the
innovation
crisis

Creating
Disruptive
Influence
in the
Ministry
You Lead

TED
ESLER

FOREWORD

Sometimes I play a game when I read the Bible I call "Which side would I be on?"

I try to guess whether I'd side with the disciples who told people to go home or side with Jesus who invited people to stick around. I wonder whether I'd be one of the leaders who accuses Jesus of eating with scum and being a drunkard, or whether I'd be at the table with Jesus raising a glass with my hands unwashed. And then, as I read about the early church, I wonder whether I'd side with Peter who insisted everyone follow the Old Testament law or with Paul who said it really didn't matter and, hey, here's some bacon.

I don't like the results of that game.

The ministry of Jesus was so highly disruptive and innovative that it frightens me (if you actually read Scripture for what it says, that is).

Let's be honest, a lot of Christians struggle with *innovation*.

The fact that our current approach to ministry has been failing at almost every level for decades now doesn't seem to bother us nearly as much as it should.

One of the reasons is something sociologists call "sunk cost bias." You're good at church. You've got a lot invested in it. It's been good to you.

Which is exactly why I'm so glad that Ted Esler has written this book.

In it, you'll encounter some super sharp observations, innovative thinking, really tough questions, challenging ideas, and a call to innovate that will hopefully make you (and me) uncomfortable enough to do something risky that might not work.

And that's exactly the point.

You and I live in an age where you either disrupt yourself or you get disrupted.

It's time to disrupt ourselves before culture finishes the work for us.

CAREY NIEUWHOF
Bestselling author, podcaster, and founding pastor, Connexus Church

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IDENTIFYING INNOVATION TARGETS

Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right thing.[1]
Peter F. Drucker

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
Isaiah 43:19 (niv)

Business and ministry have a fundamental difference. The ultimate metric in ministry is not profit. We measure ministry less by black and white metrics. If, for example, you are in a discipleship focused ministry, how do you measure success? Jim Collins, writing in the monograph, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, warns us that ministry must not be treated like a business. "We must reject the idea – well-intentioned but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sector is to become 'more like a business.'"[2] In selecting targets for innovation, ministries have a more abstract set of issues to consider than most business leaders do.

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LEARNING FROM OUTSIDE YOUR DOMAIN

As mentioned earlier, I had to wrestle with how to price Missio Nexus membership when I first came into my role as association president. I had multiple conversations with board members about this as I considered a drop in prices. I had created multiple spreadsheets with different scenarios and was presenting these approaches to various board members. A typical conversation would end with something like this: "Ted, the issue is not pricing. They want to pay the price. But they only want to pay it if there is value in the offering, and that's the real issue."

> **One of the best ways to find innovative ideas is to get an outsider's perspective.**

This was the real issue. People do not mind paying for value. I had to stop altogether and reassess. My intuition had been telling me for some time that we were charging a segment of our membership too much. The seeds of that idea had been planted in a survey, months before, about why a member had not renewed. I let that seed grow into a nice, fat thesis about pricing. I had then marched out in search of the data to support it. This type of confirmation bias leads to bad decisions. It also inhibits innovation. My board had an outsider's perspective and I needed to hear it.

We all expect that as limited beings we have limited perspective. What we often fail to recognize is that as we become better at what we do, we create mental models that become, themselves, limiting. One of the best ways to find innovative ideas is to get an outsider's perspective.

An innovation lab at a major hospital once told a friend that the solutions to the biggest health care problems will not come from within the health care sector, but outside of it. For that reason, the lab seeks partnerships and shared learning opportunities with other industries.

Ministry leaders should similarly seek out insight from outside of the ministry space.

The Innovation Taxonomy

There are several helpful "taxonomies" intended to categorize types of innovation. One that is particularly helpful for business is found in the book, *Ten Types of Innovation: The Discipline of Building Breakthrough*.[3] Rather than utilizing a model designed to increase value to *customers* (thus increasing revenues), the following taxonomy is designed to generate value to the *kingdom*. A church, mission agency, or other ministry can use it to evaluate if any of these areas are ripe for innovation.

When I make the distinction that ministry innovation is different from business innovation, businesspeople scoff. These are the same, they argue. Creating value for people is agnostic as to why you are doing it. I do not agree. Value in the kingdom is not the same as value to a consumer. Kingdom value may have little value to the consumer. The Bible is filled with examples that defy the value proposition. Isaiah was not very effective as a prophet. He preached to an audience that did not respond to his message. That was the point (God was using Isaiah to demonstrate the hardness of the heart among the Jewish people). Jonah, on the other hand, provides us with a picture of a reluctant prophet who had a bad attitude about those to whom he was sent to "provide value." Yet, his ministry was highly effective from the value standpoint. Suffering and martyrdom are hard to figure out if the measurement is increased value, yet they are among the most valued elements of Jesus' ministry (and the ministry of countless saints in church history). Nobody would say that we should treat our spouses using the value construct from the business world. If we did, our relationships would become transactional and void of the beauty and mystery of love.

Innovation in ministry can go in directions other than the value proposition commerce offers. This should be freeing to us even though

it makes the pursuit less concrete. A taxonomy is a useful way to categorize information. The following taxonomy can be used to evaluate different types of ministry innovation.

