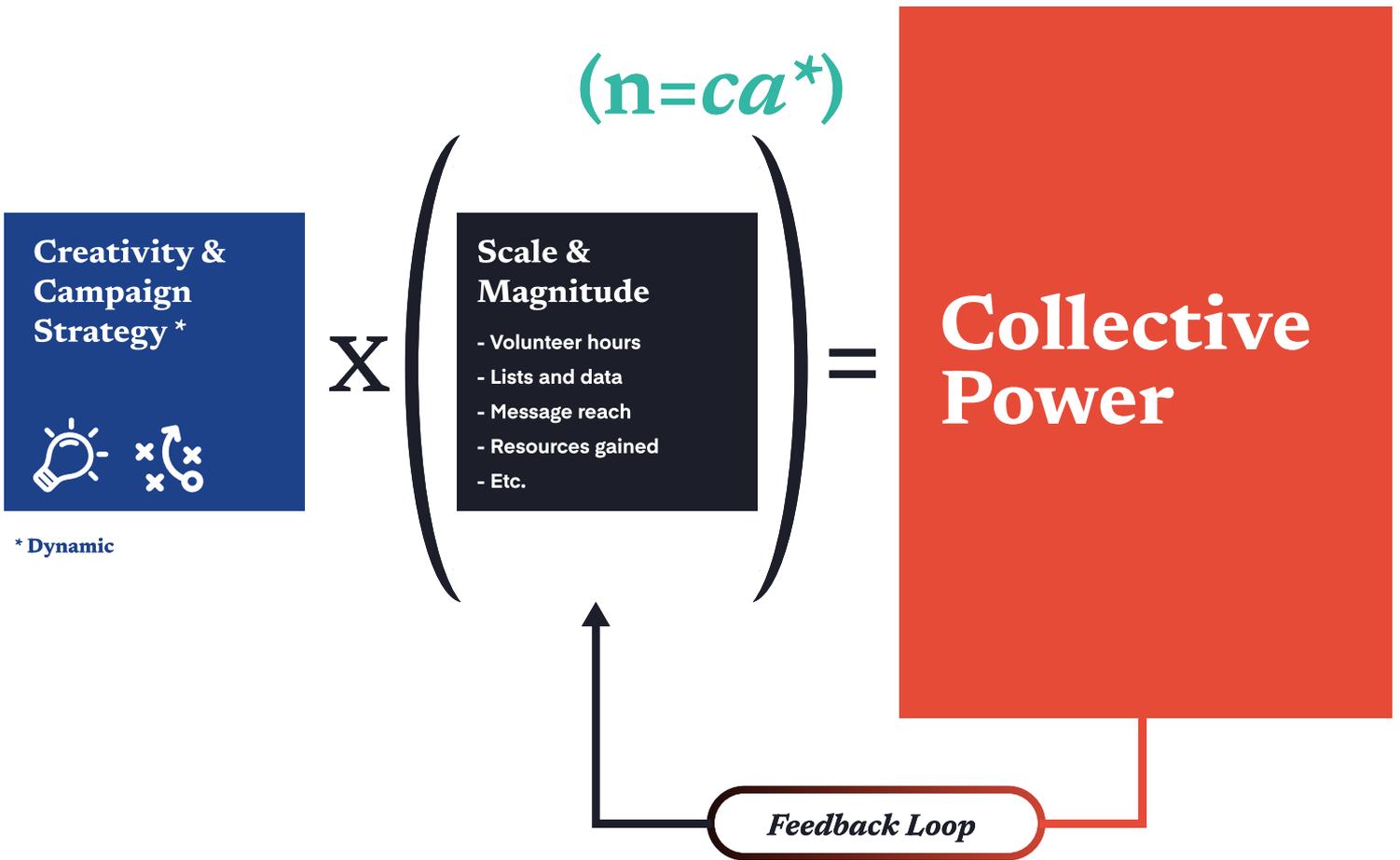


# Explaining our Organising Equation

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To better understand organising, and the elements that comprise it (that need to be measured), we developed a metaphorical equation - symbolic rather than mathematically rigorous.



\*ca **Coordinated Action**

*Personal Choice*

Community outcomes > personal outcome

VARIABLES

**1. Allegiance**

- Trust
- Relationships between supporters
- Belonging
- Identity

**2. Objective Alignment**

- Decentralization
- Agreement on objectives
- Strength of collective agreement

**3. Hope**

- Belief in likely of outcome

**4. Narrative Strength**

- Importance of cause
- Story of movement
- Supporters role in story

**5. Leadership & Symbolism**

- Leaders as personification of values
- Other symbols



## Why we need an equation to measure organising?

The leadership of campaigns need to be able to measure the key components of organising to help them make good decisions, invest resources correctly, and make their work effective.

To measure organising we need to understand how power works within organising.

