

THE CHALFONT PROJECT

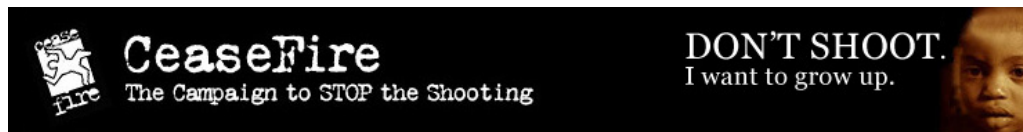
ORGANISATION ARCHITECTS

Viral (social) Change in action: The Chicago CeaseFire model

By Leandro Herrero (28.10.08)

I am just back from the annual Pop!Tech conference in Camden, ME, USA. This is my third time as a participant. This is a forum for exploring the interactions between technology and society. It is evolving towards a platform more focused on social innovation, social entrepreneurship and change. The audience, participants, speakers (mainly US people) are a mixture of people from arts, design, academia, engineering, social trends, entrepreneurship, socio-economic fields, health etc.

One of the presentations was by Dr Gary Slutkin, who is executive director of [The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention](#). I must confess my total previous ignorance of that work. Under the logo/slogan of 'CeaseFire', the project engages people from communities and neighbourhoods to literally stop the circle of violence by confronting individuals of gangs and 'stopping the shooting' (on spot sometimes) and/or stopping the frequent retaliation. The project is extremely successful achieving reductions in shootings up to 40% in the neighbourhoods where the model is operating



What is extraordinary for me is the obvious similitude between our [Viral Change™ model](#) and CeaseFire modus operandi. CeaseFire, like us, uses the language and models of epidemiology (Gary Slutkin day job is Professor of Epidemiology!). Like Viral Change™, the real work in CeaseFire is done by a selected small group of connected individuals called 'interrupters' or 'Outreach workers'. In the graphic below I have attempted to summarise this comparisons.

Viral Change™ has been designed, developed and implemented with the organization in mind. The only reason for this has been so that I could focus on the territory of my daily consulting work as organizational architect. But the Viral Change™ model is a social model, not constrained to those borders. Social change (communitarian, micro-social, social innovation initiatives, public health initiatives, etc) is a perfect territory to implement Viral Change™ as the Chicago 'CeaseFire' project shows.

I will be working on those micro/macro social areas as well in future to at least gather examples of implementations and broaden the Viral Change™ scope. Those of us who do organizational work are bound to learn a lot from the dynamics of social change. Similarly I believe that Viral Change™ can contribute to the further refinement of social initiatives.

Not all of those social change initiatives are Viral Change™ as I have described in multiple places including [the second edition of the book](#). Most of them still follow

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what we call in Viral Change™ ‘Big Splash’, that is, ‘massive (as massive as possible) reaching out’. In many of those programmes there is an implicit assumption that behavioural change will follow the right information or communication campaign (e.g. AIDS). It is a pity that money is largely spend in the communication/big-splash side versus the formation, development and training of ‘social activists’ that influence other people and ‘train’ other activists.

This is a summary of Viral Change™ and CeaseFire. I do not pretend to have all the CeaseFire facts right. I am hoping to be able to visit Gary Slutkin in Chicago at some point, soon to learn more and close the loop and hope to be able to contribute to them as much as they are already showing me how wonderful model the one of ‘small numbers’ is....

	Ceasefire Chicago	Viral Change™ (in organisations)
Theoretical base	Epidemiology. Infections.	Infections. Network theory and maths, epidemiology, behavioural sciences.
Onliner	“Violence is as contagious behaviour, a social infection’	‘Organizational change as an internal epidemic; only behavioural change is real change’
Model	(my interpretation) Key influencing individuals have the power to create high social impact. Community mobilization plays (reinforces) in the background but it is not in itself sufficient to stop the violence	(Stated Viral Change™ model) A small set of behaviours, spread by a small number of highly connected and influential people, creates behavioural tipping points of ‘new ways of doing’ equivalent to sustainable cultural change. It is fast and more efficient
Old model that doesn’t work, abandoned	(my interpretation) Exclusive massive public campaigns appealing to rationality (‘Violence is bad, stop it’) with focus on awareness and communication versus real time behavioural intervention	Big problems need big change, need big initiatives, cascaded top-down the organization, via massive communication programme trying to reach all, and naively expecting behavioural change as a by-product
Model of influence	(implicit; my interpretation) Community influencer (‘one of us’) to people is more effective than Authority role models. Law can be enforced by agencies but behaviours equals bypass/avoid law enforcement. Law enforcement has a role but it is limited as behavioural change agency	Peer to peer is key, Hierarchical authority works on reward/punishment but studies consistently show highest levels of inter personal trust in the ‘one of us’ model. ‘CEO and management’ are substantially lower than peer to peer. Hierarchical authority is not negligible but it is not the most efficient source of behavioural modification
Key players	‘Interrupters’ and ‘Outreach workers’	‘Change Champions’
Their goal	Stop the behavioural circle. ‘Stop the shooting’ (vs. appeal to rationality to stop violence’) Stop retaliation. Real time interruption of the vicious circle	Spread the new behaviours needed for the organizational change, by personal endorsement, personal behavioural modelling and behavioural reinforcement of behaviours in others

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How they do it	Break the chain of events, stop the escalation in situ, one to one or one to group/group to group. Avoid tipping points of violence.	Create a chain of events. Informal, often invisible, otherwise well planned peer-to-peer conversations leading to peers changing behaviours, leading to behavioural (social) tipping points
Their profile	Tough, 'being there', often 'in the other side', projecting authority (not hierarchical) and respect, able to confront	'Being there', well connected and high influence (not hierarchical). People will listen to; able to confront. Often ex-ceptical and unconventional.
Other roles	Community and Faith leaders. They support, articulate, endorse and are visible but 'work is being done by interrupters'	Managers and leaders. They support champions and facilitate their activities but 'work is being done by champions'
Additional mechanisms of action	Community mobilization (including street demonstrations) campaigns, political and religious public endorsement. These are supporting mechanisms to the person-to-person/group work of the interrupters and outreach workers	Viral Change™ calls 'Big Splash' intervention to awareness campaigns (for change), use of corporate Web 2.0/social media. 'Big Splash' per se doesn't have the power to create sustainable behavioural change, which only occurs via reinforcement of desirable behaviours, often called by us 'non negotiable behaviours'

