

# I-Operations

## Is It Time for New Wineskins?

By Brett Johnson



**M**any pastors and church staff are, subconsciously at least, struggling to make things work. At the so-called spiritual end of things, they have no trouble figuring out the next sermon series, but at the infrastructure and management end, they're less confident. To illustrate, let me tell you about some leaders I know (the names have been changed) who might be representative of this struggle:

■ **Allen** is the lead pastor of a thriving alternative church service. New converts are added each month, there's a buzz and excitement, and the congregation is approaching what you might call "critical mass." The influence and income that comes with this success may enable Allen to begin to shape the broader church body. But the transition from a successful service to a well-functioning body of believers has yet to happen. Allen is asking, "How is this really going to work?"

■ **Jane** is executive pastor of a church with a diverse portfolio of activities, including Allen's alternate service. Experienced in church management and an excellent administrator, Jane's doing her best to make the governance, leadership and management structures she inherited work. But they're not. Her predecessors put together a convoluted matrix of committees, boards and task forces as checks and balances for visionary pastors who were sometimes dangerous when it came to practical matters.

Jane values tradition and loves the new influx of people, but is now asking, "How do I make this work?"

■ **Chip** is pastor of a church plant. He had the luxury of starting afresh, unencumbered by the problems Allen and Bill face. He could preach the word, and love the people.

He had some start-up capital from a denomination, and

planned to be self-funding in a few years. Some people have loved the informality, and others have loved reinventing the church. Now, two years later, traditions are starting to creep in. Worse still, the economy has tanked and he needs a second round of denominational funding.

Chip is fast exiting the honeymoon stage and starting to ask, "How will I continue to make this work?"

■ **Doug** is senior pastor of a healthy church which he has led for 10 years. He has a good board of elders who provide spiritual oversight, deacons who run the practical side of the church, and house-church leaders who care for the people on a daily basis.

Doug has some entrepreneurial flair, and has led his church into many new ministries, such as homeless shelters and educational programs. Doug and his elders see the next frontier as business enterprises. The first business, The Bread of Life Bakery, is up and running. Co-locating the new businesses and the church in the same property is being considered.

This represents a diversity of activities that mixes the domains of local church, missions and business. Doug is asking, "How will we make this work?"

■ **Ed** is the leader of an international missions ministry. He, like Doug, believes the worlds of business and government should be impacted by the infusion of biblical principles. Having preached the role of business in expanding the Kingdom of God, he's now faced with businesses that wish to partner with him.

But Ed is afraid of the negative influence a business which serves its bottom line could have on his mission, and is skeptical of historical attempts to mix business and missions. On the other hand, he wants to reach business leaders, and to experiment with self-sustaining ministry models.

So he, too, is asking, “How can I make this work?”

In the end it all boils down to the same challenge: leading a dynamic organism where the “wine” is constantly changing. So how do we make sure the wineskin is right for the wine?

Jesus used the analogy of a wineskin to answer a question about religious traditions. “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined” (Matthew 9:17).

### What do you mean, “new”?

Jesus explained, by pouring “new wine into new wineskins, both are preserved” (Matthew 9:17, italics added). Two different root words for the word “new” are used in this verse. Neos, for “new” wine, refers to a fresh batch or quantity or arrival of something that’s essentially the same as it’s always been. Kainos, for new wineskins, refers to something radically different from the way it’s always been. It refers to a new structure, material or container.

New wine happens wherever the gospel is at work in people and organizations. The basic Kingdom principle is that this new wine demands a new wineskin—new ways to get things done. Every generation is responsible, I believe, to discover the new wineskin for their times. What are some likely characteristics of the new wineskin for our time?

Scratch below the surface of the battles in many established churches, and there are struggles of traditional versus the new. Many churches are experiencing deep struggles today because they love God but fail to see that their views on how things work, and how organizations should be structured, are based on tradition, not revelation.

### Obstacles to Discovering New Operating Models

Let’s consider some of the obstacles that make it difficult for organizations to discover new operating models:

**1. Second-guessing God.** Spiritual matters are God’s domain, but organization charts, core processes and budgets are ours, so we think. After all, God gave us brains, so let’s use them! This kind of thinking is more rooted in independence than reality. It’s easier to do it our way than to learn God’s ways.

**2. Oversimplifying things.** The times we live in are inherently more complex than times past, so it stands to reason that

operating models are more complex. Our work with corporations, churches and mission organizations indicates there are 10 drivers of “impact” in today’s world. Organizations that ignore this complexity will halt the hunt for new wineskins.

**3. Dichotomizing the secular and sacred.** There’s a strong tendency to draw hard lines between different domains such as church, business, media, education, government, etc. We see principles governing each domain, and are happy to occasionally reach over the fence and borrow principles from realms outside our own, but feel safest when the fence is intact. So we use biblical principles for the “front office” of our churches, and borrow business principles for the “back office.”

Beyond that, we view preaching as more spiritual than accounting, and leading worship as more holy than janitoring, ignoring the reality that all things are God’s. He’s given us the ministry of reconciling all things to himself. The whole operating model belongs to God.

