

Creating “Moments of the Whirlwind”: Why Effective Movement-Building Demands Both Structure and Momentum

By Paul Engler and Kai Newkirk

Introduction

Any organizer who experienced the immigrant rights uprising of spring 2006 in Los Angeles shares a common memory of awe. It was as if, out of nowhere, the mass movement of our dreams erupted all around us. On March 25th, we went downtown expecting only to march with a few thousand people and to see mostly familiar faces from the LA immigrant rights scene. Instead, we joined what seemed like a mass popular occupation of the city’s center. There were so many people it was hard sometimes to tell where the protest began or ended. Subways and buses heading toward the city center were packed, and hundreds of marchers in white T-shirts streamed in from innumerable feeder marches. Downtown blocks overflowed. Structured organizations, like the unions and community groups who wore colored t-shirts, were a tiny drop in a vast sea of white. No one could deny that we were caught up in the flow of a force that extended far beyond our own organizing efforts.

Over a million people marched that day in the largest protest in Los Angeles' history. The impact of “La Gran Marcha” reverberated throughout the nation, inspiring hundreds of thousands

of immigrants and their allies to take to the streets in cities across the country. In many places, the protests were the largest in their local history. In LA, the momentum from March 25th further swelled two days later, when tens of thousands of students protested by walking out of school. Then, on May 1, International Labor Day, the burgeoning momentum reached an epic peak with a day-long mass demonstration that seemed to bring the entire city into the streets. Well over a million people marched over the course of the day, joined by millions more in cities across the country. Hundreds of thousands of Angelenos (including, without a push or even an endorsement, hundreds of members from our own union, UNITE HERE Local 11) stayed out of work or school in what was proclaimed a “day without an immigrant.” Entire neighborhoods and industries were shut down, including, most prominently, the Los Angeles ports, which reported millions of dollars in lost profit.

The political impact was dramatic and immediate. Within days, the center of the national immigration reform debate shifted from the Sensenbrenner Bill’s draconian repression to the amnesty-oriented compromise of the McCain-Kennedy proposal. Months later, although the new movement’s momentum had slowed, its historic impact was confirmed when Latino voters abandoned the Republican Party at an unprecedented level in the 2006 midterm elections. This exodus from the political right was one of the most important factors that brought Democrats to power in both houses of Congress that year.

The day after May 1st, the atmosphere in our union and in the Los Angeles labor movement as a whole was electric. In our union's staff meeting and in immigrant rights coalition meetings there was a euphoric celebration and an exploration of this new moment and its implications. Our leaders asked, “How did this happen? Can we make it happen again? Can we channel the power of these newly awakened masses into our drive to organize workers and build

union density? Can we build permanent organizational power out of this mobilization. Can this be used to actually win the immigration reform that has been stalled in Congress?” Some labor organizers believed that Spanish-language radio jockeys like Piolin and El Cucuy, who had been hyping the rally for months, were the driving force behind the massive turnout; other political strategists—and much the media—forewent any concrete explanation, calling *La Gran Marcha* a “flash-in-the-pan” that one could neither predict nor control.

Contrary to these ‘historical fluke’ narratives that regard mass mobilizations as mystifying anomalies, we, like other theorists of nonviolent action, believe that such explosive moments of large-scale protest are controllable and predictable phenomena that consistently occur within social movement cycles.¹ We are not the first to grapple with the implications of these moments.

In the early 1960s, when faced with circumstances much like those encountered by Los Angeles union leaders organizing in the wake of May 1, 2006, Nicholas von Hoffman, a protégé of the legendary organizer Saul Alinsky, dubbed this phenomenon “the moment of the whirlwind.” It is explained in a story in the biography of Saul Alinsky, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*. Alinsky, whom some call the father of community organizing, was accustomed to slowly and methodically building local community groups for years before the maturation of any political potential. Von Hoffman, a highly-skilled organizer trained to build permanent organizations by recruiting and developing committees of indigenous leaders. The Freedom Rides of 1961 had energized the Chicago Woodlawn citizens as well as the community organization of Woodlawn.

