Church Planter Network Resource

Systems Thinking

*A Resource for Developing or Reviewing
Your Church's System Design*

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PREPARING FOR SYSTEMS DESIGN AND THINKING

Introduction

Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck in *Management for your Church* point out that

> *A local church is very much like a can of worms. The church is the can (system); and every department, function, committee, program, constituency, and so on, is a worm (subsystem). All the subsystems are moving in their own directions, doing their own things; and yet they are always entangled, overlapping, unable to move very far in one direction or to accomplish very much without similar movement in all the other subsystems.[1]*

All church planters and pastors need to understand systems--how they interact and impact their ministry. A study of the Bible shows that God created systems within which we live and function. The typical western mindset is based on a linear perspective of the world, while the mindset of the rest of the world is based more on a more cyclical systems approach. When a person studies the Bible, it becomes clear that God created systems that are moving toward a conclusion. Linear thinking is correct in so far as systems and everything in the world is moving toward a conclusion, but this truth must be understood within the framework of interrelated systems moving in a cyclical pattern. The Old and New Testament reveal how certain aspects of life repeat themselves. This is partially due to the fact that each generation does not learn from previous generations. Those who are in ministry leading churches in mission work or planting churches must learn how to effectively work within society's systems and understand how these systems impact people. Mary Walton in her book The Deming Management Method says: "the biggest problem facing the Western world is not in its competition nor the Japanese. The biggest problems are self-inflicted, created right at home by management that is off course in the competitive world of today."[2] Christians make the same mistake when programs and ministries are undertaken without understanding the systems that God created.

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[1] Lindgren, Alvin J. & Norman Shawchuck, Management for your Church: A Systems Approach. (Organizational Resources Press, 1984) p. 12.
[2] Walton, Mary. The Deming Management Method. (New York: A Perigee Book, 1986) p. xii.

As we study Scripture, it is important to recognize that the world in which Scripture was written was based on the four seasons and a close personal interaction with God and the systems He created for the world. People were aware of God and did many things to worship him. The following Bible study is designed to help a church planter discover and use the systems God created for us. Read Genesis 1:1-2:4 and answer the following questions:

Questions to study for Genesis 1:1-2:4

1.   What systems do you see God creating in these verses?

2.   How are they interrelated?

3.   Do you see the sequence of events as God created the world?

4.   What does this say to you about planting a church? Are there systems in society that a church needs to interface with?

5.   If a church functions in the context of systems, what does this say about the church you are planting?

In these 35 verses, God tells us how He created the world. In these verses, we see that the world is very interrelated. God is teaching us that we live in an organic world with multiple, interrelated systems. Notice the way God carefully tells us about His creation. Did you notice the sequence of creation and how each act of creation has a relationship with those acts preceding and those following?

The first act of God was to create the heavens and the earth. Verse 2 explains that the earth itself was formless and empty, and there was darkness over the surface of the deep. The next step is the creation of light, a subsystem in this world created without form. The heavens and earth are systems in which God created multiple interdependent subsystems. After God created the light, He separated the light from the darkness,

creating daytime and nighttime, to meet the needs of His world. God's next step was the separation of the earth from the water. As God spoke, the expanse or sky came into being, separating the two bodies of water. Two new systems are introduced which are likewise interdependent.

After creating the land, God then brought forth various types of vegetation, including some which bore fruit for the future inhabitants to eat. Each of the plants and trees had seeds according to their own species for purposes of reproduction. Again, we see more interrelated systems coming into being. In studying this process, notice the sequence and timing of each act of creation and how each relates to the whole.

The next step in creation was the creation of lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the seasons, days and years. Furthermore, God created two major lights to govern day and night.

God's next act of creation was the creation of life in the water and birds above the earth. Notice the systems of life that God created -- birds for the air and living things for the water. God blessed them and said to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water and air. As God continued, He created many kinds of animals to inhabit the earth. He then moved to the creation of a human. God created a mankind in His image. To man God gave the responsibility of stewardship over all that God had created.

