

Congregational
Vitality Project



Cultivating Vital Congregations Workbook

Guide to accompany congregations as they consider where they have been and where God is calling them next.

Use with Cultivating Vital Congregations video.

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Congregational Vitality Project

CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY PROJECT

Introduction

This booklet is designed for congregational leaders that have taken the Congregational Vitality Survey (short or long version) and are looking for next steps. Each section presents a unique aspect of vitality and includes a self-assessment followed by a brief explanation of the concept followed by specific ways your congregation can move forward.

If you have not yet taken the congregational vitality survey, visit <http://congregationalvitalitysurvey.com/resources.html> and choose from one of the Vitality Assessment Tools.

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Section 1: Domains impacting your congregation's vitality

Vital congregations have life-changing relationships with God, one another and their community.

Research shows that the following areas are important to a congregation's vitality.

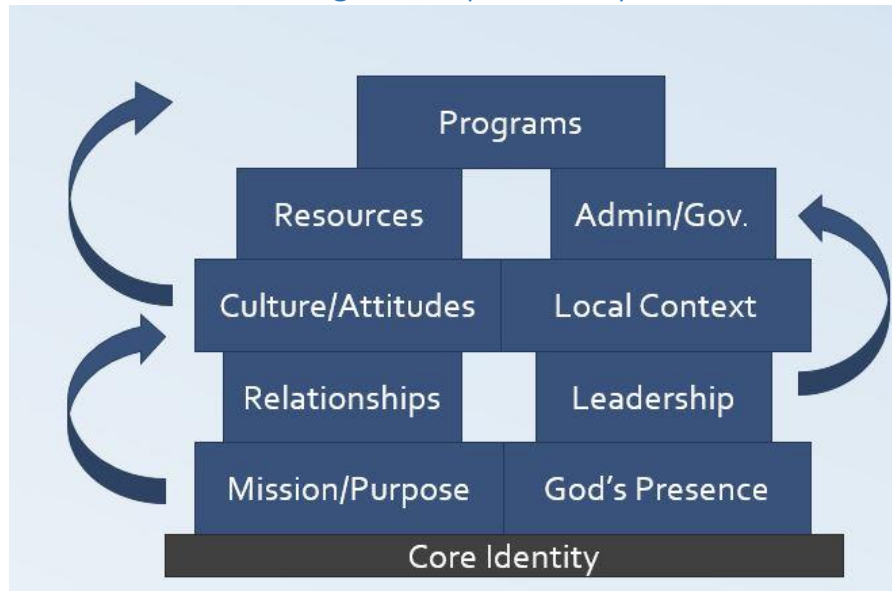
Use the **Impact** column to mark the way each of the following areas impacts your congregation using the following scale.

- 5= **Strength**: This is such a strength that it will help the congregation through tough times.
- 4= **Helpful**: this is helping or strengthening vitality. It is something you do well.
- 3= **Neutral**: this is not having a significant impact on vitality (positive or negative).
- 2= **Risk Factor**: this is hurting vitality but is not critical. It is something for which we compensate.
- 1= **Barrier**: this is keeping the congregation from vitality. It must be changed before meaningful progress can occur. A barrier might be a lack of something (e.g. vision, leadership, trust, resources) or the presence of something harmful (e.g. conflict, isolation, and dysfunction).

Next, place an X in the **Intentional Activities** column to indicate the domains where you spend most of your time and energy. Only mark areas where you can name concrete action being taken.

Domain	Definition	Impact	Intentional Activities
God's Presence	Leaders experience God's active presence in the congregation. Leaders can articulate how God shows up and works in and through the congregation and its people.		
Mission/ Purpose	The congregation has a clear understanding of God's larger mission and the purpose for their church in this time and place. The congregation can articulate that purpose and has a specific plan to implement.		
Leadership	Pastor, lay leadership, and unofficial leaders- Their skills, personalities, overall health (physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, etc.) are strong and match the current mission.		
Relationships	Relationships among leadership, pastor & staff, and the congregation create loving community with good communication. People work together respectfully through disagreements.		
Attitudes/ Culture	Mission orientation (Mission is the driving force behind everything the church does.), willingness to change to achieve mission, sense of ownership, belonging/ commitment, level of engagement, and interest in embracing local community		
Local Context	Congregation has mutual (2 way) relationships with its neighbors and is an important part of and partner with the community where it is located.		
Resources	There is adequate money, facilities, equipment, technology, and people power support missional activities		
Governance & Admin	Decision making, administration of finances, and personnel management support missional activities		
Programs	The things a congregation does, it does well. May include: worship, fellowship, faith formation, prayer, youth/ young adult ministries, evangelism, outreach, stewardship, etc.		

