

Independent Innovators of Social Organizations

Stuart Conger¹

Ottawa, Canada, stuconger@gmail.com

Abstract: The creation of new laws, organizations and procedures that affect the ways that people relate to themselves and others individually and collectively is now seen as important to the continuing advancement of society. Many governments and foundations encourage social invention/innovation but little attention has been paid to the process by which new organizations have been formed, yet some (Scouts, YMCA, Women's Institutes, service clubs, Red Cross, etc.) have played a major role in advancing civilization. It is the purpose of this article to identify the processes and to suggest how agencies set up to promote social innovation can identify and support local innovations that appear to have promise of becoming a national or even international organization fostering the advancement of society. The above-named organizations were started by individuals who were able to quickly get supporters, but many innovators with equally good ideas see their projects fail for lack of collaborators. Agencies established to support social innovation need to search for and support these nascent organizations.

Introduction

An independent innovator of social organizations is a person who has created an organization which has had a profound impact on the continuing development on the ways that people relate to themselves or others. Eventually these innovators attract supporters. Independent social innovators would include people, such as Sigmund Freud, who invented procedures (psychoanalysis) or Binet (first intelligence test) but the focus in the paper is on those who created small organizations that grew to world-wide prominence.

The importance of examining this type of innovator lies in the active support of the European Union, a number of countries and several foundations to support would-be social innovators. Little has been done, however, to describe and define the characteristics of the innovators or the process of invention and development. This paper attempts to do just that in respect of organizations.

The purpose of this note, then, is to examine the creation of new organizations that have had a profound impact on creating our civilization in the past 200 years. It is hoped that we can derive some principles that will be useful to those who would encourage those whose aim to foster further organizations in support of growing a better society. The organizations included in this study are: YMCA, Boy Scouts, Women's Institutes, the service club, international Red Cross, Jehovah's Witnesses, So You Think You Can Dance and One Million Voices Against FARC.

How does an individual create an entirely new organization that enhances the lives of citizens? This question has been seldom asked in spite of increasing support given to would-be innovators by governments and foundations.

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges Andreas Hjorth Frederiksen for his critical reading of an earlier draft and for his useful suggestions.

Creating an organization is not an easy task no matter what domain it operates in. For example something like 60% of new small businesses are dead within two years and 80% shortly thereafter. It is not surprising because the owner/manager has to make decisions in every aspect of the operation including: fundraising, technical operations, recruiting supporters, staffing, marketing, public relations, finance and accounting, facilities, etc. Yet he or she has had little or no training or experience in any of these areas. The same may be said of social innovators who have a great idea but typically lack the knowledge and skills of creating and managing an organization. There are undoubtedly many organizations that perish very quickly.

The following pages describe eight successful organizations but many organizations that promoted social inventions have failed. Our newspapers often report the demise of a local project to promote a great cause or idea. Usually, the failure is attributed to shortage of funding but there may be many other reasons including those cited in the paragraph above

The Invention of Organizations

It may seem paradoxical that some of the key organizations that play an important role in our society were created by individuals, admittedly with subsequent support from many other people. Our examples are those who did not require agitation to achieve their aims, and indeed whose aims became clearer as their projects won acceptance. Their aims were quietly achieved without fanfare.

THE INVENTORS

Rotary International - the first service club - PAUL HARRIS

The world's first service club, the Rotary Club of Chicago, was formed in 1905 by Paul P. Harris, an attorney who wished to capture in a professional club the same friendly spirit he had felt in the small towns of his youth. Rotary's popularity spread, and within a decade, clubs were chartered from San Francisco to New York to Winnipeg, Canada. By 1921, Rotary clubs had been formed on six continents.

As Rotary grew, its mission expanded beyond serving club members' professional and social interests. Rotarians began pooling their resources and contributing their talents to help serve communities in need. Today, 1.2 million Rotarians belong to over 32,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

As it approached the 21st century, Rotary worked to meet society's changing needs, expanding its service efforts to address such pressing issues as environmental degradation, illiteracy, world hunger, and children at risk.

The membership structure of each municipal club goes a long way to ensuring the survival of the organization. Each member represents a different occupation and therefore the club has a wide range of skills to call upon in its own management.

