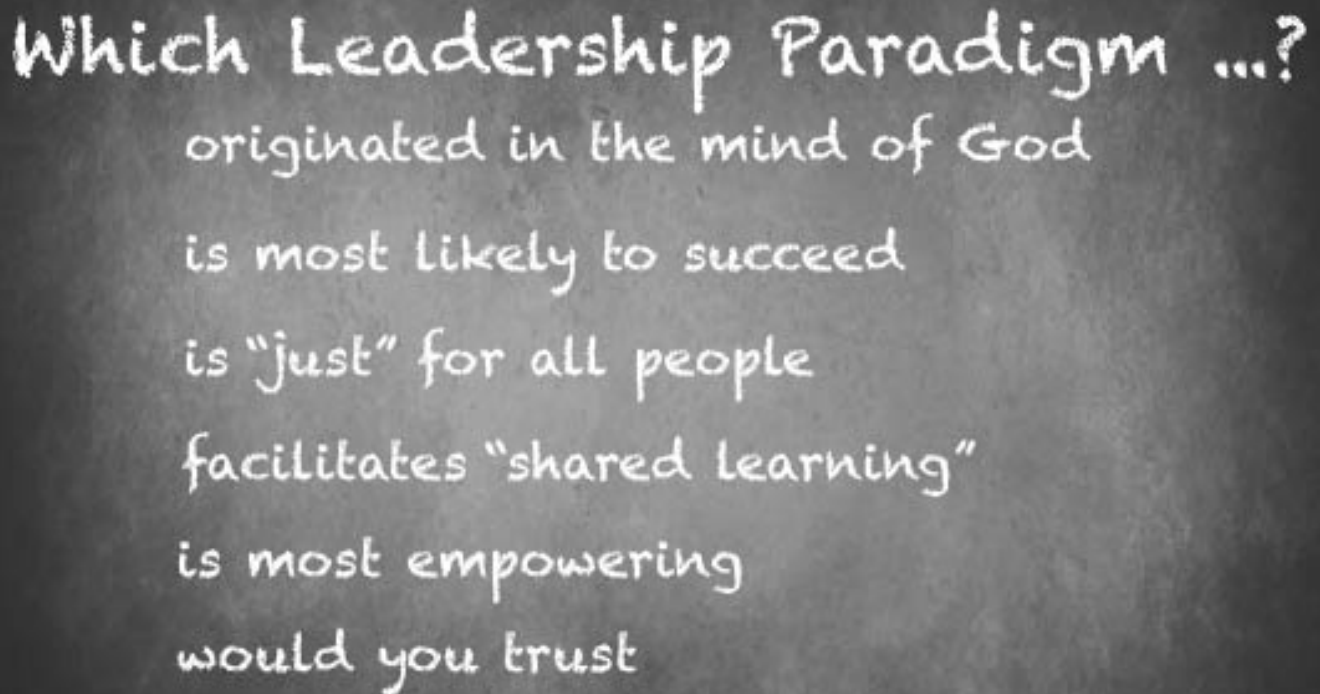


# *A PARADIGM UPGRADE*

*TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, CHARITIES & OTHER VITAL ORGANIZATIONS*

*STEPHEN F. STATEN*

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Which Leadership Paradigm ...?  
originated in the mind of God  
is most likely to succeed  
is "just" for all people  
facilitates "shared learning"  
is most empowering  
would you trust

*HOW MUCH HAVE YOU BEEN INFLUENCED BY HIERARCHICAL NORMS PROMOTED BY PHARAOHS, CAESARS AND OVERZEALOUS PRAGMATISTS?*

*A Paradigm Upgrade was developed for use with both spiritual and secular organizations and was derived from Steve Staten's unpublished material for an unreleased book. In spite of the title this paper is not to be confused with "a paradigm shift," the term first coined in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn to describe an abrupt rejection of one view by its replacement, which becomes the new paradigm. This inquiry involves the pursuit of superior organizational paradigms in a world where a wide range of models will persist.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Most Nations, societies, religions, and companies strive to achieve their goals through a top-down organizational model that owes much to ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, Rome's Caesars, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Frederick Taylor. What would happen if our cities, churches and organizations embraced an organismic model? And importantly, what does the Bible have to say about the way believers relate to one another, organize for optimal achievement and stay alive for God's glory? We are going to test our assumptions against Scriptures and natural revelation, God's creation.*

The case is being made that: (1) The Bible and creation more prominently promote an "organic" interdependent network over the pyramid model for the church. (2) A healthy organization should include formal and informal means of top-down, bottom up, outside in, inside out messaging. (3) A primary role of leadership is to equip individuals to advance the agreed aims of the whole system—not the interests of a few members, (4) Endeavors that have discovered and applied these principles are leading in every sector of society.

