

“Insider” Movements: How Do You Know if You Have One?¹

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¹ Adapted from, *Measuring Insider Movements? Shifting to a Qualitative Standard* *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 35:1, Spring 2018, pp. 21ff. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* King Arthur approaches a French castle to explain his quest for the Grail and is told “we’ve already got one.” It’s a humorous scene, and of course, they *don’t* have the Grail. But then, how would they know if they did?

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gimli is riding with others towards Helms Deep and is expounding about his culture, including the bearded nature of the women of his culture which he admits has led to the idea that they have no women. He begins to comment on the ridiculous nature of such a view just as he unceremoniously falls from his horse.

Some reactions to news about insider movements resemble the comments above: when I speak of insider movements and say we “have one,” I get asked “how do you know?” And since IMs don’t look like what people expect, there is a suspicion that they don’t really exist.

I am primarily interested in this relative to insider movements, but of course similar questions apply to any sort of movement, and so I will write with a more general approach as well.

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What Makes a Movement a Movement?

Depending on who you ask, a movement may be measured by how many believers, or how many fellowships/churches you have, or more likely, some combination. Time factors may be included: X number of new fellowships in Y amount of time, etc. More and more reports of movements, such as what we report in *MF*, also look at things like how many “streams” of key leadership and churches have multiplied other leaders and churches down their respective chains, and how many iterations of multiplication that has produced.

In some insider movements, while less frequently reported or captured in databases, similar data is tracked, discussed and also corrected. I remember one meeting with insider movement leaders who were discussing the status of fellowships in various regions of their country. Several of them mentioned numbers and added anecdotes. At one point a brother, who had already shared, interrupted to say he had misinformed everyone. As he thought about it more, he realized he needed to reduce what he had reported because he remembered that several fellowships had ended for various reasons.

While there is a place for such quantitative data, is this the sort of thing that is *most* important to track? I have been more and more convinced that we need to pay more careful attention to qualitative elements.

Years ago we started using certain criteria and teaching others to use them by modifying the “Three Self” criteria developed by both Henry Venn (Anglican) and Rufus Anderson (Presbyterian). Another fourth “self” was

suggested over time in various circles, and so we began to speak of “Four Self” Movements, which included being:

- Self-Propagating
- Self-Governing
- Self-Supporting
- Self-Theologizing

We developed definitions and a tool for assessing progress in movements among the unreached. But over time, a number of things made my insider leader friends and me increasingly uneasy about these standards.

First, all of the first three selves were developed in response to the felt need for handing over already functioning mission churches to local leadership. They were primarily used, in other words, to address developments in a relatively established mission situation, instead of a context looking to foster newer movements.

Second, as such, there is a sense in which these selves were in fact not part of the original vision or purpose of the churches they were now trying to encourage to be independent. The selves were never really meant to be criteria to measure a movement but were employed to assist in a hand over. Origins matter.

Third, the emphasis on “self” created more of a focus on just that, the dimension of self. Thus, it was easy to miss the dynamics of propagating, governing, supporting and theologizing. The ultimate aim of that thinking was to get younger mission churches to do these things themselves.

Fourth, and closely related to this, we became convinced that the use of and continued repeating of the word “self” in our day was a not-so-subtle message that smelled of Western individualism. This seemed directly counter to the picture of koinonia and partnership so deeply rooted in the New Testament movement(s), which served to connect churches in ways that were interdependent.

Finally, that fourth self, “self-theologizing,” created huge misunderstandings, not only among those outside of our organization but also among those within our agency. This was so much the case that often we were unable to overcome the resulting static, doubt and confusion merely by the constant redefining of what we meant by “self” and “theologizing.” We concluded that different terminology would be important.

Our Own Training Caught Up

In addition to these considerations, we as trainers were being affected by our own delivery of our programs. That may sound strange, but allow me to explain.

One component of our training is a series of five studies focused on Luke and Acts. In a short period of time we go through those two books in their entirety five times, each time asking questions related to healthy movements. The aim is to help those we train to identify the dynamics that help movements grow and spread and mature and remain healthy.

As a result of these repeated readings, those of us in leadership found that these texts, the very ones we were using to train others, kept speaking to *us*. And by us, please read me to be saying, me!

The dynamics which we had discovered inductively in Luke and Acts were actually quite different from the four selves we had been telling our trainees to use in applying the training. There was a growing sense of disconnect and discomfort internally.

For all of these reasons, we felt a change was needed and decided to try to rethink, simplify and re-express. We asked several people from different cultures within our organization to suggest changes.

As a result, we came to speak of “Four Signs of Healthy Movements.” They were simple, and we attached biblical references that seemed to sum them up.

Our summary was that healthy movements exhibit some of the things the “four selves” were trying to get at: more multiplication, more leaders, more generosity and more engagement in Scripture. But they will also demonstrate

more miraculous evidence of the Spirit, more character, more reconciled relationships, different attitudes toward women and children, hearts for others to know Jesus, hearts to know Jesus ourselves and on and on.

So, how do we know?

Basically, we talk about these things. We talk about them personally, in our own lives, not just in the movement as an “other” thing. We discuss whether a team is seeing these dynamics, and if so, how developed are they. It is oral, conversational, communal.

Are there quantitative-numerical details that could surface in the answers to these qualitative descriptors? Certainly.

But in our view, if the dynamics are healthy, then there is a movement, regardless of the size or numerical measurements.

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Conclusion

So, how do we know if we have one? The answer to that, implicit in the previous text, is essentially, “only through close enough relationship to see and experience it.”

There are several factors that make it hard to demonstrate that such movements are real. Security issues are probably one of the most common. But this element of relational trust is another (they are connected, but not identical). Add to that factor the additional element of focusing on qualitative measurements, and I can fully appreciate referring back to Gimli, that the idea arises that there aren’t any.

The church in its local, Catholic and movement expressions is the Body of Christ. It is a living thing. This suggests an analogy to my mind. The fact of human DNA is what determines that “this” is a person, a human being, one who will grow, develop, and become mature. In the same way, I am suggesting that if the right DNA is in place, then we have a movement. I am further suggesting that the most crucial and determinative DNA is qualitative. The primary job description, then, for pioneer church-planters is to disciple and coach from day one with the aim of fostering this DNA.

Healthy, growing movements flow from the right DNA.

