

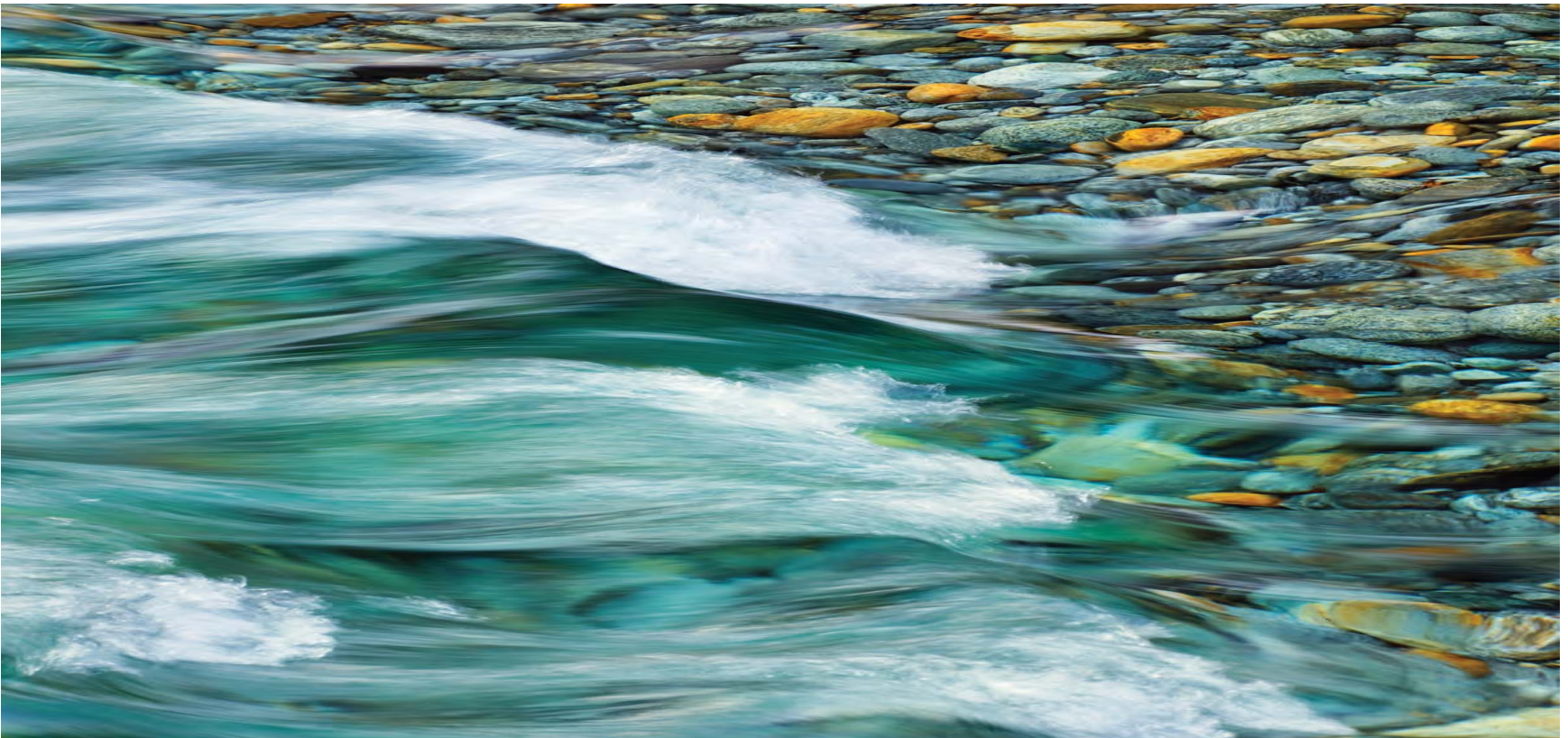


UNSTILL WATERS: THE FLUID ROLE OF NETWORKS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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“Networks are not social movements; but social-justice movements need networks,” says Marco Davis, a veteran network builder in the Latino community.



Working Definition of Movement Networks:

- *multi-organizational*: movement networks link independent organizations and activists to one another and through a central hub organization;
- *movement oriented*: movement networks intentionally contribute to a broader social movement;
- *focused on the long term*: movement networks stick together for the long haul and join to advance interests that extend beyond a single- issue campaign; and
- *porous*: movement networks have more flexible boundaries than a formal franchise structure, such as the Girl Scouts or Habitat for Humanity.

Their purpose is not to serve members alone but to meaningfully analyze, understand, and foster the development of a movement by working with and for others in the network.

Definition of a Social Movement

“A collection of persons or groups who come together around a common concern. Typically their mission is to bring about some type of societal change relative to their concern.”

Movements, they note, are characterized by the following elements:

- collective intentional action
- continuity of sustained action
- outsider status
- scope and scale
- formation of collective identity

Beth Zemsky and Dave Mann, “Building Organizations in a Movement Moment,” *Social Policy: Organizing for Social and Economic Justice*, vol.28, no.3, 2008.