THE INNOVATION TAXONOMY

OUTCOMES	WHO DOES THE MINISTRY SERVE?
Stakeholders	Understand and service stakeholders in creative, new ways.
Collaboration	Work with others to solve ministry problems.
Evaluation	Define, understand, and evaluate ministry goals.
SERVICE	**WHAT DOES THE MINISTRY DO?**
Experience	How people experience your ministry.
Identity	How your ministry is perceived by others.
Relevance	The cultural relevancy of your ministry to others.
ORGANIZATION	**HOW IS THE MINISTRY ORGANIZED?**
Economic Engine	How expenses are paid for or eliminated.
Structure	Alignment around your ministry purpose.
Methodology	How you execute on ministry purposes.

Outcomes

Outcome-based innovation focuses on **who the ministry serves**. Outcome-based innovation in a ministry is aimed at identifying the people being served and seeks to serve them better, innovating on outcomes. Sometimes, ministries do not understand who they are serving. If they have the right audience in mind, they are often serving them in ways that are not relevant to them.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders represent anybody involved in a ministry. This seems like an easy to identify target, but it is not. Who does your church serve? The people attending or the people not attending? The board of elders? Perhaps it is the community in which the church resides. Of course, the answer is that it serves all of them. There are few innovations, though, that will serve such a disparate group of stakeholders. Ministry organizations are faced with a similar dilemma. Do they serve the donors, the missionaries, the churches sending the missionaries, the board of directors or the people they are seeking to reach?

Stakeholder innovation means a narrowing of the focus on who the ministry serves and ways to deliver that service. Life.Church is a multisite church that is based in the Oklahoma City metro area and has dozens of locations throughout the Bible Belt and across the nation. From this Midwest base, they serve a stakeholder that many churches would never dream they'd be able to serve. On July 10, 2008, Apple opened its App Store with five hundred apps, two hundred of which were free to download. The world had never seen anything like it before. A place where small programs could be instantly downloaded onto your phone. Among those two hundred free apps was the YouVersion Bible App, the only Bible app available on day one. As of this writing, the YouVersion has almost a half billion unique downloads worldwide. How many churches do you know that can claim to have this kind of reach

across the globe? YouVersion is unique in that it was a "first to market" app. Today there are competitors, but none compare to YouVersion. It also has a kid-friendly sidekick, Bible App for Kids, that has more than 65 million downloads.

Imagine it is late 2007 and somebody has just asked for money from your church budget to develop an app.

"A what?"

"An app. A small program that will run on your phone."

"My phone?"

"Yes, your phone will soon be able to run programs."

"Cool. But why would we want to use church resources for this? Who does this serve in our congregation?"

YouVersion was innovative, not only because Life.Church saw that a new era was coming, but because they decided to serve somebody outside their church walls, the many people globally who want to read the Bible. They decided to serve people outside of their direct line of influence.

Life.Church generously serves the Global Church in other ways as well. They give away tools related to church metrics, youth and children's programming, leadership development, training in many different areas, staff development, and a means of putting any church online. When COVID-19 hit, thousands of churches who would otherwise not be able to easily go online, utilized their resources to offer virtual services. These tools are free. When they developed these items for their own use, they did so in a way that would enable them to share the tools with the Church at large. If they had seen their primary stakeholder as themselves, they would never have innovated in this way. Reframing who your stakeholders are opens a wide vista for innovation.

A few years ago, the mission agency Frontiers questioned how they were being understood by Muslims, the people they were seeking to reach. As they examined their own communication, even internally, they realized that they were sending a message inconsistent with their mission. They innovated on their mission statement, which is now, "With love and respect, inviting all Muslim peoples to follow Jesus." This mission statement respects an important stakeholder for Frontiers.[4]

> **Reframing who your stakeholders are opens a wide vista for innovation.**

As you seek to innovate, who is your primary stakeholder?

Collaboration

Collaboration creates innovation through scale, resourcing, the mixing of attributes from different collaborators, and creativity. By working with others, you bring more people into the equation. By working with those who have different resources than you, you combine strengths. By collaborating, everybody gains the advantage of creative ideas from different perspectives.

Because we covered collaboration in chapter 6, we will move on for now. As a reminder, collaboration seeks to answer the question, "What is something we could do together that we could not do on our own?"

Evaluation

Evaluation has to do with the judgments we make about how and what we do in our ministry. Goals are inextricably linked to evaluation. Often, the goals we have are unspoken and only through careful examination do we understand even our own motivations.

Changing how we evaluate can lead to breakthrough innovation.

We all work under assumed standards each day. When I meet a pastor and ask about their church, I almost always get a reply that is related to the size of the church. They will tell me how many people attend weekly services. This is a helpful way for us to socially understand the type of ministry and the scope of the ministry that the pastor oversees. But it is a terrible rubric for evaluating a ministry and we all know it. Goals set the stage for how we think about the work we are doing.

Similarly, I recently spoke with a leader frustrated by the emphasis on missionary sending. New forms of missionary service, from entrepreneurial business start-ups to taking jobs in multinational corporations have become commonplace. He was challenging the notion that we should ever count missionaries and think that it means anything significant.

Poverty alleviation has been greatly affected by evaluating who we are serving. It summed up in the age-old phrase, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." Is the goal of a ministry to feed a person, or is it help that person feed themselves? It would seem obvious that giving away food, water, shelter, and other things to alleviate poverty is less strategic than investing in people to make that gift unnecessary. Yet, a significant amount of direct aid is given away every year. To be fair, there are situations in which direct aid is appropriate. Yet, evaluation of how aid affects those who receive it has transformed the development community.

