March 12, 2015

Dear ARL,

Attached is my paper for the ARL meeting. I should probably explain a bit about the paper before you start reading so that you know why there are places where the argument skips forward.

I set out to write a paper that had four sections. The original outline looked like this:

Section I: The Goal of Innovation

Section II: Organizing for Innovation

Section III: The Process of Innovation

Section IV: Education for Innovation

As I began to write, the paper grew to 100 single-spaced pages and had not even addressed all the topics. At that point, I realized I was writing a book and not a paper. Not wanting to subject you all to a 100-page paper, I cut out portions to create what you have here.

In this paper, I summarize what was Section I in just ten pages. And then I present Section II and the first part of Section III. I have cut out Section IV altogether. Because there are so many footnotes, I have emailed a separate bibliography because, as one of our colleagues said at a previous ARL meeting, “You can’t tell the players without a program.”

It is a first draft and I take very seriously the idea that writing (like innovation) is an iterative process. So I value your feedback. Indeed, if any of you want to follow up with detailed critiques, I would be most grateful.

Please read the paper in advance. The discussion at the ARL meeting will presume you have read the paper.

Our ARL president, Karen Dalton, has asked that we presenters try to be a bit more innovative in the ways that we present the papers. So, in that spirit, I would ask you to watch a five-minute YouTube video in advance of the conference. We will use the video as a metaphor throughout our discussion. The video is called “Tin Toy.” It is the first animated short that Pixar created and it won the Academy Award. I use it in class as a metaphor for vocation and calling. Specifically, I teach that *leaders do not have followers; they have people entrusted to their care. To be a leader is to have a people entrusted to your care*. Everything else we say about innovation assumes that fundamental reframing. You can find the video at: [www.**youtube**.com/watch?v=wtFYP4t9TG0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtFYP4t9TG0)

Thank you and I look forward to seeing you in Chicago,

Scott Cormode

**Christian Innovation:**

**How do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on**

**continuity with the past and fidelity with tradition?**

Scott Cormode

Paper Presented to the Academy of Religious Leadership (ARL)

April 2015

An academic paper begins with a problem and a thesis. The problem is usually defined as a gap in the scholarly literature and the thesis summarizes the argument that the paper will use to fill that scholarly gap. This paper will employ a different structure. It will indeed start with a problem, but one that resonates beyond the bounds of the academic literature. It begins with a problem that the Christian church in America experiences, one that will require an innovative response. And then, instead of presenting a summarizing thesis at the beginning of the paper, the paper will build toward a conclusion by explaining the vocabulary we will need to construct our response.

The description for the problem that the paper will address comes from a particularly reputable source. Perhaps the most level-headed scholar of American religion is the Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow. He writes carefully researched studies with long “methodological notes” explained in detailed appendices. Such scholarship is designed never to say more than the data can support. Indeed as a sociologist, he has been clear that his work is descriptive, but not prescriptive. That is, he will say what is happening, but he will not tell people what to do about it. In the last twenty years, he has written twenty meticulously researched books in this detached, descriptive style.[[1]](#footnote-1)

So it came as quite a surprise when Wuthnow titled a book, “The Crisis in the Churches.” He admits he wrote the book “reluctantly.” But his reluctance was not about calling the problem a crisis. Anyone who has looked at simple statistics over the last fifty years can see that, by every measure we can muster, the strength of Christian practice in America has waned significantly.[[2]](#footnote-2) Wuthnow’s reluctance comes in having to name the source of the problem. He argues that the root of the problem lies with the clergy (and by extension, the seminaries who train them) – and especially with the topics they choose to address when they speak to their people. This is both a spiritual crisis and a leadership crisis. It is “a spiritual crisis,” Wuthnow says, “because it derives from the very soul of the church.”[[3]](#footnote-3) It is a leadership crisis because it is ultimately about how clergy lead God’s People. The church’s leaders are paying attention to the wrong issues. They have allowed themselves to be distracted.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The heart of Wuthnow’s indictment is this: Christian leaders do not focus on the issues that matter most in the everyday lives of their congregants but, instead, they talk about culture wars and minute distinctions of doctrine. “Clergy,” Wuthnow argues, “must preserve the sacred teachings of their traditions [by] making them relevant to the strenuous, pressure-filled lives that most of their middle-class parishioners lead.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Wuthnow describes how he and his graduate students interviewed Christians from all over the country. They asked them about their families and their work, their health and their finances. They listened for the things that mattered most in people’s lives. And then they heard a sad comment from these people. The researchers – strangers only visiting the area – now knew more about the people’s lives than their pastors and their congregations did. No one from the church ever asked the congregants about their “strenuous, pressure-filled lives.” The clergy[[6]](#footnote-6) spent more time talking than listening; and when they talked, the churches talked about arcane things that never influenced how people lived and worked each day.[[7]](#footnote-7) And that led to the crisis, a crisis that demanded a systemic response. But the system of churches and seminaries has done little to respond.[[8]](#footnote-8) We have not responded, I believe, because we do not know what to do. The problem resonates; we recognize ourselves in Wuthnow’s indictment. But the problem overwhelms us; we do not know how a single actor can change the whole system.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The problem I intend to address in this paper is the crisis Wuthnow defined. It is a crisis phrased in the negative in that it tells us what we are not doing – i.e. American Christianity on the whole does not speak to the issues that Americans experience in everyday life; we are speaking to the wrong issues. But it does not tell us what we should be doing; it does not say which issues require an innovative response.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Thus, (an abridged) Section I of the paper will describe the*goal of innovation*. That will allow the rest of the paper to take up the *process of innovation*, specifically: **How do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on continuity with the past and fidelity with tradition?**

**Section I: The Goal of Christian Innovation**

When Peter Drucker wanted to re-cast the work of business, he created what became five questions that every enterprise needed to answer.[[11]](#footnote-11) Drucker thought that if an organization could answer these questions, then the organization could sufficiently explain its mission so that it could focus its work. The questions function both as the goal and as the guiding steps to achieving the goal.

At the end of this section, this paper will propose five companion questions designed to give Christians and Christian organizations the parameters for innovation, specifically the kind of innovation that will address Wuthnow’s Crisis. The questions will name both the goal to which we strive and the next steps we can take toward reaching that goal.

The Drucker Questions have been established as a common shorthand for keeping an organization on task. Any enterprise should be able to ask two people in the organization these questions and get similar answers. The questions have become famous enough that they have taken on a life of their own. They show up not only in academic articles, magazine pieces, and blog posts. They are also written on T-shirts, coffee mugs, and irreverent posters. The Drucker questions are:

1. What is your organization’s mission?[[12]](#footnote-12)
2. Who is your customer?
3. What does your customer consider value?
4. What results will your customer use to measure your performance?[[13]](#footnote-13)
5. What is your plan for providing your customer with value?

The questions follow a progression.[[14]](#footnote-14) They ask the organization to pick a purpose and then they focus the organization on the people outside the organization (i.e. the customers) who will determine how the organization goes about pursuing that purpose. The progression is a remedy to the inward focus that tempts an organization. The questions push the organization to think outside itself. It is a remarkably Christian perspective. Your organization does not exist for itself, Drucker says; it exists to serve others. And you will be measured as an organization not by your own opinions and experiences, but by the degree to which those others see you as serving them.[[15]](#footnote-15)

These questions were, however, created for businesses. And they assume a “customer” who will pay a fee in exchange for a product or service. We need a different set of questions because producing a profit is not our goal as Christians; we do not need to know what the market will bear. We do, on the other hand, ask how we can serve. So the questions provide a starting point. Our goal will be to create a set of questions that are similar to the Drucker Questions but can guide Christians and Christian organizations in their pursuit of God’s purposes.

<At this point, I have removed twenty pages of argument constructing the categories necessary to build a Christian analog to the Drucker Questions. I will simply list those questions here and add the little bit of commentary necessary for the questions to make sense. Ultimately, Sections I & II should be separate papers. We might call this analog, The Ambassador Questions in honor of II Corinthians 5:20>

**The Ambassador Questions**

The purpose of the Ambassador Questions is to provide a framework for constructing a response to Wuthnow’s Crisis. The response will require innovation. But innovation requires a goal – a telos toward which to march, one that is more specific than telling ourselves we need to respond to a crisis. For example, the Google corporation decided to expand its work beyond simple Internet searches. But it had to decide which projects were central to their work of innovation and which ones were considered peripheral.[[16]](#footnote-16) The company settled on a single phrase that guided each decision, “Focus on the user.”[[17]](#footnote-17) For an example of their commitment to focus on the user, two Google executives (Schmidt and Rosenberg) describe Google’s purchase of a company called Keyhole, simply because Keyhole had figured out how to visualize maps in a way that Google thought its users might like. They did not have a plan. They simply purchased a sapling and turned it over their employees, hoping they would cultivate it into a tree. Eight months later Google used that technology to launch GoogleEarth, an innovation that made the company millions of dollars. Without the emphasis on the user, Keyhole would have remained an interesting piece of software that never found an audience. Google’s goal for innovation is to focus on the user.[[18]](#footnote-18) In the same way, Greg Jones of Duke Divinity School argues, “In our thinking as well as our living, we are oriented toward our end, our telos: bearing witness to the reign of God. That is what compels innovation.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

This is, of course, Wuthnow’s main point. All that we do in the church needs to be grounded in the lived experience of the people entrusted to our care. And each Christian has to find a way to do more than talk about Jesus. We have to talk to people about Jesus so that our people see how the gospel changes the way that they experience the things that keep them awake at night. That is what it means to bear witness to the reign of God and what it means to be an ambassador – one who represents Jesus to the world.

The Ambassador Questions can thus guide a Christian in the same way that “Focus on the user” guides Google. They provide the end to which innovation aims. Thus, the questions can apply to a Christian organization like a congregation, a mission agency, or an aid organization. And they can just as easily aid an individual Christian attempting to map out the next steps in her vocation. Here are the questions:

Ambassador Questions

1. **Who are the people entrusted to your care?**

* I do not believe in leaders and followers. Every leader, instead, is defined by her relationship with the people entrusted to her care.
* This changes our understanding of vocation. A vocation is not about my gifts. To have a vocation is to have a people entrusted to your care. Then we do all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of that people.

1. **How do those people experience the longings and losses that make up the human condition?**

* The human condition refers to the wonderful and terrible things that all humans experience. I summarize those things as “longings and losses.”

1. **How do those people experience role conflict as they try to reconcile the longings and losses associated with each of their roles?**

* Contemporary life requires people to navigate multiple social roles (e.g. I am a father, a Christian, and a professor).
* The demands of these roles often become competing commitments in that what one role requires interferes with what the other roles require.

1. **What big lies reveal the inadequate mental models our people believe about how to deal with the human condition?**

* People often try to cope with the human condition by believing a Big Lie.
* For example, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement recognized that the Big Lie at the heart of Jim Crow was: some lives are worth more than others.
* Pastor Aaron Graham in Washington, DC, recognized that the young government workers entrusted to his care believed the Big Lie that said, as he put it, “You can change the world apart from community.”

1. **What shared stories of Christian hope make spiritual sense of the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care?**

* I define vision as a “shared story of future hope.”

**Section II: The Process of Christian Innovation**

In the first section, **we established the goal of innovation. We must make spiritual sense of the human condition as experienced by the people entrusted to our care.** We know from Wuthnow that the current construction of Christianity in America does not do a good job making spiritual sense of the things that keep people awake at night. So we know that responding to the crisis that Wuthnow described will require something qualitatively different. It will require innovation.[[20]](#footnote-20)

But there is a problem. Most of the literature on innovation assumes that the best innovations will tear down the past and replace it with something better – in the way that cell phones have eliminated the need for pay phones and phone booths. But we Christians cannot distain the past. We are bound to the past. Let me give a quick example (we will return to it later). Let’s say I am a youth minister and the people entrusted to my care are teenagers. And let’s say that I am listening to a wonderful teenage girl talk about how she experiences the longings and losses of adolescence – one of which is that she, like many teens, feels isolated, unloved and perhaps even unlovable. And let’s say at some point I say to her, “Jesus loves you so much that he died for your sins.” I am introducing her to a shared story of future hope. The story says that part of what she is feeling is that she is becoming aware of her own sin and concluding that it makes her unlovable. But the story further says that God, in his great love for her, sent his Son to live and die as one of us in order that she might be connected to God and to other people. That is a shared story of future hope. But what happens if it does not sound to her like a shared story of future hope? Perhaps she says that death seems awful harsh and then she asks, “Can’t we talk about Jesus without talking about death?” And that is the moment that we Christians experience the constraints that the past places on our abilities to innovate. If we were secular entrepreneurs, we would listen to our customers and innovate a new gospel that no longer has to talk about death. But we cannot do that. We are permanently, inextricably (and happily) tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We cannot innovate a new gospel. Wuthnow tells us that we are in crisis because we don’t listen to people talk about their isolation and pain, and when we do, we tell them the old story in old ways – ways that do not touch their daily experience. It is true we cannot innovate a new gospel, but we can innovate a new way to connect that unchanging gospel to the people entrusted to our care. And that leads to the paper’s central question.

**How do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on continuity with the past and fidelity to tradition?** None of us gets to invent the Christian faith. We receive it – both from God and from those who came before us. We are tethered to the Bible as the authoritative witness to Jesus Christ. And we are bound by the theological reflections of the historic Christian church.[[21]](#footnote-21)

I need to say a bit more about the role of tradition, lest you get the wrong idea. Every Christian organization is deeply dependent on the inherited Christian tradition. No Christian, for example, invents practices like prayer. We receive them. And no matter where we stand along the denominational spectrum, we expect that the future of the faith will look something like its past. For example, we will continue to worship the God revealed in Jesus Christ, just as Christians have for centuries. But, as the theologian Gregory Jones points out, “Tradition is fundamentally different from traditionalism.” He quotes the Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” [[22]](#footnote-22) And, while we all know at some level that the experience of Christianity has changed over the centuries (e.g. there are few current congregations that sing Gregorian chants), our tendency is to freeze or calcify the present. We tend to believe that the current is better than the past and that the future should look about like the present. All this makes new ideas look suspect.

There is, however, a deeper problem. The organizations that represent Christianity – the congregations, seminaries, and parachurches – are calibrated to express the current constructions of Christianity. Think of the organizational structure of a congregation, for instance. In the stereotypic American situation, there is a pastor and perhaps a part-time youth director and music director, supported by maybe an even-more-part-time church secretary. This presumes that the work of the congregation is having a youth group and putting on a worship service. The youth group requires a youth minister. And the worship service requires a sermon from the pastor, songs from the music director, and a bulletin from the secretary. These are self-replicating positions (i.e. if one of them left, we would hire another). And it tends to freeze the way that we do ministry. The organization we have is the organization we need for how we currently do things. If we want to do something different, we have the wrong positions. The way we do things is calibrated to support the status quo and to resist change.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Secular organizations likewise are calibrated to express their current goals, creating a similar problem when they attempt to innovate. “Managers who are skilled at executing clearly defined strategies are ill equipped for out-of-the-box thinking” says a recent HBR article, “because the company is organized to support one way of business and doesn’t have the processes or metrics to support a new one.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Esteemed management author John Kotter recognized this problem as well. Thriving companies, he observed, are “optimized for efficiency rather than for strategic agility.” [[25]](#footnote-25) This is why managers need to test embedded assumptions.[[26]](#footnote-26) “Conventional [management] approaches do not apply” to innovation[[27]](#footnote-27) because “innovation and ongoing operations are always and inevitably in conflict.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Organizations are calibrated to express what they currently do rather than to pivot to something better.

We are, in this way, trapped by past successes and past mental models.[[29]](#footnote-29) We feel obligated to stay connected to a past that is constructed for a world that no longer exists.[[30]](#footnote-30) This is at the heart of the crisis that Wuthnow named. Christians in the past could assume a condition we have called Christendom – where the secular society reinforces the Christian church. But Christendom fell apart starting in the 1960s, which of course coincides with the decline that Wuthnow names. We have to innovate because we can no longer rely on Christendom. But our contemporary mental models – and the organizations that express them – still assume this world that no longer exists.

