

# CHURCH HEALTH IN THE 3 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

## Part 1 – Framing it Out

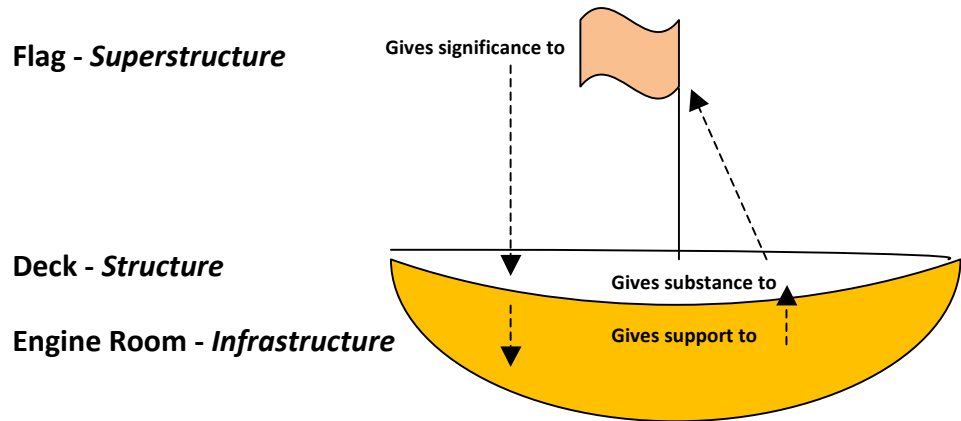
Volunteers needed, Men’s Breakfast, retreat, trip, work day, financial report, etc. It is the stuff of church life. Often ministries will advertise their programs as just another thing on the calendar. Other ministries will have niche ministries that advertise for their niche interests within a niche purpose but not as part of the church’s overarching, global direction. Because of my convictions contained herein, I have to say that just doing church stuff or working within fragmented ministries is not effective to get God’s work done or to inspire God’s people. The better and best is to understand that living on the **Structure** level (people acting within ministries) without continual connection to the **Superstructure** level (global reason for being) is merely conducting programs for the sake of programs. With proper attention, you can inspire your congregation to see the small and large individual contributions they make as related to a sense of destiny—a sense of contributing to changing the world by being part of something bigger than any one person or group.

Leaders know that planning and acting for effectiveness is hard work. Even if a team can avoid the rhetoric pitfalls of being unclear or of saying too much, the real work begins with translating words into action. Even harder than that is continuing to stick with the plans for the long haul. Finally, teams also have the challenge of getting followers to catch onto the plans and align their values with those of the organization. While there isn’t enough space to address each of these planning challenges comprehensively, I can introduce you to a helpful model for sorting out and then putting activities within your church in a healthy context.

Having a big picture **Superstructure**, a **Structure** of people doing activities, and repeatable systems and protocol of **Infrastructure** is far from revolutionary. The three in isolation can make sense and be relatively easy to manage. The truly revolutionary undertaking faced by any church is creating a logical flow and relationship between the three. Each of the three structures benefit, and are benefitted from the other two. Conversely the three are weakened or even stifled when leaders do not aggressively and repeatedly connect them.

There is some organizational philosophy in here so let me give three central concepts that can serve as a map through the follow pages. First, **Superstructure** is the destination or destiny of the organization. Second, leaders must be careful that **Infrastructure** and **Structure** details and programs do not replace the passion and dreams of **Superstructure**. Third, leaders must regularly connect those details of church life with the reason for being of **Superstructure** both by informing and inspiring.

Allow me to first define the three structures and then I will pull out a number of helpful principles. I will give some other metaphors and examples of the three structures further on, but right now I will use the metaphor of a ship. (Please excuse the starkness of the picture but I am joyfully graphically challenged!)



## I. DEFINITIONS

### A. SUPERSTRUCTURE - The Ship's Flag

A ship's flag is a piece of cloth with a lot of meaning that is connected to a society and its values. A nation's flag, a skull and crossbones, and a red cross all have significance. A nation's flag says that the ship is out doing the business of that nation whether it is transportation or war. A pirate flag and a Red Cross flag tell everyone that the ship itself and the people on that ship are operating for a specific purpose.

- ✓ **Superstructure** answers the questions of "Why are we doing it?" and/or "Where are we going?" It states the organization's reason(s) for being.
- ✓ It is the values and desired future of the organization.
- ✓ It gives significance to the elements of the lower levels. It calls us out of rote movement and mundane lives. It is a source of evaluating the effectiveness of what we are doing.

