

## Episode\_8\_\_Organizing\_for\_Leadership.mp3

[00:00:06] Hi I'm Avi Greene. Thanks for joining us on the Scholars Strategy Network's *No Jargon*. Each week I discuss different social and policy issues adding insight and research from one of the nation's top scholars without jargon. This week I'm really delighted to be joined by Hahrie Han. Hahrie is an associate professor of political science at the University of California at Santa Barbara and she's been studying organizations. All of us are part of organizations in our communities or in politics that help us achieve the things that we want or that may be dysfunctional organizations that get in our way. So I'm really delighted to talk with Hahrie and find out a little bit more about her work. Hahrie is also the author of two books on this subject if you want to know more she's the author of *How Organizations Develop Activists* as well as the book *Ground Breakers*, which is a study of the 2008 Obama campaign. Hahrie, I'm so glad you could join us.

HAHRIE: Thank you for having me.

AVI: So how did you start to study this topic?

HAHRIE: Now it's really funny so before I started working on the first book, *How Organizations Develop Activists*, I remember I was looking around at a lot of the movements that are going on around the world and I felt like there is kind of this funny paradox that was going on. So, on the one hand a lot of the organizational leaders that I was talking to were really excited because all the technological tools and digital tools that we had made it easier for them to get more people involved than ever before. So there was this real excitement about that.

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AVI: You mean things like email, text messaging—

HAHRIE: Email, social media, you know. And then you also had stories like, you know, the beginning of the Arab Spring where with a google doc and a Twitter handle they were able to get hundreds of thousands of people out to Tahrir Square and basically bring down the Mubarak regime, right? You had stories like the uprising around Trayvon Martin where, you know, a viral outcry emerged that was able to, you know, spread like wildfire across the world and so it felt like we were, you know, this was a new era in which people had more say than ever before. But then on the other hand I was talking to organizations that were looking at the same movement and sort of saying, “well, gee,” you know, they were able to bring hundreds of thousands of people out to Tahrir Square but, you know, fast forward a few years after that and the military regime was back into power. You know, we're looking at movements like Occupy where they are able to get people to camp out in public spaces across the United States for months and months and months but then they weren't able to actually change any policy around inequality. And so I began to sort of ask this question about, you know, isn't just about how organizations engage people or are there certain ways of engaging people that lead to sort of more durable levels of participation over time than others.

AVI: Does this bring us towards the difference that you've described in your work between organizations that mobilize and organizations that organize?

[00:03:03]

HAHRIE: Yeah, it's funny because what I decided to do is I sort of said, OK, well, you know, if I'm trying to figure out, like, how— why some organizations are better than others at trying to get people involved, then why don't I go around and look at these different organizations and figure out which what the ones that are really good at getting people involved are doing that's different than the ones

that aren't as good? And basically what I find is this difference that you describe, you know, between what I call sort of transactional mobilizing and transformational organizing.

AVI: Tell me about those. Let's start with transactional mobilizing. What is that?

HAHRIE: So the idea of transactional mobilizing is that it's all about getting your numbers, right? It's all about getting as many people as you possibly can to do as much stuff as possible. And so the whole idea behind a transactional mobilizing is that organizations want to get to scale and so they get as many people as possible to sign the petition and to call their congressman, to send letters to the editor, to do whatever it is they want to do, and so in order to do that they make the work as easy as possible.

AVI: I actually had some experience with this. I've volunteered on some campaigns over the years and I remember years ago working on a campaign and you would— you would knock on doors and of course there was this sort of quantity, quantity, quantity— how— how many voters have you spoken to sort of as fast and as efficiently as you could.

HARHRIE: Yeah.

[00:04:22]

HAHRIE: Now I remember when I was— when I was observing some of these organizations, like, they would— you know, they'd be looking, like tracking their phone banks and tracking their canvassers and trying to figure out, like, how many— who are the canvassers that are getting the most conversations in, that are able to hit the most doors, and they are doing anything they could to sort of maximize that. And they were thinking about, gosh, how can we make it as easy as possible for someone to click on this link to donate to our campaign? Or how can we make it as easy as possible for someone to call their legislator, you know, and so they would create all these templates and things that would make it easier for people to take action. And so the idea is is that if someone is out there who wants to do work, then what the organization is doing is basically providing them with the opportunity to get engaged. And because of all the, you know, the big data and tools that we have, it was easier and easier for organizations to go out and find people who actually want to take the actions that they had created.

AVI: So can you give me a real world example of an organization that just did this mobilizing and really blew up with it.