**4. Ignoring the existence of multiple realities.** There are multiple realities at work in each situation: the faith reality, leadership reality, practical reality, etc. All must be assessed simultaneously. Suspending practical reality because “God spoke” is not wise. Placing the so-called “faith” realm over the “practical” realm is not always right. Likewise, applying “good business principles” when tackling subjects of operations, and “biblical principles” when tackling matters of programs is flawed.

Faced with difficult choices, we have to define all realities clearly, and then, as needed, prioritize such realities. But we should not have a default setting that says ‘faith first’ for every situation. Nor should we suspend faith when dealing with operations.

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### Operating Models

In *I-Operations: the Impact of the Internet on Operating Models*, Gary Daichendt and I define the operating model as “the processes and procedures used to design, build, market and manage an organization’s products and services.” Churches have operating models they use to design and build programs, and then to service, promote and manage them. Whether it’s a Sunday School or homeless shelter, the elements of design, build, market and manage are all there. The operating model helps create a service, and then deliver it to those who need it.

I can’t recall seeing a church that didn’t fall loosely into what I call the 4x4 Operating Model. The four services define the “what” of ministry: love, disciple, train and send, and the four zones define the “where” of ministry: local (Jerusalem), regional (Judea), national (Samaria) and the world (ends of the earth).

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Operations is “the execution of the operating model.” Simply put, you can’t get from grapes on a vine to satisfied patrons without an operating model. The problem isn’t having an operating model, but keeping it updated. It’s even more challenging for churches which idolize their current structure, polices and procedures.

## The Church and Change

Many Christian organizations are going through significant change. When leadership changes, there’s an inevitable shift in the operating model. The question is not whether this is true, but the extent to which such organizations recognize its nature and extent. Despite the inevitability of change, there’s a period when it’s assumed things won’t change much. This is a predictable delusion.

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# The Institute’s 10-P Model™

**1—PURPOSE:** The purpose of an organization radically affects its ability to have Impact. Countless months are spent laboring over clarifying products, programs and services, when what’s really lacking is a purpose. Other organizations may have a stated purpose but lack clarity on the values that are essential to fulfilling the purpose.

**2—PRODUCT:** Products and services are key components of how the target audience experiences what you have to offer. Products create the “touch, see and smell” factors that make an organization come alive. For nonprofits, products usually take the form of programs.

**3—PRESENCE:** Products consumed out of context do not carry the full Impact the purveyor intends. Traditionally, marketing is intended to make consumers aware of their needs, and how particular products can fill those needs. Marketing creates presence—a mind-set for the product or organization—and it builds a story and experience that goes beyond the simple consumption of the product. Presence results in Impact.

**4—POSITIONING:** If another organization creates a perceived advantage in the minds of your customers, then purpose, products and presence will not be enough. Establishing a clear positioning of both organization and products is essential. The value proposition of the organization and what differentiates it from others is essential to creating Impact.

**5—PARTNERING:** Partnering is demanded by customers, making it a condition of business that suppliers cooperate. Why? Because they know no one organization can do everything

well. Partnering creates better Impact for organizations and their customers alike. The same is true for the service sector; we need effective networks to serve constituents.

**6—PROCESSES:** Core “business” processes can either be handled adequately, or they can be deliberately directed towards the creation of Impact. Decision-making is an important aspect of business processes; the location, speed, and quality of decision-making processes influence the stakeholders’ perceptions of value.

**7—PEOPLE:** People have a tremendous effect on the Impact of the organization. When people—including the way in which they are organized—are thoroughly aligned with the Purpose of the organization, Impact is heightened.

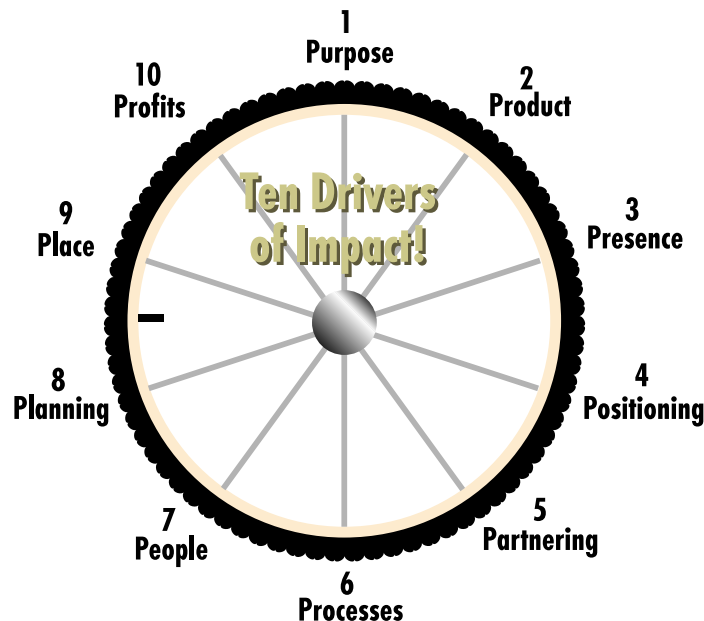
**8—PLANNING:** Appropriate planning remains a crucial driver of Impact. The old adage is still true: if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

**9—PLACE:** An organization’s location, the environment/image of the facilities, the corporate identity that goes beyond buildings, proximity to target audience, partners,

and others in one’s ecosystem—all of these can be used in the “place” spoke of the Impact wheel.

