>=8 | 2 transition to workforce<br>2 middle career<br>=4 |
| Kara (“Irish Catholic”) | borderline working to middle class, seminary | World War II | No/retired | 2 middle career<br>3 late career<br>= 5 | 1 middle career<br>2 late career<br>=3 |
| Natalie | upper middle class, advanced Degree | Gen X | Yes | 1 preadult<br>3 transition to workforce<br>3 early career<br>8 middle career<br>=15 | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 middle career<br>=2 |
| Sara | borderline working to middle class, college | Gen Y | No | 4 transition to workforce<br>=4 | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 early career<br>=2 |
| **White men** | | | | **18 total** | **5 total** |
| Jonathan (“Jewish/Caucasian”) | middle class, advanced degree | Gen X | No | 2 early career<br>2 middle career<br>=4 | 1 middle career<br>=1 |
| A.F.S. (“WASP”) | upper middle class, advanced degree | Baby Boomer | Yes | 1 early career<br>1 middle career<br>1 late career<br>=3 | 1 late career<br>=1 |
| Irving (“Jewish”) | working class, blue-collar apprenticeship | World War II | Yes | 1 preadult<br>2 transition to workforce<br>1 middle career<br>2 late career<br>=6 | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 late career<br>=2 |
| Skyler | upper middle class, advanced Degree | Gen X/Y | Yes | 1 preadult<br>2 transition to workforce<br>2 early career<br>=5 | 1 transition to workforce<br>1 early career<br>=1 |

*Organizing or directly supervising organizer

phases of careers were thus stacked closer together (i.e., each phase lasted fewer years) than might be the case for other careers, while middle and late career phases were broader.

The first career phase that I distinguished was *transition-aged activism*, lasting one to four years. From the 14 careers studied, 20 turning points occurred around the organizers' initial transition into the workforce. Sixteen other decision points occurred within two years following transition and were considered *early-career* decision points. I clustered the 25 decision points that occurred six to 20 years into careers as *midcareer*, and the seven that occurred when organizers were actively beginning to consider retirement options were classified as *late-career* decision points. I included as many middle- and late-career decision points as possible among the 30 cases selected for detailed examination.

In terms of geographical location and historical context, I mainly emphasized cases that had occurred since the 1990s on the West Coast. However, for purposes of comparison, and because experiences in other times and places were still important parts of participants' careers, I included several cases from earlier periods and other locales. I intentionally selected seven cases involving social workers, four of which directly involved decision making related to the social work profession. A purposive balance was also sought between decision points of organizers who later left organizing and of those who were active at the time of screening; 11 of 30 cases involved organizers who were no longer active during the study.

As the study progressed and early findings began to drive sampling, I identified decision points that could address particular developing aspects of the theory. For example, educational decisions emerged as important, so I purposely sampled several of these. This also often resulted in the inclusion of cases that exhibited key similarities and also significant contrasts with other cases, such as those offered by Ramon and Jacobo. These men were included in part because

they were both young Latinos. Ramon was from a more economically privileged background, but Jacobo had achieved a master's degree and Ramon had not. Both became interested in organizing while in college, yet there were important contrasts between the two men's resources, their experiences at decision points, and their long-term outcomes, making comparison of their perspectives rich fodder for analysis.

**Early and Coarse-grained Analyses**

Following each interview I created a summary sheet that identified key themes and issues associated with careers and decision points collected, prominent characteristics of each case, and other findings that stood out as immediately interesting or important at either the career or decision point level. Audio recordings were professionally transcribed. I prepared memos and noted micro-hypotheses throughout the process of data collection and analysis, helping me build my understanding of individual cases as well as comparisons across them.

Once most participants were enrolled and had provided first interviews, I began to undertake methodical coarse-grained analysis of overall accounts of careers (from recommender and screening data, as well as first interviews), in order to assemble information about the sociodemographic makeup of the sample, descriptions of these careers, and key emerging development and sustainability themes. I relied primarily upon the handwritten notes from interviews for these coarse-grained data, though transcripts and recordings were used when notes were incomplete. I open-coded notes and clustered them inductively into basic categories, and I noted common overarching themes. I delved into deep analysis of two careers (Barbara and Jacobo, a female and a male organizer of different generations, ethnicities, and class backgrounds), using an event-listing format as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) so as to illustrate the timing of events across different contextual settings. Using simpler timelines

composed of main pathways, changes in pathway, and other career milestones, I wrote brief summaries of all 14 careers and listed, for each one, the decision points identified for possible study in chronological order.

I also summarized how the organizers had described each of the 72 decision points initially identified. These summaries themselves yielded insight about how individuals thought about decision points. Comparison of the factors that emerged from these (i.e., decision point triggers, short-term outputs, and what individuals considered to be the essence or crux of each decision) also proved instrumental in classifying and sampling among the available cases.

I then used findings to test the assumptions upon which the study rested: whether the parameters examined were appropriate to the research questions, whether organizers and organizing careers fit the definitions and exhibited the expected characteristics, and whether decision points were viable, identifiable, and boundable phenomena that could be used to inform understanding of the sustainability and development of organizers. I prepared a summary of descriptive findings relevant to the organizers' careers, of emergent themes, and of how respondents identified and interpreted decision points. It became clear at this juncture that decision points at different stages in organizing careers were substantively different, and that there were also other differences among decision points even in the same career phase, although a full typology had not yet emerged. A final set of findings that emerged from coarse-grained data entailed some ideas about how these junctures were relevant to overall careers. After coding and writing memos about these findings, I developed four potential overarching hypotheses to explain the role of decision points in development and sustainability. These would undergo further testing and change, resulting in two such hypotheses that proved relevant and enduring across cases in this study.

As a last step in preliminary analysis, I defined the boundaries of decision points collected and thereby isolated accounts of decision points from interview transcripts, and I open-coded 21 of these (nonmethodically selected). I clustered these codes inductively and used them to create a preliminary formal codebook of 12 categories and 74 codes from which to begin axial coding. The initial process model developed from these codes, memos, and micro-hypotheses, to which I would compare cases for sampling and fine-grained analysis, confirmed the six key domains of the decision point process (prior influences, objective and subjective status-quo conditions, context, decision point triggers, processes of change, and outputs).

All of these activities and findings informed the subsequent collection and analysis of data. With coarse-grained descriptions and initial findings noted, I organized finer-grained analyses to answer the three research questions for this study, concerned with (a) the conditions that gave rise to decision points, (b) the processes that occurred once they were triggered, and (c) their outputs and consequences. I utilized Cohorts 1 and 2 to further refine the process model, composed of findings related to research questions 1 and 2. I then applied these findings deductively to Cohort 3, and I finally addressed question 3 using all 30 cases.

**Selection and Inductive Analysis of Cohort 1**

Selecting the cases for typical Cohort 1 (n=8) involved some guesswork, since analysis was still in its early stages. Nonetheless, all decision points in Cohort 1 occurred after 1995, and all seemed typical of the sample in one or more other ways. Early career decisions were purposely included, in keeping with the natural skew of the sample, as well as those in which experiences prior to and during decision points were generally positive, and whose consequences were positive, since positive decision points were most typical in the overall sample of 72.

A few others were chosen because they seemed emblematic of the transformation process documented as resulting in deepened commitment and politicization, and most participants in this sample were still organizing at the time of their interview (Kara had retired, but after a career of more than 50 years).

Nonetheless, I also sought some variance in this cohort in terms of the personal characteristics of organizers, and I sought to include some social workers. Despite the purposive inclusion of cases that were typical in terms of career stage and participants still being active as organizers, I also looked for some variation in these regards. These steps were taken so that the definition of "typical" would not be inordinately influenced by one group of individuals or one type of decision point.

Using these rules, Ace's third decision point (hereafter Ace DP3) and Ramon's DP1 were included in part because they were foundational decision points at the transition into the workforce; also, these reflected positive experiences and the experiences of Generation Y organizers of color who were still organizing at the time of the study. Rachel DP1 and Amy DP2 represented the voices of women of color, and of Generation X/Y. These cases, along with Skyler DP2 (Generation X), took place early in careers but post-transition, and they offered variance as to whether the experiences were positive or negative. Rachel and Skyler were both active as organizers when the study began, and their cases seemed to represent typical transformations. Amy was not organizing, and she and Kara had both experienced more mixed levels of satisfaction in the movement than had the others.

Finally, this first cohort included three late-career cases from two older white women. Barbara was the only representative of the baby boomer generation in this cohort, while Kara represented the World War II generation. Kara's career was more entrepreneurial and

noninstitutionalized than Barbara's overall, and the two therefore faced differing financial options with regard to retirement.

To undertake analysis, I first engaged in formal axial coding of all eight cases, utilizing ATLAS.ti software, which allowed for modification of codes and categories. I also performed in-depth, within-case analysis of each one, using a variety of exploratory analytical techniques recommended by Miles and Huberman: one-page summary sheets, full case writeups, various types of matrices (such as the event listings already described), and network diagrams (such as event-state networks, which helped to show how events brought about changes in ongoing conditions). Since all the tools recommended by Miles and Huberman are useful but the sample for this study was too large to permit the use of all such tools on every case, I experimented with the use of different tools upon different cases. I identified main milestones and activities for every case and conducted at least two types of analysis of each one. I began with more exploratory techniques and then progressed to more sophisticated and defined tools. Eventually, for each decision case in Cohort 1, I created a timeline of decision points that illustrated both the actual passage of time and the progression through decision point domains already confirmed in coarse-grained analysis (prior experiences, status-quo conditions, triggers, processes, and outputs).

To understand abstract themes and issues, I wrote memos and micro-hypotheses about the raw data and the insights gleaned from matrices and network diagrams. I also examined what was at the crux of each case. These distilled conceptions of what decision points were "really about" were sometimes volunteered by interviewees, were elicited by direct questions in other cases, and were extracted from participants' accounts where necessary (and then, if possible, verified with the participant). To make cross-case comparisons, I stacked the timelines

for all eight cases together. I examined these and wrote memos summarizing clusters of similar events as well as differences and patterns of variance, both within and across cases.

Finally, in order to verify that these cases were typical of the sample, I identified 20 major characteristics and themes that seemed to arise repeatedly in all the cases I had examined coarsely and finely so far. I noted that every Cohort 1 case exhibited at least 15 of these 20 common themes and characteristics; this discovery seemed to both (a) confirm that these cases were indeed fairly typical of the sample, and (b) provide a measure of typicality by which other cases could be evaluated.

**Selection and Abductive Within-case Analysis of Cohort 2**

I next selected seven additional cases to include in Cohort 2, which provided examples of atypical aspects of decision points. To create a framework for identifying atypical cases, I examined the remaining 32 cases available for selection, identifying aspects that were atypical or extreme, or were of particular interest to this study. I also sought to include cases that failed to exhibit 15 of the 20 common characteristics identified from Cohort 1. Cohort 2 cases therefore included historical cases predating 1995, cases that involved negative experiences in the movement, leaving the movement, or organizers who later dropped out, and those that presented extreme risks or conditions, such as those involving arrest, communal living, or international activism. Educational decisions were also included in Cohort 2, as well as two cases that featured social workers interacting directly with the social work profession.

Hence, I selected two decision cases, Irving DP1 and Barbara DP1, for Cohort 2 because they provided historical (i.e., pre-1995) examples of transition-aged decision points as contrasts to the decision points in Cohort 1 involving older organizers. Both Irving and Barbara noted the importance of their Jewish cultural backgrounds in these cases. Barbara's case was also of

interest because it involved her first arrest for civil disobedience and because it exhibited themes of difficulty in academic settings. Irving's case was distinctive because he was part of the communist movement when it was targeted by Sen. McCarthy and because he faced extreme risk in resisting when drafted into the Army during the Korean War; he too grappled with educational decisions. Finally, one case, Kara DP1, involved the extreme experience of living in an activist commune, and it was the only one of the 72 decision points that caused the participant to leave the movement and later return. It was also the only mid- or late-career cases in Cohort 2.

Decision points in Cohort 2 that occurred after 1995 all involved younger organizers of color: Jacobo DP2 and DP3, Rachel DP2, and Samora DP1. Rachel, originally included in the study as a still-active organizer, had since left the movement to develop a clinical social work practice, and her decision at DP2 revealed how this change had occurred. Jacobo's cases also reflected social work experiences and involved some of the most difficult and negative experiences reported in the sample. He, too, had abandoned his quest for movement work in midcareer. Samora, on the other hand, was a Generation X organizer of color who had succeeded in advancing along a desired trajectory. His decision point (Samora DP1) provided another example of positive transformation, this time in an international context.

Abductive in-depth analysis of these cases added refinement to the analytical models under development. I coded four of these seven cases, further modifying codes, categories, and themes. I conducted limited inductive within-case analysis of all Cohort 2 cases: main activities and milestones were identified and the crux of each case was defined. I then added these cases into the Cohort 1 cross-case matrices, a deductive exercise that allowed the structure of the matrices to determine what data I utilized from Cohort 2. These activities allowed me to use data from both cohorts to more fully develop the emerging theory.

**Inductive Theory Building: Cohorts 1 and 2**

I relied and expanded on the cross-case matrices, codes and categories, and themes and issues created in order to build analytical models that could answer research questions. Taking this step necessitated making the diverse cases comparable, so I identified variables or measures for each domain of the process inductively: I examined data in cross-case matrices, both within and across cases, to determine the variables captured by each participant's responses. I then categorized responses as they naturally clustered. Since the study is exploratory, these measures themselves were emergent findings and are detailed in chapter 5. Nonetheless, some decisions had to be made as to what to examine, and defining some measures presented methodological challenges that need explanation. I provide detail below about how I analyzed findings related to each measure, and I also explain how I operationalized variables and arrived at solutions to methodological challenges.

**Research question 1.** To analyze the conditions under which decision points occurred, I first examined the point at which they fell in careers, operationalized as the career phase, the level of childhood experience in movements or with politics, the duration of the adult career prior to the case examined, and the number of major previous pathway changes experienced. The latter measure (previous pathway changes) did not capture every change in role that participants had experienced, since organizers often engaged in multiple activities, meaning that one pathway could change while another remained constant. Nonetheless, having an idea of how often organizers had previously been confronted with significant changes in their everyday modes of engagement seemed useful, since (a) the focus of the study was just such junctures, and (b) the duration of careers may indicate depth of experience but not breadth, since it is possible in careers examined for someone to have experienced a greater number of pathways and perhaps

more decision points than a counterpart whose career had lasted longer. Because these numbers are necessarily imprecise, I grouped them into loosely defined categories (fewer than five previous changes, five to 10, 10 to 20, and more than 20).

I turned next to comparisons of conditions at status quo when decision points were triggered. Codes and cross-case matrices revealed the value of comparing the (objective) pathways that organizers were in at the time. Comparisons of roles performed, social issues addressed, material compensation or arrangement, and the type of organization allowed for the designation of categories of pathways, operationalized into roles (organizing, post-organizing, etc.) and types of main pathway settings (nonprofit, labor union, etc., as well as what issue the organization or group addressed). Codes and categories revealed that status-quo variables also included subjective narratives by which organizers understood their past experiences, their present situations, and their intentions for the future. Though these measures were derived inductively, I used Ganz et al.'s (2004) conceptualizations of projects (motives, goals, and means) to identify the common components of organizers' mental constructs in this study. Other narratives were also revealed, including assessments of how projects were unfolding and organizers' intended trajectories and desired next steps. To understand how these components fit together, I compared pathways to intended trajectories and examined whether projects and assessments helped to explain whether these matched.

Making sense of the context in which decision points occurred was challenging, since each case involved multiple domains and actors. Two simple measures included the general geohistorical context in which cases occurred and the broad sectors or industries in which organizers worked or sought positions. I also described and counted the numbers of everyday domains and actors, which revealed contextual elements that were important as well as the

complexity of ecological relationships that organizers managed in each case. Counts were not definitive, as I counted only those that were explicitly named by each participant. This was one aspect of decision points for which the granularity of data reported was important: domains and actors that would have been mentioned in a fine-grained account may have been missed in cases with medium-grained data. So I have assigned complexity ratings to each case (high, medium, or low, for both domains and actors) that took into account both the number of relationships discussed and the granularity of data. I finally examined the triggers of decision points identified by participants, which I had specifically asked them to identify, and which were shown to vary in origin (internal, external, or mixed) and in number and sequencing of events.

**Research question 2.** Examination of the sequencing of activities and milestones in the comparative timeline matrices already developed revealed the structures underlying the processes of change. I expanded the process domain of these timelines by identifying, for each case, a series of distinct segments in the change process. Each of these segments was defined by engagement in a main set of activities and delineated by a major milestone in the process. The following case example illustrates how milestones often interacted with activities:

> The initial trigger for Jacobo's DP3 occurred as he was approaching graduation from his MSW program, when the completion of his field placement finally allowed him to begin looking for a post-graduation job. For the next month he began examining job options while completing the remainder of his program, but was not yet very focused on this effort and pursued only one opportunity. Upon graduation (pathway change), he began looking for work in earnest, but positions were difficult to find in the difficult economy. A secondary trigger occurred a few months later, when his job-seeking activities had not yielded results and yet funds were running thin, prompting him to take (decision) a temporary, part-time position (pathway change). Negative experiences in that position then led him to trade that job for another part-time position (tertiary trigger and pathway change) while he continued to search for a permanent pathway. Until then he had limited his searching to organizing positions, since he had just completed his MSW and organizing-oriented field placement with the express intention of securing an organizing role. Finally, his continued inability to find a permanent position, and the resulting financial strain and dissatisfaction he felt (fourth trigger), pushed him to change the parameters of his job search (decision) to include direct services positions. He was then

able to secure a direct services position (pathway change), and he spent the remainder of the time adjusting to his new arrangement.

As shown, certain portions of decision points were dominated by particular activities. For Jacobo, this decision point proceeded in five segments, as denoted by the four triggers identified in the biographical excerpt and then the acceptance of a direct services position, which initiated a fifth segment involving adjustment to his new job. Analysis showed that decision points contained three to five segments each. Segments lasted from a few days to about one year. Identification of these segments did not indicate a predictable ordering of events, as if they were defined phases or stages of a process; the segments simply mark substantively different portions of the process in each case. Cross-case comparisons of these then allowed for the development of common steps and stages of the four subprocesses identified.

I further examined the activities and small milestones that took place during each segment and how these related to the major milestones that delineated them, using the codes and categories I had established during earlier analysis. Activities initially fell into five major categories: decision-making, navigation of opportunity structures, transition, sensemaking, and transformation. When I compared this information to the initial framework from chapter 3, I noted that the first three fit the activities expected prior to fieldwork, and the latter two were predicted to be key themes but had not necessarily been conceptualized as activities or processes. I further observed that transition- and transformation-related activities and milestones were closely related and often difficult to differentiate. So I determined that the process at decision points was composed of four major subprocesses: sensemaking, decision-making, navigation, and transition/transformation.

I then created four additional matrices, one for each subprocess, to compare what occurred at various process domains and segments across all 15 cases. I again observed, at these

finer-grained levels, within- and cross-case patterns and clusters. It was challenging to make sense of how organizers first reacted to triggers, since these were not yet entirely distinguishable as one subprocess or another. Continued analysis of cross-case matrices and the coding process eventually suggested that initial interpretations and emotional responses to triggers were best seen as part of the sensemaking process. The effect that these interpretations had on organizer attitudes, emotions, and immediate levels of activity in the movement proved most relevant to transition and transformation processes.

The results revealed by cross-case subprocess matrices ultimately yielded common steps or stages of each subprocess, despite the fact that these processes were revealed to occur concurrently, or to sometimes repeat or deviate from the expected progression during the course of a decision point. Nonetheless, in most cases, issues addressed at one stage of a process generally seemed to build upon those from previous ones. I finally examined what organizers considered the endpoint of the overall period of transition and decision making associated with each case, which allowed for assessments of the duration of each process. These were not always specifically identified by participants, especially when decision points overlapped, though many cases had somewhat distinct endpoints (I estimated these and usually verified them with participants when they were indistinct).

I turned next to the more abstract themes and issues that appeared in each case, beginning with those that were most prominent and central, or what seemed to constitute the crux of each case. When themes were considered in the context of the process steps undertaken, specific contextual influences and concrete organizer strategies also began to emerge from generalized themes. Further analysis of these allowed for the identification of strategies organizers utilized in relation to each subprocess.

I then examined the dimensions along which cases varied. I first organized data by cohort. Differences according to career stage increasingly emerged as prominent. When I considered the crux of each case, along with the career stage at which it occurred, distinct types of cases became visible. These types were identified initially via examination of the 15 cases in Cohorts 1 and 2; I then tested this typology on all 72 cases identified, which helped to confirm its utility and further refine it. Nine types were uncovered at this stage, six of which were represented in Cohorts 1 and 2. Many cases showed attributes of multiple categories; whenever possible, for comparison and analysis, I have assigned the cases examined only to the one primary type that best fit them (a few cases were blends of two types).

I finally reordered the cross-case matrices according to decision point type, thereby revealing notable patterns of variance in several domains of the process. Once again, I wrote memos and posited micro-hypotheses, summarizing and making conjectures about these variations by type of decision point. Data also suggested that personal characteristics of organizers and geohistorical context in which decision points occurred were key dimensions of variance, but it was not possible to analyze these differences with such a small number of cases.

**Selection and Deductive Analysis of Cohort 3**

In order to strengthen findings and to be able to make further comparisons, I selected 15 additional cases for Cohort 3, or what Gilgun called a haphazard sample of both typical and atypical cases. I subjected these to deductive analyses, which refined and helped to generalize the models developed using Cohort 1 and 2 data. Since there was no need to ensure a balance of typical versus atypical cases in this cohort, I sought to balance out the sociodemographic characteristics of organizers in the overall sample and the career stages at which cases occurred. Additionally, previous analysis of Cohorts 1 and 2 and coarse-grained analyses of all 72 cases

had suggested three types of decision points not included in Cohorts 1 and 2, so some Cohort 3 cases were selected to represent these missing types. Finally, cases were sometimes included in this cohort if they provided key similarities and contrasts to cases in Cohorts 1 and 2. For example, Kara and Barbara were both white women, of the baby boomer generation or older, who discussed decision points involving activist communes of which they had been a part. Both had challenging experiences involving romantic relationships in these settings, although they were of different sorts and with differing outcomes. I thus included Barbara DP3 in Cohort 3 to balance Kara DP1 in Cohort 2.

Although Cohort 3 contained no cases from two of the three types missing from the first two cohorts (midcareer advancements within organizations, and decisions about mid- or late-career transformative excursions), I was able to purposively include five midcareer cases, two of which involved launching or maintaining capstone ventures and two that were initially difficult to classify. I examined all Cohort 3 cases deductively: I recorded key milestones for each case, and I utilized these analyses to confirm that the basic process domains and steps were applicable to the entire sample. I also identified the crux of each Cohort 3 case; analysis of the crux and career stage of each allowed me to revisit for a final time the typology that I had established. Existing types were confirmed in this cohort, and the two cases that had defied classification were found to both represent a new tenth type of case: midcareer cases of settling into trajectories. Two subtypes of preworkforce decisions would emerge from this analysis as well: preorganizing and youth/student organizing. I also analyzed the ways in which Cohort 3 cases stood out as unique in the sample, or as different from those in Cohorts 1 and 2 of the same type, and I wrote a summary of what these new findings added to existing ones.

I finally utilized the entire sample composed of Cohorts 1 through 3 (N=30) to (a) analyze themes and issues related to diversity and the experiences of organizers of underrepresented backgrounds and (b) to make systematic comparisons between the experiences more generally of organizers of different backgrounds. These analyses were also deductive and so involved primarily selective coding methods. Using similar cross-case matrices to those already described, I compared responses about experiences with diversity in the movement or issues related to personal background. I compared the responses of white women, white men, women of color, and men of color in terms of their cumulative and status-quo satisfaction levels at decision points, and with regard to whether they had experienced direct barriers to movement participation in the cases examined. I also noted some themes not specifically related to diversity but which nonetheless varied among individuals of differing backgrounds.

**Research Question 3: Cohorts 1-3**

To understand the consequences of decision points, I examined mainly the short-term outputs of all 30 cases, since (as noted) long-term outcomes were posited to be difficult to predict (as discussed in chapter 3). Nonetheless, I also assessed to the extent possible the long-term outcomes of organizers involved in each case—both those that I could observe from career-level data and those that the organizers specifically described as connected to a particular decision point. Analysis revealed several descriptive outputs, which varied from case to case and type to type. I compared these outputs themselves and also compared them to pre-decision point findings, which revealed four aspects of change that decision points could entail (change in pathway, change in intended trajectory, intrapsychic changes, and personal life changes). I then used simple tallies of how many of these aspects exhibited change ($\Delta$) in each case versus how

many remained constant (C), so as to assign an estimated overall magnitude of change associated with each case (low, medium, or high).

Lastly, since the main focus of the study was on development and sustainability, I considered what kinds of changes decision points seemed to produce along these lines. My findings had confirmed, consistent with prior research, that both efficacy and persistence were dependent upon the external and internal resources at an organizer's disposal. So I determined that short-term increases or decreases in these resources would serve as reasonable proxies for development and sustainability outputs. Using measures already identified in the analyses completed for research questions 1 and 2, I examined the resources available to organizers before and after each case. By considering long-term outcomes in addition to short-term outputs, I determined the resources that appeared most relevant to persistence or sustainability. These included situational availability, as well as satisfaction and whether individuals got what they sought out of a decision point; the latter two served as proxies for intrapsychic motivation-- and overall level of mobilization or activity in movements) and those that seemed to describe developmental outputs (expertise, credentials, reputation, and networks). I assigned for each either an increase (+), a decrease (-), a mixed effect (+-), or constancy (C). I finally analyzed all 30 cases for variance in their outputs, within and across types of decision points.

## Verification of Data and Participant Input

A phenomenological approach to research challenges the positivist notion that establishing a single objective truth is either possible or desirable when one addresses questions about people's social realities (Schutz, 1967, 1999). Therefore, qualitative methodologists have suggested that validity of qualitative findings is best measured by whether the findings accurately reflect the perspectives and voices of participants. I have taken up this mantle of

responsibility to participants in this study, since (a) the goal is to present an understanding of decision points from the perspective of organizers themselves, and (b) these perspectives actually drive decision making and thus may be more relevant to continued development and sustainability than the objective truth of a situation.

I took several steps to ensure that participant views were properly represented. First, audio recordings and transcripts enabled me to remain closer to raw data than would handwritten notes of interviews alone, and extensive use of quotations has allowed organizers' own words to be prominently heard. I conducted follow-up interviews with seven of the 10 participants represented in Cohorts 1 and 2, to fill in missing information, clarify discrepancies, and ask additional questions. All participants also had the opportunity to read early drafts of results and conclusions, to correct misinformation, and give feedback as to whether they felt my interpretations were correct and valuable. Twelve of the 14 participants were provided this information; eight read them and responded with active feedback, four provided passive agreement with results (by receiving documents and choosing not to respond with changes), and two were unreachable. Active responses were unanimously very positive, and the corrections offered were minor, indicating that the findings were true to their realities.

I also verified objective aspects of data, following recommendations widely held among qualitative researchers to triangulate multiple data sources (Yin; 2009; Padgett, 2008; Maxwell, 2004). I checked participant accounts of dates, organizational specifications, and the like against archival data, when available. Finally, as noted, I reviewed my field recordings and online communications from my own participation in justice movements, reflected on these when interpreting findings.

## Drawing Conclusions and Building a Descriptive Theory

To draw final conclusions and develop a theory of organizer decision points, I compared findings to the initial conceptual framework posited prior to fieldwork, noting what initial expectations were met, and also what unexpected findings had emerged, for all domains, processes, and themes. I considered the conditions, process steps and themes, and outputs presented in results, and I synthesized microhypotheses into main posited explanations of outputs and long term outcomes. I finally compared the resulting theory to existing findings in the literature, devising an understanding of the limitations and implications of the inquiry.

# CHAPTER 5

# RESULTS

This study seeks to understand how justice organizers develop and sustain careers, via qualitative exploration of how organizers negotiate key decision points and how this process is influenced by the context in which decisions and transitions are made. I begin this chapter with general, overall descriptions of all careers examined (N= 14) and decision points identified (72). I then report more detailed results for research questions 1 and 2. I consider the conditions (Question 1) and processes (Question 2) associated with decision points, via inductive analyses of Cohort 1 (n = 8 "typical" decision points, or cases) and Cohort 2 (n = 7 cases with "atypical" or highlighted characteristics).

I next examine to what extent these findings are generalizable to Cohort 3 (n = 15 cases, with a mix of typical and atypical features). Finally, I examine the outputs and consequences (Question 3) of all 30 decision points in Cohorts 1 to 3. This exploration of organizers' career decisions and transitions can identify patterns in organizer behavior, advance theory development, and indicate directions for future study.

## Descriptions of Careers and Decision Points

This section will describe organizers' careers and decision points—where in their careers those points fell, their geographical and historical context, and how participants identified and summarized them. Table 6 includes descriptive information about the careers of all 14 participants screened for inclusion (see Table 3 above for the participants' personal characteristics), and Appendices A and B provide additional detail. Because of the wide age range of participants (24 to 80 years old when interviewed), the experiences that they reported occurred over more than 70 years, from the 1930s to the present.

**Table 6**
***Participant Personal and Career Characteristics (N = 14)***

| Career Phase[Δ] | Pseudo-nym | Generation/ Age | Ethnicity | Gender | Family SES | Education[†] | Adult career length (years)[Δ] | Still active?[Δ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Early** | Ace | Y 24 | Biracial (Arab/ Caucasian) | M | Borderline/ movement resources* | Completed college | 6 | Yes |
| | Sara | Y 28 | Caucasian | F | Borderline* | Completing college | 5 | No |
| **Middle** | Jacobo | X/Y 28 | Latino | M | Working class | Completed college | 2.5 | No |
| | Ramon | Y 28 | Latino | M | Middle class | Completed college | 10 | Yes |
| | Amy | X/Y 31 | SE Asian (Indian) American | F | Working class | Completing post-graduate | 11 | Yes |
| | Rachel | X/Y 31 | Biracial (Mexican/ German) | F | Working class/ movement resources* | Completed post-graduate | 14 | No |
| | Natalie | X 33 | Caucasian | F | Upper middle class/ movement resources* | Completing post-graduate | 14 | Yes/Post |
| | Skyler | X 33 | Caucasian/ Jewish | M | Upper middle class | Completed post-graduate | 5 | Yes |
| | Jonathan | X 38 | Caucasian/ Jewish | M | Borderline/ movement resources* | Completing post-graduate | 20 | No |
| | Samora | X 40 | African-American | M | Middle class | Completed college | 20 | Yes/Post |
| **Late** | A. F. S. | Baby boomer 62 | Caucasian, "WASP, Scottish" | M | Upper middle class | Completed post-graduate | 20 | Yes/Post |
| | Barbara | Baby boomer 63 | Caucasian/ Jewish | F | Middle class | Completed post-graduate | 45 | Yes/ Post |
| | Irving | WWII 80 | Caucasian/ Jewish | M | Working class/ movement resources* | Formal blue collar apprenticeship | 61 | Yes |
| **Retired** | Kara | WWII 72 | Caucasian/ Irish | F | Middle class | Blue collar training, Pastoral | 40+ | No/Post |

*Note:* World War II Generation individuals were born prior to World War II, baby boomers circa 1945-1963, Generation X circa 1964-1976. Those born circa 1977-1980 were Generation X/Y, and those born in 1981 or later were Generation Y.
Δ At the time of the interview; includes both paid and unpaid work.
* "Borderline" refers to being raised on the borderline of working and middle classes. "Movement resources" refers to being raised in the movement or having access to movement resources via family members, potentially increasing one's participatory resources compared to what one's SES would otherwise suggest.
† In addition to mainstream education and credentials, all participants received some form of training within movements.

## Antecedents to Organizing Careers

For many subjects, preadult experiences formed a general basis and foundation for adult organizing and were often mentioned specifically as considerations in adult decision points, though there was not usually a direct linear progression from preadult affiliations into specific career pathways. All but one participant reported that the values with which they were raised and their experiences as youths predisposed them to pursue organizing work later in life. Five

participants were raised in explicitly politicized family environments, and others referred to personal experiences that had a politicizing effect. For example, Amy, as a teen, successfully prosecuted her father for sexual abuse; Barbara's parents were Holocaust survivors; and Samora's African-American parents viewed the civil rights movement as a "central fixture" in their value system. Several directly participated in movement activities as young people.

Among both white and biracial organizers in the sample, experience with movements during youth was quite common across generations. Natalie and Rachel had family members who were so oriented, and they themselves participated in movement activities. Irving, Ace, and Jonathan experienced full immersion in movement life during childhood. Finally, Rachel, Skyler, Ramon, and Natalie reported that they had shown signs of rebellion or delinquency as teens, which they related to their affinity for activism. Ramon, Rachel, and Natalie also had the opportunity as teens to travel internationally or live independently from their families.

**Organizing Careers**

All participants began their movement involvement before or during the transition to adulthood. Their adult careers lasted from three to 58 years, as shown in Table 6. Not only the duration but the diversity of participants' movement experiences varied, as reflected in Appendix B, ranging from fewer than five to several dozen previous pathways (roles performed in particular organizational settings).

College activism was by far the most common entry point to adult organizing careers; Kara and Irving, who did not attend college (although Kara would pursue pastoral training later in life), accessed their careers via existing youth movement activities. While the organizers in this study were a highly educated group, many faced detours along their educational paths; dropping out, changing focus, changing schools, and facing conflict or dissatisfaction with

educational experiences were common. Skyler, Sara, and Natalie moved in and out of school through their late teens and into their twenties, while serving intermittently as organizers. Skyler's transition to adulthood was complicated by a period of drug addiction and criminal activity after he dropped out of community college. Nonetheless, he, Barbara, Jacobo, Rachel, Amy, and Jonathan pursued advanced degrees in social work, public policy, or sociology.

Appendix C summarizes the types of organizations in which study participants operated over the course of their careers. Positions included both paid labor and nonprofit organizing and work in informal grassroots associations and volunteer-based groups. Overlap between organizing and human services was present among 12 of the 14 participants' careers. Participants received various forms of compensation, as full-time or part-time staff or getting stipends or room and board; some served as volunteers. Some organizers took an entrepreneurial approach to the problem of not being able to secure a full-time position; they either helped to launch new projects, created their own positions, or pieced together temporary, contract, part-time, or volunteer arrangements. Other individuals took more professionalized paths dedicated to pure organizing or to a combination of direct service and organizing. Several took temporary nonmovement side jobs or full-time blue-collar positions in order to support themselves. Irving, for example, worked and organized workers in the railroad industry for more than 30 years, exemplifying a commuter trajectory; he also had the distinction of almost never having been paid for organizing work throughout his long career.

Pay scales (for those who received payment) varied significantly, from small stipends to a salary of $95,000 a year plus benefits. Interestingly, some young organizers were among the highest-paid. Overall, however, most participants earned working- or middle-class incomes. Some took time off from movement work to pursue other interests, such as the lucrative high-

technology endeavors that A. F. S. undertook before returning to the movement to launch two successive for-profit social and environmental justice ventures. Natalie held at least 12 different movement-related positions in a 16-year period while also working as a licensed massage therapist, artist, and model. Four others (Jonathan, Rachel, Jacobo, and Amy) had left organizing as a paid career, opting for related work in academia, direct services, or policy. Both professional and commuter trajectories offered better opportunities to obtain decent wages and benefits than did more entrepreneurial approaches, and solutions to the question of how to retire also varied. Irving's selection of a blue-collar commuter trajectory at a young age would allow him to retire while still young. Starting in the early 1980s, he and his wife would live simply on their pensions while he waged voluntary entrepreneurial efforts for several decades.