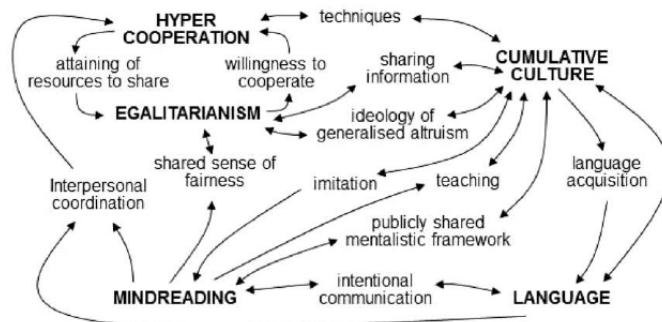


The traditional heavily top-down leadership model is failing our world. In recent times, politicians came up with **healthcare** stipulations that have disenchanted doctors spending more time in front of computers than with their patients. That wasn't what they signed up for. Similarly, federal bureaucrats forced a model of **education** called "common core," limiting choices, leaving very little room for teachers to make adjustments for the unique needs of their students, and putting more time into testing than educating. That's not what they signed up for. And in **policing**, in Chicago for instance, a recent directive of the US Department of Justice has confused officers who are left to balance the use of crime statistics, comparing racial percentages in stops and arrests to city's demographics, and responding to suspicious or criminal activity. The danger of overcorrecting by blurring law enforcement responsibilities of an injurious policing culture without, at the same time, addressing societal problems, risks the creation of uniformed scapegoats. And ignoring reality to keep up appearances is not what the police signed up for.

**Churches** have frequently succumbed to various versions of exclusively top-down leadership. One example is the ineptitude of Catholic Church leadership that led to the sexual abuse scandals and the cover up. But, that travesty is not the only case of decision-makers who become far removed from realities, who decide who they will and will not listen to, and make decisions autocratically. What person who ascends out of the baptistery knew or thought that they signed up for an institution that they neither influence or use their God-given gifts to enhance it. Top-down, one-way messaging, sheltered decision-making is not what Christians signed up for.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF RIGID TOP-DOWN LEADERSHIP

Anthropologists promote the idea that early humans have instinctually cooperated until resources are challenged. The diagram (on the right) illustrates what two researchers identified as the five pillars of social dynamics among hunters and gatherers.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, humans are capable of forming a network of relationships that is interconnected and nuanced rather than highly ordered and tiered.



The more familiar leadership model described as top-down, command and control, is not evil. In fact, in some circumstances it's like a defibrillator—you are glad to have it in emergencies but don't want to depend on it very long. Its origins suggest it evolved out of necessity. When a threat arises, societies become hierarchical, as a means of survival. Rules are developed, responsibilities are given decided by the dominant leader. The arrival of this leadership paradigm appears to have developed towards the latter portion of the agricultural revolution, thousands of years before Christ. Ancient Egypt may be the most iconic civilization that clearly embodied the strictly top-down model. There are many variations of highly hierarchical systems that continue to the present day.

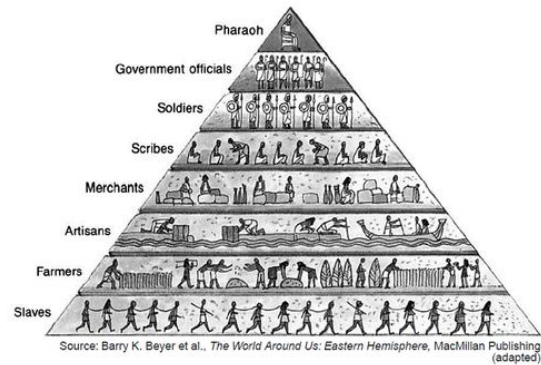
<sup>1</sup> Andrew Whiten and David Erdal, *The human socio-cognitive niche and its evolutionary origins* (2012)

## I. EGYPT

- The dynasties of the Pharaohs lasted from 3100-305BC. Each ruler was deified while they were living.
- Needs were met and justice was served according to class and ascent in the hierarchy.

