

General Plan

How serious are you about learning how to help solve society’s biggest problems?

We’d like to do something unusual for a meetup group. Democracy is in crisis. The problems facing activists are so critical, especially since the rise of hate-based authoritarians like Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, that we’d like to take *a business project approach*. If we want to change the world, we need to take a serious approach.

Project Goal

To replace Classic Activism with Analytical Activism.

Our Perspective

An **activist** is anyone helping to solve public interest problems. They can be an individual, a scientist, a scholar, a grassroots activist working with an NGO, a politician, a government employee, and so on. While science and business solve *technical* problems, activism solves *social* problems.

Modern activism began with the birth of modern democracy in 1776. The goal of modern activism is to optimize long-term quality of life, for those living and their descendants.

Activism did well at first and solved some problems, as shown below. But there’s a larger group of problems that activism has been unable to solve.

The World’s Most Important Social Problems

| Solved | Unsolved | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Slavery | 1. Poverty | |
| 2. Serfdom | 2. War | |
| 3. Civil Rights | 3. Corruption | |
| 4. Colonialism | 4. Discrimination | |
| 5. Women’s Suffrage | 5. Large Recessions | |
| 6. Russian Communism | 6. High Economic Inequality | |
| | 7. Environmental Sustainability | |
| | 8. Climate Change | |
| | 9. Hate-based Authoritarianism | |

Prevents solution of all the other problems

(The list of problems is described in Film 1 of the *Democracy in Crisis* film series.)

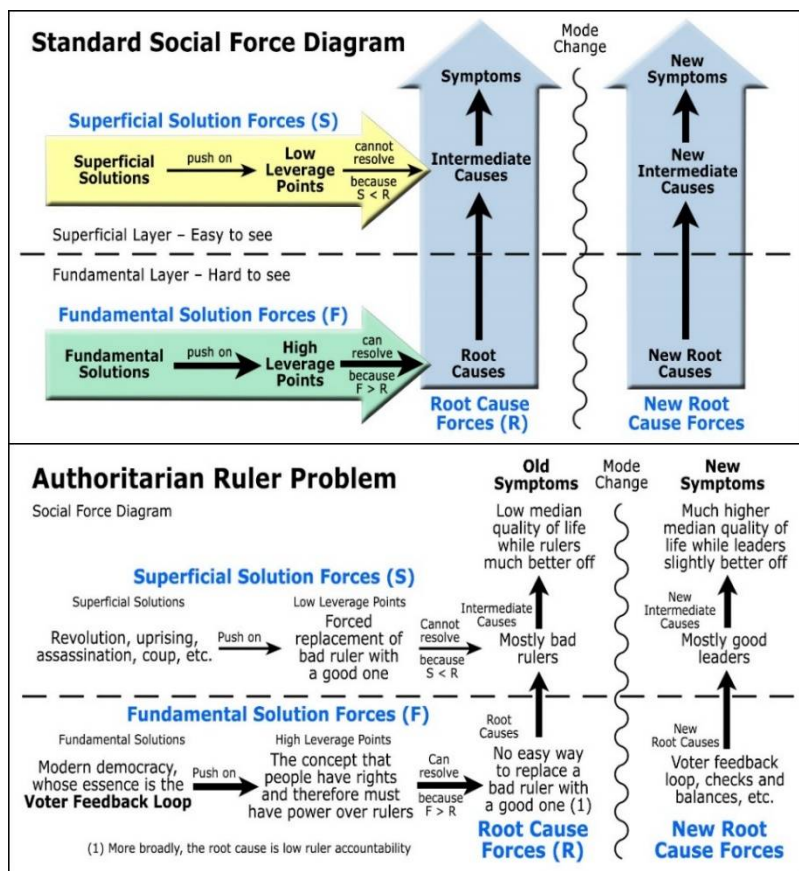
Why is modern activism able to solve some problems and not others? **Because solutions are not designed to resolve root causes.** In that answer lies our perspective and our contribution.

Our Contribution

Presently public interest activists are using an intuitive, trial-and-error approach to solving public interest problems, called **Classic Activism**. This fails on the unsolved problems because it has no concept of root causes. Our contribution, and thus our goal, is to change that completely by replacing Classic Activism with Analytical Activism.

Analytical Activism is the use of analysis instead of intuition and trial and error to solve difficult activist problems, whether they be environmental, economic, social, or political. *The core strategy is to take an engineering approach* and apply business tools to social problems, using tools such as root cause analysis, social force diagrams, feedback loop modeling, and a problem-solving process that fits the problem. While such tools may sound overly complex, they are not.

