

A SCALABLE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

By Bill Tenny-Brittian

WHEN ROBERT WAS called to First Church, the average worship attendance was hovering around seventy-five. Fifteen months later, the church was regularly seeing 190. With that many people in the pews, the number of church ministries had grown significantly – which was a good thing. But that also meant the board grew from twenty members to over forty-members and decision making had become a tedious and time-consuming process. So, Robert set a task force loose to rework the bylaws and six months and a contentious church-fight later, the bylaws were approved and the board was back to twenty again ... one member from each committee, two elders, two deacons, two youth, two at large members, plus the chair, vice chair, treasurer, and secretary.

Fortunately, the church continued to grow. Unfortunately, the new board structure had only reduced the number of participants, it hadn't changed how decisions were made. Just like it had always been, the committees met, made plans, and then made a written recommendation to the board. The bulk of the three-hour board meetings were to hear reports and to review committee recommendations, to discuss them, and often to insist on changes or to say "No" to the ideas altogether. As a

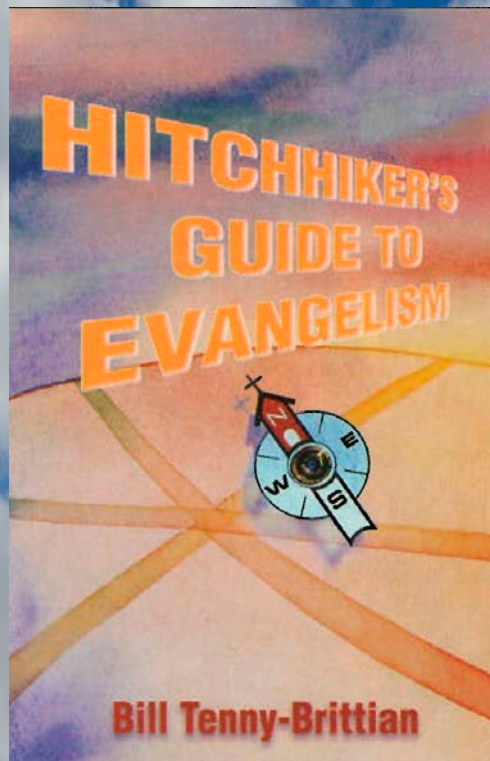
result, ministry opportunities were falling by the wayside and the committees' morale was one degree below pond scum.

Robert called us and we talked about his church's situation in depth. He realized that the board's structure and function had to change, but he also realized that if the church's growth continued at its current rate, he'd have to do this again at virtually every growth barrier (300, 500, 1000, etc.). And every time the church had to make changes to its bylaws, there was both an outbreak of conflict and the church's growth stalled.

The solution we proposed was two pronged. First, the roles of the board and the church's leadership had to be redefined. And second, the organizational structure needed to be upgraded to a scalable model.



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To that end, we created a recommendation report for the church that they have since implemented with good success. With some edits, the recommendation part of that report is what follows.

Redefine Leadership's Roles

In most churches, the decision-making process is cumbersome at best and dysfunctional at worst. The solution to the issue is twofold. First, it's critical that the church create, adopt, and implement a viable congregational DNA – a biblical mission, shared values, and an inspiring vision. Second, it's equally critical that you recruit and appoint *only* trustworthy leaders of integrity – and then allowing your leaders to do their jobs. But far too often, the organizational structure prevents leaders from leading. Instead, the best they can do is come up with ideas and hope the board/council will “allow” them the privilege of engaging ministry.

Today's effective and growing churches depend on streamlined decision making – which means that decisions are made at the ministry-delivery level (that is, the lowest possible level on the church's hierarchy chart). It

also means that the key leaders, the pastor included, is given the latitude to make day-to-day ministry decisions without having to seek “permission” of an oversight body. These decisions include starting ministries, ending ministries, recruiting and deploying leaders, and making personnel decisions. The only restraints include working within the congregational DNA; staying within budget; operating within moral, ethical, and legal boundaries; and meeting agreed upon vision-based goals.

“So, what's the point of a board/council?” I'm glad you asked.

