DM 999 – "Diagnostic Problem-Solving: Root Cause Analysis (RCA)"

# Church Be Nimble
*Marty Kuchma*

**Introduction**

    *Church Be Nimble* is divided into four sections: (1) factors that shaped current church organizational models; (2) new ways of viewing church organizational models; (3) reflection points to assist congregations in reorganization; and (4) resource reflections for continued learning.  For the purposes of this course, *Diagnostic Problem-Solving*, this paper will primarily consider sections (1) and (2) of the book.

    Anderson and Fagerhaug say, "Beneath every problem lies a cause."[1]  The first goal of this paper is to summarize the author's key thinking related to higher level causes, possibly root causes, of recurring church organizational problems.  Its second goal is to promote better church organizational models.  The third goal is to relate the implications of Kuchma's better organizational models to the mission of the church and Martin Luther's theology of the cross.

### I.     Machine Model Thinking

    While Kuchma identifies the concept of machine model thinking as the significant underlie for recurring problems in organizational systems, he also puts forward several others: generational groups, an age of posts (*post modernism*, *post-Christian world*, and *post-denominational world*), and process and procedures.  For our purposes, we will consider only the implications of machine model thinking to diagnostic problem solving.

    Kuchma describes the dawn of a new era when it comes to thinking about organizational life:  a living systems model.[2]  He contrasts this transformational living systems model to the old age of what he calls "the Machines."[3]  For Kuchma the age of the machines had significant influence in "organizational development and, consequently congregational life."  The basis for his understanding is tied to the implications of the English mathematician, astronomer, and physicist, Sir Isaac Newton, and his principals.  Kuchma observes, "In the seventeenth century, Sir Isaac Newton changed the world by claiming that all things on earth and beyond the earth are governed by a set of principles that cause them to function in predictable ways."[4]  Kuchma suggests this new understanding (paradigm), had implications in the physical and thinking

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[1] Bjorn Andersen and Tom Natland Fagerhaug, "The ASQ Pocket Guide to Root Cause Analysis," (ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2013.), 3.

[2] Marty Kuchma, "Church Be Nimble," (Church Be Nimble Publications, 2014.), 13.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

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worlds of organizations and is what gave birth to the age of organizations, even churches, behaving like "machines."[5]

He notes the simplicity of the machine model: "Machines are conglomerations of parts positioned in relation to other parts so that sufficient force in a particular direction causes the machine to produce the same result over and over again."[6]  Kuchma argues machine thinking has no room for "spontaneous reorganization," that is, creative thinking.[7]  To preserve the machine model, he says, "the capacity for creative self-expression by any of the parts must deliberately be limited."[8]  This leads to thinking that things just are what they are.  New ideas for old problems are discouraged; this lack of expression becomes the root cause of the problem.

Additionally, the problem with a machine, Kuchma reminds us, is that its parts "inevitably wear out and break down."[9]  Some church-school ministries believe they can solve problems by taking one person out and inserting a new person, just like an owner would do with a tractor belt or stripped nut.  The assumption is that, being like a machine, the problem is fixed by removing the defective part and operations should resume like before.[10]

Finally, among the problems of machine-model thinking is, "[the] assumption that life will be under control if everyone plays his part, when things do break down, someone or something naturally gets blamed."[11]  Kuchma, along with many other systems theorists, emphasizes the interconnectedness that exists in the human element of organizations, saying, "Machine models discount the importance of the relationship networks that underlie all human organizations."[12]  He concludes, "While machine model thinking may be perfectly adequate for understanding machines, it does not translate well to working with living organisms and organizations, including congregations."[13]  You cannot just replace people with people.

## II.      *New Ways of Viewing the Church Organization*

### A.   Marty Kuchma – *'Self Organizing Systems'*

The alternative to the "old" organization model is a "new" one.   Kuchma is committed to the idea of innovative thinking when it comes to the church organization.  He encourages his

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 14 – 15.

[9] Ibid., 14.

[10] Ibid., 15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 16.

[13] Ibid.

audience, "to pioneer organizational models that work for the age in which we live."[14]  He advises this type of innovative thinking will involve an open system (open mind) and hard choices.  He ties these characteristics of the model to the effectiveness and problem solving abilities of the organization.  He asserts, "the notion of self-organization which makes it possible for organizations to 'stay strong by staying open' so that they might 'create structures that fit the moment'."[15]  Those who struggle with the 'open-mindedness' of postmodern thinking may see Kuchma's concept of the *self-organizing system* as too post-modern, with no absolutes.  But this is not what he argues.  Instead, he warns that the organization must hold fast to their identity.