Common names and elements: Mission, vision, credo, values, goals, objectives, macro, global, big picture, aerial view, marching orders

## B. STRUCTURE - The Ship's Deck

- ✓ **Structure** answers the questions of “What are we doing?” and “Who is doing it?”
- ✓ It is the tangible actions “on deck” and the people who do those actions.
- ✓ It gives substance to the dreams of **Superstructure**.

Common names and elements: Programs, people, ministries, initiatives, activities, rubber meets the road, brass tacks, assignments, responsibilities.

## C. INFRASTRUCTURE - The Ship's Engine Room

- ✓ It answers the question of “How do things get done?” and “When do they get done?”
- ✓ It is the repeatable and predictable processes, protocol and systems that keep things going and running smoothly. It is the “hard” detail things that allow you to do “soft” ministry things with needed resources and regularity.
- ✓ It gives support to **Structure**

Common names and elements: Policy, protocol, channels, timeline, schedule, facilities, finances, procedures, operations, administration, accountability, supervision, systems, communications, alignment.

## II. OTHER EXAMPLES

### Civilizations

- SUPERSTRUCTURE - Constitution, Manifesto, etc.
- STRUCTURE – Citizens and their Roles
- INFRASTRUCTURE – Government Structure, Transportation, Utilities, Communications

## The Early Church

- SUPERSTRUCTURE – The Great Commission
- STRUCTURE – Peter and Paul and thousands of believers spread the Gospel
- INFRASTRUCTURE – Roads, common Greek language, common Greek writing of the Septuagint, much of which was developed during the “dark” 400-year inter-testamental period.

## Mountain Climbing



## III. INSIGHTS

### Effective Organizations:

- ✓ Have strength on all three structure levels
- ✓ Have one flag versus multiple, divided and competing flags.
- ✓ Identify and repeat common *Superstructure* language.

### Effective Leaders:

- ✓ Continue to proactively connect *Structure* people and activities to *Superstructure* at every opportunity in big and small ways.

In John 15:15 Jesus said that His followers are friends who know the Father’s business. My interpretation of it is that slaves simply perform functions because they are told to. Friends do the work with an understanding of the big picture reasons. Church leaders must do the same by connecting the work of the church with the purpose of the church.

We assume that people make the connection between what the organization is doing and the organization's purpose when they often do not. As churches grow in size the game changes. What works for a church of 100 is much different than that of a church of 2,000. Lines of accountability, roles, expectations, etc. all change as increased size equals increased complexity.

Moving a church of 100 toward a common objective is (usually) much easier. There is usually THE pastor who is very close in proximity to the congregation. He is very accessible. He preaches one to two times a week, leads prayer meeting, attends many or all leadership meetings, plays softball at the church picnic, and comes over for dinner. THE pastor dedicates, baptizes, marries, counsels, visits, and buries each congregant. There is direct communication, direct access, direct modeling, and direct absorption of his (hopefully noble) values. The values might not even be formally stated but they are still directly "caught" by the congregation.

It is not so at a large church. The congregation is largely physically distant from THE pastor. The Senior Pastor is a specialist as are the rest of the pastoral and administrative staff. The congregation is sectioned off by interests, life stages, facility locations, campuses, etc. Figuratively and sometimes literally speaking, many people are mentally and physically in the twenty-seventh row and we have to broadcast what we want them to get. The bottom line is that communication has to change in that we have to be utterly intentional, clear and repetitive.

There is an information and inspiration component to connecting Infrastructure and **Structure** with **Superstructure**. The information component is more static and matter-of-fact than inspiration. In conveying information, leaders usually communicate the information connection verbally or in writing by making an association between a **Superstructure** values and the **Structure** program or story. So my church, Cypress Bible Church will list related ministries under Celebrate God, Build Bridges and Connect Together section in our worship folder or website. In announcements we make connection between what we are highlighting and the threefold **Superstructure**. Note that connecting to your church's logo or slogan doesn't have enough meat on it to have impact. I suggest that you go a level deeper into the breakout of values or the desired future to connect more specifically.

Inspiration is impacting the congregation on a different plain. We must repeat values, tell stories, and paint pictures of what the desired future looks, feels, smells, and sounds

like. Whereas information really affects the eyes, ears and the brain, inspiration goes after the imagination, emotions and hair on the back of the neck. It is communicated by body language and voice inflections since passion and energy do matter here.