The Boy Scouts - LORD BAREN-POWELL

Lord Baden-Powell served in the British Army from 1876 until 1910 in India and Africa. Several of his military books, written for military reconnaissance and scout training in his African years, were also read by boys. Based on those earlier books, he wrote "Scouting for Boys" published in 1908 for youth readership.

On his return from Africa in 1903, Baden-Powell found that his military training manual, "Aids to Scouting", had become a best-seller, and was being used by teachers and youth organizations. Following his involvement in the Boys' Brigade as Brigade Secretary and Officer in charge of its scouting section Baden-Powell decided to re-write "Aids to Scouting" to suit a youth readership. In August 1907 he held a camp on Brownsea Island to test out his ideas. About twenty boys attended: eight from local Boys' Brigade companies, and about twelve public school boys, mostly sons of his friends.

Boys and girls spontaneously formed Scout troops and the Scouting Movement had inadvertently started, first as a national, and soon an international phenomenon. In 1920, the 1st World Scout Jamboree took place in Olympia, and Baden-Powell was acclaimed Chief Scout of the World.

YMCA - GEORGE WILLIAMS

Sir George Williams (1821 – 1905), was the founder of the YMCA. He was born on a farm in Dulverton, Somerset, England. As a young man, he described himself as a "careless, thoughtless, godless, swearing young fellow" but eventually became a devout Christian.

He went to London and worked in a draper's shop. Appalled by the terrible conditions in London for young working men, he gathered a group of his fellow drapers together to create a place that would not tempt young men into sin. That place was the YMCA.

Williams was knighted in 1894 by Queen Victoria. After his death in 1905, he was commemorated by a stained-glass window in the nave of Westminster Abbey. Sir George Williams is buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

The Red Cross - JEAN HENRI DUNANT

Dunant (1828 – 1910), was a Swiss businessman and social activist. During a business trip in 1859, he was witness to the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino in modern day Italy. He recorded his memories and experiences in the book "A Memory of Solferino" which inspired the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863. The 1864 Geneva Convention was based on Dunant's ideas. In 1901 he received the first Nobel Peace Prize. His book of 1,600 copies and was printed at Dunant's own expense. Within the book, he described the battle, its costs, and the chaotic circumstances afterwards. He also developed the idea that in the future a neutral organization should exist to provide care to wounded soldiers. He distributed the book to many leading political and military figures in Europe.

Dunant also began to travel through Europe to promote his ideas. His book was largely positively received, and the president of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare made the book and its suggestions the topic of the February 9, 1863 meeting of the organization. Dunant's recommendations were examined and positively assessed by the members. They created a five-person Committee to further pursue the possibility of their implementation and made Dunant one of the members. Their first meeting on February 17, 1863 is now considered the founding date of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Women's Institutes - ADELAIDE HOODLESS

Adelaide Hoodless (1858 – 1910) founded the international women's organization known as the Women's Institute. When her son died from impure milk she devoted herself to the education for new mothers. She became president of the Young Women's Christian Association, and taught classes in domestic science (home economics). With Lady Aberdeen, she helped found the National Council of Women of Canada, the Victorian Order of Nurses and the National Association of the YWCA. In 1898 she published "Public School Domestic Science". An 1897 speech to farmers' wives in Stoney Creek,, Canada, inspired the formation of the first Women's Institute, intended for the education of rural women, and within a decade more than 500 had been organized across Canada!

In 1890 she became second president of the Hamilton, Canada, YWCA. In that capacity she attended the World Congress of Representative Women held in 1893 in Chicago. Discouraged by the reception that Canadians received as a result of their lack of national organizations, she returned with a determination to alter the situation. She helped create the National Council of Women of Canada. Hoodless established Hamilton's Local Council of Women. She organized in Toronto the founding meeting of the national YWCA, of which she became first vice-president and then, in January 1895, president.

She began a multi-pronged campaign to gain acceptance for domestic science in local schools, the provincial educational curriculum, and teacher-training institutions. The Department of Education provided regulations in 1897 governing the curriculum for home economic. At the minister's urging, Hoodless published a textbook, "Public school domestic science", the following year that was a compilation of recent scientific findings derived from the application of chemistry to the understanding of food values, preservation, and preparation.

