An Introduction to Church Systems

Life is made of systems.

Systems cycle.

- systems exist to control reality and maintain balance
- systems maintain homeostasis in repeating cycles
- systems exist to keep the status quo running smoothly
- systems change slowly – and usually prevent change
- systems use multiple subsystems to do their work.
Troeltsch Denominational Cycle

Established churches spin off sects which become churches in 200 years...

Sect ►►►►
- passionate
- revolutionary
- converts
- one focus
- commitment
- Antithesis

Church►►►►►
- rational
- structured, stable
- children
- diverse pluralism
- Thesis/Synthesis

◄◄◄◄ Sect
Peter Senge – The Fifth Discipline

Systems Archetypes “Limits to Growth”

**Reinforcing Loop**
Emerging Trend
Brings Change
Exciting
*Conductors*
Leadership
Big Picture
Vision
Proactive
Responds to Potential
Entrepreneurial
Ready to gamble

*Visionary Minority (16%)*
Ignores Limits
Out of control
*Pushes the trend*

**Balancing Loop**
Smooth Cycles
Preserves Stability
Comforting
*Resisters*
Management
Micro-managers
Details
Reactive
Responds to Anxiety
Institutional
Risk averse

Pragmatic Majority (84%)
Prevents Competency Limits
Under control
Thermostat Correction

The image for a Balancing Loop is a teeter-totter; happiness is keeping everything in balance.

The image for a reinforcing loop is a snowball rolling downhill increasing in momentum and intensity. Happiness is an emerging trend.
Competency Limit: When the system has grown so large that it can no longer function, it becomes incompetent, unstable, dysfunctional and painful; survival is truly threatened by disaster. A system, therefore, that fully utilizes capacity is very inefficient and even in danger, as it has no reserve capacity to deal with crisis. The existence of a realistic threat to survival is an indicator that the limit of system competence has been reached. The balancing process is overwhelmed and cannot cope with a trend of change originating in the reinforcing process.
Changes are always challenging the balance of the system. **The Balancing Loop** functions like a thermostat, to keep the system in balance at all times.

What happens when the trend for change overwhelms or even destroys the Balancing Loop, creating a situation where there is no resistance to change? *Can you think of an example?*
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Systems Archetypes “Limits to Growth”

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Prevents
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Thermostat Correction

OVERWHELMEDS: Diabetes, Hurricane Katrina
in the New Orleans levee system

DESTROYS: Israel/Palestine conflict …
Iraq after Saddam Hussein.
**Thermostat Correction:** When anxiety increases, *the balancing loop reacts long before necessary to retain control and prevent the pain of reaching a Competency Limit.* Anxiety, not reality, triggers this response to keep the system in the “comfort zone” of homeostasis.
Pushing the Trend: *The reinforcing loop pushes the trend, attempting to overwhelm the* balancing response with urgency; by artificially stimulating anxiety, a Thermostat Correction is triggered earlier than necessary.
Peter Senge – The Fifth Discipline
Systems Archetypes “Limits to Growth”

**Reinforcing Loop**
- Ignores Limits
- Out of control
- Pushes the trend

**Balancing Loop**
- Prevents Competency Limits
- Under control
- Thermostat Correction

**The sign of a system at work to prevent change:**
When there is a trend pushing the system, a thermostat correction increases pressure in opposition to restore balance and prevent the change. If the pressure is increased, the opposing pressure will likewise increase. No change is now possible; the trend has been neutralized.

Change strategies that emphasize pressure, predict disaster and increase anxiety will always fail. Adaptation occurs slowly in the absence of anxiety as the system adopts obvious, proven means to achieve a more favorable, positive balance.
Leadership that pressures the status quo is guaranteed to fail.
Systems frequently prevent change by encouraging leadership to push.

Senge's Solution: Increase the power of management to maintain balance so that a positive trend can be incorporated with minimum anxiety and stress in the adjustment, and the system will adopt the innovation without problems over time.
Mat 4:17  From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Pop quiz: Reinforcing or Balancing?
John 11:47-50 ... v 48 If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

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In your context:
Who are the people in each group?
What are the issues?

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Prevents Competency Limits
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Thermostat Correction
Let's take an exciting 5 minute stretch break!
Everett Rogers – *The Diffusion of Innovations* – how social systems change

Diffusion is the sociological, scientific study of how cultural adoption of innovations takes place. It is defined as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.” There are five basic categories of people open to change...
The Chairman of the Administrative Board called the meeting to order. “We have a problem,” he announced gravely, “with mice. They are gnawing holes in the wood and getting into the church.”