Jenga Theory of Vitality



While all domains are important to vitality, they do not all have the same impact. Domains work like Jenga blocks (the game with blocks that stack crosswise). Lower domains are a foundation for others, influencing the way higher domains are lived out. The bottom blocks of *Mission/Purpose* (*What is God's purpose for our congregation?*) and *God's Presence* (*What is God doing here and now?*) set the tone for the congregation's culture and how it relates to the local community. That culture and those relationships determine the kinds of programs that are developed or emphasized by the congregation. The alternating row of leadership and the relationships drive how resources are managed. Layers also interact with the adjoining blocks.

The alternating pattern allows congregations to improve or change some things without toppling the structure. Over the years every congregation experiences changes. Missions evolve as people and pastors come and go. All the while, the tower can hold strong on a firm foundation built on a sense of God's presence and mission.

The core identity of your congregation is the table upon which everything sits. This describes the deep, often unspoken "why" behind your congregation. This why frames the way God's mission and presence are understood.

Discussion Questions:

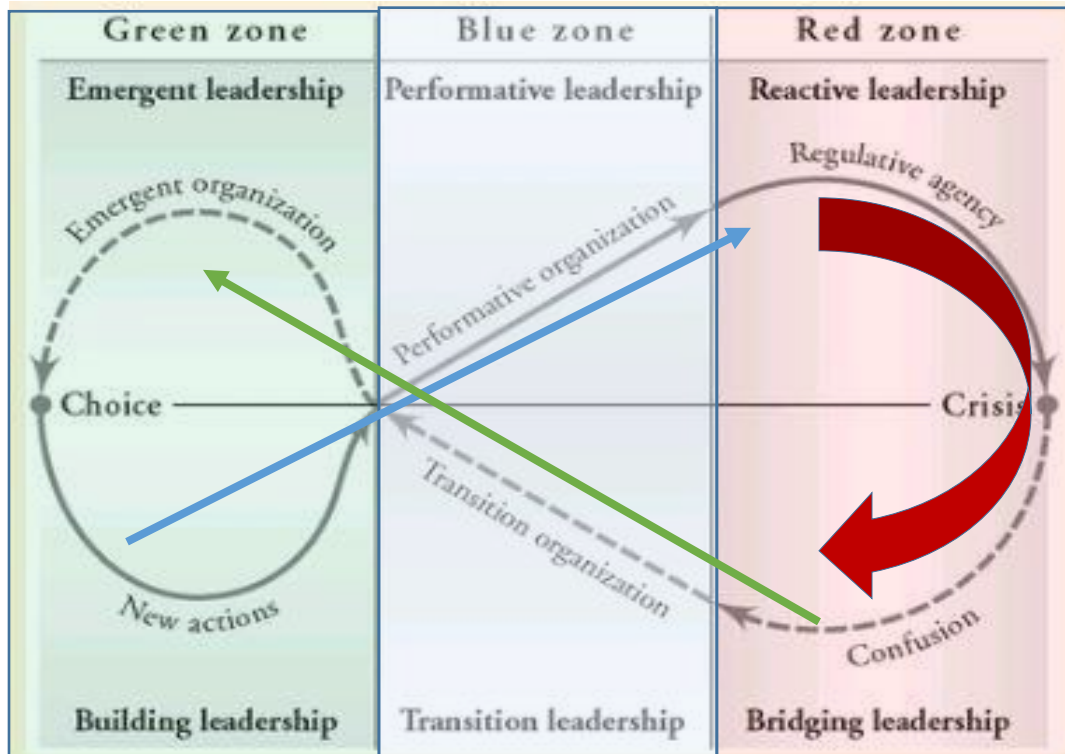
Consider your ratings on the Domain worksheet.

1. How strong is your congregation's foundation?
2. Where are you currently putting your leadership's energy?
3. Is your energy going where it is needed?



