

HUMAN PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT THEORY, METHODOLOGY, AND TOOLS
IN CHURCH AND SCHOOL MINISTRY

Martin E. Lee

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

February 26, 2017

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	
Purpose.....	3
Significance.....	3
Terms	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	8
The Way Things Have Always Been	8
The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, Heifetz.....	8
Church Be Nimble, Kuchma.....	11
The Way We Could Do Things.....	13
Church Be Nimble, Kuchma.....	13
ThinkReliability	14
Root Cause Analysis: The Core of Problem Solving and Corrective Action, Okes.....	17
Chapter Three: Conclusion	18
Conclusion	18
Application.....	20
Summary	25
References.....	26

Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose

The topic of decline in main stream churches has often been discussed by LCMS leaders over the last half century; but, maybe more should be done to holistically address the quality and effectiveness of our LCMS church and school partnerships and the possible internal reasons for such a decline. The research questions this paper attempts to answer are: (1) Do LCMS church and school leaders avoid using secular performance improvement theory, methodology, tools in their ministries and, if so, why? (2) Would church and school ministries be more effective if they used secular performance improvement theory, methodology, and tools? (3) And is it theologically appropriate to use performance improvement theory, methodology, and tools in ministry settings?

This paper will show that LCMS church and school leaders are not trained sufficiently in secular performance improvement theories, because the LCMS functions as a closed system and does not recognize the need for such methods. In some cases, the avoidance of such theories, becomes more than just a closed system it is a matter of moral superiority, or virtue signaling. It will further attempt to show that church and school ministries would be more effective in removing those things that are a hindrance to the gospel¹ if they used secular performance improvement theories and methods in their daily ministry operations. And finally, this paper will propose that using such tools is the same as using any of God's created gifts as instruments for our good and to His glory.

Significance

¹ Hebrews 12:1 – "...let us throw off everything that hinders..."

Per a study cited in the Special Issue of the Journal of Lutheran Mission, dated December 2016, the LCMS is losing members as both young and old alike are leaving their home congregations. The young are leaving the rural communities for employment and the old are leaving to retire in the south and southwest. The exodus of young people is described as “a trend also called the ‘rural brain drain.’² ... To sum up, large numbers of LCMS adherents tend to be found in counties that are losing population and where the median age is higher.” In other words, the talent pool is shrinking, and the traditional professional church staff are not trained to pick up the slack. This front receives little consideration. Instead, to avoid further decline of the LCMS, the journal prescribes persuading young people to move to rural areas, or dissuading them from leaving in the first place. If young people cannot be dissuaded, the suggested remedy is planting churches wherever young people are going.³

Another reason cited for declining membership is that families are having fewer children because young people are marrying and having children later than in past generations.⁴ The study acknowledges that later marriages and lower fertility levels are “generally celebrated by the contemporary society”⁵ in response the LCMS is encouraged to “pursue policies that facilitate earlier marriages and larger families.”⁶ Influencing family planning choices, particularly through policies, may not be an ideal way to solve the root causes of the membership problem and residual effects. The study does recognize the limits of

² Journal of Lutheran Mission – December 2016, Special Edition.,

³ Ibid., 28.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Ibid.

this approach noting efforts should be made to curtail these trends, “even if it can only lead to marginal improvement.”⁷

Another notable change in the LCMS, not mentioned in the Journal Special Report, is the evolving church and school ministry. In 2012/13 the LCMS Lutheran Schools Statistics reported there were a combined 2,335 early learning centers, elementary schools, and high schools. In only two years (2014/15) the LCMS Lutheran Schools Statistics reported a combined total of 2,111 - a decline of 10% in 2 years. From these studies, it seems clear this sub group may be on the frontlines of the emerging church. Is there a relationship between the aging and shrinking population to the decline in schools, or is it something else? Further research to compare the decline in churches with schools to churches with no schools is required. However, combining a shrinking population to an aging population the ‘rural brain drain’ is compounded. There are even fewer human resources available due to the level of interest and physical limits of those in retirement to oversee evolving technology, changing regulatory laws, policies and procedures manuals, staff job descriptions and evaluations, and the numerous other administrative tasks of overseeing diverse ministry groups.

