

Can It Be Bad When It's So Useful? Management Science as a Carrier of Modernity

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The Need for Intellectual Battle Lines

When a *Time* magazine feature on "Our Cheating Heart"¹ contended that evolution shaped human love and caused marriage to self-destruct, it triggered a vigorous chorus of objections. Human beings, the article argued, were designed to fall in love but not to stay in love. This thesis from evolutionary psychology drew out the fire in readers of Christian persuasion because the challenge was direct and clear. It was a frontal assault on the sanctity of marriage and the reality of sin. The response was an unflinching counter-offensive.

Christians are no wimps when the intellectual battle-lines are clearly drawn. Conventional conflicts between Christianity and the sciences have seen open and sustained debates. The staunch, if sometimes misinformed and misguided, defence of the Christian faith against Darwinian socio-biology is a classic case in point. The ingrained suspicion of evangelicals toward psychology has put them on a watchful guard against any pernicious infiltration by a field long known for its secularism, be it the starkly repugnant mechanistic-behaviourist model or its openly seductive longtime holistic-humanist rival. The feeling is mutual: few Christians have become psychologists, and fewer psychologists have become Christians.

The battle-line between the Church and management science² is, however, far from clear. Some Christians may wonder whether there is any conflict in the first place.

Management science is not perceived as an enemy, hence there is no need for battle. Indeed it may even be a good thing. Who would object to better planning, better people management, better resource and talent utilisation, and better public relations in the running of churches? Surely a good dose of well-regarded corporate practices can do church management a world of good! Church management should be an epitome of good management, so says the conventional wisdom.

An increasing segment of the congregation are working as managers and executives in industrial and commercial enterprises. Some are heading these outfits and many have been exposed to the organisational culture and practices of multinational corporations. The stark contrast between the professionalism of their workplace and the relative lack of sophistication in the churchyard is more likely to present management science as a saviour than a scourge. Having seen corporations become more effective through the use of sound management techniques, it seems sensible to apply these techniques for church growth. Christians will expect their churches to be more professional; they are unlikely to warn them of the perils of modeling after successful corporations. If the right kind of Chief Executive Officer can turn around an organisation on the

eve of demise, why can't the right kind of church leader, godly or extraordinary, be despatched to ailing churches on "turnaround" operations?

A parallel can be drawn from the world of politics. Life was simpler when there were good guys and bad guys. When there were real communists to fight against, the battle call was loud and clear, and witchhunts were run like crusades. Now that communists are not even sure about their doctrines (with some behaving more capitalistic than the originals), the Western world is in a state of sustained ambivalence and suspended animation. The bad guys aren't so bad after all, and the good guys are no better. The delirium that greeted the former Eastern bloc's liberation had since turned into disillusionment. One former East German said that she spent thirty years grappling with the contradictions of communism and now she would likely have to spend the next thirty years wrestling with the contradictions of capitalism. The great divide became the grave confusion.

Likewise, when it is hard to make a villain out of management science, there is no perceived need for wariness and watchfulness. Astrophysicists, nuclear chemists, socio-biologists and clinical psychologists are sitting ducks. Their mind-boggling grasp of cosmological infinity and infinitesimal matter, their exhilarating exploration of the labyrinths of life, can be readily portrayed as tempting human arrogance and taunting godly awe.

Darwin and Freud. These two intellectual giants trigger knee-jerk reactions among Christians. Their names spell trouble. They are seen as wolves in wolves' clothing. Domes of Christian articles and books have attacked their agnosticism and arrogance. The battle-lines are not only clearly drawn, they are deeply personalised.

While Einstein is spared such vilification, his look of helpless innocence and image of benign religiosity does not fool discerning Christians. While he did object to the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics with his pithy comment that "God does not play dice," we know that his god is an impersonal pantheistic force, not our personal monotheistic God. We recognise that he is from the opposite camp, an anointed secular saint of spiritual seekers and intellectual inquirers of our time.

Church leaders will be hard put to name any management thinker that will give them nightmares or day rage. With the success of Western corporations credited to the Protestant work ethic, and with industry leaders avowing corporate values that bear the shape and sound of Christian truth, management science enjoys good public relations in conventional Christian circles. Church circles are threatened by purveyors of ideas, not worried about conveyors of service. They perceive established sciences as being about thoughts and ideas, hence their wariness. They see management science as a toolbox and technical manual, hence the unguarded openness. Ideas in the established sciences may undermine the Christian faith, but isn't management science merely about helping to get the work done? Science may challenge Christianity, but surely management techniques can come in handy in church matters?

Unlike its face-off with the established sciences, the Church approaches management science in a less conceptual and more pragmatic way, and is as shrewd as doves in a field packed with "witch

doctors” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1996). The danger lies in becoming fixated on what will work rather than being fixed on what is right. This expedient mindset may blind the Church to the stealthy and steady intrusion by management science into its sanctuary and the consequential shredding of the spiritual fabric and fibre of the Church.

