9 Modelling events as social agents of change

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Chapter aims

- ☐ Define social agents of change,
- ☐ Understand how events produce a stage of information and education to lead and inform society,
- ☐ Analyse how events mirror societal attitudes and behaviours,
- ☐ Explore motivations and outcomes for leaderless events,
- ☐ Identify how economies driving events management lead to new employment practices.
- ☐ Focus on leadership in action: Industry insight from Rose Wilcox of The Leadmill on music venues as social agents of change.

Introduction

This chapter offers a model of events as social agents of change to outline how leadership in, and through, events evidence leadership of societal change. First, 'social agents of change' is defined to clarify this term to apply to the model. Following this, each area of the model is discussed to identify how events can be modelled as social agents of change. Through this model, you can consider how events provide information and education, how events clarify societal behaviour and action, how leaderless events support cultural and political issues, and how events management has created new employability practices. Each element of this model refers to theory and case studies to provide support for events being seen as social agents of change. The summary offers the model in full and student questions offered at the end enable

you to apply this in your studies to complete critical analysis of events as social agents of change.

Social agents of change: A definition

A social agent of change (SAC) can be a person, group or outcome from a range of activities. They are signalled as the start, or leader, in changing existing phenomena. Social agents of change as a term is rooted in Sociology theory, as they evidence a change in existing social practices, scaled according to the issue actioned. Although the origins of the term have been linked to university students in Canada in the 1960s (see Lemon, 2004), in contemporary practice SACs can be seen in businesses and individuals.

An excellent example of organisations set up to change existing phenomena is 'Grind out Hunger'. This is a not for profit organisation whose mission is to empower youth to take leadership in the fight against childhood hunger and malnutrition, through their passions of skateboarding, surfing, snowboarding and music. The following table offers case examples of both businesses and individuals who could be seen as SACs:

Businesses	Individuals
Grind Out Hunger (www.facebook.com/grindouthunger/)	Maria Shriver
Impakt (https://www.impaktcorp.com/)	Teachers
Ford Motor Company fighting HIV/Aids in South Africa	Emma Gonzalez
Green Mountain Coffee fair trade deals	Shamma bint Suhail Faris Mazrui

Table 9.1: Social agents of change: businesses and individuals

The examples offered in the table above evidence how SACs are not always one action or person but can be a combined effort by groups of people to change societal issues. An SAC is not always created to lead in societal change though. Film and media, for example, can serve to question the status quo in society to enable viewers to consider ways in which society act and behave (Bapis, 2014). Other examples of SAC use is noted in linguistics (Charity, 2008), mobile phone use (Nurallah, 2009) and migrant participation in society (Burgess, 2004; Grabowska et al. 2016)., Therefore, although SACs are noted as a singular term, they are

present in a wide range of businesses, individuals, media production, communication forms and members of society. If you raised money for a charity, you are also an SAC as you are raising awareness of the charity and signalling support is required for the charity's cause.

In terms of the governance and form of an SAC, this can also vary. SACs can be created as profitable or not-for-profit. They can also be private, public or volunteer managed. In terms of the profit framework for an SAC, if the issue or cause requires fundraising for others then it could be a charitable event or sequence of events to raise money. However, if new products are used to raise the money, then there may be profits required in the fair payment of people working within or to support the SAC. So, for example, an SAC may be set up as non-for-profit and then later require profit according to the activities needed to grow and increase the impact of their efforts. In terms of the public/private/volunteer nature of SACs this will also depend on the issue or cause. There are a number of non-government organisations (NGOs) considered SACs (Pearce,1993). This is perhaps an obvious link as NGOs are created by citizens and usually have humanitarian aims or objectives. You may expect an SAC to be an NGO, but examples in this chapter offer a range of private, public and volunteer organisations which are considered SACs. Also, if an NGO does not lead to social change it cannot be defined as an SAC. For example, if Oxfam supports a local community in building new schools, but does not change local practice or political support, they cannot be seen as an SAC in that particular context and situation.

From this discussion, it is evident that SACs are present throughout global society. Even if they are not labelled, or marketed, as an SAC, countless people and organisations desire to challenge, address and improve social issues. The industry, form and structure of the SAC could be emergent rather than designed. The issue is often immediately addressed by citizen action which is then later formalised into an organisation acting for social change.

Issues SACs champion, support or challenge

When in progress an SAC will raise awareness of key issues linked or included in the phenomena to be changed. This section seeks to outline some of the issues contemporary SACs have addressed. SACs will