Christendom is different from the Christian tradition. The Christian tradition defines the way things should be. Christendom defines the way things have been. The Christian tradition says we worship the God revealed in Christ through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Christendom says we express that worship by going to a service on a Sunday morning that has hymns, a sermon, and an offering. We get in trouble when we conflate worship with our expressions of worship. Our problem is that we often confuse the way things are with the way things should be. In our efforts to protect the unchanging Christian tradition, we often defend the changeable expressions of that tradition. We tend to protect the old things whether they are part of the unchangeable tradition or not.

All this is a problem because our organizational culture is designed to do the opposite of what innovation requires. Our culture is calibrated to protect the old when, as Ed Catmull points out, innovation requires an organizational “culture that protects the new.” Catmull has been the head of Pixar from the beginning.[[31]](#footnote-31) He tells the poignant story of how Brad Bird, the writer and director of the movie *Ratatouille*, inserted into the movie an expression of his own struggles to express innovative ideas in a movie industry often bound by rigid mental models about how things should be. The movie is about a rat who decides to become a chef, which of course defies our mental models. And, at the end of the movie, a food critic named Anton Ego comes for a meal, expecting to look down his nose at the tradition-defying restaurant. The appropriately-named Ego writes a review then serves as a commentary on the restaurant, but also on the struggles of innovators and artists. The experience, Ego says, “challenged my preconceptions [and] rocked me to the core” because the role of the critic is to enforce the standards and to uphold tradition. Ego decides to stick his neck out. “The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations,” he observes. But he will take his stand with this innovation because, as he concludes, “The new needs friends.”[[32]](#footnote-32) How then do we become friends of the new without giving up our family ties to tradition? Or, as Gregory Jones concludes, “People who bear a tradition are called to be relentlessly innovative in ways that preserve the life-giving character of the tradition.”[[33]](#footnote-33) That is our central purpose.

**The goal of this paper is to describe a way to maintain a rock-solid commitment to the unchanging Christian faith, while at the same time cultivating innovative ways to express that faith**.

The remainder of the paper describes how to pursue that innovation. It will have three parts. The first, a short one titled “Ideas are like saplings” dispels the myths that people carry about innovation and establishes in their place the notion that ideas are like saplings in that many small ones are better than one big one. The second – longer – part describes how to organize for innovation. And, the third part specifically addresses the problem of innovation that honors tradition.

**1. Ideas are like Saplings**

There is a giant redwood tree in my grandmother’s tiny backyard. Towering sixty feet tall, it has no business in a suburban neighborhood. There is, of course, a story. In the 1920s, when a man named Lester owned the place, he went to visit the Sequoias. And there he discovered a redwood seedling. He carried it home in a coffee can and transplanted it in his yard. He watered it for many years while it struggled to put down roots. And then, when those roots hit the water table, the tree shot up until it became the tallest tree in the valley. Lester’s redwood is a metaphor for innovation, at least that is what the stereotype would tell you. But the stereotype is wrong. The standard story is that a lone genius – like Lester – discovers one big idea. It starts as a tiny seed. He nurtures it through hard times until it becomes a towering achievement. But all the research says that Lester’s brand of innovation is a myth.

The Redwood Myth of innovation is a myth made up of many myths. There is the myth of the lone genius, epitomized by Thomas Edison working in his attic. But Walter Isaacson has shown that most of these “lone geniuses” are really embedded in communities of laborers. Edison, for example, created a team of engineers working side by side. As one scholar put it, the team created the innovations, and Edison created the team.[[34]](#footnote-34) He created a community of people all working together to turn out innovations. Then there is the myth of the visionary leader, the person who rallies a people around an idea just as Lester picked up that little sprig in Sequoia. But, as Linda Hill and her team found, “leading innovation cannot be about creating and selling a vision.”[[35]](#footnote-35) And finally there is the myth of the Eureka moment.[[36]](#footnote-36) The patron saint of the Eureka moment might be Albert Einstein, working with just his intuition, isolated in his lonely Swiss patent office. But Einstein himself debunked the myth. “Intuition is nothing,” he said, “but the outcome of earlier intellectual experience” and interaction with the ideas of others.[[37]](#footnote-37) Isaacson summarizes it this way. “An invention,” he says, “usually comes not from an individual brainstorm but from a collaboratively woven tapestry of creativity.” For “only in storybooks do inventions come like a thunderbolt, or a light bulb popping out of the head of a lone individual in a basement or garret or garage.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Ideas are not like a lone redwood tree.

But there is something important about that Redwood Myth. It emphasizes that ideas grow. They start small and vulnerable. They need care – and the right environment. The problem comes in thinking that one tree stands alone.[[39]](#footnote-39) I would like to offer an alternative to the Redwood Myth.

Ideas are like saplings; you never grow them alone. If you are a farmer who wants to raise trees for sale, you do not grow one tree and hope it gets to be big. You plant rows of saplings. Some of the trees will die out – as the parable goes. But from those rows you know you will get some excellent adults.[[40]](#footnote-40)

*Ideas are like saplings; you grow them in numbers. The currency of innovation is new ideas, not great ones. Contrary to conventional wisdom, nineteen little ideas are better than one big idea. And the hallmark of an innovative organization is regularly generating lots of new ideas.*

Ideas are like saplings; you cannot know which one will grow into being a great idea. The innovation literature regularly repeats this, usually quoting Thomas Edison, who said, “To have a good idea, have a lot of them.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Edison built his lab around this idea of saplings – or what Edison called “the rapid and cheap development of an invention” by creating “a minor invention every ten days and a big thing every six months or so.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Or, as another scholar put it, innovation only comes from “a portfolio of ideas.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

Ideas are like saplings; you measure them in quantity not quality. Because we cannot know which saplings will grow into great redwoods and we cannot wait to evaluate our work until the ideas have grown, we measure innovation in numbers not size – just as Edison did. He measured innovation in ideas generated per week – or in saplings planted. He trusted that the right nurture would turn those saplings into trees and that some of those trees would become towering inventions.[[44]](#footnote-44)

But that prompts the obvious question of how to “nurture” ideas so that they take root.[[45]](#footnote-45) Google, for example, draws on the work of Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, who described the need for a systematic process of “branching and pruning.” What Google means by that phrase is “trying a lot of stuff and keeping what works.”[[46]](#footnote-46) You do not put all your energy into one seed, but instead nurture many ideas until you see which ones will bear fruit. Ideas are like saplings.

Christian organizations tend to do the opposite: they try one big (expensive and loud) plan. And when it does not take immediate root, they complain and abandon the project – having learned the lesson that such innovations do not work.

The rest of the paper is divided into two longer sections. It takes the primary question of the paper and separates it into parts. The primary question is, of course, **How do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on continuity with the past and fidelity with tradition?** That breaks down into two questions. **How do we pursue innovation? And, how do we do it in a way that honors the past?** The next section – titled, “Organizing for Innovation” – describes how to pursue innovation. But, as we will see, most of the literature on innovation assumes that the best way to pursue innovation is to break with the past. Once we have described how to pursue innovation, the rest of the paper will explain how to do it without abandoning the Christian tradition.

**2. Organizing for Innovation**

There is another way that the “ideas are like saplings” metaphor helps us. Just as in agriculture, innovation requires the right environment to thrive. The soil is as important as the seed.[[47]](#footnote-47) And most Christian organizations, as we have seen, are calibrated to nourish what already exists. They are not calibrated to be rich soil for fragile seeds – or to be a friend of the new. Leaders do not innovate. Instead, “a leader of innovation creates a place – a context, an environment – where people…do the hard work that innovative problem solving requires.”[[48]](#footnote-48) The environment the leader creates is called the organizational culture.

There has been a lot of good scholarship recently focused on how to create an organization where innovation blossoms. This portion of the paper will describe the characteristics of such an organization and talk about how to lead one. There are any number of ways of presenting the themes that appear in these studies. This paper will follow the contours Linda Hill and her team use to describe organizations that create what she calls “collective genius.”[[49]](#footnote-49) She identifies five characteristics of innovative organizations. We will look at each of these five in turn. They are:

(a) an identity-creating purpose,

(b) communally-shared values,

(c) diversity-rich collaboration,

(d) discovery-driven learning, and

(e) integrative decision-making.[[50]](#footnote-50)

1. **Identity-Creating Purpose**

An innovative organization cannot perform innovation as one of its tasks, as if it were one of many things on a checklist. It must exist for a purpose that demands innovating. Innovating is itself not enough of a purpose. There must be an end-goal for its innovation. For Google, that end-goal is the user. The goal is not innovating for the sake of innovating; it is innovating for the sake of the user. This idea of purpose must be so strong that it becomes the organization’s identity. Or, as Hill’s team put it, “Purpose is not what a group does but who it is and why it exists.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

This need for an identity-defining purpose is why we devoted Section I of the paper to constructing a clear idea of *telos*, of purpose, of vocation. The calling of any Christian or any Christian organization is to make spiritual sense of the human condition as experienced by the people entrusted to their care. The people entrusted to our care define us. We exist to serve them and to demonstrate for them how God in Christ responds to their longings and losses. Innovation is necessary because the church has not in recent years been able to respond to the human condition of the people entrusted to its care. Whenever we as Christians get lost or confused, whenever we want to evaluate the merits of new ideas, whenever we need to set priorities, we can go back to listening to the people entrusted to our care. Where those people do not hear the gospel as God’s response to their longings and losses, we must innovate. And since we cannot innovate a new gospel, we must innovate a better way to communicate that gospel message. We do not exist for ourselves. We serve God by serving them.[[52]](#footnote-52) To respond to the Wuthnow Crisis, an organization must exist for the purpose of innovating new ways to respond to the human condition of the people entrusted to its care.

1. **Communally-Shared Values**

Another part of the environment where innovation thrives involves values. These values structure the way that the organization constructs its incentives and disincentives. Because most organizations are calibrated to extend the world that already exists, they build their reward structure around the standards of the current configuration. For example, Carl is an executive with a mission agency. He determined that the organization’s ongoing work in an important region of Africa was never going to accomplish the goals the organization had set because the society had changed too much. He pioneered and tested a set of new ideas. And then he got permission from his organization to devote one-half of his work time to creating experiments to see if the organization would be able to implement the ideas at scale. It was going very well. Unfortunately, the evaluation process of the organization did not have room for such work. At his year-end review, the categories for assessment all reflected the part of his job that had nothing to do with the innovation; the evaluation did not ask about the work he was doing in innovation because it was not in his job description. And because he was only supposed to be working on that portion of his job half of the time, it looked on paper like he was only doing half a job. Only through the intervention of an executive-level champion was he able to continue the work. The values[[53]](#footnote-53) of the system were aligned with the work that the organization was already doing and did not know how to account for innovative work.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This is why innovative organizations require a commitment, as Hill discovered, to values such as “bold ambition,” “responsibility to the community,” “collaboration,” and “learning.” Each of these values assumes that the people in the organization are collaborating to do something great, even though that great thing is not something that the organization as yet fully understands. And each of these values is calibrated for ambiguity. Most organizations are constructed to reward the person who puts her head down and works each day to do what her job description says is her job. These are not. Look, for example, at “responsibility to community.” In my job as a professor, I can teach and write without any real interaction with my colleagues. And I will be rewarded for doing my job. That will not work in an innovative organization. Innovation requires shared values, especially values aligned with the collaborative pursuit of a bold but amorphous problem.[[55]](#footnote-55)

1. **Diversity-Rich Collaboration**

“Innovation usually emerges when a diverse people collaborate to generate a wide-ranging portfolio of ideas.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Diversity is necessary because it takes many and varied nutrients to feed innovation. For example, the Kelley brothers of IDEO and the Stanford d.school talk about how a person who wants to become creative needs to “get outside what you know” in order to see the world from a different point of view.[[57]](#footnote-57) They regularly put their students in diverse groups and then take those groups to visit well-known settings to see them from unexpected perspectives. Likewise, Birkinshaw talks about how it is important not just to hire people like yourself but to “bring in outsiders” who see the world differently from you.[[58]](#footnote-58)

The respected Stanford scholar Kathleen Eisenhardt explains why diversity is so important to innovation. She explains that innovation rarely happens by following the logical next step in a line of thinking. “Innovation is the result of synthesizing, or bridging, ideas from different domains” --- calling it “the result of simultaneously thinking in multiple boxes.”[[59]](#footnote-59) If we see innovation as being about one person doing all the work, then it becomes very difficult for that person to master many different domains of experience. But if we see innovation as residing in the group or organization, then it is easy to see how a diverse group has access to more domains of experience. Innovation depends on diversity.

That means, of course, that fragmentation (or an organizational structure that has siloes) is the enemy of innovation. Many of our Christian organizations have siloed structures. In, say, a religious nonprofit perhaps the soup kitchen is separate from the outreach ministry. Or, in a congregation, the youth group is isolated from the other ministries. Or, in a seminary, the departments operate independent of each other.[[60]](#footnote-60) There is a perspective that says that the best way to honor diversity is to give each group its own silo. But scholars have shown that this cannot work in the long run.[[61]](#footnote-61) Diversity is good for an organization, but only when the diverse peoples collaborate.

At this point, we have briefly explored three characteristics of organizations that promote innovation: (a) identity-defining purpose, (b) communally-shared values, and (c) diversity-rich collaboration. These can apply to any kind of organization. But our goal is to apply them to Christian organizations, which need to be inherently conservative on belief and inherently innovative on the strategic implications of belief (particularly for how those beliefs address the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care). There are two more characteristics, and describing them will require a little more space than we used for the first three – and perhaps a couple of unifying examples.

1. **Experiment-Driven Learning**

These characteristics can apply to any organization interested in innovation. But our goal is to apply them to Christian organizations, especially Christian organizations interested in innovating a response to the crisis Wuthnow described. And we know a few things about what kind of innovation this will require, things that can help us focus our discussion of the remaining characteristics of innovative organizations. We know from Wuthnow that any Christian innovation must not only maintain fidelity with the Christian tradition, but that innovation must also resonate with the experience of the people entrusted to our care. And at the same time, we know one more thing. We know that our innovations will not come as devices or products (like an iPhone), but will come as interpretations and meaning (such as we described in Section I when Graham’s congregation in Washington, DC, responded to the Big Lie that “You can change the world without community.”). In fact, they will likely come as stories that make spiritual meaning. So we will use the following discussion not only to explain the fourth and fifth characteristics of innovative organizations. We will also use them to show examples of, first, how one organization (Google) ensures that its innovations resonate with its people, and, second, how another organization (Pixar) uses stories to make meaning.

Google did not start out as an innovative environment. It started out as Lester’s Redwood, a single big idea – in this case, a radically different way to search the Internet. But soon thereafter, the founders realized that their future depended on expanding around multiple ideas. So they started planting many saplings – small ideas that they hoped would someday grow into big initiatives.

Google has its own way of implementing the three characteristics we have seen so far (purpose, values, and diversity). For purpose, Google has a simple goal. “Our prime directive when it comes to product strategy,” Google says, “is to focus on the user.” The goal is not necessarily to make money. “We will always focus on the user, and we trust that our smart creative [employees] will figure out how to make money off of it.” For an example of their commitment to follow the user, Schmidt and Rosenberg describe their purchase of a company called Keyhole, simply because Keyhole had figured out how to visualize maps in a way that Google thought users might like. They did not have a plan. They simply purchase a sapling and turned it over their employees. Eight months later Google used that technology to launch GoogleEarth, an innovation that made the company millions of dollars. Google focuses on the user.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Google is also very clear on its values. It looks for very specific traits in its employees – and refers to those employees either as Googlers or “smart creatives.” The values that Google puts in place are designed to maximize the innovative capacity of these smart creatives. The values include “trust,” a “culture of Yes,” “humor and fun,” and the famous phrase “don’t be evil.” This commitment to “don’t be evil” is a way that the organization plants a vocabulary that allows Googlers to argue over what is right and what is wrong. The executives at Google describe the phrase as like being the “Emergency Stop” cord on a Toyota assembly line. When an engineer protests that a new feature would be evil, he is “pulling to cord to stop production, forcing everyone to assess the proposed feature and determine if it is consistent with the company’s values.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Those values make for a better user experience.