Church leaders are unlikely to do battle with management science. They are more likely to enter a marriage of convenience with management science to prevent their churches from fossilising toward obsolescence and propel them into the next century as state-of-the-art organisations. Numerous church seminars and sermons have been conducted on the conflicts between the sciences and Christianity, materialism and spirituality, and being practical and being principled. Any flirtation with the behavioural sciences is frowned upon but fault-lines in the marriage of convenience are hardly noticed. As conflict has not surfaced, its latent reality is too easily ignored.

In the author’s experience, Singapore churches are eager to *apply* task and people management skills in church leadership, youth work and pastoral ministry. But he has yet to be asked to advise on how churches should *view* management science from the biblical rather than merely practical standpoint. Churches do not even ask whether management science is relevant, they assume that it must be. They are more concerned about how it can be customised to the context of church and parachurch leadership. They have yet to ask whether management science is conceptually congruent with the spirit and substance of their vision and mission. Skipping immigration clearance of aliens, management science slips into the clothes of a potential church ally.

The Case for Scepticism

Should church leaders view management science with a sceptic’s eye when it appears to play a workman’s role in helping to make things work better? What harm can it do when it merely plays the role of a facilitator? For all the help that management science can give, perhaps we should not look a gift horse in the mouth. Might resistance against management science be a regressive step? Will putting management techniques through a fine tooth comb turn out to be a cover for the “NIH” (Not Invented Here) syndrome? Is this paper merely stirring up a storm in a teacup?

In an article analysing the idolatry of immortality inherent in all organisations, Alonzo McDonald observes that people today “think of management generically as a purely commercial activity, and one that is therefore secular. But sound management is thoroughly biblical. Essentially it is another word for stewardship. Many of the most tried and true management principles are taught or practised in the Old Testament books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and embodied in the example of Jesus Christ Himself” (McDonald, 1992, 148).

This view is tantamount to saying that just because many of the best childrearing and psychotherapeutic practices are found in the Bible, effective parenting and psychotherapy are essentially biblical. But sound psychotherapeutic practices, with the validation of efficacy, may be an anathema from the Christian standpoint. What works in bringing up *Hao Congming* [very bright in Chinese] in Singapore may not be what Christian leaders should urge their congregation to follow. Likewise management practices with a proven track record may not be what churches should implement. Sound management cannot be incontrovertibly classified as good stewardship,

for the roots of management science are essentially secular. Despite the numerous models of matchless biblical leadership and management, management science -- like physics, chemistry, biology and psychology -- was not developed from the Bible. We will want to avoid the NIH syndrome, but management science was not invented by the Church.

Taking the fundamentalist view that the Church was a founding father of management science only serves to perpetuate a fundamental error. For failure to separate the spiritual chaff from the practical grain in management science will suck Christian leaders into the drain of modernity.

A symptom of modernity in the management conduit is the belief that the latest is the best. Management gurus keep coming up with cutting-edge systems and practices. Sometimes it is old practice in new language. Other times see a removal of the old order as a new generation of young turks edge out the old guards. It is unwise to go along with what the market throws up as one can look quite silly later. Being grounded on biblical principles, churches and parachurch organisations should not fall prey to fad and fashion. Especially when they did not invent the science, they must carefully chose the practice.

The practices swing like a pendulum: in one fad cycle people are emphasized as the performance drivers, and in another re-engineering gives management science a renewed task orientation. In the seventies and early eighties Japanese management was the saviour as American industry lost self-confidence. In the nineties, as Japan loses its grip on the economic rudder and America loses its patience with incremental zero-defect practices, American-style management dives into re-engineering.

In Singapore participative management was the rage of the eighties, with managers trying to look participative, at least when they responded to management questionnaires and psychometric instruments. Now industry captains are doing turnaround operations, with very few considering whether non-invasive surgery or primary health care might be more people-sensitive as well as a better option.

The point is: sound management is as much about perception and fashion as it is about substance. Progressive churches may not run the risk of supping with the devil but merely flowing with the passing waves of cutting-edge management practices may throw them onto roller coaster rides with so-called progressive companies.

Choosing a management approach solely on pragmatic grounds may turn out to be a rational cover for dumbly following the crowd. Churches need to look deeper before plugging into the management grid. Instead of gulping what is marketed as the best, church and parachurch leaders must take two fresh initiatives. First, their choice of management practices must be values-based rather than success-driven. Second, they must define the management philosophy that is at least consistent with the Christian faith.

McDonald goes on to say that precisely because sound management is essential for corporate success, it is subject to the idols of excess, and that unthinking managers often end up focusing more on technique than accomplishment, thereby getting bogged down in marginally useful

forms and data (McDonald, 1992, 148). He takes the stance that management science is potentially good, that it merely plays the role of a facilitator and that whether it turns out to be good depends on how people use it. His warning about the dangers of using management science is not uniquely biblical: it is something that any corporate practitioner will take note of. His warning does not quite address the peculiar dangers of using management science in churches and parachurch organisations.

