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
      - 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