

Factors That Contribute to or Impede Movements

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Abstract

This article reports on the first-ever empirical study of factors that either contribute to or impede the catalyzing of movements. The study administered a survey among 307 pioneer missionaries across 38 countries and conducted 45 in-depth interviews. Survey participants rated 21 items in terms of their significance in contributing or impeding. The data analysis shows that contributing and impeding items map onto five factors that align with existing conceptual categories, most notably *effective ministry strategy*. The findings show that the factors with the most significant impact on movement outcomes are primarily internal, such as ministry strategy or managing time constraints, whereas external factors such as societal opposition or prior openness to the gospel have a lesser impact. This distinction carries major implications for missionary strategy. Practitioners need to be educated on the nature of these factors and should be equipped to develop effective ministry strategies, take charge of their own personal growth and competency development, deal with team character issues and conflict, build capacity, and mitigate the impacts of external opposition.

Key Words: movements, catalysts, contributing factors, impeding factors

Introduction

What are the factors that contribute to movement breakthrough? What factors impede movements from happening? This article reports on the answers that came to light through an extensive research project conducted by Bethany Research Institute. Three hundred and seven pioneer leaders took part in the study. Of these, 147 had catalyzed a movement (the effective catalysts), and the remaining 160 (the control group or non-catalysts) had not. The research had two main goals: to identify the traits and competencies¹ of effective catalysts in comparison with non-catalysts, and to examine factors that the pioneers considered to have either contributed to or impeded the catalyzing of movements. This article focuses on the second goal.

Our research examined, through four research questions, the correlation between certain traits and competencies and the effective catalyzing of movements:

1. What are consistently stated traits and competencies of pioneers who were instrumental in catalyzing a movement?
2. What are the traits and competencies that distinguish these effective movement catalysts from those who did not catalyze a movement?
3. Which factors, other than the pioneer's traits and competencies, are consistently stated as contributing to or impeding the catalyzing of movements?
4. What is the role of the pioneers' traits and competencies versus other factors (intervening variables) in their ability (or inability) to catalyze a movement?

The data demonstrated that the person of the pioneer leader, characterized by specific traits and competencies, is a key element that impacts whether a movement is catalyzed. In order to account for other factors that influence movement outcomes, the study also asked respondents about realities that they perceived had either contributed to or impeded movement breakthrough

(research question 3). In other words, while the study found that the traits and competencies of the movement catalysts have a primary influence on movement outcomes, it also sought to measure other potential influencing variables. These other variables were grouped as eleven “contributing” items, denoting aspects that would be expected to positively influence the catalyzing of a movement, and ten “impeding” items that would possibly hinder it. The resulting 21 items were treated as intervening variables, without a specific hypothesis other than expecting at least moderate corresponding correlations with movement outcomes. In this article, we provide an analysis of the results of the survey and related interviews concerning these sets of items.

After setting the research in context, this article provides a descriptive statistical overview of the findings about contributing and inhibiting items from the individual survey questions. Next it presents the findings of a factor analysis on these items, resulting in a set of five factors that describe the latent variables behind them. The article goes on to examine these factors through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (a regression analysis). Lastly, the article combines the results from the quantitative analysis with findings from 45 interviews that also formed part of the study.

Methods

Building on David Garrison (2004; 2014), in our research we define a movement as “a rapid indigenous multiplication of disciples making disciples and churches planting churches in multiple streams within a people group to the fourth generation or beyond.” An effective catalyst is then defined as a pioneer who:

- (1) has catalyzed a movement with churches that have multiplied to the fourth generation (also referred to as “movement breakthrough”),
- (2) was the first to engage this people group with the gospel in a way that led to the catalyzing of the movement (not necessarily the first to share the gospel among them), and
- (3) was the most influential catalyst (compared to others who made contributions to the growth of the movement).

Those who catalyzed a movement to the fourth generation of churches or beyond were designated as “effective catalysts,” while the other pioneers were designated as “control group members” or “non-catalysts.” The non-catalysts had also done pioneering church-planting work—fruitful to a certain extent, but not to the same level of reproduction.