The dangers are more than that of letting technique supplant accomplishment. On this point, time management texts will say that good management is results-oriented rather than technique-fixated. Put in bottom line terms, management emphasis should always be first on doing the right things (accomplishment), then on doing things better or merely faster (technique) -- not the other way round. But the real danger for churches and parachurch organisations is that management science can and has been a key success factor in their accomplishments. No church, indeed no organisation, should become obsessed with form-filling and rigid about planning. But the deeper issue is that using management science as a means to accomplishment can enmesh a church unwittingly into idolatry -- the very kind that C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape* likes for dessert. Effective management produces the *desired* corporate results. For the church, the question must be whether it produces the *desirable* results: whether the desired achievement may turn out to be a case of winning a battle but losing the war, or even that of winning the world only to lose one's soul.

The Church Under Scrutiny

McDonald indicts churches and parachurch organisations for performing much like voluntary organisations. His ranking of the performance expectations the American public places on various organisations, in progressive order, is as follows: civic and voluntary organisations, educational institutions, government, commercial operations, and professional practitioners. To illustrate, surgeons are not allowed such excuses as domestic problems and overwork for botching even a minor surgical procedure. On the other hand, because little or no financial reward is involved in voluntary organisations, any contribution is bonus issue in the public's mind. McDonald contends that Christ-centred activities should top the list.

Where do churches and parachurch organisations sit on the Asian performance expectation list? Here one should note that the performance expectations in the Asian context may be quite different, and may even vary from country to country. In some Asian countries, the government may be accorded low expectations, and commercial operations may be understood in terms of personal connections (*quan xi*). Professional practitioners are still likely to be ranked high; Asian mothers hope for a son as much as they strive to turn him into a doctor.

In comparing American and East Asian governments, Fallows (1994, 216), observes that the latter "are more competent because the great prestige of the civil service continues to attract the best-educated people in the country. For historic and social-status reasons, jobs in the government bureaucracy are still among the most desirable jobs in Korea, Japan, and other Confucian-influenced East Asian societies." Above the politically shifting sands in such East Asian states as Thailand and Japan (where lasting a full electoral term makes a prime minister a political icon), the civil service rises in integrity and dignity.

In Singapore much is expected of the government. Even community service organisations are scrutinized in terms of how much of the donation dollar actually goes to the needy. The prevalence of multinational corporations in Singapore exposes Christians to modern management practices, systems and software.

Whether they work in government bureaucracy, community service organisations or private companies, Christians and would-be Christians in Singapore are therefore well exposed to cutting-edge management practices and quite road worthy about what is good and bad management practice. They are likely to apply these same criteria and expectations to churches and parachurch organisations. Moreover the Asian public's history-tinted mindset of missionary organisations as an expression of Western superiority (in firepower, economic might or educational brainware) perches churches and parachurch organisations at the top of the performance expectation list.

All things considered, the effectiveness and efficiency of leadership in churches and parachurch organisations are likely to be scrutinized by their members. Christian leadership has nowhere to hide. And it must not even run.

Church and parachurch leaders must not put across their indecisiveness as seeking God's will. Failure to lead must not be explained away as leadership of all saints. Poverty of ideas must not be presented as poverty of spirit. Disorganization must not be glorified as emergence from the rule of the law to the freedom of the spirit. Spiritual stillness must not be mistaken for management paralysis. Hiding under the apron of false spirituality invites accusations of hypocrisy. A Christian leader who couches his management inadequacy in spiritual terms awards himself a halo that others will see as hollow. Sadly the perpetrator perpetuates the problem when human denial slides into spiritual delusion.

This close internal scrutiny must compel church management to shape up. But it must not cause church leadership to swing senselessly toward any management trend.

Church Leadership and Management: Worshipping God and Serving Man

A modern trend in management is to be customer-centred. It is cliché to say "the customer is king," "the customer is always right," or "the customer may not be right but he is always the customer." The "customer" used to refer to the people who buy your products or ideas. Now the most progressive organisations are looking after the interests of suppliers even though the latter are the ones who get paid. The rationale is that treating them as customers will make them more able and willing to serve you, their paymasters, better.

In the past only service providers in the private sector used to give consideration to the customer; government nurses were impatient with the "fon" ("full of nonsense") patients. Britain, an English general once said, has the dubious distinction of inventing a new missile named *Civil Servant*, one which does not work and cannot be fired. Locally the civil servant was considered to be neither civil nor servant. While civil servants in most countries are either perched (too alive, one might add) atop the public or too submerged (though somehow still alive) in the sea of files to emerge, Singapore civil servants are urged to look at and serve the customer, and

rewarded for doing so. Until recently only front-line staff were supposed to serve the customer. Now everyone, including the CEO and backroom boys, should be customer-oriented. Organizational leaders are now urged to see their staff as customers, and urge their staff, especially those from different departments, to serve each other as customers. Even your wife, children, and family are your customers.

Just as client-centred therapy and pop psychology have been carriers of modernity through their worship of the self, management science carries the modernity torch through its emphasis on customer focus. In this customer-centred stratosphere Christian employees in Singapore are inhaling their 9 to 5. The issue is not whether there really is service excellence. People in Singapore may not give good service. But they, and Christians no less, expect pristine service. Christians may have been urged to go into the world. But the ways of the world, not the brutally devious but the blandly decent kind, may be oozing into the pores of their skin. They expect churches and parachurch organizations to treat them as customers. It is after all in keeping with the spirit of the times to pamper customers with what they want, to pander to their wishes. In turn management of these organizations is pressured to be customer-oriented. Christian leaders will no doubt object to this as conspicuous conformity. But the ways of the management world can assume an innocuous form and thereby go easy on the Christian palate. Certain things you instinctively spew out of your mouth. Some others enter the Christian realm like a computer virus: it gets in unnoticed, settles in unobtrusively and when you realise it's there, you're wiped out.