¹ Bill Moyer has written about the social movement cycles that are generated by momentum-driven campaigns. Each cycle contains within it a “trigger event” that ignites a new wave of momentum-driven activity and mass action. Momentum organizers consciously try to engineer “trigger events” – what Van Hoffman termed “moments of the whirlwind” – to generate organizational growth, escalation, and polarization. Such trigger events are not flukes but rather consistent and observable parts of the social movement cycle. (Moyer, *Doing Democracy*, p. 54, 55)

And those rules of community organizing that he had learned from the masters, and refined through years of struggle, were instantaneously transformed.

Von Hoffman was skeptical about organizing a speaker for the Freedom Rides, a trigger event that created massive amounts of publicity for the civil rights movement. A few riders asked to make their first public appearance in Woodland, but von Hoffman envisioned failure. He could not recall “one civil rights rally or protest in recent Chicago history that had attracted much of a crowd.” And his time tested assessment of turnout for the event through his new organization was predicting not even enough to fill the front rows of local school’s gymnasium. Alinsky's biographer, Sanford Horwitt, describes the situation:

Now, he could easily imagine an embarrassing, poorly attended meeting that gossipmongers in Woodlawn and, worse still, across the Midway at the University of Chicago would point to as a sign of TWO’s weakness and incompetence. . . .

On Friday Night, two hours before the program was to start, the gym was empty and von Hoffman was nervous-his initial fears seemed about to be confirmed. An hour late, an elderly couple arrive, and then, to von Hoffman’s total amazement, so many more people turned up that there was no room left in the gym, in the foyer, or on the stairs. Hundreds of people were out in the street, where loudspeakers were quickly set up. Woodlawn had turned out en masse for the Freedom Riders. Towards the end of the program, one of them said, “we have a song we sing, it’s called ‘we shall overcome.’ How many of you know it?” Only a few hands went up. “We shall teach it to you,” one of the Freedom Riders said, and they did.

At the evening's end, von Hoffman was in an unfamiliar state of shock and euphoria. He went out with friends for a drink and tried to fathom how his expectations could have been so wrong. When he got home at three in the morning, he did not hesitate to pick up the special phone in his apartment that only Alinsky called on -- to call the boss at his house in Carmel. ‘This better be good,’ was the boss’s opening growl, to which von Hoffman replied, ‘It is good; mix yourself a drink, I got to talk to you for a while.’ Blow by blow, von Hoffman described what had happened, and when he finished, he said, ‘ I think that we should toss out everything we are doing organizationally and work on the premise that this is *the moment of the whirlwind*, that we are no longer organizing but guiding a social movement". There was a brief moment pause at the other end, and then Alinsky said, ‘You’re right. Get on it tomorrow.’ Only years later did von Hoffman fully appreciate Alinsky’s reaction. It pinpointed Alinsky’s

brilliance as a political tactician: he was able to shed even the most favored organizational concepts and assumptions when confronted with new, unexpected reality.²

In the next few years they struggled to integrate this new realization into the traditional Alinsky community organizing methodology. With this attempt at understanding this new momentum driven moment, they made many breakthroughs that was impossible using just traditional community organizing techniques. (I think I should look at what I had before in the draft about it being a success.)

We too have experienced this euphoria and questioned how our organizations should respond to these whirlwinds. We experienced it after the Seattle WTO protests of 1999, and we have studied the uncannily similar accounts of organizers who have experience other moments of mass mobilizations. Among other historic touchpoints, their stories relate experiences of the Gandhi-led Indian independence movement's Salt March; the Civil Rights Movement's lunch counter sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and Birmingham and Selma campaigns; the Berkeley Free Speech Movement; the Clamshell Alliance's 1977 anti-nuclear campaign; and the rapid spread of Occupy protests in the fall of 2011. All of these events were dubbed "flashes in the pan" by the media—and even by perplexed organizers who could not explain the sudden surges of mobilization. We believe that often labor and community organizers find it difficult to understand the "moment of the whirlwind" because they are operating within an organizing tradition that does not incorporate what we call "momentum-driven mobilizations." In fact, one of the most common themes in the history of social movements is the internal schism between organizing traditions that view "moments of the whirlwind" in very different ways.

²Horwitt, Sanford. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Random House, 1992, pg. 401

I. Defining the Two Movement Paradigms

Our conception of two conflicting organizing traditions that help elucidate both the dynamics of “moments of the whirlwind” and why they are so commonly dismissed by many organizers was inspired by Charles Payne, a scholar of the civil rights movement. In his book I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, Payne credits Bob Moses with identifying two distinct organizing traditions in the Civil Rights Movement. Payne writes:

Bob Moses, himself responsible for much of what made the Mississippi movement distinctive, even among SNCC projects, has written that the Civil Rights movement can be thought of as having two traditions. There was what he labels the community-mobilizing tradition, focused on large scale, relatively short-term public events. This is the tradition of Birmingham, Selma, the March on Washington, the tradition best symbolized by the work of Martin Luther King.