The innovator had an unusual idea. “If we tore down the old church and built a new one out of stainless steel, the mice couldn’t gnaw their way in.”

The early adopter saw the advantages. “We would certainly be in the forefront of all the churches in our conference in using this new material to build a church. Just think: it would never rust, never need painting, and last forever.”

Is this a Reinforcing or Balancing System at work?
The middle adopter was practical. “Wouldn’t it be very hard to work with steel as a building material? You’d have to weld everything. And it wouldn’t be cheap.”

The late adopter was nostalgic. “I would miss the old church of wood. It seems so comfortable and warm to me. Wouldn’t steel be expensive to heat in winter?”

The laggard harrumphed. “My sister has too many cats on her farm. I’ll bring one over tomorrow and it won’t cost us a nickel.”

“Well, I see we’ve solved that problem,” the chair noted. “Now, on to the next problem.”

Is this a Reinforcing or Balancing System at work? Which one are you?
Successful change moves in stages from left to right.
Myth #1:

We live in a time of rapid and continuous change.
"La plus ca change, la plus c'est la meme chose [The more things change, the more they stay the same]."

Jean Baptiste Alphonse Karr - 1849

Fashions change.
Technology changes.
People don't change much.
Myth #2: People are uniformly open to change

The Diffusion of Innovations
Standard deviation: five adopter categories.
Which one are you?
Light Bulb Parable:

Pastor: There's a light bulb burnt out in the sanctuary. Can you help?

A person's response to this simple question helps identify their position in the five categories.
Innovator: If you’ll just be patient, my nuclear fusion bulb will be at the prototype stage real soon now. Never needs changing and uses no electricity.

2.5%
Pastor: There’s a light bulb burnt out in the sanctuary. Can you help?

Early Adopter: Has anyone analyzed whether it’s in our best interests to spend the extra money on those long lasting bulbs? 13.5%
Pastor: There’s a light bulb burnt out in the sanctuary. Can you help?

Middle Adopter: Sure.

(Gets ladder, puts new bulb in.)

34%
Late Adopter: Are you sure we need a new bulb? There’s nothing wrong with the old bulb. Give it a chance. My mother gave that bulb to the church as a memorial to my grandfather; see the plaque next to the fixture? Have you tried praying for healing for the bulb? Where is your faith? 34%
Laggard: After a while, the truly faithful really begin to sense God at work in the dark. Perhaps God prefers the dark. When God wants a new bulb, He will change it Himself. Stop interfering with the will of the Lord with your devilish desire to change everything!
There are people who would rather fight than allow change.

Late adopters are sad. Laggards are angry.
Traditions of the elders
Pharisees / Zealots
“mercy & hypocrisy”

Sadducees
“scripture & power of God”

Jesus
the Disciples

2.5%        13.5%             34%               34%                  16%
Acts 13:42-51  
43 And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas ...  
45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy ...  
46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.
In your context: Who are the people in each group? What are the issues?
Diffusion Spinner ...
On any issue, those for and those against will sort themselves out into the diffusion framework categories.
Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Pop quiz: Visionary Minority or Pragmatic Majority?
John 11:47-50 ... v 48 If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

Pop quiz: Visionary Minority or Pragmatic Majority?
Keeping track ...

Reinforcing Loop
Leadership

Antithesis
*(Hegelian Dialectic)*

Sect *(Troeltsch)*

Visionary Minority
Innovators
Early Adopters
16%

Discipleship System
Jesus
the Apostles

Disciple Makers
Process of Grace
Networking
Small Group Fellowship

Pop Quiz: What is the distribution of resources between the reinforcing and balancing loops?

Balancing Loop
Management

Thesis
Synthesis

Church

Pragmatic Majority
Middle Adopters
Late Adopters
Laggards
84%

Temple System
Sadducees
Pharisees

Traditional Church
Institutional Maintenance
Temple Worship
Large Group Events
“the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.”

In case you missed it ... only 16% of unchurched people are attracted to change. 84% of lost people have no need for the church to change.
Adoption fails most of the time ... because the visionary minority routinely choose to communicate with the pragmatic majority in ways that guarantee failure.

(Time for lunch.)