The same goes for diversity. “A multiplicity of viewpoints – aka diversity – is your best defense against myopia,” the Google managers say. “People from different backgrounds see the world differently” and “these differences of perspective generate insights that can’t be taught.” The goal remains innovating the best user experience. And a diversity of perspectives working collaboratively is, Google believes, the best means to that end. So we can see how Google illustrates the first three characteristics we have discussed about innovative organizations. Let us move on to the fourth one: experiment-based learning.

Google has constructed its management practices around experimentation. “To innovate, you must learn to fail well,” say Google executives Schmidt and Rosenberg. “Learn from your mistakes…Morph ideas don’t kill them…Don’t stigmatize the team that failed.” To “fail well,” you must “fail quickly, but with a very long time horizon” (i.e. take the time to go through many cycles of experimental learning). All this rapid failing is necessary because innovation is an iterative process. “The key” to innovation, they say, “is to iterate quickly and to establish metrics that help you judge” how to take your next steps.[[64]](#footnote-64) They emphasize that innovation is a cycle; it’s not a linear process. Each experiment leads to a new experiment. And each idea builds on what you learned from your last experiment. This calls to mind a favorite phrase from my dissertation advisors, “There is no such thing as good writing, only good re-writing.” There is not such thing as good innovation, only good re-innovation. Innovation requires cycles of experimentation.[[65]](#footnote-65)

There are a number of characteristics about experimentation that we can observe from Google’s experience.

First, experimentation involves failure. When we think of “learning by discovery” in the sciences, we picture physicists running experiments to discover, say, the secrets of the atom. We recognize that they follow a “scientific method” that involves incremental learning. But, more importantly, we recognize that “successful” experiments are usually the end-result of many cycles of “failed” experiments, or experiments that move step-by-painful-step toward “success.” In the sciences, we do not judge a project after the first experiment. We see the initial experiment as the first foray into uncharted territory. Thomas Edison connects this idea to innovation. He reportedly said that before he invented the light bulb, he found many different ways not to make a light bulb.[[66]](#footnote-66) His point is that experimentation creates innovation. Without experimenting, there can be not breakthrough innovations. This is important because, as we shall see, we who lead Christian organizations have a very low tolerance for “failure.” We too quickly label things that do not work the first time as failures and we become inoculated to their ideas. It would be like judging each step on a journey a failure except the one that finally stepped through the door.

Innovation requires experimentation, experimentation requires a tolerance for failure, and a tolerance for failure requires a safe environment. The one “established idea” about innovation, Julian Birkinshaw of the London Business School has said, is that innovation happens only when organizations create “an environment where it is safe to experiment,” by which he means an environment “where it is possible to ‘pilot’ and ‘test’ ideas…before they are subjected to [management’s] stringent performance metrics.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Experiments are crucial because, as scholars have known since the 1990s, the biggest competitive advantage is the capacity to learn.[[68]](#footnote-68) “The key to success” is not being first to market or having the best idea, it “is learning quickly,” according to Govindarajan and Trimble. “The competitor that learns first generally wins.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Experiments are crucial, then, because we learn more from failure than from success.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Experimentation that leads to innovation is not linear. It is cyclical. One experiment generates learning that leads to another set of experiments and more learning. This cyclical nature of experimentation leads scholars of innovation to use a different metric for talking about experience. The Kelley brothers (of IDEO and Stanford) say that experience is measured in cycles of experiments not in years on the job. So, a twenty-two year old who has run one prototype a week for six months would have more experience in their mind than an executive who has been in the same job for twenty years. They quote the innovation scholar Diego Rodriguez, who uses the term “informed intuition,” which they take to mean that “relentless practice creates a database of experience that you can draw upon to make more enlightened choices.”[[71]](#footnote-71) This is particularly important in situations of significant ambiguity[[72]](#footnote-72) because “rapid innovation cycles” result in “reduced anxiety in the face of ambiguity.”[[73]](#footnote-73) (The idea, as we shall see in Section III, also has deep implications for how we need to change the education of innovative Christian leaders.)

This cycle of experimentation and learning means that success is often a matter of failing at an increasing level of competency. My wife and I learned this as we watched our toddlers grow. They were constantly failing at some new skill – tying their shoes, making their bed, learning the alphabet. But whatever they struggled to learn to today, they mastered by tomorrow. But then tomorrow they took on a new and more difficult skill. Learning the alphabet gave way to reading picture books, which in turn became reading chapter books – and so on. Mastering one skill only led to struggling with a new one. It is an important metaphor. Every organization has things that it does poorly today. But a successful organization has a trajectory of learning over time. The things we could not do last year, we take for granted this year. And that buys us the time to take on a new struggle this year. And so on. Every day Thomas Edison’s lab struggled with some experiment that was failing. And every day they kept working so that each of those failures eventually brought new knowledge. The best way to measure an innovative organization is to measure (a) ideas generated per week, and (b) the trajectory of time to see if what was a struggle yesterday is a cinch today. We fail our way forward.

This is particularly important if we are going to focus our innovation on responding to the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care. You can expect that “your initial expectations are wrong,”[[74]](#footnote-74) and use experiments to “test your beliefs”[[75]](#footnote-75) about the people entrusted to your care. Google’s work with “user experience”[[76]](#footnote-76) shows that people rarely receive a message in just the way you intended to send it. So even the most enlightened innovation will still require cycles of experimentation to ensure that the audience hears what the speaker intends.

And there is the rub. The audience will judge us by what they hear, not what we intend to say. And that leads to a high penalty for “failure.” Think, for example, of a youth ministry attempting to respond to the longings and losses of teens or a ministry to working adults responding to the big lie of compartmentalization. It is going to take time to get the message right. And, especially in this world of over-reacting websites, it is easy to lose credibility if we make our experiments too public.

One solution to this problem is to run experiments on the margins, which is the opposite of what we tend to do as Christian organizations. Usually we announce our intentions as big plans. For example, I have worked closely with the Fuller Youth Institute training churches that want to implement Sticky Faith,[[77]](#footnote-77) an innovative way of doing youth ministry. We teach the congregations to try experiments on the margins without fanfare. But many ministries pursue the opposite strategy. They announce a new program, give it a name, and perhaps a logo. They publicize it as if it were a finished product. And they lose credibility when the first experiment is a successful first step but not a finished product. They invite people to watch them make their rookie mistakes. Let me offer an analogy to show why this is a bad strategy. I taught my daughter to drive by taking her to the church parking lot on a quiet afternoon to practice simple maneuvers. But let’s say that my daughter was really nervous about learning to drive. So I decided to get her some support. Let’s say I built a grandstand in the church parking lot and invited all her friends and family, her youth group and her grandparents. And they all sat in the grandstand cheering her on while she fumbled through her first attempts to drive. Would she experience that as support or pressure? Of course, it would just make it harder to learn. Every mistake is magnified by the attention. It no longer becomes a safe place to experiment – the cost of failing forward is too high. But that’s what religious organizations do when they announce big plans and make big promises about innovative programs. Experiments need to be in the quiet shadows so that they have room to fail their way to building success.

Instead of a grand announcement with a logo, youth ministries could try experiments that incorporate new ideas into what look like the ongoing work of the youth ministry. Use a portion of the singing time to do something a little different; try a new way of teaching; incorporate a new idea into a weekly small group; or take a portion of the annual mission trip to do something new. All these experiments come under the cover of what looks like ongoing programs. No one outside the leadership team needs to know that they are experiments. Stealth experiments reduce the cost of failing our way forward.[[78]](#footnote-78)

But we have to be careful not to think that once we finally create a new program that we are done learning. There is lots of experimentation that goes into creating a new program. But there is also a lot of learning that happens once we create the new program. Because the measure of success for our programs is the degree to which they resonate with the people entrusted to our care, we cannot know how successful they will be until we have seen how our people receive them.

This is how innovative organizations like Google operate. Google intentionally releases new products to their users before the products have all the small details set. (They do lots of beta testing first; but they know that the product cannot be completed until the people have worked with it.) Google does this in the name of the user. They know that they will never be able to anticipate fully how a user will want to use a product. So they release the product before the concrete has hardened, as it were, so that they can easily adapt the product to the feedback that Google assiduously collects. They call the process “ship and iterate.”[[79]](#footnote-79) The important idea here is that Google cannot follow the artist’s process of prototyping because Google measures its purpose according to its audience’s reception. In the humanities, we know that the audience will make its own interpretation. But that is not the artist’s problem. The artist creates what she wants to express – and her process is not really connected to how the audience receives it. Google cannot do that. Its entire goal is to connect to its audience. So a product that excites Google will be discontinued if it does not connect to the audience. At Google, innovation is an iterative conversation with its users.

There is another example of how to follow the people entrusted to your care. Think of a school district that builds a new high school. A person would think that the district is not ready to open the school until, say, the sidewalks of the school have been paved. But in the last decades, I am told that architects and builders have followed a different course. They put up the buildings. And then they open the school without paving all the sidewalks that connect the buildings. Then they see where the students walk. And that is where they eventually lay the sidewalks. You see, the builders got tired of guessing wrong. They would make a plan for where the students should walk and then lay the new sidewalks according to the plans. And then in the first year, they would watch in dismay as the students walked on the grass between buildings. Now, the builders wait to see where the students will walk. And that is where they put the sidewalks. It is a wonderful metaphor. As Christian leaders, we cannot change the buildings we construct. Every high school needs a Chemistry lab and history classroom. And every Christian program has to talk about the resurrection of Jesus and the call to daily discipleship. Those are set in concrete. But how we connect them – the pathways between them – are not yet paved. We need to work with our people as we decide where the sidewalks should go.

That is why, in Christian organizations, innovation must be an iterative conversation with the people entrusted to our care. We have to measure the degree to which our efforts scratch the itch of our people’s longings and losses. This is the essence of Wuthnow’s finding. The source of the crisis in the churches is not a lack of effort; we are producing sermons and services every week. It is a lack of connection. Google only continues efforts that land with people. We regularly speak without listening for the reaction. I have said, in other contexts, that “vision must emanate from the leader, but it is not a vision unless it resonates with the people. That is what it means to say that vision is a *shared* story of future hope.” Wuthnow’s indictment is that we speak without adjusting our message to the needs of the people entrusted to our care. Innovation must be an iterative conversation that resonates with our people.

But there is a problem here, one that Google does not face. When Google created a new email platform called GoogleWave and it fell on its face, Google quietly discontinued it and moved on.[[80]](#footnote-80) Google did not lose any credibility (although some pundits poked fun at them). We who represent Jesus often face a higher standard from our people. If someone disagrees with the way that I construct an article or with something I say in a sermon, then it can easily get constructed as “heresy” and blown out of proportion – especially in this Internet Age.[[81]](#footnote-81) We have little public room to fail our way to getting it right. For example, I found that my students were having a hard time understanding that baptism is a communal event, not just an individual exchange with God. So I once wrote a piece on baptism that turned out to have a significant flaw in it. It was never published; I just used it with my students. But one of my colleagues (at another school) read it and pointed out the flaw. She was very agitated. I listened to her and told her that I thought she was right. There was an implication of my idea that I had not considered (the image I used carried a connotation for her that it did not carry for me). So I thanked her for teaching me something, and I told her that I would no longer express it that way. I thought that is how scholars should work together. But she had a hard time letting it go. She told me months later that I had lost a great deal of credibility in her eyes for even thinking such a thought. I was trying to find a new way to express an old doctrine because it was not reaching this generation. And she thought that I should simply have accepted that the old way was the best way and then done a better job demanding that this generation conform to the old ways of speaking. The traditional formulation had stood the test of time. It was the product of years of debate. And anyone who deviated from that traditional language was suspect.

Can you see the problem? Google measures effectiveness by the degree to which a product resonates with an audience. We in the church measure effectiveness by the degree to which it conforms to past formulations. If something does not reach a people, we foolishly assume that there is something wrong with the people. But that is the whole point of the gospel. There is indeed something wrong with the people entrusted to our care; all of us are tainted by sin. But God in Christ chose to reach across the divide that separates us. That is the point of II Corinthians 5. That is why we are called to be ambassadors – to be the ones who cross the divide in order to be ministers of reconciliation. We have to measure our effectiveness like Google measures effectiveness. It is not enough to have a beautiful doctrine that conforms to all the standards of orthodoxy. (We do indeed have to do that, but it is not enough; we cannot stop there.) We also have to find a way to express our beautiful doctrine in a way that resonates with the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care.

Perhaps it might help to have a simple process to follow when trying out ideas. Start with an idea, and then create what inventers call a “proof of concept.” Build something small that shows how the idea would work. Then try it out on a small scale, far from the public eye. Then if that works, expand it. But through the whole process, pay attention to the to how people react to an idea. Ask them what they heard and see if that is what you meant for them to hear. Try lots of little iterations before you decide it is ready for a wider audience. And even then don’t announce a big program. Create what restaurants call a “soft opening.” Get all the kinks worked out before you invite the general public.

Let me give an example. To build the example, we will need some vocabulary. I want to distinguish between a practice, a program, and a form. Practices are communally-defined and historically-rooted activities that embody some ultimate good.[[82]](#footnote-82) They are activities that the church has been doing for centuries, activities that are so important that they define what it means to be Christian. A form is the current way that we carry out a practice. The practice does not change over time, but the form that we use to engage in the practice does. For example, Christians have practiced alms-giving for all of the Church’s existence. But the form we use to practice alms-giving has changed. We used to hand money directly to a beggar. Now it is more likely that Christians will give their money through an organization like the church or the Salvation Army.[[83]](#footnote-83) By contrast, a program is an activity that gathers together a collection of forms to practice them in a formalized way. The Mission Committee of a church, for instance, is the program that gathers together all the forms by which the congregations engages in the practice of alms-giving.

Now let us say that you wanted to innovate around the ways that the church uses money. Where would you be bound by the past and where could you innovate? Any Christian is obligated to retain the practice of alms-giving. It is part of what it means to be a Christian. But we have lots of different ways we might go about alms-giving. We could experiment with new forms. The old form might be putting money in a collection plate during a worship service with the knowledge that some of the church budget would go to the poor. How might we experiment with finding new forms? For example, we might try a monthly gathering where congregants met to talk about their money concerns and to listen to the needs in the community. At the end of that time, we might give people a summary of all the needs discussed and ask anyone so moved to write a check. There are lots of ideas we might pursue. But let’s pretend for the sake of argument that we thought this one might resonate with the people entrusted to our care. The standard Christian response would be to roll out a new program with an announcement in the bulletin and perhaps a special mailing inviting people. That would be turning the new form into a program. Instead, what if I simply invited some people to my house to try out this new form? We played around with it. We recognized that some parts of the idea might be good (e.g. the communal nature) and some might be bad (e.g. people might feel uncomfortable talking about money). But we could keep trying new iterations of the idea until we came up with something that worked. Then we might expand it – say, by asking a friend of mine who led one of the congregation’s small groups to try out this new idea in her covenant group and to give feedback. (Notice how important it would be at that point to provide detailed training and practice for the small group leader.) That would set off another cycle of experimenting. But only once we had worked out all the bugs would we think to make it a program where we announced it publically.[[84]](#footnote-84)

We will return to this distinction between practices, forms, and programs later. But for now the key idea is that we experiment with forms far from the public eye. Programs happen in public, but we can try out many forms on the margins.

We need to follow the iterative process of experimentation. But we have to do it in a way that does not damage our credibility. How can we do that? We will take up that question in a moment. But before we do, we need to take up one last characteristic of innovative organizations. Hill and her colleagues named purpose, values, collaboration, and experimentation. The final characteristic is integrative decision-making.