Given the LCMS’s rich history and commitment to Christian education solving the problem of the struggling church – school ministries deserve priority attention in the discussion of the shrinking church. From the earliest days, of the Lutheran church, the preservation of Christian schools existed. Luther was a big proponent of educating children and young people.

⁷ Ibid., 27.

Luther's strong position on teaching our children is the reason he wrote the Catechism and one of the reasons for the Lutheran church's history of establishing schools.⁸

Luther said that schools help the Church by imparting a Christian training to children, by preparing useful teachers and heads of families, and by fitting ministers to preach and defend the Gospel. "When schools prosper," says Luther, "the Church remains righteous and her doctrine pure. ... Young pupils and students are the seed and source of the Church. If we were dead, whence would come our successors, if not from the schools? For the sake of the Church we must have and maintain Christian schools. They may not appear attractive, but they are useful and necessary. Children are taught the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and thus the Church is wonderfully aided through the primary schools."⁹ Luther also believed that good schools were necessary for the training of civil leaders so that society could have wise and good leaders.¹⁰

Terms

Root Cause Analysis.

Root cause analysis, as used in this paper, is "the establishing of a logically complete, evidence based, tightly coupled chains of factors, from the least acceptable consequences to the deepest significant underlying causes."¹¹

Diagnostic Problem Solving

For the use of this paper, diagnostic problem solving is distinguished from brainstorming, troubleshooting, and problem solving activities. These three activities are intended to be

⁸ F.V.N. Painter, A.M., *"Luther On Education,"* (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., 1928.), 128.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 132 – 133.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 133 – 139.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

completed in a short period of time and at nominal expense. Whereas, diagnostic problem solving implies a process of using theory, methods, and tools to discover and remove problems at the root cause level, implement solutions, and monitoring the implementation plan.

Cause Mapping

Cause Mapping is a root cause analysis method used to organize, document, analyze, and solve problems. It is a simple visual map illustrating how a sequence of causes led to a problem.

Human Performance Improvement

Human Performance Improvement (HPI) is a field of study related to process improvement methodologies. The goal of the theory is focused on improving performance in whatever activity is being pursued. HPI will draw from many disciplines to improve the quality of output. “It stresses a rigorous analysis to identify the causes for performance gaps, provide appropriate interventions to improve and sustain performance, and finally to evaluate the results against the requirements.”

The Five Whys

The “5 Whys” is an iterative interrogative technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem.^[1] The primary goal of the technique is to determine the root cause of a defect or problem by repeating the question "Why?" Each answer forms the basis of the next question. The "5" in the name derives from an anecdotal observation on the number of iterations needed to resolve the problem.¹²

Virtue Signaling

¹² Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys , 2/25/2017.

“Virtue signaling is the conspicuous expression of moral values by an individual done primarily with the intent of enhancing that person's standing within a social group. The term was first used in signaling theory, to describe any behavior that could be used to signal virtue – especially piety among the political or religious faithful.^[1] Since 2015, the term has become more commonly used as a pejorative characterization by commentators to criticize what they regard as the platitudinous, empty, or superficial support of certain political views on social media; and also used within groups to criticize their own members for valuing outward appearance over substantive action.”¹³

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Way We’ve Always Done Things

Cultural Norms and Forces.

The authors of “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership” recommend identifying cultural norms and forces to understand “what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior.”¹⁴ They recommend becoming aware of the stories, group norms, rituals, and meeting protocols that exist. The authors observe, “Unlike [organizational] structures the culture of an organization is not usually written down or formally documented, so it may be hard to describe in precise terms.”¹⁵ The authors suggest, “Adaptive leadership requires understanding the group’s culture and assessing which aspects of it facilitate change and which stand in the way.”¹⁶ Unfortunately,

¹³ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue_signalling , 2/24/2017.

