

4 Marks of healthy church systems

excerpted from Flow: The Surprising Role of Systems in the Health of Church Staff and Key Volunteers

Sometimes ministry feels like a grainy distortion. We know something's wrong. That's obvious. It's also frustrating. What did we do? What didn't we do? And what's next, especially when we've done all we know how.

Your systems, and more specifically-- your church's macrosystems, might need some attention. They are the ways everyone gets good work done together (think: projects, planning, and resources.) They are also the places where unnecessary frictions like to hide.

So, are your systems?



knowable

Knowable (everyone using the system can summarize its basic structure)

It stands to reason that the ways everyone gets work done together need to be understood by everyone. But that's not always the case. Why? Getting to understandable structures and language is a very challenging discipline. We understand this when it comes to theology. The same relentless pursuit of the irreducible and compelling should apply to our systems. Can it be talked about in common terms that land with the appropriate implications? That's the standard.



repeatable

Repeatable (everyone can do the work with the same tools and steps)

*When do systems fail?
When they require new or different steps for different users.*



invisible

Invisible (eventually—they'll seem ever-present during development but good macro-systems fade well)

Given time, all systems will fade into the background of ministry life. New systems work takes up an inordinate amount of time and energy, elevating initially what is meant to run in the background. It's perfectly normal, if a bit maddening.



scalable

Scalable (can go up or down in numbers of people or tasks without affecting stated outcomes)

Appropriately designed systems can account for increased or decreased people and tasks without a complete overhaul. One direction (decrease) is a focus. One (increase) is an expansion. Both are measures of scale. If the basic structure of the system must be skewed (or destroyed) in order to scale, you will be coming back to ground zero far more than is healthy.

Church Macrosystem Scorecard

System name

Total Score



knowable



repeatable



invisible



scalable

5=best fit w/descriptions above

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5