1. **Integrative Decision-Making**

While most discussions of innovation focus on producing devices, recent scholarly studies have also singled out an organization that produces stories, the movie studio Pixar. We will examine Pixar’s process in some detail because they make meaning by telling stories, which is very similar to our stated goal of creating shared stories of Christian hope in response to the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care. Indeed, we might say that the movie-going audience comprises the people entrusted to Pixar’s care. And Pixar is quite careful to invite their audience into stories where the audience can so identify with the longings and losses of the protagonists that the audience takes on the protagonist’s condition as its own.

In Pixar’s first feature-length movie, *Toy Story*, the central question is Woody’s choice. Woody is a cowboy doll who is the leader of a group of toys owned by a boy named Andy. Woody’s choice is: do I belong with my friends or do I belong with the boy who plays with me? It is a question of identity, as many human condition questions are – because our longings and losses often define who we really are. And it is a question that each person in the audience understands. It captures the role conflict that we all face. Are my friends more important than my family? Is my family more important than my job? How is what I do related to who I am? What defines me? The movie’s power comes from the fact that Woody’s questions resonate with our questions. Woody’s dilemma calls up our dilemmas. Woody ultimately answers the question by deciding that he belongs to ‘Andy,’ the one whose name is written on his sole (a very Christian answer). The power of the movie comes from producing a story that taps into the human condition. We who lead Christian organizations want to do the same thing. Pixar has found a way to do what we want to do.

And it is no accident that Pixar’s movies have this resonance. So let us start with seeing how Pixar embodies the lessons we have seen so far about building an innovative organization and then see if perhaps their organizational process is something we can emulate. We started this section talking about an identity-defining purpose. At Pixar they are very clear on their purpose – and they know what they are not. Most people would say that Pixar is first and foremost a computer-generated animation studio. They would not say that. They would not dispute that they use computers to animate. But that is not why they exist. Computer animation is simply a means for them. It is not their end. They exist to tell stories, especially stories that resonate, that draw in the audience. From the very start, “the first principle was ‘Story is King’”; it continues to be their “defining goal.”[[85]](#footnote-85) They simply use computer-generated animation to pursue that goal.

Likewise, they are quite clear on their shared values. Ed Catmull (the long-time head of Pixar) writes about how “candor” is a crucial value for Pixar. They refer to it as a “virtue,” a very Christian word. For Pixar, “the word communicates not just truth-telling but a lack of reserve.” The key story-tellers do not mince words when they talk to each other. “A hallmark of a healthy creative culture,” Catmull says, “is that people feel free to share ideas, opinions, and criticisms. Lack of candor, if unchecked, leads to dysfunctional environments.” This is an example of how healthy organizations handle competing commitments. Most organizations value candor, but they value politeness more.[[86]](#footnote-86) In most organizations, it would be impolite for me to tell a colleague that I think there is a flaw in his screenplay. At Pixar, it would be rude to think that there was a problem and not to say anything. This candor has an added benefit. It allows me to hold loosely to my opinion. I may think there is a problem with your screenplay. But if I never talk about it, I simply retain that idea. But if I tell you about it, and then you speak with the same candor back, then I may well learn that I missed something crucial and that I was wrong all along. Or you and I may start a conversation where we both learn something. But without candor, I have to send a mixed message, one that says that I approve of what you are doing even though I secretly think it is wrong. And, as Chris Argyris has shown, organizations that lack candor live in the chaos caused by mixed messages.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Such an emphasis on candor can, however, create as many problems as it solves, especially if the candor becomes mean or is used to put people in their place. We will say much more about how Pixar creates space for healthy interactions in a few paragraphs. But in the meantime, it is important to note that the over-riding goal of creating good movies that resonate with people is such a strong value that it tends to police bad behavior. Bad behavior makes bad movies. And bad movies are unacceptable, which makes dysfunctional candor unacceptable.[[88]](#footnote-88) We will say more about how Pixar’s culture checks these very human tendencies. But for now let us start with the bad movies.

Catmull is quite clear about one point. All Pixar movies start bad – even the award winners. That is why experimentation is so important. Catmull puts it this way, all “our films [begin as] ‘ugly babies.’ They are not beautiful, miniature versions of the adults they will grow up to be. They are truly ugly: awkward and unformed, vulnerable and incomplete. They need nurturing – in the form of time and patience – in order to grow.” That is where administrators come in. “Our job is to protect our babies from being judged too quickly. Our job is to protect the new.”[[89]](#footnote-89)

That means that the people who lead innovative organizations have a particular role that no one else shares. The senior leaders need to “protect the new” because the momentum of the organization – what Catmull calls the “hungry beast” – will instinctively devour anything that is vulnerable. Now Catmull recognizes that not all things can or should survive. Some saplings don’t make it. He acknowledges that. But he understands something about the nature of innovation that places a burden on senior leaders. “When someone hatches an original idea, it may be ungainly and poorly defined,” Catmull says, “but it is also the opposite of established and entrenched – *and that is precisely what is exciting about it*.”[[90]](#footnote-90) The hungry beast – the organization doing its daily tasks – does not have the categories to decide if the ugly baby is worth more resources. The organization is calibrated to dismiss innovative ideas – specifically because they are innovative.[[91]](#footnote-91) And “part of our job,” as senior leaders, “is to protect the new from people who don’t understand.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Catmull illustrates this by telling the story of director Andrew Stanton’s initial pitch for the movie that became the Oscar-winning *Finding Nemo*. The plot he pitched was a tangled mess of complicated subplots and distracting flashbacks. As a story, it was an ugly baby. But when Catmull and John Lasseter first heard the pitch, they only needed to hear two things to sign off on the project. They heard that it was a story about fish and that “the tale Andrew wanted to tell got to the heart of the struggle for independence that often shapes a father-son relationship.”[[93]](#footnote-93) In other words, it was a story about the human condition. So Catmull knew that it was an ugly baby that he needed to protect. And he trusted that Pixar’s process – especially the value of candor – would iron out the problems that made the baby so ugly. The virtues of candor and protection go hand in hand.[[94]](#footnote-94)

So we have seen how Pixar illustrates what Linda Hill and her colleagues call purpose, values, and collaboration.[[95]](#footnote-95) We do this because Pixar is a particularly resonate example for Christian organizations because they create stories not devices. Like Christians, Pixar tells stories that make meaning, even meaning that challenges our mental models.[[96]](#footnote-96) We will then continue to use Pixar as an example as we look at the next characteristic of innovative organizations: experimental learning by discovery.

Learning by discovery happens because each movie evolves as a series of experiments. After *Finding* Nemo’s initial pitch, Lasseter and Catmull sent Andrew Stanton off to work on the next iteration of the story*.* Then it went through more cycles of prototyping each character. They used storyboards to picture the flow of the movie. And when the flow did not work, they created another cycle. They rapidly went through many cycles. This gave them the experience that comes from repeated experimentation. At no point did a clunky plot point feel like a failure; it was a step in the right direction. But they did not make the mistake of showing their ideas to public too soon. We Christians like to announce new programs and then invite the public to watch us make our rookie mistakes. That would be like Pixar hosting a red carpet event to premiere its ugly baby. Pixar is committed to rapid and repeated experimentation.

There is one final characteristic in the innovation model that Hill and her colleagues outline; it is called “integrative decision-making.” Its purpose is to create a forum where it is appropriate to speak productively with candor, to create a space where candor is constructive not destructive. Their goal, according to Ed Catmull, is to “put smart, passionate people in a room together, charge them with identifying and solving problems, and encourage them to be candid with each other.” He believes that “without the crucial ingredient that is candor, there can be no trust. And without trust, creative collaboration is not possible.” That means that his “primary role” as a senior leader is “making sure that the compact upon which the meetings are based is protected and upheld.”[[97]](#footnote-97) This word “compact” is important. It is supposed to call to mind the social compact – or social contract – that holds groups together – the contract that turns a group into a community. To understand this compact, we have to understand the venue where Pixar expresses this candor. They call it the Braintrust.

The Braintrust, “which meets every few months or so to assess each movie [Pixar is] making, is [Pixar’s] primary delivery system for straight talk.” The Braintrust began as the meeting of the creative heads of Pixar. These are the folks who would be the writers and directors of Pixar’s movies. Over time, they have included other diverse people, “whose only requirement is that they display a knack for storytelling” (because at Pixar “Story is King” in that it drives the purpose of the organization). This emphasis on storytelling is crucial. The purpose of the meeting is to hone the story that will become a Pixar movie. So the credibility of each person in the room depends on their ability to contribute to that goal. (For example, Catmull attends for management purposes but is largely silent because his strength is not in storytelling.) No one is allowed in the room who is “motivated by the kinds of things – getting credit for an idea, pleasing their supervisors, winning a point just to say you did – that too often lurk beneath the surface.” [[98]](#footnote-98) All that matters is getting a good story.

But there is a problem when you put that many creative people in the same room. There are too many ideas to fit into one story, which means that the details that matter to me may not be the details to you because we are telling slightly different versions of the story. The Braintrust handles this by designating that every movie has only one director. The director is the one whose vision is the final arbiter who decides which pieces of advice to remove and which feedback to incorporate. (Notice how this is a cultivated instinct in that it is about which data to notice and which can be safely ignored.) This clear sense of whose vision matters yields an important rule. “The Braintrust has no authority. This is crucial: The director does not have to follow any of the specific suggestions given.” By removing the power dynamic, Pixar creates “an environment where people want to hear each other’s notes.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

Catmull says that “we give our filmmakers both freedom and responsibility.” In this way, the Braintrust is a holding environment – the ideal setting to do adaptive work. A holding environment has to be uncomfortable enough that people cannot stand still but safe enough that they can experiment with a new way of being. Ronald Heifetz describes how a leader has to “turn up the heat” in order to make it uncomfortable enough and “turn down the heat” to make it safe enough.[[100]](#footnote-100) The responsibility (in the form of feedback) turns up the heat, while the freedom (in the form of autonomy) turns down the heat. This makes a Braintrust meeting like a holding environment.

We should say one more thing about this idea of heat. Heifetz uses the term “heat” to mean a level of discomfort that comes from having to face a problem that a person would rather avoid. But there is another way that we talk about heat. Sometimes it means the discord that comes with conflict – we sometimes talk, for example, about more heat than light. If candor dominates a meeting, will people get offended, will they shout at one another, will passionate people throw so much passion into the argument that someone’s feelings get hurt? Brad Bird, one of Pixar’s directors, was asked in an interview with the celebrated consulting firm McKinsey & Company, about how passion plays out. Indeed McKinsey phrased it by asking if innovators need to be angry. Bird answered,

“I would say that *involved* people make for better innovation. Passionate involvement can make you happy, sometimes, and miserable other times. You want people to be involved and engaged. Involved people can be quiet, loud, or anything in-between—what they have in common is a restless, probing nature: ‘I want to get to the problem. There’s something I want to *do*.’ If you had thermal glasses, you could see heat coming off them.”[[101]](#footnote-101)

So this is a third way we can talk about heat – as passion radiating off of engaged people. So we have to recognize that engaged people will sometimes be loud and argue with each other. And we have to teach our people how to engage in an argument – even loudly – without taking permanent offense. I have to let you say something with candor – even if I think it is mean, even if you say it loudly – because I trust that you are not defending your turf. You are trying to reach our common goal. And you have to let me answer back with just as much vigor. And then in the end, we have to remain partners. In pre-marital counseling, we regularly tell young people that every married couple needs to learn how to fight – how to argue so that, as one of my friends says it, “It is not you versus me; it is you and me against the problem.”[[102]](#footnote-102) We need to teach our passionate innovative Christians to do the same thing.

But how does the Braintrust work? At each meeting, the team looks at the progress of a script – at the development of the experiment in telling this story. They identify what is working and where there are problems. Let’s look at an example from a Braintrust meeting about movie *Toy Story 3*, where the screenwriter Michael Arndt was told about a problem with his plot that he had not seen before. An important turning point in the story is when, as Catmull tells it, “Lotso – the pink teddy bear and mean-spirited leader of the day-care center toys – is overthrown after the toys mutiny. But the problem was that, the mutiny wasn’t believable.” Andrew Stanton commented that Lotso was like Stalin and the giant toy called Big Baby was like Stalin’s army. There needed to be a reason for the army to rebel. Stanton did not explain how to fix the problem. But he gave Arndt the feedback he needed to construct a backstory that, when revealed, caused Big Baby to flip in allegiance.[[103]](#footnote-103) The point is that Ardnt would never have solved the problem – nor known about it – without Stanton’s candor.[[104]](#footnote-104)

How might this idea of the Braintrust play out in a Christian organization? Let’s look at a case study.[[105]](#footnote-105) The Ebeneezer Partnership is an inner-city social service project with an after-school tutoring program, a food bank, a counseling center, and a job training and placement service. The new Executive Director (called the Exec, and specifically not the President) is Bert Martin. Judy is the head of the day care. And Maggie is in charge of the jobs program. There are also heads of the counseling center and the food bank, but they do not play into this case. Most presidents (or in this case, the Exec) convene a regular staff meeting for the purpose of streamlining administrative tasks like the budget. That makes sense for Bert to continue that. But Bert could also treat each of the divisions as Pixar would treat a movie and treat Judy and Maggie like Pixar would treat a director. It would mean that every month Bert would convene the four heads of the divisions and they would work like the Braintrust. They would present the projects that they were pursuing and ask for feedback. They would speak to each other with candor but not arrogance, and Bert would ask each one to execute a vision.

All this works in theory but it is hard to practice.[[106]](#footnote-106) Chris Argyris explains why it is so hard to practice in an article debunking the idea of employee empowerment. The key to the Braintrust is the director accepting both freedom and responsibility, just as empowerment means that managers give up power and employees accept responsibility. Argyris shows that most employees and managers engage in a subtle game that thwarts empowerment. Managers, he says, will pretend to give up power and allow employees to pretend to take responsibility. Managers don’t want to lose control and employees don’t want to be held accountable. So the two sides collude and pretend. The Braintrust model can only work if both sides follow through on their commitments.

That takes us back to the Ebeneezer Partnership, which is a four-part case study that I use with my Nonprofit Management classes (Don’t worry; I rehearse the whole thing here). In Episode One, Bert is the new ED and he discovers that Judy comes in late, leaves early, and rarely supervises her employees. In another episode, Bert finds that Maggie is distracted from her jobs placement task because she has a secondary role as a fund-raiser. It would not work to have Judy a part of the Braintrust because she would likely not be willing to accept the responsibility that being in the Braintrust entails. In other words, the Braintrust only works when you have the right people in place. It is a way to free up the right people to do innovative work. But it cannot make up for the wrong people in the wrong roles. Pixar found good storytellers and gave them an environment to thrive. But the wrong seeds will never produce good saplings. Maggie, on the other hand, would be a good member of the Braintrust because she has both passion and talent. But Bert would need to free her up from her fund-raising duties if he expected her to be truly innovative in her work with jobs placement and vocational training. A Braintrust can work in a Christian organization if we have the right people and we free them to do innovative work.[[107]](#footnote-107)

So in the last few pages we have described the kind of organization that can be an environment for innovation to thrive. If we accept that “ideas are like saplings,” then we want an organizational environment that has: the willingness to innovate built around (a) identity-defining purpose and (b) communally-shared values, and the ability to innovate built around (c) diversity-rich collaboration, (d) discovery-driven learning, and (e) integrative decision-making.

But there is still one more problem. All of these examples – including Google and Pixar – come from organizations that bear no obligation to the past. We will have to be able to do all the things we have already described and do them in a way that embodies the Christian tradition. The paper’s primary question has been: how do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on continuity with the past and fidelity with tradition? **We have described how to construct an organization that pursues innovation. Now we have to describe how to do it in a way that honors the past and embodies the Christian tradition**.

1. **Recombinant Innovation: Creating New Cultural Tools**

We tend to think of innovation as being about the creation of something that did not exist before. And that can certainly be true. But in the world of Christian organizations, we will likely not create something out of nothing. We will create something using the traditional faith as our raw materials. Indeed, innovation will likely come from mixing and matching ideas that are already present with new situations in order to make new spiritual meaning for the people entrusted to our care.

