Explainer: What's the Difference Between an Alternate Hierarchy and Calculated Members?

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What is an Alternate Hierarchy?

An **Alternate Hierarchy** allows you to create alternate groupings of members from an existing data model to simplify mapping and allow for automatic updates to the data from your source system. In an Alternate Hierarchy, you can repeat the same members in both hierarchies but revise the order of your members via your alternate hierarchy. For example, if you need a breakdown by a particular set (e.g., projects in a particular month), you can create an alternate hierarchy to list the projects in the order of the month they start.

What is a Calculated Member?

In Vena, you have the ability to create special members that are composed of other members through an MQL statement. These members are called **Calculated Members**. In practice, Calculated Members are most often used when you want to create a special roll-up that is not supported by your regular hierarchy. This roll-up can then be used as a custom reporting bucket, representing a useful shortcut when building reports. Calculated members are displayed on a template as a total of the expression in a single member.

How do I choose which one to use?

Depending on the scenario, you may have the option of choosing either an alternate hierarchy or calculated members. There are benefits and limitations to both of these options, outlined below:

Alternate Hierarchy	Calculated Member
Only bottom-level members can be shared members.	Can contain members from any level of the hierarchy, in any combir
When you set up an alternate hierarchy, it remains static unless you modify it.	Can be dynamic, static or a combination of the two.
The visualization of members is simplified.	Visualization occurs via the MQL statement. Visualization in the tem member (components are not broken down).
Supported in Drill Down.	Not supported in Drill Down.
Supported in Drill Transactions.	Not supported in Drill Transactions.
Can build multiple levels into a hierarchy.	Can only be a total.
Can be automatically updated through channels.	Not supported.
Can have multiple different alternate hierarchies. This is not easy to accomplish using attributes or calculated members.	Can have multiple different calculated members.
Can be difficult to maintain if you don't have this information stored somewhere else. *AH are an arbitrary rollup and typically you have to duplicate every single*	Easy to maintain since it is in one expression.

member in the hierarchy because they need to be part of your alternate rollups somewhere.

Helpful links

How-To: Build an Alternate Hierarchy

How-To: Build a Custom roll-up using Calculated Members