

PRINCIPLE

USE ORGANIZING STRATEGIES THAT SCALE

Once your movement has a clear story, structure and strategy, you can scale up quickly by finding ways for people to start organizing using the resources already available to them in their daily lives.

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"MOVEMENTS THAT ARE "OPEN SOURCE" ARE EFFECTIVELY SELF-RECRUITING."

"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow."
—English Proverb

Movements often win because they have more players than the other team. Rather than recruiting these players manually, core members of a movement can "hack the system" by using scalable organizing strategies and tailoring mobilization tactics to where people are at. This allows movements to recruit "by multiplication" instead of just "by addition." The Occupy Wall Street movement spread organically around the world because people everywhere were enraged by corporate power, and they all could find a place of local significance to occupy.

Movements that are "open source" — that allow people everywhere to form structures and take action without direct permission from a central body — are effectively self-recruiting. Unity and discipline come less from a top-down leadership structure, and more from a shared set of ethical and operating principles, or "movement DNA."

The National Land Defense League (NLDL) in Uganda grew quickly in size and power once they switched from centralized meetings to a strategy of decentralized chapter formation grounded in eating together. The idea was simple and accessible to the poorest farmers across Uganda. Using millet bread as the NLDL's national symbol, any farmer could easily call neighbors to a dinner to discuss strategies for collective resistance to local land grabbing.

This strategy is not only good for growing a movement but for helping movements become more resilient. When 200 Ugandan farmers occupied a United Nations office to protest militarized evictions, chapters of the NLDL that had already self-formed among farmers in other areas of the country raised local donations of

POTENTIAL RISKS

Not all movements should be accessible to the voluntary leadership of anyone. Particularly in highly repressive environments, riddled with espionage and extreme consequences for public dissent, organizers will have to be strategic and careful about what degree of decentralization is appropriate. It may be safer in certain contexts to start small, and/or work underground.

Opening up a movement to people everywhere also risks diluting the mission and values of a movement. Giving autonomy to a broad group of people may cause a movement to descend into unfocused chaos or insignificance, especially if the DNA of the movement hasn't already been set.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Billionaires for Bush

produce and brought them to the occupiers.

After Denmark's 2016 austerity measures made it more difficult to access their benefits, disabled folks and their allies built support teams in towns across the country under the banner of Næstehjælperne ("next helper"). Via Facebook pages and face-to-face meetings, communities of support formed among those who felt alone in their quest to secure benefits. These networks of self-affiliating disabled people began to show up in large numbers to welfare interviews of individual members, building alliances with social workers, and securing more successful benefits interviews for members.

By following the decentralized Momentum organizing model, the young climate organizers from Sunrise in the US have been able to create a "movement whirlwind" around the Green New Deal. How does Sunrise recruit? Any three people anywhere in the country who speak aloud the Sunrise statement of principles, are automatically part of Sunrise.

Sunrise follows a three-phase "Cycle of Momentum" theory of movement building, from Escalation to Activating Public Support to Absorption of that new support into the growing movement. In that third Absorption phase, in particular, decentralized self-recruiting is key:

In order to get to scale, movements need to decentralize to have the capacity to absorb new members during critical moments of public attention. In order to decentralize without collapsing into chaos, movements must "frontload" their story, strategy, and structure.

A scalable organizing strategy is one that is at once decentralized across a vast geographic or demographic reach, yet still gathers people together locally in accessible ways that build community, and has enough shared movement DNA (aka "story, strategy, and structure") to maintain unity and focus.

And using strategies accessible to people in their everyday lives not only allows for organic recruitment, but also builds a culture of solidarity and support within the movement.

LEARN MORE

Næstehjælperne
Næstehjælperne
<http://naestehjaelperne.org/>

How Networked Social Movements Can Scale-Up Exponentially
Movement Net-Lab
<https://movementnetlab.org/category/learn/>

- Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army
- Fees Must Fall
- Flower Speech Campaign
- Harry Potter Alliance
- Lysistrata Project
- PARK(ing) Day
- Round Dance Revolution
- Schools of Struggle
- Street Graduation
- The Salt March

Tactics

- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Distributed action
- General strike
- Hashtag campaign
- Mass street action
- Phone blockade
- Trek

Principles

- Anyone can act
- Beware the tyranny of structurelessness
- Build people power, then negotiate
- Build strength through repetition
- Delegate
- Enable, don't command
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Know your community
- Make new folks welcome
- No one wants to watch a drum circle
- Seek safety in support networks
- Use the power of ritual
- Use your radical fringe to shift the Overton window
- We are all leaders
- Would you like some structure with your momentum?

Theories

- Comunalidad (communality)

Resources for Scaling-up Movements Quickly and Effectively Momentum Community

<https://www.momentumcommunity.org/resources>

Mass Protest, the Cycle of Momentum and Moments of the Whirlwind

The Ayni Institute

<https://ayni.institute/massprotest/>

Decentralized Organization — a flexible, dynamic structure that can bring thousands of people while maintaining discipline and movement integrity.

The Ayni Institute

<https://ayni.institute/socialchange/#decentralizedorganization>

- Dunbar's number
- Floating signifier
- Memes
- New Pan-Afrikanism
- People's "Shock Doctrine"
- Prefigurative politics
- The commons
- The propaganda model

Methodologies

- Artstorm
- Baraza
- Theory of change

TAGS

Campaign strategy, Communications, Community building, Democracy, Digital organizing, International solidarity, Movement building