Think, for example, about the “seeker-sensitive service” that became popular in evangelical churches over the last generation. We will return to this example regularly through this description. The seeker-sensitive service was not something new under the sun. It was an adaptation of something that had existed for centuries – a service of Christian worship. The new thing, however, was that this service of Christian worship was designed so that it would make sense to people who were not already familiar with the contours of Christian worship. Not only that, this innovative service was calibrated to address the needs (the longings and losses) of a particular people: those who do not know Jesus but may in fact be interested in him. The service came about because some Christians decided that there was a particular people entrusted to their care, namely those who do not yet know Jesus. The service was not all that new. It included elements that had been present for generations. But it felt new to people who were used to the traditional way of doing things. And, indeed it not only felt new it felt to many of them as if it was not quite right. That is why the seeker-sensitive service started out as such a controversial way to conduct a worship service.[[108]](#footnote-108) And now it is an acceptable part of the American Christian repertoire.

Sociologists have a term for what happened with the seeker-sensitive service. They say that the service had to be “legitimated.” It had to move in the public mind from being de-legitimate (i.e. an inappropriate expression of the Christian practice of worship) to being legitimate (i.e. an appropriate expression of that practice). This idea plays off of Ann Swidler’s extremely influential work on culture as a tool-kit.[[109]](#footnote-109) She argues that humans do not have an unlimited set of options when we try to engage in action. We can only carry on those actions that culture deems appropriate (i.e. legitimate) for that moment. It would not, for example, be culturally-appropriate for me to offer a turtle dove as a sacrifice to God as part of my Sunday morning worship – even though it appears that for many years God’s People were instructed to do just that. We Christians have agreed that animal sacrifice is no longer necessary because Jesus the High Priest is Himself the once-and-for-all sacrifice. Likewise, it would have until recently been inappropriate (i.e. de-legitimate) for Christians to “speak in tongues” when they prayed, or to gather in mixed company for a Bible study in a college dorm room,[[110]](#footnote-110) or to send teenagers to a foreign land on a week-long mission trip. But each of those forms has recently been legitimated. They are, in Swidler’s terms, now part of the cultural tool-kit that is available for Christians who wish to take action in the world.[[111]](#footnote-111) This pertains to the Wuthnow Crisis because the cultural tool-kit available to contemporary Christians is constructed to support the tasks of a previous era – the era of Christendom. We are trying to make due with the tools we have, even though we are taking up tasks for which we do not have the proper tools.

**Creating new cultural tools – tools designed to respond to the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care – is the task of Christian innovation. The whole point of building innovative organizations is to create new tools that our people can use to make spiritual sense of their lives.** So we will need to spend some time talking about how to innovate new cultural tools.

Andrew Hargadon is a scholar of innovation. His approach to explaining how innovation happens is quite different from the ones used by scholars who focus on innovating new devices, and as such his approach addresses the concerns of we who must maintain fidelity with the past. He believes innovation is usually about creating new meaning – meaning which requires new cultural tools. He explains why and how that process of creating new cultural tools works, and he shows how to construct organizations that take advantage of that knowledge. He calls the process “recombinant innovation.”[[112]](#footnote-112) And he builds this process around the cultivation of new cultural tools,[[113]](#footnote-113) especially tools that connect to the past. Innovative organizations “succeed not by breaking away from the constraints of the past,” he says, “but instead by harnessing the past in powerful ways.”[[114]](#footnote-114) This is good news for organizations whose credibility depends on fidelity with the past.

Hargadon begins by showing where people get their cultural tools. He talks about how all people are embedded in networks of ideas and relationships. Some of these are formal networks that are defined by organizational structure – e.g. the organizational chart defines my relationship to my boss, to my colleagues, and to my direct reports. But these formal networks are not as important to Hargadon as are the networks that shape my ideas, my mental models. He is more interested in interactions, especially interactions that influence how I see the world. For example, if I read the same blog every morning but only talk to my boss once a week, then that blog may well be more influential than my boss. Or it may be more influential on a wider range of topics than are interactions with my boss.[[115]](#footnote-115) Either way, I am embedded in a network of relationships, of ideas, and of interactions. And, from these networks I glean a set of choices – what Swidler calls a tool-kit. Responding to the Wuthnow Crisis is about creating choices for people that allow them to follow Jesus and to address issues in their lives.

Let me pause for a side-note. I have found in my teaching that people often become confused by the notion of a cultural tool-kit. So I will offer an added analogy that tries to make the same point. Think of soup cans in a cupboard. When you want some soup for lunch, you can either pull a soup can from the cupboard, or you can follow a recipe (which may involve a trip to the store to purchase ingredients), or you can improvise a recipe on the spot using whatever ingredients you have on hand. The vast majority of people choose the soup cans in the cupboard because it is easier. Once in a while, you may follow a recipe, but that usually requires more thinking ahead and a greater investment of time to cook it. Very few people have the experience and confidence to invent something new. And if they do, it is likely a variation of something they already know. When Swidler talks about tools, she means something like these soup cans. It would be exhausting if we had to invent a new strategy for every situation we encounter in life. It would be like having to invent a new recipe every time we ate. Humans have learned, instead, to select from a limited array of choices.[[116]](#footnote-116) You can call them a kit full of tools or a cupboard full of soup cans.[[117]](#footnote-117) But either way, we select from strategies for action that are already legitimated for us.

So, we could say that the Wuthnow Crisis comes from the fact that most Americans do not have soup cans that satisfy their hunger to make spiritual sense of the longings and losses they experience in their daily lives. When they want to figure out how, for example, to spend their money or work through a conflict at work, the soup cans on their shelf are not ones created from Christian ingredients. For example, we could say that Christian virtues like putting other people first were once in the moral cupboard for most Americans. And when they needed to decide how to work through a conflict at work, they opened the cupboard and one of the things they saw was, “Deny yourself.” The American Church (which includes me and my congregation) has over the last few decades done a poor job creating soup cans (or tools) to replace the ones we lost when Christendom ended. Most Americans hear Christian messages as negative (e.g. “It is wrong to…”) and disconnected from the questions that those Americans ask each day. We tell people what not to do, but don’t tell them what they should be doing with the longings and losses that fill their days. An American may have a Christian soup can that says “don’t have sex outside marriage” but she no longer has tools that help her know how to love her grumpy co-worker. Instead, she receives from the secular culture tools that reinforce her selfish perspective – cultural tools that say things like “do your own thing” and “just do it.” We need to innovate because for most Americans the Christian cupboard is bare.

These choices – whether we call them soup cans or cultural tools -- become particularly important for Hargadon as he discusses innovation. Innovation happens when someone creates a new soup recipe by mixing and matching ingredients in creative ways. Those ingredients come from the networks that Hargadon studied. The networks provide the raw materials for building new ideas and new avenues for action. Our interactions (and the ideas and mental models they furnish) create for us what the Nobel laureate Herbert Simon called “the network of possible wanderings.” Think of the innovations that are possible as the paths that we can possibly explore to discover tools – or the rooms in a house, where each room contains a different kind of tools (e.g. the kitchen has different tools than the garage or the medicine cabinet). The most innovative people, according to Hargadon, are not necessarily the people with the most innate intelligence[[118]](#footnote-118) or the liveliest creativity. Instead, they are the people who have the most extensive network of paths that they can explore – the most rooms in their house, the greatest access to the most diverse kinds of tools. “Entrepreneurs and inventors are no smarter, no more courageous, tenacious, or rebellious than the rest of us – they are simply better connected.”[[119]](#footnote-119) They have more rooms to explore in their house, more ways to mix and match tools. Hargardon concludes that rather than “pushing people to think outside the box,” we should be “helping them think in other boxes.” Rather than inviting people to see new nooks and crannies in their current room, we should invite them to wander into rooms where they (and perhaps the church) have never been – or to explore rooms they have long forgotten. The best way to encourage innovation in Christian organizations is to open new pathways for them to explore, what Steven Johnson (echoing Simon) calls the “adjacent possible.” [[120]](#footnote-120)

At this point we need to look at the work of Steven Johnson and the work of Andrew Hargadon together. Each has a piece of a puzzle, but neither has the whole picture. Hargadon describes how the networks of ideas and interactions that define us create “small worlds” that we then inhabit, and Hargadon shows how to expand those small worlds. Steven Johnson shows how those who share similar networks of possible wanderings form “subcultures.” And he shows how those subcultures both empower and constrain people. Hargadon’s “small worlds” are akin to Johnson’s “subcultures.” They empower people by creating a space for them to work with like-minded people and at the same time, they constrain people by limiting the number of legitimate options available to them. Or, in terms of the Wuthnow Crisis that we are trying to solve: the “small worlds” that most Americans inhabit do not include Christian ways of seeing the world. Our innovative task is to create new pathways that open a space for people to explore using Christian perspectives to make sense of their everyday lives.

Knowing that these small worlds both enable and constrain us is also important to our attempts to innovate a new response to the Wuthnow Crisis because Christians themselves inhabit just the kind of world that Johnson and Hargadon describe. On the one hand, that world enables us because we begin every conversation about Jesus with a rich vocabulary of ideas. We do not have to improvise, say, a discussion of the atonement. We already know that there are historic theories of atonement. We know the strengths and weaknesses of each one. And, even if I am sitting with an adolescent who has never thought before about what it means to say that “Jesus died for your sins,” I can draw on this rich vocabulary (just like pulling pre-packaged soup cans off the shelf). But, on the other hand, that language constrains me. The number of theories of atonement is not very large. There are only four (just like having only four types of soup in my cupboard).[[121]](#footnote-121) And I am not free to invent one on the spot just to make the gospel more palatable to a novice. Let’s say I am speaking to a person who experiences the idea that Jesus died for my sins as “unnecessarily violent” for her palate. She recognizes the need for a punishment for sin, but death seems awful harsh to her – even if Jesus is eventually raised from the dead. And she wonders if we can talk about the idea of atonement without getting too gory, without talking about death. It is easy to see how in our society, the idea of death could create a problem for people. But we Christians are constrained. We cannot innovate a new form of atonement where it is no longer necessary for Christ to die.[[122]](#footnote-122) But we can change how we present that soup. We should explore the work of Johnson and of Hargadon further because the idea of innovation within constraints resonates with our experience as Christians. We need new and better soup cans for people who are hungry for the gospel.

Hargadon uses the term “recombinant innovation” to describe this whole process because it is like recombinant DNA in that it creates something new by re-combining things that already existed into new shapes that eventually add up to something completely different. “Recombinant innovation” draws on the work of cultural sociologists and network theorists – scholars who show how people thrive in society using cultural tools. By “recombinant,” Hargadon means that people mix and match things that already exist in society in order to make something new – like combining old ingredients in a new way to create a new kind of soup. And, because each generation and each people that we serve have their own experiences of longing and loss, they will each experience need new ways to hear the gospel. We have to keep mixing and matching until we find what resonates with our people. Some of these combinations survive; others do not. They survive if they become “legitimated” and they die if they do not.

Legitimation is the key term for the cultural sociologists, as we saw when we introduced Swidler’s idea of cultural tools. A cultural tool that exists in society – one that people can use as part of their repertoire – has been “legitimated.” [[123]](#footnote-123) And a new cultural tool will have to become legitimated if it is to survive. So we should saw some more about what the term means. Let me give an example from Christian history to show why this matters. Before the Pentecostal outpouring of the early twentieth century, speaking in tongues was not a legitimate activity for most Christians. Then the movement began (or, as the Pentecostals would prefer we say, then the Holy Spirit was poured out). The practice took off at first in marginal groups, places on the sidelines. But over time, it took root and spread. It now has legitimacy all over the world. But, I should add, not in all places. Although there are many Christian settings (Protestant and Roman Catholic) where speaking in tongues is now legitimate, there are also many settings (Protestant and Roman Catholic) where it is not legitimate.[[124]](#footnote-124) Not all practices have universal acceptance; some places find a practice legitimate while others do not.

Legitimation shapes peoples expectations. When something is legitimate, it looks the way that people expect it to look. And when it does not meet people’s expectations, it is called “illegitimate” or has become “de-legitimated.” Scholars talk about something that is legitimate as having the “shape” that people expect it to have;[[125]](#footnote-125) it looks like they expect it to look. This is not a well-reasoned process for people. It is instinctive in just the way we talked earlier about cultivated instincts. People would immediately recognize “Vegetable Beef” as legitimate kind of soup and “Fudge Ripple” as a legitimate flavor of ice cream, but vegetable beef ice cream just sounds wrong. It does not seem legitimate because we have a mental model – a set of defining expectations – for ice cream, which vegetable beef ice cream violates. Our mental models shape our expectations and changing those mental models requires a process of legitimating new categories for making sense of the world.

Let me give an example of how legitimation and expectations shape our response to new cultural tools by comparing “seeker-sensitive churches” to “tongue-speaking churches.” When I was growing up, my parents took me every Sunday to a stable Presbyterian church. But at some point when I was in about fourth grade, my parents were in a group that experienced speaking in tongues. This was what became known as the “Charismatic Renewal” movement of the 1970s. I did not know much about it; I was nine years old. But this whole thing proved too much for the pastor of our stable Presbyterian church and so my parents “left” that congregation to attend a series of house churches and Pentecostal congregations. Their experience of the Spirit was deeply disturbing to our pastor because it did not fit his experience. Scholars would say that this innovation seemed illegitimate to him because he did not have the categories to make sense of it. (Pay attention to this idea of categories because changing these categories is the stuff of innovation.) Years later, my parents wanted to have a more traditional “youth group” experience for their children, so one Sunday my mother and I returned for a visit to that staid Presbyterian church. No one said anything on Sunday, but that week my parents got a note in the mail from the pastor. The note said, “Saw you were in church on Sunday. Noticed the walls did not come down. Welcome back.” That was his way of saying that he now had the categories to make sense of their charismatic experience and that their experience no longer seemed illegitimated to him. That was over thirty years ago and my parents still belong to that church. Once the pastor had the categories for making sense of speaking in tongues, his objections disappeared. Creating new categories is often the way that Christian innovation happens.[[126]](#footnote-126)

Let me contrast that with a second example. When I first experienced “seeker-sensitive services” back in the early 1990s, I had my doubts. It seemed illegitimate to have a service of worship that did not have the “elements” that I had been taught belonged in a worship service – especially some kind of confession of sin – and it seemed overly-commercialized to have a “food court” selling sandwiches after church right in the middle of a church campus (it all smacked of money-changers to me). I also worried because of the congregations that I knew that were engaged in seeker-sensitive services, many of them did not allow women in leadership. But then I had an odd experience. I was going to be traveling to another part of the country for work. And one of my friends said that I should attend her sister’s church. So I contacted her sister and arranged to go with her to church. It was one of the nation’s most well-known, seeker-sensitive churches, where it just so happened that my friend’s sister was the first woman to sit on the church board (because the congregation was making a conscious effort to include women in leadership). And the day before I was going to go, I discovered that an old friend would also be in town that day. We arranged to go to a ballgame together, but I explained that I was going to this church first. My friend said that he would tag along to the church and then we could go to the game. Now, I foolishly had not thought to invite my friend because he is not a practicing Christian, but he volunteered to go anyway. But as we drove to the church, he explained that he was open to what he called “the spiritual.” So I nervously observed him throughout the service. He loved the experience; he sang, he prayed, he did what seekers are supposed to do. And then after the service, in the dreaded food court, I saw person after person come to our table and talk to us. It was like taking the whole congregation to brunch. They chatted, they did church business, they talked about concerns for ailing friends, they may even have prayed for one another. And then I realized in that moment, all three of my de-legitimating expectations were doused. I was experiencing hospitality and koinonia in a food court, while sitting between a female leader and satisfied seeker. Yet somehow something in me wanted to complain. It just did not *feel* right. It was not what I knew -- what I was taught in seminary -- that worship should look like. The experience had answered all my objections but I was uncomfortable. I had trouble giving up my categories even when I discovered I was wrong. And we need to talk a bit more about why that happens.