In 1896 she spoke at the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) in Guelph. As a result of her suggestion that the women present organize to foster self-education she was asked to attend a meeting a week later that resulted in the founding of what became the Women's Institute of Saltfleet Township. The idea quickly spread, benefiting in Ontario from the financial and organizational support of the provincial Department of Agriculture. Within decades Women's Institutes were operating in many parts of the world and Hoodless enjoyed lasting fame as the movement's founder.

James Mills, president of the OAC, desired to see a home economics faculty established there in emulation of certain American universities. To achieve this end, Mills had sought financial support from Sir William Christopher Macdonald, the tobacco magnate. In 1901 Hoodless travelled to Montreal to

meet Macdonald. Early in 1902 a grant to establish the Macdonald Institute of Home Economics at OAC was announced and construction begun.

A speech she presented at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in 1908 led to her appointment a year later as adviser to the Carnegie Technical Schools. Also in 1908 she accepted the challenge of reporting on American trade schools for the Ontario government. .

Adelaide Hoodless was exceptionally adept at discerning contemporary trends and adapting new ideas to the Canadian sphere. In helping to found two national women's organizations and in suggesting the creation of Women's Institutes she left a distinct imprint on her own and subsequent generations.

Jehovah's Witnesses - CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL

Pastor Russell (1852 – 1916) was a prominent early 20th century Christian restorationist minister from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and founder of what is now known as the Bible Student movement, from which Jehovah's Witnesses and numerous independent Bible Student groups emerged after his death.

In 1879 he began publishing a monthly religious journal, Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence. The journal is now published by Jehovah's Witnesses on a semi-monthly basis under the name The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom. In 1881 he co-founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society and in 1884 the corporation was officially registered, with Russell as president. Russell wrote many articles, books, tracts, pamphlets and sermons, totaling approximately 50,000 printed pages. From 1886 to 1904, he published a six-volume Bible study series originally entitled Millennial Dawn, later renamed Studies in the Scriptures, nearly 20 million copies of which were printed and distributed around the world in several languages during his lifetime.

Russell was a charismatic figure, but claimed no special revelation or vision for his teachings and no special authority on his own behalf. He stated that he did not seek to found a new denomination, but instead intended merely to gather together those who were seeking the truth of God's Word

So You Think You Can Dance - SIMON FULLER

If there is an answer to the question "Is there a person who has instigated important and influential organizations in support of the arts?" my answer would be Simon Fuller the talent manager, television producer, creator of the Idol and So You Think You Can Dance franchises, One or more of the franchises operate in over 100 countries and provide aspiring singers and dancers an opportunity to demonstrate and perfect their talents. Each program promotes the art form, and arts schools such as dance and music institutions report greater enrolments because many viewers want to improve their talents. Each broadcaster holding a franchise engages top artists as judges in auditions and also as judges in the broadcasts themselves. The broadcast programs have significantly increased the audiences for live performances, and observers say that the audiences appear to be younger.

Simon Fuller is a British entrepreneur best known for being the creator of the Idol franchise, which was first seen in the UK under the name Pop Idol and he created number one rated shows in other markets as well, including American Idol in the US. Fuller is also the co-creator and executive producer of the Fox TV reality shows So You Think You Can Dance, Q'Viva, and other U.S. and European TV shows.

In 2007, Time magazine named Fuller one of the 100 most influential people in the world. Fuller received the 2,441st star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on 23 May 2011. The 2012 Sunday Times Rich List values Fuller at £375m; the sixth richest music millionaire in Britain. In the Daily Mail in 2012, music promoter Harvey Goldsmith ranked Fuller at No.1 in a list of the greatest British Entrepreneurs, commenting; "he is a man of real vision".