No matter where you go in the world, one reality remains constant. If somebody in a household has a job that provides for that household, poverty rates decline. For this reason, groups like Join the Journey have turned to new forms of micro-enterprising to alleviate poverty. Adam Cole, the founder, has a vision to create a massive peer-to-peer giving network for entrepreneurs. Small scale loans make possible business ventures that you can fund straight from your phone.

Yet another area under massive change surrounds orphan care. We have all seen pictures of institutionalized orphans. A movement to stamp out orphanages within the next decade seeks to replace these

institutions with foster care. Instead of seeing a parent-less child as somebody with needs for food, shelter, and education, this new movement sees them as children who need parents. By placing them in homes an entire system is disrupted.

Subtle shifts in goals have significant consequences. Planting a church is a very different goal than planting reproducing churches. If you plant a church, you will serve a congregation. If you seek to reproduce churches, then you will be working with leaders to encourage that reproduction.

Sometimes removing metrics that have been traditionally used in your ministry helps spur innovation. Examples might include counting how many people attend church services (a poor metric by any measure, no pun intended), how many missionaries are sent (does not speak to effectiveness), or how many people visited your website (does not evaluate action taken). As long as these metrics are utilized people will focus their efforts in this direction.

When the goals are changed, there is great opportunity for innovation. What might you measure that would lead to innovation?

Service

Service innovation is aimed at improving **what the ministry does**. The delivery of your service to people is like the Marshal McLuhan observation about media: the media is the message. The form of a medium becomes part of the message and influences its meaning. Similarly, service becomes a part of how people experience the kingdom through your ministry, influencing how they perceive and understand the kingdom.

Experience

What kind of experience do people have when they interact with your ministry? It is a broad question, encompassing digital presence (your website, mobile, email, social media and similar representations of your ministry), physical touch points (from architecture to how events are

organized), and spiritual sensitivity (do people sense the Holy Spirit in relationships, communications, prayer, and how you care?). Churches must pay special attention to the experience they provide to those whom they serve. Too often in evangelicalism, we have put truth and doctrine too far ahead of how we communicate and live out that truth and doctrine.

Despite what you might think about the seeker sensitive movement, it was innovation focused on this attribute of experience. The leaders went to great lengths to identify church service elements that would upgrade the experience of an attendee. They wanted to communicate that people were welcome. Sermons were adapted to an audience that were considered theologically naïve (this touches on innovation in the outcomes arena as well, since the people being served shifted from informed Christian to Spiritual Seeker). Coffee and donuts, easy parking, and friendly faces were, in the mid-1970s, downright revolutionary at most churches.

L'Abri, the Swiss spiritual retreat center that flourished in that same era, was known for the experience it delivered. It did not matter what doubts you harbored about your faith. When you came to L'Abri, you were welcomed by a community that embraced your journey.

As a missionary, I learned that hospitality is the "killer app" for the kingdom. To have somebody in your home, eating food you prepared, conversing freely around a table is powerful. Westerners have largely lost the art of simple hospitality, replacing it with "entertaining." I yearn for innovation in hospitality. What would it look like for every believer to offer their homes, even for one night a week, to anybody who would like to come? This could tip the balance of power in the culture.

There is a cultural expectation in the West that an institution, be it a church or ministry organization, will deliver service via the Internet and, more and more, in a mobile friendly way. Giving history, for example, must be online, easily accessed, searchable, and downloadable. Because of the pace of change in these expectations, high service levels are not particularly innovative any longer. They are assumed. This means that it takes even more effort and creativity to craft an experience that is innovative.

The experience of your staff is also important. Websites like Glassdoor allow any employee to anonymously rate their experience working for you. This becomes a part of your public persona. Recently, a friend was looking for a new church. I was surprised when he told me that he ruled out a church after checking on Glassdoor, a website where employees leave reviews about employers. His view was that a church with negative staff reviews is not a church he would attend.

What kind of experience do people have when they come into contact with your ministry?

Identity

Jesus said that it is the love between His followers that was the mark of a disciple (John 13:35). That is incredible branding. Imagine for a moment what it would look like if people in our culture held the view that we are a loving community. In place of this, we are perceived as political, self-serving, and out of touch with the larger culture. To be fair, this was predicted. Yet, our branding as people of God could use some serious re-branding. The identity of your ministry in the broader community is important and offers opportunities for innovation.

Branding and identity, as I use them here, are closely related but different. Branding is the message you control and craft about your organization. Identity is the way you are perceived. Branding contributes to identity. First impressions matter, but identity is also set by the fulfillment of the promises your brand makes.

The Association of Gospel Rescue Missions had a problem. Their leader, John Ashmen, knew that when people heard "rescue mission," it brought up images of "Soap, Soup, and Salvation."[5] The traditional view of what their many member organizations did was not what they were, in fact, doing. They are involved in job skills training, dental and medical care, transportation, housing procurement, counseling, and many other services. Their services were much more extensive, holistic, and redemptive. Yet, their public brand did not reflect this reality.

In 2017, John and his board started a process of rethinking their identity. Any association that has members who are highly committed to the existing brand and identity needs to start by listening to its members. They also undertook an extensive education program about the importance of branding. They highlighted the positive contributions of rescue missions through their founding in the UK, to the New World, and up to today. They celebrated where they had come from. Then they highlighted the many ways rescue missions had "grown up" to become full-service ministries, focused on restoring the people they served. They had outgrown their brand.