Ann Swidler has shown that people’s expectations come in story form. We turn experiences and ideas into stories. The mistaken stereotype is that people rationally weigh the evidence and come to an abstract conclusion about new things. But Swidler showed that we instead fit new experiences into stories. Think of the experience of, say, ordering at a restaurant. There is a cadence to what you expect -- plot points you are supposed to hit -- in the way that the story is supposed to go. And if a waiter violates any of those expectations, say by taking too long or not checking back to see if you need more water, then it seems wrong and his legitimacy is in danger (measured by many people in the form of a meal-ending tip). But all that is forgivable, if the story ends well. The end of the story shapes everything else. We know that at the end of the restaurant story, the waiter is supposed return with the food you requested. The legitimacy of a waiter is mostly judged by how the story ends. If a waiter is slow or rude, we might complain but we would not say that they had stopped being a waiter. But if the waiter was polite and filled all your expectations right up until the end, and then he brought you a meal you did not order (“I thought you would like this better,” he says), then you would say he lost his credibility as a waiter. We know how the story is supposed to end and if it does not end the proper way, then it is automatically illegitimate.

When I visited that seeker-sensitive church, I felt uncomfortable because I “knew” how the story was supposed to go. I knew the plot points. And they left out some of the most important plot points. But I had to ask myself in the end, did these people worship God? And, especially, did my seeker friend worship God in this church in a way that would have been unlikely at my home congregation? The answer to both is Yes. But I still felt uncomfortable. And that is the nature of innovation. We have to keep working at it so that we can overcome people’s initial discomfort. One successful experience will not change people’s minds.

The difficult question then becomes how to create and then legitimate new cultural tools – new ways for people to make spiritual sense of their longings and losses. After all, that is our goal. We want to legitimate new ways of expressing the historic faith to the people entrusted to our care. This often requires creating new categories or resurrecting old categories (especially old categories that presently have little meaning – and little ownership – among the people entrusted to your care).

We have said that new cultural forms get created by mixing and matching (i.e. recombining) presently-legitimated cultural tools. So, where might a Christian leader go to find cultural tools that already have legitimacy? In another context, I have written about cultural *resources*. In the same way that we know how to build physical tools from structural resources (like building a car out of resources like steel, glass, and rubber), so we build cultural tools out of cultural resources. In another setting, I listed the primary cultural resources that we use to build cultural tools: identity, beliefs, values, purposes, narratives, practices, and rituals.[[127]](#footnote-127) This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. But it will get us started as we seek to build new cultural tools.

Leaders who wish to innovate in response to the Wuthnow crisis can begin by listening to the cultural resources already legitimated among the people entrusted to their care. When I work with a group, I list along the side of a sheet of paper or a whiteboard of the cultural resource categories like beliefs and values. And then along the top, I list some of the characteristics of the human condition among that group of people – knowing that the losses and fears play more strongly than the longings. For example, teenagers often feel “anxious, busy, and stressed” and they can believe Big Lies like “popularity equals friendship,” “I am what I appear to be,” and “if you really knew me, you would not like me.” (Notice how these lies contradict each other without losing their terrible power.) The rows of cultural resources and the columns of losses create a grid. In that grid, we can list what resources that teens use to create the Big Lies that misunderstand their worlds. For example, the advertising world wants teens to believe that appearances and popularity are a legitimate goal for teens. And they use that myth to sell things like Clearasil (or the contemporary advertising favorite, X Out). We have to understand what resources build the myths if we are to send messages that replace them. Further explanation of how to use cultural resources to create new cultural tools is beyond the scope of this paper.

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The paper began with Wuthnow’s Crisis: contemporary Christianity is not helping people make spiritual sense of their everyday lives. The paper argued that the goal of innovation needs to be to create new ways to make spiritual sense of the human condition as experienced by the people entrusted to our care. To do this we, have to answer the question, How do we pursue innovation when our credibility depends on continuity with the past and fidelity to tradition? We dispelled myths about innovation saying instead that, “Ideas are like saplings,” having nineteen little ones is better than having one big one. Then we broke the question into two parts. We said that the way to pursue innovation is to create an organization that has (a) an identity-creating purpose, (b) communally-shared values, (c) diversity-rich collaboration, (d) experiment-driven learning, and (e) integrative decision-making. And, finally, we argued that the way to create innovations that honor tradition is to mix and match cultural resources to create new cultural tools – tools designed to speak to the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care.

Summary of the Unabridged Paper

A. The Ambassador Questions (to establish the goal of innovation)

1. Who are the **people entrusted to your care**?
2. How do those people experience the **longings and losses** that make up the human condition?
3. How do those people experience **role conflict** as they try to reconcile the longings and losses associated with each of their roles?
4. What **big lies** reveal the inadequate mental models they believe about how to deal with the human condition?
5. What theological and spiritual **mental models** provide a more appropriate response to their longings and losses?
6. What is **a shared story of Christian hope** that explains the mental models that provide a Christian response to the human condition as experienced by the people entrusted to your care?

B. Characteristics of Organizations where Innovation Thrives

1. Identity-Defining **Purpose**
2. Communally-Shared **Values**
3. **Diversity**-Rich Collaboration
4. **Experiment**-Driven Learning
5. Integrative **Decision-Making**

C. Recombinant Innovation as **Meaning-Making Innovation**

1. Cultural Tools

* Soup Cans

1. **Legitimating New Cultural Tools**

* Expectations

1. Innovating new cultural tools that make spiritual sense of the longings and losses of the people entrusted to our care.

D. How do we express this shared story using **cultural resources**?

(NB: The story of the innovation and the characteristics of the organization should align)

1. Narrative
2. Beliefs
3. Values
4. Purposes
5. Practices

Separate:

1. Practices
2. Programs
3. Forms
4. Content
5. Ritual

E. **Sources** of New Ideas

1. Spanning **Subcultures**
2. **Adjacents** (The Adjacent Possible)
3. **Exaptation**
4. **Isomorphism**
5. **Diverse Voices**
6. **Both/And** Thinking

F. How the ideas will **spread**

* 1. The Power of **Naming**
  2. Keep the **appearance**, change the use
  3. **Plant Language**
  4. **Small Wins**: The Power of Organizational Momentum
  5. The **Strength of Weak Ties**

G. What Prevents the Spread of New Ideas

* 1. The **Hungry Beast** of Weekly Meetings
  2. What to De-legitimate
  3. **Stakeholder Conflict**

H. **Education** for Innovation: Cultivating Agility

1. Kelley & Kelley’s **Four Phobias**
2. **Cultivated Instincts**
3. The Necessity of Surprise
4. Cultivated Instincts and Pastoral Imagination
5. **Re-designing Knowledge Work**
6. Cultivating **Agility**

Still to incorporate: Clayton Christensen’s notion of “disruptive innovation” deserves its own chapter because (a) the decline of Christendom is akin to a disruptive innovation, (b) the rise of the Internet disruptively changes how information is distributed and thus the nature of organizations that fundamentally distribute information – even congregations, mission agencies and seminaries; (c) we need to prepare leaders who have the agility to ride disruptions, and (d) perhaps we can engage in disruptive changes that displace secular messages and the role reposition of the Christian message in American lives.

Either way, we have to recognize that Christensen’s notion of disruptive innovation is qualitatively different from our current discussion because it is by definition a dramatic break with the past.