Our research consisted primarily of an in-depth survey administered via SurveyCTO (www.surveyccto.com), resulting in 307 valid responses. The survey’s 21 questions, related to factors perceived as either contributing or impeding, were selected based on a review of findings of a previous study by the author (Prinz 2016; 2022), as well as the preliminary findings of an internal assessment by a major movement-oriented organization. These factors can be categorized as either “internal” or “external.” Internal factors are those that can be influenced by the pioneers themselves and/or their teams, while external factors are outside of their immediate control and cannot be influenced directly (other than through prayer). Of the 21 items, 13 were classified in the study as internal, and eight as external.

We had the survey translated by native translators (from English) into French, Hindi, Indonesian, Swahili, and Spanish, then had each version back-translated to ensure accuracy. Survey participants rated on a Likert scale of 1-5 the extent to which each factor had impacted

their ministry, with 1 representing *not at all* or *not at all significantly* and 5 signifying *very much* or *very significantly*. The catalysts and non-catalysts completed identical surveys, other than slight rewording of some of the introductory questions as applicable. For example, catalysts were asked, “To what extent has government opposition impeded the catalyzing of your movement?” while non-catalysts were asked, “To what extent has government opposition impeded your ministry fruitfulness?” Both versions used the same Likert scales.

The research team also conducted in-depth structured interviews with 45 of the pioneers (15 effective catalysts and 30 control group members) who had participated in the survey. These interviews covered a range of topics related to movement catalyzing, to complement the quantitative survey with a level of qualitative depth. The interviews consisted of 14 open-ended questions which allowed interviewees to share about their experiences, while focusing on the factors that had helped or hindered their ministry fruitfulness.

Participants

Survey participants were representative of the largest mega-cultures of the world, with a focus on the regions or groupings where most movements have occurred, specifically Latin America, Francophone Africa, East Africa, West/South India (especially India), Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia), and ethnic Chinese. To recruit catalysts, the research team made use of lead researcher Emanuel Prinz’s extensive network to identify and invite potential participants. The network included those who took part in his previous research (Prinz 2016), along with other key movement network leaders. Participants were contacted through the personal networks of the researchers, including GlobeServe partners connected with Bethany International, New Generations, and others.

The resulting sample contained disproportionate numbers of pioneers from India, slightly unevenly distributed between effective catalysts and control group members. As a result of this non-representative distribution, the influence of potentially significant factors such as region, country, ministry network, ministry approach, and the religion of the adopted people group on movement catalyzing were not evaluated.

Table 1: Study Participants’ Ministry Networks

Ministry Network	Catalysts	Control Group	Both
AI network – Cambodia	4	0	4
AR network - Mexico	0	12	12
Kale Heywat Church – Ethiopia	2	4	6
GlobeServe Ministries - Ghana/Burkina Faso	2	3	5
Indonesia network 1	2	0	2
Indonesia network 2	9	0	9
LifeWay Global - East Africa	10	10	20
New Generations - Central Africa	10	2	12
North India network	85	0	85
Northeast India network	1	3	4
Northwest India network 1	9	0	9

Northwest India network 2	0	29	29
Northwest India network 3	0	18	18
Not stated / not part of a network	13	79	92
Total	147	160	307

Limitation

A limitation results from the challenge in finding sufficient numbers of respondents. This limitation meant that a convenience sample method was used, which led to a skewed sample. As a result, a number of intervening factors, including geographic region and other contextual factors, could not be fruitfully analyzed to evaluate whether movement catalyzing depends on factors such as regional variation and the religious affiliation of the adopted people group.

Analysis I: Descriptive Statistics

We first present the results of the descriptive analysis by items. Table 2 shows the results for pioneers' perception of contributing items, sorted in descending order by the ratings of effective catalysts. Column 5 ("Both") represents the average of both groups, while column 6 ("Difference") shows the mean difference between the two groups. Asterisks behind the "Difference" value indicates that the mean difference between catalysts and non-catalysts is statistically significant.

