

Developing Sociological Interventions

The following are the steps I take in developing sociological interventions. As with all other human endeavors, these steps are a work in progress. Ultimately, the intervention process is emergent, iterative and to a certain extent, always a process. The key to a successful intervention is keeping this in mind, staying open to new ideas, paying attention to any unintended effects, not being wedded to the original intervention nor the original framework for understanding the intervention, and realizing that you are a student of it.

1. **Identify the issue** -- this seems simple enough, and it usually is. Similar to establishing a "problem statement."
2. **Research the issue** -- The idea is to explore the issue in as many dimensions as possible -- look up literature on it, read theory that relates to it, use heuristics to investigate it, ask friends about it, see how it affects you -- find out how you contribute to the problem. Don't worry about the level of the developing intervention, i.e., micro, meso, macro. This is where, IMO, sociological interventions get their beauty -- we consider all aspects of the issue -- cultural, structural, institutional, social constructionist, etc., using all of the perspectives, studies, theories, concepts that sociology has at hand to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the issue begging for the intervention.
3. **Pay close attention to the findings** -- of any study related to the issue. The findings of different studies will begin to inform you about what the intervention is. Traditionally, findings indicate areas of further research, knowledge gained, etc. When reviewing studies with an eye toward intervention, however, the findings instruct on areas to build on or areas to address -- the focus of the intervention.
4. **Think about intervening on the issue** -- while doing all of the above. If you thoroughly identify the issue, research all you can about it, pay attention to the findings of studies related to the issue, then usually the basic idea of the intervention presents itself. A simple example would be a study in which there is evidence that children who have a stable relationship with an adult are less likely to engage in truancy. So, if truancy was your issue, then you would begin to think of ways that you could strengthen existing relationships children might have, developing mentoring relationships for those that don't, etc. Using sociological theory, you might focus on ways to increase time spent with a primary group (family, church, after-school program, etc.). An additional step is to do a thought experiment, putting yourself in the shoes of an individual who may be suffering from the issue -- think, "what would help me in this situation?"
5. **Find out what has already been done** -- as interventions -- on all levels (micro, meso, macro). If the issue remains, the interventions were insufficient. Your job is to figure out what would be a sufficient intervention. The idea is to not reinvent the wheel but to use what is promising -- keeping in mind that whatever promise an available intervention has, it obviously was not sufficient enough on its own to eliminate the issue. This is where sociological insight can come in handy -- generally interventions that are designed are limited in scope, for whatever reason -- our job is to figure out why they were insufficient, figure out what part(s) of them did work, figure out how we can address the areas in which the intervention was lacking, and put the entire package together into a newer, more complete intervention.
6. **Frame the intervention** -- using all of the above. Identify the level that would have the

best impact, that would leverage the resources for the best outcome. Map out the intervention, map the steps, identify resources needed to fulfill it. Put it on paper. Reflect on it, ask yourself if it would work for you as an individual. THINK BIG. I think the difference between the interventions that sociology has to offer and the interventions that other disciplines have to offer is the frame of reference that informs the intervention.

7. **Ask for feedback** -- on the proposed intervention from colleagues, friends, folks in other disciplines, etc. One of the best ways to actually do this is to solicit feedback from the intended recipients of the intervention from the start -- invite them to join in the process throughout the process. Sometimes this is not possible, but when it is, do it. The wealth of knowledge that those needing the intervention have about the problematic issue is invaluable. In many ways they will know far better than anyone else about what works, what doesn't, what is really needed. Oftentimes, they are not consulted before something is done. Obviously, if people participate in the alleviation of a social ill that is affecting them, the outcomes on all levels will be much better. Even when doing this, however, it is important to continue to use your sociological knowledge to guide the developing intervention.
8. **Test it out** -- on a small scale, if at all possible, to see how it works. Pay close attention to what is happening when you do this -- gather as much data as you can about what is happening, and make adjustments where necessary -- use it to learn about the intended intervention.
9. **Implement the intervention** -- try it out, pay close attention to any unintended effects, make sure it is not contributing to the problematic issue, solicit consistent and regular feedback from the recipients of the intervention, modify it as necessary. Document what is working, what is not, consult with colleagues, consult with the recipients, use your skills as a researcher to observe the effect that the intervention is having. Iterate.