1. Wuthnow describes a sociologist’s role by emphasizing this detachment, “As a social scientist, I can muster evidence, weigh it in relation to what we know about the institutional and cultural dynamics shaping American religion, and speak with some degree of detachment about the problems I see. That, at least, is my hope.” Wuthnow steps out of his cherished neutrality because “I am convinced now that I can no longer write responsibly about American religion without raising a critival voice.” Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) vii [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I use the term “Christian practice” here because the political influence of some Christian groups – especially socially-conservative Christians in the Republican Party – has clearly grown. But there are few if any scholars who would say that the political influence of the Religious Right has signaled a corresponding growth in Christian piety or devotion. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wuthnow, *Crisis*, 5; \*\*\*tie this back to Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989) and *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Society* (Eerdmans, 1988) to show how the sociological and the theological (indeed, missiological) conversations tie together. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. cf. Eugene Peterson’s indictment that pastors have become shopkeepers building careers rather than ministering to the people entrusted to their care. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Eerdmans, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wuthnow, “Crisis,” 7. Wuthnow’s use of the term “middle-class” is significant here. Sociologists will tell you that the vast majority of Americans see themselves as middle-class. Yet we in the church often look down our institutional nose at the term because we either aspire to be more or we see it as shutting out diversity. Yet the middle class in America is tremendously diverse. Indeed, not to recognize it as diverse is a subtle form of racism. When Wuthnow says to pay attention to the “middle class,” he is not saying to ignore the poor. He is saying that the vast majority of congregations make the crippling mistake of ignoring the lives of the congregants entrusted to their care. Wuthnow calls on congregations to start by listening to the people God has placed in their charge. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Although Wuthnow focused on congregations and clergy, I am going to argue that his findings apply to all who lead God’s People – whether they are ordained or lay, whether they are in congregations, seminaries, mission organizations, or informal groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lest one think that Wuthnow is denigrating theology, he notes approvingly that, “The essence of churches continues to be the word (“the Word,” as those in the churches would say) – the teachings, the beliefs, and the discourse and behavior that arise from the teachings and beliefs.” Wuthnow is asking for that life-giving theology to build a bridge to the very real and crucial issues that dominate people’s lives. Wuthnow, *Crisis*, vii [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. \*\*\*Add a note about the Missional Church movement in America, the Fresh Expressions movement in the UK, and the Emergent Church across the world as signs of hope – and perhaps as cautionary tales as well. This should eventually become a theme running throughout the paper/book, with lots of examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Part of the reason we don’t know what to do is that the crisis is a “systems problem.” It is the product of a system that is beyond the control of any one actor – whether pastor, congregation, or seminary – in the system. Any one actor can feel powerless to change the system. Perhaps the best work on systems problems is Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Random House, 1999), which is summarized in Senge, “The Leader’s New Work,” *Sloan Management Review* (Fall 1990) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. NB: The examples that Wuthnow uses in illustrating his crisis focus on economic issues. But Wuthnow does not mean to be exhaustive. He recognizes that there are other issues. He just does not address them in this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The questions were originally constructed to focus on for-profit corporations. But they have since been recast in order to apply more generally to nonprofit and religious organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This is a particularly complicated question for religious organizations and for educational institutions because of the conditions that Cohen & March call “ambiguity.” One characteristic of ambiguity is “unclear goals” or “unclear ends.” They do not mean that the organization has been sloppy in defining its goals. They mean some goals – some purposes – cannot be precisely clarified. Look, for example, at religious organizations like a church, a mission agency, or an Inter-Varsity chapter. “Spiritual growth” must be one of the organization’s goals – perhaps the most important. But how do we clarify exactly what qualifies as “spiritual growth” and how would we “measure” it? We cannot say that a sermon or a Bible Study raised a person’s Growth of Discipleship (GOD) Index by seven GOD points. Any discussion of “mission” has to acknowledge the corrosive power of ambiguity. On ambiguity, see Michael Cohen & James March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (Harvard Business School Press, 1974). For a detailed discussion of the implications of ambiguity for Christian organizations, see Scott Cormode, “Multi-layered Leadership,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1:2 (Fall 2002); for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between vision and mission, see Jim Collins & Jerry Porras, *Built to Last* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This is Drucker’s version of the maxim: “What gets measured gets done.” And it has the same caveats about ambiguity. If we cannot clearly define our goals (e.g. spiritual growth), then we cannot really measure them. But the need to measure things drives us to create proxies – measurements that stand for the thing that we really value. But the danger here is that we accept the proxies as being equal to those things that they are supposed to represent. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is church attendance. We all know that attendance is a poor proxy for growth. Yet the term “church growth” does not mean growth in spiritual maturity; it means growth in numbers. Measurements are crucial. But we have to remind ourselves that they are often proxies. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Skarzynski and Gibson used a similar set of questions to describe “innovating across the business model.” They asked (1) Who do we serve? (2) What do we provide? (3) How do we provide it? (4) How do we make money? (5) How do we differentiate and sustain an advantage? Peter Skarzynski and Rowan Gibson, *Innovation to the Core* (Harvard Business Press, 2008) Figure 5-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is particularly true in the “service economy.” Scholars tell us that one of the most important changes in the American economy in the second half of the twentieth century is the move from a “manufacturing economy” to a “service economy.” The measure of quality in the service economy is, by definition, subjective. In the manufacturing economy, we can construct objective standards for quality (e.g. durability). But service is in the eye of the beholder. NB: the “service economy” ends up celebrating many of the values of the Christian tradition. This is, of course, appropriate for a people whose leader called us to serve rather than to be served. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Note: Google focuses its innovative work on their core mission. But they also encourage their engineers to pursue ideas that may not at first appear to be part of the core. And they have a mechanism for ensuring that the mission stays at the center. The “Twenty Percent Time” program allows says that “engineers can spend 20 percent of their time working on whatever they choose [but the program] is generally misunderstood. It is not about time; it’s about freedom” – by which they mean, “the sense of freedom that comes from doing what you want to do, not doing what you are told.” Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works* (NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2014) p. 226 and 226n182. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Google leaders say, “Our prime directive when it comes to product strategy is to focus on the user.” Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works*, 213 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 213, 214 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. J. Gregory Jones, “Traditioned Leadership,” *Faith & Leadership* (January 20, 2009); accessed January 2015 at <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The scholarly literature uses the term “innovation” in a number of ways. Birkinshaw describes “**discontinuous innovation**” and lists four kinds of research on it: research on “industry structure,” “emerging customer needs,” “cognitive barriers,” and “internal mechanisms.” Julian Birkinshaw, John Bessant, and Rick Delbridge, “Finding, Forming, and Performing: Creating Networks for Discontinuous Innovation,” *California Management Review* 49:3 (Spring 2007) 69; Clayton Christensen famously talks about **disruptive innovation**, starting with *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Harvard Business School Press, 1997). **Strategic innovation**, as Govindarajan & Trimble describe it, is innovation that “breaks with past practice in at least one of three ways: value-chain design, conceptualization of customer value, and identification of potential customers.” Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble, “Strategic Innovation and the Science of Learning,” *Sloan Management Review* (Winter 2004) 21 cf. Morten T. Hansen and Julian Birkinshaw, “The Innovation Value Chain,” *HBR* (June 2007) 2-10; This diversity leads to different takes on innovation. For instance, Sawhney, Wolcott & Arroniz list twelve different “**dimensions” for innovation** all held together by the idea that “innovation is about new value not new things.” Mohanbir Sawhney, Robert C. Wolcott, and Inigo Arroniz, “12 Different Ways for Companies to Innovate,” (NB: This emphasis plays off of Drucker’s third question: what does your customer consider value?) *Sloan Management Review* (Spring 2006) esp. pp. 31 and 29; In addition to these scholars, prominent practitioners have shaped the conversation. Peter Drucker, writing back in 1985, described innovation as “the effort to create purposeful, focused change in an enterprise’s economic or societal potential.” Peter Drucker, “The Discipline of Innovation,” *Harvard Business Review* (August 2002) 6, excerpted from Drucker, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles* (NY: Harper & Row, 1985); And, the executives at Google believe that “innovation entails both the production and implementation of novel and useful ideas…For something to be innovative, it needs to be new, surprising, and radically useful.” Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Google Works* (NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2014) 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I recognize that the very meaning of “the historic Christian church” is subject to debate. But even those who want to disclude others from the historic faith want to maintain their particular link with the faith passed on through the generations. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. L. Gregory Jones, “Traditioned Leadership,” *Faith & Leadership* (January 20, 2009) <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Note: I am not saying that the people who hold the positions are themselves resistant to change. I am saying instead that we looked for people and set up procedures around the current way of doing our work. Any change will require fighting the momentum that system creates. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Rashik Parmar, Ian Mackenzie, David Cohn, and Dand Gann, “The New Patterns of Innovation: How to Use Data to Achieve Growth,” *HBR* (Jan-Feb 2014) 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. John Kotter, “Accelerate!,” *HBR* (Nov 2012) 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Jules Goddard, Julian Birkinshaw and Tony Eccles, “Uncommon Sense: How to Turn Distinctive Beliefs into Action,” *Sloan Management Review* (Spring 2012) 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Govindarajan & Trimble, “Strategic Innovation,” 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble, *Beyond the Idea: How to Execute Innovation in Any Organization* (St. Martin’s Press, 2013) 7. They also note, elsewhere, that “strategic innovations” always involve unproven business models and regularly warn their readers that the “other side of innovation” is execution. Govindarajan and Trimble, *10 Rules for Strategic Innovators* (Harvard Business School Press, 2005) and *The Other Side of Innovation* (Harvard Business School Press, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. To escape this trap, Ed Catmull of Pixar says, “Managers of creative enterprises must hold lightly to goals and firmly to intentions.” Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 140 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Birkinshaw, Bessant & Delbridge, “Finding,” 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Pixar as we know it was built around three very strong personalities. Ed Catmull was the organizational head from the beginning. Steve Jobs purchased it very early on and imprinted the company with his innovative personality. And John Lasseter is the creative voice – first, as the Oscar-winning director for Pixar’s initial productions and then as the Chief Creative Officer overseeing the soul of each movie and short. On the role of Steve Jobs, see Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs: The Exclusive Biography* (NY: Little, Brown, 2012) 260-268; on Catmull and Lasseter, see Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*.; on the culture they created together, see *Creativity, Inc.* and Linda Hill et. al. *Collective Genius*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For a longer discussion of the ways this commentary reflects the experience of Pixar itself as an innovator, see Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* pp. 129-144, esp. pp. 143, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. L. Gregory Jones, “Traditioned Leadership,” *Faith & Leadership* (January 20, 2009) <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen,* 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Direction setting leadership can work well when the solution to a problem is known and straightforward.” Hill et. al., “Collective Genius,” 3, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Birkinshaw, Julian, Cyril Bouquet, and J.-L. Barsoux, “The 5 Myths of Innovation,” *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Vol. 52, Issue #2, Winter 2011) pp. 43-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Einstein, quoted in Isaacson, *Innovators*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Isaacson, *Innovators*, 84 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Isaacson uses this agricultural imagery when he says, “What may seem like creative leaps – the Eureka moment – are actually the result of an evolutionary process that occurs when ideas…ripen.” Isaacson, *Innovators*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For others who use agricultural metaphors to describe a systems approach to innovation, see Govindarajan, Vijay and Chris Trimble, “Strategic Innovation and the Science of Learning,” *Sloan Management Review* (Winter 2004) esp. pp. 21ff; Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* esp. pp. 207, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See, for example, Hill et. al., *Collective Genius*, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Quoted in Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Hill et. al., *Collective Genius*, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Respected scholar Kathleen Eisenhardt argues that “innovation is inherently serendipitous and almost impossible to predict,” which means that the seed that you think will grow into the towering redwood is likely not the one that shoots up. So it is more advantageous to have many saplings than it is to have just one. Eisenhardt, “Foreward,” in Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen*, vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. This work of nurturing ideas is so crucial to innovation that Govindarajan & Trimble have created a cottage industry of articles and books describing this nurturing of immature ideas as “other side of innovation.” See, Govindarajan & Trimble, *The Other Side of Innovation* (2010); *10 Rules for Strategic Innovators* (2005), and *Beyond the Idea* (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 209, 210; they are quoting Collins & Porras, *Built to Last* (NY: HarperCollins, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. cf. Isaacson, *Innovators* pp. 35ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. One CEO used a different metaphor to make the same point. “My job,” he said, “is to set the stage, not to perform on it.” Hill, *Collective Genius*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Hill and her co-authors wrote both a book and an article called “collective genius.” When the paper references the book, it will print the title in italics (*Collective Genius*) and when it references the article, it will print the title in quotation marks (“Collective Genius”). Linda Hill et. al., *Collective Genius* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2014); and Linda Hill et. al., “Collective Genius,” *HBR* (June 2014) 4-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Summary quotation: “Innovation usually emerges when a diverse people collaborate to generate a wide-ranging portfolio of ideas, when they then refine and even evolve into new ideas through give-and-take and often-heated debates.” Hill et. al., “Collective Genius,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Hill, “Collective Genius,” 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. For more on the ways that purpose creates identity, see Collins & Porras, “Building Your Company’s Vision,” *HBR* (Sept 1996) and Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), pp. 81-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On the connection between values and identity, see Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense,* pp. 77-81 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. On the ways that the reward systems of organizations tend to retard innovation – whether they intend to or not – consider the following example. Irma Martin is a bright young ethics professor at a theological school in the eastern United States. One year, the dean of her school, Harold Pointer, approached her about participating in a pedagogical experiment. “The school has decided to devote more resources to integrative work, especially in the field education program,” he said. “We would like you to lead one of the ‘Reflection on Ministry’ seminars that students take each week during their internships? You seem ideally suited to this because you care so deeply about the connections between ministry and ethics.” At first, Irma demurred, saying that a pre-tenure professor has to write in order to get promoted. But the dean persisted. He pointed out that her book was already at the publisher and that her tenure review would stand or fall on its merit. Since the task was not part of her course load, Irma then asked about the effect this assignment might have on her salary. Annual merit raises were tied to scholarly output. Harold assured her that he considered the application of her discipline to the work of the school an appropriate scholarly output. Irma agreed to take on the seminar. She found the experience invigorating to her work and rewarding for the students. The experiment seemed like a success. But that was, unfortunately, the last year that Irma participated in the “Reflection on Ministry” seminars. Her merit salary increase that summer was far lower than in any other year before or since. When she gingerly inquired of the dean about her meager raise, his answer was not reassuring. “This has been a particularly tough year to decide on increases,” he said. “So many of your colleagues have done exemplary academic work that we had to be quite rigorous in applying our standards for scholarly output to quantifiable projects.” Harold either forgot about his previous statements to Irma or chose not to mention them. And Irma never brought it up directly. Instead, she learned her lesson. In the years since, she made sure to write a number of short but duly quantifiable book reviews and at least one major article. And each year she got her share of the merit increases. But she never participated in the reflection seminars again. This example comes from Scott Cormode, “Building Partnerships and Managing Culture: The Pedagogical Responsibilities of Administrative Leaders in Theological Education,” unpublished paper, 2005, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. I should say something about this term “amorphous problem.” The reason “learning” is such an important value is that the organization cannot really understand the problem while trying to solve it. The organization can understand the goal (i.e. to make spiritual sense of the human condition experienced by the people entrusted to our care). But, each time that it attempts a new innovation, it learns a bit more about the longings and losses of its people. So the organization never fully understands its end goal – just as Google never fully understands the experience of its user. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hill et. al., “Collective Genius,” HBR, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Tom Kelley and David Kelley, *Creative Confidence* (NY: Random House, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Birkinshaw, “5 Myths,” 45. Note: as we will see in Section III on the education of innovators, it is important when bringing in outsiders not to socialize the outsiders too quickly. There are plenty of examples of the mixed messages that religious organizations deliver when they hire someone because they have a different point of view and then judge them based on the degree to which they conform to the very standards they were meant to disturb. This applies, say, to Christian nonprofits that hire a non-white person and then expect them to see things from a white perspective. And it applies to Christian colleges that bring in someone to represent an inter-disciplinary perspective and then judge them on the degree to which they think like everyone else. Likewise, congregations will sometimes want to “invite people from the neighborhood,” with the unspoken understanding that they expect the people who visit to look, act, and think like the congregation’s old-timers. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Eisenhardt, “Foreward,” in Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen*, viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Much of the scholarship on theological education starting in the 1980s has bemoaned the “fragmentation” of the theological curriculum. Yet, by all accounts, the disciplines (and their attendant courses) still operate independently. Indeed, a department’s worth at many schools is measured by the degree to which it can act as a silo, with areas that cannot or do not operate as siloes complaining that they lack status. This is important because one of the reasons that the movement toward integration in theological education stalled is that “inter-disciplinary” work was seen as a threat to the status of departments that saw themselves as traditionally under-appreciated. This meant that they saw integration as a veiled means for those that traditionally had high status to swallow those that traditionally had low status. So what started out as a way to honor diversity (by integrating diverse voices from across the curriculum) came to be seen as a threat to diversity (because people assumed that any collaboration between bodies with unequal status will always benefit those with power). Edward Farley began the discussion of fragmentation in 1983 with the publication of *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press). See, also, Farley, Edward. “Why seminaries don't change: A reflection on faculty specialization.” *Christian Century*, February 5-12 1997, 133-143 and David Kelsey and Barbara Wheeler, "New Ground: The Foundations and Future of the Theological Education Debate," in *Theology and Interhumanity: Essays in Honor of Edward Farley*, ed. by Robert R. Williams (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) esp. pp. 186, 187; The history of the debate that Farley created is summarized in Cherry, Conrad. *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), esp. Chapter IV, and especially in Kelsey, David H. *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The best illustrations of how siloes ultimately marginalize diverse voices come from the women who work together at the Center for Gender and Organization, coordinated by Simmons College in Boston. (What they say about the experience of women explains much, as well, about the experiences of people of color and of others who labor within a dominant ethos.) They have shown, in multiple articles and books, that the idea of “valuing the feminine” by creating a separate (i.e. siloed) women’s department only isolates women. It gives the appearance of honoring women’s concerns while allowing the rest of the organization to engage in business as usual. They show how the siloed space strategy was a phase that organizations passed through (especially in the 1970s) but one that did not serve the cause of gender equity. Instead, these scholars argue that the best way to rectify the inequities for women in the workplace is to change the culture of corporations. And that can only happen, they say, through engagement rather than isolation. The irony, of course, is that the people who most opposed the integration process were the women who controlled the “women’s departments.” They confused their individual loss of power with a loss of power for the group they were supposed to represent. For a compilation of CGO’s work, see <http://www.simmons.edu/about-simmons/centers-organizations-and-institutes/cgo> For a summary of the massive literature on gender and organization, reference two overview articles by CGO participants: Robin Ely of Harvard, Debra Meyerson of Stanford, Marta Calas of UMass, and Linda Smirchich of UMass. Robin Ely & Debra Meyerson, “Theories of Gender in Organizations,” in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, ed. by Staw & Sutton (2000) 103-151; Marta Calas and Linda Smircich, “From ‘The Woman’s Point of View’: Feminist Approaches to Organization Studies,” in *Handbook of Organization Studies*, ed. by Stewart Clegg et. al, (Sage Publications, 1996) 218-257; cf. on ethnicity, Stella Nkomo and Taylor Cox, “Diverse Identities in Organizations,” in *Handbook of Organization Studies* (Sage, 1996) 338-356; for resources on how to implement cultural change that supports gender equality in the workplace without resorting to marginalizing siloes, see Debra Meyerson, *Tempered Radicals: How Everyday Leaders Inspire Change at Work* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003), Joyce Fletcher, *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work* (MIT Press, 2001) and three books by Deborah Kolb of the Harvard Program on Negotiations, *Everyday Negotiations: Navigating the Hidden Agendas of Bargaining* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), *Her Place at the Table: A Woman’s Guide to Managing Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success* (Jossey-Bass, 2010), and *Negotiating at Work: Turning Small Wins into Big Successes* (Jossey-Bass, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 213, 214 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 64, 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works*, 234-240, quotes from 238-240. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Because it is clear that the only way to produce innovation is to build on experiments. So we need to revisit our “mental model” of an experiment to see how it plays out in Christian organizations. Govindajaran & Trimble list five criteria for good experiments: (1) Results are available quickly, (2) Results are unambiguous, (3) Experiments can be isolated from outside influences, (4) Experiments are inexpensive, (5) Experiments are repeatable. All this is well and good if you are making devices. But Cohen & March showed back in 1974 that there are some organizations that live under conditions of “ambiguity” – including churches and schools. And in those organizations, it is impossible to follow these five criteria because (1) there is a lag in how means lead to ends so results cannot be available quickly, (2) results are –by definition – never unambiguous, (3) forces interact so that experiments can never be isolated from outside influences, and (4) situations are so complicated that no result is repeatable. So we will not be able to follow the “scientific method” when talking about experimentation. See, Govingdajaran & Trimble, “Science of Learning,” 21; Cohen & March, *Leadership & Ambiguity*; on the implications of ambiguity for religious organizations, see Scott Cormode, “Multi-layered Leadership*,*” *JRL* 1:2 (Fall 2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This is a complicated quotation. It appears in many studies of innovation. But the quote is likely apocryphal in the sense that Edison did not “invent” the incandescent light. I continue to use the quote, however, because its core is true. Edison did improve the light bulb to the point of innovation and Edison did go through an enormous number of failed attempts before getting the innovative result that we celebrate. For a detailed description of Edison’s innovative prowess (as well as a debunking of the myths we attach to Edison), see Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen*, esp. pp. 7ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Birkinshaw, “Five Myths,” 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (NY: Doubleday, 1990); cf. “Over the long run, superior performance depends on superior learning.” From Senge, “The Leader’s New Work: Building Learning Organizations,” *Sloan Management Review* (Fall 1990) pp. 7-23, esp. pg. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Govindarajan and Trimble, “Strategic Innovation and the Science of Learning,” *Sloan Management Review* (Winter 2004) 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. # The fact that we learn more from failure than from success has been an accepted part of the disciplines of Organizational Behavior and Organizational Psychology at least since Karl Weick’s pioneering work in the 1960s. For a summary of Weick’s work, see his *Social Psychology of Organizing* (MacGraw-Hill, 2nd Ed. 1980) and his compendium *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Sage, 1995); see also, Chris Argyris’s discussions of how leaders who avoid learning from mistakes end up avoiding learning. On Argyris, see his articles in the Harvard Business Review and the seminal book he co-authored with Donald A. Schon. Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *HBR* (May 1991); “Skilled Incompetence,” *HBR* (Sept 1996); “Good Communication that Blocks Learning” (July 1994), and “Empowerment: The Emperor’s New Clothes,” *HBR* (May 1998); Argyris and Schon, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (Jossey-Bass, 1992)