Table 2: Items Contributing to the Catalyzing of a Movement/Ministry Fruitfulness (I = Internal Factors; E = External Factors)						
	Contributing Items	Catalysts	Non-catalysts	Both	Difference	Standard deviation
1	Prayer (I)	4.76	4.61	4.68	0.14	0.725
2	Received specific guidance from God (I)	4.60	4.35	4.47	0.25*	0.918
3	Raised up leaders effectively (I)	4.55	3.75	4.13	0.81***	1.133
4	Reproducible disciple-making (I)	4.52	3.97	4.23	0.54***	1.068
5	Effective ministry strategy or method (I)	4.51	3.71	4.09	0.80***	1.074
6	Contextualized ministry approach (I)	4.33	4.20	4.26	0.12	0.879
7	Signs and wonders (E)	4.30	3.99	4.14	0.31**	1.026
8	Compassion ministry/met holistic needs (I)	4.17	3.67	3.91	0.50***	1.177
9	Discovery approach/groups (I)	4.16	3.45	3.79	0.72***	1.181
10	Prior openness to the gospel (E)	3.76	3.44	3.59	0.32*	1.186
11	Conversions without human involvement (E)	2.65	2.78	2.72	-0.12	1.358
	Average of all Contributing Items	4.21	3.81	4.00	+0.40***	0.612

* / ** / *** signifies $p < 0.05$ / $p < 0.01$ / $p < 0.001$. $N[\text{catalysts}] = 147$, $n[\text{non-catalysts}] = 160$.

The bottom line of Table 2 shows a notable contrast between the averages of the two groups, with the catalyst ratings scoring significantly higher (+0.40). Interestingly, we found no statistically significant difference between the groups for the contributing item *prior openness to the gospel*, even though catalysts rated it slightly higher than non-catalysts.

Items with a statistically significant mean difference between effective catalysts and non-catalysts of at least 0.5 (1/2 of a Likert scale point) were: *raised up leaders effectively* (+0.81), *effective ministry strategy or method* (+0.80), *discovery approach/groups* (+0.72), *reproducible disciple-making* (+0.54), and *compassion ministry/met holistic needs* (+0.50). All of these have to do with ministry strategy or approach.

Moreover, all these factors are internal, meaning they can be influenced directly by pioneers and their teams. In contrast, contributing external items (*prior openness to the gospel* and *conversions without human involvement*) play an insignificant role. The only contributing external factor with a statistically significant difference between the two groups is *signs and wonders*, even if only by +0.31. The only item that was rated slightly more significantly in non-movement ministry situations was *conversions without human involvement*.

We now examine impeding items, sorted in descending order by the average self-ratings of effective catalysts. Again, asterisks behind the “Difference” value indicates that the means difference between catalysts and non-catalysts is statistically significant based on a two-sample, two-tailed t-Test (a statistical test that determines whether there is a significant difference between the means of two groups).

Table 3: Factors Impeding the Catalyzing of a Movement/Ministry Fruitfulness (I = Internal Factors; E = External Factors)						
	Impeding Factors	Catalysts	Non-catalysts	Both	Difference	Standard deviation
1	Persecution by society (E)	3.29	3.43	3.36	-0.14	1.227
2	Lack of funding (I)	3.05	3.38	3.22	-0.33*	1.418
3	Government opposition (E)	3.02	3.13	3.07	-0.10	1.318
4	Lack of prior openness to the gospel (E)	2.82	3.43	3.14	-0.61***	1.212
5	Time limitation due to family challenges (I)	2.70	2.98	2.85	-0.28	1.313
6	Key workers recruited away (E)	2.63	2.58	2.60	0.05	1.429
7	Time limitation due to tentmaking (I)	2.59	3.07	2.84	-0.48***	1.308
8	Conflicts on team or with partners (I)	2.47	2.51	2.49	-0.03	1.227
9	Personal character issues (I)	2.20	2.79	2.51	-0.59***	1.300
10	Money misuse or corrupting character (I)	1.76	2.00	1.89	-0.24	1.291
	Average of all Impeding Factors	2.65	2.93	2.80	-0.28***	0.670

* / ** / *** signifies $p < 0.05$ / $p < 0.01$ / $p < 0.001$. $N[\text{catalysts}] = 147$, $n[\text{non-catalysts}] = 160$.

The items rated by catalysts to impede movement breakthrough most strongly were *persecution by society* (3.29), *lack of funding* (3.05), and *government opposition* (3.02). Two of

the three items, persecution and government opposition, are external in nature. Non-catalysts rated *persecution by society* and *lack of prior openness to the gospel* as highest (both at 3.43).