A. F. S. similarly retired from a career as both a nonprofit and for-profit entrepreneur with retirement benefits and greater wealth. Also entrepreneurial, Kara modestly met her needs at retirement with the combination of a small fixed income, a low-income housing arrangement, and a low monthly stipend from her GLBTQ organization.

As Table 6 indicates, nine of 14 participants were organizing at the time of their interviews, including four who had moved into postorganizing director or supervisory roles still related closely to or involving direct organizing. Kara was still employed and active in her organization as a pastor and in other roles but had officially retired as an organizer. The other four had left organizing, at least for the moment. Of these, Rachel and Jacobo were working in direct service roles but hoped to retain their organizing values. Appendix D gives more information about participants' pathways at the time of interviews.

Overall, organizers appeared to be unusually busy people, often participating in more than one social movement at the same time, in addition to holding nonmovement work

responsibilities. As expected, many reported either great overlap and/or significant tensions between movement life and personal commitments. Their nonconventional lifestyles and careers, often involving long work hours and substantial travel, spilled over into their personal lives and presented the threat of burnout. Interviewees commented that organizing "can be lonely," and that it was "difficult for loved ones to keep up." As expected, decision points could often occur frequently in these careers, probably more so than in others. Two participants noted that getting older made adapting to constant change and uncertainty more difficult. On the positive side, some organizers appreciated the diversity of their organizing experiences, the opportunities to travel, and, as one interviewee put it, a career that helps people become "more outgoing."

## A Working Typology of Decision Points

General overall examination of all 72 identified decision points provides some understanding of where these decision points fell in the span of organizers' careers, along with some general commonalities and differences among cases. The distribution of decision points was quite skewed toward early career phases. Additionally, as expected, decision points were not single moments in time but, rather, involved an extended period of transition. Some represented a series of decisions closely related in time and content, or a generalized period of uncertainty and transition. Putting boundaries on decision points was more complicated when they overlapped with other transitions (as was especially common during early careers or trajectory changes).

To make sense of the varied and often complex issues contained in decision points, I extracted what appeared to lie at the crux of each case. If decisions represented answers to career questions, then the crux of a case represented that key set of questions, options, or

dilemmas that the decision tried to answer. Examination of the crux of a case, then, does not tell its outcome, but rather the main set of challenges confronted.

Just a few of the cases identified occurred during childhood; I have labeled these as *preadult decision points*. There were then three types of cases that could occur during the transition to adulthood: *preorganizing decision points* and *student organizing decisions* were related to student and voluntary activism prior to entering the workforce, while some cases centered on the seminal experience of *attempting to launch a career* in organizing. Organizers early in their careers encountered situations where they were *called to deepen commitment*, or ones that offered the opportunity to experiment with potential career trajectories (*trajectory experiments*). Some middle- and late-career decision points represented choices to undertake or manage adversity in career-defining situations where the organizers played a particularly central role and were strongly invested in the potential outcomes (I have called these *capstone venture decisions*). Others involved *advancement decisions* and other moves within existing organizations; there were also midcareer decisions about *transformative campaigns* often involving risk and/or travel and a perceived chance for high social impact and personal transformation. Still other midcareer situations prompted participants to consider a *potential trajectory change*, which could also involve consideration of leaving a capstone venture. Finally, a few cases challenged older organizers to navigate the *transit to retirement*.

**Introduction: Inductive Findings (Cohorts 1 and 2)**

Closer analyses of 15 decision cases will show that decision points arose out of prior and status-quo situations and understandings, and that they were triggered by specific events or changes. The activities in which organizers engaged at such junctures were seen to involve four key processes: sensemaking, decision making, navigation of opportunity structures, and

transition and transformation. As expected, processes were undertaken by organizers in the context of, and in interaction with, their surroundings. The data also indicate the development and sustainability strategies employed by organizers. Some aimed to *optimize* satisfaction and efficacy, or to maximize the benefits of available resources and opportunities. In other situations, market or personal availability constraints meant that available positions were either not ideal or not well understood; in these cases, organizers sought to choose the best available, or to *suboptimize*. Below, I examine the phases of each of the processes identified, including a synthesis of the main themes, contextual influences, and strategies that emerged.

### Question 1: What conditions and triggers set the stage for career decision points?

Research question 1 addresses the point in each organizer's career at which decision points occurred, the status-quo situations in which participants found themselves, the narratives by which they understood their situations and evaluated their experiences, and the specific events that triggered decision points. The following discussion is organized in terms of these themes.

#### Decision Points in Careers: Placement and Types

Participants were between 17 and 71 years old when they faced the decision points sampled. As the sample was skewed toward early and midcareer decision points, I also added cases that reflected late-career decisions. Table 7 compares (a) the level of childhood exposure to politics and social movements that preceded each case, (b) the duration and history of each adult career up to the decision point, and (c) the number of previous pathway changes experienced. I have operationalized the varying levels of preadult experiences that participants had had with politics and social movements (discussed in the overall findings) as low, medium, or high; all cases exhibited some early predisposing experiences. Duration of organizers' *adult* careers before the decision point ranged from none (i.e., just beginning one's career) to 55 years.

**Table 7**
***Decision Point Placement in Life Course and Career***

| Career Phase | Decision Point | Point in Life Course | Preadult Experience Level | Adult Career Duration Prior to Decision Point | Previous Pathway Changes* | Decision Point Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Preorganizing /transition to workforce** | Barbara DP1 | Age 17, transit to adulthood | Medium | First year | <5 | **Preorganizing/ student decisions** |
| | Irving DP1 | Age 18, transit to adulthood | High | Adult career start point | 1st adult, <5 total | |
| | Ramon DP1 | Age 22, (end) transit to adulthood | Low | 3 years | <5 | |
| | Ace DP3 | Age 23, early adult | High | 3 years | <5 | **Attempt to launch career** |
| **Early** | Skyler DP2 | Age 23, early adult | Medium | 5 years | <5 | |
| | Samora DP1 | Age 25, early adult | Medium | 7 years | <5 | **Calls to deepen commitment** |
| | Rachel DP1 | Age 25, early adult | Medium | 7 years | 5-10 | |
| | Jacobo DP2 | Age 26, adult | Low | 6 years | <5 | |
| | Amy DP2 | Age 27, adult | Low | 7 years | <5 | **Trajectory experiments** |
| **Mid/Late** | Jacobo DP3 | Age 28, adult | Low | 6 years | 5-10 | |
| | Rachel DP2 | Age 31, adult, transit to family life | High | 12 years | <5 | **Potential trajectory changes** |
| | Kara DP1 | Age 36, midlife | Medium | 17 years | 10-20 | **Potential trajectory changes/ Capstone venture decisions** |
| | Barbara DP4 | Age 55, mid- to late life | Medium | 37 years | 10- 20 | |
| **Late/ retirement** | Kara DP2 | Age 68, late life; pretransition to retirement | Medium | 52 years | >20 | |
| | Kara DP3 | Age 71, late life; transition to retirement | Medium | 55 years | >20 | **Transit to retirement decisions** |

*Pathways refer to roles performed in particular organizational settings.

Regarding the four decision points among organizers making a transition into adulthood, the main prior organizing experiences included student and voluntary activism. Irving, however, was already quite experienced as a volunteer organizer at age 17. Ace was already out of college at DP3 and had begun organizing in a Catholic volunteer corps program. Five cases occurred when organizers were in their early careers. Following his recovery from heroin addiction, Skyler had secured a full-time position at the foreign treatment clinic and policy organization to

which he owed his sobriety. Rachel (DP1), Samora (DP1), and Jacobo (DP2) had held full-time organizing positions since college; for Jacobo these included environmental organizing and direct service roles. Amy had worked in legal advocacy and peer education services for youth. Rachel (by DP1) and Jacobo (by DP3) had completed MSW programs. Kara and Barbara, prior to their late-career decision points, had engaged deeply and widely in activism under a large number of material arrangements; both had also lived in activist communes.

Table 7 illustrates wide variations in the involvement that preceded decision points, and therefore in how well equipped the individuals may have been to negotiate the complexities of decision points. This description of past experience also suggests that pathway changes were often frequent during the early years of an organizer's career and that, although careers became more stable over time, they were never immune to significant changes (column 6). The last column categorizes the decision points into types. As noted, 12 types were identified among the 72 cases presented; Cohort 1 and 2 cases fell into seven of these. These types will be referred to frequently throughout the text, to illustrate how the process varied among substantively different decision points falling in different phases of organizing careers.

**Status-Quo Pathways and Context**

To make sense of the various positions organizers were in when decision points arose, I have operationalized status quo pathways in terms of the time commitment required, payment arrangement, roles and social issues addressed, and the main local context in which they worked. Doing so permitted the categorization of these as either preorganizing activism, organizing (professionalized , commuter, or entrepreneurial), organizing blended with other activities (direct services, pastoral work), postorganizing (advancement, retirement), or nonorganizing

(nonmovement work); Appendix D contains these results, and Appendix E the derivation of these categories for each case examined).

**Roles and material arrangements.** In three cases, individuals were still students at decision points and had some financial support from family, financial aid, internships, or part-time work. In six cases, the individual was in a professional organizing position (although not necessarily with full salary); two combined organizing with direct services. The remaining six cases began with participants in commuter or entrepreneurial organizing roles, or in nonorganizing positions. Jacobo was not organizing but provided direct services. Barbara's pathway at DP4 was highly professionalized, in that she had advanced to the level of executive director of a community homeless center.

Participants were often involved in more than one activity when decision points began; therefore, in many such cases, they were working more than full-time hours in order to meet their financial needs and pursue ideological goals. In 10 of the 15 decision cases in Cohort 1, organizers were engaged in three or more pathways simultaneously. Kara's multiple pre-DP1 pathways included, first, a commuter pathway as a school bus driver, which enabled her to be part of the implementation of racial integration while earning a salary and also gave her access to participation in the related union. Additionally, she was involved in several voluntary and entrepreneurial pathways, including work as a volunteer organizer in several local groups and as founder, resident, and owner of one of two houses comprising a commune made for racially diverse working-class lesbians.

**Context.** These roles were performed in varying organizational contexts, as illustrated in Appendix D. Overall, nonprofit organizations were the most common setting for organizing, including grassroots organizations, service providers, and organizations that blended direct

service and organizing. There were significant differences in work experiences and conditions among the various settings, and many organizers operated in multiple settings at once. Participants in 11 cases interacted in the formalized nonprofit social-action sector, composed of grassroots organizations addressing issues like housing, jobs, and living wages. Nine cases unfolded in informal and voluntary settings, including campaigns related to gay and lesbian rights, racial equality, feminism, or labor rights. Seven cases involved interaction with the nonprofit human-services sector (e.g., homeless services, youth and family services, and drug treatment), while Skyler engaged in both for-profit and voluntary human-services work (in drug treatment and policy reform). Other less common sectors of engagement included academia (five cases), government (three), religious (three), and for-profit nonmovement spheres (two).

Within and across these broad sectors, organizers engaged in a multiplicity of smaller, everyday settings (detailed in Appendix F). Domains included formal organizations, informal groups, larger movement networks, and nonmovement work settings. Participants were also involved in informal peer and mentorship networks with other activists and with public institutions such as the U.S. Army and the Peace Corps. Finally, organizers cited generalized areas of activity, such as the job market, academics, and personal life contexts.

Specific actors identified as influencing the course of events during decision points included individuals, internal factions within organizations or networks (e.g., organizational leadership), or organizations and larger institutions themselves. Influential people included supervisors or founders of organizations, as well as coworkers, subordinates, organization members, clients, mentors, staff of partner organizations, and also targets of organizing campaigns (public authorities in Skyler's case, or church officials for Kara). Within the personal life domain, romantic partners, parents, extended family members, and friends were prominent in

many cases. Finally, there were more distant or nebulous forces, like the requirements of funders that constrained both Amy's and Barbara's (DP4) ability to practice effectively.

On a broader level, decision points also played out in varying geohistorical contexts. Two-thirds of all cases examined occurred during the 2000s—some in Southern California, where labor and immigrant rights movements have thrived, and others in Northern California, where drug policy reform, GLBTQ interests, and antiwar protests have had strong support. A few of the most recent decision points were directly affected by the national economic downturn. Samora's DP1 occurred in 1995, at the height of the welfare reform debate. Irving's DP1 took place in 1948-1951 during the onset of McCarthyism; Barbara's DP1 played out in the context of the early 1960s civil rights and student movements; and Kara's DP1 came in the 1970s as part of New Left feminism and the gay and lesbian rights movement. Overall, knowing the placement in careers of decision points, their types, status-quo pathways, and the context in which decision points unfolded provides a baseline by which both subsequent external changes and decision making can be understood, and it also describes the main components of opportunity structures that will be relevant.

**Existing Narratives: Past, Present, and Future**

Just as important as the status-quo pathways and surrounding context of each decision were the understandings and intentions under which organizers were operating. Conceptualizing organizers' perceptions as narratives, or coherent stories about their past, present, and future, has helped to interpret results. I outline common content of these stories below, starting with the prior experiences organizers discussed as relevant at decision points.

**Prior experiences.** In their descriptions of decision points, participants referred frequently to specific previous experiences and influences. The particular previous experiences

that were relevant to each case varied by type of decision point, as summarized in Appendix G. Organizers in every case mentioned previous experiences in social movements that influenced decision points. For organizers starting careers, these were limited to preadult and college activism, most of which had been experienced positively. In both early trajectory experiments and changes in more established trajectories, prior positive and negative experiences (both within and outside of movements) provided a template for evaluating new options. Experiences in previous pathways that were relevant at decision points focused on whether and why an organizer had been either satisfied or dissatisfied in previous roles, as well as evaluations of the social change outcomes achieved. Themes usually related to (a) interpersonal, structural, or political issues that had previously dampened or enhanced organizers' movement experiences, and/or (b) their understanding of how and why particular efforts had affected the social problems targeted. Negative experiences in nonmovement settings or nonorganizing roles were also relevant to decisions to pursue organizing pathways (Jacobo DP2 and DP3, Amy DP2, Barbara DP1 and DP4), while Rachel's positive experiences in counseling work figured into her decision to pursue this nonorganizing trajectory at DP2.

Participants also saw status-quo positions as products of earlier developmental activities: they were cognizant of who and what had helped them arrive there, and of what they felt they had learned about organizing and career planning. Developmental experiences and resources included socialization experiences in movements, training and mentoring, and network-building activities. Lessons and resources gained from these sources were relevant in 12 cases, and organizers cited them as especially crucial to their ability to initially launch careers.

For those raised in the movement or who participated during their transition to adulthood, values and ideologies into which they had been socialized in movements were also important,

sometimes in unexpected ways. This influence was most apparent for Irving, whose deep socialization throughout childhood into the Communist left had resulted in his unquestioned adoption of "all this weird revolutionary communist ideology." This ideology led him to join the ranks of the working class without ever considering college. To his surprise, even though Irving held a staunchly antiwar stance, his communist ethos "said to me internally that if young workers are being drafted into the Army, then I needed to be drafted along with them. I never even thought about conscientious objection. So ... I ended up getting drafted."

College-related experiences that affected decision points included particularly eye-opening college coursework and exposure to diversity of background and thought. Many respondents mentioned student internships and activist groups as providing formal training, hands-on movement and work experience, and social relationships, as well as connections to paid positions and other resources. Training and study within the movement, sometimes with the help of mentors, also informed status-quo conceptions in several cases.

Nine cases overall were preceded by network-building and relationship-building activities that participants said were important in how decision points played out. These activities were influential because of the options, resources, and constraints that had resulted from them, as well as organizers' growth in understanding how to develop and sustain careers. Rachel, Ace, and Ramon all discussed relationships with mentors, who served as resources but could also present constraints, as organizers sometimes felt obligated to make choices that their mentors would approve. On the other hand, Jacobo's relative lack of network ties seemed to undermine his access to pathways and his personal availability to organize. Finally, past interpersonal conflicts could also impact decision points, as Kara and Rachel discovered.

Among the prior decision points that participants discussed in relation to the decision points they had faced, some were quite recent relative to the decision point and thus important because they resulted directly in the organizers' current pathways (as listed in Appendices D and E). Others were from long ago and formational. Organizers frequently explained that they analyzed situations by reference to the reasoning they had employed in previous decisions, the circumstances they had confronted, and how these memories compared to current situations. They also assessed how successful they felt those efforts had been, in order to determine what they might try next. Four participants (Ace, Barbara DP1, Rachel DP2, Skyler) discussed previous decision points that had been transformative, or had especially defined their identity and values in some way, and so guided their thinking at subsequent decision points examined.

Personal characteristics and histories also influenced decision points and status-quo conceptualizations. Most ethnic minority and working-class participants discussed ways in which these identities defined their thinking at decision points, as well as barriers and disincentives to participation that had affected their options and perceptions. Additionally, Kara, Amy, and Rachel indicated that spiritual and religious orientation, sexual orientation, and personal identity exploration were important defining factors.

In eight cases, prior personal issues, or interaction between personal lives and movement participation, influenced what occurred at decision points. Personal issues included past traumas, mental and emotional health, difficult family relationships, and addiction issues. Past overlap or disconnect between organizers' personal lives and their movement work affected the content of decision points in seven cases. Such personal issues often contributed to the politicization of these participants and/or complicated their decision points. Skyler, for example, discussed how an incident in which a transient, mentally ill man was brutalized and killed by

police near his home triggered his DP2, reinforcing his grooming to "see police as adversaries." At the same time, his struggles to recover from heroin addiction affected Skyler's confidence in his decision making as he sought to deepen his commitment.

**Status-quo narratives.** The above understandings of the past gave rise to status quo narratives. The concept of projects, as guiding mental frameworks by which participants organized their goals, motives, and the means available to reach their goals, proved useful in interpreting their understandings of the present and future. Other narratives also emerged; Table 8 summarizes some key elements of these. A horizontal read illustrates that assessments of past experiences had led individuals to select current trajectories (a main component of projects-- I offer descriptions of trajectories, and other elements of projects *not* included in Table 8, below). Participants then assessed status quo experiences as positive, negative, or mixed, and status-quo pathways as either stable or in flux, which then contributed to the next project individuals desired to pursue (all illustrated below and in Table 8).

One factor all projects had in common was that no participants in this sample saw organizing as simply a job; rather, all purposefully sought out organizing careers in order to achieve social change goals. Nonetheless, social identity needs in movement communities, and other personal and career needs, also motivated decisions. Components of projects commonly discussed included an organizer's intended trajectory (a construct itself made up of several subparts), the populations, causes, and organizations or networks to which they were committed, the ideologies and practice styles they espoused, and personal life concerns.

***Intended trajectories (a main component of projects).*** As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, trajectories are conceptualized as one's intended direction of advancement, and pathways were seen as avenues by which trajectories might be pursued. Since these are related constructs, with

**Table 8**
***Status-Quo Narratives: Selected Components of Projects, Assessments, and Desired Next Steps***

| Decision Point Type | Decision Point | Assessment: Cumulative Satisfaction | Key Project Component: Intended Trajectory at Status Quo* | Assessment: Status Quo Satisfaction | Assessment: Status-Quo Stability | Desired Next Steps |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-organizing** | **Barbara DP1** | Very positive | **Clarifying: organizing or activism, general** | Very positive (reinforced by negative nonmovement experiences) | Larger transition; current paths stable | Take the "next step" to deepen activism; make "irrevocable" decisions that would compel commitment |
| **Attempts to launch careers** | **Ace DP3** | Very positive | **Professionalized non-profit organizing** | Very positive | In transition to full-time paid role in existing pathway | Continue in current path; "three years and out" |
| | **Ramon DP1** | Very positive | **Clarifying: build on current entrepreneurial organizing/ direct services venture** | Very positive | Planned change coming | Continue current involvements as nonstudent |
| | **Irving DP1** | Very positive | Commuter labor and voluntary organizing | Very positive | Planned change | Pursue trajectory upon graduation, continue current involvements |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | **Skyler DP2** | Very positive | **Clarifying: Professionalized organizing or direct services, or both** | Very positive | Stable | Continue and expand involvement, continue in personal recovery process |
| | **Samora DP1** | Very positive | **Professionalized non-profit organizing** | Very positive | Stable | Means of rejuvenation, revisit project |
| **Trajectory experiments** | **Jacobo DP2** | Mixed | Professionalized organizing/direct services | Mixed/ negative | Planned path change | Peace Corps tour and/or graduate school |
| | **Amy DP2** | Mixed | Professionalized non-profit organizing | Mixed | In transition; in temporary pathways | Pursue trajectory when an ideal addition presents |
| | **Rachel DP1** | Very positive | Shifting toward professionalized labor organizing (from nonprofit) | Mostly positive | Stable in path, interested in change | Organize the unorganized in a labor union |
| **Potential trajectory changes** (sometimes involved leaving capstone ventures) | **Jacobo DP3** | Mixed, often negative | **Clarifying: Professionalized labor or nonprofit organizing** | Mixed | Planned path change | Use MSW and placement networks/experience to secure an organizing position |
| | **Kara DP1** | Mixed | **Commuter / entrepreneurial organizing** | Mostly positive | Stable | Continue current engagements |
| | **Rachel DP2** | Very positive | **Professionalized labor/nonprofit organizing** | Very positive | Stable | Remain in current pathway, cultivate more time for family and spirituality |
| | **Barbara DP4** | Mixed, positive overall | **Professionalized post-organizing/direct services administrator** | Positive but deteriorating | Stable | Potentially remain in current pathway until retirement, complete capital campaign |
| **Retirement-related decisions** | **Kara DP2** | Mixed | **Entrepreneurial organizing/pastoral services blend** | Mostly positive | Stable | Continue in current pathway, expand pastoral work |
| | **Kara DP3** | Mixed | Shifting toward retirement as organizer/ post-organizing elder role | Mixed | Considering retiring as organizer, otherwise stable | Select a final campaign before retiring as organizer |

*NOTE:* Status quo narratives included lessons and perceived resources or barriers from past experiences, projects-- composed of intended trajectories (in turn composed of career orientation, work sector, and type of organizing) and other components not included in this table (populations, issues, or organizations, practice ideologies, personal life goals and needs, and specific career strategies employed)—as well as subjective assessments of cumulative and status-quo satisfaction and status-quo stability, and desired next steps, as shown above.
*Intended trajectories in **bold** indicate that status quo pathways (actual roles in particular organizational settings) matched or were direct avenues toward intended trajectories (narrative constructs about goals for advancement). Those not in bold indicate a mismatch between status quo pathway and intended trajectory. See Appendices D and E for more information about status quo pathways.

trajectories being longer-term and more encompassing, trajectories are described using similar terminology to the pathways already discussed: components included the classifications posited in chapter 3 (professionalized, commuter, or entrepreneurial), the sector of the nonprofit or for-profit sphere pursued, the financial arrangement associated with the work (full-time paid, entrepreneurial, or volunteer), and whether organizing was combined with other practices (such as provision of direct services or pastoral work), since pursuit of each of these possible directions entailed distinctly different conditions, requirements, and incentive structures (illustrated in Table 8). In several cases, individuals' understandings of their trajectories also included specific positions to which they aspired in the long run, usually either a director role in a nonprofit organization or a chance to start a new venture.

Despite this similar terminology, an individual's pathway may or may not match his or her intended trajectory (shown in Table 8; see Appendices D and E for more detail about pathways). By way of illustration, Amy's (DP2) intended trajectory at status quo was to pursue professionalized grassroots organizing in the nonprofit sector, yet she had not yet found a pathway toward these goals. So she was working in multiple part-time (entrepreneurial) nonmovement pathways while she sought a more suitable position. In some cases, pathways were selected in order to advance an already identified trajectory, while in other instances trajectories were discovered or became available as a result of the selected pathway.

Seven of the younger organizers in the sample were engaged in activism at decision points, and yet they were not entirely clear on what trajectory they wanted to pursue; the same was often true in late-career changes. Among the 11 cases in which trajectories were fairly well defined, nine participants wanted to advance in professionalized organizing trajectories, within either nonprofits or labor unions, while two pursued blue-collar commuter trajectories. Ramon's

trajectory, though still becoming clarified, had entrepreneurial elements, since he wanted to participate in the launching of a new program.

As noted, each trajectory brought with it different long-term material rewards and incentives. Factors making professionalized and commuter work desirable included greater job stability, decent if modest wages, and fringe benefits. At DP4, Barbara felt she had achieved the material goals that several younger participants in professionalized trajectories were seeking: she was secure in her postorganizing director position, with full salary and benefits, and she had the option to remain in this pathway until retirement, at which point she would have a pension on which to rely. Many cases showed a close fit between intended status-quo trajectories and pathways; however, as shown in Amy's example above, some were on pathways that did not match desired trajectories, due to market-driven factors or personal life constraints (this was also the case for Jacobo at DP2).

***Other project components (not included in Table 8).*** In addition to general trajectory, several participants indicated that their projects centered on specific populations or social issues that they wanted to address, such as homelessness (Samora, Jacobo DP2, and Barbara DP4), gangs (Jacobo DP2), or drug addiction and drug policy reform (Skyler). In other cases, organizers were dedicated to specific organizations, networks, or geographical areas. Irving, for example, considered himself "on assignment" for the Communist Party at DP1. Similarly, Ramon felt very committed to the day labor program that he had helped to launch as a student activist and volunteer board member. Later in careers, organizers sometimes felt deep attachments to capstone ventures that they had launched.

Some projects were driven by particular ideologies, social change values, or practice understandings. Organizers often felt strong commitments to certain tenets such as nonviolence

(Kara DP2) and civil disobedience (Kara DP2 and Barbara DP1), or to leftist ideologies more generally (Barbara DP4). Samora, Ace, and Amy had shaped their understandings of organizing around Alinsky-style methods. These conceptualizations were important, either because they drove the selection of pathways or because they then had to reconcile Alinsky's notions with real-life practice scenarios. Samora (DP1) encountered xenophobic attitudes among the homeless people he organized, presenting a dilemma between his conscience and Alinsky's tenet that an organizer should simply bring people together and not challenge their politics: "I was engaged in this work because I had my own politics … but I was also committed to building a democratic organization. [California] Prop 187 was the first time where those two things very clearly clashed."

Projects also often included consideration of competing or overlapping personal agendas. Ace preferred to live close to East Coast family, rather than to stay in Southern California, for example, while Rachel considered at DP2 how to accommodate her desire for a better family life. Other organizers dealt with mental health concerns, caregiving demands, and resource or availability constraints. The importance assigned to personal life factors at decision points seemed to depend on one's resources or situational availability, as well as on life course factors.

Finally, projects often addressed the means of meeting goals via specifically articulated strategies that organizers were employing to maximize satisfaction and efficacy, given the complexities of the considerations involved. Optimization strategies included short- or medium-range routes toward advancement and gaining experience (Ace, Skyler, Rachel DP1, and Amy), as well as efforts to minimize costs, risks, and barriers to achieving goals while making maximum use of the resources available (Samora, Jacobo DP2 and DP3, and Kara DP1, among others). Participants discussed maintenance and utilization of personal and professional

networks, for emotional and material support as well as access to positions, and some aimed to adapt existing positions to organizing-oriented goals (Barbara DP4, Jacobo DP3). In cases in which ideal options were not available (Jacobo DP2 and DP3, Rachel DP2, Amy), organizers had taken into account market and movement constraints, personal resources and limitations, and competing goals and obligations in order to formulate suboptimizing strategies. Jacobo, for example, had battled a tough job market for organizing positions throughout DP2 and DP3, so he pursued an advanced degree and fell back on direct services work, believing that it would help him build experience with populations whom he eventually hoped to organize. Availability constraints sometimes also prevented organizers from taking on certain risks and sacrifices or forced them to manage conflict with loved ones regarding movement activities (e.g., Rachel DP1 and DP2, Jacobo DP2).

***Subjective assessments: satisfaction and stability.*** However carefully prepared their career project was, participants could never be certain whether a given pathway or campaign would work out as well as hoped. They approached decision points with subjective evaluations and attitudes about both their cumulative experiences and their current situations (included in Table 8). These evaluations were generally framed in terms of congruence, belonging, and efficacy, and they informed current choices. Subjective evaluations of both prior and status quo situations were generally positive at the start of careers and became much more mixed as organizers experimented with new trajectories and in later careers. Status-quo evaluations were generally positive in 11 cases, though at DP4 Barbara's situation had recently begun to deteriorate; evaluations of previous experiences were also generally positive in nine of these, even after many years and a diversity of experiences. In the remaining four decision cases, past and status-quo pathways received far more mixed evaluations.

Participant accounts also indicated that their situations or intentions were often in flux, even when they were not at decision points. As Table 8 illustrates, natural pathway changes like graduations could be imminent, and organizations often faced major instability. This was the case for Ace at DP2, at which time his organization was facing instability and staffing changes, while he himself was in transition from an intern position to a full-time paid organizer role. Personal lives were often in transition as well; Rachel (DP1), for example, was preparing for a likely relocation, as she and her partner-fiancé hoped that he would be accepted into a graduate program.

Of the four cases in the transition to adulthood (i.e., preorganizing and starting a career), only Barbara (DP1) was in a stable status-quo pathway. Both organizers considering deepened commitment were also in stable pathways, while trajectory experiments began when transitions were either underway or imminent. Midcareer organizers were generally stable in pathways prior to trajectory changes, with the exception of Jacobo's (DP3) struggle with a tough job market. Finally, Kara was stable in her pathway prior to her two retirement decisions, which allowed her to make choices about when and how to retire as an organizer. Each person's sense of either status-quo stability or change was significant in the subsequent process of transition.

Amy's DP2 provides an example of how decision points could unfold in a situation already in flux. She had experienced variable levels of satisfaction in previous paid justice (nonorganizing) jobs, along with consistently positive experiences as a member of a group of young, South Asian volunteer organizers. Based on these evaluations, she wanted to experiment with Alinsky-style, full-time paid organizing in a nonprofit organization, in order to gain experience and also to determine how well a nonprofit organizing trajectory would suit her. Since she was not able to find a position immediately that fit that bill, she pieced together a "sex

educator job, teaching the class for high-school girls on feminism and globalization, and also teaching SAT classes, sort of biding my time, waiting to see what the next step was going to be."

***Desired next steps.*** Due to the instability discussed, organizers indicated that they often engaged in maintenance-level career-management activities, even when pathways seemed secure. As Ace suggested, "I always try to keep feelers out for if really, really, really good opportunities come up … essentially, you never know where the action is going to be in two or three years." The last column in Table 8 gives more detail about the notions that organizers held, at status quo, as to their desired next steps. Ace commented that he wanted to learn from each career experience and then move on "into the thick of a fight that is hot … my overall goal as an organizer is to be able to show up at the right place at the right time, whatever that may mean." Jacobo (DP2) had more contingencies to consider. He had long dreamed of joining the Peace Corps, and he wanted to advance toward becoming a director of a grassroots nonprofit organization. He thought he "might need extra school—even if I were to do the Peace Corps when I came back." There was some worry about his father's health and few resources for caregiving. So he "started to plan for [graduate school], so I'd have more options in case my dad needed me around."

**Trigger Points**

If status-quo situations could be in flux, then a question yet to be addressed is how participants knew when they were at a decision point. I turn now to trigger points, or the moment at which an organizer became consciously aware that a particular career decision was imminent and unavoidable. As illustrated in Table 9, nearly all cases were signaled by external events originating from within current pathways or broader networks, in one's personal life, or at the macro level. Triggers could be singular occurrences or a series of events; they sometimes

originated internally in organizers or in conjunction with a natural life transit, such as a graduation (Irving DP1, Jacobo DP3, Ramon DP1), reaching age 18 (Barbara DP1), or

**Table 9**
***Triggering Events***

| Pattern | Internal, External, Life/Career Transit | DP# | Origin | Trigger |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Singular | External | Ace DP3 | Actor(s) in broader networks | Offered potential pathway |
| | | Amy DP2 | | |
| | | Skyler DP2 | Personal life | Local community incident: police brutality |
| | | Rachel DP1 | | Partner accepted to graduate school in another city |
| | | Kara DP2 | Actor(s) within organization | New campaign announced in current pathway |
| | Life transit | Irving DP1 | Natural | Impending high school graduation, reaching age 18 |
| | Career transition | Jacobo DP3 | Natural | Impending MSW graduation |
| | Internal | Samora DP1 | Effect of external conditions | Burnout |
| Series | External | Barbara DP1 | Actors in pathway, natural life transit (turning 18) | Recruited for civil disobedience role in campaign |
| | | Jacobo DP2 | Actor in pathway, personal life event | Father's illness, Peace Corps tour pushed back |
| | | Kara DP1 | Actors in pathway | Interpersonal conflict, infidelity in commune |
| | | Kara DP3 | Known target, actor in pathway, natural life transit (retirement) | Church refused to decriminalize homosexuality |
| | Mixed | Ramon DP1 | Natural, actors in current path/broader network | Impending college graduation; mentor advice and connections; discovery of potential training and employment pathway |
| | | Rachel DP2 | Actors in current path/broader network | Negative experience in organization, supervisor turnover, conflict in organization, burnout, change in interest, life transition to thirties family life |
| | | Barbara DP4 | Actors in current path/broader network/macrolevel | Macro changes, policy changes in organization, incongruence, recruited for another campaign, "small inner voice" |

*Note:* "Pattern" refers to the number of triggers in a case. Column 2 distinctions describe whether triggers originated externally, internally, or due to natural career or life transits; column 4 further describes the domains or actors causing the triggers to occur.

approaching retirement (Kara DP3). There was also the appearance of new potential pathways or campaigns, such as when participants were recruited or discovered new leads (such as Ace DP3, Kara DP2 and DP3, Barbara DP1 and DP4), or when new campaigns were launched or proposed in existing pathways (Kara DP2 and DP3, Skyler DP2).

Political and historical events and changes, at the community or macro level, could also trigger the need for a decision, like the police violence incident that triggered Skyler's DP2. And

the Catholic Church's refusal to support a United Nations resolution against the criminalization of homosexuality provided the impetus and opportunity for Kara to pursue a new campaign. Internal triggers did not usually force decisions by themselves (except for Samora, whose DP1 was triggered by burnout) but commonly appeared in conjunction with external triggers. Barbara (DP4) had chosen her nonprofit director position a decade before,

> because I felt like homelessness was really one of those bellwether issues … working on it was a way to be an abrasive presence in … promoting humane values. But in the course of my being there was the whole Republican revolution and the Newt Gingrich leadership and the 1,000 points of light and the cutting of the social welfare program under Clinton. … I just couldn't stand how we were being treated by funders and foundations. And I felt like I was enabling the Republican Revolution, basically. And the other thing is that when you're in a nonprofit for 10 years people start getting dependent on you in a way that didn't seem to be healthy for the organization.

Barbara's frustration solidified when policies forced her to fire a valued employee and when an organizer recruited her to assist with a labor campaign that was much "edgier," but that she could not do because it would implicate the agency she headed. She said the final trigger was "this still, small voice within us that tells us when we need to make a change. … I don't know where it comes from, but something inside me lets me know that it's time for me to move on."