## II. BABYLON

- The “divine” king Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC) assimilated and edited 282 laws, distinguishing punishment by class, related to business dealings, personal behavior, punishments and a host of other societal matters.
- Fewer classes than Egypt, but similar.
- Followed a priest-ruler model, whereby the leader is anointed.



## III. ISRAEL

- Under Moses, mid-13th century BC.
- The organizational system developed to move some 1.5 to 2.5 million people from Sinai Peninsula to Canaan, and evenly resolve disputes along the way.
- Utilized impressive organizing principles for selecting leaders of 10s, 50s, 100s and 1000s (Deut. 1:9-18).
- The birthplace of equitable justice systems, civil rights and sensible order and did not favor a class, title or position or even a citizen over a foreigner.
- Not strictly top-down because the people themselves chose (vetted) those who would judge their problems.
- Note: Israel was not designed as a model for the Christian religion, and those who disagree cannot point to one example of a denomination who uses Moses’ organizing principles.

## IV. INDIA, CHINA, ROMAN EMPIRE (THE MILLENIUM BEFORE CHRIST)

- China—1000 BC to Confucius (552 BC), a worth-according-to-position hierarchical system developed that became a *sufficiency for all, not necessarily equality for all* take on society.
- India—Channakya Kautilya (332-298 BC), an advisor to a statesman, promoted early Human Resources workplace guides that fostered an attitude of suspicion towards people of lower rank, resulting in strict controls, over / under and watchdog mentalities over government employees.



- Rome—Caesar Augustus (reigned 27-14BC), was founder of the highly organized Roman Empire, and developed the first government to separate the legislative and executive branches of authority.
- Augustus’ heavy-handed autocratic style was effective, due to his brilliance and charisma, but his successors never lived up to his accomplishments. Yet, each new emperor received a deified status in the East, influence by the Egyptian Pharaoh legacy.
- Rome created or sanctioned the blueprint for everything, under its dominion, including religion (which is one reason why Christians took their mission to Rome so seriously).

## V. THE CHURCH

- An organizational anomaly was promoted by Jesus and His apostles that does not operate by the principles of the conventional pyramid model (covered in the next section).
- Bishop Ignatius, the so-called popes of Rome Victor and Cyprian, pope Gregory the Great and others brought in aspects of the Roman governance models into the church (between 110-600 AD), which was the structural basis for Catholicism that remain unchanged through most of the Medieval period.
- Most Protestant denominations developed hierarchical systems similar to Catholicism that varied based on country of origin, alliances with the State, and other ecclesiological and structural preferences.

## VI. THE WESTERN TRAJECTORY (EUROPEAN / AMERICAN)

- Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) released *The Prince* in 1513, emphasizing “the assumption that all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature” and gave right for the ruler to rule by any means.
- Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), the father of scientific management, which focused on output performance and efficiency. He promoted low view of the “unthinking” worker, furthering the twentieth century corporate mindset that all analysis comes from the top, resulting in a “not-invented-here mindset.”



It is essential to avoid disparaging all top-down, command and control, hierarchical enterprises as bad. After all, with a benevolent dictator in a crisis, it might even lead to protection, rapid stabilization and economic promise. For instance, last century Harry Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015), the prime minister of Singapore, transformed the nation from third world to first world in one generation. However, the skills and good will that they bring don't tend to last beyond their founders.

Next we will look at a paradigm that is more dimensional, and where influence can openly come from many directions.

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF “ORGANIC” LEADERSHIP

The year 1940 has been suggested as the year when a renaissance began in how all systems are portrayed and discussed. It began in biology with the study of cells and life but gained an increasing interest that soon spilled over into nations and organizations. Some of the early pioneers of the emerging Systems Thinking field, though not particularly religious, referred to creation as models to envision organizations.

For most of known history our governments, industries and religious associations tended to see life, ecosystems and society through principles that applied to manmade machines such as clocks and engines. The “sea change” began to occur during the build-up to World War Two when Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), a mathematician, biologist and zoologist from Vienna, began distinguishing “closed systems” and “open systems.”