HAHRIE: Yeah, I mean the classic example is MoveOn.org. You know, like, when they first emerged in the late 90s, like, they were able to use e-mail— which now seems like this primitive tool, but that was a tool that they used to all of a sudden get all these people to sign this petition to protest the impeachment of President Clinton.

[00:05:42] And so— and they kept doing that over and over and over again, you know, throughout the 21st century is they're able to sort of make it really easy for people who are outraged about whatever issue is is going on in the day to sign a petition to express their outrage.

AVI: What are the strengths of that model? I meant— what are the weaknesses?

HAHRIE: Yeah, so what I found was that there is a difference between organizations that just focused on— on that kind of mobilizing, right, and organizations that also, in addition to doing that kind of mobilizing, did what I call transformational organizing. And the idea behind transformational organizing is that it's not just that you're giving people opportunities to get

involved, and it's not just that you're trying to hit your numbers, but you're trying to sort of do work to push people up some kind of activist ladder. Right. So if someone comes to a door and says, "hey, all I can do is, you know, stuff envelopes in your office for an hour a week," or something like that, then you say, "great." But then you engage them in activities that will try to sort of develop their motivation and their desire to get involved. So they keep doing more and more and more. And so one way to think about the difference is, I remember, you know, I'm looking at some organizations that are trying to organize people around environmental issues. And there was one organization that was really much more mobilizers, and they wanted to launch a letter to the end of the campaign. So they created this whole template that all people had to do was sort of put in their name picking— you know, scroll through a list, click on a link to their local paper and they could send off the letter to the editor.

[00:07:12] Whereas the group that was sort of more interested in the transformational organizing. if you wanted to write a letter to the editor, they would send an e-mail out to people to see who would want to do it. But then if you signed up, they put you in partnership with somebody else. So you had to work with another person in your community to craft a letter together and then send it off to your local newspaper. And the whole idea was that they wanted to put people into relationship with each other, because it's those relationships that make people want to stay involved over time.

AVI: Is this leadership development that you're talking about?

HAHRIE: Oh yeah, it's absolutely a form of leadership development. You know. I didn't use that term because it also encompasses stuff— like some organizations in the area use the term leadership. But it's all about sort of doing that transformative work, right, of making people develop kind of different interests and skills and capacities and desires than they had when they first came into the door.

AVI: Right. It strikes me that— so I've always said, and I'm not someone who studies this, but that leadership is when you get someone to do something that they were not already going to do and that leadership development is getting someone to do something that they weren't already going to do and that they didn't know how to do— you know, sort of moving them up some kind of a ladder. Can you tell me more about some organizations that you think really did a good job of doing that?

HAHRIE: Yeah, so I did a whole project looking at the Obama campaign, because the 2008 Obama campaign is probably an example of an organization in recent history that's been most successful at getting to scale in terms of getting people involved. Right.

[00:08:44] And so one of the questions that my co-author and I were looking at was what made it possible for the campaign to be able to get so many people involved at such a high level. Right. And in their 2012 campaign, they had two point two million volunteers. They had 30,000 neighborhood team leaders across the country or across battleground states, and those neighborhood team leaders on average volunteered at least 10 hours a week of their time.

AVI: And this is pretty different from other campaigns.

HAHRIE: Oh, it's hugely different from other campaigns. I know a lot of — you know a lot of other campaigns, like, most of their field operations would depend on paid staff. And actually, a story that illustrates that as I remember one of the people that we interviewed was this guy named Alex Waters. And Alex had originally gone to college thinking that he was going to be a golf professional. And he goes off to college thinking he's going to be a golf pro. And the first fall of his freshman year he's at a lake house with some friends one weekend playing and he's standing at the end of a dock and his hat blows off his head into the water and he thinks, you know, the water is

about 18 feet deep. He's going to jump into the water and get his hat. He dives in, the water turns out to be 18 inches and not 18 feet deep. And so he breaks his neck and because instantly quadriplegic so his life has changed. So fast forward a few years after that and all of a sudden the Obama campaign is recruiting him to be a field organizer and he says, "are you kidding me?"

[00:10:03] There's no way that I can be a field organizer. I can't knock on doors. I can't dial phone numbers. I can't even turn on the lights in the office, like, there's no way that you can ask me to be a field organizer because I can't do any of the work that you want me to do." And they say, "Alex, you're thinking about traditional campaigns, because in a traditional campaign it's a paid field organizer whose job it is to knock on the doors and call people and do all the voter contact. And we're trying to run a different kind of campaign. In our campaign, your job is not to sort of do the voter contact but instead it's to sort of develop the leadership of people who live in the community that you're trying to organize, and they're going to be the ones who reach out to their friends and neighbors," So the idea is that, you know, it's OK that Alex couldn't dial phone numbers or knock on doors. What he was supposed to do is have conversations with the people who became that 30,000 neighborhood team leaders so that they would develop their own motivations and capacities to organize other voters in their communities, so you had neighbors organizing neighbors, essentially. And so Alex goes on to become one of the most successful organizers in the campaign, if you just look at his sheer numbers, right. And it's not because he knocked on more doors than anybody else, but it's because he was able to develop the leadership of others.