Over the course of the next few months they involved the community on a process of finding a new name and highlighting the new identity. As they researched, they developed a list of eight activities that restated the stages of life transformation while embracing the fact that spiritual transformation could occur at any one of these stages.

SERVING
SETTLED
SECURE
SKILLED
SCHOOLED
STABLE
SOBER
SAVED
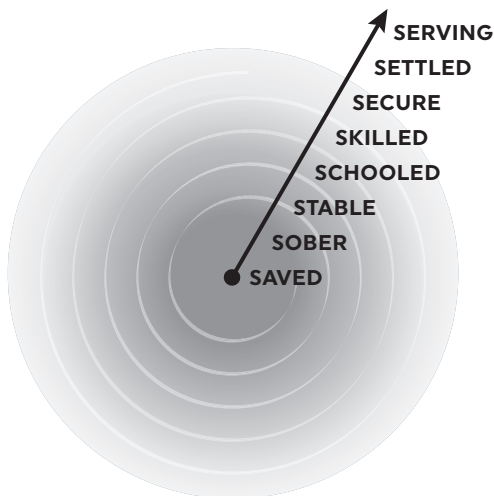
CITYGATE NETWORK'S TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL

In an unveiling of the brand, Citygate Network, they dropped dated language. Perhaps more importantly, they introduced a new, more

appropriate reality about who they were. They did not reinvent themselves. Rather, they discovered who they were in a culturally contextualized way. By rebranding, new partners emerged that would not have thought to work with them before.

A job skills training center leader heard about Citygate Network at a conference. She introduced herself to John and as they spoke, she realized that what she did was what Citygate Network's members were also doing. She decided to join. A low-income medical services facility run by volunteer doctors would never have considered membership in Citygate Network. Yet, by becoming members they can more easily partner with the rescue mission in their city. The people they both serve are better off when they cooperate. By rebranding, this new partnership is far more likely to happen.

It is important to note the branding did not drive their reinvention. Their reinvention drove their rebranding. The new identity opened doors otherwise closed to them. It helped them delineate their services as an association, driving growth and ultimately deeper partnerships.

Another example of innovation on identity is the "I Am Second" campaign. Unlike an organizational or church rebranding effort, "I Am Second" attempts to rebrand the traditional Christian testimony. It does this by combining high quality video stories of people from different walks of life. They feature both celebrity testimonies alongside the stories of regular people. To "live second" means to put God first, yourself second. In a culture thar is increasingly dominated by short attention spans, videos and celebrities are a powerful way to communicate.

Issues of branding, how to do it, what should be communicated in a brand, and other topics are a study in themselves. For our purposes, consider that branding influences your identity. It has innovation opportunities embedded within it. Uniquely communicating your mission is incredibly hard work but pays dividends in mission fulfillment.

How do your stakeholders perceive your ministry?

Relevance

Related to identity is the issue of cultural relevance. The best example of this is Jesus' teaching, which I call "retro-revolutionary". I first heard of this concept from N. T. Wright who wrote that Jesus taught on themes that were culturally familiar to His audience (the "retro"), while simultaneously being prophetically challenging to the culture (the "revolutionary").[6] A Jew listening to Jesus teach would immediately understand and appreciate Jesus' message as Jewish. It came from the soil of Jewish culture and resonated as authentic and contextualized. Yet, at the same time, Jesus also taught things that were so counter to Judaism that He was crucified for it. Bridging the gap between culturally contextualized messages and those that are countercultural is a gateway to innovation.

Culture is a mix of historical movement painted on an ever-changing generational canvas. This moving target, in which this year's "hip" ministry becomes next year's cynically critiqued has-been, requires ministry leaders to constantly be on the lookout for innovative ways to connect with people.

Cultural relevance touches on several, very diverse issues, all ripe for innovation. In addition to the generational considerations in ministry, you can innovate on contextualization (adjusting to the context), developing a prophetic voice for a ministry (opposing the culture), using new communication tools (remember that the media one uses affect the meaning of the message), innovating on forms and formats, and tackling current cultural issues like abortion, racism, income wage gaps, and so on.

Steiger International is a ministry with a focus on relevance. In 1983, David and Jodi Pierce began a Bible study on a barge known as Steiger 14 behind the Central Train Station in Amsterdam. The people they were reaching were the punk rockers, anarchists, drug addicts, and those who were walking away from mainstream society. David knew that these people cared a lot about music. It was the early days of the Euro-punk scene so he founded a band, *No Longer Music*. The group

grew as the band played in bars, rock festivals, and anywhere they could get an audience.

David Pierce, with his two-foot-long dreadlocks, continues to tour with the band, finding audiences in just about every urban center in the world. Since their founding, the world has changed, making Steiger International *more* relevant now than before. With the advent of the Internet, a global youth culture has emerged. From Azerbaijan to Zambia you can find young people with tattoos, piercings, and a shared worldview, quite distinct from the majority cultures in which they live. Steiger missionaries work in places you might not think headbangers hang out, like the countries of the Middle East. Their missionary training schools, traveling teams, and long-term strategy emphasize how the church can and should speak in ways that people can understand.

