



Sustaining Organizational Life Through Innovation

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Abstract

Innovation leaders can find inspiration and hope from assessing the historical development of the Christian faith. This article reflects on the innovative work of Jesus to strengthen Peter as a rock of faith on which to build the church. Leaders and innovators can learn from Peter to value their experience and use it innovatively to strengthen others. Innovation is seen as a purveyor of organizational life.

Introduction

Organizations, leaders, and innovators can experience a renewed sense of inspiration and hope from assessing the historical development of the Christian faith. Innovation and creativity can be assessed in the context of the early Christian church. As Bruce L. Shelley, author of *Church History in Plain Language* noted, “Christianity began as a tiny offshoot of Judaism. Three centuries later it became the favored and eventually the official religion of the entire Roman Empire. Despite widespread and determined efforts to eliminate the new faith, it survived and grew. By the reign of Constantine (312-337 A.D.), the first Christian emperor, there were churches in every large town in the empire and in places as distant from each other as Britain, Carthage, and Persia. How did that happen? Where, specifically, did Christianity spread and why did it expand so rapidly?” This essay poses that the Holy Spirit worked through people to reveal and establish the kingdom of God. This innovative process is experienced spiritually as people come to a sense of laying down an old self-driven life in exchange for the new life in Christ. People throughout history experienced this inner transformation often through the catharsis of trials and turbulent circumstances. As they moved across continents and living out their faith with inner conviction and good deeds, Christianity spread.

The Role that Peter Played in Spreading the Gospel

Peter contributed to the understanding of this spiritual innovation by writing a letter to believers who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1-2). His letter identified their need for innovation and strategy: “rid yourselves of all malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like new-born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:1-3). Now Peter wrote this towards the end of his life as an adult but also as a spiritual adult. He came through that process of being creatively remade.

Peter had to grow in the Lord. As a young disciple he was weak in His opinion of Christ and blowing like a reed in the wind according to his audiences but Jesus was preparing His disciples for the fulfillment of His mission by asking them “Whom do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:17; Mark 8:27). He asked them a second time, “But what about you? Whom do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29). Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus regarded this answer as a revelation from the heavenly Father to be used as a foundation for building the church (Matthew 16:17-18). Simon would grow into a new identity, solid as a rock, named Peter.

Peter wrote from his experience understanding deeply the inner reconstruction that he went through to come a deeper understanding of who Jesus was and what the Christian life entails. His letters are filled with hope and guidance urging the readers to grow in this innovative process by assessing their lives and attitudes, redirecting to Christ, and to grow in their commitment to Him. The trials that are experienced should be seen as incubators of faith. Trails should be regarded as durational with the revealing of Christ at their end. The revelation of Christ should be the ultimate goal and be celebrated with great joy.

The readers of Peter’s first letter were commanded to work towards the revelation of Christ by starting with the preparation of their minds for action. They had to be self-controlled and focused on living a holy life remembering that the word of the Lord stands forever. They were instructed to live such good lives among the pagans that even if they were accused of wrongdoing, eventually the pagans would change their perceptions and see good deeds and also glorify God.

Peter commanded the readers of his first letter three times to be self-controlled, clear-minded and focused on serving others in a hospitable manner. In this way, the society would receive the grace of God, the strength of God, and the words of God. Peter regarded himself as a fellow elder as he instructed the elders to be “shepherds of God’s flock” – the exact words that Jesus instructed Peter with (John 21:15-19). At that time, however, Peter was hurt that Jesus told him a third time to look after his flock (John 21:17). Yet, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter could persevere in his call. Peter’s metanoia altered not only his behavior but also his values and his attitude. This transformed him from being a weak follower of Christ to a strong servant leader with integrity who will live eternal life in the peaceful presence of Christ.

Innovation as a purveyor of organizational life

By the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, innovations could become a purveyor of organizational life. However, Scott Berkun in his book *The Myths of Innovation*, stated that innovations are seldom new as they build on knowledge that has been known despite history lacking perfect documenting. How far back the historical roots go might surprise those seeking radical innovation in their field. Louis Boone and David Kurtz comprehensively described the historical development of management thoughts in their academic text called *Management*. They are of the opinion that management thoughts have their roots in the Sumerians (5000 B.C.) who used record keeping as a control technique, and in the Egyptians (4000 B.C.) who recognized planning, organizing, and controlling as specific functions. Socrates, Plato, and Alexander the Great noted and applied staff concepts with Alfarabi listing the traits of an effective leader in 900 A.D. The Industrial Revolution of the 1750's paved the way for observations on team efficiency and a scientific approach to management. Henri Fayol (1841 - 1925) is credited as the first developer of a general theory of management comprising fourteen basic management principles. His contemporary, Max Weber (1864 - 1920), focused his research on the topic of authority.

J.C. Rost, in his text *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century*, noted that the leadership definitions of the first three decades of the 20th century emphasized control, centralization of power, and domination. Thereafter, a group focus was again taken leading to J.M. Burns during 1978 to initiate leadership as a transformational process involving both leaders and followers. The 21st century seeks to define leadership from a number of perspectives such as servant, adaptive, authentic, and spiritual, said leadership expert Peter Northouse in 2016. Northouse also noted the "common goal" in the leadership context, and the question could be asked how it relates to the worldview promoted by Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002)? Could it also relate to "the rapidly changing face of management consulting" as researched by management consultants Larry Greiner and Flemming Poulfelt?

Davila, Epstein, and Shelton, in their important innovation text *Making Innovation Work*,¹ posed three types of innovation. Incremental innovation entails small alterations to the current products or business processes similar to solving a puzzle. Radical innovation involves a new product delivered in a new way. Semi-radical innovation entails either a new product or a new business model. Knowledge of the business model and technology levers provide clarity on where to focus organizational creativity. The business model levers are the value proposition, the value chain, and the target market. The technology levers comprise the product and service range, the process technology and the enabling technology. These form the foundation but also the context, for the organization searching for sustained life.

What Can Organizations Learn from Peter?

Just like Peter had to invest in his relationship with Christ, organizations need to know that innovation is a quest on an unknown path. Organizational leaders and innovators should be positive that their innovations will have positive outcomes if they pursue goodness for individuals, organizations, and societies suffering from numerous problems and challenges. These problems and challenges are synonyms to the trials that Peter spoke about. Your organization and innovation can become a source of strength which Christ could be thanked for.

Innovation is a process that requires an enduring focus and self-control because innovation teams contain a spectrum of personalities, emotions, perceptions, and passions.

Variety could be a recipe for conflict or it could be a collection of creative thinkers. To have the latter, leaders and innovators should be strong like Peter.

Just like the church was built on the foundation of the Law and the Prophets, innovations are built on the foundations laid by others. Peter wrote about his experiences and it became the source of innovative wisdom in serving those scattered amongst Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Leaders should value their former experiences and learn from them.

Like Simon, leaders have to be innovatively remade in order to bring out the best in others. More than a change in conduct is required if leaders want to serve communities with the transformational love of Christ. It requires a new value system and a change of attitude. Accepting the invitation for spiritual transformation from Christ is worth taking the risk and making the investment of following His direction, seeking alignment with the work of the Holy Spirit, and is committed to obeying His commands. By partaking in this process is to become a purveyor of more than organizational life. It could lead to the growth of the church and to eternal life for those you served during their trial.

Conclusion

This essay reflected on the innovative work of Jesus to strengthen Peter as a rock of faith on which to build the church. Leaders and innovators can learn from Peter to value their experience and use it innovatively to strengthen others. A quest for innovations to serve societies is important as it spawns good deeds which can result in the transformation of lives with eternal rewards.

About the Author

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