

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE

The purpose of science is to explain natural phenomena

Theory is a general explanation of how natural phenomena works

Valid theory should explain *all* types, cases, and scales of a phenomenon

What does *not* change as well as what does

Valid theory should be *predictive*

Principle = a specific rule about a natural phenomenon

Principles that can help in understanding sociocultural change:

1. Cultural change is a **systems** phenomena

- Changes occur as an holistic, integrated, and dynamic *system*
Not just a trait (culture is an *integrated system*)
One change is stimulated by other events
One change stimulates other changes
- *All* aspects of culture are subject to change
Psychological/ideological and social as well as technological/economic traits
- Change is the **rule**
Cultural systems are continually evolving

2. Changes are *initiated* and *directed* by the **interaction** between a group's POTENTIALS and its environmental CHALLENGES

- A group's internal **potentials** set the possible range for changes:
The sum of the group's *needs* and *resources* influence those changes which are possible
The greater the internal *diversity* of a group, the more possibilities it has for changes
New traits can be introduced to a group through two *processes*:
New traits can emerge from the process of *innovation*:
The existing pool of ideas provides the basis for innovation
New ideas involve the identification/*recombination* of components of preexisting ideas
New traits can be introduced by *diffusion* from another group
Internal *inconsistencies* initiate change:
Unmet needs
Relative deprivation
Social conflict
Other *cultural features* which direct the course of change include:
Ideology
Leadership
Social structure
- The environmental **challenges** set the actual changes from among the group's possibilities:
The sum of the environmental *demands* and *opportunities*
Selects *which* potentials can work the best under existing conditions
Includes both *socialbehavioral* as well as *ecological* environmental challenges

3. The primary **direction** of change is towards greater group-environment equilibrium/*adaptation*
 - The course of change follows the need to maintain/restore equilibrium (whatever the functional directions)
 - Within* a social system
 - Between a group's *biobehavioral* system and its *environmental* system
 - A trait does *not* change if it contributes to a functional balance in the system
 - Though its *relationship* with other parts of the system may change
 - The *inertia* of a trait or change may be too focused or inflexible (and thus *maladaptive*)
 - Each group is unique in reorganizing its cultural system (cultures are *relative*)
 - The ultimate **measure** of the adaptiveness of a change is *continuation* of the group
 - Intermediate* measures which indicate group continuance can be used
 - eg: population growth, health, etc.
4. Though changes are continual, the **rate** and **degree** of changes are proportional to the relative *disequilibrium* in the group-environment interaction
 - The more *disequilibrium*, the *greater* and *faster* changes are necessary
5. The **scale** of change (unit of analysis) can vary
 - Changes occur at the individual level
 - People can learn/relearn new behaviors (humans are adapted for *learning*)
 - And accrue to collective changes in their culture
 - Changes can occur at different levels simultaneously throughout a social system
6. The basic **process** of change is *reorganization* (synthesis/syncretism) of the SYSTEM
 - It is the cultural **system** that changes - not just traits
 - The *sequence* of adaptation includes:
 - Initial system configuration
 - Group's traits in relative balance with environmental conditions
 - The group's POTENTIALS set the alternatives
 - DIVERSITY maximizes group's adaptive potentials
 - Imbalance in the system
 - Systems balance is upset
 - Malfunctioning or disruptive *internal* relationships
 - Altered or new *external* conditions
 - Reorganization of the **system**
 - Group makes changes to meet the new challenges
 - The *preexisting* DIVERSITY provide the range of POTENTIALS to draw upon
 - ADAPTATION** actually occurs at this stage (or not)
 - Group reorganizes its traits to restore a balance with the environmental conditions (or not)
 - New system configuration
 - All phases are occurring *simultaneously* in a dynamic system
7. The **time** frame of changes need to be specified
 - Adaptive outcomes can be enhanced/reversed in different time frames

The **evaluation** of change should follow scientific principles:

- *Controlled comparison* is needed to establish causal relationships
- *Facts* should be kept distinct from the *interpretations* of those facts
- BIASES (including ethnocentrism) should be recognized and **controlled**
- Conclusions should be based on *empirical* evidence