The internal impeding items that catalysts rated most highly were *time limitations due to family challenges* (2.7), *key workers recruited away* (2.63), *time limitation due to tentmaking* (2.59), and *conflicts on team or with partners* (2.47). These ratings were lower than almost all those for external items.

The greatest difference between the effective catalysts and the control group is that non-catalysts face a greater *lack of prior openness to the gospel* (-0.61), and their ministry is more significantly impeded by *character issues of team members or partners* (-0.59) and *time limitation due to tentmaking* (-0.48).

For effective catalysts, the average of all impeding items (2.65) is much lower than the average of all contributing items (4.20). For non-catalysts, contributing items are also higher on average, at 3.81, versus 2.93 for impeding items. In contrast to the effective catalysts, non-catalysts assigned a much higher relative importance to the impeding aspects than the contributing aspects. How much of these assessments comprises participants' subjective perceptions and how much reflects the actual realities is another matter.

Analysis II: Factor Analysis Identifying Five Composite Factors

To better understand the underlying dimensions influencing movement outcomes, we did a factor analysis of the 21 contributing and impeding factors. A factor analysis is a statistical method used to identify underlying patterns (called "factors") by grouping together related survey items that tend to be answered similarly. Our analysis identified five underlying composite factors. These five allow for a clearer comparison of how these broader themes differ between effective catalysts and non-catalysts. Table 4 below presents the average ratings for each factor and examines which ones show a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Among the composite factors, *external opposition* received the highest overall rating (3.22 of 5 on the Likert scale). However, when distinguishing between catalysts and non-catalysts, only *effective ministry strategy*, *character issues and conflict*, and *lack of capacity* show a statistically significant mean difference between those two groups. Of these three factors, only *effective ministry strategy* showed a large effect size as measured by Cohen's d (a standardized measure of effect size that quantifies the difference between two group means in terms of standard deviation, where values below 0.5 are considered small effect sizes).

Table 4: Composite Factors Impacting the Catalyzing of a Movement/Ministry Fruitfulness
(I = Internal Factors; E = External Factors)

Contributing Factors	Catalysts	Non-catalysts	Both	Mean difference	t value (Two-tailed)	Cohen's d
F1 – Effective ministry strategy (mostly I)	4.37	3.76	4.05	0.61***	7.56	0.87
Impeding Factors	Catalysts	Non-catalysts	Both	Difference		
F2 - Character issues and conflict (I)	2.14	2.43	2.30	-0.29*	-2.53	0.29

F3 - External opposition (E)	3.15	3.28	3.22	-0.12	-0.97	0.11
F4 - Time constraints (I)	2.64	3.03	2.84	-0.38**	-3.09	0.35
F5 - Lack of capacity (I/E)	2.84	2.98	2.92	-0.14	-1.06	0.12

* / ** / *** signifies $p < 0.05$ / $p < 0.01$ / $p < 0.001$. For each of the five factors, $n[\text{catalysts}] = 141/139/147/147/140$, $n[\text{non-catalysts}] = 157/157/160/160/156$.

Thus, the factor *effective ministry strategy* shows the largest effect size of all factors by a wide margin, with the four impeding factors correlating negatively and showing only minor effect sizes. This factor also shows the largest mean difference between catalysts and non-catalysts. Both factors *time constraints* and *character issues and conflict* are seen to impede fruitfulness significantly more in the ministries of non-catalysts than those of catalysts. Interestingly, both external factors, *external opposition* and *lack of capacity*, show no statistically significant mean difference between catalysts and non-catalysts. All these findings indicate clearly that movement outcomes are primarily influenced by internal factors—factors under direct influence of the catalysts and their teams—and barely at all by external factors in the same context.

Analysis III: Regression Analysis Verifying Three Factors

The five composite factors were entered into a multivariate statistical analysis called regression analysis. This analysis measures the simultaneous influence of several explanatory variables on a response variable (or outcome), to see which of these factors influence the outcome in a significant way. In the regression analysis we examined the influence of the five composite factors as explanatory variables on movement outcomes.