AVI: How did he do that?

[00:11:12] HAHRIE: Well, you know, basically, like, you know, part of what we look at in our book is kind of this question of you know what are the nuts and bolts of how the Obama campaign went about doing that. And so they had a couple strategies. I mean, they had lots of strategies— I'll just mention a couple here. First was this whole idea of organizing people in neighborhood teams. Right. And the reason for that is because people tend to sort of stay involved in activism over time not because of their commitment to the issue or because of their commitment to a candidate but because of their commitment to each other. And they felt like if we want to get these volunteers to devote 10 hours a week over the course of an entire year we're going to need them to feel like really strong bonds to each other. The first thing they did was they organized all their volunteers into neighborhood teams. Right.

AVI: So these good organizations are aware that they're all about relationships.

HAHRIE: Yeah. And that's one of the reasons, you know, in the example I was giving before about the letter to his— letters to the editor. That's one of the reasons why it wasn't that they want— that they want people to write the letter to the editor, like just hit their numbers on how many letters they got but they want people to work in relationship with each other to write those letters. That's why they put you in contact with someone else in your community.

AVI: What else did the Obama campaign in 2008 do to do this transformational organizing.

HAHRIE: Yeah, so another thing that they did was they really gave their neighborhood teams a lot of responsibility. Right.

[00:12:35] So I remember the first time that I ever volunteered for a campaign was a campaign where basically I was in high school and I was required to do some volunteer work, so I walk into this campaign office and say that I'll spend Saturday afternoon there. And they say great. And they give me this really boring work. You know, I have like a phone script and I have to dial through numbers and just call people and leave messages and just read the same thing over and over and

over again. And I was about to, you know, shoot my brains out by the end of it it was so boring. And I didn't— I didn't want to go back to it.

AVI: I think I worked on that same campaign.

HAHRIE: Yeah, I know, seriously, I'm sure a lot of people did.

AVI: We all did.

HAHRIE: Right. So the whole idea with the Obama campaign is they sort of realize, you know, like people— like, people are smart. Right. And people know when you're giving them busy work and when you're giving them work that really matters. And people know when you're giving them work that depends on them versus when they're interchangeable cogs in a machine. So what they decided is that if they really want to sort of generate and sustain volunteer commitment, they are going to have to give their make their volunteers accountable for real outcomes, right, so that people are feeling, you know, they can't they can say “gee, you know, I'm a little tired today. I just don't think I'm going to go into the office.” They'd think, “you know, gee—

[00:13:39] I'm a little tired today but I really need to go into the office, because if I don't, then, you know, we're not going to be able to sort of, you know, talk to all these voters that we want to talk to. And if we don't talk to those voters, the campaign's not going to hit its goals, and if they don't hit its goals, we're going to lose the state of Ohio. Right.

AVI: Right. You had— you had your own your own numbers. And then you also have that previous thing that you mentioned which is the social relationships.

HAHRIE: Right. Yeah, people— people would say— Yeah, people would say, like, you know, we interview people where they're talking about— I remember talking to one volunteer who had gotten really involved the campaign and then her husband was diagnosed with cancer and so they were going— you know, he was going through chemotherapy and, you know, she wanted to— he— she thought about dropping out of the campaign but she said, you know, I just couldn't let my team down. Like, I just couldn't let the other people down. And so what her team did was they figured out, well, why don't we bring the word to her house? And they would just work out of her house so she could be with her husband as she continued to be part of the team.

AVI: Wow, that's that's that's some dedication, you know, all around.

HAHRIE: Oh, sure, it's those kind of relationships that make this work really possible. \

AVI: Now was the Obama campaign just sort of an isolated thing in 2008? Are there other organizations that mirror some of those traits? And I would presume that this is not— this kind of good, strong, organizing is not a phenomenon that's, you know, sort of limited to professional, presidential campaigns, you know, in— in the Democratic Party or on the left.

HAHRIE: Oh no, absolutely not.