¹⁴ Heifetz, Grashow, Linsky, “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership,” (Harvard Business Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 2009.), 57.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

they note, “Too often, people taking on tough issues in organizational life do not devote enough time to this diagnosis.”¹⁷

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linksy explain why organizations often push forward without adapting to the changes around them. They assert, “Organizational systems take on a life of its own, selecting, rewarding, and absorbing members into it who then perpetuate the system.”¹⁸ There is an understanding of acceptable behavior “virtuous” and unacceptable behavior. The goal is to keep the machine and momentum going, avoid any delay. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linksy warn such self-reinforcing behavior can “become tenacious quickly”.¹⁹ The threat to diagnostic problem solving and root cause analysis now becomes the organizational system which does not encourage behavior that disrupts the established way of thinking and talking even during times of significant change. Coincidentally, many “organizations get trapped by their current ways of doing things, simply because these ways worked in the past.”²⁰

Jumping to Conclusions and Closed Systems.

Luther would agree that man’s perspective, individually and corporate, is limited in its view and direction, always stifling 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. From this perspective, the organizational challenge is man’s narrow (closed system) perspective. He does not see God or his neighbor, but only himself.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Mary Linksy, “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership”, (Harvard Business Press, Boston Massachusetts, 2009.) 50.

²⁰ Ibid.

“In organizational and political life, people often jump to treatment without stepping back to clarify the nature of the problem itself” says Ronald Heifetz.²¹ Instead, a helpful diagnostic tool to locating the resistance to change is to look for the feedback patterns. Every organization, like a church-school ministry, has developed reinforcing behavior. This was the adaptive behavior which allowed the church to survive during a once challenging time, but is no longer useful in the current situation.

Jumping to conclusions often happens by using *default* problem-solving models. Defaults are described as, “ways of looking at situations that lead people to behave in ways that are comfortable and that have generated desirable results in the past.”²² Heifetz describes that, “a default response, puts people on familiar ground and plays to their organization’s strength.”²³ For example, the conversation may begin by saying: “We have been here before,” or “Last time we were struggling this is what we did” or “We are not alone, all the other mainstream churches are experiencing the same declines.” Blind spots often accompany interpretative and behavior defaults. The quandary is “It can blind people to a wider array of solutions and ideas that might generate even more value.”²⁴ Defaults are constraining and do not allow for cross-pollinating with God’s smart world. The authors recommend identifying default interpretations that your organization regularly makes. For example: “Has the LCMS fallen back on more evangelism, more youth outreach, more prayer, more Bible study, more fellowship, or more church planting as default problem-solving methods from the past to avoid making real change?” In what situations has the default worked well? In what situations, has it proved less effective? What’s different about those two situations?

²¹ Ibid., 47.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

A church-school ministry may be considered a “closed system” when unable to recognize the need for new ways of thinking and behaving to address current challenges. Pastors and principals have comfort levels, too, and use feedback patterns to keep the life of the church and school steady at a level familiar and comfortable to them. Congregations get comfortable at their size, with their type of people, with an outlook, and with levels and types of ministry programs. Like thermostats, “Whenever the church begins to deviate from the desired comfort level, signals are sent to bring the system back into desired states.”²⁵

Machine Model Thinking.

In my experience, when church and schools get stuck they think of their ministries like machines. One of the problems with a machine is that its parts “inevitably wear out and break down.”²⁶ 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.²⁷

Marty Kuchma, author of, “The Nimble Church,” 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.”²⁸ Kuchma argues machine thinking has no room for “spontaneous reorganization,” that is, creative thinking or borrowing from the ‘smart world.’²⁹ To preserve the machine model,

²⁵ Ibid., 159 – 160.