A “closed system” — also called *mechanist*, is fixed, having relatively little interaction with other systems or the outside environment—like a clock. An “open system” — also called *organismic*, like cells, and animals, and ecosystems possess abilities to respond to surprise, learn, adapt and even transform.

### ORIGINS

The first chapter of the Bible tells of the stars, sun, earth, moon, and all creation which is summed up in Genesis 2:1 as a vast “array” or *tsaba*’ in Hebrew, which means a “system” in modern terminology. The narrative portrays hierarchies with mutual dependencies. For instance, we know that the moon orbits the earth, for which it depends to sustain. But even though it is lower in the hierarchy, it provides reflected light. Scientists inform us that the moon even provides gravitational reverberations which help aerate our lakes and rivers.

We could then expand on the broad ecosystems of life that are also mentioned in Genesis. God breathed life into the “vault of the sky” where birds fly, the “sea” that is teemed with creatures, and the “land” with plants and animals. Each system is intra-dependent within itself and interdependent with others. And each one can be broken down into smaller ecosystems. And none of these systems, tiny or large, are strictly top-down but there are keystone/dominant species.

All living systems designed by God possess mutual dependencies that allow them to instinctively, by nature, to recreate, respond to threats and adapt. By definition, they are “open systems.”

The term of a “array”/ *tsaba*’ has also applied to angelic and human systems:

- Angels—1 Kings 22:19                      *heavenly beings in alignment*
- Israel—Exodus 12:41                      *mobilizing a large body*
- Army—Judges 9:29                      *preparing for battle*
- Levites—Numbers 4:23                      *fulfilling of a role*

By making use of Genesis chapter one, palpable observations of God’s living ecosystems, and the New Testament, it can be argued that God-ordained systems (such as His church) comprise the following features.

1. It is God who breathes life and sustains the system.
2. There is hierarchy that would be described more like a network than a pyramid.
3. There are governing / keystone roles and other crucial roles.
4. All roles and systems are intra and inter dependent.
5. The health of a living system is determined by its capacity to respond to disruption.

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## THE INTENTIONALLY ORGANIC CHURCH

One observation that Ludwig von Bertalanffy cautiously made during Nazi occupation, was that nations can be led in such a way as to adopt features of closed systems (unopen, inflexible). The Germans were increasingly troubled by the implications of the professor's theories and attempted to censure him. Clearly, systems thinking was and will always be a threat to totalitarian institutions.<sup>2</sup>

These are the following working definitions of closed and open organizational systems.

A closed system usually means a highly controlled structure, that doesn't adapt to new situations, or have sufficient channels to process feedback or add to organizational learning. A closed organizational system can accomplish good, and be quite efficient—if its leader is noble. But it will eventually experience a breakdown if it doesn't become an open system. A challenge to the closed system, even a contrary view, can lead to a complete halt, or reactivity and chaos. King Rehoboam led Israel in a closed system manner and the results speak for themselves (1 Kings 11:1-24).

An organization built on open system premise can learn, obtain perspectives, adapt, remember, and interact with other systems. Challenges tend to make an open system organization stronger because of the ability to cultivate shared learning for all the members. The apostles and elders in Jerusalem provided an example of open systems church when it was successfully engaging opposing voices on a crucial issue (Acts 15:1-35).

Closed and open organizational tendencies exist in Scripture and history. We worship in churches, live in nations and work for organizations that are somewhat on the continuum. Obviously, we want to serve God in more of an open system. But we need more meaningful terms to describe it.

I propose that the best and most accurate word is organic—but *intentionally organic*. The root word for both organic and organization is the Greek *organon*, which comes from the same root as *erg*, “work” and which had the linked meaning of a performing “tool, musical instrument, or part of the body.” In other words, *organon* conjures up the idea of a component within a larger whole, that involves some level of task or functioning. It is reasonable to suggest that being intentionally organic means a part fulfilling its best role according to the needs of the whole system. How does this concept fit with the church in the Scriptures?

The main passages on this subject are 1 Cor. 12:12-27. Rom.12:3-8, and Eph. 4:7-16. The apostle Paul had the well-defined interdependent concept of the human body in mind when he simultaneously referenced the church body, visualizing both as collection or parts combined to achieve a purpose.