The Role and Responsibilities of an Effective Board

Most Boards operate as if they are organizational management boards. However, in today's world almost no non-profit (outside of the church) tolerates such an ineffective and dysfunctional system. Effective, faithful, and sustainable churches develop an organizational structure that allows their leaders to lead and empowers the board (council, session, vestry) to hold the leaders accountable to the church's mission and vision.





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The function of an effective board is twofold:

1. To create policy as needed.
2. To hold the leadership accountable for achieving the congregation's mission.

In the most efficient churches, the board exists for the above reasons, only meets as necessary, and the “leadership” it holds accountable is the lead pastor ... and *only* the lead pastor. Of course, this means that the lead pastor is not only responsible for ensuring mission alignment by all staff, committees, teams, ministries, and missions, it also means the pastor has the authority to effect changes in personnel, etc. as necessary to achieve that mission. All ministerial staff, therefore, reports to the pastor (who has the authority to hire and fire). In smaller churches, all committee chairs report to the pastor who has the authority to hold these leaders accountable for results. In larger churches, committee chairs report to the staff person responsible for their area of ministry. If the pastor mishandles a situation, the expected behaviors and the congregation's leadership

covenants are the first line of reconciliation. However, if the pastor doesn't get the results the congregation expects (in terms of mission achievement, not in terms of whether or not the pastor visited so-and-so, etc.), then the pastor is held accountable by the board. However, so long as the results are as expected and the pastor is operating within the congregation's stated values and expected behaviors, then the board provides a wide latitude in anything that could be construed as interference. If the board *does* have to step in, its primary role is to either provide a corrective for the pastor or else to remove the pastor.

For most churches, making this shift is not an overnight process, since often bylaws, etc. may need to be changed (though we recommend just suspending the bylaws while you live into the change – better to be able to make tweaks before the church's new holy writs are in place than having to try and make adjustments later. However, there are four practices that should be put into place immediately, regardless of your church's bylaws.

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Only nominate and install leaders whom you implicitly trust. If you don't trust them, don't put them into leadership. *Period.*

Provide viable limits for these leaders: give them a budget and a mission for their ministry/committee/event/task. Provide them with staff oversight to whom they are accountable. Remind them they must embrace and embody the congregational covenants, the congregational values, and to keep their ministry ethical, moral, and legal.

Then get out of the way and let them do their job, including scheduling (or cancelling) events, spending funds, making changes, etc.

Finally, support these leaders by running interference for them. If someone complains about a change that's been made, etc., and if the leader has made that change within their mission and budget, then deflect the complaint and stand in solidarity with the leader. In other words, if the leader is achieving the mission within the bounds of the congregation's covenants, values, and within budget, then stay out of the way ... and keep others out of the way ... so these leaders can make the hard decisions that will lead the congregation into an effective, faithful, and sustainable future.

Adjusting the role of the board is going to be necessary prior to, or simultaneously with the implementation of the scalable organizational structure. Put these two pieces together, and no matter how big ... or how small ... your congregation gets, the organization should never be needed to be re-organized or remodeled.

Re-Design Your Organizational Structure

Reportedly, Peter Drucker suggests that an organization must revise its organizational structure each time it experiences 15–20 percent growth. This means churches operating without a scalable organization will find themselves losing new-found growth because decision-making and operations at the larger level aren't sustainable using a smaller church model. Indeed, most churches that experience sustained growth tend to follow a pattern of growth–plateau, growth–plateau in part because they must repeatedly pause to reorganize themselves at predictable growth levels (100, 200, 350, 500, etc.). However, we've found that the "inevitable" reorganizational size plateaus can be overcome using a scalable organizational structure.

We probably shouldn't be surprised that God provided us a visible model for sustainable growth in creation (cf., Romans 1:20). It turns out that a very small seed can grow into a very large tree and not once does it need to stop and reorganize itself to sustain growth. The same model seen in nature can be adopted, adapted, and applied to the church to facilitate sustainable growth. Science has called that model a *fractal*.

A fractal is a repeating pattern and is seen in both nature and in math. It is perhaps easiest seen in a palm tree. A palm tree has a large trunk (called a stem) with branches (called petioles) that come off of it. Each of those branches have leaves (called fronds) that come off of it.