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

he says, “the capacity for creative self-expression by any of the parts must deliberately be limited.”³⁰ New ideas for old problems are discouraged; this lack of expression and curiosity (shallow causes) can pile on and, overtime, become the root cause of the problem.

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.”³¹ 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.”³² 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.”³³ You cannot just replace people with people. He recommends Richard Ogle’s concept of the “smart world:”³⁴ basically, making connections to the many ideas in the world around us. The goal is to spark new ideas and creative solutions to the recurring problems.

Finally, like the authors of “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership” describe about an organization’s tenacious self-reinforcing behavior within a machine-model framework of organizations, there is no room for disturbance or disturbed people (they get removed and replaced).³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 14 – 15.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 57.

³⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

The Way We Could Do Things

The alternative to the “old” machine model, or a closed system, is a “new” self-organizing model that invests in educating people and utilizing new theories, methods, and tools.

Self-Organizing Systems Thinking.

Kuchma is committed to the idea of innovative thinking when it comes to the church and ministry leaders. For him the term “self-organizing” is a simple way to capture the idea of each organization customizing their adaptation per their context. We might compare Kuchma’s *self-organizing* concept to the personal nature of the Holy Spirit activity of applying Sunday’s message in a variety of ways per each hearer in the pew. Kuchma encourages his audience, “to pioneer organizational models that work for the age in which we live.”³⁶ 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’s leaders. 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’.”³⁷ 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 its identity.

What he does argue for is a “nimble” organization able to make the necessary adjustments to the changing needs of their ministry context.³⁸ In the *self-organizing model*, Kuchma asserts, “Contrary to machine model organizations that strive for equilibrium, open,

³⁶ Ibid., 39.

³⁷ Ibid., 66.

³⁸ Luther’s where the spirit blows quote...

self-organizing systems make the most of imbalance to bring about adaptation and change.”³⁹ He recalls one consultant who, “frequently made people uneasy and uncomfortable.”⁴⁰ Kuchma notes, “They became **disturbed enough** to bring about constructive change.”⁴¹ 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.”⁴² 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.

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.”⁴³

Root Cause Analysis.

A common problem solving method used in most all industries is some form of root cause analysis (RCA). It is a form of *diagnostic* problem-solving. The goal in diagnostic problem-solving is to apply a rigorous process of study to eliminate root causes and promote improvements. For instance, if a plane engine keeps catching on fire, the root cause must be eliminated. If patients keep dying when undergoing a procedure, the root cause must be eliminated. Likewise, when a church-school ministry faces significant hindrances, the goal

³⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 68.

⁴³ Ibid.

should be to use God's smart world instruments as servants to eliminate the root causes to reclaim resources and refocus on the primary task of promoting the gospel.

There are several schools of thought on how many steps are involved in root cause analysis: Andersen and Fagerhaug put forward six steps, Duke Okes recommends ten steps, and the consultants from ThinkReliability use three. For ease of application, this paper will summarize ThinkReliability's three step approach of root cause analysis.

The first step in root cause analysis is to define the problem. Mark Galley, an RCA consultant at ThinkReliability, explains, "To accurately define a failure, there are four simple questions: What is the problem(s), When did it happen (Causes)? Where did it happen? How were the overall goals impacted? Instead of writing a long problem description, simply answer these four questions in an outline format. Don't write responses as complete sentences, just short phrases."⁴⁴ The analysis (or investigation), should not start with what people see as "the problem(s)" but with the impact to the overall goals. How were the overall goals impacted negatively? People see problems differently, but defining every "problem" by how it negatively impacts the goals provides a consistent starting point. Start with the impact to the overall goals to define your next problem.⁴⁵ In summary, "the organization views the problem as any deviation from the ideal state."⁴⁶

Galley warns that every effect has causes (plural). Organizations may try to identify a single cause of an issue, what is commonly referred to as the "root cause." There is not a single