**At Status Quo: Themes, Influences, and Strategies**

This examination of the conditions and triggers giving rise to decision points revealed several key themes. Organizers often framed current understandings in the light of negative and positive past experiences, operationalized in terms of congruence, efficacy, and bonding and identity. One aspect of this framing was a tendency to politicize understandings of personal experiences and incorporate them into evolving ideologies, both motivating and complicating careers. Contextual factors and influences and demographic factors also surfaced, along with some examples of conditions in movements and personal lives that were influencing existing situations. Triggering events or changes were usually in the environment, and environmental

forces generally seemed to act as resources, barriers, or normative forces that shaped organizer responses. I will further examine, later in this chapter, the notion that experiences related to organizers' sociodemographic characteristics were important to some decision points.

Finally, the formulation of projects represented a key strategy by which organizers constructed their priorities, their reasons and intentions in selecting existing pathways, and their approach to managing their roles and their complex life and career responsibilities. Organizers strove to accommodate, as a package, all of the concerns entailed in their projects, and they assessed how to best achieve this goal based on what experience had shown them would work. All such understandings then informed articulation of more specific optimization and suboptimization strategies, such as remaining vigilant to ever-changing opportunity structures even when not at decision points.

### Question 2: How did organizers negotiate these decision points?

### What was the underlying process?

We now turn to modeling the processes that occurred once decision points were triggered. Activities undertaken by organizers fell into four categories: decision making, exploitation of opportunity structures, transition, and sensemaking. Moreover, these activities were punctuated by related milestones, or events and changes that organizers pointed to as indicators of progress. These fell into six categories. First, in every case participants arrived at new understandings of their options and changing situations. Second, all were presented with new leads, new opportunities, or potential campaigns or pathways. Third, all participants made two or more key decisions in relation to each case; fourth, they all experienced two or more changes in their roles within pathways. Fifth, life course transits were sometimes underway and sometimes resulted in specific rites of passage, such as graduations or final campaigns. Finally,

secondary triggers, such as the disappearance of an opportunity, a loss of funding resources, or emerging family caregiving responsibilities, also introduced new and often unforeseen elements. As shown in Figure 1, further analysis revealed the structure underlying each set of activities and milestones, or an understanding of each as a relatively coherent process comprised of identifiable phases. As triggers provided information that signaled actual or potential change, organizers engaged in *sensemaking* activities to revise their current understandings. Sensemaking gave rise

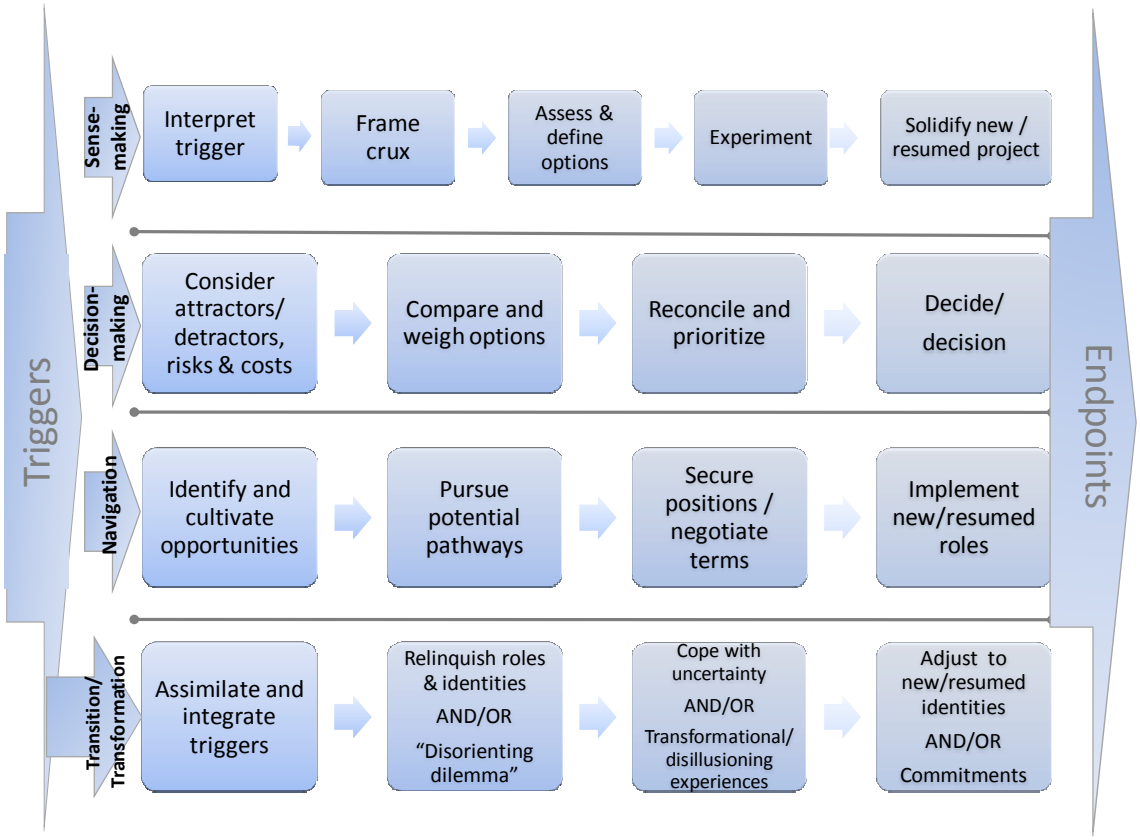



*Figure 1*. The Four Processes of Decision Points

to *decision-making* processes, as well as more externalized *navigation* activities aimed at securing opportunities and resources. Organizers also underwent and managed intrapsychic and interpersonal aspects of *transition* as issues of personal growth and transformation arose.

Transformational experiences interacted most closely with transition processes, so I have interpreted transition and transformation as a single process. These four processes could occur simultaneously rather than successively, over a period lasting from two months to more than two years. Often the steps occurred in a nonlinear manner; processes could be repeated multiple times at a decision point or proceed out of order, or unexpected events could change or reverse earlier decisions and courses of action. So there was considerable variance across cases, in duration, content, and sequencing of events.

**The Process of Sensemaking**

Figure 2 presents the sensemaking process at decision points in greater detail. As discussed earlier, triggers signaled the need for a new flurry of sensemaking activities, to interpret the new information presented and formulate new conceptualizations that would guide actions and decisions. Participant accounts suggested that recognizing the presence of a decision point was itself an act of making meaning, accompanied by emotional and cognitive understandings of the specific implications of triggers. Participants determined the crux of their situation and the options available, and they struggled to make meaning of continually changing events as they experimented with provisional pathways and campaigns. Eventually they formulated associations and understandings about new or resumed roles and arrangements.

**Interpreting triggers.** Before decisions could be made and implemented, organizers first had to make sense of the triggers themselves. When decision points represented life or career changes that were planned and expected, triggers were essentially seen as events or changes that signaled that the expected transition was now underway. In some cases triggers were expected but the timing and manner of their arrival was a surprise, while other situations caught organizers completely unaware. Initial reactions also included perceptions about

organizers' own role in what was to come, or their perceived autonomy as to what level and types of external change they would choose to undertake. Triggers could be experienced as positive, negative, or mixed developments.

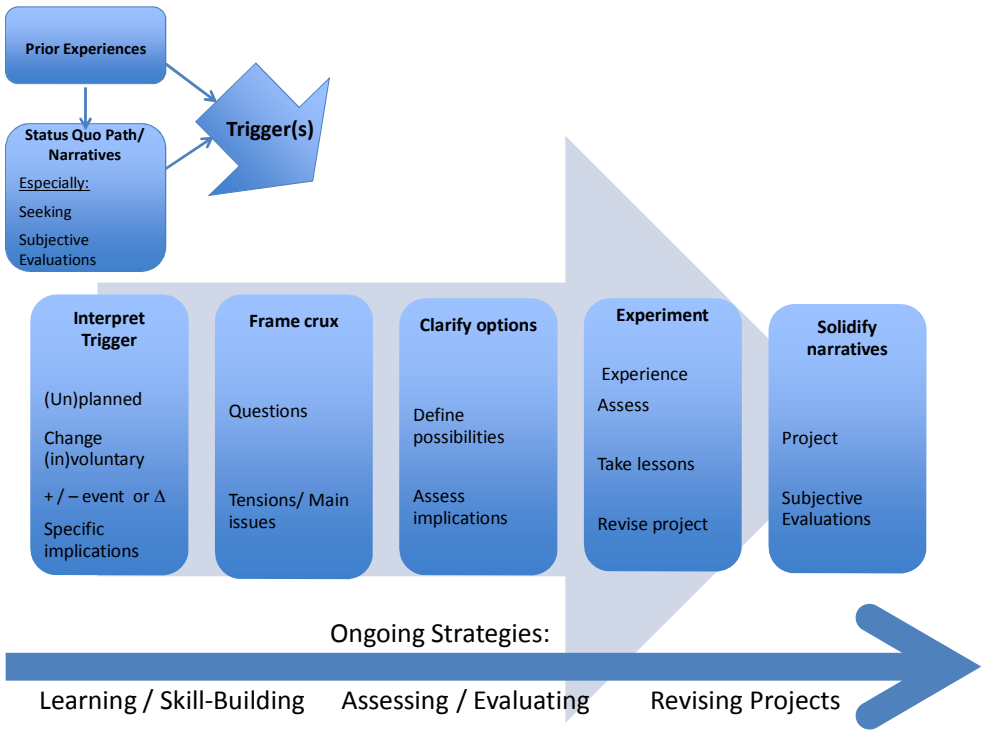



*Figure 2.* Stages and Strategies of Sensemaking

Triggers also elicited varying specific interpretations, depending upon their origins and content. Overall, they were most likely to be understood as new opportunities (nine of 15 total decision points, across all types, were interpreted in this way), as indicators of how status-quo situations might be changing for the better or worse, or as rites of passage that were part of natural life transits. Events were sometimes seen as assistive, or as creating new barriers to intended projects, and they elicited emotional responses. Such interpretations and reactions often varied according to the type of decision point confronted.

Decision points occurring at the start of careers involved graduation from school, transition to adulthood or the workforce, and the supportive actions of mentors. All of these steps were seen as positive developments, or as ways to continue activist roles previously pursued as students. Ramon was nearing graduation when a mentor suggested that he consider community organizing as a career. His mentor said, "Hey, come meet this guy. He's an organizer here in the [area], real lot of energy, a real good guy." The organizer he met then suggested "Hey, you don't know what you're doing? Think about community organizing. … If that's what you're doing right now and you're into it, why don't you take the next step?" Ramon explained that, prior to that conversation, "I don't even know if at that time if I had heard the term [organizer]."

Both Skyler and Samora, in the decision points categorized as deepening of commitment, were in stable pathways and having positive status-quo experiences. These organizers encountered unplanned, negative triggers—the police brutality incident that angered and politicized Skyler, and burnout for Samora after three years without a vacation. These triggers plunged both organizers into involuntary intrapsychic changes. In trajectory experiments, organizers had completed their entrance into the workforce, but then encountered much more difficult experiences as the initial supports of transition-aged activism fell away. Triggers in existing pathways were often experienced negatively—as developments that decreased satisfaction and congruence, as changes in the terms of engagement, or as new personal life barriers to participation. Additionally, Amy had the positive experience of being recruited for a position that matched a trajectory of interest to her. Rachel (DP1), Amy, and Jacobo (DP2) desired new trajectories and were in transition before these new decision points were triggered.

Triggers of late-career trajectory changes similarly tended to push organizers away from old trajectories and toward new ones. These were often experienced as indicators of incongruence or dissatisfaction in status-quo arrangements, such as the loss of autonomy or respect in an existing position (Rachel DP2, Barbara DP4), or a decreased fit between preferred practice style and role expectations (Barbara DP4). Yet not all of these participants had been unhappy in their status-quo arrangements prior to the trigger. When status-quo experiences were positive, the negative triggers came as a shock; other cases represented more gradual deteriorations in congruence and satisfaction. These cases were also split in terms of whether change was voluntary or involuntary. Both Barbara (DP4) and Rachel (DP2) were experiencing changes over which they had little control; Kara was deeply shaken and devastated when her girlfriend began dating another member of their commune. These organizers were forced to change, though they did have choices as to how they would respond to their situations.

The final category of decision points consists of Kara's two retirement-related transition cases; in both instances the triggers were interpreted as leadership opportunities wherein she could pass her wisdom as a veteran organizer on to a younger generation, after which her identity could be reshaped in retirement. Her DP2 trigger also raised alarming questions of congruence, as well as immediate conflicts with other group members.

**Framing the crux of the situation.** As events unfolded and triggers were understood, organizers turned their attention to making sense of what they felt was primarily at stake in the decisions that they faced. A decision point could not end until the questions at its crux were resolved. Organizers understood the crux of each case according to what they were seeking prior to triggers, and according to their interpretations of these events and their implications (see Table 7).

***Preorganizing decisions.*** Organizers coming of age were faced with negotiating both the natural life transit into adulthood and the consequences of activism. Barbara was active in a civil rights group when she was recruited to participate in an action at age 18 that involved risking arrest:

> I was looking for people with good values that I could learn from. I was very inspired … I felt like this was an opportunity for me to step up. … I wanted to be an organizer or an activist. [And] it was kind of important to make decisions that were irrevocable—that kept me, maybe even against my will in the future, on this path. I knew it was really easy to waver from this path. … At the time if you got arrested you could never be a teacher. … You could never work for the government. I knew there was a risk. But I wanted my life kind of defined in a way for me.

***Starting organizing careers.*** Among organizers who were starting an organizing career, Irving had a fairly clear idea that he would organize among blue-collar workers, while the other two were still clarifying which trajectories they would pursue. Since all were inspired by positive early experiences and were seeking ways to continue current engagements as nonstudents, their concerns were related to selecting an organizing career, determining how to do so, and considering particular opportunities presented to them.

***Calls to deepen commitment.*** Since Skyler and Samora were having stable and positive experiences but still formulating long-term trajectories, they were looking for ways to expand and supplement their experiences. Their decision points entailed deep internal shifts in orientation and identity in response to intense stimuli, both negative and positive, that caused them to consider how and whether to deepen their involvement. For example, Skyler described the crux of his DP2 as "verbalizing [to his therapist] the intention to commit more deeply" to activism, as he processed with her the intensity of the community tragedy he had experienced.

***Potential trajectory experiments.*** Despite having had mixed experiences in movements, Rachel (DP1) and Jacobo (DP2) were committed to being organizers; the issue was to find the

right fit in an organizing position. They had a strong desire for pathways that matched their visions and supported specific practice understandings and ethical concerns, yet they were confronted by hard realities in organizations, a lack of available congruent positions, high costs of movement participation, and other constraints. The questions that they faced therefore included what new trajectory to try, how to secure a path to it, and how to manage personal agendas.

***Considering a major trajectory change.*** The four midcareer cases (again listed in Table 7) were preceded or triggered by experiences of incongruence not just with a position but with a trajectory, or even with organizing or the organizer's movement in general. These cases were differentiated by the stronger and longer-duration status-quo attachments and entanglements that these organizers had. For Kara and Barbara, status-quo projects were capstone ventures, so considering a trajectory change also entailed extricating themselves thoughtfully from deeply entrenched roles and start over. They considered how to deal carefully with conflict, leadership succession issues, and weighing personal versus organizational needs. Leaving familiar territory led to complex issues of identity and role adjustment as they attempted to transfer hard-earned skills and reputations to new tasks and networks, often resulting in an extended period of trial and error.

***Retirement-related decisions.*** Kara's retirement decisions were complex. Her organization had undergone a generational shift in leadership, and the national organization had also incorporated a youth chapter, centered in another city. Problematic elements in the interorganizational structures at work, generational differences in practice and communication styles and cultures, and Kara's own struggle to find her sense of identity and belonging in the group as she approached retirement led to major conflicts within the organization. From a

practice perspective, Kara was concerned with how to empower the younger generation to lead, but she did not feel that the youth members respected the wisdom and participation of older participants. She was also financially dependent on her stipend.

Ultimately, organizers defined the crux of a decision point with existing projects in mind. They gathered information about constraints and resources in their opportunity structures, assessed how situations had changed since trigger events, and considered what these developments meant for their existing projects and what they were currently seeking. Out of these understandings they devised a new perception of what currently confronted them.

**Defining options.** With their questions identified, participants then defined available options and solutions and assessed the implications of each one. Organizers constructed their understandings and the options available to them by interpreting contextual factors and events as resources, barriers, and opportunities. They compared what information they could glean from opportunity structures to the questions and issues at the heart of their decisions. They then assessed the implications of various options. For example, Ace described his choice as "between short-term material gains and long-term goals" as he weighed leaving his intended pathway and network to accept one of two offers that he had received.

Circumstances, including stability of status-quo pathways, affected the complexity of the options considered. Rachel's DP1 situation was complex:

> My fiancé … got into graduate school in [Southern California] ... I was doing immigrant rights work [in a national-level nonprofit]. It was really awesome [but] I was always asking myself how effective the organization was … wanting to organize the unorganized but there wasn't a whole lot of support for that. … I wanted to really make a commitment to the labor movement. [My fiancé and I also had] a rocky relationship. … I was kind of afraid of my partner at that point. I wasn't thrilled about moving but I realized most likely I was going to have to move if I wanted to stay with my partner, and for financial reasons. … It was a little tough because I didn't see my dad for 14 years [as a child].

Her options included ending this difficult relationship, relocating to one of two cities, and making a trajectory change; two main pathways presented themselves in the city and trajectory that she chose.

Participants confronted with potential trajectory changes, like Kara at DP2, often considered whether to accept incongruences in existing pathways, fight to change them, or leave either quietly or in vocal protest. If they chose to leave, they could make a clean break or begin a slow transition. Finally, some participants discussed choices that were available but not accepted, or desired but not available, yet were relevant to their processes and outcomes. Jacobo at DP2 pursued a position that would satisfy his interest in international work and offered a greater level of congruence with his goals than the Peace Corps could promise. He was not qualified for this position, but, because he had not previously realized that there were organizations like this one, learning about it reframed his subsequent ideas about his options.

**Experimentation.** Questions and opportunities presented at decision points, like triggers, could occur all at once or piecemeal. Thus, interpretations of triggers and constructions of main questions and options were continually reformulated, through a process of experimentation. Organizers would seek and gather information, inquire about or provisionally embark upon pathways and campaigns, assess results, and continuously revise narratives accordingly. External "game changers" could also cause them to reconsider current experiments.

For organizers starting careers, experimentation at decision points occurred in the context of guidance received. Ace, for example, relied on feedback from supervisors, mentors, and colleagues to help him interpret new information and revisit his intended project in light of the job offers that he was receiving, while Ramon benefited from a comprehensive summer training and job placement program. Because they were interested in deepening commitment, both

Skyler and Samora experimented with new leadership roles and practice styles, as well as new campaigns, while remaining stable in their main pathways. Trajectory experiments similarly yielded new experiences and attempts to try out newfound lessons and roles in various settings. These experiences were enlightening, whether positive (Rachel) or negative (Jacobo, Amy).

Organizers contemplating trajectory changes later in their careers sometimes experimented in order to address vexing challenges in their existing pathways. Rachel's DP2 provides a distinctive example. As a lead organizer, she was assigned a new director:

> [It] was really disempowering 'cause … they sprung this on me when I felt very, very protective of my campaigns and had lots of kind of freedom to be creative … and the next day I had somebody above me who was gonna make all the decisions, who I felt knew very little about the campaign, so that kinda didn't sit right.

Worse, the director began to engage in "some probably unintentional but yet still pretty hurtful sexual harassment." Rachel then spent 18 months trying various strategies to rectify what became an increasingly negative situation. At each turn she considered what had occurred, the results, and what she might try next. These cases also involved protracted periods of experimentation with accessing and finding fit in new trajectories.

Finally, Kara at her two late decision points experimented primarily with campaign strategies and their effects. At DP2, she experimented with different approaches to convince the other members in her group to abandon a campaign to permit gays in the military, an endeavor contrary to her convictions about nonviolence. When all her efforts failed, she resigned in protest, posting her resignation letter on the organization's website as an act of internal dissent. Then, Kara recalled, "I realized I had more power if I stayed then if I left," so she began attempting to resume her previous position.

**Solidifying new projects and assessments.** At some point in every case, organizers began to solidify their projects, forming more lasting notions in response to the questions of

"what am I doing here?" and "how is it working out?" Three participants recalled constructing new projects to fit their early-career arrangements. Ramon expressed eagerness about learning hands-on skills and continuing to discover his "political voice" in the day labor position he was offered. Ace and Irving both found themselves in unexpected and nonideal situations that they then turned into activist projects. Ace worked without pay for several months in a highly successful campaign to save his organization from financial collapse. Irving had to relinquish his intended plans and become a war resister when the Korean War broke out:

> [I] didn't want to sign the loyalty oath, so the army kept me isolated together with a couple hundred other people who also didn't agree with the government's position. [They] literally didn't know what to do with [us]. … So it wasn't [a] severe punishment … [just] waiting for the government to make a decision.

Early-career organizers who were trying out new trajectories (Rachel DP1, Jacobo DP2, Amy DP1) were learning new roles and skills, and they reformulated projects and subjective assessments of congruence and bonding in their new environs. Personal life relationships were also important for Amy and Rachel, as both had abusive domestic partners who objected to feeling alienated from the movement. Among midcareer trajectory changes, only Barbara's DP4 ended in an organizing role. Rachel (DP2) and Kara (DP1) had both left their movements, Rachel to explore counseling work and Kara to start her flower shop and pursue (non-Catholic) spiritual explorations. Following DP2, Kara resumed most of her pre-DP2 projects; after her DP3, when the entire youth branch of the organization resigned and major leadership problems were revealed, she focused on managing fallout from the conflict and rebuilding the organization.

**Key sensemaking themes, influences, and strategies.** Whereas status-quo narratives appeared as finished products, this analysis elucidates the process by which new information was

processed and meanings made, and how this played out in different types of cases. Trial and error was a key theme: every case exhibited experimentation and uncertainty, and adapting to changing circumstances and finding a good fit was often a messy process, involving false starts and temporary solutions, before new arrangements could be solidified and understood. Whether triggers and changes were expected, voluntary, or experienced negatively or positively often had implications for how participants made sense of and handled their situations, sometimes via politicization of these new experiences. As shown, this could lead to the choice to wage internal protests against incongruent practices.

Conflict was a key theme, manifesting itself at decision points in the form of various tensions: between personal and collective agendas, between lofty goals and limited resources with which to achieve them, among conflicting relational obligations from both within the movement and in personal lives, or involving ethical and ideological practice dilemmas. Contextual factors were often at work, including organizational barriers and supports, interorganizational tensions, and cultural and relational concerns that had a normative effect. Organizational change processes, and specifically leadership succession and intergenerational issues, came up in some cases, since decision points often involved passing the torch from one leader to another, or establishing trust between founders and new staff or volunteers. Finally, sensemaking strategies of continuous learning and skill-building toward practice and career development, making assessments and evaluating results of experimental participation, and revising projects and plans according to lessons learned, all helped organizers to maximize positive outcomes (optimization), or to suboptimize when necessary.

## Decision-Making Processes

In light of understandings developed during the sensemaking process, participants set about deciding whether to make a change in their status-quo arrangements, what pathways and campaigns to select, and how to implement their decisions. Figure 3 illustrates the steps in this process. The focus here is on how and why organizers made their choices of pathways and campaigns, to the extent that they had the freedom to select what was most desirable for them.

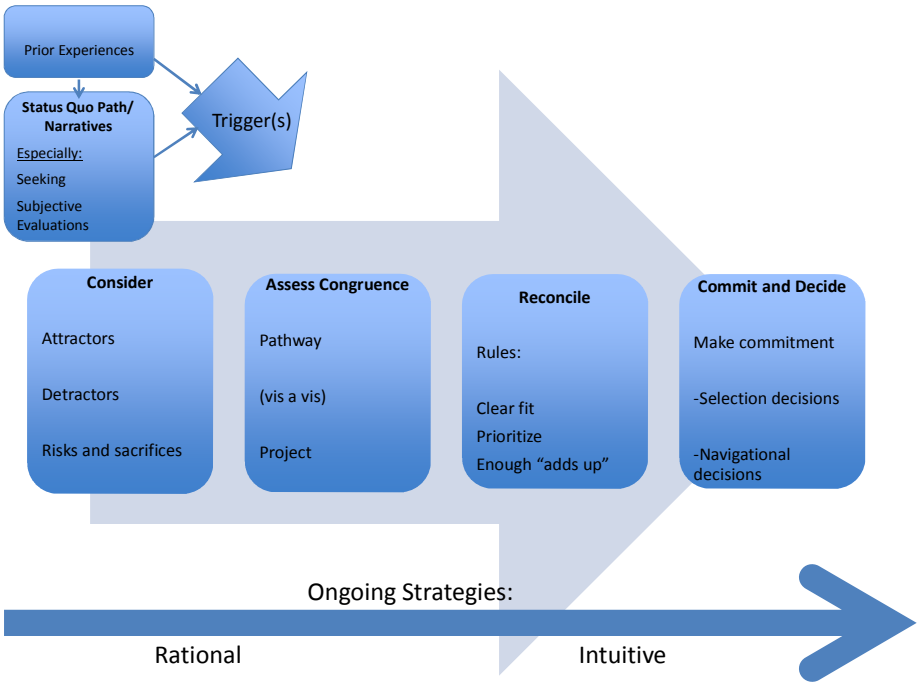



*Figure 3*. Decision-Making Phases and Strategies

**Considerations.** Considerations at decision points included the potential risks or costs and the rewards promised by potential pathways. Starting early in the decision-making process, participants noticed aspects of potential pathways and campaigns that were either attractive or unattractive or that presented significant risks or costs. Remaining in current pathways was sometimes an option, and some organizers thought about their status-quo arrangements as baselines for evaluating new options, even when remaining there was not possible.

***Attractors and detractors.*** Analysis revealed factors likely to be seen as attractive or unattractive, depending on the type of decision point. Young organizers were most attracted to movement pathways and campaigns that provided a sense of belonging and a forum in which to build their identities as people and activists. Several wanted mentoring and training from talented organizers, as well as exposure to ideologies and worldviews that were congruent with their desire for social change—often via adventuresome pathways, including domestic (Ramon, Barbara DP1, Rachel DP1) and international travel (Skyler, Ramon, Samora) or high-risk activism (Skyler, Barbara). Organizers at the beginning of their careers discussed few detractors, perhaps because most of their experiences to that point had been positive.

As careers progressed, specific aspects of potential work settings began to matter more to organizers. Rachel (DP1), Samora, and Jacobo (DP2) agreed that nonprofit programs often offered organizers the autonomy to run projects and programs as they saw fit, to the extent that resources allowed. However, nonprofits could also be disorganized and could fail to provide adequate support. Furthermore, Amy, Jacobo, and Barbara described restrictions that organizers could face on what they could do in nonprofits, especially when direct services were combined with organizing, or when funding streams too tightly controlled organizational activities. Other complaints about direct service settings were that organizers did not feel they were having a strong impact on macrolevel forces or that organizations sometimes failed to sufficiently emphasize organizing activities. Rachel and others suggested that organizing work in labor unions may be even more demanding than in nonprofits. Unions were often described as more highly structured than other nonprofits, with very tough conditions and hours (Rachel DP1 and DP2, Barbara DP4) and an intense culture demanding commitment and sacrifice. This type of atmosphere embodied both positive and negative aspects.

Organizers often had positive experiences in voluntary groups when they had a strong sense of belonging. However, interpersonal dynamics could be problematic in these settings. Kara, for example, pointed out that she often felt she did not belong in certain voluntary groups because she came from a working-class background; this perception affected her coping ability at decision points. Working in a for-profit treatment clinic in another country while organizing for legalization of that treatment in the United States was safisfying and allowed Skyler work from home, where he was surrounded by other activists also waging their own ventures, and to travel internationally (though he would later encounter major ethical problems at the clinic).

Whatever the sector, there tended to be frustrations in highly institutionalized and bureaucratic settings, such as the Peace Corps, or in national-level nonprofits and labor coalitions with local chapters. One challenge of these kinds of arrangements, experienced by both Rachel at DP1 and Barbara at DP4, was having a supervisor located in another state. Furthermore, interpersonal problems could arise in and detract from any setting. Organizations seen positively tended to have a strong reputation and effective track record (as experienced by Amy, Ace, and Rachel), to provide training and mentoring for new organizers (Rachel DP1, Ramon, Ace), or to offer supportive national interorganizational networks (Ramon, Ace). Conventional career incentives, like pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities, were considerations in most cases. When confronted with potential relocation, Rachel (DP1), Kara (DP1), and Barbara (DP1) also expressed a desire to live within a progressive culture or a greater diversity of population.

***Risk and sacrifice.*** The physical, professional, and legal risks associated with civil disobedience and other subversive activities could either attract or repel organizers, depending on the situation. Sacrifices also included low pay for extremely hard work and long hours in tough conditions that left limited time for family or personal life. Activism by its very nature

calls on individuals to put themselves at risk, but these risks could have real and profound personal consequences with no guarantee of benefits to justify the undertaking.

Several organizers expressed positive feelings about the notion of risk and sacrifice. Barbara spoke of getting arrested for civil disobedience as an "attractive opportunity" to be "part of the righteous few." Kara, Rachel, Amy, Ace, and Barbara all turned down higher pay, or even worked without pay, in favor of pathways with greater social change promise.

These individual values were often reinforced by the shared culture in movements and by the work requirements of organizations that expected or demanded this kind of dedication, as described in nine cases. Some participants reported that they avoided these types of environments, but many openly sought them. However, doing so could also lead to intense burnout (Samora, Rachel DP2, and Barbara DP4). While Barbara was willing to give up a great deal to return to front-line organizing, she could not keep up with the high-pressure environment of labor organizing for more than a few years: "I was used to … workaholic organizations and organizations that didn't cushion or pamper their leaders, but this was extreme."

**Assessing congruence.** In addition to noting the positive and negative aspects of proposed pathways, organizers compared each option to the career projects that they hoped to achieve. In this section I will examine a few cases that exemplify how the participants determined congruence between potential pathways and their projects, including (a) participant evaluations of particular options and (b) insights into the processes, both rational and intuitive, by which they came to these conclusions.

***Articulating fit.*** The following examples illustrate four ways in which projects defined organizer evaluations of potential pathways. Ramon exemplified a young organizer-to-be clarifying his intended trajectory as he evaluated the options before him. He said he "loved" and

"needed" to continue participating in the project he had launched as a student activist, even after he was out of school. "If you're intent on changing your surroundings and that's part of your goal, you're going to look for how you can do that and apply it to the real world, and I think organizing does that," Ramon explained.

Second, some participants were attracted to pathways that presented potential remedies to issues previously encountered in organizations or to prior negative social change outcomes. For example, Amy at DP2 wanted to experiment with a professionalized nonprofit organizing trajectory because congruence had previously proved elusive. In her most recent position,

> my work was very gratifying. … [But] the young people would often say to me, "We wanna run a campaign about the way that the police in our schools treat us … the violations that we're experiencing at their hands." And the executive director would always say no [due to concerns about losing city funding] even though supposedly we were supposed to let the young people take full ownership of the project and really do projects that spoke to them. … That was one of the things that led me to leave that job.

When she was then recruited to organize in a large-scale program organizing low-income citizens, Amy was pleased that "one of their specific and overt campaigns [was] about cops in schools" and related issues. Thus, this new opportunity promised her exactly what she had previously missed. Third, in some cases a change in an organizer's project or in work conditions made a position more or less desirable, especially in considered mid-career trajectory changes.

Fourth, several cases showed how projects drove decision making about campaigns and smaller projects. Examples included campaigns undertaken as part of organizers' responsibilities in existing pathways (Ace, Samora, Barbara DP1 and DP4, Kara DP2). At DP3, Kara's existing role was as lead organizer for Catholic actions in her GLBTQ organization (she was also a pastor and involved in other Catholic left activities). She recognized the Vatican's refusal to support decriminalization of homosexuality as a chance for her to undertake a "last big action" and "go out in a grand finale." She then faced a host of navigational decisions about the campaign,

which she was trying to lead while also passing responsibility on to the younger generation, and the need to tread carefully with preexisting conflicts arising from her internal campaign at DP2 and her temporary resignation.

Other campaigns were supplementary and engaged outside of primary pathways, such as when Skyler viewed the campaign against the police in his neighborhood as a first opportunity to deepen his activism. Some organizers had their own personal campaigns, or short-term projects inside pathways, to voice dissent about an action that the organization was taking (Kara DP2), to deal with interpersonal conflict and structural problems in organizations (Rachel DP2, Kara DP1 and DP3, Barbara DP4), or to defend their own rights as workers (Rachel DP2, Jacobo DP2 and DP3). All these cases suggested that organizers must consider their choices in such situations carefully, not only in terms of how to best achieve their immediate goals, but also because of how their actions would impact their relationships within the movement and their career projects.

Finally, personal life concerns were important. Pathways that involved relocation were sometimes more attractive if they were nearby and allowed for maintenance of family relationships and responsibilities (Rachel DP1, Jacobo DP2, Ace). Others were attractive because of the travel and migration possibilities they offered (Irving, Samora, Rachel DP1, Ace).

***Rational and intuitive processes.*** In terms of how organizers arrived at the above assessments of fit and then used the resulting information to arrive at decisions, participants described both rational approaches and more emotional or intuitive ones. Most cases exhibited both of these aspects, though some emphasized one over the other. Ace at DP3 carefully weighed the pros and cons of potential pathways and consciously evaluated their fit with his project. He received two better-paying job offers but was committed to his current pathway.

> There's a certain investment that this network is now making in me. … I had to ask myself what the long-term impact of going to a different network so early on in my career

> would mean. … I wanted to really deepen the relationships I had already started to build in that network. I really thought this was where the best organizers were across the country and the best national work was being done.

By turning down the first offer, he was able not only to follow through with his plans but also to make the new opportunity available to his colleague, who seemed better suited to the position because of his ethnic background and was in greater need of a well-paying position because he had a child.

In contrast, Kara described her situation at DP1 as intense and traumatic. She had been wildly happy and proud of the commune that she had helped to found, and it had come as a great shock to her when infidelity issues arose between her girlfriend and another member, who had violent tendencies. As the owner of the property, she could put up with the situation, evict one or both members, move out and be an absentee landlord, or sell the property and leave entirely. In this morass, rational decision making was inadequate:

> I feel that God sends me messages all the time. … I was fairly suicidal. I had always said I wouldn't commit suicide because I would never do to my son what my mother had done to me. And so I decided, well, no, I guess I do want to live, and I … started packing up all this old clothes I didn't wear and stuff like that, … just getting rid of it. Not knowing what this was all about—just kind of following the spirit and telling my ex-husband, talking to him on the phone … and he was the one who first said, "Why don't you move out here? [My adopted African-American son] would love to have you here." My son said, "Mom, you should come here. This place is so different from [New England]; you wouldn't believe it." You know, because [New England] was so racist.