Switching to the metaphor of mountain climbing, we are painting pictures of the mountain top. People aren't inspired as they should be when we tell them about climbing, tents, ropes, and protective clothing. Their ordinary lives are filled with activities, supplies and details. Yes, there is a joy in the journey but we need to inflame their hearts with a view from the mountain top. Leaders need to tell the congregation, "These are the views, fresh air, feelings, etc. of the mountain top. I've been there or I just know it is there."

Too often we stay at the **Infrastructure** and **Structure** levels of details without regular mention of the dreams of the **Superstructure**. The words impact, Kingdom, serve, etc. are certainly biblical and noble expressions. However, we have to be careful that they don't become churchy phrases that replace passion. **Superstructure** is a statement or series of statements that can be as mundane as any detail unless we breathe the beauty of the mountain top into it. So if one of your **Superstructure** values is outreach, the communication has to go beyond a Fall Festival event, volunteers needed and evangelism training. That is the people and programs of **Structure** and is a replacement for **Superstructure**. They may have become your highest level but it is falling short. Rather we need to paint the mountain top pictures of husbands falling back in love with their wives, one student changing an entire high school, and the church hallways being filled with new faces of unpolished people and families. I see ethnic groups accepted and loved, nose rings, the smell of cigarette smoke on clothes, a story of an inept evangelist taking first steps with a fellow construction worker, addictions healed, the lonely finding a family, tearful prayers of thankfulness ... somebody stop me! Can you see the view from the mountain top? Can you taste it? Are you willing to give up personal comfort to get it? Do you want it or are you that happy living life and collecting a paycheck?

What does a wonderful life of worship look like? As you view connecting with other believers, what mountain top laughter, encouragement, and tears can you help others see? It has to go beyond talk of zip code groupings and database.

From church to church an Executive Pastor's job description will range in responsibility and jurisdiction from administration to heavy involvement in leading and guiding the church at large. Wherever you land, you have to communicate the mountain top,

**Superstructure** view wherever you can. You also have to influence all leaders, including the Senior, Lead or Teaching Pastor to regularly paint mountain top pictures for large and small initiatives.

✓ **Don't allow the lower 2 levels to become the *Superstructure***

Mountain climbing is not the mountain top. It is an activity to get to the mountain top. Preparation, supplies, base camp, and communications are not hiking nor are they the mountain top. They are an Infrastructure support system. Be careful to make that distinction. Methodology is methodology, programs are programs, and church stuff is church stuff. As humans we have the tendency to get out of balance in our views and practices and balancing the three structures is no exception. The three structures in isolation are seen below:

***Superstructure* in Isolation = Lofty Dreams**

Inflammatory statements and “coulda, woulda, shoulda” are easy. They can be a dime a dozen in that there is no shortage of people who believe they know THE secret to the church’s success. In addition, few churches struggle with crafting some sort of a vision statement. However, there are a myriad of threats to realizing a vision when:

- The vision itself lacks the “bite” to drive a ministry. The vision then becomes a platitude that is placed on a church’s website and dusted off for the state of the church address.
- Leaders cannot translate ***Superstructure*** into meaningful and purposeful people and actions of Structure.
- Leaders lack the maturity and tenacity to stick with a ***Superstructure*** vision.

***Structure* in Isolation = Programs for Programs’ Sake**

One of the differences between humans and the animal world is that humans not only have thinking processes but they can also step back and think about *how* they are thinking. Elephants throw dust on themselves and cheetahs chase gazelles because that is what they do by nature. The challenge is that churches are pretty good at doing noble church stuff without thinking about why since:

- It's what they've always done. In a sense, man-made program or methodology gets raised up to near scriptural status.
- Leaders are unwilling to pay the political cost to change it.

Continually (as in daily and moment by moment) keeping the Superstructure in play gives meaning to Structure by laying out a destiny or reason for being. In addition, it is also a catalyst for thinking about how we are thinking in gauging the effectiveness of our **Structure**.

### ***Infrastructure* in Isolation = Cold Calculations**

Again, we are called to proactively seek balance and also proactively avoid the pitfalls of imbalance. Within ***Infrastructure*** itself we have to balance being presumptuous and poor stewards with taking God-sized risks.

- ***Infrastructure*** people, maybe even a wide segment of the congregation can swing to the imbalance of solely keeping budget in the black and protecting facilities.
- Ministry can become bottom line business calculations without the warmth of lovingly guiding sheep and bandaging wounds.

\* Part 2, the applications of these principles, will be in the next XP-Newsletter.