[00:15:10] I mean, in my other book *How Organizations Develop Activists*, I was looking at organizations that were organizing around health and environmental issues, and so they weren't doing electoral work. They were doing issue-based work. Right. And I basically found the same trend, which is that the organizations that were most successful at generating and sustaining activism over time were the ones that combined mobilizing and organizing. Right. So the organizing that— the organizations that did just mobilizing, they had lots of people, like lots of

breath, but they had no death. And the organizations that did just the organizing had a ton of depth but they had no breadth. And so organizations that were most successful, they were using mobilizing tools to sort of reach out to a lot of people to generate, you know, a big list of potential activists and things like that. But then they would use organizing to really push people up that activist ladder and sustain it over time. And so you see lots of examples of that, you know, in lots of different organizations. You know, one story— one example, one story I can tell that doesn't come from my research, becomes the research of a sociologist named Ziad Munson, is he went and he looked at the pro-life movement. And he wanted to understand, you know, what made— you know, he wanted to look at people who are at the very front lines the pro-life movement. These are people who were standing outside abortion clinics protesting women who are going in and things like that and he wanted to understand, like, what was their pathway into this kind of activism.

[00:16:31] And he finds lots of really interesting things, but one of the most shocking things that he finds is that, you know, if I were to ask you, like, what kind of people join the pro-life movement what would you say?

AVI: People with deeply held religious beliefs and really, really, really strong views on this issue?

HAHRIE: Yeah, so you think, yeah, people— the kind of people who join the pro-life movement are pro-life people. And what he finds is that of these activists who are the people that were at the very front lines of the pro-life movement, almost half of them— so just under— just like 47 percent of them, when they first joined the movement they were either pro-choice or they had no views on abortion.

AVI: What!?

HAHRIE: Yeah. I know, it's totally shocking right. But what ends up happening is that they join these organizations for a variety of different social reasons, like maybe they just moved to a new community and they want to meet new friends.

AVI: Wow.

HAHRIE: Maybe it was a working woman who became a stay at home mom, you know. You know, like, all these different kind of social reasons, they would join these organizations and then they would become politicized or transformed through these organizations over time.

AVI: This is absolutely fascinating to me.

HAHRIE: Oh, it's totally fascinating. You know, I think part of what I really learned from doing work on both of these books is that we— I think right now in politics, we underestimate the transformative potential of a lot of the organizations and campaigns that exist out there.

AVI: Right.

[00:17:52] You're always saying that people can be transformed in two ways, right, that they can be transformed in terms of the relationship that they have with an organization or the skills that they have. But also that the possibility that they're transforming their political beliefs and their beliefs about themselves and who they are.

HAHRIE: Yeah. And I remember talking to one organization leader who is doing a lot of this transformative work. And he said, you know, our goal is to move people to a place where they're asking themselves the question of “who am I? And because of who I am, what does that mean I

must do?" You know. So it's this idea where you're getting people to sort of think really deeply about, you know, what kind of person they want to be in the world and what that implies for the actions they must take as a result of that. You know, and that whole process of sort of getting into that kind of— that sort of identity work within an organization is really about a transformational process.

AVI: So, Hahrie, I guess I want to actually ask you to give me some advice and some advice to our listeners. We're all often asked to join organizations whether they're political organizations or neighborhood organizations or issue-based organizations. Here's my jargon term— I perceive that there are organizations and then there are groups that I refer to as disorganizations, and I would prefer not to join disorganizations. Are there ways that I can tell?

HAHRIE: Yeah, I think there are lots of things to look at. I think the thing that I would think about is when I go in and they ask me to do something, do I feel like I'm an interchangeable cog in their machine? Right, if I didn't show up for something, would it matter that it wasn't me, or would—

[00:19:30] Or would it actually matter that I didn't show up. And I think people have really good instincts around that. But so often because of the way that our politics has developed over time people think, ohm this is just politics— of course, I'm an interchangeable cog in the machine. And I think part of what I was surprised about that I learned in my research is that it doesn't have to be that way. You know, there are a lot of work that is out there where people are really valued for who they are. And that was part of what made the most high engagement organizations I looked at really stand out.

AVI: Connect this to I guess what— what for many citizens is their ultimate hope when they— when they join an organization that they want to, you know, that they want to change the world or at least change the country or— or change their neighborhood.

HAHRIE: Yeah, you know when people ask me about that I like to sort of tell the story about this woman named Frances Willard. I don't know if you heard of her.

AVI: No. Tell us about Francis.

HAHRIE: Yeah, so Francis Willard was— basically she was the woman that organized the temperance movement, so the movement to sort of ban alcohol and pass a constitutional amendment to ban alcohol in the United States. And so I'm— just to be clear I'm telling the story not because I want to ban alcohol—

AVI: right.