In management terms, one of the major deliverables or goods and services of churches is the worship service. The worship service can become just a service proffered to demanding customers. But what's wrong with that? After all, did Jesus not urge the disciples to wash each other's feet and did he not command Peter to "feed my sheep" (John 13). Is this not about serving one another and nurturing the weak and needy?

Church members, like other employees, are generally spending more time at work. They feel the demands of their customers, and they as customers will be most responsive to, if not insistent on, help-on-demand. A worship service that is not helpful will feel and look less attractive. Worship service becomes weekend mass therapy for the week's woes, rather than the launcher for setting the week ahead in godly perspective. It will be a sad day if the worship service is oriented toward what church members want rather than how they must be led to worship God more deeply.

One wonders how Martyn Lloyd-Jones will be received in modern-day Singapore. He urged that preaching should be serious, though Christians may be looking for light-hearted relief or a psychological massage. Preaching is not infotainment or edutainment, which formulates and formats a message to fit into the attention-deficit bandwidth and to amuse the bored brain of adults still surfing the learning medium of *Sesame Street*.

I was once told by a young member of a congregation that my sermon reminded her of Zig Ziglar. I wondered whether she had given me a left-handed compliment, but she appeared genuinely enthusiastic about my sermon, which made me all the more worried - for Zig Ziglar is a renowned motivation and sales trainer. My sermon must have to met her need, perked her up or

at least captured her attention, but did she worship God more wholly or would she follow Him more fully?

The next kind of customer service focuses on the non-believer who seeks a God-less spirituality. The latest in-thing in church leadership is to conduct, in American-style alliteration, "Seeker-Sensitive Services." Sunday services are attuned to the needs of spiritual non-seekers, catching them on their day off to give them "petrol-kiosk" service. Tailoring the main Sunday worship service to relieve their piled-up weekday stress serves the good intention of drawing them to God. Christians will have to do their worship and have their spiritual needs met during weekday worship services.

This SSS approach in delivering a regular church production can for all intent and purposes be made to sound biblical. After all aren't we supposed to reach out to the world and be the salt of the world? But the essence of this SSS approach is conceptually no more than the customer-centred service of the eighties and nineties, and the client-centred therapy of the sixties and seventies.

A trend in modernity revolves around the desire for a secular form of spirituality that addresses the spiritual needs of seekers without directing them to God, drawing them inward without taking them upward. Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul* (1992) exemplifies such a trend. The book by the former monk stayed on the New York Times Bestseller List for over forty-six weeks. It elicited a rapturous response from Sam Keen, a high priest of spiritual humanism, who wrote, "This book just may help you give up the futile quest for salvation and get down to the possible task of taking care of your soul. A modest, and therefore marvelous, book about the life of the spirit."³ Spirituality, less God, is more -- in the balance sheet of spiritual secularism. But God-less spirituality is idolatry of the self.

Secular humanism has for decades evoked a spirited and sustained challenge from Christians, who sees it as a wolf in wolf's clothing. Spiritual humanism is seductively soothing to Christians and non-Christians alike. Christians might even see this sly fox as a sheep in sheep's clothing. The deception is harder to uncover because the inner satisfaction emits the sights and sounds of biblical spirituality.

Herein lies the virulent danger of the SSS approach. Its paradigm pictures the seeker as a customer and reduces the church to a restaurant. Operationalizing this paradigm may cause the secular seeker to come, and keep coming back, for the soul-soothing menu but he will feel so satisfied that he does not bother about seeking God. The medium becomes the massage, no message needed.

In their over-anxiety to attract external customers, SSS-type churches have done their congregation a disservice. Expecting members to worship during the mid-week service will likely result in most church-goers being fed with spiritual congee on Sundays with no assurance that they will come for solid nourishment on a busy weekday. In the end, the seekers will learn to feel better about themselves without getting anywhere near God, and the worshippers will feel

good while losing their grasp of God. After all how many church members would bother to savour the real thing during the weekday on top of attending the Sunday service.

Christians have no bone to pick with this customer orientation if it were merely a case of selling a product or service according to what the customer wants or giving a therapy that suits the client. After all it is the customer and the client who pays for the goods and services. It is selfish and silly to give service that is convenient to us rather than the people we serve, or to offer therapeutic solutions that soothe us but suit nobody else. And we can indeed be a good Christian witness by serving customers and helping clients empathically. The problem is something else: the more fundamental one of modernity's exclusive focus on the "self" through the vehicles of customer and client-centredness.