⁴⁴ Mark Galley, "*Basic Elements of a Comprehensive Investigation*," (ThinkReliability, Houston, Texas, 2008.), 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

cause to any incident. There are causes.⁴⁷ Instead he recommends, “As an incident is broken down into detail, more and more causes are revealed. Understanding these detailed causes reveals additional ways the problem could possibly be solved. As the causes get more specific the solutions also get more specific. Problems are not solved in general. Problems are solved when specific action is taken.”⁴⁸

One of the most effective ways to communicate the causes of a problem is in a visual format, like a cause map. Again, the cause-and-effect analysis starts with the negative impact to the overall goals, or ideal state. This is where most RCA practitioners utilize a tool called “The 5 Whys.”⁴⁹ The 5 Why questions take the investigation team backwards in time through the problem, visually breaking down and mapping the cause-and-effect relationships as the information is collected, and documenting the investigation with supporting evidence.⁵⁰

Cause Mapping

Cause mapping is another RCA tool used to guide the diagnostic analysis process. Jon Bernardi observes, “When completing a Cause Map, you are striving for as much detail as you need to come up with workable and practical solutions to prevent the issue or incident from recurring.”⁵¹ “It also means you need to probe beyond the generalities of the situation, i.e., “shrinking population” or “aging population.” Such generalities in our ministry context are pervasive: changing demographics, poor economic environment, post-modern culture, meta-physical explanations, and so on. With the increased specificity, categorization becomes

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See definition in “Terminology” section of this paper.

⁵⁰ Mark Galley, Ibid., 3.

⁵¹ Jon Bernardi, “*Cause Categorization: Does it Aid in Improvement*” (ThinkReliability, Houston, Texas.), 1.

increasingly difficult.”⁵² This is a good outcome according Bearnardi. He says, “Remember, your goal is to find the cause-and-effect relationships so that you can come up with a good range of solution possibilities and ultimately the solutions you will implement.”⁵³ Cause mapping promotes linking and prioritizing causes based on how they impact goals, like God’s mission in our ministry context. Among the HPI tools available many organizations will use a grid of some type to define the level of impact and the level of investigation; a three by three grid is very common (with high, medium, and low for frequency and impact scales).⁵⁴

Implementing Solutions

Duke Okes, author of “Root Cause Analysis – The Core of Problem Solving and Corrective Action” advises, “Once a list of possible solutions has been generated, the solutions must be sorted through to identify the one(s) to be implemented.”⁵⁵ At this stage Okes observes, “Two major issues need to be considered relative to the decision-making process: (1) who should make the decision, and (2) what criteria should be used to make it?”⁵⁶

When a church-school ministry is ready to implement a solution, Okes cautions, “Finding a good solution is one thing, but effectively implementing it is another. With the former it’s all cognitive, but with the latter it’s all about getting organizational resources very focused for a specific period of time.”⁵⁷ In my experience, selecting the solution to be implemented, and who is responsible for implementation, is a challenge for most church and school ministries - especially during any organizational change. Organizational change in a church-school ministry

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Duke Okes, “Root Cause Analysis: The Core of Problem Solving and Corrective Action,” (ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2009.), 106.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 113.

could include reassessing budget limits, adding, or reducing staff, key staff or faculty member retiring, and so on. Interestingly, Okes includes deferring to an experienced or knowledgeable individual as a viable option. Deferring to an individual regarding decisions that historically are handled at voter's meetings is not something church and school ministries do instinctively. It requires a great deal of change to constitutions, by-laws, guidelines, and job descriptions. Deferring to an individual is not easy to do when roles and responsibilities are not formally established to accommodate a leaner decision-making model, or if knowledge and training is not perceived to be present.

Human Capital Theory.