The use of broadcasts to promote these two art forms may hold promise for social innovators as indeed is evidenced by the following example

“One Million Voices Against FARC” - OSCAR MORALES

Upset with the rebel group FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), one man in Colombia started a Facebook group that quickly gained strength and led to the organization of over 200 rallies held around the world. How did Oscar Morales build this group? How could a handful of volunteers organize simultaneous protests around the world? Morales, a young engineer in Barranquilla, Colombia, was distressed with FARC's intimidation of and attacks on Colombian citizens, as well as the seeming complacency of Colombians toward the group's actions. Oscar felt outrage and frustration and decided to take his concerns to Facebook.

He created a Facebook group called “One Million Voices Against FARC” and invited his friends to join. The simple message of the group: “No more kidnapping, no more lies, no more deaths, no more FARC.”

Morales thought that the social networking platform was the perfect place to raise consciousness about FARC. Within 12 hours, the group had 1,500 members. By the next day, there were 4,000 members. The group saw exponential growth, gaining 100,000 members within its first week.

Clearly, people who chose to join the group agreed with Morales's sentiments and the group's message, but he and his friends began to wonder how they could sustain their cause beyond a Facebook group. How could they move from the social network to offline collective action? As he said “We just kept growing exponentially, and we soon realized we needed to take the momentum from the internet to the streets.”

Morales and other organizers began to plan a national protest against FARC to be held in cities across Colombia on February 4, 2008. Members of the Colombian diaspora, however, were also interested in organizing events in cities around the world.

The group employed a number of tactics to coordinate their actions, prepare for the events, and inform people who were interested in participating. E-mail, Google Docs, instant messaging platforms, and Skype were used to communicate with organizers around the world. Flyers with strong images were also designed to attract attention, including one flyer with a picture of a town nearly destroyed by the FARC.

While planning information was placed on Facebook, organizers also built a public webpage to reach out beyond Facebook members.

Morales and the other organizers were not shy about speaking to members of the media, who were intrigued by the notion that young people on Facebook were attempting to take their protests to the streets. International media outlets are often eager to cover stories of young people using new technologies for political change, and the No More FARC activists capitalized on this tendency.

Much time and effort was devoted to coordinating the logistics at each protest site, which included working with city governments to obtain permits and shut down streets. The group's organizers also found help in consulates and ambassadors around the world for assistance in organizing the rallies.

Morales didn't know how many people would turn out on February 4 to protest FARC and was astounded by the outcome. Protests were held in 45 Colombian cities and towns, with an estimated 1.5 million people coming out in Bogotá alone. Solidarity rallies were held in some 200 cities worldwide including Berlin, Barcelona, London, Madrid, Toronto, Dubai, Miami, New York, Brisbane, and La Paz. Colombia's president, Álvaro Uribe, and El Tiempo, the country's most influential newspaper, also offered support.

The influence of FARC has been on the decline as well, with more than 3,000 FARC insurgents defecting in 2008. The rallies drew international attention to Morales's group and shed light on the fact that Colombians were not willing to tolerate the actions of the FARC. The Facebook page now has nearly half a million people behind it.

Children as Fundraisers

Recently, young children have expressed not only concern for the plight of sick children, and environmental and social issues at home and abroad but also the determination to do something to help. That something is often to use the social media to educate the public about the problem and to raise funds. Some of these projects are amazingly successful while others are a great disappointment to their promoters.

Types of innovators

The above social innovators might be classed under four headings as follows:

1. **Personal need.** People who experienced a personal need (Harris for fellowship), Williams (for clean living conditions), Russell (for religion based on the Bible), Hoodless (for child care) and who enrolled like-minded people to their projects to a point of giving them a world-wide reach.
2. **Talent recognized.** Baden-Powell represents a somewhat unique category. He had written books on scouting for the British Army but youth read the same publications and he was urged to start a scouting project.

3. **Advocacy.** Dunant saw a great need for a new social organization and advocated through publication and personal representation and in various capacities served the organization for which he had responsibility in founding.
4. **Social media.** The inclusion of Simon Fuller and Oscar Morales may come as a surprise to those interested in social innovation but it may also be a sign of the future. Perhaps Fuller's work will serve as a model for social innovators. Morales was also very successful in using the social media but in his case to effect social/political change. Finally, children are showing an entrepreneurial talent in promoting causes and fundraising.

What are the prime needs of neophyte organizers of social organizations?