In Table 5, only the factors in bold font were found to have a statistically significant influence on the catalyzing of movements ($p < .05$). Positive values in the “Value” column of the table indicate that a factor promotes movement catalyzing, while negative values indicate a correlation with the control group of non-catalysts.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Analysis of Contributing and Impeding Factors as well as Traits and Competencies (Standardized Coefficients)						
Source	Value	Standard error	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > Chi²	Wald Lower bound (95%)	Wald Upper bound (95%)
F1 Effective ministry strategy (mostly I)	0.560	0.091	38.157	<0.0001	0.382	0.737
F2 Character issues and conflict (I)	-0.046	0.083	0.310	0.578	-0.209	0.116
F3 External opposition (E)	-0.044	0.078	0.328	0.567	-0.197	0.108
F4 Time constraints (I)	-0.211	0.078	7.370	0.007	-0.364	-0.059
F5 Lack of capacity (I/E)	-0.025	0.083	0.091	0.763	-0.187	0.137
Lack of prior openness to the gospel (E)	-0.234	0.081	8.345	0.004	-0.393	-0.075

$N[\text{catalysts}] = 139$, $n[\text{non-catalysts}] = 156$, $n[\text{total}] = 295$.

The results show that the factor *effective ministry strategy* has a strong positive influence on movement catalyzing (0.57), while the only other significant factor, *time constraints*, has a comparatively weaker influence (-0.20). As would be expected, the perceived contributing factors all correlate positively with movement catalyzing, while inhibiting factors correlate negatively.

The regression confirms the primary importance of the internal factor *effective ministry strategy*. Overall, the impact of this contributing factor (with a “value” of 0.560) was higher than that of the two significant impeding factors of *time constraints* and *lack of prior openness to the gospel*. Overall, significant correlations with movement outcomes were found for one external and two internal factors, confirming the prior impression that external factors have a significantly smaller impact on movement catalyzing. This result also indirectly confirms the findings from our wider study, which showed the primary role of internal factors, including the catalysts’ traits and competencies. Even though lack of receptivity to the gospel does have an influence on movement outcomes, it can be mitigated and overcome through effective ministry strategies.

Analysis IV: Findings of Interviews

In the interviews, effective catalysts were asked the following open-ended questions:

- What have been the main factors that have significantly contributed to the catalyzing of your movement? Please name the three most significant ones.
- What have been the main factors that have inhibited the catalyzing of your movement? Please name the three most significant ones.

Those who had not catalyzed a movement were asked the same questions, formulated slightly differently, asking about their ministry fruitfulness instead of the catalyzing of their movement. In a follow-up question, each interviewee was asked to describe *how* the factors identified had proved to either contribute to or impede their work.

The overwhelming majority of aspects mentioned by the interviewees fit into the internal category. Only two related to external aspects: openness to the gospel as a result of crises, and government providing freedom for ministry. This result confirms the conclusion from the quantitative analysis that internal aspects are more significant for movement outcomes than external aspects. Moreover, respondents volunteered many of the same contributing and impeding factors that formed part of the online survey, providing additional corroboration.

Examining the Roles of Contextual Factors and Prior Openness to the Gospel

We will now examine these findings in light of a common question related to movements: the significance of external factors such as context-specific openness to the gospel and opposition to the movement for the likelihood of pioneers’ ability to effectively catalyze movements.

First, the analysis shows that movement catalysts are not necessarily more effective in catalyzing movements because their contexts are “easier.” The average perceived external impeding factor rating for catalysts was 2.85, slightly higher than for non-catalysts (2.73). This difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ($n[\text{catalysts}]=147$, $n[\text{non-catalysts}]=160$, $t=.970[\text{observed}]$, $p=0.333$). This assessment is largely confirmed by the regression analysis, where two out of three factors with a significant correlation were internal. A lack of prior openness to the gospel was also a significant influence. However, its importance was much lower than the combined impact of the other two factors.