This is the movement of popular memory and the only part of the movement that has attracted sustained scholarly attention. The Mississippi movement reflects another tradition of Black activism, one of community organizing, a tradition with a different sense of what freedom means and therefore a greater emphasis on the long-term development of leadership in ordinary men and women, a tradition best epitomized, Moses argues, by the teaching and example of Ella Baker. (p. 3)

We understand "organizing traditions" to be formal and informal methodologies of organizing passed on by lineages of leaders and communicated in key texts. These practical traditions exist within broader *paradigms* of social change that answer basic questions of strategy: How do we build power? How do we develop leadership? How do we generate organizational resources? How do we win? Two major and distinct paradigms that have organically evolved, cooperated, and clashed throughout struggles for social justice are *structure* and *momentum*. Connected to the traditions of labor unions, Ella Baker, and Alinskyite community organizing, *structure* builds power and resources through long-term organization, develops leadership through one-on-one relationships and committee building, and believes that campaigns are won primarily through

leverage over primary and secondary targets. Conversely, Gandhi, Dr. King, and the various ‘moments of the whirlwind’ are best understood using the paradigm of *momentum* (or momentum-driven organizing), in which organizations build power and develop leadership by using a series of repeated, nonviolent, and escalating scenarios to create political crises that gradually create a majority of active public support for reform or revolution.

Before we begin dissecting these movement paradigms, it is important to simply embrace the idea that different paradigms exist—and to recognize varied and sometimes conflicting strategic logics that work within different organizations under different conditions. These paradigms appear in many different organizational forms, and organizing traditions in different countries, and time periods. These often conflicting paradigms have been noticed and written about using different labels by a variety of scholars, and activists from across the globe, like Francis Fox Piven, in her influential book, *Poor Peoples Movements*, or Ivan Marovic, non-violent trainer, and prominent Serbian Revolutionary, or Gandhi³. Such recognition opens up space for a deeper understanding of complex movement dynamics, for productive dialogue, for promising strategic innovation, and perhaps for the integration of various parts of different organizing traditions. Instead of thinking of them as mutually exclusive dichotomies, they are polarities, which at their extreme expressions are opposing, but often have many mutual supportive elements. Many organizations naturally use some natural integration of the two

³ Francis Fox Piven writes extensively about these two paradigms of organization throughout US history, in the unemployment workers movement, the industrial workers movement, the civil rights movement, and the welfare rights movement. She calls the contrasting distinction, “membership organization”, “permanent organization”, or “formal institutions”, vs protest movement, disruptive movement, or disruptive power. Ivan Marovic, has lectured extensively about the conflicting dynamics of two contrasting organizing tradition in Serbia, that were integrated together to form Otpor. He called these, the protest movement, as represented by student mobilizers that executed the student strikes, and the organization work, as represented by youth leaders organizing more permanent political party organization. Gandhi was a major expert and integral thinker of both structure and momentum and acknowledged the contrasting tendency of these paradigms on occasion. His movement was complex integration of these two paradigms he called “Satyagraha” on one side, and Party work, and constructive program on the other.

paradigms, or have some elements of the other. In fact, we believe some of the most significant social movements of the last century have come from leaders who understood, even if only intuitively, the distinctions between these two paradigms and attempted to integrate them together into an effective fusion. In his final years, Martin Luther King Jr. began to articulate a strategic vision that advocated this kind of integration (King, Where Do We Go From Here, p. 187). He was unable to actualize his vision before his death. Nevertheless, we believe that an integration of these two paradigms is the greatest hope for social change in America.

That said, before a good understanding of this integration is possible, we must clarify the two distinct paradigms. Thus, in this paper our focus will be on exploring the differences, strengths, and weaknesses of each paradigm. We will leave an in-depth discussion of the integration of these two paradigms for future papers.