There are three principal problems that endanger a new organization:

1. **Passive board of directors.** The organizer generally must have a board of directors to meet legal requirements yet he or she does not know the kind people that are required: a board should have experts in every aspect of running an organization, such as law, accounting, fundraising, recruiting supporters, and facilities management. Because most would-be innovators do not know such people they recruit family and friends to sit on their boards. These people generally don't have the appropriate skills but are content to support the organizer although unable to give advice and perhaps new ideas. These are boards of convenience rather than competence.
2. **Fundraising.** This is probably the most difficult problem facing the innovator. He or she does not know all the sources of grants and how to make winning proposals, nor are they able to organize fundraising events nor get wealthy supporters
3. **Recruiting supporters.** This is a complex process involving an analysis of the talents that are required publicizing the vacancy, using personal contacts to find potential candidates, interviewing them to assess their related talents and, indeed, their interest in becoming involved. Typically, a social innovator does not know good candidates and has to rely on friends and family to sit on the board of directors even though they have little or no idea of what to do.

The agency that exists to encourage and assist social innovators should create a panel of experts in these fields that it can call upon to help individual projects.

Conclusion

One person with an idea for an organization that he/she thinks will meet a widespread need must find supporters who make the idea come true and who can elaborate the idea and its implementation to the great benefit of society. That person needs supporters who can manage the various aspects of running an organization

Implications for supporters of social innovation

It is conceivable that there are people today who have great ideas for new social organizations but whose projects are in danger of collapse because of the above problems. An agency

purporting to support social innovation might establish an “early detection” system to identify these and possibly help them before they fail. The early detection system might be quite simple: to ask such questions as:

Who has been trying to help?

What have they and others tried?

Who has a good idea but can’t make it work?

What online projects appear to have great promise but have not attracted many followers?

These questions might be posed to people on the street, to community organizations such as churches, schools, sports and recreation groups, housing authorities, foundations and businesses. Following the identification of these individuals an assessment needs to be done of the idea and what the innovators actually did, a consideration of what would have been necessary and whether the agency could help.

The innovators described above were not, with the possible exception of Hoodless, interested in changing society on a massive scale, but they did. Why? Because others saw the merits of their ideas and were keen to elaborate them. There is no evidence that Paul Harris, in his search for fellowship visualized the Rotary Clubs and their extensive good works, or that Williams imagined the Ys spreading around the world and even spawning universities. Given the important role of supporters it raises the possibility of a role for agencies anxious to support innovation. They would benefit by having an early detection system that would alert them to modest projects being undertaken by one or two individuals and visualizing what these might become. We cannot rely on these projects asking for funding or other support as they don’t imagine their own potential. We can not rely on applications for funding or other support as these projects are not seeking outside help. Baden-Powell was a prime example of someone whose project was visualized by others who prompted him to follow through.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point* attributes the passage of ideas and mobilization of colleagues to three types of people: connectors, mavens and salespeople, He described them somewhat as follows:

Connectors know lots of people. They are important not only because they know lots of people but because of the people they know. They manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches. According to Gladwell they do this because of their curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy. Because they have a foot in so many worlds they can bring them all together. Connectors have loose ties with those whom they promote because they operate in different circles. Each of the innovators described above had connectors to help them

get the support and involvement of other key people. For example, it was believed that King Edward VII encouraged Baden-Powell to retire from the army and devote full time to scouting.

Mavens accumulate knowledge. A maven is a person who has lots of information about lots of things and likes to share that information. A maven is socially motivated and wants to help people with their decisions, They read more magazines, newspapers and even junk mail than most people. A maven is not a persuader. They want to educate and help. They are information brokers sharing and trading what they know. Mavens were key to the spread of these innovations because they liked the ideas and wanted others to know about them.

Salesmen are likeable, charming, energetic and optimistic. Their nonverbal cues are more important than verbal ones. Simple physical movements can have a profound influence on how we feel and think. Sales persons actively spread information about the innovators and their innovations. Without such people Hoodless's Women's Institutes would not have spread so rapidly.

The Innovator does not typically know or have access to these people. It is up to the agency supporting social innovation to make the introductions or to perform the functions of Connector, Maven and Salesperson.