Read Matthew 16:13-19 and answer these questions:

1.   Who is to build the church?

2.   What does Jesus give to the disciples for empowerment?

3.   How will the disciples access the source of empowerment?

4.   What are the systems Jesus gives to His followers to enable them to accomplish God's work?

5. What does this say to you about your ministry and the church's ministry God has entrusted to you?

6. What role will systems play in your thinking and work?

In this passage we are reminded that Jesus is to build his church. We are to be the laborers with him to accomplish the task of planting and growing His church. Jesus promises that He will give us the keys to the kingdom, so whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven. The source that empowers the believer for the task is the same source that reveals to Simon Peter who Jesus was. That source is the Father in heaven. For believers today, access to the source of power, knowledge and the ability to accomplish God's tasks is through the Holy Spirit who was sent by the Father for this work.

Be sure you can answer the question, "Who is to build the church?" A.W. Tozer in his book *Tragedy In The Church: The Missing Gifts* has some deep spiritual insights concerning this question when he says that 90 percent of the work in the church is being done by men and women who do not display the spiritual gifts promised through the Holy Spirit.

Read I Corinthians 12:1-31 and answer the following questions:

1. What is God telling us about the church in this passage?

2. As you study this passage, do you see how God has provided the church with people who have different gifts to accomplish God's work?

3. Do you see that God has various systems that are at work in the church?

4. What are the systems that your church will interact with in your ministries?

A.W. Tozer in his book <u>Tragedy In The Church: The Missing Gifts</u> states

The Christian Church cannot rise to its true stature in accomplishing God's purposes when its members neglect the true gifts and graces of God's spirit.[3] The secret of an effective church lies in discovering the gifts He has provided and using them to reach a particular people group. God knows what is needed. He provides the vision for a church to minister in its environment. Since God is the creator of systems, He knows the system(s) in which the church will minister in as well as the resources needed for ministering in a particular community.

In this chapter of Corinthians, we see several areas that a church planter needs to be mindful of when planting a church. The first is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. As you read verses 1-3, what does God say about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the multiplicity of gifts? Study verses 4-11 identify the various gifts the Spirit of God provides to believers. In verses 12-31, the analogy of the body is introduced to the reader. As you read these passages, think about the physical body. The first obvious thing is the physical body has many different parts with distinctive functions. In addition, the body has many systems, such as the nervous system, circulatory system, digestive system and reproductive system. These systems must work together for optimum function. As a body, the church has various parts and systems, that must work together if the church is to function effectively in its community.

From these verses, Romans 12:3-8 and Ephesians 4:7-12, list the different types of gifts that God has provided to the church. Compare the gifts that God has given with the types of functions that are needed for the church to be able to minister in its environment. Begin to list related systems (ministries, programs or organizations) that these types of gifts would work in. When you complete this list of gifts and systems within the church, identify how these would interface others systems within the

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[3] A. Wozer. <u>Tragedy In The Church: The Missing Gifts</u> (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1995) p.25.

community. As a part of the study, look at the various systems in the church and the systems in the community to see if you can discover where potential conflicts might arise. When you find potential conflicts, see if you can find how God has provided the needed gifts within the church to deal with and resolve these potential conflicts.

Explanation of Systems Thinking

Now that a brief study of scripture has been completed, a question you may be asking is: What is systems thinking and how does one develop this skill?   Lindgren and Shawchuck describe systems theory as a theory that "holds organizational and goal achievement, and the growth of a person and the achievement of their own goals within the organization, to be of equal importance."[4] Systems thinking according to Peter Senge in his book … "is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and help us to see how to change them clearly."[5] For the Christian the systems that are a part of the world have been shown to us through God's word. However, for some reason we have chosen to neglect the tools God has provided us to work with.