There is another angle on contextualization that most ministries never consider. Contextualization is about framing the message to fit the context. Ministries can also do the opposite. They can influence the context to make it better fit the message.

In 1986, Steve (the President of Pioneers USA) and Arlene Richardson moved to Southeast Asia to work among the "Kantoli,"[7] a large Muslim people group. When they asked if there were any Christians among the people in this culture, the response was that to be Kantoli was to be Muslim. There was no other way. A person who is Kantoli cannot be Christian. This made evangelism rather difficult. They decided that they needed to change the worldview so that Jesus was at least an option.

A team was developed to create media that highlighted the lives of Kantoli who were Christ-followers. They developed a television show, printed materials, and a cultural center. Each of these highlighted indigenous Christians. Because there were few resources in their Kantoli language, these resources were novel in a society dominated by the trade language. Word spread and the worldview was changed. Today, if you ask a Kantoli if there are any Christians in their people group, they not only tell you that, yes, there are, they also know where to point you to.

This reverse-contextualization has created a new condition in which the gospel has a chance to be heard.

Is your ministry relevant to its context?

Organization

This next area of potential innovation is more about the internal workings of your ministry. How you organize the ministry should be among the easiest things to change. Yet, because we have become accustomed to the way that we work, it is easy to neglect this type of innovation. Most of us, for instance, consider the sources of revenue that undergird our work to be secondary to vision. Yet, funding affects most areas of ministry, as do structures and methodologies.

Economic Engine

The economic engine that drives a ministry has significant ramifications for all other aspects of its work. How a ministry is funded touches all relationships, both those inside and outside the ministry. Innovation in this area carries high stakes both in risk and potential gain.

For churches, the economic engine seems straightforward. Regular attenders contribute and the church stays in operation because of their generosity. Of course, anybody who has been on the losing end of a donor battle in a church knows that giving in a congregation is not evenly distributed. A few people give the most, and when push comes to shove, they have outsized influence. A pastor with independent funding is considered by many to be dangerous. Why? Because paychecks often translate into accountability.

The Open Network supported by LifeChurch.tv offers free services to any church that needs them. "Free," of course, means that LifeChurch.tv, not you, is paying for them. Because they offer the services for free, they have an audience that others do not. Free services as a business model usually means that the burden of the economic engine is shifted

to somebody else. Google charges most users nothing for an incredible array of services. Of course, they sell you and your use of those services to others. When looking at free models, consider where the burden is placed and why. In the case of LifeChurch.tv, they realized that if they were building out these services for themselves, why not go the extra mile and offer them to others? In return, their church has been able to influence thousands of other congregations.

Innovation around finances can change the nature of any ministry. Ministries that charge money for their services are influenced by their economic engine as well. Our ministry charges membership dues. As the CEO, I must always have this in the back of my mind. I need to consider how it influences our work. In the past few years, I have watched other networks develop around specific issues like church planting, reaching the unreached, and so forth. These networks fall into two groups. Those that are free and those that charge membership dues. The two groups behave differently from one another, the amount of ownership participants have is different, and the expectation for service is different.

The Business as Mission movement seeks to upend the support-raising structures that have dominated missionary financing for 250 years. A large part of the "price" for support-raising is time. A support-raised missionary has, in comparison, vastly more time to spend on ministry activities than somebody working full-time in a secular job. One argument is that the full-time business employee has more credibility in the culture they are seeking to reach. In this case, the economic engine has a distinct benefit for the employee.

Many ministries contact me about rethinking their economic engines. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed weakness in how ministries are funded. There is a growing concern that giving patterns among Millennials are changing, regulatory issues have increased the cost of doing ministry, and the expectations of major donors is changing. This is an area ripe for innovation. Churches are not exempt from these changes and I expect there to be changes to church funding in the decade ahead.

Medical missionaries are among the most impactful of all that are sent. You do not have to take my word for that. In 2016, two Jewish philanthropists, Rabbi Erica Gerson and Mark Gerson, created a grant to be awarded to Christian medical missionaries. L'Chaim Prize for Outstanding Christian Medical Missionary Service provides a half million dollars a year to doctors providing direct medial service.

I have personally witnessed the heroic sacrifice of missionary doctors working in extreme conditions. One hospital I visited in South Sudan was under intermittent attack by the Sudan Air Force. Despite the danger, a missionary doctor labored tirelessly to train new doctors. He did this as the only trained medical professional in a region with some millions of people. Unfortunately, medical missionaries face a challenge. Upon graduation, they face years of payments against student loans. This disqualifies many for service in traditional missionary agencies. Even if they were appointed, the fundraising amount is prohibitive and the alternate (to stay home and serve in a Western hospital) is highly lucrative.

MedSend has seen this problem and innovated an entire organization around a solution. They partner with mission agencies to "strategically fund qualified healthcare professionals to serve the physical and spiritual needs of people around the world."[8] They raise the money necessary to pay the student debt of actively serving medical missionaries. In doing so, these doctors can focus more time healing and less of it raising money. This is innovating on the economic engine, removing financial barriers and blessing others.

How do you fund your ministry?

Structure

As a ministry grows so does complexity. This complexity requires organization that stifles agility, focus, and urgency around the mission. Business leaders call this the paradox of growth. While many leaders seek growth, many bigger ministries fondly remember the days when they were smaller. With size, alignment becomes more difficult,

specialization creates silos, and members of the ministry cannot see the big picture.