    [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Kelley & Kelley, *Creative Confidence*, 48, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ambiguity is a particularly important organizational term. We will discuss the technical definition later. The seminal work on is Michael Cohen and James March, *Leadership & Ambiguity* (Harvard Business School Press, 2nd Ed. 1986 [1974]). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Rodriguez publishes many of his ideas in his influential *Metacool* blog (<http://metacool.com>). See especially his 2009 series on 21 Principles of Innovation, including “14: It’s not the years, it’s the mileage,” “4: Prototype as if you are wrong,” and “12: Instead of managing, try cultivating.” Quote from Kelley & Kelley, *Creative Confidence*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Govinjardan & Trimble, “Science of Learning,” 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Goddard, Jules, Julian Birkinshaw, and Tony Eccles, “Uncommon Sense: How to Turn Distinctive Beliefs into Action,” *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Vol. 53, Issue #3, Spring 2012) pp. 33-39, esp. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. On Google’s commitment to “focus on the user,” see Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 5, 212-216; for the science of “user experience,” see Jakob Nielsen, *Designing Web Usability* (New Riders, 2000) and his extremely influential website useit.com (now housed at <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/> as part of his consultancy practice, The Nielsen-Norman Group). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. On Sticky Faith, Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Zondervan, 2011) and Kara Powell and Brad Griffin, *The Sticky Faith Launch Kit* (Fuller Youth Institute, 2013) and <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/sticky-faith/what-is-sticky-faith> [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Add a few paragraphs – or perhaps a section – on how to move from stealth experiments to a program. Think of the recent project that spent five years innovating a new way forward and eventually got the project approved as a celebrated new program – only to see the program gutted a year in because some congregants saw innovation itself as an elaborate attempt to remove them from power. \*\*\*This example is important and requires a thoughtful response. \*\*\* Connect it back to the Center for Gender and Organizations literature on the problem with siloes. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. They also quote Steve Jobs, who reportedly said, “Real artists ship.” Google says, “New ideas are never perfect right out of the chute, and you don’t have time to wait until they get there. Create a product, ship it, see how it does, design and implement improvements, and push it back out.” Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works,* 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Schmidt & Rosenberg, *How Google Works*, 237ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Note to self: As I am editing this paper, I am watching a Facebook conversation in a congregation where a TULIP Calvinist has labeled a sermon “heresy” because it did not preach Limited Atonement. \*\*\*Need to add a section here or in the “values” area about cultivating generosity. Whatever else our innovative future holds, I think it needs to include a generous spirit. My branch of Christianity (evangelicalism) has been so careful about one mandate (right belief) that we have neglected other Scriptural mandates (such as generosity and gentleness). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. There is a fourth element to any definition of a practice – i.e. standards of excellence (like the Lord’s Prayer). But for now, this informal definition will have to do. The seminal philosophical discussion of practices are Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and. and Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988) esp, pp. 276ff ;the seminal theological discussion is Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice,” in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, edited by Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) pp. 35-66 and continues in Bass, Dorothy, ed., *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997) and in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), esp. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002); I have been particularly instructed by Brad Kallenberg, “The Master Argument of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. by Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); It is a pleasure as well to acknowledge helpful conversations with Robert Muthiah, who came at the time as a doctoral student to learn from me about practices. I am not sure, however, that I did not learn more from him than he learned from me. I found the conversations so helpful that I cannot tell you where my formulations end and his constructions begin. So let me simply acknowledge how much I enjoyed those conversations and commend to you his paper that eventuated from them. Robert Muthiah, “Christian Practices, Congregational Practices, and the Priesthood of All Believers,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2:2 (Spring 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Even in its earliest times, there times that Christians gave money through the church. The “collection for Jerusalem” in II Cornthians comes to mind. For more on that collection, see David Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Note: need to talk about the difference between creating an additional form and creating a replacement form. Allowing some people to talk together before giving would be much easier for a congregation to swallow than requiring all people to give up their accustomed form (i.e. the weekly passing of the plate). Replacing the form would be for some tantamount to saying that the old way was illegitimate. Adding a form would be like saying there is more than one way to express the practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 45-65, and 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Kegan & Lahey have pointed out that the reason most people and most organizations do not change is because they cannot handle these competing commitments. They say, for example, that a man may be committed to losing weight but he is more committed to eating well. And the greater commitment prevents progress on the lesser. When our organizational commitment to avoiding conflict outweighs our commitment to honest conversation, then we know that candor will never prevail. See, Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change* (Harvard Business Press, 2009); and Kegan & Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Act* (Jossey-Bass, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Argyris shows how mixed messages create what he tongue-in-cheek calls “Four Easy Steps to Chaos.” Chris Argyris, “Skilled Incompetence,” HBR (Sept-Oct 1996) 2-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Note that Catmull was not asking for candor in all things – only on story-telling. The over-riding purpose of the Story was so important that the key people in the organization were relentless in “stripping a plot down to its emotional load-bearing sequences and then rebuilding it from the ground up.” That can only work when the entire creative team is allowed to speak with candor. If for Christian organizations, our over-riding purpose is to make spiritual sense of the human condition experienced by the people entrusted to our care, then that is the place where we must have candor. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 132 (emphasis in original) [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. The management structure of successful organizations is calibrated to be what Govindarajan and Trimble describe how a successful organization works like “a Performance Engine” that pursues goals with ruthless efficiency. Their ruthless engine is Catmull’s hungry beast. Govindarajan and Trimble, *Beyond the Idea*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Catmull notes that it is particularly important to protect people who are speaking with candor to senior leaders. He illustrates this by talking about what happened when Pixar merged with Disney Animation, which had a hierarchical culture that penalized people for speaking truth to authorities. Eventually Catmull and Lasseter gathered the Disney employees and “stressed that no one at Disney needed to wait for permission to come up with solutions. What is the point of hiring smart people, we asked, if you don’t empower them to fix what’s broken? For too long, a culture of fear had stymied those who wanted to step outside Disney’s accepted protocols.” Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. It is not surprising that Pixar illustrates these points. Pixar was one of the organizations Hill et. al. studied. Indeed, one of Hill’s co-author’s (Greg Brandeau) is the former Chief Technology Officer for Pixar. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. On Pixar and mental models, see Catmull’s discussion of Pixar’s upcoming (Summer 2015) movie called *Inside Out*. In discussing the movie, Catmull says, “We are meaning-making creatures” who use “mental models” to make sense of the world. And “when human beings see things that challenge our mental models, we tend not just to resist them but to ignore them.” But, he emphasizes, “our mental models are not reality.” But once a “flawed mental model…gets in our head, it is difficult to change.” This will become particularly important in our discussion of “recombinant innovation.” Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 178-182, see also, pp. 225ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 86, 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 88, 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,*  92, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Harvard Business School Press, 1994) and Heifetz and Donald Laurie, “The Work of Leadership,” *HBR* (Jan 1997). On the application of these holding environments to religious organizations, see Cormode, “Multi-Layered Leadership” *JRL* 1:2 \*\*\*\*Note to self: there will need eventually to be a section that separates technical innovation (i.e. along our current path) from adaptive innovation (i.e. that opens a new path). The legitimation process (and the dangers involved) will be different. Most of what matters to Christian leaders will in fact be adaptive innovation. And most leaders will want to use technical means to adaptive ends. So it becomes particularly important to make this distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Emphasis in original; Hayagreeva Rao, Robert Sutton, and Allen P. Webb, “Innovation Lessons from Pixar: An Interview with Oscar-winning Director Brad Bird,” *McKinsey Quarterly* (April 2008); accessed February 2015 at <http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/innovation/innovation_lessons_from_pixar_an_interview_with_oscar-winning_director_brad_bird> [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Brad Bird gave an example of how important it is to handle such confrontational candor. By letting an angry person confront him and taking that person’s angry not as an affront but as an expression of passion, Bird was able to turn the tide and create what we will later call a momentum-changing small win. But he could only do that because it was appropriate – indeed welcome – for someone to confront him. Here is how Bird described the situation. “When Pixar asked me to take over *Ratatouille*, the project had been in development for five years but was not in any shape to produce as a movie. There was a moment, at the very beginning of my involvement, when I was in a room full of about 30 people. At this stage, the rats in the movie had been articulated. Articulation is where they design how the muscles and controls work on the characters. Because people were worried about the audience’s reaction to rats, all of them were designed to walk on two legs. I thought that was a mistake. I knew it would be an expensive use of resources, at that point in the process, to rearticulate the rats, but I said, “We have to get them so that they walk on all fours. And Remy, the protagonist rat, has to be able to walk not only on all fours but up on two legs.” Everybody said, “Ugh!” because they had spent a year making the rats look good walking on two legs. If you simply took those models, bent them over, and put them on all fours, their hips didn’t work and things just looked wrong. They were designed to be upright. One of the guys challenged me. He said, “I want to know why you’re doing this.” Now, I had gone into this film reluctantly. It’s not what I was looking to do after *The Incredibles*. And there was a part of me that wanted to say, “Because I’m the director, that’s why. Do *you* want to take this problematic thing over?” But I stopped and thought for a second. I thought, these guys have been sent down blind alleys for a couple of years. They want to know that I’m not doing anything lightly and that if I’m going to make them do a bunch more work, it’s for a reason. So I said, “This movie is about a rat who wants to enter the human world. We have to make that a visual choice for the character. If you have all of the rats walking on two legs, there’s no separation between him and the other rats. If we have this separation as a visual device, we can see the character make his transformation and choose to be on two legs, and he can become more or less ratty, depending on his emotional state. That brings the audience into the character’s mind.” I spent six minutes saying all this and the guy was initially scowling. But gradually the scowl went away, and he said, “OK.” Once I gave that answer, *everyone* felt, “OK, we’re on this ship and we’re going toward a definite destination.” *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. This commitment to candor is so strong that it even affected the most famously-strong personality in Silicon Valley, Steve Jobs. He was known for arguing so passionately for his perspective that he created what people called a “reality distortion field” that made people agree with him even when they thought he was wrong. And when that did not work, he was notorious for pulling rank. At least, that is how he operated at Apple. Steve Jobs owned Pixar. He could have commanded people to make any story changes he wanted. But, according to Catmull, Jobs “didn’t believe that his instincts were better than the people here, so he stayed out. That’s how much candor matters at Pixar: It overrides hierarchy.” Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.,* 100. On the “reality distortion field,” see Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (NY: Little, Brown: 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Like all the cases that I use in my teaching, it is fictionalized so that no one’s mistakes are open to public scrutiny. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Do I need to insert a section/chapter/discussion of productive conflict? Christian organizations have not typically learned how to engage in productive conflict rather than destructive conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. \*\*\*This example needs to be longer or shorter. It either needs to be longer and incorporate all the lessons from Hill’s five characteristics or it needs to be shorter an illustrate only one part of the Braintrust. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. In the terms that we developed earlier: worship is the practice; a Sunday morning gathering for worship is the program; and singing was the form present in the service of worship. An (overly-simplistic) description of the evolution of the seeker-sensitive service would say that the first thing that got changed was the musical instruments in that the charismatic renewal movement of the 1970s and the Jesus People movement of the 1960s each had guitars playing songs that would be well-known to most evangelical Christians of the time. The guitars often appeared alongside rather than instead of piano and organ. Then, after people got used to that, the guitars appeared without piano. Then the pace of the songs quickened and the kind of guitar moved from acoustic to acoustic with microphone to electric. At the same time, the other elements of the service changed slowly. The liturgy was slowly whittled to include only the singing and preaching (with perhaps an offering). Even the seating changed from pews to padded pews to interlocked chairs to movable chairs. And finally even the time for worship changed: from 11am Sunday to earlier on Sunday morning to Saturday night to even weeknights. The point here is that the practice of worship remained a Christian practice. The program was still a worship service. And the forms were things singing or preaching. Changing the content of a form (say, the instrument used in singing at an 11am Sunday morning worship service) was not revolutionary. The big change came when many small movements changed the form, which in turn changed the program. Seeker-sensitive services did not really become controversial until they were seen as an alternative to the Sunday morning worship service. (\*\*\*This footnote needs work and lots of documentation; it covers too much history in too little space.\*\*\*) [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. I should warn the reader now that the literature on culture is filled with mixed metaphors and competing metaphors. I will use more than one metaphor and I will even mix them because that is what the literature has done and that seems to make the whole idea easier to understand. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Likewise: studying the Bible is the practice; a college ministry like Inter-Varsity is the program; and the small group is the form. It would be possible to pioneer another form to enact the same practice. This might lead us to abandon the small group study, but we cannot jettison the practice of studying Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (April 1986) 273-286 cf. Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); Note also, Swidler was a co-author (along with Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, and Steven Tipton) of the extremely influential book *Habits of the Heart* (University of California Press, 1985), which lays the groundwork for talking about how culture can shape the most basic human experiences. This book is particularly important because it takes social science approach to the questions that animate what the Western Tradition has typically called the human condition. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. This process is similar to the process that Paul DiMaggio calls “cultural entrepreneurship.” DiMaggio’s ideas have more resonance in sociological circles. We will use Hargadon’s term because he specifically addresses the goal of innovation. But it is important to note that the ideas go together. In fact, Hargadon learned about creating cultural tools from a band of scholars that quite consciously built off of DiMaggio’s original work. So it makes sense that Hargadon discovered cultural processes similar to the ones that DiMaggio first explained. See, esp., Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston,” Media, Culture and Society 4 (1982): 33-50; see, also, DiMaggio’s influential article on the larger question of how cultural shapes the way human’s process information, DiMaggio, “Culture and Cognition,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (Aug 1997) 263-287. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. I recognize that I am mixing metaphors when I talk about cultivating tools. But I choose to do this because the process of creating a tool like a hammer is much like that for creating a device. But the process for creating a cultural tool is much more organic; it is more like cultivating a sapling. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003) xii [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. From the perspective of what neo-institutional scholars call “institutional isomorphism,” the blog shapes my thinking through mimetic isomorphism, while my boss is more likely to influence my thinking through normative isomorphism or even sometimes coercive isomorphism. That distinction is important because there is only a small range of topics that can be influenced by normative and coercive means. Neo-institutional organizational theory is closely tied to our interests in cultural innovation because the seminal author in each area is Paul DiMaggio. DiMaggio’s work on “cultural entrepreneurship” precedes and strongly influenced Swidler’s work on cultural tools. See, DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston,” Media, Culture and Society 4 (1982): 33-50 On institutional isomorphism, see DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality,” in Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) pp. 63-82; Friedland, Roger and Robert R. Alford, “Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions,” in Powell and DiMaggio eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) pp. 232-263. and Harry Stout and Scott Cormode, “Institutions and the Story of American Religion: A Sketch of a Synthesis” in Demerath et.al., *Sacred Companies*; See also, Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, p109n15 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. On the importance of having a limited set of choices in order to make good decisions, see John Tierney, “Do You Suffer From Decision Fatigue?” *New York Times Magazine* (Aug 17, 2011). Tierney is a science columnist for The Times. His essay is adapted from a book the wrote with the noted psychological researchr Roy F. Baumeister, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (Penguin, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Indeed, one of the key characteristics of “cultivated instincts” is the judgment to know what requires attention and what can be safely ignored. This limits the number of variables that an experienced practitioner has to address in determining a course of action. Think of walking into a hospital room to see a patient. A nurse will pay attention to one set of variables, while a pastor will pay attention to a different set. But each one uses her experience to make sense of the situation before she has walked the few feet from the door to the bedside. She then selects from a very limited set of options for action based on the data she has already received. That is what experience does for us. The purpose of Christian meaning making is to get the people entrusted to our care to pay attention to Christian categories even when they are not in specifically-Christian settings. For example, a recent MDIV graduate founded a catering company built around the Christian practice of hospitality. Paying attention to hospitality in every setting – whether providing food or giving an estimate – changes the way that the owner engages in business because “hospitality” is not normally one of the categories that small business owners are taught to notice. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. “There is little evidence that innovative behavior is an innate quality in some elite set of organizations,” including Thomas Edison’s labs. Hargadon, *How Breakthroughs Happen*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Hargardon, *How Breakthroughs Happen,* 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. The network of past wanderings defines the “network of possible wanderings,” or what Johnson calls the “adjacent possible.” Hargadon describes not only how the adjacent possible works, but, more importantly, how to expand the adjacent possible. He says it happens by expanding your network, especially the network that builds on the strength of weak ties (see below). Cf. Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From* (Riverhead Trade Books, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. The theories of atonement I have in mind are: the Moral Influence Theory, the Ranson Theory, Substitutionary Atonement, and the *Christus Victor* theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Even the Moral Influence Theory recognizes that Christ died, although some progressive versions of it do gymnastics to downplay the necessity of his death. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. For scholars something is legitimate when it “is defined by a set of social norms as correct or appropriate.” This definition of legitimacy comes from Richard Scott’s standard textbook, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems, Third Edition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992 [1981]) 307. Other organizational scholars would use slightly different definitions. But each would explain legitimacy in terms of what the cultural rules define as appropriate. The lineage of the term traces back to Talcott Parsons’ emphasis on values. See, especially, Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Classics, 2003 [1978]) esp. 193-202; Richard Scott, “Unpacking Institutional Arguments,” in Walter W. Powell and Paul DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 169ff. On its application to Christian leadership, see Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, pp. 67ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. On the rise of Pentecostalism, see Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006); and on the global spread of Pentecostalism, see Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven* (De Capo Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. DiMaggio and Powell, “Institutional Isomorphism,” in Powell & DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Yale University Press, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Expand this idea by talking about the difference between expanding categories and creating new ones. It is sometimes easier to expand a presently-legitimated category than it is to create a whole new one. In other situations, the old category has clear boundaries. Think especially about Luke Timothy Johnson’s discussion of the cycle from Acts 10-15, which describes how a new category (i.e. Gentile followers of Jesus) became legitimated. On the one hand, it took interventionist act of God (i.e. the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit and so Peter decided to baptize with water those that God had already baptized with the Holy Spirit). On the other hand, Peter does not rely on his authority as an Apostle to legitimate his actions and instead simply tells the story. This demonstrates the power of narrative to legitimate new cultural tools. See, Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Abingdon, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See Part Two of Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense* (Abingdon, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)