For example, a standard **social force diagram** and an example are shown below. The basics of the tool can be learned in half an hour, plus practice to become fluent. Thereafter it can be applied to any social problem to get a quick overview of a problem's causal structure. *The great benefit of the tool is once you learn it, you are now thinking in terms of problem structure and root causes.* That's the mental model that we, as analytical activists, need to be thinking, living, and breathing in if we are to begin solving the unsolved problems, because all problems arise from their root causes.



Social force diagrams explain why Classic Activism solved some problems and not others. It's because the solved problems were so easy they had only one easy to see layer. The root cause was easy to see, so you could intuitively design solutions that worked.

But the unsolved problems, being more complex, have a fundamental layer that's impossible to see without formal root cause analysis. If you can't see a problem's root causes, then you can only base solutions on intuition and trial-and-error, which rarely works or takes a long time. For example, solving the Authoritarian Ruler Problem took a long time because problem solvers were not using root cause analysis.

Our Strategy: Test, Improve, and Promote

The Analytical Activism approach was developed by Thwink.org. Founded in 2001 by Jack Harich, Thwink's goal is *"to help solve the complete sustainability problem using the most efficient and effective methods available. This requires changing from antiquated tools that don't work to new tools that do."* Jack is the main researcher, assisted by several collaborators like Philip Bangerter in Brisbane, Australia and Scott Booher in Los Angeles, plus various other people over the years.

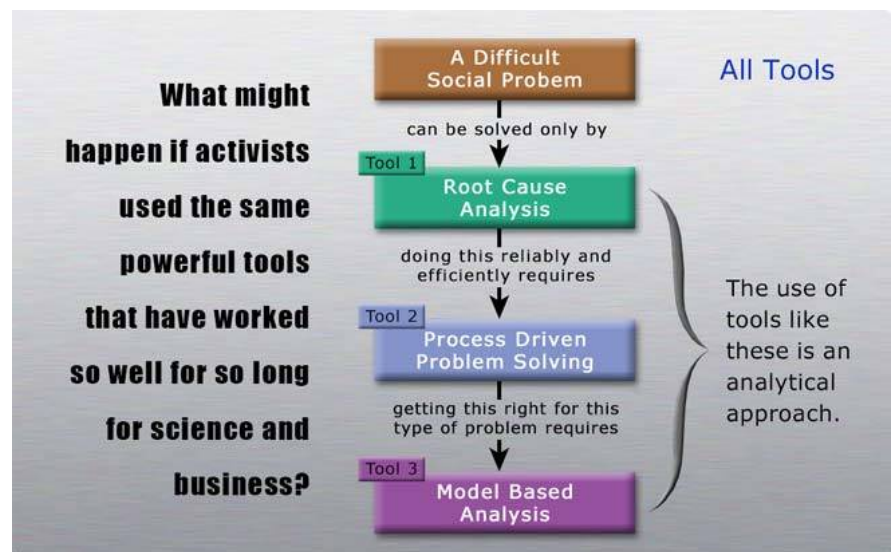
The Atlanta Analytical Activists meetup group is a vehicle for *evaluating, improving, and promoting* the tools and materials developed by Thwink, plus other ideas the group may have. The Thwink approach is a mere starting point.

Here's the core of our strategy. 99% of the effective work on public interest activism is done by established organizations, ranging from small local orgs, to national orgs like the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) and the Sierra Club, to international orgs like the World Wildlife Fund and the United Nations and its many agencies. But even the best of these organizations are unable to move forward on the unsolved problems because they're using the wrong tools. In 2006 Thwink performed an assessment of ten representative organizations, including the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the European Union Environmental Directorate General, and the United Nations Environmental Program. None were using root cause analysis or a formal problem-solving process that fit the problem. Today in 2017, nothing has changed.

Now imagine what would happen if these organizations switched to Analytical Activism and began using the right tools. That would utterly change everything.

The Analytical Activism tools are based on the same tools used by business to solve millions of problems routinely. But business solves *technical* problems. Activists solve *social* problems, those dealing with large social systems like communities and nations. *To fill this void, Thwink has adapted a handful of business tools to fit social problems.* The tools are described in the material at Thwink.org. Conceptually there are three main tools, as seen in the image from the Tools menu at Thwink.org.

Our tiny little meetup group is not going to directly solve any of the unsolved problems. Instead, our strategy is to *test, improve, and promote* the tools to established organizations, so that they can at last taste success. Once we've turned existing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments on to *the power of the right tools*, our job is done. It's a clear and simple strategy.