In the business world, both quality and speed matters. Getting to market first, having just-in-time inventory, and being able to make big changes fast equals survival. Having quality offerings that delight people, create loyalty, and drive the bottom line create revenue. Should we who lead ministries have the same values?

People get uncomfortable when speed is discussed in ministry circles. Particularly as it relates to people-centric ministry like church planting, discipleship, and evangelism, speed has a bad name. Yet, our ministry slogans are filled with "speedy" language. We say things like, "Within our generation," or "By 2030 we will . . ." and "Hasten Christ's return by . . ." Is there an equivalent to "just-in-time inventory" for ministries?

James Kelly, a young tech enthusiast from Toronto, Canada, and the founder of FaithTech, organizes hackathons. In one of these gatherings, the group was shocked by some data that presented. Suicide rates, particularly among white males, were on the rise. The group began to research this and soon learned that one of the top Internet searches was "How do I kill myself?" The results showed very specific methods for how one might end their life.

Kelly and the group saw an opportunity. They brainstormed solutions, and something innovative emerged. One person asked, "What if we owned the domain name howtokillyourself.org and made it the top result for that search?" They assembled a few web developers, a communications specialist, and networked with Christian groups that provide suicide assistance online and via phone calls. When somebody clicks on that link, instead of seeing "7 Easy Ways to Kill Yourself," the banner says, "You Are Not Alone." There are helpful videos, links, and a way to instantly talk with somebody about your situation. These innovators created this website over a weekend. When is the most critical moment to deliver our "just-in-time inventory" of loving care to somebody contemplating suicide?

This simple solution took very little structure to create. There were already ministries providing suicide assistance. What Kelly's hackathon team did was to organize a better way to connect those suffering from suicidal thoughts with those who could help.

Structure, the way that we organize and deliver products, processes, and services, affects both speed and quality. The role of innovative structures has been debated in the church for hundreds of years. Catholic orders like the Jesuits and the Benedictines were specially designed structures to perform tasks that the Catholic Church itself was either not doing or wanted done in a different way. The monastics had a unique structure, and the church created the diocese around the city/states of feudal Europe.

Structure often becomes embedded into our mental frameworks and affects much more than structure. My son has been a part of a house church, and one day we were talking about different issues churches encounter (from men's and women's roles to authority to modes of baptism, etc.). The reality is that his church doesn't even experience some of the issues that split larger congregations because its structure sidesteps these issues. It highlights the ways that structure influences a ministry philosophy.

Within evangelicalism, we also have "sodalities and modalities." A sodality represents the missionary team, Paul, Barnabas and company, being sent out from the modality, the local church at Antioch. The modern missionary agency of today is like the sodality of the first century. In fact, much of the missional movement is driven by reducing the difference between these two concepts. They argue that the church itself should have, at its core, the same sort of missionary fervor of the sodality. The challenge is that the freedom to innovate structurally within the boundaries of a local church can be difficult. Many of the organizations that are a part of Missio Nexus were started in local churches but outgrew the structure and were launched on their own.

Structural changes in the eccliosystem can have long-term consequences. The Sunday school movement, for example, changed not only

the way church was conducted for 250 years, but how literacy, simple math, and Bible literacy spread in England. Sunday school happened on Sunday because child laborers worked the rest of the days, often for twelve hours. Early Sunday schools also held the promise of receiving free paper and pencils, which were valuable commodities at the time. Christian leaders saw the transformation and the idea spread, Ultimately, millions were influenced by Sunday schools. It was not until secular education was introduced that Sunday schools were turned into Bible-only affairs.

It is important to observe that structural change may or may not be linked to organizations, nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations, and other contemporary models of working together. Often, the structure within our own ministries need new, innovative ideas.

Consider this real-life example of structural challenge within a single ministry. Many missionary agencies have decentralized their leadership structures so that decisions are made closer to the field action. As their staff has grown, they may have added non-Westerners to this leadership. Imagine that a fifty-year-old Arab man is the leader of a region in the Middle East. First Baptist Church has sent out a young, millennial Bible college graduate to work in the region. This will be her first cross-cultural experience. When she arrives, she finds it very difficult to relate to the leader. He refuses to spend any one-on-one time with her, does not treat her as she believes a team member should be treated, and has asked her to make him coffee on numerous occasions, which she finds very offensive. From his point of view, she dresses provocatively, disrespects him in a group by interrupting him, and spends too much time on her phone when she is with others. He wishes she would sit with the women during the team meetings or in the other room with the children.

She calls home to First Baptist and explains her frustration to the missions pastor. He in turn calls the mission agency and demands to speak to her supervisor. The agency has a church relationship team. They take the call and pass the information on to the field leader in an email, detailing

the situation as accurately as possible, though it now has passed through two third parties in the retelling. The field leader is astonished by what he reads. He has been publicly critiqued behind his back, shaming him. He asks the young missionary to leave and she does. Upon arriving home, she begins publishing her story on a blog. When the organization asks her to stop, she harshly criticizes the agency for being so out of touch. First Baptist will never again partner with that agency.

As you read this example, you should see how values in structure have affected the way this team was brought to crisis. These values are reflected in how they empower field leadership, place non-Westerners in leadership over Westerners, and default to open communication about disagreements. These are all considered "best of" approaches in international ministry. Yet, there are opportunities in how the structure could be innovated upon to prevent similar incidences in the future. It might take the form of additional training, parallel leadership structures, changes in how missionaries are placed onto field teams, field-based intervention, or all these simultaneously.