Roles of a Movement Network

Movement networks play concrete and essential roles to support and contribute to their social movements:

- 1. Building linkages and connection with a broader movement.*
- 2. Deepen agreement on a shared political frame.*
- 3. Coordinate efforts, take joint action, and disseminate information about what works.*
- 4. Engage in advocacy campaigns.*
- 5. Marshall and increase resources and capacity.*
- 6. Cultivate new leaders and build their identity as part of the movement.*
- 7. Identify and fill gaps in the movement's capacity to win.*

Deepen Agreement on a Shared Political Frame

- Understand, integrate, and contribute to a shared vision
- Align on shared values and principles
- Deepen a sense of trust, belonging, and identity.

More than any other factor, this shared political frame connects individuals and organizations to networks, and networks to movements



Engage in Advocacy Campaigns

- Effective policy campaigns
 - help “cut the issue,” give members “clear handles”
 - make specific the complex problems movements seek to address
 - seek to win real improvements in the lives of constituencies
- Vehicle for movement networks to
 - expand and activate network members
 - reach out to those at the periphery of the movement
 - build power, influence, and visibility.
- Winning the campaign is not the end goal for networks; but rather a means to the ultimate end

Juggling Complexity

Networks require balancing many varied and seemingly contradictory elements such as:

- Juggling the autonomy of individual members with the need for collective action and accountability;
- Holding the needs and engagement of existing and emerging members;
- Straddling political disagreements and differing approaches to the work;
- balancing transparency and engagement in decision-making processes with the need for efficiency and rapid responses.

To get the work done and create predictability and organization, we tend to build structures, rules, and procedures.



Beware: Calcified Structures Can Clog Network Arteries

- The problem isn't that we build structures; it's that we get attached to them and believe that they will provide the glue to hold these networks together.
- Structures get rigid, hardened, calcified.
- Rather than being vehicles to open space or advance critical work, they start to block the vitality of the network.

Fostering Flexibility

Networks that emphasize structure are less effective than those that adeptly learn and change. To support adaptation:

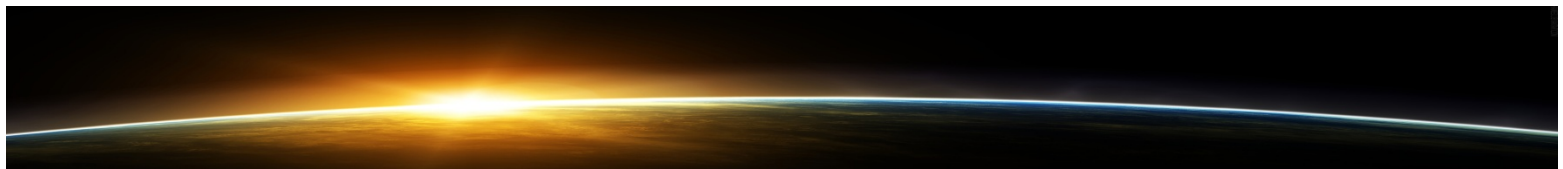
- *Analyze the movement.*
- *Accept the network's real and potential power.*
- *Minimize permanent structure.*
- *Make space for marginalized and new voices.*
- *Learn from those outside their movement.*
- *Experiment.*
- *Identify innovation.*
- *Encourage disagreement and disruption.*
- *Create time and space for reflection.*
- *Connect and align action with vision.*



Next Horizon

If we accept the important and organic nature of networks, what could that mean for:

- how members might relate to their network?
- how network hubs view and manage their roles?
- how funders support the work of networks?
- how much complexity we ask leaders to hold as they move between the individual organization, the network, the movement levels of work?
- how we (especially organizational development practitioners) think about building strong organizations, networks and movement?





Building Linkages and Connection with a Broader Movement.

- Aggregate power results in gains that will make a difference to members' constituencies as well as advance the movement as a whole.
- Members see themselves as part of an "us" and examine how that "us" is positioned within and contributes to the broader movement.



*Coordinate efforts, take joint action,
and disseminate information about
what works.*



- Facilitate and support coordinated action. Social movements need coordinated action to build momentum, demonstrate support, and push for change.
- Vehicles for dissemination of messages, approaches, programs, innovation, and ideas.

Marshall and Increase Resources and Capacity



- The strength and power of network largely derived from aggregating the strength and power of members.
- Networks build the organizational capacity, effectiveness, and sustainability of members individually and collectively.
- Hubs raise money and visibility for the network and its parts.

Cultivate New Leaders and Build Their Identity as Part of the Movement

- Enhance capacity to develop concrete leadership skills, think strategically, build relationships, and broaden their own movement analysis.
- Ensure that critical constituencies previously excluded from leadership roles have a place at the network table

Identify and Fill Gaps in the Movement's Capacity to Win

- Build an honest and shared analysis about where the network is strong and where it lacks the capacity to be an effective player in the movement.
- Helps members identify what is needed to advance the movement and not just individual organizations.