The issue you are dealing with in this church planting network is how do systems thinking impact you and the church that you are planting. At this time review these questions:

1.   Have you been through an assessment process?

2.   Have you attended Basic Training?

3.   Are you participating in a Church Planter Network?

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[4] Lindgren, & Shawchuck, Ibid. p.24.
[5] Senge, Peter M. The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of The Learning Organization. (New York: Doubleday, 1990) p. 7.

4. Have you gathered information about the community and the people in the community?

5. Have you were enlisted an intercessory prayer team?

6. Have you a vision statement for your church plant?

7. Have you completed the development of your core values and mission statement?

8. Have you completed and verified the identification of your ministry focus group?

9. Have you completed your development of a people (evangelism) strategy?

10. Have you developed a strategy for gathering the core group?

11. Have you developed a small group strategy?

12. Have you developed the plans for discipling believers?

13. Have you completed the worship design for the new church?

14. Have you thought through plans for reproduction—planting the next church and issues related to that?

15. Have you developed a system design for the church's organizational structure that reflects how theses various systems will relate to one another?

The areas listed above are parts of the Church Planting Process, which is a larger system designed to equip you for the task you are now doing. Each one of the areas mentioned are systems and subsystems in which you work to start and grow a church in the environment God has placed you to serve. If you attended Basic Training, review what you did in the unit on your initial Master Plan that you developed your church system design. What has changed since Basic Training? How have some of the original planning components been revised? Review the information you gathered about the community prior to Basic Training and compare this to the people with whom you are currently working. Also, evaluate what your organizational structure is like at this point in time. Does it reflect the type of system(s) needed to effectively assimilate the people you are reaching?

<u>Church Systems Designs</u>

In thinking about church systems design, it is very important to reflect from a biblical perspective what will produce a healthy church. Christian A Schwartz in his book <u>Natural Church Development</u> provides a strong biblical basis for what creates a healthy church. In the opening paragraph on page 8 he says, "Why call our approach 'natural church development?'   Natural means learning from nature. Learning from nature means learning from God's creation. And learning from God's creation means learning from God the Creator."[6] An example of the "biotic approach can be found in Matthew 6: 28: 'See the lilies of the field, how they grow.' The word 'see,' however, does not fully cover the implications of the Greek word katamathe. This is the intensive form of manthano, meaning 'learn,' 'observe,' 'study,' or 'research.' In Greek, whenever kata is used in front of a verb, it usually intensifies the word. In our context it would mean diligently learn, observe, study, or research. What is it then we are to study? It is not the lilies' beauty, but rather their growth mechanisms ('how they grow'). We are to study them, examine them, meditate on them and take our direction from them--all these aspects are included in the imperative verb form katamathete. And we are told that we need to do these things in order to understand the principles of the kingdom of God."[7]
As we look at the design for the church, is it compatible for the church and its environment?

From the Church Systems Design segment of basic training, the following information is what guided you in preparing your design.

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[6] Christian Schwartz. <u>Natural Church Development</u> (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996) p. 8.
[7] Ibid., p. 9.

I.   What is a church-system design?

A church system design is a brief picture of what the church is to look like in the future. At this time write a brief news release about the church ten years in the future from the community's perspective. At this point in your church's development, is there a correlation between what the church is about and its ministries? Are all of the systems and subsystems required to accomplish the vision in place yet? Are the people you felt God leading you to reach being reached, or are you reaching a different target group? If so, why? Are the small groups and worship service reflecting what was designed? If not, why? As you review your current structures/systems, do they reflect what Christian Schwartz calls the six biotic principles?

1.   Interdependence

2.   Multiplication

3.   Energy transformation

4.   Multi-usage

5.   Symbiosis

6.   Functionality[8]

How are new people coming into the church? Are the new people being assimilated into the life of the church? If not, then what changes in the assimilation process need to be made to close the back door?

II.   If you attended Basic Training

This is an opportunity to review, evaluate and fine tone your church's system design. Answer the following questions:

Review the church's vision, core values, and mission statement. Are the church's ministries supportive of the vision, core values, and mission statement?

When looking at the context in which the church is located, are you reaching the people your vision calls you to reach?