Paul emphasized a pre-ordained interdependent network (body) of gifts (organs/limbs) of different functions, and all gifts are to be respected. He went on to say that each one should obtain sober clarity on one's gift/function, and fulfill it for the greater whole. He used the word *katartizo* (Eph. 4:12), which is usually translated “equip” but literally means, in this context, “fitly frame together his people”, “fit alongside together.” Therefore, the church achieves its purpose as individuals fulfill their roles, fit alongside one another according, self-aware, thoughtful, and acting with the whole community in mind.

An ideal scripturally organic church could be described this way:

- Members fulfil their God-given functions for the whole
- The church is like a body, which has inter and intra dependencies
- All members are to be sober-minded, show respect and are to be respected
- The members are to see themselves in relation to one another, fulfilling distinct roles
- The elders, evangelists, teachers help to equip the body for its well-functioning and maturity
- There are established and informal processes to effectively communicate throughout the church
- The community retains a “shared” memory of what hurts, helps, and is dangerous

In order that we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the **waves**, and blown here and there by every **wind** of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.” (Eph. 4:13-14)

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<sup>2</sup> The backstory of Ludwig von Bertalanffy will be told in book, *The Renaissance Advantage: Mavericks, Their Tools and the Art of Breakthrough*, when it comes out later this year.

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## ***NOTABLE SNAPSHOTS AND TURNING POINTS IN VARIOUS SECTORS***

The following individuals and nations authored, modeled contributed with some aspect of organic leadership, network over pyramid hierarchies, and all-direction messaging.

### ***I. JESUS AND THE APOSTLES***

- Jesus is the author of all creation and the head of the church (Colossians 1:15-17).
- He was among his disciples as one who served (Luke 22:25-27).
- His apostles treated people with respect, were able to be influenced, could collaborate, solve problems, and move forward w/out heavy the use of authority (Acts 6:1ff, 15:1ff).
- One apostle compared the church to the human body (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

### ***II. LUDWIG VON BERTALANFFY: BIOLOGY***

- Mentioned earlier.
- Professor von Bertalanffy gradually developed “General Systems Theory,” which led to a sea change in many fields, including how nations and organizations see their citizens and members, respond to outsiders and handle new information.

### ***III. EDWARDS T. DEMING: INDUSTRY***

- W. Edwards Deming helped Japan’s economy turn around after the war, beginning in 1950.
- He once cited 1 Corinthians 12, “A body is not one organ, but many ...” to describe interdependence within a body or organization.
- Deming emphasized that organizations should deemphasize position so that its members can listen to and depend on each other.
- The entire nation was engaged in a single vision developed out of systems thinking.
- In the 1950s Tom Burns and G.M. Stalker were the first to use the term “organic organizations” to differentiate from “mechanistic organizations” because they are flexible and value external knowledge.

### ***IV. THE NEW GERMAN REICHSTAG: GOVERNMENT***

- The German Parliament / Reichstag met in a building that was associated with corrupt top-down, political system and decisions that led to WWI, WWII and the holocaust.
- It was heavily damaged during War.
- After the re-unification of East & West German a decision was made to rebuild it, bring the parliament back in and make it a symbol of openness and transparency. The new architecture highlights an “open systems” government.

Visitors enter a passageway that winds all the way up to a prominent glass dome that provides multiple sensations and messages. The further up the spiral one sees the city, the more aware the guest is that the legislators below are serving the people above and beyond. Mirrors send natural light down into the legislative chamber. The dome symbolizes transparency and light, which are above the leadership, as are the people who elect them. Everyone, the politicians and the public, enters the building together and has access to the same observation platform, within a transparent dome, allowing people to ascend symbolically above the heads of their government servants. The building is both a reminder of the past, as a museum, but in a radical departure from the past, its reliance on sunlight means that its activities are in view.