Below is a chart that summarizes the two paradigms' major characteristics and how they relate to fundamental questions of strategy. We acknowledge that different groups use different languages to describe the following concepts, and that specific organizational cultures will develop new phrasing based on their particular circumstances. Also, while we have organized this chart (and this essay) to highlight the distinction between traditions of *structure* and *momentum*, there have been integrations of the two paradigms, and we believe that both paradigms can coexist together in highly productive ways.

	Structure	Momentum
<i>Trainers</i>	Midwest Academy, New Organizing Institute, Wellstone Action	CANVAS, Training for Change, War Resisters League, Einstein Institute

<i>Thinkers</i>	Saul Alinsky, Ella Baker, Marshall Ganz ⁴	Gene Sharp ⁵ , Gandhi, Dr. King, Bill Moyer, Francis Fox Piven
<i>Theory of Change</i>	Build leverage over primary & secondary targets to win concrete institutional change	Polarize spectrum of support towards demands, pull pillars of support towards movements & and build critical mass of active public support for change
<i>Campaign Demands</i>	Instrumental: real improvement in people's lives	Symbolic: builds public support for larger changes
<i>Campaign Goals</i>	Win transactional concessions & incremental reforms; build organizational power	Build public support for transformational societal change through symbolic victories
<i>Tactics</i>	Lower risk, gradual escalation, focused on creating real leverage, resource use and	Prioritizes higher levels of escalation, nonviolence; nature of action is primarily

⁴ Although Marshall Ganz is most well known for his systemization of structure paradigm, he has done some integration of the two paradigm in his thinking about how to organizing with UFW, and in political campaigns. of this integrative thinking was helpful at creating more momentum driven volunteer team structures that made the Obama campaign more momentum driven than most political campaigns. . However, most of his work, and his well known work is in public narrative which is a systemization of structure based organizing, not momentum driven mobilization.

⁵ Although the field of civil resistance, and thinkers within it like Gene Sharp, and Bill Moyer are useful at explaining the dynamics of momentum driven mobilization, symbolic protest, and resistance movements that use escalating mass non-cooperation, they also carry elements of structure base organizing in their field. Gene Sharp, and the Field of Civil Resistance was at first very interested at systemizing and theorizing how Satyagraha worked from Gandhi movment, it did not integrate Gandhi's ideas about his constructive program, or party work. Gandhi was a major expert and integral thinker of both structure and momentum. However, his theory on what he called "Satyagraha", is very within the momentum paradigm.

⁶ It is true that momentum driven campaigns sometimes use instrumental demands and tactics that is about creating leverage on a target, like the Motgermery Boycott, or the Birmingham boycotts of downtown stores. However,

	leadership development	symbolic and expressive ⁶ Build movements profile with public.
<i>Resources</i>	Consistent, long-term fundraising from constituents, foundations, donor base, membership dues, grants, email lists.	Ad-hoc fundraising spikes during peak events; large one-time donations, church & union offerings. Volatile, rapidly rises and falls.
<i>Leadership</i>	Systemic development of leaders: recruitment via mapping and targeting, developing indigenous leadership thru one-on-one relationships, apprenticeship.	Recruited via actions and peak events, developed via mass trainings, speaking events, collective action in affinity groups.
<i>Historical Examples & Organizations</i>	NAACP, labor movement, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), CSO, churches, ACORN, PICO	Gandhi's Salt March, Birmingham 1963, SNCC, Clamshell Alliance, Occupy Wall St., SCLC, Otpor!, Seattle '99
<i>Power</i>	Organized base of constituents, organized money, connections to elected officials and long-term coalitions.	Ability to continually launch mass actions with high levels of escalations; ability to generate multiple, consecutive crises via nonviolent action.

these campaigns the instrumental demand and leverage was within a symbolic framework the prioritized winning public opinion over winning a local demand. This is tension is often in many movements, between local leaders , or community organizers that are focused more on tangaible concrete victories, and movement organizers who are focused on building a movement that can win bigger changes. (see tension in negotiation between Shuttleworth, and Martin Luther King during Birmingham negotiations.)

<i>Mobilization</i>	Primarily through relationships & leadership structure.	Primarily through prophetic promotion, media attention, and activation of large networks.
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Polarities. Instead of groups falling in one or the other paradigm, groups could be put on a spectrum between two poles:

Momentum driven mobilization

Organizing a Structure

Very far on momentum side: Early SNNC (lunch counter sit ins, Freedom Rides, Albany), Serbian Student strikes of 94, Berkeley Free Speech Movement, Welfare rights protest of late 1960's, Direct Action Movement (anti nuclear movement, global Justice Movement), 2006 immigrant rights protest, US Farm Worker Strikes of the early 1960's, Occupy Wall Street.