Remove one of the "branches" and you'll be looking at what appears to be a "mini" version of the whole tree. You'll see a "stem" and "branches" and "leaves." Remove a frond and look closely and you'll see a "stem" running up the middle of the frond. And off of that "stem" you'll see tiny "branches" that are embedded in the frond. Stem, Branch, Leaves. All the way down to the micro-level. That's called a fractal, a repeating pattern from the macro to the micro.



To our knowledge, the fractal model of organization was first adapted by Pastor Wayne Cordeiro of New Hope Christian Fellowship Church in Oahu, Hawaii. Cordeiro developed the fractal model of organization as he led the congregation from two (he and his administrative pastor Dan Shima) to over 3,000 in less than three years. Because of the phenomenal growth, an organizational model was needed that could support rapid growth without having to endure a reorganizational process every year or two. Because the fractal model he developed is stable, replicable, and scalable he applied it to New Hope and to our knowledge, it continues to be used as the effective administrative and ministry organizational structure for New Hope, even though there are regularly over 22,000 in worship.

Over the past decades, we've been adapting and recommending this model for churches that have the capacity for sustainable growth. What follows is a generic version of that recommendation.

The Scalable Fractal Model or Organization

In every effective church, there are but four core processes necessary for the mission and ministry of the church.

The Inviting Process. This process is all about getting people to the church, whether that's to a worship service, networking, marketing, etc.

The Connecting Process. This process is developed specifically to retain people long enough to apprentice them as disciples of Jesus Christ. Connecting deals with helping people make a connection with the church through networking, mixers, and friend-making events.

The Apprenticing (or Discipleship) Process. This process is focused on helping people become fully invested disciples of Jesus Christ. It includes Christian education, mentoring, encouraging one-another, and small groups.

The Sending Process. This process helps people identify their spiritual callings and passions and then either connects them to a compatible existing mission/ministry or else helps them give birth to a new mission/ministry. Ultimately, this process is about sending people out of the church and into the community and beyond to be neighborhood missionaries.

In this illustration, the "fractal" has been drawn to show the relationship between the Lead Pastor and four Key Leaders who have responsibility for the mission-critical core processes. As will become apparent in the next few paragraphs, these four processes encompass 100 percent of the congregation's ministry needs including worship, small groups, pastoral care, leadership development, outreach ministries, and missions (read more about the process and

delegation in the *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches* book by me and Bill Easum).

First, notice that the larger circle encompasses 100 percent of the congregation's mission and ministry. Everything that goes on in the church neatly fits within the circle.

Second, notice that the circle has been divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant represents one of the mission-critical processes of the church.

- Invite: Getting People In the Door
- Connect: Retaining People Long Enough to Disciple Them
- Apprentice: Training People to Become Fully Effective Disciples
- Send: Sending People Into the Community and Beyond to Be Neighborhood Missionaries

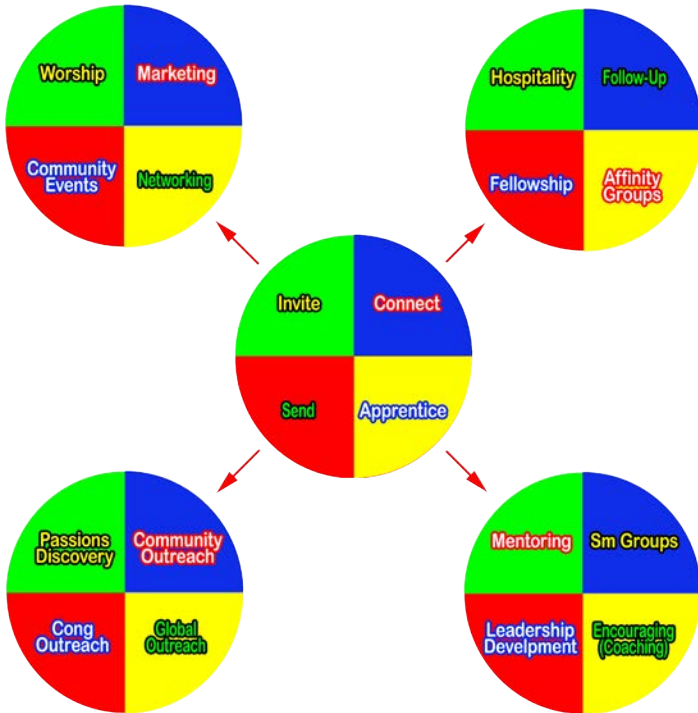
Third, notice that the Lead Pastor's "circle" encompasses a "mini-quadrant" from each of the four key quadrants. This is a graphical representation of the ultimate leadership responsibilities of the pastor. When it comes to the mission and ministry of the church, the "buck stops" with the pastor. As John Maxwell has correctly said, "It