- In 2016, US News and World Report, released their first rankings of best nation in the world.<sup>3</sup> Germany is on the top spot, largely because it is the undisputed leader in reusable energy, other “green goals”, civil rights, possesses a low unemployment rate, and is a hotbed for innovation in urban development.
- Germany is the greatest example of a western nation abandoning an archaic paradigm.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries>

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## V. *THE US MILITARY: ARMY CULTURE*

- A 2008 research paper by Colonel Frederick S. Clarke titled *Changing Army Culture Creating Adaptive and Critical Thinking Officer Corp*, opened up with the sentence, “As an open system organization the Army is constantly affected by variations in the environment that should ultimately spark change in the way Army leaders view, approach, and resolve problems.”
- Clarke expressed boldly, “we must initiate drastic changes to our military education system to allow for less structure and more free thinking to identify core problems and develop appropriate solutions.”
- The paper was approved for distribution and manuals are undergoing significant changes.

## *FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH*

The following observations were derived from my 1995-1996 thesis research on the question, *Was There Unity in the Sub-Apostolic Church?: An Investigation of the Tunnel Period (~A.D. 62-150)*. The focus of the inquiry was to examine the trajectory of the most prominent churches in five regions in order to assess their unity following the deaths of the apostles. Copies are available on request.

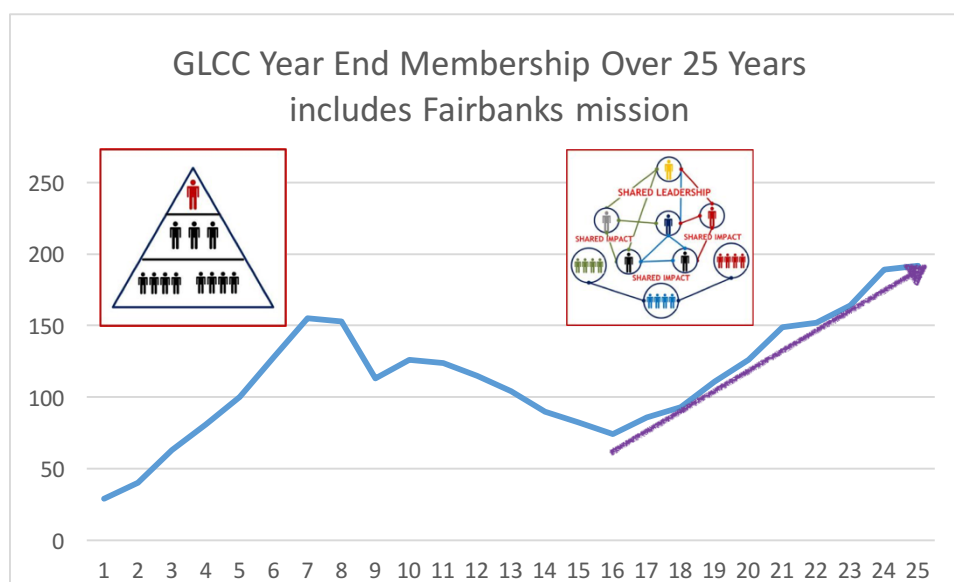
1. **The Book of Acts and the Epistles Reveal an Organic Ecclesiology.** There are five pillar churches in the New Testament—Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. None of their ecclesiastical structures look the same as the other for a variety of reasons such as imitations, local cultural influence, and resource limitations. That means they were adaptive, rather than prescriptive. And the limited use of leadership vernacular in the letters reveal self-perpetuating churches, not man-driven.
2. **The Strongly Top-Down Leadership Came After the Apostles.** The command and control traits that came later in church history are not the character of apostolic Christianity: (1) Steep authoritarian and permission-based structures, (2) demeaning people based on rank/class, (3) clergy/laity attitude, (4) members as the unthinking drones, (5) members can't be trusted, (6) the “not-invented-here” leadership mindset, and (7) protections of the elite. A few of these developments appear abruptly between 60s-120AD, as the apostles were increasingly being martyred. Most of these traits came later.
3. **Individuals Were More Often Described by What They Brought to the Church, not Position.** In fact, “leader” is rarely used in Scripture in reference to members of the body, and when it does it is usually in reference to apostles, elders and prominent forerunners (Acts 1:20, 15:22, 1 Cor. 3:21, Heb. 13:1, 17, and 24). More often, individuals are noted for their specific role, influence, or gift such as sacrifice, serving, preaching, sacrifice, encouragement, being “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” teaching, etcetera.