In the middle, some integration: Early UFW, Indian independence movement, Otpor, South African Anti-apartheid (especially the UDF, United Democratic Front boycott campaign), Early Justice for janitors. Some unions during a large strike—like UNITE HERE. Obama 2008 campaign, Moveon.org (and some mass online organizations), Freedom Summer. (the field of Civil Resistance, Gene Sharp and others), Marshall Ganz.

Very far on structure side: UNITE HERE international local 11 and New Haven, SEIU whole worker organizing (as expressed by Jane), Most labor unions, grassroots political party organization, traditional political campaigns, Alinskyite community organizing, IAF, Pico, the UDF before mass campaigns. etc.

The following sections of this paper expand on the distinctions described in this chart.

II. The Organizing-the-Structure Paradigm

The "organizing the *structure*" paradigm is epitomized by organizations like UNITE HERE Local 11 and other good organizing locals in the labor movement, by Marshall Ganz's "public narrative" organizing curriculum at Harvard (which was implemented in the Obama campaign's 2008 field operation) and in the community organizing methods derived from Saul

Alinsky and his organizers at the Industrial Areas Foundation. The heart of this paradigm is the long-term process of committee-building: identifying, recruiting, and training one-by-one (and often over many months or even years) groups of indigenous leaders to take control of their own lives, workplaces, and communities. Dr. King referred to the necessity of structure-driven organizing when he wrote the following: “To produce change, people must be organized together in units of power. These units may be political, as in the case of voter’s leagues and political parties; they may be economic, as in the case of groups of tenants who joins forces to form a union, or groups of the unemployed and underemployed who organize to get jobs and better wages” (King, Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom). As Kim Bobo explains in Organizing for Social Change, a key text in the structure tradition, change in structure-driven organizing comes through waging consecutive “issues campaigns [that] end in a specific victory” (Bobo *et al.*, Organizing for Social Change, p. 10). Organizers build power by creating big, strong organizations that can apply pressure to targets. When developing strategy, organizers consider how to gain “enough power to make a government or corporate official do something in the public’s interest that he or she does not otherwise wish to do” (Bobo, p. 30). Power manifests in one of three concrete ways: “you can deprive the other side of something it wants; you can give the other side something it wants; your organization can elect someone who supports your issues” (Bobo, p. 11).

Organizers in this paradigm become masters of the house visit. They know how to knock on someone’s door that they’ve never met before, get in the door, and get a feel for whether that person is a leader. They are experts at building relationships with people and moving them to overcome fear and the emotional obstacles that can deter their participation. Through these personal relationships organizers recruit and develop leaders, and they teach these leaders to do the same with others and eventually become organizers themselves. Through this process, organizers in this paradigm can build powerful and permanent institutions that not only wage sustained, consistent battle over years with multinational corporations and the state—but also

win. These institutions can build a war chest of resources over a long period of time, usually through dues-paying members, the support of their constituency, and some foundation funding.

In the "organizing the structure" paradigm, planning a major march or rally involves a predictable strategy of working through the structure of leaders and their followers to turn out the organization's members. Most often, organizers can accurately estimate beforehand how many people will come out to an action. Furthermore, organizations like UNITE HERE Local 11 can run formidable grassroots political campaigns at municipal, state, and even national levels by mobilizing an army of members, not only to vote, but to volunteer to contact, persuade, and motivate thousands of other voters.

While the structure-based organizing paradigm can develop leaders with very deep levels of commitment, build long-lasting organization that institutionalizes power, and consistently win important concrete victories, it has limitations for those who urgently seek fundamental change in the face of entrenched opposition. The structure model builds power very slowly and requires major resources to execute and sustain its campaigns. Generally, it is most effective at winning more transactional and incremental reforms, focused on a specific institutions, rather than transformational change of a society as a whole. It is not designed to create major shifts in public opinion or to generate widespread social movement momentum. When working through structure, recruitment of leaders and changing public opinion can be a painfully slow and resource-intensive process compared to the explosive growth of momentum driven mobilization.