Human Capital Theory addresses the value of a person's collective knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, judgement, Christian character (spiritual maturity), emotional maturity, and so on. In a church and school environment, human capital is the number one asset (blessing). It is one of how God comes. Financial reports, and often annual congregational reports, are not able to reflect properly the value of a church and school's human capital. Churches and schools should not ignore the proper use, management, and investment in the faculty and staffs' spiritual and professional growth. Studies have shown there are significant benefits to those organizations that make investments in people.⁵⁸

Chapter Three: Conclusion

While the study cited in the Special Issue of the Journal of Lutheran Mission attempted to identify the reason(s) for declining church and school populations, the study reflected primarily demographic data and suggested outdated solutions. Evangelism, youth outreach, church planting, and family planning matters have long been solutions proposed by church and

⁵⁸ Acemoglu & Pischke, "Beyond Becker: Training in Imperfect Labour Markets," (Royal Economic Society, February, 1999.) Abstract.

school leaders. The literature read for this review suggests that LCMS churches repeat patterns of behavior (defaults and feedback patterns) that worked in the past but are no longer appropriate for the current situation. In day to day operations, many LCMS churches and schools are closed systems using outdated management strategies, organizational models, staffing configurations, and job descriptions, and fall into habituation and machine model thinking to solve organizational and financially complex and dynamic problems.

What was not addressed in the literature were three profoundly important issues: (1) the unreliability of data used in church and school statistics, (2) the poor financial management skills of both churches and schools, and (3) the theological reasons for the LCMS's unwillingness to use secular performance strategies in church settings. From my experience, the unreliability of data enables churches and schools to continue to operate as closed systems, not acknowledging the true or current ministry state. The poor financial management skills and oversight abilities of churches and schools profoundly impact ministry resources, staff effectiveness, and the level of conflict between ministries.

Possibly most importantly, the theological reasons for the unwillingness to use secular performance theories, methods, and tools may display a misapplication of important doctrines. Some in the LCMS flinch at the idea of moving away from the way things have always been done, genuinely believing it would mean putting aside biblical norms and truths. But, using performance methods to comply with budget limits, improve the quality of ministry, and to write policy to respect every person's functioning position is using God's creation as His instruments in service to our neighbor. I would propose secular HPI tools can be used as a servant to help

“equip the saints for works of ministry [and] build up the body of Christ”⁵⁹ without doing away with biblical truths or the primary mission of the church.

Application

Root Cause Analysis principles (and other HPI theories, methods, and tools) from God’s smart world could easily be applied to our church and school ministries.

The first step would be to make sure church and school leaders are rooted in good theology. There may be more confusion surrounding diagnostic problem-solving and root cause analysis for the community of faith than for the general market place. On the one hand, the community of faith is committed to trusting God in all circumstances, especially in times of trouble and want. The temptation in this theological mindset is to abandon attempts to learn and use diagnostic problem-solving techniques at all, believing God is the ultimate problem solver and the church must trust and wait. To do otherwise is a sign of idolatry. On the other hand, the community of faith should be active in love and not be found lacking in any good works. In this scenario, the temptation is to dive into problem-solving and unknowingly (due to lack of training and understanding) use HPI as a tool to link everything to the spiritual heart of the faithful, or “faithless”. Often this approach involves spiritual inquisitions, witch-hunts, and concludes in only giving many of God’s children a bad conscience. The scene of the investigation becomes man’s heart and eliminating a root cause becomes eliminating people.

The better approach is to see all people and things (HPI) as God’s instruments to be used to His glory. Luther’s doctrines of divine providence and vocation describe all creation as in service to God as His instruments to bring about His purpose everywhere. There is much to learn from God’s smart world in theories and methods to apply in church and school life. Like

⁵⁹ Ephesians 4:12.

the printing press in Luther's day, secular theories and methods can be applied for our neighbor's good and God's glory.