## A CASE STUDY: THE GREAT LAND CHRISTIAN CHURCH-ANCHORAGE

In December of 2016 I consulted for the GLCC-Anchorage for a “look under the hood” engagement. Following nearly fifty interviews, many more surveys, I sent them a 27-page report. That paper, which contains history, and a summary of observations and recommendations, is available to church leaders. Below are some take-aways.

- A small congregation in Anchorage embraced a new leadership and ministry paradigm in 2007.
- The members describe the model as “an upside down pyramid” who are also emphatic that this is “not a top-down church”—but a “one another” church. And yet, there is authority, direction, that comes out of a servant-based foundation, established by the ministers (Matt. 23:11).
- When congregants refer to one another, including those with official titles, they are described for what they mean to the church family—not by position.
- There was ten years of GLCC growth from 74 to 192 (164-Anchorage, 24-Fairbanks planting)
- Throughout the consultation the term “organic” was frequently used.



The report contained the following observation of one of the strengths of the GLCC.

*The Exceptional Congregational Spirit to Move in Unison, Independently.* The ancient Greek word used to describe harmony in Scripture is *homothumadon* (think of various musicians with different instruments playing along in unison). It means to “rush along” and “in unison” suggesting “progressive power” or “harmonic progression.” Think of the word “together” as an action. The apostle Paul used this expression in his letter to the Romans.

...that *together* [*homothumadon*] you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5–6 ESV, emphasis added)

Both Great Land Christian Churches in Anchorage and Fairbanks appear to exemplify a level of progressive movement, moving in unison along the same path. This attribute of a well-functioning group is especially remarkable for the aging congregation in Anchorage.

What is astonishing is that the members of the congregation emphasize their freedom and that unison is not a product of compliance but of intentionality and appreciation of everyone’s uniqueness. Readers from other church cultures might find this observation counterintuitive: “Shouldn’t we confront independence because it will lead to disunity?” Nonetheless, it appears that the key ingredients in the GLCC are trusting leaders, openness to the Spirit’s lead, permission-assuming self-starters, and mission-mindedness, rather than a stagnant conformist spirit of “Let’s be unified.” The form of independence described by dozens of members did not seem like a rogue spirit, but a healthy autonomy that combines respect and looking out for the interests of others (Phil. 2:3–4).

Even when things don’t work sufficiently, which some report about the functionality of the recent experiments with zones, members seemed to possess a spirit of “Let’s keep trying different ways together until we get it right.”

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## *PRACTICAL STEPS*

If you are attempting to initiate changing from a pyramid view of your church or charity towards more of a network structure, consider following some of these exercises, involving a sample of representatives. First, however, ensure that your attitude is consistently respectful. Don't rush change or waste time disparaging the past or present leadership. And please, don't use this material to confront anyone. See my *Becoming Wavemakers* white paper for more insight about steps and decorum for initiating change.

1. Interactively discuss positive possibilities of a more optimized church or charity. Ideas might include:
  - Greater engagement / commitment
  - Greater ownership of neglected roles
  - Greater empowerment
  - Less overworked individuals
  - Improved efficiency
2. Consider interviews, surveys and strength-sharing sessions to discover what type of work that each member/employee:
  - Is objectively skilled or gifted at
  - Enjoys spending their energy and resources on
  - Thinks that they might be good at or would like to try
3. Map out all the major roles in the current organizational structure (even if it looks like a top-down pyramid):
  - draw solid lines of hierarchical responsibility between members
  - draw dotted lines between roles that have or should have a direct impact on each other
  - place arrows on the lines to indicate the direction of helpful feedback & influence (hint: every line should have arrows on both ends)

Now, redraw this network without placing the primary leaders on the top of the drawing. This is not a statement about authority in as much as it is way to re-visualize dependencies. What are the implications of this redrawn picture?

4. What is a common problem or challenge that occurs in the organization? \_\_\_\_\_

Now, look at the redrawn network and discuss which roles in the network should be involved the discussion of that challenge.

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## ***RECOMMENDED READING***

Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*

Colonel Frederick S. Clarke, *Changing Army Culture Creating Adaptive and Critical Thinking Officer Corp*

Daniel Wren, *The History of Management Thought 5th Edition*

Joseph R. Meyers, *Organic Community*

Israel Galindo, *Perspectives on Congregational Leadership: Applying systems thinking for effective leadership*

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