III. The Momentum-Driven Mobilizing Paradigm

The "momentum-driven mobilizing" stands in contrast to structure-based organizing. The momentum-driven paradigm is exemplified in the United States by the nonviolent direct action tradition of the civil rights movement—associated in particular with Martin Luther King, Jr. and

his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), as well as the early Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Within this paradigm fit organizations that Barbara Epstein categories as the Direct Action Movement—including the anti-nuclear Clamshell Alliance, ACT UP, the Direct Action Network (DAN) of the global justice movement, and the general assemblies of the Occupy movement that arose in 2011. As Dr. King explained, leaders who use this paradigm must become “specialists in agitation and dramatic projects” that attract “mass sympathy and support” (King, Where Do We Go From Here, p. 186). King believed that the civil rights movement “forged [its] own tactical theory of nonviolent direct action” not rooted in the established organizing traditions of the time (King, Where Do We Go From Here, p. 19). This new tradition of strategic nonviolence was an Americanized version of the Gandhian *satyagraha*.

King’s SCLC was based around a small core of senior staff people (who, at times, managed a few dozen campaign staff) and a network of churches, represented by their pastors. It had no large, direct membership base of individuals. Organizers in the momentum-driven mobilization tradition use such relatively loose structures, networks, and organizations to craft dramatic, confrontational actions that capture the media spotlight and mobilize thousands of people who have little or no connection or established relationship to the organization and its leaders. These are people “outside the structure.” In this tradition, the organizer is a kind of social movement “promoter” who specializes in creating events that will captivate the wide universe of individuals and organizations that, broadly speaking, make up a social movement and its supporters. Within this art of “prophetic promotion”—sometimes dismissed as “hype”—are a series of skills that organizers in this paradigm develop.

Organizations that successfully mobilize outside the structure know how to identify targets, articulate demands, and choose tactical scenarios that will resonate deeply with the

public. In this paradigm, organizers study and experiment with provoking and managing public crises while facilitating diverse and dynamic coalitions in the midst of them. They know how to recruit big-name celebrities and public figures to lend their credibility and “star power” to movement actions. They strategically use media coverage to cultivate movement luminaries and develop a movement brand. They practice engaging and manipulating the mass media to communicate a message to millions. They use social media and develop participatory websites as organizing hubs and communication networks, and they use “guerilla marketing” techniques like banner drops, wheat-pasting, stickering, and tagging. And they use art and music to attract movement interest, enliven protest, and sustain the spirit of sacrifice in the midst of expected repression. Using all these tools, the organizers generate a powerful, contagious sense of popular momentum—a “buzz” around an action or campaign. At the heart of this paradigm is the practice and principle – sometimes spiritual but always at least strategic – of militant nonviolence.

Militant nonviolence, the essential principle at the core of Martin Luther King’s leadership, can be understood as the determined willingness to suffer greatly and even die for what you believe in, without ever retaliating or seeking to harm your opponents. This willingness to make such deep personal sacrifices—whether by going to jail, marching for days, being beaten, or fasting indefinitely—gives activists the power to escalate a conflict to the level of a true public crisis. By combining great personal risk and disruptive power with the refusal to attack or harm others, militant nonviolent actions can positively transform all involved, whether participants or witnesses.

The crisis created by powerful, escalating, nonviolent actions can change public opinion more dramatically than a major political scandal. They can move the entire spectrum of popular support away from movement opponents and towards the activists and their demands. As a

result, participants become more committed, supporters become more engaged, the apathetic public becomes passively supportive, and previously ignorant bystanders become aware of the issue at hand. Even when—as often happens—these actions drive those nearest to movement opponents closer to the opposition and cause opponents to escalate their efforts to repress the movement, the actions still sow dissension within opposition ranks and cause opposing forces to be isolated from broader public support. However, creating such high levels of conflict requires extensive training. Designing a program of training that can build a capacity for militant nonviolence within the largest possible army of committed activists is perhaps the most important type of preparation for organizers who “mobilize outside the structure.”

While momentum-driven mobilization can create explosive energy and power, it lacks stability. It is hard to sustain the momentum, especially when it depends on the mass media. After reaching a climax, there often is not an organizational structure or disciplined leadership that can escalate and continue the momentum. Rarely are there concrete ways to use the momentum to create organizational structures that endure the fluctuations of media attention and vicissitudes of symbolic campaign progression. Participants and leaders are incredibly vulnerable to cycles of boom and bust, burnout, and organizational collapse.