**Reconciling and prioritizing.** At some point, organizers had to set some priorities among the factors considered. So far, the decisions that we have examined can be explained by the notion that the selected option presented a way forward, given the project that an organizer was trying to advance. In no cases were projects simply abandoned, though outputs were not always ideal. Organizers most often applied one of three criteria to the decision. First, in favorable cases, there was such a close fit between what people were seeking and what they

found that a highly coherent narrative could be constructed about why this option was clearly and inherently superior to others. Ramon's decision to pursue day labor organizing represents one such example. Amy's decision was another: despite certain detractors, she was "really drawn to wanting the experience of paid organizing work and figuring out whether it was something I could do." Second, when no option clearly represented the best way forward, a common decision methodology was to identify one or a few most important factors and allow these to guide the outcome. For Ace, when his mentors neither encouraged nor discouraged him with regard to leaving his position, he feared that leaving could risk those relationships, "and that was probably just enough to not do it."

Third, when no one option was ideal and no one factor was determining, the organizer had to weigh more complex considerations to identify the most acceptable solution. Rachel's professional and personal interests and needs were changing at DP2, when the organization was also going through contentious times and there was a shortage of advancement opportunities, because so many young organizers had been hired during the labor movement revival of the late 1990s and early 2000s. This created problems for her, in terms of both career planning and her satisfaction with her current role. She felt that her expertise and on-the-ground knowledge of the campaign were largely devalued and ignored. Ultimately she concluded that the position "was just not sustainable for me," so she prepared to leave the organization and pursue nonmovement clinical work.

**Committing to decisions.** This was the last step in the decision-making process. Not every decision was thoroughly considered; for example, Samora made a decision to visit South Africa "on a complete whim," yet the trip would nonetheless have far-reaching consequences.

Kara's thoughts about her decision at DP1 to sell the house and move to California revealed a sort of "leap of faith" that could be taken when no option is particularly satisfying:

> As things got really bad [in the commune], I decided just to sell the house and leave … it was just a lot of messages about it's time to make this change. … Things just began to fall in place. And when that happens, I pay attention and kind of go, "Oh, what's going on here? Where is this leading? What's the message I'm trying to get?"

**Themes, context, and strategies of decision making.** Themes related to decision making included factors that either attracted or repelled organizers. As expected, organizers sought pathways that would allow them to bring about effective social change and experience a sense of congruence and belonging. These findings have also illustrated the complex attitudes of organizers toward personal risk and sacrifice, and the lofty and transformative nature of some decisions considered. Personal life implications and needs were also important, especially when resources were low or challenges were complex. Notable detractors included pathways that violated ethical concerns or prevented freedom of practice style. Blatant violations of organizers' needs and rights as workers were sometimes also viewed as problematic, both personally and through an empowerment lens.

Although the process of decision making was primarily concerned with how organizers made choices to the extent that they had the agency to do so, decisions were influenced by material constraints, relational obligations, and cultural norms, as well as competing agendas presented by other actors. Varying types of organizations tended to offer different attractors and detractors, and organizers relied on resources like the advice or support of peers, mentors, and significant others in making decisions. As seen in Rachel's DP2, negative interpersonal interactions could exacerbate burnout and a sense of alienation. One apparent set of contextual cross-pressures was a tension between cultural expectations in justice movements that favored collaboration and sacrifice, on the one hand, and the realities of competition that arose among

activists for positions and resources (Ace DP3, Rachel DP2). Issues of leadership succession and intergenerational conflict were sometimes related to these tensions.

As noted in Figure 3, decision-making processes finally reflected the use of both rational and nonrational strategies in seeking a match between pathway and project (i.e., optimization). Amy, Ramon, Samora, and Ace were able to find a strong congruence between projects and pathways. Rachel's DP2 and Kara's DP1 illustrated how some organizers suboptimized by creating rules by which to decide.

**The Navigational Process**

I have conceptualized navigation as the process by which organizers cultivate opportunities, externalize their decisions to secure pathways and campaigns, and manage job markets and movement environments more generally. Since many pathways and campaigns pursued exhibited social-entrepreneurial characteristics, I have framed these activities in terms of the pursuit and exploitation of opportunities. Figure 4 illustrates steps by which participants typically pursued and implemented pathways: they identified and cultivated opportunities, pursued those that seemed viable, secured offers, negotiated terms, and implemented projects.

**Identifying and cultivating opportunities.** The first step toward securing opportunities was to find them. This step required not only access to information, but also the ability to recognize an opportunity as such. Navigational and decision-making processes occurred simultaneously and iteratively; whereas decision making sought congruence between goals and available pathways, navigational evaluations considered whether pathways were available and viable. Avenues and strategies for identifying opportunities included networking (all cases), launching new campaigns (five) or ventures (three), cold searching (five), and utilizing formal training and placement programs or services (four). Unsolicited opportunities could also appear.

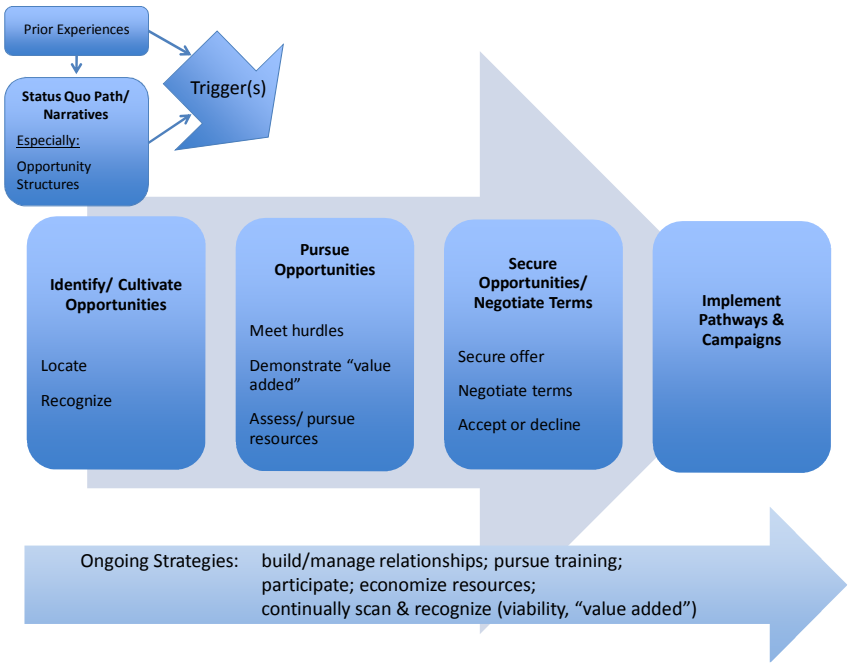



*Figure 4.* Steps and Strategies of Navigation

For all four cases in the preorganizing and workforce entry phases, opportunities presented themselves via status-quo pathways. These young people had proven themselves to be dedicated and valuable in their current settings, so that movement and organization leaders were motivated to help them find a way to deepen these involvements. In the cases of potential deepening of commitment, the opportunities were volunteer assignments or short-term campaigns. For Skyler at DP2, both his status-quo position and the campaign that he would join against the police in his neighborhood were discovered because he was directly affected by the problems they addressed. Other campaigns that he joined voluntarily at DP2 were ones with which he was linked due to his networking in the local activist community. Samora was able to visit South Africa, on the one-year anniversary of the first free elections there, because of network connections that he had built from earlier anti-apartheid work. He could make the trip because he had saved frequent-flyer miles (an example of economizing resources). The

campaign that he would undertake upon returning presented itself naturally in the context of his existing role, and he would recognize it as a chance to apply some of the lessons that he had brought back from that experience. Assessing whether these voluntary and endemic opportunities were viable primarily involved considering whether one had the time and leadership skills to take them on, or whether they made sense from a practice perspective.

The three organizers who conducted trajectory experiments (as presented in Table 7) were seeking full-time paid positions, and all found assistance in locating and interpreting the viability of opportunities from mentors, past supervisors, and colleagues cultivated through previous movement experiences. All three also searched listings on their own; both Jacobo and Amy named the search engine idealist.org as a main source of job listings for organizers. Rachel and Jacobo both found that pursuing one position could result in a referral to another opening. Midcareer organizers considering trajectory changes similarly relied on networking and reputations, as well as their own research. They also often acted to apply or transfer the sometimes considerable resources they had built, in order to cultivate or access opportunities in a desired trajectory. Barbara (DP4), for example, noted that she was recruited to help with a union campaign because of her reputation and prior work with the same population.

**Pursuing pathways and campaigns.** After identifying desirable or interesting opportunities, organizers pursued them by meeting formal hurdles such as applications and interviews, attempting to market themselves and demonstrate the value that they could offer. The specific requirements depended on whether the pathways pursued were of a professionalized, entrepreneurial, or commuter nature. *Professionalized* pathways (i.e., paid jobs and graduate programs) required organizers to meet the same requirements common to many professions, and positions were often highly competitive with relatively few openings.

Organizers sometimes participated in multiple or group interviews, or they participated in roleplays where their political and interpersonal skills could be observed directly (Ramon, Jacobo DP3). One upside of the often onerous process was that it sometimes provided organizers more room to learn about the viability of a potential option, and to showcase what they could bring to the venture. Amy at DP2, after being recommended by a colleague for a position as youth organizing director for a nonprofit organization, was interviewed by all the members of the department in which she would work. She discovered that her experience, philosophy, interests, and even the length of time for which she envisioned staying would render her valuable:

> They were starting to create more of a hierarchical structure. [They] had always operated as a collective. [The interview process revealed] a lot of clarity … that in an ideal world, [they] would have hired from within the organization, but that … there was no one from the youth program who had the skills to be the department director. That's aligned with my own vision about how to do this work … and I wanted to go to grad school … but I wasn't ready to go. It seemed like the right fit in terms of staying for … three, four years and then being able to go to grad school, … developing the leadership in the program so that someone could step up from within … and I could go to school.

Blue-collar *commuter* positions were accessed through related unions; for Irving, early paid positions required no skills or training, while Kara had to pass a test to drive a school bus. At DP1, she determined to become a business entrepreneur when she moved to the West Coast, applying the profits from selling her share of the commune property toward opening her flower shop. Instances of *entrepreneurial* pathways pursued within the movement included Amy's efforts to secure and juggle multiple part-time positions, Barbara's stint as a freelance consultant, and Ace's pursuit of an emergency fundraising campaign to save his organization and position. Each of these involved a great deal of insecurity and risk of personal resources, marketing one's ability to add value to ventures, and effective mobilization of movement resources. Further, Ramon's participation in a competitive summer organizer training program and his volunteer

involvement with the newly forming day labor center were in effect entrepreneurial endeavors that made him an attractive candidate for a full-time staff position at the center.

**Securing access and negotiating terms.** Some pathways and campaigns required little pursuit and were easy to secure. This was often true for the organizers just starting out, because organizations were eager to have them. For example, since the opportunities pursued were entirely voluntary, Samora and Skyler simply had to step up and expend their resources. Others positions were more difficult to attain and negotiate. For Kara (DP2), six months passed before she would be hired back under her previous arrangement, following a long process of negotiation. She started by volunteering and then was given various freelance assignments, because "the whole staff wanted me back, except the young adults … had never forgiven me" for her temporary public resignation. Members looked for unique contributions that she could make and lobbied the executive director. Finally, she suggested to the director, "It would be a lot cheaper if you just paid me my basic $500 a month and put me back on staff than to pay me for my hours." Despite having "some serious reservations," he finally agreed.

By far the most difficult job-seeking process involved Jacobo (DP3). Upon completion of his MSW degree he spent a full year looking for a suitable position. For each opportunity, the "interview process and callback process would take almost a month … so I would prepare for each one, strategize my interview approach, research the organization." At first he was able to manage financially because he "had a little bit of … excess from school funds and a credit card loan I had taken out beforehand. … My grandfather had helped me out a little bit. But that ran out fairly quickly." He took a part-time job and continued looking. He was then highly attracted to a "mole" position, in which he would work as a low-wage migrant worker on assignment from the union to "salt" the workforce from within. But there was a catch: the union could not fund

the position, so the only compensation for working double duty as farmworker and organizer would be the low wages that all migrant workers received. "That itself was enough to make me [reconsider] whether or not I could actually afford to do that, with my school loans, with my financial responsibilities, family." He also learned of some troubling politics in the organization, making him question "whether or not I'd think it would be worth that to sacrifice so much to be within a position such as that." He ultimately determined that he could not afford to risk everything for this position. So he determined to suboptimize: he applied for direct services positions, getting three offers and choosing one that he hoped might allow him to use an organizing approach.

**Implementation.** Finally, pathways and campaigns also had to be implemented, including status-quo pathways, since being at a decision point did not mean that existing day-to-day activities ceased to require organizers' attention. Barbara (DP4), for example, discussed the need to remain silent about her thoughts of leaving her organization until she had completed the capital campaign she was currently directing, lest her announcement have negative consequences on the fundraising effort. There were also intentionally short-term pathways and projects to implement, like campaigns and training programs, the implementation of which would have consequences for future engagement (Ramon, Ace, and Kara DP2 and DP3).

In new pathways, organizers often had to prove themselves or were cultivating ventures that were still vulnerable enough to fail, resulting in immediate implementation challenges (Jacobo DP2, Barbara DP4, and Amy DP2, among others). To cope with resource and availability constraints, both Ace and Jacobo relied on partners and family members when seeking employment or working without pay; for both, this would require careful relationship and resource management. Amy's implementation challenges arose from preexisting problems

in her new pathway: despite the rigorous vetting process described and many attractive elements of her new organization "on paper," her department proved highly dysfunctional, plagued by interpersonal conflict and high turnover. She attributed these problems to "founder's syndrome" exhibited by the department head, who had a hard time trusting and working with hired organizers. In addition to the problems that this situation caused for the organizers Amy supervised, she herself had a contentious relationship with her director and had disciplinary action taken against her.

**Navigational themes, influences, and strategies.** Navigation was a key process at decision points, focused primarily on the exploitation of opportunity structures to access participation avenues and mobilize resources. Themes were related to the cultivation and utilization of resources, and to efforts to overcome barriers so as to implement opportunities. Resources included skills and expertise, knowledge of the market and the field, networking connections, educational credentials, and social and material support, which allowed organizers to access pathways and be available for high-intensity and/or underresourced activities. Mentors appeared to be especially important to organizer development, at least in the early years. The absence of any of these factors, conversely, posed a barrier to participation; these examples thus suggest that coming from a disadvantaged background can hinder access to organizing. Opportunities could be found within existing pathways, through larger networks, or could be sought anew.

The activities involved in the pursuit of pathways varied, depending on whether the pathway was professionalized, entrepreneurial, voluntary, or a mix. Conventional jobs were available, but even in those cases organizing often required the investment of personal resources, involvement with startup ventures, and high instability. Implementation challenges were also

apparent, including leadership succession problems like "founder's syndrome." Strategies employed included networking, thoughtfully managing relationships, and economizing sparse resources that could be applied to movement work (see Figure 4). Further, organizers had to scan for viable opportunities and recognize whether a proposed pathway was feasible, as well as whether the organizer had particular skills or resources that he or she could (perhaps uniquely) contribute. Marketability was sometimes increased through training and educational resources, or via participation itself; by proving themselves in the movement, organizers were better able to access future opportunities. Later careers reflected themes of transferring existing knowledge, resources, and reputations to new endeavors.

**Transition and Transformation**

The three processes discussed so far have revealed how organizers understand their situations at decision points, make decisions, and navigate their way around opportunity structures. A final aspect included emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual processes of transition and transformation. All decision points examined involved some period of uncertainty, or a degree of transition, though some involved minimal external change. The process of transition often followed the predictable phases identified in transition theory ('letting go', 'the neutral zone', and 'new beginnings'), yet the high instability in these careers and the extended periods of uncertainty often involved in decision points meant that transitions did not always proceed predictably. Further, some cases showed clear experiences of transformation while others did not. Still others resembled descriptions of transformation, yet did not result in deepened commitment to the movement. Making transformation processes even more difficult to trace, decision points often represented catalytic junctures in transformations already long underway.

Hence, rather than attempting to force varying transition and transformation processes to conform to a single model, Figure 5 instead attempts to capture the various progressions and variations that transitions and transformations in this sample followed. As shown, whether transition and/or transformation were experienced followed from how individuals interpreted and experienced triggers. Below, I discuss how triggers were integrated and how these reactions led to transition and transformation. Since variation was high in these processes, I then provide some key examples that illustrate some possible ways they could proceed.

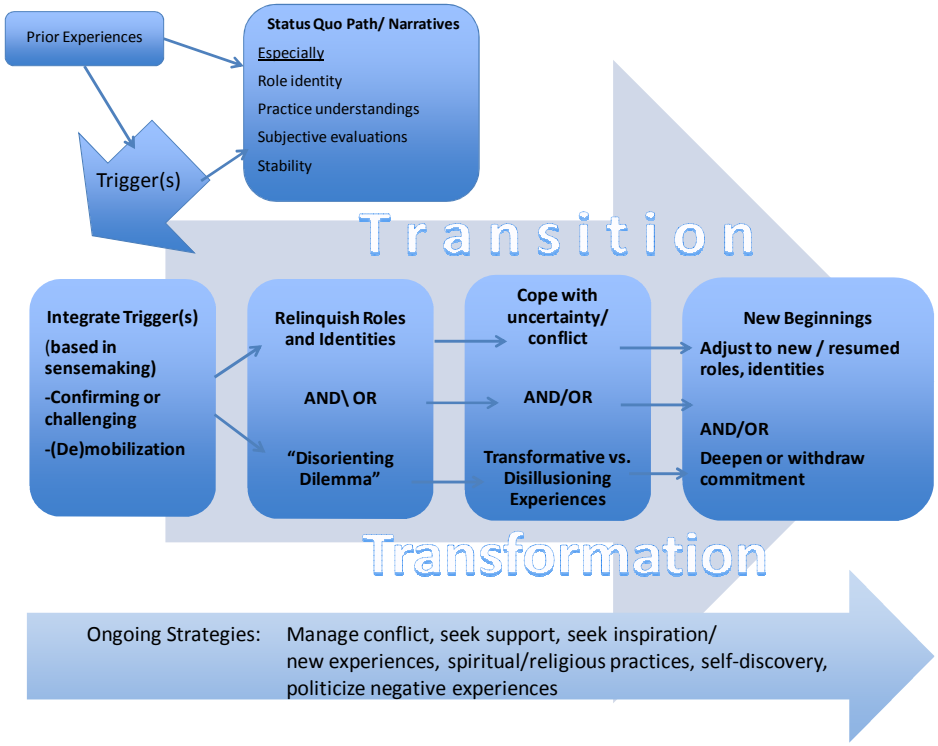



*Figure 5.* Stages of Transition and Transformation

**Integrating triggers.** In the earlier examination of sensemaking, I argued that organizers interpreted triggers in relation to status-quo factors, and as either planned or unexpected, involving mandatory or voluntary change, and positive or negative. These initial determinations, as well as status-quo role identities, practice understandings, subjective evaluations, and stability

perceptions (see Figure 5), together dictated the level of cognitive and emotional dissonance that each organizer experienced in response to triggers, how easily organizers assimilated new information, and whether the trigger had a mobilizing or demobilizing effect—that is, whether it initially elicited in them a greater or lesser level of movement activity.

Young people coming of age as activists were in the midst of intense but gradual transformation and politicization at decision points. Since triggers and status-quo experiences were both positive, these were seen as a mobilizing force and as encouraging transformations already underway. Three of the participants took significant risks at their early decision points, like Barbara's risk of arrest. These experiences helped to define these organizers' identities and transform their perspectives. Skyler and Samora similarly underwent transformative steps amidst their commitment-deepening decision points. Skyler would be immediately mobilized by the trigger of his case (an incident of police brutality in front of his home), while Samora would have to contend with a lack of motivation until later in his decision point.

The three participants who undertook trajectory experiments all wanted to similarly deepen their involvement but needed a change in focus. Amy and Rachel (DP1) would be mobilized by triggers and would integrate them smoothly, while Jacobo (DP2) would experience a more mixed reaction to his father's worsened illness (he had already prepared a "plan B"). In midcareer changes, when positive status-quo experiences preceded negatively experienced triggers, the negative information was both difficult to assimilate and demobilizing. Both Kara (DP1) and Rachel (DP2) would undergo personal transformations of sorts, but neither would remain in the movement. Barbara's triggers were demobilizing in terms of her status-quo pathway yet mobilized her toward her new trajectory. While Jacobo's initial trigger at DP3 was mobilizing, both of his decision points would ultimately represent demobilizing nonevents: he

first had to forego his Peace Corps tour and was then stymied in his search for a congruent organizing position.

The announcement of the incongruent campaign for gays in the military at DP2 both reified Kara's commitment to nonviolence and challenged her assumptions about the values of her organization. This experience would mobilize her toward voicing dissent but would also cause her to question her commitment. The decision of the church that prompted her DP3 confirmed her existing critiques of the church and so was politicizing and mobilizing. These cases had much to do with letting go of old roles and identities as Kara approached retirement, and they exhibited transformational elements.

**Transition processes: 'Letting go', the 'neutral zone, and 'new beginnings'.** Decision points often revealed that changing circumstances, roles, and identities were challenging to negotiate, emotionally and interpersonally. These cases suggest that this difficulty could complicate organizers' ability to understand their situations, make good decisions, and navigate their environments effectively. Barbara's DP4 provides a textbook example of the transition stages that organizers can go through. First Barbara had to let go of her emotional attachment to her job at the community center:

> I just really loved it. I felt like it was a little liberated zone. … Leaving [there] was interesting because it was a very deliberate decision. And it's the kind of decision that people often don't make. And then something propels them out of the organization. Whereas, they should have made it themselves earlier. … I decided to change jobs and change fields and change movements. And it was actually … harder than I thought it would be. … [When I went public six months later], people were furious at me. One woman even, who was quite challenged, committed suicide, one of our staff members. And my mother actually had committed suicide like six months before. And she knew it.

Barbara next described a difficult and awkward period, as she experimented with different pathways, both adjusting her expectations and orientations and searching for pathways that preserved her reputation and honored her experience. She said she "didn't really want to be

associated" with the homeless programs for whom she tried consulting, because she didn't respect the administrators and felt that her reputation was being used to legitimize the very things she had left her organization to protest. "So I got involved with the labor movement … [and the first position] was a terrible experience." She then found a congruent post at the local union that had recruited her as a volunteer, which was "run very collaboratively." She would successfully settle in here and remain for 12 years, yet it was still a big adjustment:

> Once you've run something, it's really hard to take direction from someone else. And I was older than … a lot of the people I worked with, and so that was hard. [And] it's a completely different field with different language. Even the words and the phrases … it took me two years to figure out what I was doing. … [So] it just took me a long time to figure out the culture of it and what the decision making was.

**Transformation, commitment, and alienation.** I have suggested that decision points can involve deep processes of self-discovery and transformation, which can lead to increased commitment, disillusionment, or other effects. I will provide some varying examples of these here, and how they produced different experiences for organizers.

***Mobilizing transformations.*** Ramon DP1, Barbara DP1, Skyler DP2, and Rachel DP1 provide good examples of mobilizing transformations. Ramon discussed the awkward "period of limbo" that can accompany a life transit like graduating from college, and the utility of having mentors to guide the way: "I was very fortunate to have certain elements come into place that kind of guided me towards what I wanted to be doing." He then had a highly positive and immersive experience in the summer training program:

> We were thrown into a campaign to establish a minimum wage … because immigrants were being paid like, $2.00 an hour, $3.00 an hour in these little dollar-store-type shops. And so we were door-knocking. … And it was real cool just engaging people, agitating people at their doorstep. Writing down the numbers, doing the data, doing the research—it was kind of like … baptism by fire. It gave me clarity as to … the process of growth and learning that took place while I was at college [and] what it was I needed to do.

This experience represented a transformation carefully guided by a structured training program, resulting in Ramon's transformation from a student activist "just going through the motions" to a trained organizer with a clear sense of what he was doing and why.

Also consider Barbara's experience of being arrested for the first time:

> It was really very scary to be … dragged by these policemen and put in paddy wagons and taken to jail. And in those days you would have to refuse bail because they couldn't really afford to raise bail for all these people. … It's a very inspiring and frightening kind of experience.

Both cases came about through hands-on learning experiences, in the context of supportive communities. Skyler would similarly undergo transformation from an "armchair activist" to organizer. Samora's trip to South Africa was a strategy to combat extreme burnout from "just working really, really hard." Witnessing the first anniversary celebrations of the fall of apartheid would be transformative, in terms of both motivation and practice understandings. He said that, prior to the trip, "there wasn't a lot of support and guidance" on the job, and that South Africa "completely blew my mind. It was the first time that I'd ever [seen] … the remnants of a vibrant social movement." This experience convinced him that undereducated people could grasp complex political discourse; as discussed earlier, the discovery would inform his decision to confront xenophobic attitudes among those he organized, and it provided motivation and vision:

> My sense [had been] that my responsibility is just to handle this corner of the world and to try to build up a democratic organization of welfare recipients that can fight in its interests and solidarity with other people. But other people will figure out the larger questions of what it means to build a movement and to ultimately sort of create a broad social force. … I realized that there was nobody else, that we were the folks that were capable and committed, … so we needed to be taking up those questions of how is it that our day-to-day organizing around welfare issues connects to our larger vision of liberation and justice … the working hard was not a problem and that it was actually something that I could sustain for a lot longer if I had clarity about the vision that I wanted to be building towards.

***Transformation denied.*** Jacobo's DP3 provides an example of how negative experiences can prevent the kinds of transformations just described. As discussed earlier, his job-seeking following graduation would be arduous and would not result in a desired organizing position; he discussed the emotional consequences of this disappointing result:

> It was a mixture of feelings from anger, a little excitement, and uncertainty. … Not that anybody should give me a job, but just that I was expecting going into that process that I would have a greater network of social supports and leads and stuff, and it'd be better. I didn't think I'd be as isolated.

Jacobo's inability to secure a congruent position, despite his long efforts to build experience, credentials, and networks, undermined his motivation. Particularly disempowering was an experience of racism on the part of the leadership of one union that had a reputation for mistreating activists of color, which may have blocked access to a position there. These experiences resulted in a growing sense of irony and alienation.

***Save yourself! Transformations out of the movement.*** Finally, both Kara (DP1) and Rachel (DP2) experienced midcareer decision points that led to personal transformations, but also to leaving their movements. As discussed, Kara overcame the urge to commit suicide by relying on her spiritual practice and support from her family. She experienced a disorienting dilemma in her movement, was alienated from it, and would not return for five years. Rachel was similarly undergoing her own life changes and spiritual transformations: she had begun practicing Buddhism and was getting ready to have children, which became incongruent with the high-conflict environment of her union. Rachel's union urged her to keep her commitment:

> There were a few conversations with supervisors … where they were like, "How committed are you? Given your personal experience … how can you do this?" And "I thought we were tight." … There was a planned intervention where everyone was trying to tell me some heartbreaking story about why I needed to stay. … There was one other incident where a lead organizer [said], "Your challenges in organizing represent issues with your partner who is probably cheating on you." … [It was] really painful and messed up.

Rachel found these interventions unhelpful and upsetting, given the committed service and deep sacrifice she had given over several years, so they actually contributed to her decision to leave.

**Transition and transformation: key themes, contextual influences, and strategies.** This examination of the fourth and final process undertaken by organizers at decision points has shown wide variations in the types and levels of transition and transformation experienced. Coping with uncertainty and managing conflict both on the way into and out of organizations (and in organizations that were in transition) were prominent themes. Some decisions would leave an especially strong mark on organizers' lives and identities, and the situations that presented themselves could act as catalytic crises, bringing about new understandings, a stronger sense of self, and a greater degree of politicization and commitment to the movement—often propelled by taking risks and making sacrifices.

Experiences of transition and transformation depended in part upon (a) whether changes and new information were generally confirming or challenging of existing beliefs and narratives, and (b) whether they were experienced as mobilizing or demobilizing. We have further seen illustrations of how social support during crisis can enhance transformation and commitment, whereas social isolation, availability constraints, and lack of congruent positions acted to hinder transformational experiences and motivation. Coming from a disadvantaged background, then, could undermine motivation and satisfaction. Finally, we have also seen examples of organizational efforts to promote commitment that backfired.

Ultimately, the strategies revealed by which organizers coped with transition included those aimed at managing interpersonal conflicts surrounding change, learning and developing a new set of roles and an identity in new or changing settings, and relying on social support or spiritual practices to cope with emotional upheaval (see Figure 5). To enhance transformation,

organizers sought out new experiences and points of view, politicizing their personal experiences to motivate commitment and revise political and practice philosophies.

**Summary: Research Question 2**

To answer the question "How did organizers negotiate these decision points? What was the underlying process?" I have modeled findings based upon a rigorous analysis of the 15 decision cases discussed. I have presented four interrelated processes (sensemaking, decision making, navigation, and transition/transformation), that together comprise the main tasks organizers undertake at decision points. The themes, contextual influences, and strategies discussed generally fit the initial categories suggested in the framework in chapter 3. One set of themes noted was that organizers of different backgrounds may have different orientations and experiences in the movement, and that economic and social disadvantage may pose high barriers to participation. These and a few other findings made more sense when the full study sample of 30 decision cases was examined.

## Generalizing to a Larger Sample: Cohort 3

I turn now to a brief summary of new findings uncovered by deductive analysis of an additional 15 decisions (Cohort 3). I will limit the discussion here to three especially significant sets of findings in the larger sample of decisions: (a) a deeper understanding of the types of decision points not explored in Cohorts 1 and 2, (b) an examination of issues of race, class, gender, and other disadvantage at decision points, and (c) other new and contradictory findings that emerged from Cohort 3 cases, and a brief discussion of how themes varied, across the sample, according to the personal characteristics of organizers.

**Typology Revisited**

Appendix H details the point in careers at which each Cohort 3 decision point fell and what was at their crux, which was used to determine the type of each case. The distribution of types across all three cohorts is shown, according to career phase, in Appendix I. Adding Cohort 3 has allowed for a better understanding of the seven types of decision points already discussed in Cohorts 1 and 2, and two additional types (from among the 12 in the original typology reported in coarse-grained findings earlier in this chapter) were also represented.

Like Barbara's DP1 (from Cohort 2), Natalie's DP1, Amy's DP1, and Sara's DP3 (all in Cohort 3) occurred while these participants were in college. Sara's DP1, like Barbara's case, took place at the preorganizing phase, and it also involved a first (but far more negative) experience of being arrested for civil disobedience; however, she was already in the workforce, having entered it directly from high school, at the time. The others were already engaged in full-fledged organizing activities in student settings. I have labeled these *student organizing decisions*, since the individuals carried greater responsibility in their status-quo pathways and grappled more directly with leadership and tactical dilemmas, as well as higher workloads, than were reflected in preorganizing experiences. Cases in the transition-age career phase also provided examples of overlapping decision points: Barbara DP2 would follow closely on the heels of her DP1 and would represent her transition to the workforce, while Ramon DP2 overlapped with his DP1 and represented the second part of his attempt to start an organizing career. Ace DP4 overlapped with his DP3 (starting a career) but more centrally represented a call to deepen commitment, since his career was now underway and the focus of DP4 was upon the valuable learning and growth experiences that his campaign provided, as well as his management of resources and motivation, given the financial sacrifice and personal risk he took

in working without pay. Jonathan DP2, like Jacobo DP2 (Cohort 2), entailed experimenting with trajectories and returning to school as a way to further organizing goals.

Among midcareer decision points, A. F. S., Ramon DP3, Barbara DP3, and Irving DP4 involved the launch of capstone ventures, while Samora DP3 challenged him to keep his homeless program afloat and his director role intact in the face of direct opposition from a local union. Finally, Natalie DP2 and Amy DP3 importantly revealed a new type of case. In these especially entrepreneurial careers that organizers had sustained for five to 12 years after transition into the workforce, their situations represented attempts to *settle into a long-term trajectory*.

**Personal Characteristics and Decision Points**

I have analyzed all 30 cases in terms of personal and demographic characteristics of organizers and their effect on the process at decision points. Table 10 organizes the data in terms of ethnic and gender groups (women of color, men of color, white women, white men), and it illustrates the socioeconomic status and generational distributions of each group. In this section, I examine how movement experiences and access varied according to these sociodemographic factors. Specifically, I examine variances in the cumulative and status-quo subjective assessments of organizing and social justice experiences of each group, as well as experiences that organizers reported with diversity issues in their movements. I also looked at whether resource barriers directly limited participants' options at decision points.

Organizers representing all backgrounds commented on positive experiences in organizing and collaborating across ethnic and class lines. Across measures, however, male, and white organizers and those of wealthier backgrounds reported the most positive experiences and greatest access to movements: no white males reported direct availability or resource barriers,

**Table 10**
***Personal Characteristics and Decision Points*** **(Cohorts 1, 2, and 3; n = 30)**

| Decision points involving … | Generation [1] | Socioeconomic Status[2] | Cumulative Satisfaction | Status-quo Satisfaction | Movement Diversity Experiences[3] (+) Experiences discussed | Movement Diversity Experiences[3] (-) Experiences discussed | Experienced direct resource/ availability barriers? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Discussed in 5 cases | | 3 cases |
| | | | | | 4 cases | 3 cases | |
| **2 Women of color (5 cases)** | Gen X/Y (5) | Working-class (5) Movement resources (2) | + (3) +- (2) | + (4) +- (1) | 3 within 2 across 1 (+) access | 1 within 1 across | |
| | | | | | Discussed in 4 cases | | 2 cases |
| | | | | | 4 cases | 3 cases | |
| **4 Men of color (9 cases)** | Gen X (3) Gen X/Y (2) Gen Y (4) | Working-class (2) Borderline / Movement resources (2) Middle-class (4) | + (7) +- (2) | + (7) +- (2) | 2 within 4 across 1 (+) access | 2 across 1 (-) no access | |
| | | | | | Discussed in 10 cases | | 5 cases |
| | | | | | 9 cases | 5 cases | |
| **4 White women (11 cases)** | WWII (3) Baby Boomer (4) Gen X (2) Gen Y (2) | Borderline (5) Middle-class (4) Upper-middle-class (2)/ Movement resources (1) | + (6) +- (5)[4] | + (6) +- (5)[4] | 3 within 8 across | 2 within 6 across | |
| | | | | | Discussed in 3 cases | | 0 cases |
| | | | | | 2 cases | 2 cases | |
| **4 White men (5 cases)** | WWII (2) Baby Boomer (1) Gen X (2) | Working-class/ in movement (2) Middle-class/ Movement resources (1) Upper middle-class (2) | + (5) | + (2) +-(2) Not discussed (1) | 2 within 2 across | 2 across | |

[1] World War II generation refers to individuals born prior to or during World War II. Baby boomers were born circa 1945-1963, while Generation X organizers were born circa 1964-1976. Participants born circa 1977-1980 were on the border of Generation X and Y, and those born in 981 or later were Generation Y.
[2] "Borderline" refers to being raised on the borderline of working and middle classes. "Movement resources" means that the individual was raised in the movement, and therefore may have had access to participatory resources that their SES would not otherwise suggest. All participants were highly educated by time of interview, either through college or advanced degrees, formal apprenticeship, or pastoral training. Kara was the only participant limited in terms of formal education to a high school education, until late in her career.
[3]These results examine both positive and negative experiences participants had in the movement that related directly to diversity issues (ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, sexual abuse history, immigration status, gender, substance abuse history, international borders, political oppression, interorganizational racial conflict). A further distinction is made between experiences they had when interacting across groups vs. within them.
[4] Simultaneous to movement experiences, three white women reported negative or mixed cumulative academic experiences and two reported mixed or negative status-quo academic experiences.

for example, while at least two cases representing every other group did exhibit these problems. Cases involving individuals of color, working-class background, and women included both negative and positive past and status-quo experiences, and some participants from these categories specifically discussed issues of oppression in careers and the movement. Working-class organizers of color were especially at risk.