Client-centred therapy encourages the client to seek for what *seems* right to him rather than what *is* right. While it makes initial sense in terms of therapeutic efficacy, for the client must work out a way of living his own life, this therapeutic stance encourages man to deny his dependence on God, and to see life as a universe unto himself. In other words, man can live by his vibes alone. Customer orientation takes this self-focus onto a far broader stage -- beyond neurotics to the populace. At first glance this stage may seem to advocate thinking of others instead of oneself. In the end it encourages people to think much too highly of themselves. There is a curious twist to courteous service: we pay to enjoy being "somebody" when deep inside we fear we are really nobody. *Screwtape* would have sanctioned this deception.

The message of customer service has raised the standard of customer service. But it has catapulted people's expectation of service. While striving to groom service providers to perform like a real *prima donna*, it has inadvertently licensed service recipients to act like pretentious *prima donnas*. In his analytical survey of the inception and growth of consumerism in America, William Leach stripped customer service of its altruistic gloss and glitter. In exposing its Christian pretensions, he noted that customer service "focused on the self, not on the community or on public duty or on holiness. Although it attempted to meet community needs, it was largely hedonistic, in pursuit of individual pleasure, comfort, happiness, and luxury" (Leach, 1993, 122).

Like any organization, churches and parachurch bodies must be sensitive to fellow servants and outside seekers. Christian leaders cannot hide under the banner of godliness when they lack people sensitivity. They cannot continue an ineffective form of service delivery in the name of substance. When the seeker does not "get" you, your message is a soliloquy. Pearls are not always thrown at unappreciative swine. The manner of throwing pearls might be swine-like.

Choosing or fine-tuning the right medium *per se* does not cast one into the net of modernity. But being fixated on the medium and dictated by the channel-surfing audience does, sucking the undiscerning users of modern methods into the seductive arms of modernity. Business management has no choice: to thrive, or just to survive, it must be customer-oriented. But churches and parachurch organizations should not and need not ape the business world.

How then should leaders of churches and parachurch organizations function? The answer revolves around when and how they should lead and manage. The distinction between

transformational and transactional leadership is pertinent here. The concept of transformational and transactional leadership was first mooted by Burns (1978). Transformational leadership is taking people where they should go. Transactional leadership is giving them what they want in exchange for their followership.

In matters of substance Christian leaders must lead; where form is the issue they should manage. It is desirable for church management to be transactional and imperative for church leadership to be transformational. They must lead others to go where the latter do not know or dare not go alone. They must manage systems and feelings in order to help their members to obtain what they need, ensuring that the desirable goals are not derailed by disorganization. As leaders they must be directive -- as directed by God. As managers, they must be consultative - sensitized to the needs and concerns of their constituents.

Imagine what churches and parachurch organizations will become if their leaders were to be mainly directed by the members and merely sensitive to God's feelings. This is the danger of treating members as customers or constituents. The service provider must always satisfy the customer, the parliamentary member cannot afford to upset his constituents. Under the direction of God, the Christian leader's main purpose is neither to satisfy his fellow servants nor to gratify seekers. While he should avoid insulting church members inadvertently, the church leader must nevertheless muster the courage to do or say needful things that will offend their sensitivity. While trying not to run down non-Christians, he must with verve and valour question the sensibility of their religious outlook.

In matters of theology and mission for instance, Christian leaders must not live by the canons of political correctness: they should lead without fear or favour. In matters of how best to use the resources available to realise the vision, they cannot afford to go it alone: they must manage without arrogance.

Worship must primarily be God-sensitive rather than servant or seeker-sensitive. In the biblical order of things, true worship of God must have the ripple effect of practical service to man, not the other way round. Being servant or seeker-sensitive is fundamentally flawed because it requires God to propose, in a *suitable* way, and encourages man to dispose, in his *own* way. We should worship God, then go on to serve man -- not cater to customers' wishes, then think of worshipping God.

Spiritual Strength and Management Science

How then should church leaders use management science? How does greater or lesser usage affect the church? As an initial attempt at answering such questions, the consequences of spiritual leaders operating the levers of management science may be analyzed with the following matrix:

CHURCH LEADERSHIP'S: **High Application of Management Science** **Low Application of Management Science**

	<i>Spiritual/Organized</i>	<i>Spiritual/Organic</i>
Strong Spirituality	1	2
Weak Spirituality	3	4
	<i>Secular/Mechanistic</i>	<i>Secular/Disorganized</i>

Quadrant-1 churches are those that are spiritually strong as well as highly attuned to the use of management science. The question is whether the use of management techniques causes them to grow, or the growth causes them to use management techniques to manage the practical requirements of growth.

Being first and foremost spiritual, such a church ensures that management techniques are kept in their place. It follows the rule best expressed by Sir Winston Churchill when he said that the expert should be put on tap, not on top. The recognition that Spirit-led growth of numbers requires practical support draws the church into the management groove. *Prima facie* a Quadrant-1 church appears to have the ideal combination, the best of both worlds so to speak, coupling spiritual rootedness with usage of a modern tool. I contend that taking the management science route is merely an expedient choice rather than a badge of honour. There is no intrinsic virtue in the choice beyond realizing that stupidity in the church is no excuse for spirituality. Moreover, a low usage of management science is not necessary an indictment on the church administration either, for Quadrant-2 is a different choice, not an absence, of administration. On the other hand, over-fascination with management wonders may suck the church into the spiritual blackhole of Quadrant-3.