all rises and falls on leadership" and the pastor is responsible for the whole of the local church's work. However, a pastor cannot do it all, even if they are responsible for it all. In the organic fractal model of leadership, a committed, passionate Key Leader is raised up for each of the key quadrants. Each Key Leader is responsible for the effective implementation of all the processes and programs that fall within their purview.

In keeping with the organic fractal model, you may recall



that a fractal is a repeating pattern; therefore, each of the Key Leader's responsibilities is broken down into four fractal quadrants. The following image illustrates and example of the core responsibilities for each of the Key Leaders. Note, that the specific responsibilities in each of the quadrants may or may not reflect the additional processes of your local church.



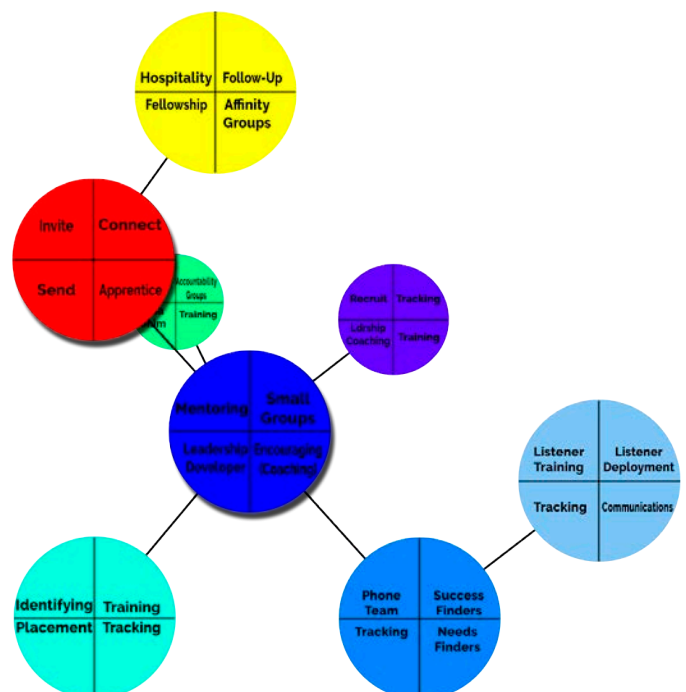
The Key Leader for each of these fractals would be responsible for raising up a leader for each of their quartiles. Let's take the Apprentice Key Leader for instance. The Apprentice Key Leader would be responsible for the totality of the congregation's discipleship process, from pre-believer (of any age) through senior adults. In the example shown, the Key Leader could raise up a leader for Mentoring, Small Groups, Leadership Development, and an Encouragement (coaching). Note, that some churches opt to divide the apprenticeship out along age-divisions: Adult, Youth, Children, and Nursery ... the division of each fractal beyond the four core processes can and should be set based on the local congregation's mission and vision.

Organizationally, using the larger Connect fractal example, the Connect Key Leader would raise up a leader for Hospitality; Follow-Up; Affinity Groups; and Fellowship Events. It should be noted that the actual division for each fractal should be developed based on the church's actual needs.

Remember that fractals are repeating patterns. As such, just as each of the Key Leaders are ultimately responsible for designing their fractals, each of the quadrant leaders would develop their own fractal quadrants under the mentoring and coaching of their supervising leaders. An example of how this might look for the Apprentice fractal is shown in the expanded fractal illustration.