The two women of color, both of working-class backgrounds, were split in terms of reporting positive versus negative experiences in the movement. Men of color reported more positive diversity interactions in movements than negative ones, yet negative experiences were nonetheless present. Positive experiences of organizers who had experienced racial or religious persecution included support from mentors of similar backgrounds (Barbara DP1, Ramon DP1 and DP2) or gaining empowerment and experiencing radicalization in ethnic-based movement settings (Amy DP1 and DP2, Ramon DP1 and DP2). Being of an ethnic minority background could also provide access to positions, due to language skills (Rachel) or because having organizers who shared the identity of those whom they organized was considered desirable (Ramon, Rachel, Amy).

Amy discussed being empowered and radicalized by the training program she attended at DP1 for South Asian radicals like herself, and she also had positive experiences working with black and Latino activists. On the other hand, the supervisor with whom she had negative experiences at DP2 shared her heritage. Ramon discussed having initial discomfort in trusting a white female supervisor, but he overcame these doubts and formed a positive relationship with her. As noted, the most negative and mixed experiences in the entire sample (including some that were directly related to racism) involved Jacobo, the only working-class male of color. Rachel had an unfortunate experience with sexual harassment. Natalie (DP1) was stabbed and nearly killed while organizing poor farmers to adopt sustainable practices in the Amazon, though this did not deter her from furthering that pathway and may have deepened her politicization and commitment.

The experiences of middle-class and upper-middle-class women were overall more positive than those of working-class and borderline women. Women also encountered more

concrete barriers to organizing than did men. Barbara, A. F. S., Kara, and Irving, all older organizers, did successfully raise children while organizing. Yet Barbara described this as something unique about her among organizers. Overall, only four of 14 in the sample were parents, and Rachel left the labor movement when parenting became a priority for her.

Finally, an important moderator of movement experiences was whether participants had been raised with access to movement-related resources due to their family's movement connection or their own participation as youths. Rachel, Ace, Irving, Natalie, and Jonathan all discussed advantages that they enjoyed because of such resources. By contrast, Jacobo came to the movement with the lowest level of childhood or family involvement in the movement among the sample.

**Generalization to Cohort 3: Key Themes and Notable Contradictions**

The addition of Cohort 3 cases presented noteworthy and sometimes contradictory findings when compared to the previous analysis. Sara's two transition-age cases provided examples of negative and mixed experiences at the start of a career that were absent from the previous sample. These cases, along with Barbara DP2, Natalie DP1, and Skyler DP2, involved dropping out or returning to school, or changing programs midstream, so were more difficult than others to classify as preworkforce, launching, or early-career cases. Barbara's DP2 began while she was a student organizer; however, the trigger of this case was that she lost her college scholarship, prompting her to drop out of school and begin her organizing career prematurely.

The two cases of settling into midcareer trajectories (Amy DP3, Natalie DP2) were especially complex; both exhibited features also associated with trajectory experiments, since these women were attempting to settle down but encountered more instability in doing so. Both women also considered new, potentially capstone ventures. Whereas midcareer considerations

of trajectory changes sometimes involved *leaving* capstone ventures in Cohort 3 cases, such projects were launched from existing trajectories and involved voluntary and desired change. Although no Cohort 3 cases were directly related to the decision to retire as an organizer, A. F. S. and Irving (DP4) both had retirement benefits and other independent resources that helped to fund their entrepreneurial ventures in the movement. A. F. S. was also the only organizer to have left the movement for decades, gained significant personal wealth, and then returned to organizing with an emphasis on for-profit projects over which he had full control. Natalie's case, finally, also involved a potentially transformative midcareer campaign, a decision point type not otherwise examined here.

Overall, findings for this additional sample suggest that organizers of minority and working-class backgrounds may have different experiences and face significantly greater access and availability constraints than wealthier, white, and male organizers. Additionally, women were far more likely to discuss personal trauma and mental health issues, such as family suicides or personal suicidality (Barbara, Kara), having survived abuse as children and experienced post-traumatic stress disorder as a result (Amy, Sara), family and personal domestic violence (Rachel, Amy), or being victimized by violence in the course of movement work (Natalie). Among men, Skyler discussed his recovery from addiction and also his short-term grief related to the police violence that he witnessed. Jonathan was kidnapped and threatened with physical violence in movement settings, and Irving struggled with political repression as a Communist.

Men and women also differed in their orientations toward leadership succession. Kara, Rachel, Amy, and Barbara discussed desires for positive and healthy transitions of leadership in organizations, along with the struggles that could occur between founders and new leaders and that could thereby hinder organizational functioning and organizer satisfaction. Jonathan and

Ace also discussed what changes in leadership might mean, and Jonathan struggled against the founder of his organization at DP2. However, these males took a tactical and competitive view that focused on the issue of whether they could wrest power away from existing leaders. Ace turned down one job in a competing network because he felt that he could take that position only

> with a specific plan to poach this [i.e., the prospective] organization and bring it into the network. [But] I didn't feel myself to be in the type of position with the experience I had to go in, take over an organization, and run it well, much less run it so well that I could poach it.

Finally, Ace and other organizers who were raised in a movement setting described their coming-of-age transformations into activism differently from other organizers, as they deconstructed previously unquestioned values and notions to which they had been socialized and found their own conscious reasons to devote their lives to activism. Their relational obligations in the movement were also often more complex.

**Question 3: What types of outputs resulted from decision points?**

To address the final research question, I describe the outputs of all 30 cases. I address the changes that these outputs indicated in comparison with status-quo conditions, and I examine the consequences of decision points in terms of development and sustainability. Appendix J lists the output pathways and trajectories of all 30 cases. People at the preorganizing or student organizing phases at status quo generally ended up as student organizers following these cases, with the intention to continue their activism. Sara, however, entered the workforce and began activism prior to starting college (DP1). Her subsequent decision point, DP3, would prompt her to drop out of school and the movement for a "mental health break," due to burnout and an unmanageable workload as a volunteer organizer, problems within her organization, and her own personal struggles. Participants who attempted to launch careers or felt called to deepen

commitment all came out of decision points still in organizing pathways and intending to remain on such a trajectory.

Overall, nine cases ended with participants in professionalized organizing pathways in labor, nonprofits, or a for-profit, or blending organizing and direct services. Jacobo (DP2) and Jonathan were back in school to further their organizing goals. Skyler and Amy (DP2) were engaged in voluntary organizing simultaneous to their professionalized roles. Amy (DP2) was doing her best in her new paid organizing position, given the challenges discussed. She felt, however, that full-time, paid organizing in nonprofits was not "what I … hoped it would be like, and actually maybe … not what I want to do in my paid work." She would next seek a commuter trajectory involving professionalized policy work and volunteer organizing. By DP3 Amy had returned to paid organizing, this time as an organizer of a population to which she was an insider: youth who had, like her, survived sex abuse. She explored the possibility of founding a nonprofit to further this work, but she ended up taking a position as the executive director of an empowerment-oriented peer health education program for low-income high risk youth. Natalie's attempt at DP2 to settle into a trajectory proved complicated. She had left an organization in Honduras and taken leave from her doctoral program. After mobilizing $15,000 to fund her own participation, a desired project in Africa fell through. She was working in nonmovement pathways when this study ended, still hoping to return to organizing. Kara (at DP2) performed entrepreneurial organizing and pastoral activities and considered a retirement trajectory.

Organizers launching or preserving capstone ventures were in postorganizing roles in nonprofits (Samora DP3, Ramon DP3), a voluntary group (Irving DP4), or a for-profit organization (A. F. S.). Barbara (DP3) was a professionalized organizer and lived in the commune that she and other activists had founded. Finally, Jacobo (DP3), Rachel (DP2), and

Kara (DP1) were not organizing at the endpoints of these cases. As noted, Jacobo (DP3) hoped that his direct services position would eventually incorporate organizing, but he was also questioning whether he wanted to organize at all. Rachel had similar hopes that her new clinical training would someday allow her either to blend organizing with direct service or to establish a commuter pathway that combined organizing activity and other paid work.

**Changes Relative to Status Quo**

I analyzed whether organizers reported changes, from status quo to output, in pathway and trajectory, as well as in intrapsychic and personal life developments (see Table 11). Based on this analysis, I assessed the overall magnitude of immediate change that each decision point created. Nearly all cases resulted in permanent pathway changes or new campaigns. Major intrapsychic changes, such as changes in worldview or practice understandings, were often involved, and decision points were usually accompanied by personal life changes, such as geographical relocation or separation from a previous life partner, or took place in the context of life transits.

Preworkforce and initial career decisions all resulted in pathway changes, and usually in more clarified trajectories—except for Sara, whose trajectory remained unclear throughout DP1 and DP3. These cases also occurred in the context of the larger life transit that these young adults were in and the intrapsychic transformation of becoming an activist; all exhibited medium or high change levels. Not surprisingly, the greatest external stability was evidenced in cases involving calls to deepen commitment, as the organizers involved in these cases were inspired to undertake new campaigns or additional outside involvements while keeping their main pathways intact, although their experience of transformation would be significant. Trajectory experiments, attempts to settle into trajectories, and considerations of midcareer trajectory changes all resulted

**Table 11**
***Types and Magnitude of External Change*: Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 (n = 30)**

| Type | Decision Point | Pathway** | Trajectory** | Intrapsychic | Personal Life | Magnitude of Δ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Barbara DP1 | Campaign | C/ Clarified | Δ | Δ + life transit | Medium |
| **Preorganizing** | Sara DP1 | Δ | Unclear | Δ | None discussed; life transit | Medium |
| | Amy DP1 | C but preparing for Δ | Δ/ Clarified | Δ | Δ + life transit | Medium |
| **Student/ youth organizing** | Natalie DP1 | Δ within pathway | Δ/Clarified | Δ | Δ + life transit | High |
| | Sara DP3 | Δ | Δ/Less clear | Δ | Δ + life transit | High |
| | Irving DP1 | Δ | Clarified | Δ | Δ + life transit | High |
| | Barbara DP2 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Ramon DP1 | Δ | Clarified | Δ | Δ + life transit | Medium |
| | Ace DP3 | Δ within pathway, advance | C | Δ | Δ + end life transit | Medium |
| **Attempt to launch Careers** | Ramon DP2 | Resume/ significant Δ within pathway | C | Δ | C + end life transit | Medium |
| | Skyler DP2 | Added campaigns *** | Clarified | | Δ | Medium |
| | Samora DP1 | New campaign in pathway*** | C/Affirm | Δ | Δ | Medium |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | Ace DP4 | Δ within pathway/ campaign | C | Δ | Δ | Low |
| | Amy DP2 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Rachel DP1 | Δ | Δ/Clarified/ expanded | Δ | Δ | High |
| **Trajectory experiments** | Jacobo DP2 | Δ | Clarified | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Jonathan DP2 | Δ*** | C | Δ | None discussed | High |
| | Amy DP3* | Δ | Δ and clarifying | Δ | None discussed | High |
| **Settling on trajectories** | Natalie DP2* | Δ | Δ within trajectory/ unclear | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Samora DP3 | C | C | Δ | None discussed | Low |
| | Ramon DP3* | Δ | C but questioning | Δ | None discussed | Medium |
| | Barbara DP3 | Δ | C | Δ | Δ | High |
| **Attempts to launch/ further capstone ventures** | Irving DP4 | Δ*** | C, Δ within trajectory | None discussed | None discussed | Medium |
| | AFS DP1 | Δ | Δ within trajectory | None discussed | None discussed | Medium |
| | Jacobo DP3 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ life transit | High |
| | Barbara DP4 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ | High |
| **Potential trajectory Δs** | Kara DP1 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Rachel DP2 | Δ | Δ | Δ | Δ | High |
| | Kara DP2 | Resume | Begin Δ to retirement | Δ | Δ | Medium |
| **Retirement related decisions** | Kara DP3 | Campaign in pathway; Δ within pathway | Δ | Δ | C | Medium |

*Still in process at interview, limited follow-up data provided by Amy and Natalie.
** Pathways refer to roles performed in a particular organizational context. Trajectories refer to intended career direction, with inherent requirements and incentives.
*** Expanded into new work sector(s).
Note: Δ = Changed with respect to status quo; C = constant with respect to status quo.

in significant change. Rachel (DP1) had traded her experiment with a nonprofit social-action trajectory for one in labor. She relocated, ended a relationship, and dove into the transformative

social community associated with her union. Amy (DP3) and Natalie (DP2), aiming to settle into trajectories at midcareer, also experienced significant change: both left academic pathways, undertook larger projects than ever before, and reported significant intrapsychic shifts.

Barbara's DP4, in which she gave up an executive director position to return to front-line organizing, represented the only trajectory change that involved a renewed commitment to organizing; the others represented choices to abandon organizing pathways and trajectories, at least temporarily. She and Kara (DP1) would both abandon capstone ventures. Decisions around starting and preserving capstone ventures mainly resulted in medium levels of change, as organizers built new ventures upon their existing activities. Most did not discuss personal life changes, except Barbara at DP3, whose involvement with the commune she helped to launch would be complicated by the troubled marriage that she was in at the time.

Overall, three young participants who were not yet organizing at status quo became organizers as decision point outputs. Of the 23 cases in which participants were already in organizing roles at status quo, individuals maintained organizing trajectories following 16. Ramon moved from an organizing into a postorganizing role, as he founded a new organization related to the day labor center, and five cases resulted in the replacement of existing organizing roles with nonorganizing pathways, usually because the organizers involved left the movement. Four participants were in postorganizing leadership roles at status quo; three of these kept their trajectories. Kara began to downshift away from organizing over the course of DP2 and DP3.

**Sustainability and Development Outputs**

This examination of decision points in justice organizing careers is primarily intended to identify how choices and experiences at these junctures bring about changes in development and sustainability. Notions of development and sustainability, however, are complex and ponderous,

so the existing literature lacks a coherent set of variables by which these concepts can be understood and measured. The preceding analysis has suggested some measurement approaches, outlined in Tables 12 and 13.

**Table 12**
***Sustainability Outcomes*: Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 (n = 30)**

| Decision Point Type | Case | Desired Output Attained? | Satisfaction | Personal Availability | Increased/ Decreased Mobilization Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Barbara DP1 | Y | High | C | + |
| **Preorganizing decisions** | Sara DP1 | N | Low | - | - |
| | Amy DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| **Student/youth** | Natalie DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| **organizing decisions** | Sara DP3 | N | Mixed | - | - |
| | Irving DP1 | Y/N | Mixed | - | +/- |
| | Ramon DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| | Barbara DP2 | Y/N | Mixed | +/- | + |
| **Attempts to launch** | Ace DP3 | Y/N | High | - | + |
| **careers** | Ramon DP2 | Y | High | + | + |
| | Skyler DP2 | Y | High | C | + |
| **Calls to deepen** | Samora DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| **commitment** | Ace DP4 | Y | High | C | + |
| | Amy DP2 | Y | Low | + | - |
| | Rachel DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| | Jacobo DP2 | second choice | Mixed | - | +/- |
| **Trajectory experiments** | Jonathan DP2 | N | High | - | - |
| | Amy DP3* | Y | No data | + | C |
| **Settling on trajectories** | Natalie DP2* | N | Low (nonorganizing) | + | - |
| | Ramon DP3* | Y | High | C | + |
| | Samora DP3 | Y | High | C | C |
| **Attempts to** | Barbara DP3 | Y | Mixed | + | + |
| **launch/further capstone** | Irving DP4 | Y | High | C | C |
| **ventures** | A.F.S. DP1 | Y | High | + | + |
| | Jacobo DP3 | N | Mixed | - | - |
| | Barbara DP4 | Y | High but difficult to keep up | C | + |
| | Kara DP1 | N | Mixed (nonorganizing) | - | - |
| **Potential trajectory changes** | Rachel DP2 | N | High, (nonorganizing) | - | - |
| | Kara DP2 | Y | Mixed | + | C |
| **Retirement- related decisions** | Kara DP3 | Y/N | Mixed | C | + |

NOTE: (+) = increased resource, with respect to status quo; (-) = decreased resource; C = constant
*In process; limited follow-up data provided by Amy and Natalie.

The need for a satisfying experience is clearly central to sustainability (Table 12), along with achieving what an organizer was expressly seeking at the status quo—or something unexpected but also desirable. Personal availability for movement work was another frequent determining factor. Overall, whether organizers were ultimately more or less mobilized toward

movement work served as a global indicator of their short-term sustainability. An examination of changes in these measures following decision points creates a sketch of sustainability at the output of a decision point.

Similarly, the analysis suggests several developmental output measures (Table 13): whether network connections were gained or lost, reputations built or undermined, and new expertise or knowledge gained or credentials achieved. Changes in any of these categories may indicate the effects that a decision point has had on development, at least in the short term. With these measures in mind, let us consider the varying outputs of all 30 decision points, starting with the preworkforce cases and those that entailed starting careers.

**Table 13**
***Development Outcomes***

| Decision Point Type | Case | Networks | Reputation | Expertise | Credentials |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Preorganizing decisions** | Barbara DP1 | + | + | + | + but difficult to keep up with schoolwork |
| | Sara DP1 | + | + | + | C |
| **Student/youth organizing decisions** | Amy DP1 | + | No data | + | + complete formal training program, continue college education |
| | Natalie DP1 | + | + | + | + internship credit toward degree |
| | Sara DP3 | + | + | + | - dropout college |
| **Attempts to launch careers** | Irving DP1 | - | + | + | + G.I. Bill, apprentice-ship |
| | Barbara DP2 | + | + | + | - dropout college |
| | Ramon DP1 | + | + | + | + formal training |
| | Ace DP3 | + | + | + | C |
| | Ramon DP2 | + | + | + | C |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | Skyler DP2 | + | C | + | + motivated return to college |
| | Samora DP1 | + | No data | + | C |
| | Ace DP4 | + | + | + | C |
| **Trajectory experiments** | Amy DP2 | + | +/- | + | + formal training |
| | Rachel DP1 | + | + | + | + position at a "respected training local" |
| | Jacobo DP2 | + | No data | + | + MSW student |
| | Jonathan DP2 | No data | No data | + | + return to complete college |
| **Settling on trajectories** | Amy DP3* | + | No data | + | + complete master's degree |
| | Natalie DP2* | + | + / - | + | Leave of absence from doctoral program |
| **Attempts to launch/further capstone ventures** | Samora DP3 | No data | +- | + | C |
| | Ramon DP3* | + | + | + | C |
| | Barbara DP3 | No data | + | + | C |
| | Irving DP4 | +/ - | +/ - | + | C |
| | AFS DP1 | No data | No data | + | C |
| **Potential trajectory changes** | Jacobo DP3 | + | No data | + | + MSW degree |
| | Barbara DP4 | + | + | + | C |
| | Kara DP1 | - | No data | + | - failed bus driving test |
| | Rachel DP2 | +/- | No data | + | + clinical internship |
| **Retirement-related decisions** | Kara DP2 | +/- | +/- | + | C |
| | Kara DP3 | +/- | +/- | + | C |

NOTE: (+) = increased resource, with respect to status quo; (-) = decreased resource; C = constant
*in process, limited follow-up data provided by Amy and Natalie

The 10 student activists and young organizers most often experienced positive transformations and almost entirely positive results in terms of both development and sustainability, except for availability issues, which seemed to fluctuate in this career phase. These results are not surprising, given the positive experiences that nearly all of these individuals had and their overall success in securing desirable positions. Sara's two cases were unusual among transition-aged decision points in that she had a negative experience being arrested in an unsuccessful action while a nonstudent young adult, leading her to drop out of the movement temporarily. Later, as a student organizer, she was saddled with too much responsibility and pressure too soon and began to suffer incongruence and burnout much earlier than other organizers. She then dropped out of both school and the movement at DP3 (Barbara also dropped out at DP2). Nonetheless, Sara reported that she still gained significant developmental resources in every other category at both points: she noted that staying as long as she did "definitely helped me make a lot of new connections and earn respect with the workers and immigrants, and with other activists. And I learned so much."

Samora (DP1), Skyler (DP2), and Ace (DP4) answered calls to deepen their commitment, both intrapsychically and in their expanded actual involvements. They reported positive development and sustainability outcomes, in that they remained somewhat stable in status-quo pathways while adding positive supplementary experiences and experiencing positive transformations. Ace (DP3 and DP4) would be highly successful in the campaign that he and his colleagues waged to restore funding to their organization. His careful management of relationships and collaborative approach to decision making also brought him strong relational resources, which already benefited his practice and career in critical ways.

Trajectory experiments had much more mixed results. All four organizers in this category attained some of what they set out to find at status quo. Rachel's experiences were strongly positive, but Amy encountered low congruence and satisfaction along with demobilization. Furthermore, her subsequent conflict with her supervisor, who placed her on probation, may have had a mixed effect on her network connections and reputation. Jacobo's two cases showed as many negative outputs as positive ones, or more. This was true in terms of congruence and satisfaction, as well as in mobilization, following his trajectory experiment at DP2, as he had settled for his second choice of pathway (graduate school instead of the Peace Corps) because of his father's illness, which would continued to hinder his availability. Yet he was able to continue to build networks and develop expertise, and he and Jonathan would both attain new educational credentials at these points. Jacobo's DP3 outcomes were more negative in terms of sustainability, while developmental outputs reflected both positives and frustrations: he had managed to build sorely lacking network connections, yet he did not feel that he had gained the resources his efforts had promised.

The results of cases of midcareer organizers attempting to settle on trajectories were less clear, since both were in process at the time of final interviews (though limited follow-up data were available for Amy and Natalie). Amy (DP3) had completed her master's program and returned to professionalized peer education programming, now in a post-organizing role as an executive director. Natalie had halted her educational progress and job availability in general was scarce; she retained her motivation to organizing but as noted had not found a suitable position. Results of launching and preserving capstone ventures, on the other hand, were all generally positive, while leaving capstone ventures (Barbara DP4 and Kara DP1) had mixed results; Kara and two others (of the four who considered trajectory changes) left their

movements. Barbara successfully transitioned from nonprofit organizing to the labor sector, which brought mostly positive experiences of congruence. Since the other three left organizing, it can be said that all experienced demobilization. Kara would gain personal support but lose access to school bus driving positions, since she failed the driving test in California. Rachel would enjoy new network connections in social work and new credentials. None attained what they had hoped for at status quo, and all experienced a decrease in personal availability. Overall, it is worth noting that while organizers of color and women reported more difficulties, no clear pattern emerged regarding the positivity or negativity of outputs according to personal characteristics. Class disadvantage, however, did seem to make for more negative outputs in several cases (but not always when organizers were raised in the movement).

## Summation of Findings

In this chapter, I have presented a process model for organizer decision points, which suggests that decision points emerged from past experiences and status-quo conditions. Once triggered, sensemaking processes allowed organizers to both interpret and construct meanings, which they then put into the service of making decisions. Yet committing to a decision was not necessarily the same thing as taking action. Organizers could change their minds after making a decision, or intervening forces could prevent the decisions from being acted on or render them moot. Navigation of opportunity structures was thus another key process at decision points, through which meanings and decision points were put into action. Finally, I have suggested that organizers at these junctures coped with transition, and with transformation or the lack thereof, which both complicated and added great meaning to decision point experiences.

Findings across all three cohorts and all types generally fit the development and sustainability themes and decision point considerations suggested in the preliminary framework,

and I have illustrated some key emerging themes, such as the trial and error involved in project revision, and tensions such as that pitting a culture of collaboration and sacrifice versus competition among workers for scarce jobs and resources.

The foregoing analyses of conditions, processes, and outputs (including examination of the short-term sustainability and development gains and losses measured) illustrate how the consequences of decision points varied over the course of careers. Young adults who were able to start careers in organizing were likely to have positive experiences and show gains early on, though Sara's examples illustrated conditions that might prevent this. Some would then successfully deepen early commitments, while others would experiment, with more mixed results. The cases of Amy DP3 and Natalie DP2 showed the important and potentially difficult transition that very experimental, entrepreneurial organizers may encounter at midcareer, when it is time to settle on a trajectory. Capstone venture decisions, on the other hand, showed the positive outcomes that occurred when midcareer organizers were able to deepen trajectories and create something new and valuable.

Established mid- and late-career organizers were not immune to instability or issues of incongruence, resulting in changed trajectories or leaving the movement; these trajectory changes showed the greatest concentration of negative outcomes. Kara (DP1) and Rachel (DP2) experienced both conflict and alienation that reduced network connections in the movement. Finally, Kara's decisions through her transit to retirement illustrate what some organizers might strive to achieve at this phase. Outputs here were complex, since it was developmentally appropriate for her to relinquish her organizing role, and yet she was not leaving the movement altogether. Her successful management of a complicated mixture of transition and transformation ultimately allowed her to overcome her lifelong struggle for belonging in the

movement, to finish her career with a successful action, and to achieve a modest but sustainable retirement arrangement.

Contextual factors (e.g., relationships, material resources, reputations, knowledge, skills, and credentials) functioned as resources, or, conversely, shortages of these resources functioned as barriers. Relational and cultural expectations and obligations were normative, and so could present both barriers and resources, and there were also attractors and detractors within the broader environment. Optimization and suboptimization strategies affected outputs as well. Status-quo strategies included optimization efforts, like making short- and medium-range maps for advancement and adapting positions to social change ambitions and other goals, and suboptimization tactics of gaining experience and training toward long-term goals, even when ideal positions were not available. Organizers remained vigilant to ever-changing opportunity structures, even when not at decision points. Key sensemaking strategies at decision points involved learning and gathering information, assessing satisfaction and efficacy, and revising projects, while effective decision making could rely on either rational or intuitive strategies and on setting rules by which factors would be prioritized.

Meanwhile, organizers undertook navigational strategies, such as building and maintaining relationships and resources or recognizing viable opportunities and the value that they could offer in those settings. To cope with transition and maximize transformation, organizers managed conflict, sought support and inspiration from new experiences, engaged in spiritual or religious practices and a process of self-discovery, and politicized negative experiences. I have focused here on short-term outputs, as appropriate to the adaptive nature of these careers. The discussion in chapter 6 will include some consideration of longer-term consequences of decision points.

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION: AN EMERGENT THEORY OF JUSTICE ORGANIZER DECISION POINTS

This study was designed to explore the process that occurs at organizers' decision points, with a focus on phenomena related to career development and sustainability of justice organizers. It encompasses the subjective views and experiences of organizers as well as observable patterns and behaviors. It has addressed both the agency of individuals and ecological influences, with a focus on experiences in movement settings, both paid and voluntary; personal life and nonmovement issues were considered only as they pertained directly to participation. Results include thorough descriptions of 72 decision points and 14 careers, which have revealed the process and a working typology of decision points. Given that little exploration of the "black box" of decision points has previously occurred, these have value in their own right; they (a) illustrate how factors already known to be at work interact in different instances, and (b) reveal fine-grained phenomena not visible in coarser studies. I have brought into the forefront real-life stories of decision-making and transition, told in the voices of justice organizers themselves.

In this chapter I will expand on the initial assumptions and conceptual framework from chapter 3 and the descriptive model and typology outlined in chapter 5, presenting an emergent theory of justice organizer decision points supported by the data. It is primarily a descriptive theory, yet I also present several explanatory hypotheses that may merit further testing. In addition I will discuss the value, limitations, and implications of the theory.

## Confirmation of Initial Assumptions

### Definition and Conceptualization of "Organizer"

I provisionally posited that organizers are participants in social movements who (a) self-identify, and/or are identified by their peers, as movement organizers, and (b) perform pivotal

roles in movements, in which they act to recruit, train, and encourage the participation of other members and/or serve as tactical, ethical, and political strategists in popular mobilizations for social and cultural change. Participant perspectives closely paralleled this definition while also adding helpful detail (see Appendix K: Participant Definitions of Organizing and Organizers).

Several subjects' responses indicated that, for someone to be considered an organizer rather than simply a participant in the movement, that person must be actively engaged, committed, and consistent. "They don't just march," one respondent said. Rather, organizers were central figures in groups and movements. However, several articulated that the very ethos of organizing is to empower others rather than holding on to leadership and authority, so organizers must be engaged heavily in recruitment and training. Several responses were consistent with the initial description of organizers as strategic planners and tactical experts, while others noted their efforts to build permanent organizations and infrastructures. Some emphasized that organizers work outside formal systems as radicals seeking to address power imbalances in society. One particularly elegant summation noted that "organizers build capacity among the grass roots, 'la basa,' to control their own lives—they try to organize themselves out of a job."

Overall, responses indicated a shared understanding of the identity of organizers, based on the levels and kinds of activities that they perform, as well as the worldviews and ideologies that they espouse. Nonetheless, there was some difference of opinion as to whether organizers can act alone or must operate in a group context. As discussed in chapter 5, there was overlap between organizing and direct services work in many professionalized pathways, though several respondents clarified that, to them, social service provision for poor populations by itself did not constitute organizing. This stance may be consistent with previously reported worldviews among organizers, who called organizing the highest form of movement work (Rooks, 2003).

**Organizer Career Characteristics**

The initial framework posited that organizing careers are likely to be unstable, entrepreneurial, skilled yet underresourced, nonconventional or stigmatized, and heavily driven by nonmaterial incentives. The frequency of pathway changes throughout careers, the frequency of overlap between decision points, and the ongoing instability often observed between decision points confirmed this characterization. Instability was most common in early career stages and surrounding major trajectory changes. These tendencies were underscored by the fact that career pathways were often campaign-driven and thus very temporary, as well as by the nearly omnipresent risk that funding for permanent positions would run out. Travel and relocation associated with pathways could also create upheaval, and conditions and relationships in organizations could change suddenly and unexpectedly, decreasing organizers' sense of congruence and bonding, or even making their existing pathways untenable.

Organizers exhibited entrepreneurialism, as expected, in response to the instability and often noninstitutionalized nature of their work by generating new pathways and devising roles within them. With regard to the initial description of organizing as nonconventional and potentially stigmatized, findings suggested that organizing has mainstreamed in some ways but remained controversial in others. Some participants did report stigmatization of their movement work by life partners and family members or a lack of respect in the workplace. It is also possible that the difficulties and lack of fit that several organizers experienced in educational settings were symptoms of their nonconventionality, or of mainstream discomfort with subversive political views, although their high overall levels of education and training serve as a reminder that organizing is skilled work. Several participants had lived in communes or were part of countercultural communities or lifestyles.

Finally, lack of resources was often an issue. Despite the prominence of nonmaterial motives in these careers, data have suggested that pay and other career incentives can and do often matter to organizers, a notion consistent with previous findings by Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994), Ganz et al. (2004), and Rooks (2003, 2004). Findings also suggested that the average salary of professionalized organizers may have risen in recent years. Still, the instances reported in this study in which organizers gave up material benefits in favor of organizing goals, took on significant bodily and legal risks, and valued concepts of risk and sacrifice all reinforce the idea that these careers are significantly driven by nonmaterial incentives.

**Decision Points as Identifiable and Bounded Phenomena**

Decision points proved to be identifiable junctures around which participants could place somewhat distinct boundaries, allowing them to understand these junctures as distinct experiences. Organizers readily identified decision points, which were framed in terms of what triggered the situation, what decision had to be made, and what the output or resolution was. They could articulate their prior and status-quo conditions, the triggers, the point at which the decision process was complete, the immediate outputs that resulted, and (often) how the essential issues underlying the decision point influenced their longer-term future. The fact that organizers consistently relied on lessons from previous decision points at subsequent junctures implies that these constructed boundaries had meaning and influenced their interpretation of reality.

Further, although the term "decision point" may seem to imply that decisions and transitions are instantaneous, the study confirmed that they are processes that unfold over time, since the data relevant to the decisions included various events and activities that transpired over a period of months or even years. In some cases, what an interviewee called a decision point was actually a series of decisions closely related in time and content, or a generalized period of

uncertainty and transition. Further, I was surprised to find that identified decision points could closely overlap; as noted, I would have expected organizers to conceptualize a period of high intensity as all part of a single transition. These findings suggest that the mental boundaries that individuals put on their past experiences may not be solely chronological.

## What Are Decision Points?

The realities described above prompted Ganz et al. (2004) to propose that organizing careers are adaptive, or that career outcomes (though not random) cannot be predicted by sociodemographics or by how careers begin. Instead, organizers must adapt quickly to repeated change and make thoughtful and fruitful decisions regularly. For these reasons, I treated decision points as forks in the road (i.e., moments of *potential* change). This approach allowed for an understanding of how organizers selected from among an array of options available to them. As I expected might be the case, decision points were often frequent and represented moments when specific adaptations were made and projects revised. All cases had some short-term effects on development and sustainability, and all involved some period of upheaval, though some did not result in a change in pathway. Existing literature has given surprisingly little attention to these considerations, focusing on decisions whether or not to follow a particular path, rather than on choices among available options. By taking this approach to the examination of decision points, I have discovered insights about career development and sustainability that were not otherwise visible and that can help to explain processes and outcomes.

## The Emergent Theory

Beyond describing decision points, I have considered what explained variances in processes or outputs, and under what conditions variables were found to have particular effects. This analysis has resulted in a working theory that helps to outline (a) what is unique about these

careers and (b) what is important about decision points, as well as suggesting an array of explanatory factors and relationships. I propose an emergent, data-driven mid-range theory (see Figure 6), various aspects of which can be tested on larger and more diverse samples. Mid-range theories are considered to be substantive but still informal when they serve analytic and interpretive functions but fall short of proving causality, or when they are supported in a small sample but are not generalizable beyond that sample; they become formal theories through repeated trial and analysis over several studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hood, 2010; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991) I present and discuss the substantive theory below. I have selected for discussion several descriptive and explanatory findings that seem especially promising and interesting and thus worthy of further testing and exploration in future studies, along with additions to the initial framework from chapter 3.

**Descriptive Findings**

The process model in chapter 5 included process domains, steps, and themes that comprise the process, and the contextual influences and organizer strategies that accompanied it. Descriptions also revealed varying types of decision points and other ways in which the process varied, as well as varying outputs. In presenting the most important findings I will begin with the process model, or the conditions, processes, and consequences of decision points, depicted in the dark purple boxes along the horizontal center line of Figure 6. (Main concepts from Figure 6 are italicized when first introduced in the discussion below.)