Second, movement catalysts may be more effective in catalyzing movements partly because their focus people groups are simply more open to the gospel. Effective catalysts rated a lack of prior openness to the gospel significantly lower than non-catalysts (-0.61). However, this difference does not represent the entire external ministry context. We asked about in the survey in both positive and negative forms, with *openness to the gospel* on the list of contributing factors and *lack of openness* on the list of impeding factors. In the above comparison of contributing factors, effective catalysts assessed *openness to the gospel* as a more significant factor by a margin of only +0.32, a much smaller difference that was not statistically significant. Also, a compound item that consists of all items relevant to this question (namely, prior openness or lack of openness, as well as external opposition in government or society) shows only a marginally higher rating by non-catalysts of 0.13, which is not statistically significant. If the external ministry context as a whole constituted a definitive explanation of the failure to catalyze a movement, the related items would have loaded onto one single factor. The context as a factor would have been revealed in the factor analysis and would have shown a significant negative correlation with movement catalyzing. However, it did not. Thus the ministry context as a whole does not constitute a significant differentiator between movements and non-movements.

Conversely, effective movement catalysts apparently *experience* a lack of openness to the gospel as less of a problem than non-catalysts, even if they minister in similarly challenging contexts. Our study found that effective catalysts display a stronger trait of internal locus of control and personal agency than non-catalysts (4.43 versus 4.11 on a 5-point Likert scale, with the mean difference of 0.32 being statistically significant). This trait refers to the belief that one has control over the outcome of events in one's life, as opposed to external forces beyond one's influence, and that life outcomes derive primarily from one's own actions. However, even if contexts where movements were not catalyzed are marked by a lack of prior openness to the gospel, the regression results show that the impact of effective ministry strategies on movement outcomes is over twice as large.

Conclusions

Our research demonstrates that contributing aspects are much more important than inhibiting aspects in catalyzing movements. Looking for ways to generate and cultivate these contributing factors is therefore paramount and distinguishes effective catalysts from non-catalysts. The contributing factor *effective ministry strategy* was highly rated by catalysts, had a significant mean difference between catalysts and non-catalysts (along with a large effect size), and had a positive impact on movement catalyzing that was nearly three times as large as the negative impact of the other two significant factors in the regression: *time constraints* and *lack of prior openness to the gospel*.

Also, two of three factors with a significant influence on movement outcomes in the regression (Table 5) and all three factors with a statistically significant mean difference between catalysts and non-catalysts (Table 4) are internal to the pioneers and their teams. The preeminence of internal over external factors was also reflected in the interview results. This finding confirms the results of our main study, which demonstrated that traits and competencies of pioneers have a significant correlation with movement outcomes.

Finally, the component parts of *effective ministry strategy* should be considered essential to and carefully built into a comprehensive approach to ministry as follows:

- developing an effective strategy for the context,
- compassion ministry that meets holistic needs,
- prayer for and actively seeking signs and wonders,
- employing a discovery approach with discovery groups,
- making disciple-making reproducible, and
- raising up leaders effectively.

In practical terms, pioneers need to become or be made aware of the implications of impeding factors and be equipped to mitigate them, in particular:

- to carefully manage time constraints resulting from family challenges or tentmaking demands,
- to deal with character issues and conflict before they compound and corrupt an emerging movement,
- to prepare both the team and the growing local church for opposition from government and society; to equip them to use personal networks and media to identify receptive pockets in societies generally not open to the gospel, and
- to continuously build capacity with resources within the (emerging) movement; this capacity includes funding, which means the ministry needs to become self-sustainable, as well as ensuring that team members' needs are met and thus safeguarding against key workers being poached by other ministries.

These findings have major implications for missions strategy and missionary training. The fact that internal factors play such a key role in movement breakthrough serves as a major encouragement both to those who aspire to launch a movement and to those who train and mentor them. This insight should challenge practitioners to fulfil their human responsibility and work on all internal factors under their influence, in a posture of dependence on God's sovereignty. The findings also serve as a motivation to pray with expectant faith that God will move in people's hearts to change the one factor outside catalysts' immediate influence: people's openness to the gospel. More practical conclusions and strategies for applying them are spelled out in the new book *What Actually Starts Movements* (Prinz, 2025).

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¹ We defined traits as personal characteristics that contribute to consistent leadership effectiveness and “differentiate leaders from non-leaders” (Zaccaro 2007, 8), and competencies as areas of knowledge or skill critical for catalyzing a movement.