> Structural innovation requires that we question assumptions. Like the walls of a house, some are load-bearing and some are not.

Structural upheaval has started in broad swaths of the eccliosystem. As a part of a board, I sometimes sit with Bible college presidents and hear their concerns. Much of what they face has to do with structural change, having built infrastructure for growth but now face diminishing student bodies due to both changes in our culture and in our demographics. House church, traditional church, multisite churches, online churches, megachurches, and combinations of these are structural answers to how we in the kingdom carry out our obedience to be the body of Christ.

Structural innovation requires that we question assumptions. Like

the walls of a house, some are load-bearing and some are not. Careful examination before makeovers are made can avoid disaster and open the door to beautiful renovations.

The mental frameworks of structure are often ripe for innovation, which cuts across our categories. Are you a nonprofit, a for-profit, or a "for-Prophet"? An entrepreneur in Asia, Sue Plumb Takamoto, is all three. She created a ministry enterprise called Nozomi Project that also cuts across all of these categories.

Sue had been praying for guidance on how she might gather women together in community. One day, while cleaning up the debris from the tsunami that devastated northern Japan, she noticed broken pieces of pottery, cups, and other fragments. Could these discarded fragments be redeemed? There is beauty in brokenness, she thought, and an idea formed. She created a social enterprise (a business that evaluates its success based on how it improves people's lives versus how much money it makes) that designs and sells jewelry made from these fragments. This social enterprise creates ongoing employment, a chance for women to gather, and beauty. It is a means of meeting and relating to people in a culturally appropriate way. As relationships develop, Sue shares her life, and thus, her faith.

In a recent interview[9] I had with Sue, she noted that as Nozomi Project developed, she had no master plan in mind. Instead, she asked God to reveal to her the "next best step." Now, looking back, she sees God's hand in how things have developed. She told me about the value of building a team. The right people providentially joined the effort at the right time. The multicultural contributions of the diverse Nozomi Project team are a part of what makes the artwork compelling and appealing.

Today, she is exploring new ministry options in Cambodia to vulnerable women, taking people from the team in Japan with her. It is powerful to impact these female tsunami survivors through Nozomi Project. It is even more impactful to see these same women empowered to help other vulnerable women across cultural divides. Featured on

TEDx as an innovator, Sue's story is a category-busting example of impact.

How could your structure better support your mission and vision?

Methodology

In 1998, I encountered a new methodology of church planting for the first time. Church planting movements, in which church planters focus on multiplication rather than simply planting one church, has rocked the global church. David Garrison's book *Church Planting Movements* introduced me to the concepts, which, frankly, I flatly rejected at the time. Since then I have seen how church planting movement methodology has changed the nature of church planting around the world.

When we consider places that are resistant to the gospel, we might troubleshoot and ask ourselves why people are not responding to the message. Garrison did the opposite. He studied places where the church was rapidly expanding and tried to see if there were any similarities between them. He developed a short list and suggested that missionaries should consider aiming toward these elements. Since that time, tens of thousands have been trained in these ideas. Like any other innovation, there are detractors and critics. Yet, the impact of Garrison's model has been widespread globally.

This table summarizes the ways that church planting movement practitioners differentiate their ministry from traditional church planters:

	TRADITIONAL MODEL OF CHURCH PLANTING	CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT (CPM) MODEL
DISCIPLESHIP	Discipleship happens in the context of the church. Healthy churches produce healthy disciples.	The church happens in the context of discipleship. Healthy disciples produce healthy churches.
PEDAGOGY	Training is paramount – the argument is that somebody needs to "rightly handle the Word of God."	Learning/Learners are paramount – the argument here is that the "Holy Spirit is able to teach anybody."
CHURCH PLANTER ROLE	The church planter is incarnational and participative. They teach, disciple, and lead.	The church planter is catalytic and incidental. They organize, shepherd, and coach.
MESSAGE DELIVERY	The message delivery is didactic and directive.	The message delivery is Socratic and self-discovered.
LEARNING STYLE	The emphasis is on deduction (Understand a general principle then apply it specifically to the text. The criticism is that it relies on systems of theology).	Emphasis is on induction (Understand a specific text then apply it to your life. The criticism is that it is too subjective).
CHURCH FORM	Favors "higher" or more formalized church government. The church is more stable, organized, and potentially more institutionalized.	Favors "lower" or less formalized church government. The church is discontinuous, less structured, and potentially more transient.
GROWTH	Growth is slower, steady, and deep. Numeric growth will follow depth.	Growth is faster, sporadic, and wide. Numeric growth will follow discipleship.

Each one of these is an alternative to a long-standing way of doing ministry. How do these philosophies translate into methodology? Traditional church planting methods emphasize the role of the preacher while devaluing firsthand discovery. Thus, the church planter encourages people to read the Bible themselves, organizing discovery Bible studies. In many cases, the church planter coaches the seekers in a simple study method in which the Scripture is read, discussed, applied and then the participants are asked to tell others about what they learned. Rather than sharing a simple gospel message using an illustration like the Four Spiritual Laws, the Bible texts are selected to highlight the story of redemption. The group is never encouraged to sit and listen to a preacher feed them the text. When people respond to the gospel, they already have the tools for starting a new group. This leads to multiplication and the cycle repeats itself.