**Conditions (research question 1).** On the left are factors and influences that constituted the conditions under which decision points came about. As expected, decision points arose out of prior experiences and current situations. *Status-quo narratives* addressed prior experiences; typically they contained previous movement experience, developmental activities (e.g.,

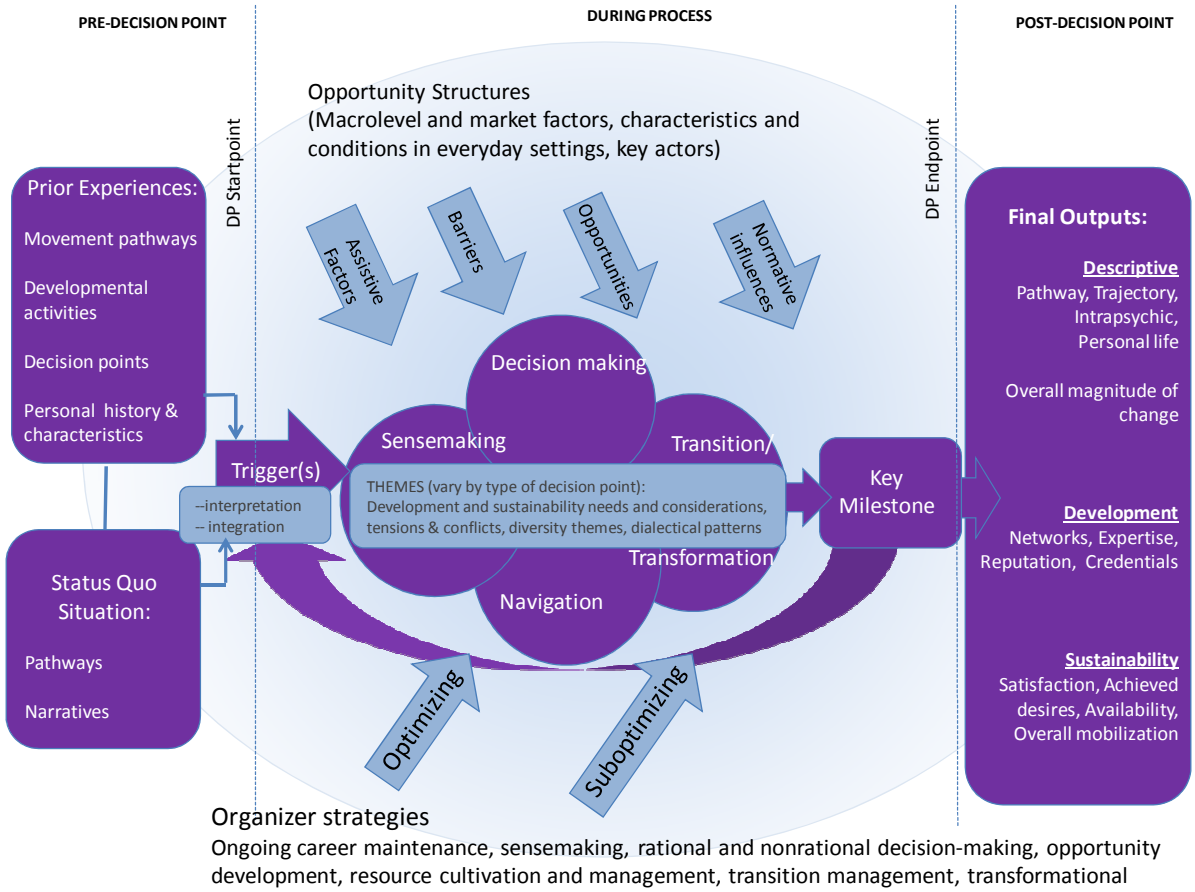



*Figure 6.* An Emergent Theory of Justice Organizer Decision Points

networking and education), previous decision points, and personal histories. Organizers had developed projects, or central narratives by which they had made provisional sense of their reasons and intentions for selecting *status-quo pathways*, and of how to manage their life and career roles. Projects included organizers' intended trajectories, which could entail working in the nonprofit, labor, or voluntary sector, and which might involve pure grassroots organizing work or could blend organizing with direct human services, policy work, or pastoral activities. Projects also accommodated practice styles, populations and causes of particular interest, loyalties to organizations or networks, personal life interests, and preferred strategies and

resources for achieving goals. Narratives often included a sense of how well status-quo projects and pathways were working out, along with some ideas about desired next steps.

Narratives, decisions, and actions at decision points were shaped in conversation with the surrounding environment, or the *opportunity structures* within which organizers operated. As posited in chapter 3, both macrolevel geohistorical factors and those related to everyday settings and actors were important, supporting the expected utility of a nested view of opportunity structures. Results also supported the importance of the interaction structural, cultural, relational, and material or capacity dimensions of the environment at decision points, or a multidimensional understanding of conditions in organizations and larger ecologies. Organizers often maintained multiple affiliations simultaneously, and their context was often changing; these factors made it possible for organizers to experience chronologically overlapping decision points. Consistent with my initial expectations, identifiable *triggers*, which could arise internally but were usually external, marked the start of a decision point.

**Process (research question 2).** From the above conditions, following the appearance of a trigger, each decision point process unfolded. The actions taken by organizers in response to triggers confirmed the importance of (a) *decision making*, (b) pursuit and implementation of pathways (*navigation*), and (c) *transition*-related actions to manage the emotional and interpersonal process of change. The concept of *sensemaking* emerged as a fourth process that paralleled and informed the other three. Sensemaking steps included interpreting triggers, defining the main crux of a situation and available options, engaging in experimentation, and finally solidifying new projects and understandings.

The stages of decision making began with considering positive aspects, negative aspects, and potential risks of pathways, followed by assessing the potential for congruence that each

prospective option offered with respect to existing projects. Organizers then reconciled and prioritized among these options, establishing rules by which to decide; finally, they committed to a decision, which was then (usually) implemented. Navigation steps included efforts to cultivate and identify opportunities, pursue and mobilize resources for potential pathways, secure positions and negotiate terms, and implement existing and new pathways and campaigns.

Stages of transition, found to be tightly intertwined with processes of *transformation*, varied more noticeably. Organizers often underwent role- and relationship-based identity changes, which required them to let go of old routines, endure an awkward period, and adjust to new arrangements. Some also experienced catalytic crises that led to transformative changes in spiritual and political orientation and reshaped their worldviews. Ultimately, these four processes played out concurrently and in interrelated fashion, sometimes being repeated several times before the experience of transition and decision making was essentially complete.

**Consequences (research question 3).** The findings suggest several output measures that may be useful in future studies of organizer development, sustainability, and decision making. The primary focus of my analysis was on short-term outputs, because the long-term impact of each decision point is constrained by subsequent changes in conditions, which give rise to the next decision point and another set of outputs.

In the preliminary framework, I noted the idea that descriptive outputs of decision points could include staying in, shifting between, or dropping out of movements, as well as changes in pathway. One key objective measure was an individual's job status (e.g., whether the individual remained an organizer, left organizing, combined careers, or changed jobs). Descriptive outputs included changes or "consistencies" (i.e., deciding not to change) in pathways, trajectories, and other aspects of projects. Intrapsychic changes, such as lessons learned and changes in attitude

toward movement work, could occur, while personal life changes could entail relocation or change of lifestyle, starting or ending romantic relationships, and advancing through life transits. Tallies of these various types of change experienced in each case allowed me to estimate the magnitude of overall change or upheaval experienced as low, medium, or high.

Increases or decreases in the participatory resources (expertise, access, availability, and motivation) that an organizer could access served as measures of short-term change in development and sustainability status. Signs of development included increase or improvement in skills, knowledge, credentials, reputation, or networking connections. Measures of change in sustainability included situational availability, satisfaction level, and whether desired outputs had been achieved. Finally, I measured for each case whether organizers came out of decision points more or less mobilized, or more or less active in (not just committed to) in the movement.

**Themes and Factors Central to Decision Points**

Major themes in decision points appear in the light blue boxes of Figure 6, while contextual influences arising from specific opportunity structures and organizer strategies that emerged from decision points are marked with light blue arrows. Although the particular themes expressed in each case varied, findings generally supported the development and sustainability themes and considerations that I posited in chapter 3. As expected, organizers endeavored to (a) attain satisfaction, (b) cultivate opportunities and devise pathways, and (c) generate and economize resources. Organizers' ability to (d) build identity and relationships and (e) continuously adapt and transform themselves was also expected and found to drive these career choices. Considerations at decision points therefore included their motives, needs, and expectations, potential risks and rewards of available opportunities, available and needed resources, cultural and relational concerns, and issues of personal growth, transition, and

transformation. So the preliminary framework proved useful in understanding these needs and issues.

Some unanticipated themes were also noted among the findings, including important tensions and overlaps across the above categories, issues related to diversity among organizers and cross-cultural interactions in movements (which emerged naturally and fairly readily, given the politicized orientation of participants), and dialectical patterns of trial and error, action and reflection, conflict and resolution, and burnout and renewal. As illustrated in the blue arrows in Figure 6, participants viewed a variety of ecological structural, relational, cultural, and capacity-related factors in organizations, the macrolevel context, and organizers' personal lives as either assistive factors, barriers, opportunities, or normative forces in decision point processes. These were made even more complex because organizers usually interacted in several local domains at once. Organizer strategies, both with regard to ongoing career maintenance and at decision points, were aimed either at optimizing opportunities and resources or at suboptimizing among less ideal options.

**Variance in Decision Points**

Substantively different types of decision points emerged inductively from data; these were unanticipated in the preliminary framework. The 12 decision types were uncovered by first identifying what was at the crux of each case and then grouping these central themes into clusters based on the prime objective presented to each organizer by a given situation. The 12 types, grouped by career phase, included:

- Preworkforce (3): preadult, preorganizing, student organizing decisions
- Transition to workforce (1): attempts to launch careers
- Early career (2): calls to deepen commitment, trajectory experiments

- Mid- and later career (5): attempts to advance within existing pathways, to launch or further capstone ventures, or to settle into trajectories after long periods of experimentation; decisions about potentially transformative campaigns or potential trajectory changes
- Late career (1): retirement-related decisions

**Suggested Explanations**

The process model presented in this chapter was applicable to all types of cases, but the prior and status-quo influences, triggers, themes, and outputs often varied according to the type of decision point. Other factors that appeared connected to these variances included organizers' personal characteristics, the geohistorical context in which decision points occurred, and how triggers were interpreted and experienced. While rigorous identification of causal links is beyond the scope of this exploratory study, several variables helped to explain how and why processes and themes played out as they did at decision points and thus may have had indirect effects on outputs. Also, a few emerged as especially promising direct influences on decision point outputs. These possible causal links arose from past and status-quo experiences and narratives, from within the process itself, from opportunity structures, or in organizer strategies. I discuss below the variables identified and their effects.

**Prior and status-quo influences:**

***1. Status-quo pathways, participatory resources, and narratives (i.e., projects and assessments) were partially explained by career phase, past experiences, and personal characteristics.*** The overall depth and breadth of experience that an organizer had at status quo often predicted his or her pathway at that time, since organizers were likely to move over the course of their careers from preorganizing to organizing positions, and then on to either post-

organizing or to nonmovement positions. Level of experience also seemed to influence the nature of projects, as these became more complex and sophisticated over time.

Participatory resources usually increased over time, but with some exceptions: (a) organizers who left the movement and then returned had to start over in terms of resources and opportunities; (b) the recent economic downturn has made it harder for some midcareer organizers to access positions and resources; (c) some resources dwindle as an organizer nears retirement. The success of previous developmental activities also helped to explain organizers' level of resources, such as how well relationships, experience, and education had been cultivated.

The components and priorities of projects helped to explain the extent to which an organizer's pathway (i.e., status-quo role in context, such as grassroots nonprofit organizing of homeless individuals) matched the intended trajectory. When pathway matched trajectory, projects often provided further insight into why the pathway and trajectory had been selected. When they did not match, other project components usually explained this. Past politicizing or transformative experiences often provided motivation for organizing, and these helped to explain the specific content of projects, especially motives and goals. Some included past personal trauma, which, though motivating, could also have undermining effects on availability. Positive assessments of previous movement pathways and decisions also influenced projects: organizers constructed projects to replicate satisfying or effective experiences, or to remedy negative ones. Cumulative satisfaction seemed to color status-quo satisfaction.

Being female, a racial minority, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or self-identified as gay or lesbian affected the content of status-quo projects. Participants in these categories often had fewer participatory resources and lower cumulative and status-quo satisfaction, though several had had positive experiences in ethnic-based, feminist, or GLBTQ-friendly settings.

Being raised in the movement seemed to provide resources for participation and had sometimes moderated the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage in pre-decision point histories. Other common themes for those raised in the movement included (a) coming-of-age transformations that involved deconstructing previously unquestioned movement views (Irving, Jonathan) and (b) complex relational issues (Rachel, Ace, Jonathan, Irving), as familial obligations overlapped with movement ones.

**2.** ***Past and status-quo factors often helped to explain variance in processes.*** The level of prior experience and career phase, along with specific prior and status-quo experiences and narratives, all helped to determine the type of decision point encountered, since these were specific to various career phases. These factors then continued to be driving forces in all four subprocesses. For example, differences in status-quo and cumulative satisfaction, along with the properties of triggers themselves, influenced interpretations of triggers. Organizers raised in movement settings had noticeably different transformation experiences at decision points because they had inherited initial commitments from their families of origin.

Prior and status-quo factors also explained differences in contextual influences on decision points, and in the strategies that organizers utilized. At early career stages, organizers relied most often upon mentors and opportunities related to their status-quo pathways, or family and student supports, while those with a longer history of activism tended to rely on peer networks and material movement resources to which they had previously gained access. Experienced organizers often exhibited more sophisticated strategies in negotiating decision points. Assessments of the results of previous developmental activities and decision points informed strategies at subsequent decision points; those seen as successful were replicated or adapted to current situations, while those with negative results were eschewed.

**3. *Sociodemographic characteristics of organizers had mixed effects on decision point processes and outcomes, depending on factors related to the pathways they pursued.*** Having a disadvantaged background was often associated with the types of barriers and disincentives present at decision points. On the other hand, coming from a disadvantaged background could actually improve access to resources and opportunities, when movements and groups were gender- or ethnic-based or when they made affirmative efforts to promote diversity or indigenous leadership. These supports were especially present during the transition to adulthood and in early careers, whereas such purposefully developed resources for disadvantaged organizers became slimmer in later years. Women had a relatively high prevalence of serious trauma and mental health issues and of being victims of violence, both within and outside of movements, which could affect status-quo factors as well as decision point processes.

The limitations of the present sample preclude drawing firm conclusions about the effects of one's sociodemographic background on the outputs of decision points examined, but the hypothesis that sociodemographic privilege is generally associated with greater frequency of positive decision point outputs deserves further study. So, too, does the proposition that, when organizations and movements make affirmative efforts to counter these problems, coming from a background of disadvantage may bring about more positive outcomes.

**4. *Status-quo projects, assessments, and desired next steps helped to explain pathway and trajectory selection and other descriptive outputs.*** Organizers defined and evaluated their options in relation to their existing projects, which were made up of a complex set of prioritized concerns and agendas; they tended to select pathways and trajectories that were congruent with their projects as a package, including both social change and personal goals and needs, rather than with just one particular aspect. They were frequently attracted to pathways, campaigns, and

other experiences that would allow them to further test their theories about what works. In most cases, organizers achieved an output that satisfied what they had wanted at status quo, and they generally defined outputs of a decision point as unsatisfactory if they did not achieve what they were seeking.

***5. Existing resources and satisfaction levels may either present the risk of or promote resiliency against burnout and instability at decision points.*** Greater status-quo resources and satisfaction levels were generally associated with more positive development and sustainability outputs. Organizers' accounts showed that, at decision points, they relied on existing resources and felt more vulnerable when they had insufficient resources or a history of dissatisfaction. Resiliency among organizers who were raised in the movement may have been especially high, as findings suggested support for the notion that these organizers experienced more positive decision point outputs.

**Process variables affecting subsequent processes and outcomes:**

**1.** ***How triggers were understood and experienced, in relation to previous and status-quo situations and perceptions, had strong effects on how processes unfolded.*** Triggers that were expected, entailed voluntary change, and were viewed as positive were easier to interpret and had an immediate mobilizing effect, resulting in quicker and more productive responses. In contrast, unwelcome surprises and other negative triggers could be demobilizing, and organizers frequently exhibited difficulty in strategizing a response to them. These tendencies varied, however: negatively experienced triggers, in early career situations when the status quo was positive and fairly stable, could bring about transformative processes. On the other hand, negative triggers at midcareer, in the context of otherwise positive experiences, could be quite shocking and difficult to understand. When status-quo conditions were negative or deteriorating,

negative triggers from within existing pathways, especially if combined with opportunities or other positive triggers in new pathways and trajectories, generally propelled organizers to seek career change.

The notion that organizers would react to triggers specifically, even if they were not the cause of change, is consistent with prior understandings of sensemaking (Weick, 2003). Sensemaking does not occur until some external stimulus irritates the senses and throws previously unquestioned truths into doubt. Furthermore, whether new information and events are experienced positively (as in line with one's desires) or negatively (as undesirable) affects the facility with which the person can integrate and act upon the information.

**2.** ***There was some correlation between the type of decision point and the processes that occurred, as well as with both descriptive and evaluative outputs.*** For example, early career organizers were seeking and clarifying trajectories, so they were most willing to experiment. By midcareer, organizers were often looking to settle into a longer-term trajectory, and experimentation came at a higher cost. A detailed discussion of these differences by type is provided later in this chapter, as these differences illuminate overall career courses.

**3.** ***Whether transition, transformation, or both were undertaken and experienced at decision points affected the process.*** Transition and transformation processing each entailed different steps and presented differing considerations. Taking risks and making personal sacrifices were often associated with transformation. Organizers were more likely to risk themselves when the pathways involved were seen as worthy and honorable, offered a reasonable hope of furthering the organizer's career project, and provided opportunities for learning and transformation. Such efforts could be thwarted when pathways were inaccessible or availability constraints got in the way. The effect of taking such risks could also vary: when

actions were successful and organizers felt supported, taking a risk helped to build the organizer's identity, reputation, and trust as well as to further his or her politicization. In contrast, other sacrifices experienced for less honorable reasons, such as seeing their own labor rights violated by their employers or movements themselves engaging in oppression, were viewed with special irony or deep disappointment, since these experiences were in direct conflict with the ethos that drives organizing.

**4.** ***Taking risks and undergoing transformation were sometimes but not always associated with deepening commitment to existing pathways and the movement.*** This was an interesting finding, in view of existing notions that risk-taking on behalf of a cause results in a sense of personal transformation and brings deeper commitment to that cause. Deeper commitment seemed particularly likely when efforts were successful and appreciated by others in the movement, and when individuals had the ability to make informed and autonomous decisions about risk. Some individuals who did not feel tight emotional bonding to their group at a decision point could experience deep and meaningful personal transformation that nevertheless led them in non-movement career directions. Waging a personal campaign against one's group or industry was especially risky, as doing so could incur the wrath of comrades and undermine commitment. Such findings suggested the importance of resources, relationships, and cultural norms in the course of decision points.

**Contextual influences on processes and outputs.** The overall geohistorical context, political climate trends, and market factors could shape the opportunities available to organizers, the extent of congruence between these options and organizer goals and values, and organizers' marketability. Organizational conditions and processes of change also influenced the process at decision points. For example, organizational transitions (such as changes in leadership, funding

availability, or requirements) could both create new opportunities and also raise new issues. Decision-making structures within the organization and interpersonal dynamics also often shaped organizers' career decisions.

In terms of the effects of environmental factors on development and sustainability, positive relationships within the movement and access to material resources often assisted in causing positive outputs. Negative conditions, incongruent organizational practices, and interpersonal difficulties could prevent bonding, satisfaction, and transformation, thus acting as barriers to moving forward or to particular pathways. Availability of opportunities (often through networks) also appeared to be a strong explanatory factor with regard to both processes and outputs. When organizers had clearer or better options, they seemed more likely to undertake rational decision-making strategies and aim to optimize, while very negative environments and a lack of desirable options sometimes gave rise to more intuitive or nonrational decision-making processes, as well as suboptimization efforts. Market saturation and norms affected access. Ramon, for example, felt that he was able to easily land a congruent position in part because there was a dearth of organizers of color in his rural area. Jacobo, lacking sufficient network connections, had far more trouble in a saturated urban job market. A lack of desirable opportunities was particularly frustrating, leading to experimentation in search of a better arrangement; at midcareer, such troubles could lead to dropping out.

Cultural and relational factors often had normative effects on processes and outputs. Movement relationships presented obligations along with resources, shaping and constraining the options and opportunities available; as a result, these factors frequently explained organizer decisions, navigational concerns and strategies, and approaches to conflict management during a transition process. Cultural norms within organizations were often expressed in group and

interpersonal behavior toward organizers. Supportive and collaborative approaches to organizer uncertainty tended to promote bonding and availability. In a few situations, insensitive or high-pressure tactics to promote commitment actually backfired and were perceived negatively. Normative factors therefore could either promote or prevent intended outcomes, depending upon how well organizers' orientations, abilities, needs, and interests matched prevailing norms.

**The impact of organizer strategies.** Organizer strategies necessarily affected processes, because by definition they dictated the style and approach that organizers brought to each process. Whether they were aimed at optimization, suboptimization, adaptation, or selection, and whether they involved accessing positions, waging campaigns against external targets, or addressing perceived problems in their group or movement, also affected their actions and the ways in which others responded to them.

The success of strategies appeared to influence whether opportunities presented themselves and whether they could be accessed, what resources were brought to bear, and whether organizers remained motivated during the process at decision points. For example, especially later in careers, organizers' own reputations and networks could be offered in support of a campaign in which they sought to be employed; in other words, the experienced organizer could add value by strengthening an organization's legitimacy or by helping to build bridges between movements. Continuously scanning for resources, even when current pathways were thought to be secure, also seemed to better position organizers for positive outputs. On the other hand, waging intraorganizational protests against practices seen as incongruent posed substantial risk of creating severe interpersonal conflict and limiting future opportunities. Further inquiry would be necessary, however, to assess the direct impact of the various strategies noted here on descriptive, development, and sustainability outputs.

**The Relationship of Decision Points to Overall Careers: Suggested Hypotheses**

Organizers and other actors react to constraints of specific situations at decision points, not just long-term goals and larger forces. Further, at decision junctures one's place in the movement is often vulnerable, precarious, or in question. Therefore, as a first longer-term hypothesis, *the effects of short-term events and circumstances on overall development and sustainability may be magnified during these junctures.* This is so because organizers are limited to choosing among options that happen to be available in a given moment and may feel the need to suboptimize. The choice that they make may then determine the resources and opportunities available later, as well as sometimes producing a transformative experience. Finally, organizers may be more vulnerable to the effects of barriers or more dependent on help from assistive factors at these junctures. The outputs and experiences of previous decision points therefore appear to influence subsequent resources available and motivation, more so than experiences unrelated to decision points.

Second, just as entrepreneurial or project-driven careers can be seen as episodic, with each job or pathway functioning as an episode in a larger narrative, so decision making is also episodic. Previous decision points become episodes in organizer narratives, and organizers look back on their past decisions, and the consequences of those decisions, to guide present decisions. Therefore, while the experiences and outputs of any one decision point cannot predict long-term outcomes, *what occurs at these junctures may have a cumulative effect on development and sustainability.* Repeated positive experiences and outputs at decision points may build satisfaction, commitment, and future positive outputs, while repeated negative ones may build disillusionment, alienation, and increasing doubt about continued organizing. Mixed experiences or an inordinate number of pathway changes through midcareer could add up to a precarious

situation for organizers in their thirties; organizers with mixed experiences might be able to keep going for five to 15 years, but the resulting fatigue and sense of instability could lead them to drop out, especially in the recent tough economy.

**Summary: From Framework to Theory**

Overall, the use of decision points to analyze careers has yielded a fine-grained understanding of how participants used the resources available to them to further their careers, and how various factors influenced their choices and the resources with which they emerged at decision point outputs. Findings confirmed many of the propositions from the preliminary framework in chapter 3. The assumptions upon which the study rested were supported and elaborated by data. The components defined as constituting the process of decision points were effective in accommodating the fluidity and often idiosyncratic nature of these junctures, while still providing some structure with which to understand them. Conceptualizing organizers' experiences in terms of narratives, and their engagements in terms of pathways and trajectories, proved fruitful. The development and sustainability themes and considerations that were expected to arise in the findings proved a useful way to organize many of the themes that did appear.

Results also improved upon the initial framework in several important ways. Findings have helped to fill in descriptions of each of these components, revealing the specific factors in play, as well as adding specificity to the steps and stages of the various processes. More information about sensemaking and transformational processes also emerged from findings; while the themes related to these experiences were as expected, their centrality as main processes at decision points, along with the steps and stages contained in these processes, were unanticipated. Expected themes were also elaborated: data included the tensions and

relationships among the predicted categories, additional diversity-related themes, dialectical patterns, and specific contextual factors and organizer strategies that influenced processes and outcomes. Finally, whereas the preliminary framework made no attempt to hypothesize causal links, the theory has offered an array of suggested hypotheses about factors that had indirect and direct effects upon decision point outputs, as well as about the relevance of decision points to overall development and sustainability outcomes.

## Overall Insights about Careers, Development, and Sustainability

This study of decision points has uncovered several insights about careers not reported by other studies. Because prior findings were often fragmented and produced from disparate bodies of literature, this examination of careers and decision points makes a contribution in synthesizing and filling critical gaps in existing descriptions of organizing careers. The basic assumptions about the characteristics of organizing careers were largely confirmed—that is, that these careers are relatively unstable and entrepreneurial, skilled yet underresourced, often nonconventional or stigmatized, and driven by nonmaterial incentives (although traditional incentives could also matter), and that they proceeded adaptively. The present emphasis on decision points then broke new ground, helping to show what makes organizing careers different from conventional ones.

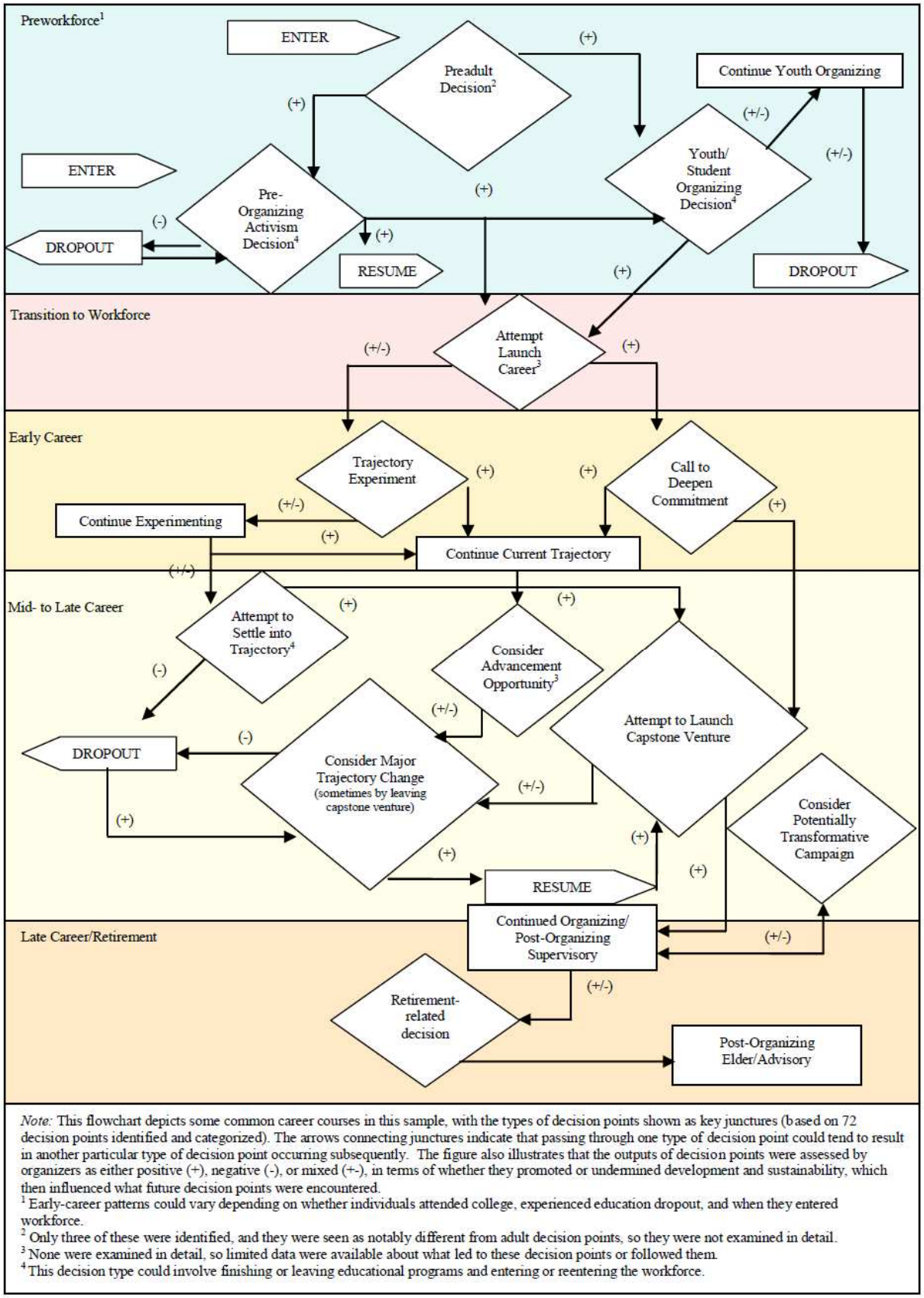
### Descriptions of Organizer Careers

Organizing careers were revealed here as especially experimental, highly constrained, and demanding high energy input, risk, and sacrifice with few guarantees. In these regards, they may have much in common with other precarious careers, such as those of artists and craftsmen or other business and social entrepreneurs. These careers, however, were also highly politicized, collectivist, and transformative in orientation, and concerned with directly challenging the status quo, when compared to other careers; they may also be comparatively short-lived due to the

considerable challenges and demands involved. These differences may set organizing careers apart, even from other unstable ones. The analysis of decision options also helped to show a variety of career available arrangements (trajectories and pathways), including part-time, full-time, and volunteer work in for-profit, nonprofit, union, and informal organizations, as well as organizing-direct services blends and post-organizing administrative or movement elder roles. These were more complex than the basic distinctions of professionalized, entrepreneurial, and commuter trajectories expected, and organizers experimented with such alternatives over time.

The discovery of distinguishable types of decision points for each organizing career phase is also very helpful in constructing descriptive understandings of these careers. Figure 7 depicts some common courses that careers in this sample took, with the types of decision points as key junctures (based on the 72 cases identified and categorized). The arrows connecting them indicate that passing through one type of decision point could result in another particular type of decision point occurring subsequently. The figure also illustrates that the outputs of decision points were assessed by organizers as either positive (+), negative (-), or mixed (+-), in terms of whether they promoted or undermined development and sustainability, which then influenced what future decision points were encountered. Consideration of these factors helps us understand better what differentiates decision points, illustrates the process of trial and error that organizers undertook, and provides an initial descriptive map of organizer careers.

*Preworkforce* organizers were discovering and selecting activism and potential organizing careers. *Preadult decision points* were not examined in detail here, since only a few were identified and these were not selected for discussion by organizers. They were usually triggered by very early opportunities to participate in actions or by foundational personal experiences, so their outputs included entry into activism or politicization. Other organizers




*Note:* This flowchart depicts some common career courses in this sample, with the types of decision points shown as key junctures (based on 72 decision points identified and categorized). The arrows connecting junctures indicate that passing through one type of decision point could tend to result in another particular type of decision point occurring subsequently. The figure also illustrates that the outputs of decision points were assessed by organizers as either positive (+), negative (-), or mixed (+-), in terms of whether they promoted or undermined development and sustainability, which then influenced what future decision points were encountered.

[1] Early-career patterns could vary depending on whether individuals attended college, experienced education dropout, and when they entered workforce.

[2] Only three of these were identified, and they were seen as notably different from adult decision points, so they were not examined in detail.

[3] None were examined in detail, so limited data were available about what led to these decision points or followed them.

[4] This decision type could involve finishing or leaving educational programs and entering or reentering the workforce.

*Figure 7.* Organizer Career Flowchart

entered into activism as adults. *Preorganizing activism decisions* addressed opportunities to take personal risks, which these organizers took; *youth and student organizing decisions* similarly presented opportunities to take on new leadership roles. The effects of such pre-workforce decisions were usually positive, though Sara provided a notable exception and dropped out before *attempting to launch a career*. All participants in this study who made such attempts were successful in doing so (the sample is skewed in this direction because individuals who were unsuccessful in sustaining organizing for at least two years were not selected for study).

*Early career* organizers who had found suitable trajectories were likely to encounter calls to deepen commitment, which were answered in these cases and concretely put into action through adding new campaigns or taking on more advanced roles. Organizers at these junctures experienced high levels of intrapsychic change, yet their external environments remained stable and supportive. Those who had not yet found a satisfactory trajectory *experimented with new trajectories*, outputs of which always involved implementation of new organizing pathways or related academic programs. The results were mixed but did not result in dropping out.

In *middle and later careers*, organizers were either building on existing trajectories, launching or protecting capstone ventures, or making difficult decisions about whether to leave such projects to try significantly different trajectories or to leave the movement altogether. Midcareer organizers were the most vulnerable to movement dropout, though efforts to lunch capstone ventures within existing trajectories were often successful. Finally, *late career* decisions illustrated some of the triggers and challenges of the transition to retirement, a largely unexplored subject about which future research would be very useful. These organizers were looking to retire with their personal satisfaction and survival needs met, and to pass on wisdom to younger generations. Some late career organizers were able to increase or continue

engagement as other work responsibilities fell away. Kara was the only organizer included in the sample who discussed decisions about retiring as an organizer; she did retire but remained active in the movement in other capacities.

Overall, since the study included only individuals who successfully started organizing careers, outcomes of early decision points were most consistently positive, becoming increasingly uncertain over time. At the same time, early careers showed more frequent decision points and higher instability than did later careers. These findings support the idea that organizing is often a youthful endeavor, and that it possible to organize for several years and never really settle down. Those who stayed for the long haul seem to achieve some stability eventually, though mid- and late-career upheaval was common.

**Development and Sustainability Processes**

Sensemaking, decision making, navigation, and transition and transformation represent the ongoing processes of development and sustainability. These activities kick into high gear at decision points, so studying these junctures enabled a focus on the steps by which they unfolded, and on the themes that rise to prominence when action is needed and uncertainty is high. While much of this information is applicable to all careers, this analysis revealed important ways in which processes are different in organizer careers than in others. For organizers, sensemaking processes were explicitly politicized, and decision making was likely to take place collectively with other activists, or with a collectivist orientation that balanced individual needs with those of the movement and other members. These orientations were not typical of other careers (Hall, 2002; Bright et al., 2005; Watts,1999; Wiese et al., 2002) , suggesting that the variety of career decision-making models available may be inadequate to address organizing careers.

Additionally, participants' navigation processes were especially entrepreneurial, and organizers appeared to be in transition far more often than most workers would be. This study is, to my knowledge, the first to grapple with the relationship between transition and transformation in any population. Transition addresses the process by which people cope emotionally and interpersonally with changing environments and expectations, while transformation is a spiritual and deeply personal process of political development and commitment building. Organizer accounts usually reflected a larger process of transformation, though decision points were not always themselves transformative experiences, so cases did not follow a single set of transformative steps. Similarly, transition was relevant to every case, yet the steps and other specifics varied, partly due to the high level of change and instability present in these careers. Several of these more distinctive findings may apply to other work for the common good, such as social entrepreneurial careers and justice jobs, and to some other precarious careers as well.

**Development and Sustainability Needs**

As my preliminary framework suggested, development and sustainability depend upon organizers' ability to attain satisfaction, generate and devise pathways, cultivate and economize resources, build identity and relationships, and continuously adapt and transform.