Organising itself is far more complicated to measure than other methods of political change. This is because of the intangible nature of the elements that comprise it (such as trust) and because of the way power works within organising, as it is built exponentially through coordinated action, creating a feedback loop.

## Campaign Strategy

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The design of a campaign is an essential ingredient in making change. It is a multiplying factor in the equation of organising power. **From individual actions to overall movement approach, the ingenuity, creativity, planning, ongoing strategy, and individual decisions of any campaign, all must deploy their theory of change to succeed in creating political change.** Without this, any campaign is powerless. The impact of a campaign is dependent not only on how the power of human resource is generated, but how it is strategically applied.

Some campaigns can win by mobilising; continually applying pressure, raising awareness, and leveraging the power that already exists from those who support it. But to **address problems of a power imbalance, organising is needed to build alternative power and creatively poke holes in existing power structures.**

As campaign techniques advance and the power being challenged adapts, our ways to poke through those holes also needs to be updated and adapted. This is one of the major challenges for digital organising at the moment as power structures become resilient to the approaches that have worked in the past. It is unlikely that future US presidential campaign rallies will be duped by Tik-Tokers, as that card has already been played.

In organising, the creativity and design of a campaign's emergent strategy is inseparable from coordinated action, because leadership is distributed and the strategy emerges from many places. **Collective decision making and collective wisdom are essential for true coordination to happen.** (Leaders also serve an important role to the coordination itself, as a personification of the group's values, as will be explored later).

## Scale & Magnitude

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Achieving scale and magnitude is key to building power - but often over-valued in the planning and measuring organising success, likely because it is easy to measure. Certainly list size, volunteer hours and message reach are more simple to report on than level of leadership, or allegiance of activists. It's also the easiest place to show impact through increasing external resources. Because it seems the quickest and easiest way to grow movements with a clear input, this is often the area campaigns leadership focuses on, despite the fact that it has nowhere near the potential impact of Coordinated Action.

The most important factor of scale and magnitude is its relationship to the entire formula for power. **This is the base with which coordination can exponentially multiply. But equally important is the feedback loop in the equation, where the overall collective power output also leads to an increase in scale and magnitude.** The clarity provided to us by this lovely two dimensional diagram misses a bit of the fourth dimension - that this is a dynamic process throughout time.

## Coordinated Action

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This is perhaps the most important element of our equation - it takes the summation of strategy and scale and multiplies it's impact exponentially. If in Alinsky's rent strike example some individuals agree to pay in exchange for a rent reduction, or if some drop out when only a few conditions are met, the campaign's potential power would be in jeopardy. Power beyond the summation of individual actions comes from coordination between activists, supporters, members, strikers, etc.

**Coordination requires collectivity, prioritising the needs of the group over the individual.**

From the perspective of personal choice, for actions to be truly coordinated, often the individual will need to prioritise the group's collective long term outcome beyond that of their own, especially in the short term.

For example, during a strike a worker may have some incentive in pay or conditions to break it - but if they hold out, could win greater gains collectively.

In some ways, **taking part of collective action almost certainly implies some degree of personal sacrifice through efforts in the short term, in the aim and hope of winning something bigger.** Capitalist thinking might have trouble explaining this, as a system based on people acting in their own self interest, but we are also motivated by altruism and collective good will - these forces form the basis by which movements get built every day, and are fundamental in creating change.

We recognise these thoughts are a work in progress, but below we identified components we believe are essential to this coordination.



## Coordinated Action: Variables

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### 1. ALLEGIANCE

This is probably the largest and most important factor that will determine if an individual will coordinate with other activists for collective action. While this may often appear as allegiance to an organisation or entity, in reality the allegiance itself is to the group. This difference is important - because it is other people and the relationships between them ultimately where the source of allegiance can be found.

A number of key components to be found that determine allegiance:

**TRUST:** If the activists do not trust one another, the group as a whole, the organisation, or the movement they will not be moved to collective action. Trust is core to developing authentic commitment and fighting for the group's collective objectives.

**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SUPPORTERS:** The way in which supporters know and value each other is, like trust, essential in their willingness to sacrifice and/or value the community outcome over a personal one. As naturally social creatures, we have empathy built into us. In more corny terms, love will heal the world.

That can be put into a very real practice when we understand the wellbeing of our coworkers, neighbours, families, communities and fellow humans are at stake. (Side note: Here's a quick check to see if you are actually organising or not - **if the activities you are doing does not build relationships between supporters/activists, then you are not organising.**)

**SENSE OF BELONGING:** Recently we wrote on how this belonging is actually a stronger factor in involvement than the cause itself. In our experience, campaigns that work to consciously create a positive culture, centering acceptance and belonging, tend to thrive and scale, where those that don't do this struggle to engage people and meet organising objectives.