For this example let's put a couple of names to the positions. Let's suppose Alvin is the Apprentice Key Leader and he breaks down his responsibilities into four quadrants: Mentoring, Small Groups, the Encouraging Champion, and Leadership Development. Once he's determined his fractal quadrants, he would be responsible for first ensuring that all the responsibilities of apprenticing are covered. Because he is a Key Leader, he is expected to be an equipper rather than a doer, and so he would be tasked with recruiting, training, mentoring, coaching, and supervising a leader for each of the quadrants. To that end, in consultation with the Lead Pastor he might decide to have Evelyn Encourager step into the Encouraging Champion quadrant. Alvin would work with Evelyn to develop a job description so she fully understood the scope of her new position. In our example, the job includes creating a culture of encouragement for one another in the church.

Once Evelyn understood her responsibilities, with Alvin's help she would develop her own fractal. As shown in the illustration, she developed her fractal with (1) A Phone Team who will make regular phone calls to church leaders, members, and returning guests to ask



about their “faith walk” and to ask how they could be prayed for; (2) A Success Finders Team whose task is to discover successes in the church ministries and missions in order to keep success before the congregation; (3) A Needs Finder Team whose task is to discover needs in the church and coordinate with the Send ministries to ensure the needs are met; and (4) A Tracking Team whose job is to ensure no one – members or guests – fall through the cracks in receiving regular encouragement. Evelyn would take seriously her responsibilities and would ensure every task was accomplished with a level of excellence befitting the Kingdom of God and the church. In so doing, and with the mentoring, coaching, and supervision of the Apprentice Key Leader (Alvin), she would recruit leaders for each of her fractal quadrants. And so it goes. In the illustration, the Success Finders Team fractal has been developed and leaders would be recruited for each quadrant.

The fractal organization can be used to involve a high number of servants (note that effective ministry is always done by servants of the Most High God, – sometimes referred to as unpaid staff – not by volunteers, who give from their abundance). Each of the quadrant leaders, from the Lead Pastor throughout each fractal thread, is responsible for developing their own fractal and raising up new servant leaders. This creates a system of redundancy that is absolutely necessary in a large church. Because each quadrant leader is responsible for recruiting and training and coaching additional leaders, no task has less than two people responsible for it. For instance, whoever is responsible for the sound board in a worship service would be expected to have at least one apprentice, which is to say that there shouldn’t be any tasks in the church that is being done by a “Lone Ranger.” Everyone in every level of leadership is mentoring someone – *not just in the technical tasks of their responsibilities, but also in the faith.*

Develop a Separate Administrative Fractal

One reality of the fractal model is that there is no specific administrative quadrant. This obvious oversight is intentional. Although the modern church generates administrative needs, these needs are not core processes; rather, administration carries the bulk of the logistical requirements necessary for effective mission and vision achievement. Effective and efficient logistics in any organization are “invisible,” that is, each ministry leader dis-

covers they have what they need when they need it and they don’t have to “worry” about their administrative need fulfillment. This can only become a reality when the administrative team (1) Knows what’s needed; (2) Has access to the needed resources; and (3) Has enough staff (both paid and unpaid) to deliver the needed resources in a timely manner.

The four core processes for an effective administrative fractal generally includes: Finances, Facilities, Office Management and Support, and Human Resources. In mid-sized churches, this fractal either reports to the pastor or to the administrative board. In larger churches, this fractal may report to the board, to a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), or to the Executive Pastor. The key leaders of this fractal operate similarly to the ministry fractal, though the expansion of the fractal into sub-fractals is dependent on the scope of the responsibilities. In a mid-sized church, the Facilities Manager may be the only staff needed for that fractal. However, as responsibilities are added, or as the sheer volume of data processing increases, the Facilities Manager will need to shift from Player-Coach to an Equipper who gets the ministry done through the hands of others.

Conclusion

The divine genius of the fractal model is that no matter how large an organization becomes, the core structure remains the same. The four core processes are the same for a church with twelve or a church with twelve-hundred: Invite, Connect, Apprentice, and Send. The pastor should never have to directly oversee more than four people using this model ... nor is anyone in the organization directly responsible for more than four. The larger the church, the deeper the fractals go, but “reorganization” will never be necessary. And when reorganization is unnecessary, sustained growth is more easily accomplished.

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