**Satisfaction.** The data support the idea that satisfaction is framed in terms of both social change goals and personal life needs and interests. Prior studies have indicated that a belief in the efficacy and potential impact of a social change effort may be the ultimate measure of satisfaction for organizers; my findings have strengthened this evidence, as understandings of satisfaction were often politicized and translated into practice and social change ideas. Still, organizers realized that social change outcomes would always be uncertain, so having a positive personal experience in the movement was often equally important as collective outcomes, as

were other personal goals and the need for a good fit between personal and movement life. Contrary to the common stereotype of idealistic organizers, the level of financial compensation clearly made a big difference for many of them.

For organizers, then, personal and career needs interacted with values-driven goals and desires. The levels and mix of these components within organizers' projects varied according to several factors. In many ways, the type of fit that organizers seemed to seek out might be best described by the concept of bonding, with its inclusive understanding of connection to a group's ideology, vision, leadership, organization, and/or community. Together these ideas encompass not only the practice style, values, and professional identity considered in notions of congruence, but also social and emotional connection and desire for identity development. Still, in some professionalized settings, congruence is a better descriptor of what they sought, since the expectation of deep emotional bonding was not always present.

**Generating and devising pathways.** My findings support Downton and Wehr's (1997) assertion that exploitation of opportunity structures may be a key to activist careers, and that creativity and entrepreneurialism are prominent components of these careers. Rather than just filling existing positions, organizers in this study sometimes generated new pathways, participating in startup ventures and entrepreneurial campaigns, and they found ways to devise or reshape existing positions to fit their organizing goals. It was common for positions to be precarious or undeveloped in some way, even within institutionalized organizations. Within existing positions, choices of alternative campaigns were often one way in which individuals fit their activities to their goals. Many positions allowed some room for creativity in organizing roles. For a few, for-profit ventures provided an unanticipated alternative pathway. The need to exploit opportunities meant that career decision making often overlapped with organizational and

campaign decision making, as organizers looked for opportunities where they could add value to organizations by building and mobilizing resources, and sometimes by taking personal risks or contributing personal resources.

**Cultivating and economizing resources.** My findings support the notion that organizers happened by chance upon the initial resources to participate in movements but then had to continuously cultivate resources in order to persist. This study also confirmed that resources needed for organizing careers include situational availability, identifiable competencies and skill sets, access to opportunities (via interpersonal and institutional networks, credentials, and reputation), and attitudinal availability. Furthermore, available resources were often sparse and had to be used to the greatest advantage, or economized and strategically aligned. Examination of decision points has helped to clarify that organizers therefore had to consider both immediate and long-term resource needs simultaneously in their decisions and actions and has revealed specific strategies by which they did so.

**Building identity and relationships.** In this study, relationships with mentors, supervisors, peers, and movement groups and networks, and with family, schools, organizations and professions, and communities outside the movement, were depicted simultaneously as motivators, assistive factors, and normative influences because of the attachments and obligations that came with them. Ties to educational institutions were also important in accessing and cultivating pathways, consistent with cultural-relational views of movement participation. The focus on decision points has revealed new insights about the importance and dynamics of these relationships, since it highlights the ways in which career decision-making and navigational processes can interact with them. My findings highlight negative dynamics in movement relationships that can hinder development and sustainability, and the fact that

relationships with educational institutions can be negative or difficult. Identity was often framed in terms of values, ethics, and movement ideologies, as expected. This study has revealed more about how identity changed and developed, since decision points presented identity-related transition and transformation issues not as readily visible when the focus is on overall career experiences.

**Adapting and transforming.** The need for adaptability in activist careers, highlighted by previous scholars, has mostly focused on the entrepreneurial process by which organizers and other career activists continuously adapt their activities to changing local resources and social change goals. Others have posited that, in order to overcome stressors and cycles of burnout associated with these careers, and to pursue continued evolution of political views and identities, long-term activists must engage in deep personal learning and change throughout their careers. So it was expected that transformation would be perceived in a lofty, idealistic way, whereas my findings help to connect the transformational process with more mundane concerns about career decision making and navigation. Finally, despite the large literature addressing individual transitions in organizations generally, prior studies of organizers have underplayed the emotional and interpersonal strain that can accompany change. The present focus highlights the fact that transitions may occur more often in organizing careers than in others, even with the difficulties that individuals faced in making such adjustments.

**Manifestations of Needs: Decision Point Objectives and Considerations**

The foregoing needs, ever-present in careers, translated to specific objectives and considerations at decision points. Examination of decision points was very useful in revealing the kinds of challenges and dilemmas that organizers must negotiate at varying points of their careers. Looking at the crux of various decision points with respect to the main questions

presented, rather than just at the decision or outcome, is in keeping with Weick's (2003) notions of sensemaking: he noted that Western thought has a preoccupation with answers and outcomes, but that this focus leaves out the all-important issue of how a situation is framed or constructed in the first place. Here we have seen that defining the crux of a situation was a key step in the sensemaking process for organizers, and examination of these further revealed the main objectives organizers sought, and how cases essentially differed (i.e. decision point types).

The satisfaction-related themes discussed above meant that organizers had to reflect on their motives, needs, and expectations of organizers at decision points, which then dictated whether aspects of existing and potential pathways were seen as attractors (such as the freedom to practice using one's own style, having friends in the movement, and feeling respected in the workplace and in movement communities) or detractors (such as a lack of fit with personal life needs, very conflicted relationships, high turnover, or lack of organization). There were also entrepreneurial navigational questions about how to generate and devise pathways, such as whether ventures were viable and whether the financial risk and investment of personal and movement resources required would be justified. This evaluation process was especially visible in cases of startup or unfunded positions, and often when pathways required investment of personal resources and assumption of personal financial risk. Often organizers also considered what resources a particular pathway might bring them in the future, thereby enabling them to better add value to ventures and open up additional opportunities later; they also considered what resources a prospective pathway might consume.

Further, organizers considered new aspects of the obligations and agendas associated with their identities and relationships. While previous studies tended to frame such tensions as existing between relationships outside the movement and responsibilities or relationships inside

the movement, organizers in this sample also faced cross-pressures and obligations within movements that could complicate and constrain commitment. Individuals also cultivated institutional connections and legitimacy, and some encountered challenges such as dropping out of school and difficulties in attaining credentials. This may reflect incongruence between organizer values and those of mainstream institutions or marginalization.

Times of transition were typified by the need to adjust goals and plans to changing circumstances, to let go of roles and attachments, and to acknowledge the complexities of extricating oneself from organizations. Themes related to the "in-between" periods of transition included experimentation, change and conflict in relationships, and long periods of uncertainty before forming new permanent pathways. Issues in new environments involved transferring skills, reputations, and other resources from one setting to another, along with forming new relationships, roles, routines, and expectations. Considerations related to transformation included seeking and evaluating worthy risks and learning experiences, coping with burnout, and making political and personal meaning of experiences and decisions. While it was expected that content of a personal nature would arise as participants discussed these experiences, it was surprising that personal trauma and mental health issues could motivate choices but could also complicate situations and decision making (especially among female organizers).

A focus on decision points was also helpful in highlighting the tensions and conflicts involved. Organizing itself was shown to be conflict-oriented work that presented a high risk of burnout. Decision points were full of other intrapsychic, interpersonal, and interorganizational tensions—pitting personal versus collective agendas, lofty goals against the limited resources available to achieve them, and relational obligations within the movement versus the demands of personal lives. In some cases the tensions included dilemmas regarding professional ethics or

ideological conflict.

Further, organizers frequently negotiated a dialectic between collaboration and competition as they endeavored to resolve these conflicts. The usually prevalent ethos of collectivism called for working together as demanded by a social justice orientation, a shared identity among organizers, and the importance of solidarity and fairness in movements seeking to achieve social change goals. These ideals and needs could conflict with or moderate the competition over territory, scarce resources, and vision that often arose during times of transition and uncertainty. Such conflicts were expressed in terms of difficulties in taking on new responsibility or in giving up previous autonomy, as well as through leadership succession conflicts and intergenerational clashes.

**Ecological Factors and Organizer Strategies**

The study has offered new insights about ecological factors important to these careers, including organizational and policy climate, the level of saturation as well as norms and preferences of job markets. Organizational conditions such as the intensity of work, the availability of movement resources to support activities, the organization's level of efficiency, and whether it was hierarchical, collective, or individualistic in its decision-making structures could act as attractors or detractors influencing organizer decisions, depending on their projects. The insights offered about how organizational change and leadership transition interacted with individual decision making also represented new information, including situations involving visible power struggles and even outright organizational takeovers. It was notable that these issues could appear when organizers themselves were not the central leaders in transition. Most importantly, this study has offered a way to conceptualize contextual factors either as assistive to decision point processes and desired outputs, as barriers, as opportunities, or as normative forces,

and it has examined how these factors interacted and could vary according to personal histories of organizers. For example, organizers raised in the movement sometimes coped with different and sometimes more complex cultural norms, identity issues, and relational obligations at decision points than did other organizers.

Insights about the organizer career strategies uncovered in this inquiry build upon prior understanding, in that (a) the array of strategies presented a more comprehensive menu than previously available, (b) strategies are tied to specific subprocesses at decision points, (c) strategies can involve optimization and suboptimization, and (d) the various cases presented have allowed for reflections upon the differing ways in which people reconciled the various conflicts and tensions presented to them. For example, a more collaborative approach to leadership succession focused on the need for leaders to exit at the appropriate time and guide a positive transition to their successors (as discussed by several women in the sample). On the other hand, more competitive or individualistic models appeared in efforts (all described by males) to poach organizations, wrest control from an opponent who had differing views of an organization's mission, or make unilateral decisions about campaigns or an organization's future.

**Diversity Themes and Disparities**

In this study, issues related to sociodemographic background emerged naturally and fairly readily, given the politicized orientation of participants. Results included (a) both positive and negative experiences of diversity or issues related to organizers' sociodemographic characteristics, (b) notable disparities among organizers of different backgrounds in satisfaction and in ease of access to organizing positions, and (c) differences in the themes that arose in careers, according to gender and socioeconomic background. These findings suggested different processes and outcomes for organizers of disadvantaged backgrounds, depending on whether

affirmative efforts to include them were undertaken. Findings also offered some support for the notion that parents may find organizing difficult, and that women may face additional risks, although we do not know whether the trauma and violence that some women in this sample faced are representative of justice movements or simply of the greater risk that women face generally.

**Dialectical Patterns**

Organizing careers were shown to involve ongoing experimentation (with each project being its own experiment), consisting of dialectical patterns of trial and error. Individuals framed current understandings in terms of their subjective responses to these experiences, striving to replicate or adapt positive experiences and learn from negative ones. Experimentation also furthered politicization, as positive and newly transforming experiences were often seen as affirming organizers' developing political views. Negative experiences could foster disillusionment, further fuel outrage and motivation toward social change, or represent an inspirational experience of self-sacrifice. Critiques of movements—such as concerns about funding requirements that presented ethical dilemmas or undermined effective practices—led participants not only to seek pathways that matched their goals, but also to protest or avoid those pathways that embodied the actions they criticized. Pathways that promised to remedy some previously experienced failure were especially attractive. These findings fit notions of transformative learning, as they involved a second dialectic between action and reflection.

Outputs of decisions often represented or required the resolution of conflicts, so organizers also experienced alternation between periods of conflict and reconciliation. Finally, decision point experiences revealed cycles of burnout and renewal, in which organizers would become overwhelmed and demotivated, sometimes followed by periods of rejuvenation. Decision points were often turning points in this cycle or served as catalytic crises, although (as

noted) their role differed greatly across cases and organizers.

**Outputs and Outcomes**

Descriptive output measures (pathway, trajectory), types of change (pathway, trajectory, personal life, intrapsychic), and level of change are all measures that assist in understanding qualitative changes and consequences of decision points. These measures can contribute to existing understanding of how organizers adapt projects to available resources, how they adapt their work to fit their goals, and how they cultivate and select new pathways and campaigns in keeping with their projects if adaptation is not possible.

Rigorous evaluation of organizers' development and sustainability outcomes is relatively difficult. Given that these careers are entrepreneurial, underresourced, and driven by nonmaterial incentives, many traditional measures of career change (e.g., promotion within an organization, or an increase in pay and other benefits) are not always useful as measures of career development or advancement. Additionally, the challenges and disincentives that plague these careers make sustainability a major issue. Therefore I have relied on the development and sustainability outputs that followed decision points to further understand these careers. These measures took the form of increases or decreases in participatory resources, and I distinguished for purposes of analysis the resources most aligned with development (network, reputation, credentials, and expertise) from those most relevant to sustainability (availability, motivation/satisfaction, and overall mobilization).

**The Discourse Revisited: Decision Points and Overall Careers**

**Understandings of decision points.** The results of this study have added considerably to the very limited social work findings available about the selection and acquisition of organizing roles. Mondros and Wilson's (1990, 1994) need-expectancy theory is essentially what Hall

(2002) called a career matching theory, or one that attempts to explain organizational selection in terms of the fit between workers and their roles or organizations. I have focused on how organizers themselves framed and evaluated congruence with specific pathways, via application of the concept of projects as developed by Ganz et al. (2004). Yet whereas the emphasis in their study was on boiling projects down to a single overarching objective (e.g., social reform), my study included projects reflecting an array of other agendas and considerations, as well as notions about their relationship to each other. Findings illustrated organizers' selection and pursuit not only of professional pathways, like those generally examined in social work studies, but also of voluntary and noninstitutionalized activities. For this reason, micromobilization understandings of bonding may be useful in expanding ideas about congruence to encompass emotional allegiances and social needs along with values- and practice-related measures.

Yet the emergent theory presented in Figure 6 goes beyond concerns about matching career pathways with desired trajectories; it also helps to remedy the fact that community practice studies have given almost no attention to decision point processes among organizers. My findings confirm the idea postulated by Ganz et al. (2004) that narratives that guide decision making contain ideas about the past, including the particular kinds of past experiences that were relevant at decision points: preadult experiences and sociodemographic characteristics, positive and negative experiences in the movement, previous decision points, and adult personal histories. My results similarly clarify and enumerate the components of projects and other narratives, as well as the steps by which they were formulated and revised, thus helping to flesh out the processes by which adaptation and selection were undertaken. As such, I have noted that this look at decision points has yielded findings with implications not only for organizing careers, but also for our understanding of sensemaking in general.

Given the agreement in community social work practice studies that organizing careers require entrepreneurship, combined with the paucity of previous work exploring what this looks like and how it is done, this study has added rich descriptions of entrepreneurialism as expressed in a variety of case examples. The finding that organizing in professionalized settings overlapped frequently with provision of direct services supports the view of Starr et al. (1999) that organizers must often creatively adapt positions to align them with organizing goals because pure organizing positions can be difficult to obtain. Findings also suggest some difficulties in moving from social work positions into organizing positions and vice versa, somewhat contradicting the observation of Starr et al. that organizers trained in social work easily managed a dual identity encompassing the two disciplines. Finally, my study includes examples of organizers launching new ventures, which are aspects of these careers not previously examined in social work literature.

Social entrepreneurship perspectives were helpful in elucidating the steps and stages in the navigational (or entrepreneurial) process applicable to their situations, as well as the need for organizers to scan for and recognize viable opportunities. These findings may also inform the social entrepreneurship literature, since I have provided a framework for understanding the pursuit and exploitation of opportunities appropriate to organizers. While other models for business and social entrepreneurial decision making exist, these do not accommodate the political concerns and subversive nature of organizing, an important aspect to consider because the political risks entailed in potential ventures may present extra challenges with regard to viability and how organizers demonstrate their ability to add value. Existing models may also be inadequate to make sense of the various forms that entrepreneurialism in organizing careers may take, whether in quasi-stable pathways or in temporary, precarious, and unpaid ones with even

less promise of personal return than standard social enterprises.

Transformation is seen as central to community social work practice ideas about organizing, and its role in organizer and activist decision-making and commitment is recognized across the bodies of literature considered for this study. Yet it makes only brief appearances in need-expectancy understandings, Downton and Wehr's (1997, 1998) theory of persistence, and the adaptive model of career decision-making by Ganz et al. (2004). Ideas from studies about work for the common good were helpful in contributing further insight with regard to the nature of transformation within organizer careers, and the intuitive decision-making strategies exhibited by some participants were also consistent with findings in these inquiries.

My findings also help to build upon the important work of Rooks (2003, 2004), who pointed out that organizers can experience cross-pressures between the capacity constraints and unfavorable conditions in organizations, on one hand, and the culture of sacrifice and vocation among organizers on the other. Present findings revealed an array of additional tensions, pressures, and conflicts with which organizers contended. Studies of work for the common good have tended to frame concepts solely in terms of spiritual and political transformation, without giving much attention to the process by which individuals extricate themselves from nonideal circumstances, adjust to new roles and routines, and manage relationships in flux.

In addition to examining career decision processes, I have built upon ideas about what predicts or explains the decisions that organizers ultimately make. Mondros and Wilson suggested that individuals would remain in specific pathways, and in organizing as a career, if they determined that their pathways were sufficiently congruent, or that persistence offered a sufficient chance of bringing about the social change they deeply desired. I examined all options considered, not just the decision to leave or stay in an organization and the field of organizing.

These findings have therefore helped to explain cases in which congruence did not predict outcomes, in which pathways did not match trajectories, or in which multiple congruent options were available; other components of projects seemed to help in explaining these situations. Hence, one idea suggested by these data is that, while it is likely true that organizers assess whether a pathway is *sufficiently* congruent, as suggested by need-expectancy theory, they also assess their various opportunities and constraints, choosing the *best available* option at a given moment.

Studies have mainly predicted decisions based on prior and status-quo factors. Findings here confirm the importance of many of these factors. The studies by Mondros and Wilson (1990, 1994) and Ganz et al. (2004) both suggested that organizers goals and intentions may be more useful in explaining organizer decisions than were sociodemographic characteristics. My results support the contention that activist motivations and interests cannot be assumed based solely on sociodemographic characteristics, and that intention plays a key role in decision-making outcomes. Still, much of the literature has argued that personal characteristics often inform the content and orientation of projects themselves, and that differential barriers affect working-class and minority leadership in labor unions. Rooks (2003, 2004) also found critical disparities in the experiences of organizers from disadvantaged backgrounds. My findings confirm that differences in both motivation and access, based on race, class, gender, generation, and other personal characteristics, must not be discounted or understated in these careers.

In addition to prior and status-quo factors, I have presented an array of potential explanations for decision point outputs, which suggest that much can happen after decision points are triggered to alter the course of events—a fact that only Rooks (2003, 2004) and Downton and Wehr (1997) had previously highlighted in long-term activists. As already

discussed at length, changing circumstances presented new barriers or opportunities, or they altered the degree of congruence or bonding that an organizer was experiencing in existing or new pathways, and organizers' own actions and strategies also had effects.

**Organizing career discourse.** Describing the processes of sensemaking, decision making, navigation, and transition or transformation is useful for the study of diverse careers, since these processes would apply broadly and since (to the best of my knowledge) no existing studies of any career sector have synthesized in a single model these concurrent and overlapping decision processes. These and other results contribute to the existing discourse on organizer careers and on leader development and persistence. Ganz (2000) has argued that leaders use their biographical experiences and network connections to wage effective campaigns, which then further build their careers; my research elaborates the processes and strategies by which these experiences and resources were cultivated and utilized. It also highlights the importance of both formal education and movement training resources in organizer development. Managing organizational transitions emerged as an important part of organizing practice, and organizers varied between the collaborative and competitive approaches to leadership succession. As Ganz et al. suggested, the issues of career decision making, as addressed in the present study, represent an important part of leadership development, since this subject matter addresses the ways in which people advance their careers as well as how they select and adapt pathways toward social change and other goals.

Moreover, my findings support the view that transformation occurs continuously throughout careers, and that transformational processes and experiences may be relevant to many or all organizer decision points but are not bounded by them. They also support prior findings that a positive social environment within activist groups, access to learning opportunities, and

taking personal risks and making sacrifices are important to praxis and transformation, and ultimately to deepening commitment. However, my data have highlighted the problem that many movement contexts do not provide strong support for the transformative process and the fact that transformation could occur without deepened commitment or could be frustrated by a lack of access to positions. These findings go beyond those of earlier studies and, as such, build upon community practice ideas about the process and outcomes of empowerment, how workplace settings affect empowerment, and the effect of empowerment on commitment to organizations and organizing.

Ultimately, my proposed theory contributes to our understanding of persistence among organizers, as conceptualized by Downton and Wehr and other micromobilization theorists. Whereas these authors have noted only a few important junctures in these careers, my research has mapped out common career courses involving 12 key types of decision points, as well as what may trigger these situations, what types of options are presented, and common outputs that may result. My findings have also added to Downton and Wehr's argument that exploiting opportunity structures requires alignment of necessary resources and minimization of availability constraints, and that activists must therefore act to manage relationships and resources and be creative in developing pathways at decision points. I have explored the relationships among these strategies and four identified subprocesses, and I have added the concept that they aim at either optimization or suboptimization. My proposed theory supports persistence theory's notion that commitment waxes and wanes with cycles of burnout and renewal and has added that development and sustainability also unfolds via dialectical patterns of trial and error, action and reflection (or praxis), and conflict and resolution.

Overall, my findings confirm and help to clarify the interrelated nature of development

and sustainability: the ability to persist must be developed, and one must also achieve some sustainability in order to continue developing. I have further provided specific evaluative measures of change and suggested hypotheses about what may promote or undermine them. These results generally support psychosocial explanations for participation. In other words, the inquiry suggests that individuals are motivated by a combination of rational-choice, intuitive or nonrational (but not usually irrational), cultural-relational, and spiritual concerns. Both social change and personal goals are important. Further, echoing Ganz et al. (2004), this perspective supports the notion that these careers are neither predictable nor random, but adaptive. Decision points are revealed as precarious moments that may have magnified and cumulative effects on subsequent careers and entrepreneurialism, as well as to undergo transition and sometimes transformation. Agency and context both mattered a great deal to outcomes, interacting idiosyncratically in various cases.

## Limitations of the Study

Several main limitations of this study should be noted. First, the findings relied primarily upon self-reports by organizers. Self-reports were only partially helpful in capturing organizational influences; I therefore supplemented these data by reviewing organizational websites and historical documents wherever possible. Had I been able to speak with other members of the groups to which study participants belonged, I could have obtained a fuller picture of organizational conditions as well as insights into how others viewed participants and their decisions. Nonetheless, this approach was appropriate for capturing data about individual experiences, in order to capture a phenomenological view of how perceptions led to future choices and actions. Additionally, Hall (2002) has suggested that any claims about career advancement, development, sustainability, and other aspects of careers are best garnered from

workers themselves, since only they know their career goals and whether they have been met.

Second, it is difficult to demonstrate causality even through careful analysis of these data. Further testing would be required to draw links between the many factors identified here and short-term outputs; even greater effort would be needed to verify and elaborate upon my proposed explanations about how decision point processes and outputs may link to long-term outcomes. Third, generalizability was well beyond the scope of this inquiry, although the sample size was relatively large for a qualitative study and within the recommended range for a case induction study. Even though the cases and individuals included were reasonably diverse, when one seeks to build a theory on the basis of the recollections of 14 participants, one is still as the point where, as Gilgun (2007) pointed out, even a single additional case could alter the theory.

After working through all this analysis, a reader might still wonder, "Why look so intently at decision points? What have we learned that we could not have learned just as well, or perhaps better, by doing standard career history interviews?" In a broad sense, this study set out to explore the proposition that processes at decision points both are shaped by the unique characteristics of these careers and exert significant impact upon career development and sustainability. Presumably, any interviews on career history would touch on key turning points in each organizer's life, but this focus on specific decisions gives much more attention to the choices made, the alternatives available, and the detailed factors that influenced choices and outputs at these junctures. This approach was productive, since it lent credibility to existing coarser-grained notions, by showing that they hold up at a finer-grained level of examination, while also revealing nuances and even contradictions not visible in other studies.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should address the decision point types and themes identified here and

investigate further how themes vary by type, as well as how the sequencing and complexity of a decision affects outcomes. Organizer development and sustainability needs merit additional examination, as do the tensions and conflicts generated by these needs and the dialectical patterns identified. Such studies would be especially useful if they included testing of the explanatory variables and hypotheses I have suggested, as well as deeper comparisons of the differing organizer trajectories uncovered.

The intersection of organizational leadership succession and individual career transitions emerged here as an important set of dynamics, both for organizer development and sustainability and for organizational development. At the individual level, we have seen here that notions of transition are helpful even though transition may be nearly constant in these careers. Still, it was difficult to capture stages that fit all cases, since there was so much variation in duration and sequencing of decision points; further examination of transition among organizers would undoubtedly provide helpful new insights. At the organizational level, leadership succession is already recognized as an important issue in current research on nonprofit organizations generally, but has not been studied heavily in social justice organizations. Further exploration of how these issues affect organizers and the strategies they use in these situations is warranted. Other strategies of organizers also deserve further attention, as the analysis presented in this study stopped short of unpacking the specific content of each career strategy or tactic and to what extent, why, and how it was effective. Future examination of the optimizing and suboptimizing effects of these strategies would be very useful, perhaps in relation to how they serve processes of both adaptation and selection.

We also need continued study of organizers of color, those from working-class backgrounds, female organizers, and organizers with children, in conjunction with broader

consideration of multicultural organizing and diversity issues in justice movements. Further inquiries could look into what factors enabled organizers from these groups to have positive and empowering experiences. Negative experiences related to race, class, gender, and diversity, such as facing oppression or feeling marginalized or stereotyped in the movement, might be easier to interpret and address with the help of additional research. The indications of a gender difference in leadership succession strategies, with men showing a greater tendency toward competitive approaches while women appeared to be more collaborative, suggests the interesting possibility that there could be distinctive male and female approaches to organizing.

The study also indicates several methodological and conceptual recommendations for future study of organizing careers. It suggests that examining organizing careers with an emphasis upon decision points may be an efficient way to understand a variety of issues related to the barriers, options, choices, and outputs that arise in these careers. Case induction has also proven to be a useful method of studying the experiences of broad and diverse populations of organizers working in an array of settings. A narrative and ecological lens, conceptualizing opportunity structures as nested and multidimensional, seems essential to study of these careers. My research also indicates that inquiries about organizing careers should pay attention to the multiplistic nature of activist affiliations. Pathways (including permanent positions as well as campaigns and other temporary pathways) and trajectories emerged as particularly useful narrative constructions.

### Recommendations for Organizers, Organizations, and Movements

Organizers themselves may also find the results presented here useful, helping them to identify pitfalls and barriers, as well as strategies for development and sustainability. They may apply these understandings both to their own careers and to practice, since organizing practice is

aimed at shepherding the participation of others. The data also offer ideas regarding how to build strong, sustainable movements and organizations that will attract, keep, and promote the development of organizers. Pay level and other career incentives were clearly important motivators to many organizers, regardless of their depth of ideological commitment to their cause. Mentoring and training, a positive social environment, waging successful campaigns, and modeling social justice values and organizational operations all emerged as motivators.

Yet the search for the resources required to provide good jobs and career development supports for organizers raises other questions for organizations and movements. One participant strikingly referred to "the 501(c)3-ification" of movement groups, or their tendency to become dependent on funders whose interests may not be fully aligned with those of the movement. Her reflections are consistent with critiques by other study participants, and by many social justice advocates, of what has been called the "nonprofit industrial complex" in the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Experiences like those of the two participants in this study who became involved in for-profit ventures, a pursuit not usually seen as consistent with justice organizing, may have significant implications as creative ways to support careers but also as ways in which the profit motive may subtly undermine social justice goals.

These results also offer insights into how justice movements can best empower the populations that they aim to benefit. The importance of conscious efforts to affirm and support women, working class organizers, and ethnic, racial, or sexual orientation minorities was made clear by the more difficult experiences these participants often had when such supports were absent. Having been raised in the movement, on the other hand, may present advantages for development and sustainability, as well as a significantly different career development process from that of other organizers. The upsides of this are that (a) multigenerational families in the

movement may be able to provide some permanency and assist movement goals and subcultures, and (b) raising children in movement contexts who would otherwise be at a disadvantage to participate as adults sometimes seemed to moderate these challenges. The possible downside is that these individuals could become a sort of "movement royalty," born into an elite class with an unfair advantage in occupying leadership roles and controlling movement resources. Such a trend could of course disenfranchise participants who do not benefit from such a legacy.

## Implications and Recommendations for Social Work

Given the profound threats to social services that current neoliberal measures of austerity and privatization of public services pose, and to the ability of social workers themselves to make a decent living, I would argue that the need for the profession of social work to embrace today's economic and social justice efforts is obvious. Similarly, social work skills and perspectives may be very useful in helping movements overcome some of the challenges they face in retaining and promoting the development of organizers. For example, this study suggests that movements would benefit from a much more thoughtful and healthy approach to the risks that activists and organizers are asked to shoulder and the methods used to encourage risk taking and retention. Rachel offered support for this notion:

> What drove me nuts [about organizing] was having to essentially manipulate [members] to do something that maybe they didn't wanna do versus, I mean, we're social workers, right? We're supposed to let people determine their own futures and their own goals and all that.

Social workers could also foster greater attentiveness to the mental health issues and risks of violence and abuse that people, especially women, face in their lives and even in movements that outwardly espouse high ideals. My experiences in justice movements have further revealed an array of unmet needs for other services, such as legal aid and medical services in protest situations. In this study, organizing roles frequently overlapped with human services

responsibilities, suggesting that social workers may already be well-positioned to contribute more directly to social change efforts.

On the other hand, proactive support for organizers' professional development has all but disappeared in many schools of social work, and my findings have suggested that some social work jobs are actually unwelcoming to organizers. Rachel, for example, reported that she was advised against listing her organizing background on her resume when applying for some clinical social work positions. Nor were social work credentials or experience necessarily helpful in accessing organizing positions, as evidenced in Jacobo's case. Social work students in the study by Starr et al. (1999) attended Hunter School of Social Work, one of the few social work programs left in the country with a strong Community Organizing and Planning specialization. If these students expressed fears, over a decade ago, that pursuing an organizing career may be a luxury they could not afford, it stands to reason that most social workers today feel even less supported in these goals.

This inquiry has provided a comprehensive theory of decision points and of the interrelated processes of organizer career development and sustainability. Even now, the future of the global upsurge of populism remains highly uncertain. Movements' ability to reach their goals will likely depend on their ability to attract and retain a diversity of effective organizers. This inquiry suggests that both social work and non-social work organizers are activists at heart who bring the keen minds of specialists to their practice, and yet whose bodily needs must be supported as well. I hope that this research has offered insights about how these aspects of organizers' identities may best be supported and their efforts maximized.

## Appendix A: Definitions

**Activism:** Social movement participation, involving a change-oriented stance toward some aspect of society.

**Career:** The entire content, duration, and activities of paid and unpaid work, or a person's "entire life in the work setting" (Hall, 2002, p.12) in social movements; it can be viewed ecologically as the course that one metaphorically navigates through the field of opportunities and workplace environments available to them.

**Career development:** The process and outcome by which individuals plan careers and cultivate new career resources and opportunities.

**Career sustainability:** The process and outcome by which individuals continue social movement organizing over time, despite high challenges.

**Decision point:** A point in the career history of an organizer that he or she identifies as requiring important decision making about his or her future participation in movement work. Decision points are generally described by organizers as junctures that had a significant impact on their overall sustainability and development as organizers. Decision points may or may not result in a transition or a change in course.

**Ecological:** Using a person-in-environment view of organizers in organizations and movements. Social movement organizations (SMOs), movements, and the overall nonprofit and voluntary sector represent ecologies, or systems, within which the individuals examined in this study operate.

**Organizers:** Participants in social movements who (a) self-identify as movement organizers; (b) are identified by their peers as movement organizers; and (c) perform pivotal roles in movements in which they act to recruit, train, and encourage the participation of other members, and/or serve as tactical, ethical, and political strategists in popular mobilizations for social and cultural change.

**Pathway:** A job or volunteer position, conceptualized as a particular role within a certain primary organizational context performed with a specific material arrangement (full-time, part-time, paid or unpaid, etc.).

**Practice:** The "production and reproduction of specific ways of engaging with the world" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000); activities in which organizers engage in their official capacities as organizers.

**Projects:** Mental narratives or frameworks by which organizers arranged and prioritized their various motives, goals, and the means by which they aimed to satisfy these. Components of projects found in this study included organizers' intended trajectories, ideologies or practice styles that they believed in, specific populations or causes that they wanted to benefit, allegiances to local networks or organizations, and personal life needs.

**Social movement:** Organized social change-oriented efforts and conversations that transcend any one protest or group, use extra-systemic or unconventional political and social strategies, and represent the connective social tissue surrounding related networks of organizations, individuals, and specific social change campaigns. These are also referred to as mass movements because they tend to generate a larger culture or community related to the societal issues addressed.

**Social movement organizations (SMO):** "Named associations" (Lofland, 1996, p. 11), or groups (ranging from formal nonprofit organizations to informal voluntary associations and ad hoc committees) that view themselves as part of a movement (or set of related movements), implement campaigns in the name of movements, and therefore serve as major building blocks of movements.

**Trajectory:** A direction along which an organizer's career can advance, with its own set of requirements and reward and incentive structures that the individual must negotiate. Trajectories can be professionalized, entrepreneurial, or commuter, and understandings of these also include the sector in which organizers work (nonprofit, labor, for-profit, voluntary), and whether they are blending organizing with other activities. An organizer's intended trajectory may include specific goals that he or she wants to achieve, or it may simply be a direction along which he or she would like to progress.