What he does argue for is a "nimble" organization able to make the necessary adjustments to the changing needs of the world.  In the *self-organizing model,* Kuchma asserts, "Contrary to machine model organizations that strive for equilibrium, open, self-organizing systems make the most of imbalance to bring about adaptation and change."[16]  He recalls one consultant who, "frequently made people uneasy and uncomfortable."[17]  Kuchma notes, "They became **disturbed enough** to bring about constructive change."[18]  In conjunction with this thought Kuchma notes it is an organization's identity that holds them together in change.  He says, "Identity sums up the enduring aspects of the organization that remain when all else is stripped away."[19]  While Kuchma's self-organizing model promotes innovation and an open system, it does not encourage it at the expense of the organization's identity and core beliefs.

   B.  Richard Ogle – *'Idea Spaces'* Concept

One innovation concept which Kuchma highlights in his living organizations model, comes from Richard Ogle's work.   Ogle maintains that we think with more than just our minds, noting, "The mind-seat and organ of human intelligence – is broader and deeper than we thought; it extends far out into the world, more outside than inside."[20]  On this basis, Kuchma reinforces his open systems and living organization model: "intelligence and creativity depend on lively interactions with the world beyond our brains – the 'extra-cranial world'."[21]  On the premise of human intelligence occurring much more from outside than inside, Ogle describes what he calls "idea spaces."   These spaces refer to the "intelligence that we use – consciously

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[14] Ibid., 39.
[15] Ibid., 66.
[16] Ibid., 67.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 68.
[20] Ibid., 57.
[21] Ibid., 58.

or not – both to solve our everyday problems and to make creative leaps that lead to breakthroughs."[22]

The *idea spaces* concept places value on making connections to the many ideas in the world around us, which Ogle refers to as the 'smart world.'  This concept can spark innovation and be used to encourage cross-pollination of ideas when seeking creative solutions to pinpoint the root cause of recurring problems.

C.  Thomas Kuhn – *The Paradigm-Shift Process*

Kuchma observes the importance of paradigms, or worldviews.  Among their many features they shape the way we think, observe, and respond to problems and how we develop and implement improvement plans.  Kuchma applies Thomas Kuhn's insights in his classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.  Kuhn describes how when old paradigms are pushed to their limits a cyclical pattern develops creating enough energy that a new paradigm emerges.[23] Kuchma believes congregations now live in a time when an old paradigm is being pushed to its limits.  He states, "The machine-model paradigm that has prevailed in organizations for centuries is now being challenged by another paradigm that views organizations as living systems."[24]

### III.    *Theological Reflection*

As part of a living system, a church-school ministry can be organizationally "nimble and free," to revolve "around Jesus' mission which Luke 4:18-19 sums up this way: 'to bring good news to the poor… proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"[25]  Remaining nimble involves stripping down the church's organizational systems until what is left is its core identity.[26] This is (unwittingly) what Martin Luther did when he "precipitated a new movement within the church," challenging the church and Pope with his 95 Theses.[27]  The way the church was organized no longer had its original purpose or identity.  Luther was disturbed and his ideas were disturbing throughout the whole church organization.[28]

In Kuchma's concept of organizations with a machine model, there is no room for disturbance or disturbed people (they get removed and replaced).[29]  Luther would agree that man's perspective, individually and corporate, is limited in its view and direction, always stifling

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 65.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 3.
[26] Ibid., 68
[27] Ibid., 10-11.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 14-15.

innovation.  He says man is always looking in one direction:  above himself to that which is "lofty" and he cannot see into the depths of those who suffer.  For Luther, the organizational challenge is man's narrow (closed system) perspective.  He does not see God or his neighbor, but only himself.   In his letter to Prince John Frederick, Duke of Saxony, on *The Magnificat*, Luther writes,

> The eyes of the world and of men, on the contrary, look only above them and are lifted up with pride, as it is said in Proverbs 30:13: "There is a people whose eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up on high."  …This we experience every day.  Everyone strives after that which is above him, after honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great.  And where such people are, there are many hangers-on; all the world gathers round them, gladly yields them service, and would be at their side and share in their exaltation.  Therefore, it is not without reason that the Scriptures describe so few kings and rulers who were godly men.  On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths with their poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery, and anguish.  From these all turn away their eyes.  Where there are such people, everyone takes to his heels, forsakes, and shuns and leaves them to themselves; no one dreams of helping them or of making something out of them.  And so, they must remain in the depths and in their low and despised condition.  There is among men no creator who would make something out of nothing, although that is what St. Paul teaches in Romans 12:16 when he says, "Dear brethren, set not your mind on high things, but go along with the lowly."[30]

For Luther, the church organization should always be "willing to look into the depths" and be disturbed for the sake of our neighbor.  We not only embrace those who disturb us, but also take on their shame and guilt for Christ's sake.  This is how the church remains an open and innovative system, just as our Creator in Christ took on our shame and guilt in a way that marveled all of creation.  This identity remains the same through every age.  Although, a church may be stripped of everything else if they are willing to look into the depths of *poverty*, *disgrace*, and *anguish; if they are willing to care for those who are despised they* will have their shared identity and mission with God in Christ.

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[30] Martin Luther, "Luther's Works, Volume 21.", (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1956.) 300.