When looking at the people in leadership roles, what spiritual gifts and abilities are functioning and necessary to reach the community?

In the design of your church with its various ministries and programs, are there places of collision and conflict?

How do the ministries relate/collide/work with the systems outside of your church?

Does the church face a major roadblock with the government in the area? If so, how can the roadblock be avoided or minimized so as not to slow down the growth of the church?

How can you redesign your system?

III.   If you have not attended Basic Training.

This is an opportunity to begin thinking about your system design. What is a church systems design? It is a snapshot of the church at a given point in time. The point in time is not now. The point in time is best understood when all elements of the vision are present and functioning. It may be five, seven, ten years in the future. It may be when the new church constitutes.

The system design illustrates the relationships of systems and ministries. What is the relationship between the people strategies, small groups and worship? These should not be seen nor function as separate entities or as ends in themselves. They exist in dynamic relationship and as subsystems of the whole church system.

The system design shows the flow of people into and through the church. To get a handle on this issue of flow try to answer the following questions. Where and how do

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[8] Ibid., p. 61-76.

new people enter (points of entry or doors of access)? How do people move through the system? Are there hurdles, barriers, back doors or dead ends? How do people flow into ministry or exit for missions?

It informs about the results of involvement in various subsystems and ministries. If a person is involved in a small group ministry, what is the result they can anticipate from that? What results can be anticipated from participating in a leadership training system? Can the person expect any results from personal involvement in a ministry to _____?

How a church systems design is created. Remember the vision, core values, and mission statement. How does this system design, reflect, and serve the mission of the church?

Consider the context. It must match the ministry focus group. Who are you? What are your spiritual gifts and abilities? The following elements of your church should be taken into account:

1.   The evangelism strategy

2.   The small group strategy

3.   Worship plans and style

4.   Plans for discipleship and leadership development

5.   Assimilation plans

6.   Plans for multiplication of disciples, leaders, groups and new churches

In developing your system design, creativity may be expressed in this activity but the focus is not on creativity. Follow these four steps to create your system design. Allow yourself an hour of uninterrupted time to work on this.

1.   Write each major component/element (ministry, program, system, etc.) on a separate piece of 3"x3" Post-it™ note. Use smaller notes to identify various aspects or elements of the major component.

2.   Place these components in logical order on a poster board or piece of easel pad paper, then consider these questions.

   (a)   What is the relationship of each component to the others?

   (b)   What is the flow of people into and through these components?

   (c)   Is there simplicity and clarity of flow? Warning: Keep it simple!!

   (d)   Where is reproduction reflected in the system?

3.   Now draw boxes, circles, lines, and arrows that indicate the relationships and flow of people into and through the system. Look closely for clear relationships and dead ends. Are there any missing components? If so, add them at the appropriate places.

4.   For each component on the 3"x3" Post-it™ Notes, determine the following:

   (a)   Level of commitment required for participation in this component

   (b)   Relationships required to move people from one commitment level to another.

Every good system design tells a story. Tell the story of what will happen to the family you have identified in your ministry focus group profile. What will be the door they enter, after they receive Christ as savior, what happens next, what will happen after five years in the church's life?

Conclusion

Christian Schwartz in <u>Natural Church Development</u> provides a glimpse into how systems work together to accomplish the task of reaching people and involving them in a church that is healthy and reproductive. Growth is not based upon methods but upon principles from God found in His word. Methods are tools that enable a church to grow. One method may work in one area of the country or among a particular people group, but in another area or among a different people group they may not be as effective. When we study the approach Jesus used in scripture to reach different people, we discover he used different methods; however, the message was always the same. When looking at your church and its development, does it reflect these eight characteristics of a healthy church?

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships[9]

Again, this paper is to enable you to review what a system is, to guide you in identifying the systems that are in your context, and to develop appropriate systems to effectively reach people with the gospel, disciple them, guide them in worship, and reproduce their faith in other people.

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[9] Ibid. p. 22-36.

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