Section 2: Congregational Seasons (Adaptive change cycle)

FROM ROXBURGH, A. AND F. ROMANUK (2011).¹



All congregations are constantly moving through this cycle of change. **Place an X in the place where you think your congregation is right now.**

Emergent - Pioneering	Performing	Regulating- Reacting
Discover new ways to be church and expand imagination about what “success” means. Spirit lifts up a new vision for embodiment. Decide to live into a new or updated identity. (Adaptive change)	Develop and refine organizational structure and capacity to implement mission. Tweak current programs and process. Focus on efficiency and effectiveness. (Technical change)	Change beyond control occurred in congregation and/or community. Old way no longer work. Reach a crisis point. Decide whether or not to continue and why . (Technical changes fail, open to new ideas)
Emergent - Building	Transitioning	Confusion
New understandings of how to live into the updated identity are built into the church structure starting at the bottom of the Jenga blocks and moving up. Build in adaptive habits to remain agile. (Adaptive ⇌ Technical change)	Cycle of Listening, Experimenting and Reflecting. Confront your assumptions and expand imagination about what is possible. (Adaptive change in full swing)	Don’t know what to do next. Make intentional space for change. Begin listening to God, each other and the community. Identify immediate next steps without clear definition of ultimate vision. (Adaptive change begins)

¹ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, vol. 17 (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

Self-assessment & Discussion questions

Discussion Questions:

Consider where you marked the figure eight on page 4 indicating the current season of your congregation.

1. Why was your congregation originally founded?
2. How does your original mission continue to inform your identity now?
3. Describe how your congregation has moved through this cycle in the past? Have you been all the way around before? Has your “why” ever changed?

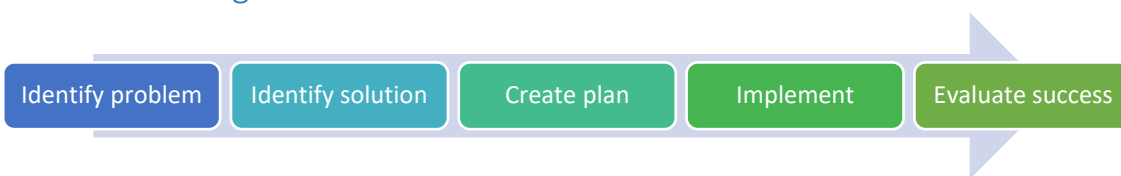
Section 3: Technical vs. Adaptive Change

The kinds of change your congregation needs depends on the season of your congregation.

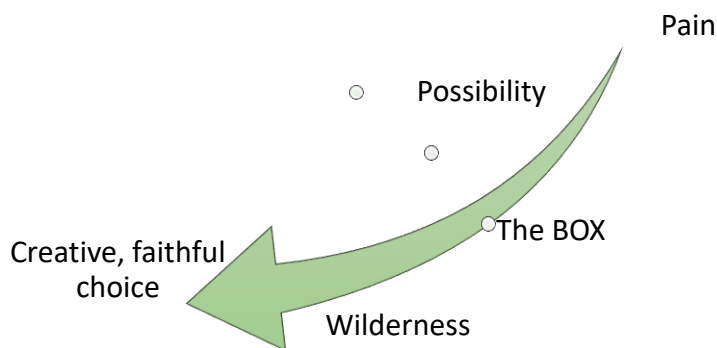


Technical change understands problem and solution. Asks: How and when should we act?
Adaptive change doesn't know solution. Asks: Why are we doing it? Who are we now?