**IDENTITY:** Personal allegiance is often determined in part by the actual level to which an activist incorporates belonging to a movement into their personal identity. For the striking worker this can mean seeing themselves as a worker rather than a 'scab'. For a political party, it could be the difference in 'I am voting for the European Greens' versus "I am a Green". The former is a willingness to participate in mobilising; the latter, provides the underpinnings of organising. Campaigns can consciously build identity into their engagement approach to understand what factors influence the cause entering into a supporter or activists identity.

### 2. OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT

Willingness to participate in coordinated action is also deeply impacted by the overall alignment of the group with the objectives of the campaign or movement. While you can mobilise around objectives that are set by a centralised decision-making body, such as leadership or organisation staff, you can never truly achieve the power unleashed by coordinated action this way - for that you need collective objective agreement.

**DECENTRALISATION:** It's not just a feature of organising; it's an input to ensure that activists are aligned with the objective itself. **When the goals and actions of the movement are led by the community itself**, there is no risk of failing to lose the trust of the community itself. For many organisations, this takes a process of re-connecting with the community if they have drifted away from those they seek to serve towards influencing policy makers, engaging with funders, or the public at large. It requires first valuing, trusting, and believing in your community. (And is often conscious work to be carried out by risk averse organisations).

**AGREEMENT ON OBJECTIVES:** There must be clear agreement among activists and the group at large on what the objectives are. Good leadership helps build commitment to the larger objective by continually bringing it back into the everyday work and asks for support in a transparent way that can keep everyone focussed on the reasoning for their involvement.

**STRENGTH OF COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT:** This can at times be an actual written agreement - as is the case with a mission statement or membership agreement - but will exist regardless in the articulation of objectives through every communication, ask, and action of the movement.

### 3. HOPE

Beyond simple campaign slogans, "You gotta give 'em hope." As the great LGBTQI movement-builder Harvey Milk said, **just promising repeatedly that you will win is not enough.** To choose the community outcome over the personal, an activist must believe their involvement will help to achieve something.

A strong case for how a movement can win overall needs to be made, but smaller symbolic wins along the way are just as important in building hope. A leader's experience in winning elsewhere or seeing similar fights won elsewhere can help fuel hope too.



## Coordinated Action: Variables

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### 4. NARRATIVE STRENGTH

The way we understand our world is through narrative. **Being able to see the value in the movements of the world through story plays deeply into the decisions we make.** Beyond just selling the importance of a cause to engage supporters and develop activists, narrative in a campaign is essential because it frames the way collective agents see their relationship and role in the 'story' of the movement.

When activists see themselves playing an essential role in the part of the story unfolding, which shows a movement's place in history, they commit to collective work. A strong narrative : should show activist agency, unresolved conflict, the forces of good, purpose, and plot in through actions that lead to a conclusion.

### 5. LEADERSHIP & SYMBOLISM

Leaders can play a role beyond guiding campaign design and strategy. **Leaders personify collective and community values and serve a core symbolic purpose for building commitment towards the coordinated action.** If the values can be symbolically represented by a leader or leaders, the movement is already centred in and therefore trusted by its community. Millennia of monarchical rule saw individuals representing the entire national identity of countries to their populations (and oddly, still do in some places).

Leadership is just one of many symbolic elements that can build dedication to collective action. **From movement logos, to key phrases, physical artifacts** (the role of hoodies in the Trayvon Martin marches for example), **and even things like music associated with the movement.**

## What Does Power Look Like?

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Any measurement of organising - and development of best practice around it - must benchmark itself against whether or not the change identified by the community was achieved. This measure of the power is obviously only seen after the success of the campaign itself.

**One way to see the utility of power from organising in the present is through the longevity and sustainability of a movement in the face of adversity.** There will always be moments of loss, backlash, spinning in place, and setbacks throughout. The ability for a movement to persist and overcome these - as we saw in Argentina's recent fight for the right of pregnant people to choose an abortion - is one of the essential components of organising.

**Organising power itself is fundamentally transformative to individuals and communities.** Individuals committed to coordinated action don't just impact a movement; it impacts them. This is not a happy side effect of organising - it is the way in which we build movements, and build a better world. Movements affect those who organise as much as about the population at large.

## Embrace complexity

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We've done our best to tease out what comprises organising in order to understand and measure it. This is a working theory, undoubtedly missing elements or relationships. We acknowledge that **simplifying this highly complex social phenomenon into a digestible two dimensional model which we can use to isolate variables is imperfect.** Certainly there are other angles with which to view the way power manifests in organising.

Part of our objective in this exploration is to represent the level of complexity.

**We hope that this preliminary framework serves to both acknowledge the complexity of organising, and to encourage attempts to measure it regardless of what messy business it might be.** It is the only thing that will allow us to understand what can be done to impact change, face the goliath tasks of rebalancing injustices, and inspire innovation in campaigning.

Read more about measuring organising at: [www.tectonica.co/equation](http://www.tectonica.co/equation)