Quadrant-2 churches are those that are spiritually strong but do not rigorously apply management principles. While conventional thinking may typecast such churches as being so heavenly as to spawn earthly confusion, and some churches do make easy targets, the low application of management science in this quadrant merely means that the church chooses to evolve organically its own way of doing things rather than to systematically change the organizational structure or install various management processes. While size makes a spiritual church more likely to shift into the Quadrant-1 gear, big and growing churches may still be quite productively parked in Quadrant-2. While some members may feel that their Quadrant-2 church can be better run, the church somehow manages the growing pains without systematic treatment.

Insisting that all growing churches must sooner or later enter Quadrant-1 is to confer upon management science the status of being a necessary and sufficient condition of spiritual growth

of the church - that is to say, the church will grow, or continue to grow, if and only if it uses management science. The spiritual growth of the church is independent of management science. On the other hand, growth in size can be effected by marketing techniques, sales pitch and premium service with spirituality as an appendage or a cover. To elevate the role of management science is to let organizational dynamics supplant spiritual substance -- a problem inherent in Quadrant-3 churches. In computer language, management techniques should be treated as add-ons (sometimes no more than bells and whistles), which the church leadership may choose to install.

Quadrant-2 churches will not be tempted into abusing or subjugating the spiritual message for the cause of organizational development (as Quadrant-1 churches might succumb or, as we shall see, Quadrant-3 churches have already succumbed). At worst it may raise the blood pressure of the professional and management Christian elites. At best this church is organic in its flexibility, and is freed from the bureaucratic woes that tend to beset large organizations. Instead of seeing it as being low on management octane, some management gurus may yet consider this to be an emblem of post-management simplicity. Thus glorified, it faces a different temptation: its organizational simplicity may supplant its essential spirituality.

Quadrant-3 churches are those that are cosmetically spiritual and vigorously thorough in applying management principles. Such a church may have an impressive congregation. Its success may delude it into regarding itself as being spiritual. But having lost its own soul while gaining the world's esteem, the tool of management science only serves to make it mechanistic. It is a spiritual blackhole because the pull of management successes prevents it from realizing that it has lost its vision. It may still sing spiritual tunes but the lyrics are essentially secular. It celebrates success in conventional terms, and is successful in helping its people to be successful. Spiritual messages have become the tool of management practices, ending up as wearables or disposables, depending on whether they suit organizational growth - rather than godly worship.

Quadrant-3 exemplifies the point that while spiritual growth will lead to physical growth, the latter may be due to factors other than spiritual. Management science, or the charisma of the guru, charlatan or cult leader, may be the cause. At best, its preoccupation with methods for success rather than the message on spirituality leaves its members high and dry, and stifles its growth. At worst, subjugating the spiritual message to the gods of organizational growth makes it a more pernicious threat than frontal assault by worldly orders. For it has become a wolf in sheep's clothing, drawing people away from God unto themselves. It becomes the church most favoured by Screwtape because it has all the sound bytes of spirituality and the hollow ring of secularity.

Quadrant-4 churches are spiritually and practically lost. Being spiritually weak and highly disorganized, they will diminish and dwindle away. Such a church is spiritually helpless and organizationally hopeless. It is likely to stagnate as a cozy club with members contemplating their navel or wallowing in mutual commiseration. There is neither an organized drive nor a sense of being called. It holds no promise and can do no harm.

Whether management science is for better or for worse depends on the church leadership's spirituality. If it is spiritual, it does not really matter whether it chooses to run the church like a multinational company, so long as it does not canonize administrative chaos. Perhaps sheer size makes management science more attractive, but size brings with it the baggage of bureaucratization. Spiritual leadership needs special grace to pry off this albatross, for bureaucratization is the bane of even the best and brightest among world-class companies (not just the civil service).

Americanization of companies, be they Singapore or British, has gained impetus in recent years. This goes deeper than the cosmetic re-titling of positions into various levels of presidency (Every executive seems to be some kind of vice-president - senior vice-president, vice-president, deputy vice-president, assistant vice-president, deputy assistant vice-president). On a whole stodgy companies are given a marketing face-lift and a service re-orientation, and compelled to take on the responsibility of being a cost or a profit centre.

Churches in Singapore are also likely shift in this direction - from their more colonial maintenance mode to a more American emphasis on efficacy. While this has clear benefits, the process of culturalization must be taken for what it is -- culturalization, without being given a spiritual coating. On the one hand, the impact of American marketing and management must not be treated as the invisible hand of God. On the other hand, converting various domains of church work into SBUs (Strategic Business Units) must not be seen as the only way to go. A particular mission work should not be abandoned just because there has been "no bottom line results" (translated to mean "no converted souls") -- the way a top conglomerate would sell off SBUs that are not the top three in their market segment. Management-by-Objectives and performance appraisal are the things to do for progressive companies. Quadrant-1 churches would be eager customers of such performance management tools. This is good and fine so long as Quadrant-2 churches are not viewed as country cousins. Preoccupation with numbers may equate big churches with good churches. Money may be re-directed to where we can see the impact of our work, where return-on-investment is higher, rather than where God tells us to invest, where the return-on-perseverance may be dismal and disheartening. These are pot-holes that Quadrant-1 churches must avoid.