## Appendix B: Participant Careers--Detailed (N = 14 careers)

| Pseudonym, Ethnicity | Generation, Age | Family SES | Stated Current Religious Orientation | Preadult Antecedents to Activism | Education† | Adult Career Duration (Years)Δ | Number of Total Adult Pathways | Current Status/ Pathway#Δ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women of color** | | | | | | | | |
| Amy (South Asian) | X/Y 31 | Working class | | Isolated politicizing events | Completing postgraduate | 11 | 5-10 | Organizing: master's student in public administration; part-time organizer with maltreated youth |
| Rachel (Mexican/ German) | X/Y 31 | Working class/ movement resources ** | | Extensive family and personal participation | Completed postgraduate | 14 | 10-20 | Not active: recently left organizing in a union-nonprofit partnership to pursue professionalized clinical social work |
| **Men of color** | | | | | | | | |
| Ace (Arab/white) | Y 24 | Borderline/ movement resources** | "devout Catholic" | Immersed in movement life | Completed college | 6 | 5-10 | Organizing: professionalized community organizer in housing organization |
| Jacobo (Latino) | X/Y 28 | Working class | Catholic background | Generalized family values | Completed college | 2.5 | 10-20 | Nonorganizing: professionalized social worker in housing organization with organizing potential in role |
| Ramon (Latino) | Y 28 | Middle class | Catholic background | Generalized family values | Completed college | 10 | 5-10 | Organizing: professionalized organizer/board member in day labor center, founder of new related organization |
| Samora (African-American) | X 40 | Middle class | | Politicized family environment | Completed college | 20 | 5-10 | Postorganizing: professionalized co-executive director/cofounder of nonprofit organizing homeless |
| **White women** | | | | | | | | |
| Barbara (Jewish*) | Baby Boomer 63 | Middle class | | Extensive family and personal participation | Completed postgraduate | 45 | >20 | Postorganizing: professionalized deputy director in nonprofit partnership with labor union; approaching retirement |
| Kara (Irish Catholic*) | WW II 72 | Borderline** | Catholic | Youth movement group participation | Pastoral | 40+ | >20 | Postorganizing: elder and staff in a movement group but retired as an organizer |
| Natalie | X 33 | Upper middle class/movement resources | Non-practicing Catholic | Extensive family and personal participation | Completing postgraduate | 14 | >20 | Postorganizing: on leave from PhD program in social transformation, preparing for international organizing in Africa |
| Sara | Y 28 | Borderline** | | Isolated politicizing events | Completing college | 5 | 5-10 | Not active: on "mental health break" from organizing, unsure about future participation in social movements |
| **White men** | | | | | | | | |
| Jonathan (Jewish*) | X 38 | Middle class, movement resources | | Immersed in movement life | Completing postgraduate | 20 | 5-10 | Nonorganizing: current PhD student in sociology studying labor union strategy |
| A.F.S. ("WASP, Scottish")* | Baby Boomer 62 | Upper middle class | Non-religious | No data | Completed postgraduate | 20 | >20 | Postorganizing: CEO of for-profit climate change technology company with large national nonprofit environmental partner |
| Irving (Jewish*) | WW II 79 | Working class/ movement resources | | Immersed in movement life | Formal blue-collar apprenticeship | 61 | >20 | Organizing: founder of voluntary global organization, no plans to retire |
| Skyler (Jewish*) | X 33 | Upper middle class | | Politicized family environment; limited youth activism | Completed postgraduate | 5 | 5-10 | Organizing: communications director of drug policy reform organization |

Appendix B Legend:

* When asked about their ethnicity, several participants stated “Jewish” as their ethnic identity. These participants did not discuss their current religious orientations. Kara similarly identified Irish Catholic as her ethnic heritage, though she also spent portions of her life exploring other religions and philosophies; she was explicitly anti-Catholic for a significant portion of her midlife. A. F. S. described his background as White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

** “Borderline” refers to being raised on the borderline of working and middle classes, as reported in Table 3. “In movement” means that the individual was raised in the movement, and therefore may have had access to participatory resources that their socioeconomic status would not otherwise suggest.

† All participants received some form of training within movements.

# Pathways refer to roles in particular organizational settings.

Δ At time of interview, paid and unpaid. Including youth participation, participants had been involved in activism for eight to 74 years (median 20 years) as of the interviews, and had organized for four to 60 years (median 14 years).

Note: The World War II generation refers to individuals born prior to or during World War II. Baby boomers were born circa 1945-1963, while Generation X organizers were born circa 1964-1976. Participants born circa 1977-1980 were on the border of Generation X and Y, and those born in or after 1981 were Generation Y

## Appendix C: Organizing Affiliation

(N = 14 careers)

| HISTORICAL PERIOD | TYPE OF ORGANIZATION | |
|---|---|---|
| *1940s and 1950s:* | civil rights groups<br>Communist groups | Jewish/Catholic leftist youth groups<br>youth labor/socialist groups |
| *New Left* | anti-criminalization of youth<br>antiwar groups<br>Catholic left groups<br>civil rights groups<br>drug policy reform<br>ethnic-based groups | free media groups<br>gay rights/gay liberation groups<br>political parties<br>student/tenant groups<br>women's groups |
| *Present day* | anti-poverty<br>art activist<br>peace-antiwar<br>community/neighborhood groups<br>day labor centers<br>drug policy reform groups<br>economic development/justice groups<br>environmental/environmental justice groups/ coalitions<br>ethnic/women's groups<br>GLBTQ groups<br>human rights/immigrant rights groups<br>INGOs | labor unions<br>local citizen action groups<br>national community organizing coalitions<br>online political groups<br>political parties<br>profession-based groups (e.g., psychology peace group)<br>school reform groups<br>social work organizations, for-profit social ventures<br>socialist groups<br>student/youth groups<br>union/nonprofit partnerships |

## Appendix D: Status-Quo Pathways in Geohistorical Context

Cohorts 1 and 2 (n=15)

| Decision Point Type | Decision Point | Main Pathway(s) | | | Geohistorical Context |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Role(s) | Context(s) | Broad Sectors/ Movements | |
| **Preorganizing/ student** | Barbara DP1 | Preorganizing activism (civil rights, student movement) | College, local chapter grassroots organization | Academic, voluntary social action | 1964<br>N. California/Midwest |
| **Starting careers** | Irving DP1 | Preadult organizing (labor, progressive, Communist Party) | High school, communist/leftist youth groups | Academic, blue-collar, voluntary labor, public (U.S. Army) | 1948<br>S. California |
| | Ramon DP1 | Preorganizing activism (day labor, students of color, electoral, labor) | College, day labor organization, ethnic student group chapter, gubernatorial campaign, faculty union | Academic, voluntary social action/human services, nonprofit social action/human services | 2004<br>N. California rural with East Coast travel |
| | Ace DP3 | Professionalized organizing (church-based, housing) | Catholic volunteer corps, nonprofit grassroots organization | Nonprofit, voluntary social action, voluntary religious | 2008<br>S. California with nonlocal interaction |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | Skyler DP2 | Professionalized organizing/ direct services (addicts/drug policy) | Cross-border for-profit treatment clinic | For-profit/voluntary human services, international, policy, voluntary social action | 2003<br>S. California with international travel |
| | Samora DP1 | Professionalized organizing (homeless) | Nonprofit grassroots organization/ service provider | Nonprofit social action/ human services, international | 1992<br>N. California |
| **Early trajectory experiments** | Rachel DP1 | Professionalized organizing (immigrants) | Local chapter of national nonprofit grassroots organization | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, labor | 2005<br>N. California/S. California |
| | Amy DP2 | Entrepreneurial/commuter; temporary roles: tutor, instructor; voluntary organizing (ethnic-based) | For-profit nonmovement company, university, sex shop , voluntary ethnic group | Nonprofit social action/human services, policy, academic | 2005<br>East Coast |
| | Jacobo DP2 | Professionalized nonorganizing direct services (homeless youth), starting Peace Corps, role unknown | Nonprofit service provider, starting Peace Corps (no campaign yet) | Nonprofit social action/human services, academic, public (Peace Corps) | 2005<br>S. California |
| **Potential trajectory changes** | Rachel DP2 | Professionalized organizing (low wage/unorganized labor) | Nonprofit labor organization with union partner | Labor, nonprofit social action/human services | 2010<br>S. California |
| | Jacobo DP3 | Professionalized organizing/ direct services (MSW placement) | MSW program, nonprofit grassroots organization | Academic, nonprofit social action/human services, professionalized/ voluntary labor | 2007<br>S. California |
| | Kara DP1 | Commuter organizing (blue-collar, voluntary)/entrepreneurial organizing: school bus driver, tenants' rights, lesbian commune | Lesbian commune, school bus company, newly integrated schools | Blue-collar, voluntary social action | 1976<br>East Coast/N. California |
| | Barbara DP4 | Professionalized postorganizing/direct services (director) | Nonprofit grassroots organization/service provider | Nonprofit social action/human services, labor | 1991<br>S. California |
| **Late career/ retirement decisions** | Kara DP2 | Entrepreneurial organizing/ pastoral (GLBTQ, nonviolence) | National nonprofit grassroots organization, church | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, religious | 2006<br>N. California (with nonlocal interaction) |
| | Kara DP3 | Entrepreneurial organizing/ pastoral (GLBTQ, church reform) | National nonprofit grassroots organization, church | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, religious | 2006<br>N. California/East Coast travel (with nonlocal interaction) |

## Appendix E: Derivations of Status-Quo Pathways

Cohorts 1 and 2 (n=15)

| Career Stage | Decision Point (DP) | Role | Time Commitment | Material Arrangement | Type of Pathway |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preorganizing/ transition to workforce | Barbara DP1 | Preorganizing activism (civil rights, student movement) | Student + part-time | Student support, volunteer | Voluntary college activism |
| | Irving DP1 | Preadult organizing (labor, progressive, Communist Party) | Student + part-time | Student support, volunteer | Voluntary youth activism |
| | Ramon DP1 | Preorganizing activism (day labor, students of color, electoral, labor) | Student + full-time | Student support, volunteer | Voluntary and part-time college activism |
| | Ace DP3 | Professionalized organizer (housing) | Full-time + part-time | Stipend/ room and board | Professionalized nonprofit organizing |
| Early | Skyler DP2 | Professionalized organizing/ direct services (addicts/drug policy) | Full-time + part-time | Salary | Professionalized international organizing/direct services |
| | Rachel DP1 | Professionalized organizer (immigrants) | Full-time + part-time | Salary + benefits, volunteer | Professionalized nonprofit organizing |
| | Samora DP1 | Professionalized organizing/ direct services (homeless) | Full-time | Salary + benefits | Professionalized organizing/direct services |
| | Jacobo DP2 | Professionalized non-organizing direct services (homeless youth) | Full-time | Salary + benefits | Professionalized nonprofit direct services |
| Middle | Rachel DP2 | Professionalized organizer (low wage/unorganized labor) | Full-time | Salary + benefits | Professionalized organizing (labor) |
| | Jacobo DP3 | Professionalized organizing/ direct services (MSW placement) | Full-time + full-time | Student support, volunteer | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services; MSW program |
| | Kara DP1 | Commuter organizing (blue-collar, voluntary)/ entrepreneurial organizing: school bus driver, tenants' rights, lesbians | Full-time + full-time | Salary + benefits, volunteer | Commuter organizing (blue-collar, voluntary)/entrepreneurial organizing |
| | Barbara DP4 | Professionalized postorganizing/direct services (director) | Full-time | Salary + benefits | Professionalized director of organizing/direct services |
| Late/retirement | Kara DP3 | Entrepreneurial organizing/ pastoral (GLBTQ, church reform) | Full-time | Stipend + fixed income, volunteer | Entrepreneurial organizing/pastoral |
| | Kara DP2 | Entrepreneurial organizing/ pastoral (GLBTQ, nonviolence) | Full-time | stipend + fixed income, volunteer | Entrepreneurial organizing/pastoral |

*Note: This appendix is a companion to Appendix C. Types of pathways in Column 6 were derived from analysis of information in columns 1,3, 4, and 5.*

# Appendix F: Contextual Domains and Actors

Cohorts 1 and 2 (n=15)

| Type | Decision Point | Geohistorical Context | Sectors/Movements | Contextual Domains | Named Actors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Preorganizing/ student** | Barbara DP1 | 1964 N. California/ Midwest | Academic, voluntary social action | 2 organizations<br>2 voluntary groups<br>1 travel campaign<br>2 movements<br>1 academics<br>1 underground music scene | 1 individual in path<br>2 boyfriends<br>1 movement<br>Mother<br>1 teacher, university |
| **Starting careers** | Ace DP3 | 2008 S. California + nonlocal | Nonprofit, voluntary social action; voluntary religious | 3 organizations<br>4 networks<br>1 home life | 2 individuals in path<br>2 individuals in network<br>Father<br>Girlfriend<br>1 organization |
| | Ramon DP1 | 2004 N. California rural + travel | Academic, voluntary social action/human services, nonprofit social action/human services | 4 organizations<br>2 networks<br>1 academic<br>1 temporary housing<br>1 personal life | 4 individuals<br>4 groups/network |
| | Irving DP1 | 1948 S. California | Academic, blue collar, voluntary labor, public (U.S. Army) | 3 movements<br>2 jobs<br>1 union<br>Army<br>Various youth groups<br>Family life | Movement leadership<br>Army<br>Girlfriend<br>3 individuals in path/movement<br>Macro forces |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | Skyler DP2 | 2003 S. California + cross-border | For-profit / voluntary human services, international, policy, voluntary social action | 2 organizations<br>3 networks<br>2 voluntary groups<br>1 therapy<br>1 home life | 2 neighbors<br>1 therapist<br>Girlfriend<br>2 voluntary groups<br>2 organizations<br>Police<br>City authorities |
| | Samora DP1 | 1992 N. California | Nonprofit social action/ human services, international | 1 organization<br>2 international movements<br>1 campaign | 2 individuals in network<br>1 group<br>2 movements |
| **Trajectory experiments** | Jacobo DP2 | 2005 S. California | Nonprofit social action/ human services, academic, public (Peace Corps) | 4 organizations<br>2 MSW programs<br>Peace Corps<br>Family life<br>Student groups | 4 individuals in path<br>3 informal groups in path<br>2 organizations<br>2 parents<br>Roommates |
| | Amy DP2 | 2005 East. Coast | Nonprofit social action/human services; policy; academic | 6 groups<br>1 network<br>Market<br>Home life | 6 individuals in path<br>Girlfriend<br>2 informal groups<br>1 network |
| | Rachel DP1 | 2005 N. California/S. California + travel | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, labor | 5 organizations<br>2 networks<br>Market<br>Personal life | 2 individuals in path<br>3 individuals in network<br>2 parents<br>Boyfriend<br>4 organizations<br>1 network |
| **Potential trajectory changes** | Jacobo DP3 | 2007 S. California | Academic, nonprofit social action/ human services, professionalized/ voluntary labor | MSW program<br>8 organizations<br>Market<br>Home life | 2 individuals in network<br>1 informal group in path<br>5 individuals in paths<br>10+ organizations<br>Girlfriend (in movement) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 2 parents |
| | Kara DP1: | 1976 East Coast/N. California | Blue-collar, voluntary social action | Commune<br>2 organizations<br>4 voluntary groups (1 nonpolitical)<br>Family life<br>Flower shop | 4 individuals in group (including girlfriend)<br>Ex-husband<br>Son<br>Spiritual teacher<br>Business partner |
| | Rachel DP2: | 2010 S. California | Labor, nonprofit social action/human services | 3 organizations<br>2 networks<br>Market<br>Home life<br>Spirituality | 5 individuals in path<br>1 informal group<br>3 organizations<br>Headhunter |
| | Barbara DP4: | 1991 S. California | Nonprofit social action/human services, labor | 2 organizations<br>3 networks | 3 individuals in path<br>Mother<br>Friend<br>1 informal group<br>3 organizations<br>1 network<br>1 policy maker<br>1 funder |
| **Transit to retirement decisions** | Kara DP2: | 2006 N. California + nonlocal | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, religious | 3 organizations<br>3 networks | 5 individuals in path<br>1 individual in network<br>2 informal groups |
| | Kara DP3: | 2008 N. California + travel/nonlocal | Nonprofit/voluntary social action, religious | 6 organizations<br>2 networks | 5 individuals in path<br>1 individual in partner organizations<br>2 informal groups<br>1 organization |

*Note:* This appendix is a companion to Appendix C. The numbers of domains and actors included in columns 5 and 6 are not definitive, as I counted only the domains and actors explicitly named by each participant, and participant accounts of decision points varied as to the level of detail provided.

## Appendix G: Prior Influences on Decision Points, and Their Origins

Cohorts 1 and 2 (n=15)

| Decision Point Type | Type of Previous Experience | Specific Experiences Discussed (with subjective evaluations* and frequency of response**) |
|---|---|---|
| **Transition-Age (Preorganzing and Starting Careers) (4)** | previous pathways | childhood participation (+) (2)<br>college (+) (2)<br>travel (+) |
| | previous developmental activities | childhood socialization (+) (2)<br>networking (+) (4)<br>politicized childhood |
| | personal histories | family relations<br>conflict between family and movement |
| | previous decision points | identity/belonging (+) (4)<br>transformative experiences (+) (2)<br>reasoning selected current path/trajectory |
| **Deepening Commitment (2)** | previous pathways | labor (+) |
| | previous developmental activities | training, networking (+) |
| | personal histories | addiction/recovery issues |
| | previous decision points | transformative experiences<br>reasoning selected current path/trajectory |
| **Trajectory Experiments (3)** | previous pathways | college/postcollege (+) (2)<br>organizing (-)<br>direct service pathways successful but incongruent (+-)<br>nonmovement/nonorganizing (+-) |
| | previous developmental activities | training; networking (+) (2)<br>network building (+-)<br>lacked strong networks (-) |
| | personal histories | childhood trauma<br>family movement participation (+)<br>family relationships |
| | previous decision points | (+-) experiences<br>access barriers (-) |
| **Trajectory Changes (4)** | previous pathways | labor (+)<br>college/MSW organizing placement (+)<br>organizing job (-)<br>direct service (+-)<br>identity issues (-)<br>social change outcomes of previous campaigns (-) |
| | previous developmental activities | networking (+) (2)<br>training (+)<br>networking (+-)<br>lacked training/mentoring |
| | personal histories | romantic relationship issues<br>personal life overlap with movement (+)<br>spiritual/sexual orientation changes<br>family relationships (3)<br>youth or recent trauma (2) |
| | previous decision points | transformative experiences (+)<br>reasoning for selected current path/trajectory<br>availability/access barriers (-) |
| **Retirement (2)** | previous pathways | (+-) experiences<br>borderline/fringe status in groups (-) (2)<br>conflicts in current pathway (-) (2) |
| | previous developmental activities | nonviolence training/socialization (2)<br>pastoral training (2) |
| | personal histories | personal life overlap with movement (+) (2)<br>spiritual/sexual orientation changes (2) |
| | previous decision points | reasoning for selected current path/trajectory (2) |

*Some, but not all, prior experiences were framed as important because they were either positive or negative; they are noted as positive (+), negative (-) , or mixed (+-) when relevant.
**n = 1 unless otherwise noted.

## Appendix H: Derivation of Cohort 3 Decision Point Types
(n=15)

| Career Stage | Decision Point | Age, Point in Life Course | Crux of the Decision | Decision Point Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-workforce** | Natalie 1 | 21, Transit to adulthood | Shift from environmental focus to social justice, involving a series of school- and internship-related decisions | Student organizing |
| | Sara 2 | 22, Transit to adulthood | Whether to remain in voluntary organizing role despite burnout and unmanageable workload | Student organizing |
| | Sara 3* | 23, Transit to adulthood | Whether to remain in voluntary organizing role despite even greater burnout, unmanageable workload, and incongruence with organization | Student organizing |
| **Transition to workforce** | Barbara 2 | 19, Transit to adulthood | Whether to stay in school, despite loss of financial aid, and how to begin an organizing career | Starting career |
| | Amy 1 | 21, Transit to adulthood | What career to pursue after graduation; change in focus from international relations/development to social justice as paid career | Starting career |
| | Ramon 2 | 23, Transit to adulthood | Starting first full-time paid organizing/direct services position, launching the new program | Starting career |
| **Early career** | Ace 4 | 23, Early adulthood | Navigating unpaid period while waging campaign to restore paid position and save organization | Call to deepen commitment |
| | Jonathan 2 | 24, Early adulthood | Whether to remain in current organizing position in for-profit venture, as organizational growth and philosophical differences with founder caused problems, how to gain credibility | Trajectory experiment |
| | Amy 3* | 32, Adulthood | Transition from MPA program to full-time workforce, how to build on status-quo part-time work organizing sexual abuse survivors and whether to found a nonprofit as an avenue to do so | Settling on trajectory |
| **Middle career** | Natalie 2* | 34, Adulthood | Whether to stay with program in South America proving incongruent with practice wisdom, whether to stay in school, what to do next | Settling on trajectory |
| | Samora 3 | 28, Early adulthood | How to manage conflict with a local union whose opposition threatened to shut down his organization and his founder/ director role | Capstone venture |
| | Ramon 3* | 28, Early adulthood | "Ready for something new," so how to evolve out of current role into a new project | Capstone venture |
| | Barbara 3 | 31, Adulthood | Whether and how to start a commune to support activism and family life, how to save failing marriage | Capstone venture |
| **Mid-late career** | Irving 4 | 52, Midlife | Letting go of national-level work and furthering international work, founding a new international voluntary venture | Capstone venture |
| **Late career** | A.F.S. 1 | 55, Late life; quasi-retirement | Becoming active in the debate on global warming and deciding to found a for-profit company to combat climate change as an economic justice issue | Trajectory change/ capstone venture |

*Decision point still in process at time of interview

# Appendix I: Decision Point Types by Analytical Cohort
(N=30)

| Career Phase | Type of Decision Point | Cohort 1 (n=8) Typical | Cohort 2 (n=7) Extreme | Cohort 3 (n=15) Mixed | Not examined in detail[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-workforce** | Preadult | ----- | ----- | ----- | Ace<br>Jonathan<br>Skyler |
| | Preorganizing decision | ----- | Barbara DP1 | Sara DP1 | |
| | Student/ youth organizing decision | ----- | ----- | Amy DP1<br>Natalie DP1<br>Sara DP2 | |
| **Transition to workforce** | Starting Career | Ace DP3<br>Ramon DP1 | Irving DP1 | Barbara DP2<br>Ramon DP2 | |
| **Early career** | Calls to deepen commitment | Skyler DP2 | Samora DP1 | Ace DP4 | |
| | Trajectory experiments | Amy DP2<br>Rachel DP1 | Jacobo DP2 | Jonathan DP2 | |
| **Middle/ late career** | Settling on trajectory | ----- | ----- | Amy DP3<br>Natalie DP2 | |
| | Transformative excursions | ----- | ----- | ----- | Samora<br>Kara<br>Barbara<br>Irving |
| | Advancements within pathways/trajectories | ----- | ----- | ----- | Rachel (2) |
| | Capstone venture decisions | ----- | ----- | Barbara DP3<br>Irving DP4[2,3]<br>Ramon DP3<br>Samora DP3<br>A.F.S. DP1[2] | |
| | Potential changes in trajectory[3] | Barbara DP4[3] | Jacobo DP3<br>Kara DP1[3]<br>Rachel DP2 | | |
| **Late/end of career** | Retiring as an organizer | Kara DP2<br>Kara DP3 | ----- | ----- | |

[1]Of 72 decision points identified by the 14 participants, only three preadult decision points were identified, and these were not considered by participants to be directly career-related decisions, so they were not examined. Four cases that could be classified as midcareer transformative excursions were identified, in which organizers embarked on risky travel campaigns that held the potential to be transformative experiences. However, insufficient data were collected on these to allow for analysis in this study (although Natalie DP2 and Irving DP4 exhibited elements of this type). Finally, Rachel identified two cases that represented midcareer advancements within existing pathways and trajectories, but she did not deem these to be as important as other cases and so they were not examined.

[2] Retirement benefits/ independent material resources in place but not considering retirement as an organizer.

[3] Also capstone venture decisions.

# Appendix J: Descriptions of Outputs

Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 (N=30)

| Type | Decision Point | Output Pathway[1] | Output Trajectory[2] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Preorganizing** | Barbara DP1 | Student organizing | Clarifying: organizing in general |
| **Student/youth organizing** | Amy DP1 | Student organizing | Clarifying: professionalized organizing |
| | Natalie DP1 | Extended student environmental justice internship | Clarifying: social justice/organizing |
| | Sara DP2 | Student organizing | Unclear |
| | Sara DP3[3] | Nonmovement travel, "mental health break" | Unclear |
| **Starting careers** | Irving DP1 | War resister, commuter organizing | Commuter organizing (blue-collar) |
| | Ramon DP1 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services |
| | Barbara DP2 | Entrepreneurial organizing | Clarifying: organizing |
| | Ace DP3 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing (temporarily unpaid) | Professionalized nonprofit organizing (paid) |
| | Ramon DP2 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services |
| **Calls to deepen commitment** | Skyler DP2 | Professionalized for-profit cross-border organizing/direct services; volunteer organizing/ direct services | Clarifying: professionalized organizing/drug policy reform |
| | Samora DP1 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing | Professionalized nonprofit organizing |
| | Ace DP4 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing | Professionalized nonprofit organizing (paid) |
| **Trajectory experiments** | Amy DP2 | Professionalized nonprofit organizing; volunteer organizing | Questioning professionalized nonprofit organizing; perhaps educational policy reform |
| | Rachel DP1 | Professionalized labor organizing | Professionalized labor organizing |
| | Jacobo DP2 | MSW program, direct services placement, student activism | Professionalized nonprofit organizing/direct services |
| | Jonathan DP2 | Undergraduate student | Professionalized nonprofit organizing |
| **Settling on trajectories** | Amy DP3[3] | In process; completing master's program, multiple entrepreneurial pathways including part-time professionalized organizing | Professionalized postorganizing, nonprofit director/founder |
| | Natalie DP2[3] | In process; between pathways | In process; entrepreneurial international organizing |
| **Capstone venture decisions** | Samora DP3 | Professionalized postorganizing, nonprofit director/founder | Postorganizing, nonprofit director |
| | Ramon DP3[3] | Professionalized postorganizing, nonprofit director/founder | Unclear; continue and broaden experience |
| | Barbara DP3 | Entrepreneurial organizing, activist commune resident | Clarifying: professionalized organizing and higher education |
| | Irving DP4 | Voluntary postorganizing, founder of international organization | Voluntary postorganizing, founder of international organization |
| | A.F.S. DP1 | Professionalized postorganizing, for-profit CEO in environmental justice | Professionalized postorganizing, for-profit CEO in environmental justice |
| **Potential trajectory changes** | Jacobo DP3 | Professionalized nonprofit, direct services; non-organizing (organizing potential) | Unclear: nonprofit/labor organizing or direct services |
| | Barbara DP4 | Professionalized labor organizing | Professionalized labor/nonprofit organizing |
| | Kara DP1 | Nonmovement entrepreneurship; voluntary spiritual pursuits | Nonmovement entrepreneurship; voluntary spiritual pursuits |
| | Rachel DP2 | Professionalized nonprofit, direct services internship; nonorganizing | Unclear: professionalized direct services/organizing blend, or commuter direct services/organizing |
| **Transit to retirement decisions** | Kara DP2 | Entrepreneurial nonprofit organizing/pastoral | Entrepreneurial nonprofit organizing/pastoral |
| | Kara DP3 | Nonprofit activism, pastoral, postorganizing | Nonprofit activism, pastoral, postorganizing |

[1]Pathways refer to roles performed in a particular organizational setting.

[2]Trajectories refer to intended career direction, with inherent requirements and incentives.

[3]Decision point was still in process at time of interview.

## Appendix K:
## Movement Participant Definitions of Social and Economic Justice Organizers

**Data Sources:**
16 participant screening questionnaires
Some recommender data also included

**Participants and recommenders gave the following responses to the question: How would you define a social movement organizer? How do you know one when you see one?**

1. Radicals, outsiders who work to address poverty. Involves civil disobedience/agitating. Organizers balance confrontation vs. collaboration with authority. Only an organizer if they are doing more than lone/solo work: must work with others, have the authority to represent group, etc.

2. A social movement organizer is someone who is actively engaged within a group effort to assertively challenge systemic inequality, while at the same time demanding the redistribution of power/wealth within an equitable manner. I think the quickest way to spot an organizer is if he/she is participating within a community event (e.g. rally, protest, etc.), and the event addresses a system inequity in a controversial and confrontational manner. Also, one can identify organizers by their clothes; organizers typically dress casually, and hopefully sporting union-made and/or fair trade apparel.

3. Someone who engages in insurgent politics, works for social transformation. Organizers are building institutions, they don't just march. There may be justice organizing that is not insurgent. Hare Krishnas are NOT; farmworkers, civil rights activists, SDS, etc. are. Unsure whether providing social services to underserved groups counts.

4. Someone who commits his or her life to empowering people.

5. Someone who is familiar with the political environment, who acts alone or is empowered by an organization to make decisions on the fly in the best interest of the movement.

6. A social movement organizer is somebody who works either as a volunteer or paid staff in a social movement and whose work involves bringing more people to support the issue, either through educational efforts, fundraising efforts, or in some case, mission-focused work. However, an organizer is more than just a service provider.

7. In my view, an organizer is an individual that focuses people on/towards an issue/a goal. (I just organized my family to congregate at a hotel for a surprise birthday party.) A social movement organizer would then focus people on an issue/towards a goal with a larger social impact (immigrant rights, child welfare, environmental justice, queer awareness, religious unity, etc.). I do not know of a particular thing that would brand an individual as an organizer. How do you know a citizen when you see one? A gay person? Someone with cancer or AIDS? Anyone could be an organizer—the little old lady at her church and that 14-year-old who holds animal rights meetings.

8. A social movement organizer builds power among people who are structurally disenfranchised from centers of decision-making power, by conducting political education workshops and skill-building campaigns, and by responding to the needs of the people s/he is organizing.

9. An organizer is someone who can create opportunities and motivate individuals to engage in concerted activity with other people towards a common goal.

10. To me an organizer is one who works to include and organize many parties in working toward shared goals (such as a safer community) through one or many avenues. I know an organizer when I see one if the individual is respected and or listened to by others; if they are able to articulate the issues at hand through their own words and also by assisting others in articulating their opinions, goals, and needs; and finally if the person is able to keep infusing the energy necessary to move forward.

11. I define social movement organizer as someone who actively involves her/himself in a social movement *and* attempts to enlist the support of others in an action. Exemplars of this may be as simple as forwarding e-mails with a call to action or recruiting others to attend a social action.

12. Organizers all look different, you can't tell one by seeing them. I define an organizer as having the ability and desire to work with others to create social change.

13. Developing and implementing strategies that shift power, wealth, and cultural hegemony from the wealthy to the general population, particularly those aspects of the population who have been locked out.

14. I may define them differently than some: organizers are people who are cognizant of what technology will do and steer it toward what is healthy for humans. They strive for the greater good, using technology.

15. Organizers build capacity amongst the grassroots, "la basa," to control their own lives—they try to organize themselves out of a job. They are strategic and methodical about it.

16. A person engaged in the art and science of building organizations to address people's needs. Social justice organizers are guided by a strategic vision of root causes, so they work to develop capacity and leadership.

17. A person who takes a belief and puts it into action, and challenges others to take action. It is true that everyone has their own definition of organizing.

**Reasons that participants gave for considering themselves organizers:**

1. I have been working with others to challenge various sources of systemic inequality such as the media, the state budget allocation process, etc. in a way that was uncomfortably honest and controversial.

2. At times, I was the only person in the organization involved consistently in immigrant rights, the main contact person.

3. I have been active in work for social justice much more than I have been an organizer, but I did identify as a full-time organizer from 2005-2007 at one organization , and I would say my work with youth at another organization (2001-2005) also had elements of youth organizing.

4. I was trained in the early civil rights movement that the role of an organizer is the highest calling of a social justice activist and that to be able to motivate and empower others to step forward and take action is the most satisfying work there is. An organizer is at the heart of any movement for social justice and is indispensable to movement building. I feel that this work suits my personal skills and talents and I have consciously made it the center of my work life.

5. The main method I utilize in any of my work is to bring people together, one by one or in groups, to listen, to plan, to move forward, and to provide any assistance necessary to helping groups to achieve their goals.

6. Since childhood I have been politically active and engaged my peers to participate in social actions. As an adult I have proactively chosen a career that would make my day-to-day activities a piece of the social justice movement that I am most concerned about. My daily work as a communication director is based around involving others in the pursuit of changing drug policy.

7. I move a progressive/radical agenda in all things I do.

**Reasons that participants gave for *not* considering themselves currently to be organizers:**

1. I feel as if I've been shifted out of the organizing scene for the moment (for reasons such as institutional racism, being too confrontational, hierarchy), and I am currently reflecting upon my desire to stay within organizing and whom to continue my involvement with if I choose to continue within organizing.

2. No, just a little voter registration.

3. Not practically doing it now but still have views.

4. Just retired—now an elder who advises.

## Appendix L

## INTERVIEW GUIDES

### Interview #1
### (Coarse-grained data: Careers and identifying decision points)

Please state your pseudonym:

The purpose of this first interview is for you to recount in your own words your overall career history in social movements.

PART I: OVERALL CAREER HISTORY

Please begin by telling me the first moment you recall being interested in social movement work:

Now let's go a little further. How did you begin to get involved in movements?

What happened then?

And then? (and so on until the story approaches the present time)

And how did you get to where you are now?

Describe your current situation in regard to movement work:

What is ahead for you? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 20?

PART II: MORE DETAIL
Let's go back and get a little more detail. You began your organizing career [recount first movement work experience].

SAMPLE PROBES:
Tell me a little more about how you got into this position.
What were your roles and responsibilities?
Can you describe the context in which you were working? What type of organization(s) were involved?
What was this position like for you?
How long did you stay [at a particular activity or position]?
When performing in more than one organization/ movement at the same time, what was that like?

Okay, then things changed, and you [recount what was next].

SAMPLE PROBES:
Tell me a little more about how you got into this position.
What were your roles and responsibilities in this position?
Can you describe the context in which you were working? What types of organization(s) were involved?
What was this position like for you?
How long did you stay [at a particular activity or position]?
When performing in more than one organization/ movement at the same time, what was that like?
How was this experience different from the previous one? How was it similar?

Continue to gain more depth about each pathway in a similar manner…

Okay, now let's begin to zero in on a few key turning points, or moments in which important life and career decisions were necessary.

PART III: IDENTIFYING DECISION POINTS

Of everything you have talked about, what situations demanded that you make immediate decisions about your organizing work?

Which of these stand out in your mind as most significant to your subsequent development and sustainability as an organizer?

For each key decision point identified:

What triggered decision making at this juncture?

What were its short-term outcomes?

What was it about this moment that was so significant to your future as an organizer?

Is this a decision point you would be willing to discuss further?

What are your thoughts and perspectives about these key decision points? What are they like? Why are they important in this type of career?

**INTERVIEW #2**
**(Fine-grained data: Decision point detail)**

Please state your pseudonym:

The purpose of this second interview is for you to recount, in your own words, your experiences in making career decisions and managing times of transition. We identified several of these moments in your career during the last interview. I would like to try and address [1-5] of these today. Let's begin with decision point #1, which you identified as the time when you were deciding [recount DP1]. Please begin by telling me the story of what occurred at this juncture, focusing on main milestones and events. Then we will go back and collect more detail.

[The following questions and prompts apply to each decision point discussed]

When was the first moment you remember thinking that a decision might be necessary?

Let's review what had occurred in your career prior to this decision point:

Tell me more about your situation at the time the decision point began:

Last time we met, you said that [trigger] triggered this decision point. Can you tell me more about that?

What happened then?

What was the experience of change and decision-making like for you?

What was the short-term outcome of this decision point?

What were some long term consequences for your career?

Are there any other reflections about this decision point you would like to share?

Now, let's go back and address what occurred in a little more detail:

SAMPLE PROBES:

What prior experiences were influential when this moment occurred?
Had you faced similar situations before?
What were your career goals at the time?
Can you give more detail about your role and the context you were in?
What was going on in the organization(s) you were in during the time just before the decision point occurred?
Were any larger societal or movement forces at work that mattered?
What were your personal life needs and situation?
What resources were at your disposal that were relevant to decision-making?

What were the costs and benefits of your current situation?
How did things begin or continue to change once the decision point was triggered?
What were your career and decision-making goals at this time?
What actions did you take?
With whom did you interact in relation to the decision-making process?
What role did these others play in your decision-making and transition?
How did you find out about opportunities?
How was it that you selected a course of action?
How did you move to implement your decision?
How did you go about securing a new position?
How did the change from one position to another feel? What was it like?
How did the process of change progress?
What were some challenges?
How did you manage these?
Were there interpersonal challenges associated with managing the process of change?
Who or what helped you during this time?
How did you manage these?
How did the changes in your work affect things at home?

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