Detractors have vociferously opposed the unseating of the church planter as the primary teacher and preacher. After three hundred years of the pastor and missionary being the center of church planting methodology, this should be expected. Their main contention is that the New Testament commands preaching, not self-discovery. Often these critiques are emotionally charged. "This will create heresy!" is one such charge, despite the amount of heresy projected weekly from the pulpits of traditional churches. I am not aware of any study that indicates greater heresy among churches planted in this way. There are issues with any method, and this one is no different. Yet, it has fundamentally changed the way church planting is happening throughout the world.

The Bible provides great flexibility in methodology. I like to teach aspiring ministry leaders to be wary of inflexibility with methodology. I warn them that "when your methodology becomes your theology, your ecclesiology becomes a pathology." Church history is filled with methods we find nowhere in Scripture as a command. Bible translation, the use of seminaries, chronological Bible teaching, making use of media, are methodological. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see the church forms we take for granted in contemporary society. No New Testament

church is described as holding title to a building, having a band or choir, or having youth groups. These are all methods. How best to utilize this freedom in method to further the kingdom?

What methodology might be employed to better reach your goals?

COMBINING INNOVATION TARGETS

These nine areas for potential innovation should not be considered in silos. Changes to the economic engine will no doubt create changes in other areas of your ministry. Collaboration will have consequences for your ability to control how somebody experiences your ministry. Serving a new set of stakeholders will rattle existing stakeholders.

In *Ten Types of Innovation,* the authors write,

> Having analyzed and used the Ten Types for more than 15 years, we can now confidently generalize: you must look beyond products in order to innovate repeatedly and reliably. By combining multiple types of innovation, you will be more assured of bigger and more sustainable success.[10]

As you investigate possible innovation targets within your ministry, map them according to the types with a goal to seeing innovation happen across more than one area.

Operation Mobilization is employing this approach in their missionary agency. Operation Mobilization has a long history of recruiting and deploying of missionaries. As the leadership has watched changes in the global environment, they believe that the future calls for a different missionary structure.

They have developed Scatter Global in response. Unlike the traditional business as a mission model that emphasizes business startups and entrepreneurs, Scatter Global focuses on providing employment opportunities for Christians who want to use their vocational skills overseas.

Advantages of this model include lower deployment costs, a culturally acceptable identity, and an avenue for fulfilling one's career aspirations and calling. Scatter Global is driven by the belief that the traditional missionary sending model is not going to work in our future.

In my correspondence with Scatter Global,[11] I used the term "marketplace missionaries." They gently corrected me. They suggested I replace this with "intentional Jesus-followers in the marketplace." A key area of their innovation is disrupting the idea that a special class of Christian exists; in this case, missionaries. They seek to activate everyday followers of Jesus to live their lives on mission for God in the marketplaces of the world. This is for everyone. Their premise is that "missionary," along with terms like "calling," "ministry," and similar terms, carries historical baggage. Rather than redefine them, a whole new way of thinking is necessary.

Scatter Global is seeking to innovate across different areas of the innovation taxonomy. They are innovating the financial model of mission. They are innovating structurally. They are innovating through collaboration (Scatter Global is an alliance of missionary sending agencies). They believe that traditional missionaries' identity harms their witness and are innovating identity as well.

This is a significant shift for them to make and time will tell if it produces better outcomes than the traditional sending model. Over the past one hundred years, the global church has experienced incredible growth while the Western church has struggled. At least a portion of this success globally is due to traditional missionaries. However, we live in a world of staggering change and radical departures from traditional models may, in fact, be in our near future.

One final word on developing targets for innovation. Cast your net broadly for ideas. The chances are much better that ministry innovation will come from organizations outside of the ministry sphere. My sense is that we in ministry leadership are struggling to innovate. Look past your own tribe and cross-pollinate your innovation with businesses, nonprofits

working in other sectors (like hospital systems or NGOs that are not faith-based), educational institutions, networks, and so on. Attend secular conferences on innovation, look for trends in similar service sectors, and ask corporations if you can visit their innovation labs. There is much more to be learned "out there" than in our traditional ministry sphere. Why not redeem the best ideas for the kingdom?

Summary

This chapter presented a taxonomy of innovation that you can use to ideate about potential innovation targets. These are categorized as outcomes (stakeholders, collaboration, and evaluation), service (experience, branding, and relevance), and organization (economic engine, structure, and methodology). Identifying new opportunities is challenging because they are flavored by the way we understand our ministry today.

APPLICATION & DISCUSSION

Questions to Ponder

1. What are the big assumptions about your ministry that keep you from seeing opportunities?

2. What is your ministry's economic engine, and is it powerful enough to propel your mission to fulfillment?

3. Compare the current ministry strategy with the innovation taxonomy. Where do current approaches fall on the taxonomy?

TEAM EXERCISE & DISCUSSION

Homework:

Have each team member use the innovation taxonomy to list three areas they think are ripe for innovation.

Facilitated Discussion:

1. Ask each team member to share their list areas that are ripe for innovation and why. Write these on a whiteboard and look for consistent answers.

2. As you survey the team's provided innovation targets, can you identify any that are able to be combined or do any of them naturally complement one another? Discuss whether two or more of the strategies need to be considered together.

3. Try to select one potential innovation target and agree upon a follow-up meeting to further define it.

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