We understand that God has eliminated the root cause of our problems, sin, by his holy Lamb. The problems considered in HPI deal in the kingdom of the left-hand (such as poor training, equipment failure, human error, unclear processes, no procedures, no guidelines, no boundaries, poor organizational structure, poor reporting, and so on) and are not fundamentally matters of a spiritual nature or eternity. Solving these problems is certainly not the mission of the church. Rather, solving these problems is purely intended to remove the obstacles that hinder the proclamation of the gospel;⁶⁰ that is, the root of these left-hand kingdom problems is not a matter of actual or specific sins.⁶¹ Every industry uses some level of root cause analysis to investigate and find the underlying cause of a diverse set of problems, and the church may also use “the hands, channels, and means by which God gives all things”⁶² in order to serve his purpose. There will be push back to the unfamiliar way of doing things. The challenge is the church culture. It may resist new roles and responsibilities of oversight for the pastoral office, principal, and other staff leadership. Again, Ronald Heifetz notes this is the normal behavior of a long-time established institution: the system wants to normalize you to reinforce the way things have always been. It is the survival instinct built in to the organizational culture. But to discover a problem's root cause one must resist being absorbed by the “tenacity” of the system.⁶³

Based on my experience and size theory principles, some of our professional church workers may be unintentionally culling the size of the congregations and schools they oversee to

⁶⁰ Hebrews 12:1.

⁶¹ See Romans 8:21-22.

⁶² Luther's Large Catechism, First Commandment, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, 361.

⁶³ Ronald Heifetz, “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership”, 50.

match their skills and abilities; that is, to a manageable size. In congregation after congregation and school after school I see the need for the faculty and staff to have improved church and school administration, operations, and financial oversight training.

The second step to introducing HPI as a gift from God's smart world would be to ensure our professional church workers receive training in these theories, methods, and tools as a part of their basic education to prepare for the church – school vocational setting. Students preparing for ministry as pastors, principals, or teachers, should be trained in skills specifically designed for the religious non-profit community. Training may be in performance-related fields, or basic organizational, financial, and operational skills. In addition, continuing education in performance-related fields should be made available. While there are many online resources and college and graduate level electives more should be done. Maybe at the curriculum level and allocate funds for professional development and advanced degrees once in ministry. Having trained church workers able to address the growing complexity in overseeing a joint church – school ministry can only be a blessing. To effectively reduce, or remove, the left-hand kingdom obstacles is an act of loving our neighbor, and allows the ministry to refocus resources on proclaiming the good news. So much of the day-to-day conflict, in the church and school, is kindled by poor communication of policies and poor stewardship of people and resources.

Failure to invest in people may also lead to poorly trained employees and lay leaders who are unaware of how their ministry's ever advancing and evolving delivering systems function. Many department heads and ministry volunteers fall behind the times. In many churches and schools, there is a bottle neck on the knowledge center. Only a few people (possibly only the pastor) can describe all the ministry processes from start to finish and all the supporting activities

and persons; that is, how the weekly worship service cycle is planned and completed, visitors and members are assimilated, an annual Bible study or small group ministry program is developed and delivered, a new student is recruited and receives Christian education, and so on. No maps, no charts, no processes, no documentation. Even for the exceptional few who do know, in most cases this knowledge does not translate into prudent oversight and management of the financial resources and limits, the building resources and limits, and the work flow and processes of ministry projects. There is little hope the knowledge of one generation of leaders will successfully be handed off to the next. Instead, the organization starts are all over again learning how to get to first base, but never fully maturing. On all fronts, it is clear action is needed to adapt to the changes (internal and external) occurring to our church and school ministry partnership. In the application section, I will recommend the need to invest in the professional church and school workers' formal education and ongoing professional development using HPI theories, methods, and tools from the smart world (God's World) and why this can be done with a good conscience.