There are many ways movements can become isolated from the public. Movements need public support to survive, grow, and win their demands. However, as a momentum-driven movement grows, so does the threat of becoming excessively countercultural, isolated, and extremist in ways that push away public support. Some veteran theorists and organizers have an in-depth analysis of the problem of countercultural isolation, which often gives rise to violent

tactics, although its dynamics are not widely understood.² Momentum-driven mobilization's most common flaw—often a devastating one—is its inability to maintain nonviolent discipline among the broad base of active participants it attracts. Without the type of lasting organizations created in the structure tradition, it is hard to cultivate the strong relationships and organizational safeguards necessary to maintain basic strategic discipline in the midst of escalating momentum. Violence, property destruction, and “diversity of tactics” often become more prominent as conflict with police, the state, and the movement opponents becomes more intense.

IV. How We Discovered the Two Paradigms

As Payne suggests, the *structure* and *momentum* paradigms, when they have appeared together, have often been in conflict. We experienced this dynamic during the global justice movement, in the high-momentum months after the epochal Seattle WTO protests of 1999. Although we were experienced student organizers and the time and had some basic training in worker organizing we had no experience (or even much of a concept) of the “moment of the whirlwind” and its significance. Thus, the impact of Seattle was a total revelation. One of us recalls the period, in early 2000:

The basic configurations of organizing had been abruptly, totally altered. Most of the major activists on my campus and the four nearby were suddenly united. Before Seattle, such an accomplishment would have taken years of gradual coalition-building between different groups and schools. Now, students with narrow political interests and pet issues were all organizing in concert for the approaching demonstration against the World Bank and the IMF in April 2000. The first organizational meeting was basically unadvertised, but nearly 100 people showed up. The attendance numbers at every planning meeting grew, and our pooled resources were huge. It was in the midst of all this that I recalled

² For more information on momentum-driven mobilization’s problem of countercultural isolation from public support, see Jonathan Matthew Smucker’s analysis of what he calls the “political identity paradox” and Bill Moyer’s analysis of the role of “the Rebel” within social movements. Relevant citations are included in the reference list at the end of this paper.

Alinsky's conversation with von Hoffman and realized, "this is what they were talking about; this is the moment of the whirlwind!" As in the prime of the Civil Rights Movement, there were now new rules in play, and more than building a movement, we were guiding one. The laws of organizing seemed to be magically transcended by the sheer energy and enthusiasm of masses of people newly awakened and willing to contribute to the movement in so many different ways. It was a challenge simply to coordinate all the explosive energy.

Prior to Seattle, I had developed a skill at predicting how many people would show up at an event, based on how many organizations were supporting it, their demonstrated capacity to turn out their members, and the amount of advertising of the event on campus. At the union where I worked in the summer, almost every individual is accounted for and "turn out" almost always hits projection. But in this new environment, these "calculations" were useless.

In late March, we invited Ralph Nader to come to the Pioneer Valley to talk about corporate globalization and the upcoming protests. Instead of advertising and mobilizing people for the teach-in with Nader, most of the major organizers were frantically working on preparations for the trip just two weeks ahead. (I had no estimate of attendance, but if I had been forced to make a prediction, I would have guessed a hundred people).

We secured a big church in the nearby town of Northampton that could seat up to 800 people, many more than most college auditoriums. Close to showtime, hundreds of people started pouring in. The church filled to capacity. People were standing in the halls, and the church supervisor started to get angry because we were breaking fire codes. Still, more people kept coming, waiting outside, hoping they could get in.

Two weeks later, I was on an 8-hour trip to Washington, DC with over 600 people in a rebel fleet of buses, vans, and cars. More than 150 of us would risk police violence, be arrested, and go to jail (many for almost a week) while others stayed behind, sleeping on church floors, to help get them out. The sacrifice so many of us endured was a bit more than I had expected, but in the aftermath I was amazed to find that participants and witnesses alike weren't discouraged and afraid. They were asking "what's next?" and, like evangelists newly baptized by fire into the movement, they were telling their story to everyone they knew.

Taking it all in on the ride back to campus, I felt like a physicist who studies gravity witnessing the flight of an airplane for the first time, or a preacher seeing the realization of biblical prophecy. Beyond the amazing events themselves, it was what they represented in my mind that was so special: a social movement the likes of which I had only read about was afoot.