Technical change



Adaptive Change²

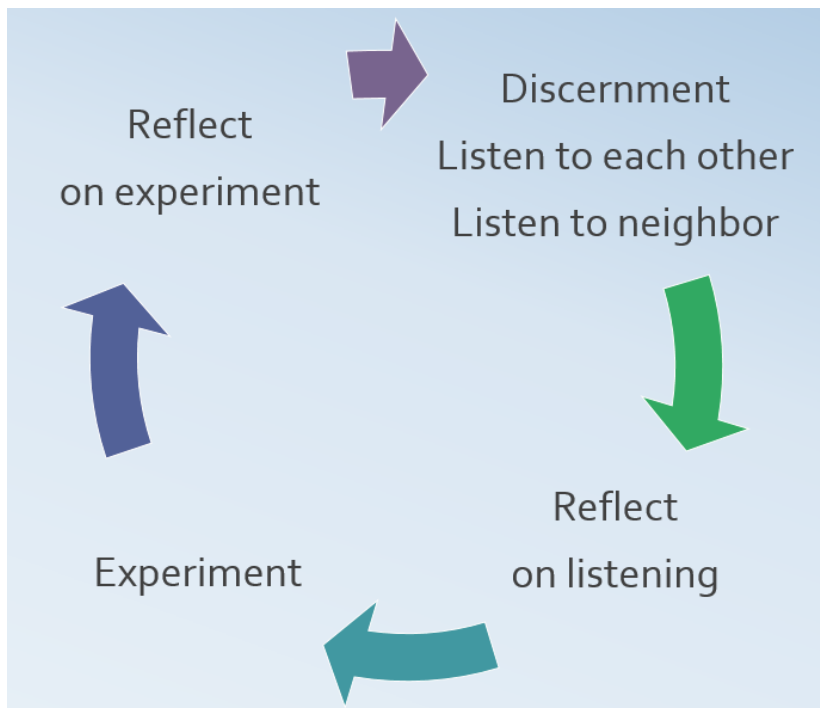


Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of change has your congregation experienced?
2. What kind of change are you currently confronting?

² Gilbert R Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual & Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

Section 4: Adaptive Change Steps



What's your plan?

	Who will do this?	How will we go about it?
Listening to God		
Listening to each other		
Listening to our neighbors		
Reflecting on what we learn from listening		
Design and carry out an experiment		
Reflect on the experiment		

Section 5: Seven Is (I⁷) Adaptive change environment

Intentional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Set aside time and space for work. Include the entire congregation throughout the process. Engage with the expectation of change.
Invested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Invest financial, emotional, spiritual, relational, temporal energy into the effort.
Integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Include partners beyond the congregation's walls. They have something the congregation needs.
Intimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Relationships are key. Be part of one another's lives. Have a stake in each other's success both within and outside the congregation's walls.
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Change must be driven by internal forces. Leadership must include lay and rostered people. Both formal and informal leaders must be involved.
Inspired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The process is experienced as being driven by the Holy Spirit which is calling the congregation forward.
Imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Spirit is at work expanding the imagination of those involved. The congregation expect to challenge and change some of their basic assumptions about the church and their community.

Reflect on your congregation's plan or process so far:

How are these conditions reflected in your process?

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Very much
Intentional				
Invested				
Integrated				
Intimate				
Internal				
Inspired				
Imagination				

Section 5: Developmental tasks for congregational seasons

Congregational Season: From green to blue - Emerging

Description: New or renewing church clarifies identity and purpose, gets organized and works to become missional and self-sustaining.

Key Tasks: Establish core theological identity, Mission/Purpose. Articulate God active presence in day to day life. Develop the expectation that God regularly shows up and works in and through the congregation. Create a supportive community. Create a sense of team and communal ownership where everyone’s gifts are known and used. Incorporate new members in leadership. Establish healthy mission focused culture that is eager to change to stay missional. Build relationships and partnerships within the local community for the sake of mission not just recruitment.

Common Threats: Fail to gain critical mass of resources or people, fail to create healthy community, Imprint a rigid culture focused on the needs of the founders rather than God’s mission.

Critical Barriers: Lack of mission, no sense of God’s presence, dysfunctional relationships, lack of partnerships with local community.

Critical Areas for focused attention: Mission & leadership. Moving toward sustainability is also critical. Programs, strong governance and administrative structures can come later.

Potential Outcomes:

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Grow into maturity with strong foundations	Fail to become self-sustaining or imprint rigid or founder centered culture= fragile

How Healthy Growth Happens: Activities in bottom blocks drive development of upper blocks. Growth happens on two tracks:

Mission Track: Establishing common mission and God’s presence sets the tone for the congregation’s culture and attitudes about themselves and their neighbors. Those attitudes lead to programs/activities in the community and the congregation.

Leadership Track: Encouraging and developing leadership skills in lay and rostered leaders plus building strong relationships creates positive energy which leads to improvements in how resources are managed and improvements in the resources themselves.



List the areas you marked as barriers. _____

If you have a barrier in mission, relationships or leadership, focus here first.