Quadrant-1 and Quadrant-2 churches are both spiritually strong. They are rightly steadfast on the matter of spiritual principle. Churches can choose their preferred quadrant of management practice depending on the readiness of the leaders and culture of their people. They can afford to, and indeed should, compromise here. The problem of choice is of greater consequence when the leadership's spirituality is low. When an ostensibly spiritual and substantively secular church leadership adopts management science, the combination effects undesirable potency. Quadrant-3 churches that are successful are too blinded by their scoreboards to return to God. There might be hope yet for Quadrant-4 churches because they are too ineffectual to succumb to conceit - for "there is more hope for the fool" (Prov 26:12)

How Then Shall We Lead?

Given the concept of transformational leadership and the preceding analysis, the question then is: How then shall church leaders lead? Conventional management wisdom says leaders must be

flexible -- in other words, they must choose the style that suits the situation and the followers. While the “It depends” answer appears trite, the complexity of leading the modern congregation makes it inevitable. Beyond this general response, there is nevertheless a case for prescribing a consultative rather than either a directive or a participative style of leadership.

Directive leadership is here defined as “a distinct style in which the leader decides and announces his decision without consulting subordinates beforehand” (Bass, 1990, 437). Such a style can be with or without explanation. Participative leadership refers to “a simple distinct style of leader-subordinate decision-making in which the leader equalizes power and shares the final decision-making with the subordinates” (Bass, 1990, 437). Here consensus is sought. In this paper, consultative leadership is defined as making decisions after serious consultations with one’s people though the decision may or may not concur with their views. It is a style of clear and unapologetic leadership that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the people. It is top-down in decisiveness and authority but bottom-up in its strong regard for the feelings and opinions of the followers. It is not consultative in a “going-through-the-motion” manner, nor is it meant to appease people. The consultative leader is fully in touch with his people, and ready and able to listen to their points and passion. On the other hand, as Calvin Miller points out in *The Empowered Leader*, “Good leaders never give their leadership away” (Miller, 1995, 158). Chosen as leaders, whether in testamental or modern times, the church leader must lead -- and lead humbly. Hence the emphasis on servant leadership throughout Miller’s book. After all, the church leader communes in a fellowship of saints, who can behave like *prima donnas*. The saints’ standing in commerce and society must not compromise him; he must neither patronize nor lionize them. The church leader must lead with authority, not autocracy, and with sensitivity, not knee-jerk reactivity. He must be a mentor, not a tormentor.

Our four-quadrant joint analysis of spiritual leadership and management science shows that the priority must be on spirituality so that the planning can then rest on management techniques. The church leader must not be possessed by bottom line results. If God were to think of bottom line results, earth is a poor investment -- with meagre returns and major heartache. Companies must think of bottom line results or else they will not be around to work on beyond-bottom line issues like community values and environmental responsibility. But the church must without the slightest hesitation go beyond the bottom line for we are into matters of eternity. The benchmarks are different from the performance standards and measurement of management science.

The church is on the right track when the world calls it stupid for investing in lost causes. Church leaders must also look beyond results before aiming for the very same results, because ungodly powers can heal, Rolls Royce-chauffeured gurus can number unmaterialistic PhD’s and wide-eyed celebrities among their disciples, and management science can be harnessed for organizational growth in a health-and-wealth church. The church leader must be called to focus on the value of some things rather than be preoccupied with the price of everything. A management science that detracts him from his pilgrim’s progress must be discarded, however politically sanitized it is.

The church leader must be wary of the seductive powers of management science, not because it is a bad thing but because it is so captivating. A young church leader I knew is a case in point.

Exposed largely to a puritanical and directive brand of leadership, he was deeply spiritual until a job opportunity with a top multinational computer firm led him to sing the wonders of management science accompanied by telling silence on matters of the faith. His was a case of jumping from a complete ignorance of management science into an ecstatic embrace of its sense and nonsense. Another once-fervent Christian manager is now engrossed, at the exclusion of her faith, with the organizational development of her multinational fashion company, which has been consistently selected as one of America's most admired companies.

I am not for a moment calling management science the devil incarnate. But critical threats to Christian leadership rarely take the form of an abominable snowman; they may look like something capable of doing good, even doing God.

Management Challenge and the Spiritual Imperative

While this paper has cautioned against a careless or carefree embrace of management science, a positive trend in corporate management poses a challenge for church leadership. Corporations are becoming visionary and missionary. Having a vision is not regarded as seeing things and making a mission statement not as going religiously cuckoo. While cynics will say that the mission statement and declaration of corporate values are only words carved on lovely plaques near the reception counter, and that often little of the values message goes beyond the service wall to the service counter, the mere expression of values in the cold reality of business facts and figures is a watershed event. It is an indication that management feels compelled to go beyond bottom line.

A recent study showed that managers used mission statements more than any other corporate tools (such as customer survey, pay-for-performance, total quality management and re-engineering), and were also more satisfied with it than with any other tool (Jones & Kahaner, 1995, ix, citing the 1994 survey by Bain & Company and the Planning Forum).

