

What Makes a Movement ...Move?

Ministry Movements. 27 Jul 2010 by **Tim Keller**

Defining a movement

A movement is marked by an attractive, clear, unifying vision for the future together with a strong set of values or beliefs. The content of the vision must be compelling and clear so that others can grasp it readily.

By contrast, "institutionalized" organizations are held together by rules, regulations, and procedures, not by a shared vision.

Unpacking the definition

1. **The vision leads to sacrificial commitment.** Individuals put the vision ahead of their own interests and comfort.
2. **The vision leads to generous flexibility.** Institutionalized organizations are very turf conscious.
3. **The vision leads to innovativeness.** Institutions are organized more vertically, where ideas from "below" are unwelcome.
4. **A movement is marked by spontaneous generativity.** Spontaneous combustion means energy generated from within – a conflagration without the need for external ignition.

How Movements Institutionalize

Vision becomes strategy, roles become tasks, teams become structure, networks become organizations, recognition becomes compensation.

How Movements Stay Strong

A strong movement occupies the difficult space between being a free-wheeling organism and a disciplined organization. A movement that refuses to take on some organizational characteristics – authority, tradition, unity of belief, and quality control – will fragment and dissipate. A movement that does not also resist the inevitable tendency toward complete institutionalization will lose its vitality and effectiveness as well.

Full article:

The word "movement" is often used to describe a kind of vital, dynamic human organization, in order to distinguish it from what are called "institutions." Both of these words can have broader meanings, but for the sake of this discussion let us define them in the following ways.

A movement is marked by an attractive, clear, unifying vision for the future together with a strong set of values or beliefs. The content of the vision must be compelling and clear so that others can grasp it readily. It must not be so esoteric or difficult that only a handful of people can articulate it. Instead, it must be something that all members of the movement can understand and pass along to others. By contrast, "institutionalized" organizations are held together by rules, regulations, and procedures, not by a shared vision.

This unifying vision is so compelling that it takes pride of place. First, the vision leads to sacrificial commitment. Individuals put the vision ahead of their own interests and comfort. They are willing to work without high compensation, power, or perks. The satisfaction of realized goals is their main compensation. There is no more practical index of whether you

have a movement or not. If the leader is making all the sacrifices, you don't.

Second, the vision leads to generous flexibility. Institutionalized organizations are very turf conscious. Members are suspicious of anyone encroaching on their area of responsibility. Positions and power have been hard-won and jealously guarded. This is done by slavish devotion to rules of procedure, accreditation, and tenure. In movements, however, the accomplishment of the vision is more important than power and position. So people are willing to make allies, be flexible, and cooperate with anyone sharing the basic vision and values.

Third, the vision leads to innovativeness. Institutions are organized more vertically, where ideas from "below" are unwelcome. Movements are flatter because the commonly shared vision unifies and empowers. The vision is what matters - so anyone with a good idea about how to accomplish it is welcome to give it. Ideas flow out of the whole organization, top to bottom, which leads to greater creativity.

Finally, a movement is marked by spontaneous generativity. Spontaneous combustion means energy generated from within - a conflagration without the need for external ignition. A movement is able to generate its own resources, recruit its own new members and participants, and (especially) raise up its own new leaders.

This does not mean that movements have no formal training programs. Rather, it means that first, the vision of the movement (especially as its content is disseminated) attracts people with leadership potential, and, secondly, that the work of the movement provides opportunities that reveal emerging leaders through real-life experience and then prepares them for the next level of leadership in the movement. Denominations or church networks that always have to recruit ministers and staff that were raised up in other environments, and that attract them mainly with good compensation, do not show signs of being a movement.

David Hurst, a Harvard scholar, summed up how movements become institutions this way - vision becomes strategy, roles become tasks, teams become structure, networks become organizations, recognition becomes compensation. It is wrong, however, to draw such a hard line between the two forms.

It is typical in the Christian movement literature to be highly critical of "institutionalism," for good reason. But the impression is left that all authority, central control, and formal processes are bad for ministry. The reality is more complex.

It is natural for new churches and ministries to try very hard to stay informal, non-codified, and non-centralized. But part of what makes a movement dynamic is a unified vision, and that always requires some codification and control.

As time goes on, to maintain the main engine of movement-dynamics - a unified vision - a ministry must adopt some of the aspects of institutions. A strong movement, then, occupies the difficult space between being a free-wheeling organism and a disciplined organization.

A movement that refuses to take on some organizational characteristics - authority, tradition, unity of belief, and quality control - will fragment and dissipate. A movement that does not also resist the inevitable tendency toward complete institutionalization will lose its vitality and effectiveness as well. The job of the movement leader is to steer the ship safely between these two opposite perils.