The third step in introducing HPI in churches and schools is to empower our professional church workers. Marty Kuchma encourages his audience, “to pioneer organizational models that work for the age in which we live.”⁶⁴ As the Special Issue of the Mission Journal indicated the number of lay people is diminishing, volunteer hours are diminishing. A logical conclusion is the professional church workers will need to take up the slack. One way to do this is through empowering the staff with more responsibility and oversight to lead in their areas of expertise. Here I am thinking of the governance model. This includes the staff being part of the financial planning team, budget owners, hiring and firing, performance evaluations and pay raises. They

⁶⁴ Ibid., 39.

need to be entrusted with responsibilities which are directly impacting how their ministry department functions. They need skin in the game. They need the tools to guide and navigate their ministry resources and efforts towards accomplishing the congregation's strategic vision. Some of my readers may think this is the norm, but I do not believe that is the case. In 2014 in the Michigan District of the LCMS of the nearly 400 churches less than 20 operated in a policy governance model. Policy governance empowers the trained faculty and staff to effect change per their job descriptions and within the limits given to them via the board of directors.

Such responsibility fosters trust and team work. Department heads are able to creatively assist one another when funds are tight or needs arise by sacrificing "in love" their department resources to provide for their neighbors'. The hidden blessing is the staff is unified in real and tangible ways. They are encouraged to work together to solve the day to day ministry challenges. And they do so during working hours, 5 days a week. This means fewer evening meetings and voting via email by lay volunteers. Instead lay volunteers are engaging in front line ministries. It is almost like a role-reversal with the professional church workers and staff taking on more of the administrative oversight and freeing the laity to be involved in actual front-line hands on ministry. By engaging the church workers, they are forced to prioritize, they are forced to problem solve, they are forced to strategically plan for the care and nurture of the various ministries in context with neighboring ministries. What an opportunity for the staff to model to God's people how to live and work together in Christ-like love. Additionally, by empowering the staff they mature professionally and realize a new sense of satisfaction in ministry and being in service to the God's people. Blessings all around.

By no means is this paper intended to exhaust the possible causes of the shrinking and aging membership or the closing schools. Further steps will be needed to address these problems and meet the challenges.

Summary

This research paper addressed whether LCMS church and school leaders would benefit from using secular performance improvement theory and methodology (HPI) in their ministries and, if so, whether church and school leaders would use HPI. This paper also discussed the theological underpinnings of using HPI in church and school ministry settings.

The literature showed that LCMS church and school leaders do not use secular performance improvement theories and methods, because they are not trained in HPI. The LCMS functions as a closed system and does not recognize the need for such methods. The literature showed how all organizations can become “stuck” in default problem-solving patterns, which can result in closed systems and an inability to innovate and adapt to change. Since churches and schools *are* organizations, they would be more effective in their ministries if they used secular performance improvement theories and methods in their daily ministry operations. Finally, this paper showed that using such HPI tools can be good and right in God’s kingdom of the left hand and can be used for our good and to His glory. I maintain that believers may, in good conscience, use root cause analysis and similar methods (theories and tools) in ministry settings as one of God’s good gifts to be a blessing in one’s vocation. I would maintain that not using such tools may be a rejection of God’s creation intended for our good.

References

- Acemoglu & Pischke, “Beyond Becker: Training in Imperfect Labour Markets,” (Royal Economic Society, February, 1999.) Abstract.
- Andersen, Bjorn & Fagerhaug, Tom Natland. (2013). *The ASQ Pocket Guide to Root Cause Analysis*. (American Society for Quality, Quality Press, Milwaukee, WI).
- Andersen, Bjorn & Fagerhaug, Tom. (2006). *Root Cause Analysis: Simplified Tools and Techniques*. (ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin).
- Collver, Albert B. III, & Day, Bart & Fale, John. (2016). *Journal of Lutheran Mission: Special Issue*. (The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, St. Louis, MO).
- Heifetz, Ronald & Grashow, Alexander & Linsky, Marty. (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. (Harvard Business Press, Boston, Massachusetts).
- Kuchma, Marty. (2014). *Church Be Nimble*. (Church Be Nimble Publications).
- Okes, Duke. (2009). *Root Cause Analysis: The Core of Problem Solving and Corrective Action*. (ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin).
- Painter, F.V.N. (1889). *Luther on Education*. (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO).