

# LEADING SOCIAL CHANGE:

A Multi-Level Meaning-Making Model

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# STARTING ASSUMPTIONS

- **Social Change** = A movement towards a desired social end; can be understood at multiple levels of analysis (*Aguilera et al., 2007*)
- **Leadership** = a process of influencing others to work towards the accomplishment of “great things” (*Vroom and Jago, 2007*)
- **Research Question** = How do organizational members lead social change from the bottom up?

# MEANING-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP

- Leadership research historically about infusing purpose and meaning in others (*Poldolny et al., 2005*)
- Return to a discursive approach
  - Focuses on use of language, social constructionist approach vs. more psychological models such as trait based approaches (*Fairhurst, 2007*)
- **HOW** do individuals lead social change?

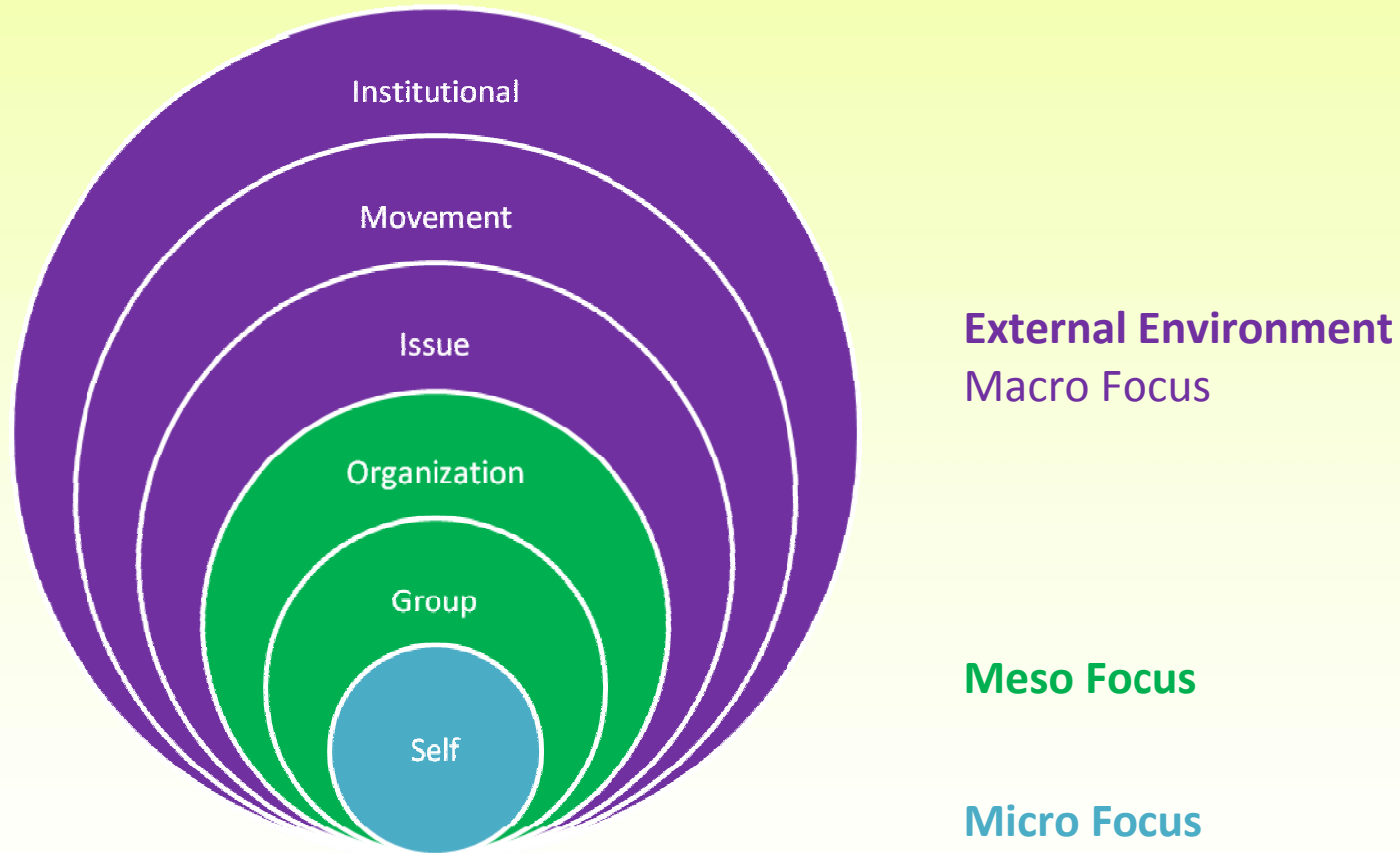
# COMMON THREAD?

## ...Meaning-Making

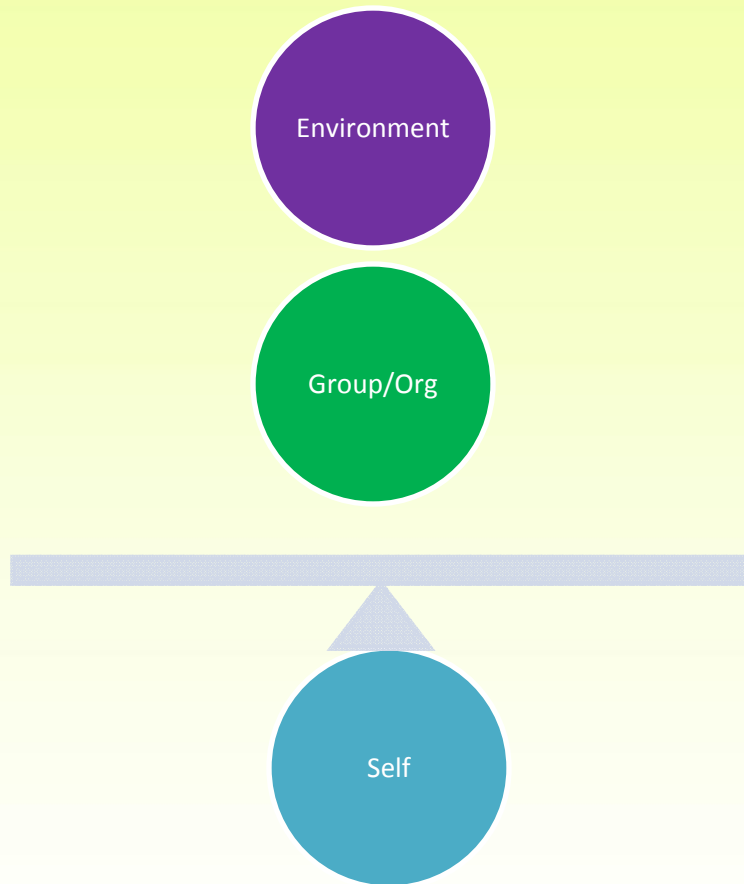
### Theoretical Integration of Literatures Related to Leading Social Change

	Issue Selling	Tempered Radicals	Social Entrepreneurship	Institutional Theory	Social Movements
Meaning Constructing Processes	<i>Selling meaning of issue based on organizational logic</i>	<i>Reconciling conflicting self-meanings</i>	<i>Creating meanings to make sense of performance and provide inducements for resources, including financial and human</i>	<i>Legitimizing meanings to encourage adoption of social issue</i>	<i>Diffusing meanings to leaders of social change inside business organizations</i>
Unit of Meaning	Issue	Self	Organization	Institution	Movement
Key Meaning Challenge for Leader of Social Change Initiative	Using meanings to convince others of importance of issue	Using meanings to balance self's desire for social change and aspiration to be accepted insider	Using meanings to acquire resources	Using meanings to demonstrate legitimacy of engaging in social change	Using meanings to understand an issue and more generally see self as social activist
What Leaders of Social Change Do	Reading organizational context to identify legitimate organizational logics	Blending local meanings of an insider with the critical meanings of an outsider	Telling compelling narrative about the organization's values and purpose	Mediating between institutional and organizational contexts	Translating meanings from a broader social movement into organizationally-relevant tactics to lead social change
	<i>Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Ashford et al., 1998</i>	<i>Meyerson and Scully, 1996; Meyerson, 2001</i>	<i>Dees et al., 2001, 2002</i>	<i>Marquis et al., 2007</i>	<i>Scully and Segal, 2002</i>

# DIFFERENT DOMAINS OF MEANING



# HIGH BALANCE



## High Balance:

All three meaning domains support social change

Transparent with social meanings

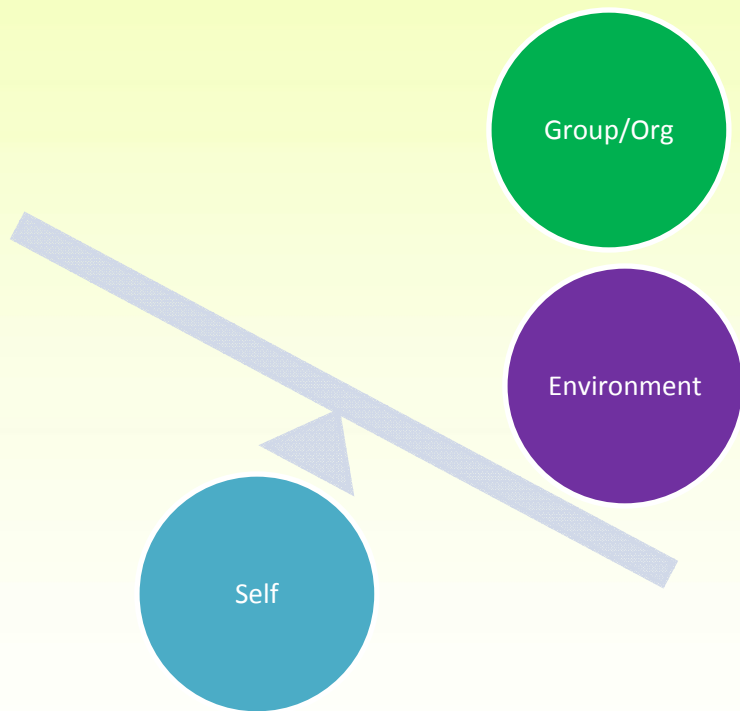
## Meaning Tool:

Affirming

## Consequences:

All meanings become more legitimate, more dominant

# LOW BALANCE



## High Imbalance:

Self meanings inconsistent with organization and environment meanings

Not transparent with social meanings

## Meaning Tools:

Framing, packaging, crafting (*Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Meyerson, 2001; Sonenshein, 2006*)

## Consequences:

Organization and environment meanings become more legitimate and dominant; self-meanings erode

# ISSUE CRAFTING EXAMPLE

## ECONOMIC EMBELLISHING

### Private Reasons:

*The issue of equality is important **to me because it is a fundamental core value** of our society. From the Declaration of Independence (“All men are created equal”), to the civil rights movement of Dr. King, to the Civil Rights Act, our society has repeatedly emphasized the need for equal treatment of all people. Without equal treatment, those discriminated against lose their basic human right to dignity and self-worth.*

### Public Justification:

*The issue of equality is **highly important to the financial success of [Company]**. Equal treatment of all employees in the workplace is not only mandated by state and federal law, it is an essential component of employee morale. . . . If irrelevant factors (such as race and sex) are used to favor certain classes of employees over others, the result will be the perception of unfairness and a disincentive for those who are discriminated.*

# ISSUE CRAFTING FINDINGS

- Economic embellishing and normative subtracting
- More prominent in bottom up change attempts, and when there is value conflicts between the individual and organization
- Agency—individuals intentionally engage in issue crafting

# MEANING MAKING MODEL OF SOCIAL CHANGE