List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths. _____

If Mission and God’s presence aren’t among them, they should be. Constant articulation of mission and God’s active presence is critical. Forming and renewing congregations need to work on both tracks at the same time to realize a positive outcome. How are you developing leadership and community? Consider where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?

Congregational Season: Blue Zone - Performing

Description: Mature congregations constantly go through a pattern of redefinition (innovation), stability/plateau, tension (as programs/processes no longer fit new environments), evaluation and then begin again with redefinition. As long as congregations continue this pattern while focused on God’s mission within their community, the ministry can be healthy indefinitely. Congregations that don’t, slip into decline.

Key Tasks: Maintain sense of God’s active presence and mission as the focus of ministry by continually and intentionally discerning God’s will and listening to each other and the neighborhood. Tell the congregation’s story as part of God’s story. Focus on making disciples who live out their faith in daily life. Maintain strong lay leadership, cycling new people into/out of leadership regularly. Adapt to changing conditions through technical and sometimes adaptive changes.

Common Threats: Unaware of God’s active presence in the congregation and the world. Become rigid, bureaucratic, inwardly- focused, unwilling to change or don’t think you need to change and get comfortable. Internal conflicts fester creating tension or apathy. Sometimes conflict breaks out in harmful ways.

Critical Barriers: Address any barriers (especially relational) before they send the congregation into decline.

Critical Areas for focused attention: Thriving mature congregations typically work intentionally in 6 or more domains simultaneously. Maintaining a missional focused culture and renewing resources (finances, facility, and people) are most critical.

Potential Outcomes:

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Remain stable and missional through generational and cultural transitions: Redefinition	Slip into decline

How Congregations Stay Healthy: Activities in bottom blocks drive development of upper blocks. This happens on two tracks:

Mission Track: Common mission and God’s presence sets the tone for the congregation’s culture and attitudes about themselves and their neighbors. Those attitudes lead to programs/activities in the community and the congregation.

Leadership Track: Encouraging and developing leadership skills in lay and rostered leaders plus strong relationships creates positive energy which influences resources and how they are managed.



List the areas you marked as barriers. _____

If you have barriers in the area of mission, God’s presence, relationships or leadership, removing them should be your top priority.

List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths. _____

Mature congregations need to constantly renew both tracks at the same time to continue having positive outcomes. If lower blocks are strong, focus can be on the upper blocks. Consider the areas where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?

Congregational Season: From red to green through crisis

Description: Losing members, money, energy, connection to community. Vague sense of mission.

Key Tasks: Reconcile conflicts, and resolve immediate resource and administrative crisis. Answer the question, should we continue to exist and if so, why? IF you agree to continue, engage in adaptive change steps. LISTEN to God, each other and your community. Use 7 Is to ensure a transformational process.

Common Threats: Congregation remains focused on survival. Leaders lack a sense of God’s presence and don’t trust God to lead and lack hope. Lack of energy. Conflict derails the process.

Critical Barriers: The presence of any barriers in the Jenga blocks will likely lead to a negative outcome.

Critical Activities/Strengths: Declining congregations that had positive outcomes were usually intentionally working in at least 6 different domains at the same time. The most critical domains include relationships, culture, resources and administration/governance.

Potential Outcomes: When faced with the question – Do we continue as a congregation and if so why?

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Decide to end ministry and leave a legacy for God to do something new. OR Decide to continue for the sake of God’s mission. Begin adaptive change process. Build relationships with new partners. Expand imagination and challenge/revise identity.	Become unsustainable and close OR Decide to continue for the sake of staying together. This leads to technical changes and short lived improvements.

How Change Happens: Adaptive change may knock over old tower allowing the congregation to build a new one based on a new or renewed sense of identity. It may take a different form or involve different players than before. The same general principles still apply. Changes in the bottom blocks lead to changes in upper blocks. Change happens on two tracks:

Mission Track: Clarifying mission and God’s presence through intentional spiritual discernment and listening leads to changes in the congregation’s culture and attitudes about themselves and their community. This leads to new activities and programs in the community and the congregation.

Leadership Track: Strengthening leadership skills and building relationships leads to improvements in how resources are managed and improvements in the resources themselves.



List the areas you marked as barriers on pg. 2. _____

Address barriers in the following areas first: Mission, God’s presence, Relationships, Leadership.

List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths. _____

How are you using these strengths to engage in adaptive change steps impacting both tracks?