We were both part of these events like these. Sharing our stories from the days and months after Seattle, we realized that we are bound by the common experience of organizing in the altered environment of a “moment of the whirlwind.” We saw that by studying the momentum of a social movement and the organizations that lead it, it could be possible to unify otherwise dispersed forces and funnel the energy of hundreds of people into actions that would mobilize mass numbers. Even though we had little if any organization or resources, our groups of student leaders were able to mobilize thousands to hit the streets, with hundreds among them willing to take great personal risks for the cause. We used an organizing tradition that we call the Direct Action Movement, which uses a set of affinity groups, action planning, tactics, and consensus-decision process similar to that pioneered by the Clamshell Alliance in 1978.³ This organizing tradition clearly fits within the momentum-driven mobilization paradigm.

Using this organizing tradition, at the height of the global justice movement, dozens of people in our local groups (and hundreds like them across the country) were willing to drop out, live communally, and organize full-time without any resources. But the structures were missing. Few leaders involved in the movement had an organization to call home or the type of organizing training to use the overflow of devoted volunteers effectively. Instead, top organizers focused on mobilizing participants in a series of temporary mass meetings (spokes councils), which accomplished few concrete tasks. Many sensed that a movement based solely on short-term mass mobilizations might, despite its explosive energy, amount to no more than the “flash in the pan” prophesized in the media. They critiqued the trend of “summit hopping” and called for sustained local community organizing. But even those pushing for long-term institutionalization lacked a model of how to do that effectively. The search for one is part of what led us to the labor movement, to UNITE HERE Local 11 (a prominent union of hotel and restaurant workers located in Los Angeles), and to a methodology which we now call “public narrative organizing”. This organizing tradition fits firmly in the "organizing structure" paradigm.

³ See Barbara Epstein’s definition of the Direct Action Movement *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, as cited in reference list.

Although we are no longer organizers with UNITE HERE, we have both been strengthened deeply by the insights from its model and have become deeply committed to the basic organizing tradition. We found much of what we were looking for. Yet, we have also come to see the limitations of structure and of organizing traditions that fit solely within it. The union's progress is painstaking and difficult. The pace of organizing workers into powerful unions is often so slow that, even if we win some battles, we cannot keep up with larger changes in the political system and the economy. We were winning battles but losing the war. Just as the global justice movement after Seattle needed a permanent, training-based organization to absorb all the recruits and maintain the activity generated by huge protests, we believe that the labor movement also needs the recruits, media attention, and other resources that the "momentum-driven mobilizing" paradigm provides.

This realization led us to a decade-long study of and experimentation with integration of these two paradigms. We are now convinced more than ever that the project of pursuing an organizing model that combines the strengths and mitigates the weaknesses of both paradigms holds amazing promise for the struggle to win deep progressive change in our country. This article is the product of our study and exploration, and we hope that it will serve as a vehicle for our hope for integration. Our own organizing efforts to produce an integrated model have moved in an independent "start-up" direction with the collaborative grassroots project called 99Rise. However, we hope that this and future articles will stimulate interest and dialogue among many organizers familiar with one, both, or other paradigms, with the end of creating integrative experiments from various organizational bases.

Conclusion

There are two different paradigms, which we called *structure* and *momentum*, that understand and relate to social movements differently. Many different organizing traditions—which contain diverse sets of institutional structures, strategies, and organizing methodologies—

fit within these distinct paradigms. The two paradigms often appear within the same movement, at times in conflict and at times complementing each other to create social change.

Understanding these different paradigms, with their respective strengths and weaknesses, helps us to navigate many conflicts and to develop strategy within social movements. It also allows for constructive dialogue.

In our next article we will elaborate on argument we introduced here and which is foundational to our project. This argument is that momentum-driven organizing can create and guide “moments of the whirlwind.” Some structure-focused organizers acknowledge that explosions such as Occupy or the global justice movement after Seattle operate with a distinct strategic logic and with different organizational considerations than do unions or traditional community organizations, yet these organizers still see such mass movement phenomena as essentially random and irreparably volatile. Thus, before we move forward to discussing possible integrations of structure and momentum in future articles, it is critical that we explore the long history of organizers, most notably Gandhi and Dr. King, who deliberately created moments of the whirlwind and harnessed the awesome power of momentum for rapid organizational growth, leadership development, and political change.

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