HAHRIE: But she was really fascinating because in the early 20th century, when we didn't really have airplanes, she traveled over a hundred thousand miles in a year.

[00:20:49] You know going to communities all over the United States and she would take a train everywhere all over the U.S. And what she would do is when she met people who wanted to be part of the movement she'd say, well, "the first thing you have to do is each take a personal pledge to swear off alcohol." Right. So the first thing of the kind of develop your own values and commitments around that. Right. But the second thing that you have to do is you've got to join with other people in your community and shut down a bar. Right. And it's not because it really mattered whether or not Joe's Bar was open and that wouldn't really make a difference to whether or not we have a constitutional amendment on prohibition or not. But it was because she wanted people to have an experience of collective action where they began to realize the power that they could have

if they worked with others.

AVI: Like the experience of a whole bunch of people going over to the bar and saying you have to shut now.

HAHRIE: Right. And that also some people realize, gosh, if I work with others, I could do things that I couldn't do by myself. And that's a core part of that transformational experience that we've been talking about. And then it was only after people had had that experience that she would say, "OK, like, now you can join the national movement," so that everyone that came into the national movement were people who are already had this belief in the value of collective action and like understood in their bones because they had gone through it what it's like to sort of win in that way.

[00:22:02] And so I feel like a lot of what I was looking at in my book was really trying to understand, like, how these organizations just get people involved. But if you want to understand not only how you get them involved how you build power to win, that I think, you know, a lot of what I learned is that the power to win comes from getting people involved in a way that transforms their own abilities.

AVI: In— in a previous couple of episodes we talked with Heath Brown about the Tea Party and I also talked with Marcus Hunter about Black Lives Matter. And I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your perceptions as someone who's not, you know, focused your whole studies on either of those things but as an observer who thinks about organizations.

HAHRIE: Yeah. I mean I think Black Lives Matter is hugely important because it's doing such important work at the forefront of racial justice. Right. And it's not only working on those issues but I think it's transforming, you know, the way that we think about democracy in the U.S. And so from what I've seen about Black Lives Matter is they've done a ton of work to figure out how to create these spaces through which people become transformed. Right, like, when I give advice to organizations based on the research, like the first that I say is: figure out where your spaces for transformation, because most organizations instinctively know how to do the mobilizing a lot is they know how to do the organizing.

[00:23:26] And I think Black Lives Matter is an example of organization that has done really, really good— really, really well at figuring out how to create those transformative spaces of the activists who come into it become transformed their experiences. But then the second question is how do you structure that transformation, right. How do you take all these people who become transformed through your work and turn it into the power to move the agenda that you want and I think that's where Black Lives Matter is still figuring it out. I think they have a ton of potential be able to do that, but they're still working out how they— how you— how you sort of take that, you know, harness all that energy that comes from this transformative work and turn it into power.

AVI: Hahrie Han, I'm just absolutely delighted that you've been with us today. Any final thoughts that you want to offer about if you work in an organization and you help to lead an organization what you should try to do to kind of take first steps towards making your organization be one that that does this transformational organizing work. Where would you go? How would you begin?

HAHRIE: So one of the things I noticed is that the most high engagement organizations in my— in my study, they were the organizations that infused leadership development or change transformative organizing into everything that they do. So what I mean by that is that you see a lot of organizations that sort of have, you know, there's one department for Media and Communications, another department for fund raising, and the department for organizational development, another department for, you know, field or something like that.

AVI: Right. Lots of departments.

HAHRIE: And organizations that were the most successful, they infused this whole idea with leadership development or transformational organizing into everything that they do.

[00:25:01] So the idea is that they would do their fundraising, but they would do it in a way that constantly developed leadership among their volunteers. They would do all the media communications work but they would do it in a way that constantly developed and created transformative experiences for their volunteers, so that the whole organization was oriented around doing this transformative work and combining it with that– with the– with the mobilizing to get to the breadth that they needed.

AVI: If more organizations embrace some of the lessons that you're learning, a lot of our experiences as citizens participating in these organizations will be so much better. Thank you so much for being with us.

HAHRIE: And thank you for having me. It was great fun.

AVI: You've been listening to *No Jargon*, the podcast from the Scholars Strategy Network. Our network is a group of over 600 university based researchers and 43 states around the nation. You can find out a lot more about us and read some of the briefs that have been written on hundreds of public policy topics by our members at [WWW.Scholars Strategy Network dot org](http://WWW.ScholarsStrategyNetwork.org). If you liked the show please subscribe and review us. Five star reviews make a huge difference for us and they make my mom incredibly happy. Thanks so much for listening and have a wonderful Thanksgiving.