Politician Truth Ratings

The tools are pretty far along in maturity. Our main tool, the System Improvement Process, was applied to the global environmental sustainability problem. The analysis found four subproblems, each with one main root cause. One subproblem is how to overcome change resistance to solving common good problems like climate change, war, and excessive wealth inequality. The root cause is low general ability to detect political deception, also known as low political truth literacy.

The root cause can be resolved by pushing on the high leverage point of raise political truth literacy. Nine sample solution elements for doing that were designed. One is **Politician Truth Ratings**. This measures the average level of truth in a politician's important statements on a scale of zero to 100%.

Thwink is just starting a project to test whether Politician Truth Ratings works or not. This involves running an online questionnaire. If this goes well, the questionnaire will be refined and run multiple times as we use the results to improve Politician Truth Ratings. Then, if things continue to go well, we will run an experiment.

If you would like to help on this project, please see the Atlanta Analytical Activists forum for [the thread on Survey Design](#). Click on Survey Design to read more about the project.

Experimental Testing

We also need help in testing, improving, and promoting the tools, so that's where you can plug in.

The Scientific Method

1. Observe a phenomenon that has no good explanation.
2. Formulate a hypothesis that explains the phenomenon.
3. Design an experiment(s) to test the hypothesis.
4. Perform the experiment(s).
5. Accept, reject, or modify the hypothesis.

Despite the Thwink.org website, an article in the Club of Rome's newsletter in 2006, a peer-reviewed journal paper in 2010, an invited paper in 2014, working with the Sierra Club, two academic conferences, several self-published books, countless personal contacts, and continually pointing out that similar tools are mandatory in the business world, the ideas at Thwink have not caught on. Why is this? Is there some fundamental flaw making our work ineffective?

Yes. Our central hypothesis is that the right tools will allow activism to solve the unsolved problems. But we have no proof this is true. *We thus need to find one or more small local problems, apply the tools, and see if we can solve the problem.* This would be done by applying the System

Improvement Process, which incorporates all the tools. Experimental results would allow us to accept, reject, or modify the hypothesis. The last would mean improving the tools.

Local means the problem must have what we suspect are *local root causes*, so that the root causes can be resolved by our efforts and those we work with. Otherwise we don't have the time and resources to solve it.

Finding small local problems to test the tools on is our most critical need. Can you think of such a problem? Can you help on solving such a problem?

Logical Testing

Conceptually, there are three main tools: Root cause analysis, process driven problem solving, and model based analysis. But these are high level strategies. We need low level physical tools. The main physical tools created by Thwink.org are:

1. **Social Force Diagrams**
2. **The Six Laws of Root Cause Analysis**
3. **System Improvement Process**

We also have a detailed **preliminary analysis** using the process. This contains so many eye-popping insights that it's almost a tool itself, a sort of road map to refer to as you explore tricky social problems. In addition, we have extensive **educational materials**. These too need evaluation.

Each tool builds on the ones before it. Together these are known as “**the right tools.**” Look them over. Find one you think you can logically test. Then do that by logically applying it to past problems, present problems, and imaginary problems. Where does the tool fall short?

Social force diagrams are the easiest place to start. Learn how they work. Then diagram past social problems that have been solved. Then diagram present problems. Some may be partially solved.

Improve the Tools and Materials

Your impressions of tool or educational materials shortcomings can be used to improve them. Report your feedback on problems or opportunities of any kind.

Here's a way to improve one of the tools that may give you more ideas. A huge way we can improve **social force diagrams** (SFDs) is by building a **catalog** of diagrams. This can help in several ways:

1. General education on how to use SFDs.
2. People can search the catalog for the problem they're working on or similar problems. Study of the SFDs can provide insight into their problem.
3. Researchers can study the catalog for patterns to improve the SFD tool, as well as other tools.

Would you like to be the SFD Catalog Manager or help in that role?

A current Thwink project is the *Democracy in Crisis* **film series**. We need help in:

1. General critique of the films. Give us your feedback. What do you really like and what bothers you? What do you feel must be improved for the films to work well?
2. We need readers. The films are in the style of Ken Burns' films, like *The Civil War*. At many places in Ken's films someone reads a revealing quote or a moving passage, like from a letter. We need a variety of voices for reading short quotes or passages in the film series. Watch Film1 and see if this looks like something you'd like to help on.

Another way you can help is improving the **materials** on the Thwink.org website. Suppose you worked for an activist organization. What would be your impression of the website and its content? What are its strong points? Its weak points? As you survey the site, jot down your ideas.

Promote

Once our group feels we've improved the tools and related materials to the point of where they are easy to learn and ready to use productively, we can start promoting them. Who do you know in an established activist organization that might be interested in learning about the right tools? What other ways might we go about getting the word out? As we move closer to this stage there will be a lot more to say about it.