**10—PROFIT:** The economic model of an organization is clearly essential. Transitioning profit from an accounting tool to a strategic weapon is the habit of champions. Sustainable Impact is best achieved in concert with sustainable economics.

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As organizations grow (the new wine), new operating models (new wineskins) are needed. But it's critical to recognize that without an objective framework for analyzing operating models, truth and tradition will be confused. We will nearly always reject the new in favor of the old.

### The Church and Relevance

The church, including local ministry and mission outreach, must be relevant to be effective. However, the rate of change in society makes this very difficult. Recognizing this, there are two dangerous, yet fairly typical, responses:

**1. To embrace technology, marketplace forces and a capitalistic view of management without examining the worldview behind it.** We inhale, in other words, the worldview behind the technology we're assimilating.

**2. To replace secular humanism with Christian humanism.** That is, to formulate a rational set of assumptions which treats the world of "operations" as separate from things of the Spirit. Christian humanism treats tangible things as though they're the true reality.

Jesus was relevant—and still is. Jesus was not stuck in one place, one *modus operandi*, one tradition on earth—and still isn't. Jesus challenged religious tradition—and still does. We can't continually renew our wineskins without a passion to follow Jesus in all matters, because following Jesus—staying current with him—is what makes us relevant.

### The I-Operations Framework

Transformed organizations begin with renewed thinking. But how should faith-based organizations view the ceaseless slew of technology coming their way? The problem with rapidly changing technologies is that we know they're disrupting our organizations and changing the people inside and outside our organization, but we don't have a mental model for evaluating, let alone assimilating, such technologies. So we often resort to happenstance and strategy-by-anecdote when it comes to making technology and operating model decisions. To avoid this trap, we developed a mental model, which is, in essence, a worldview for how organizations work.

The Institute's 10-P Model™ is also a framework for evaluating the potential uses of emerging technologies. In the I-Operations book it's used as the framework for assessing the impact of the Internet on end-to-end operating models of a wide variety of organizations. Armed with the right thoughtware and tools, the continual renewing of wineskins (operating models) is much less daunting.

### A Peculiar Challenge

I can hear you saying, "But we're a nonprofit organization, and we have peculiar challenges." That's true and this article has already tackled some of them. But there's one more package of challenges, all inter-related, which plague Christian organizations.

■ **Leadership by anecdote.** In short, the span of information leaders need to manage effectively is out of control. Therefore many leaders start to rely on anecdotes they hear from staff and outsiders.

■ **Reliance on relationships.** Coupled with this surface-level understanding of technology, ministry executives begin to rely on relationships to help them sift through the information overload and feed them what they need to hear regarding technology and operations.

■ **"Death by 1,000 Volunteers."** In worst-case scenarios, where technology and infrastructure spending is not adequate for renewing operating models, the ministry begins to rely on volunteers who offer technology-related assistance.

The same deficiencies that make it hard for CEOs of ministries to filter emerging technologies also impacts their ability to objectively filter volunteer assistance. So the ministry quickly comes to another part of the lethal package, what I call "Death by 1,000 Volunteers." Our recommendation is that you: a) carefully assess the skills of volunteers, b) assign them to areas of past expertise—not to areas where they would like to be experts, and c) try to spread them across your 10-Ps.

Christian leaders wouldn't think of passing on some new teaching that didn't square with Scripture or the core principles of their belief system. But when it comes to the equally spiritual matter of our operating models and how they need to be continually renewed, we leave our spiritual gifts at the door, throw everything into the back office pot with a quick prayer, and hope a highly aligned, finely tuned, technology-enabled operation will emerge from the broth. Having suspended rationality, we stand amazed alongside our friends Al, Jane, Chip, Doug and Ed when down the road we're pondering, "Why isn't it working anymore?"

Just as we need to let God continually renew our thinking and transform our lives (see Romans 12:2), so, too, our organizations need to be continually transformed. And just as renewed thinking for individuals shouldn't be a random fate, the renewal of our operating models must be deliberate. The times urgently demand renewing our operating models, and good stewardship demands we do so with rigor.

**Brett Johnson** is founder of The Institute for Innovation, Integration and Impact, Inc. and co-author of *I-Operations: The Impact of the Internet on Operating Models*. For more information on the I-Operations Assessment go to [www.inst.net](http://www.inst.net) or email [brettj@inst.net](mailto:brettj@inst.net).

### The I-Operations Assessment

"An organization has I-Operations," says Daichendt and Johnson, "when it has deployed the new world applications in the context of a virtual enterprise to execute its operating model." The Institute has developed a baseline of how leading organizations utilize the Internet to improve operational efficiencies, and increase influence. The I-Operations Assessment enables ministries to obtain a comprehensive analysis of the degree to which I-Operations has been achieved throughout their operating model. Using the Institute's 10-P Model™, the I-Operations Assessment analyzes 10 drivers of impact that encompass the operating model (e.g., wineskin) of a ministry.