Stockbroking is synonymous to making money ("Money is not everything, it's the only thing," a stockbroker might well have said), but the management team of one such Singapore-based firm recently spent a weekend working out the firm's mission statement. In this statement, professionalism sits alongside with integrity, developing innovativeness with nurturing people, and aiming to be number one with aspiring to make the workplace rewarding for its people.

In a comprehensive study of visionary companies by two Stanford University Graduate Business School professors, Collins and Porras (1994, 7-11) observe that these companies:

1. Are significantly less likely to have early entrepreneurial success, often getting off to a slow start, but winning the long race.
2. Do not require a charismatic leader, with its leadership more concerned with architecting an enduring institution than on being a great individual leader.
3. Seek profits but are equally guided by a core ideology -- core values and sense of purpose beyond just making money.
4. Ask the question, "What do we actually believe deep down to our toes?"
5. Almost religiously preserve their core ideology -- changing it seldom, if ever, and do not drift with the trends and fashions of the day.

6. Are not afraid to commit themselves to audacious goals, using them to grab its people in the gut, get their juices flowing, and creating immense forward momentum.
7. Are so clear about what they stand for and what they're trying to achieve that they simply don't have room for those unwilling or unable to fit their exacting standards.
8. Make some of their best moves by experimentation, trial and error, and opportunism than by brilliant and complex strategic planning.
9. Tend to rely on home-grown leadership than imports to stimulate fundamental change.
10. Focus primarily on beating themselves than beating the competition.
11. Transcend the "Tyranny of the OR" - believing that stability *and* progress, and conservative practices *and* audacious goals should and can happen together.
12. Use a mission statement only as one of thousands of steps in a never-ending process of expressing the fundamental characteristics listed above.

The authors use these twelve findings to challenge the corresponding myths about effective and enduring companies. If successful secular corporations are, contrary to conventional expectations, concerned with core values, church and parachurch organizations must do no less. These twelve destroyers of management myths challenge the church leadership to re-examine its way of effecting church growth.

As these findings have direct implications on how churches should be run, we present, in the same sequence of the above-listed twelve findings, the challenges posed by the shattering of the twelve corresponding myths, as follows:

1. ***The Myth of the Great Start.*** Perhaps churches should not be too bowled over by early successes nor disheartened by a slow start, and should be more concerned about making a biblically grounded start -- more steadfast about being true to God than to churning out startling growth figures.
2. ***The Myth of the Charismatic Leader.*** Instead of waiting for a charismatic leader to appear, churches should look for how God has been trying to stir its people to build a mission that lasts. Collins and Porras (1994, 7) emphasize that a charismatic leader is "absolutely not required for a visionary company and, in fact, can be detrimental to a company's long-term prospects." They cite the example of 3M as a model of a visionary company, yet one that doesn't seem to have, and have had, an archetypal, high-profile, charismatic visionary leader (1994, 11-12). Founded in 1902, it has had ten generations of chief executives, none of whom are particularly well-known. This finding on companies that last is especially pertinent when mega-churches and their pretenders are increasingly being compared to multinational corporations and the pastoral leader to the CEO.
3. ***The Myth of the Bottom line.*** Instead of being possessed by bottom line results, churches should return, whether in the glow of apparent success or in the mire of stagnation, to core biblical values and the sense of being called than being driven. It is telling that paradoxically, the visionary companies make more money than purely profit-driven comparison companies. Likewise focusing on the Bible rather than on purely getting results is likely to get not only better results but the right kind of results. According to Dallas Willard, "It is so easy for the leader today to get caught up in illusory goals, pursuing the marks of success which come from our training as Christian leaders or which are simply imposed by the world. It is big,

Big, always *BIG*, and *BIGGER STILL!* That is the contemporary imperative” (Willard, 1988, 246, emphasis in the original text).

4. ***The Myth of a Fixed Set of Core Values.*** Asking the question, “What do we actually believe deep down to our toes?” must be the first right thing to do, not “Which management technique is most useful for church growth?” On the other hand, Collins and Porras (1994, 8) have also pointed out that there is no “right” set of core values for a visionary company, emphasizing that “the crucial variable is not the content of a company’s ideology, but how deeply it believes its ideology and how consistently it lives, breathes, expresses it in all that does.” This suggests that organizational success may come to a church even if it is not biblical, so long as it is passionate enough about whatever beliefs it espouses. This should clearly alert us to the potent danger of fixating on an arbitrary set of beliefs rather than on God.
5. ***The Myth of Constant Change.*** If temporal organizations know the strength that comes from not drifting with the trends and fashions of the day, churches should keep their plumb line always drawn toward the Bible rather than toward what is touted as leading-edge practices -- for what is today’s management truth can be tomorrow’s throwaway.
6. ***The Myth of Playing Safe.*** Called by our Lord and empowered by the Holy Spirit, churches must not shy from setting audacious goals. The Great Commission is bold to the point of appearing absurd, yet its very force has over the centuries fired the imagination of God’s people and generated feats of missionary courage and commitment.
7. ***The Myth of Being a Great Place for All.*** If visionary corporations are not a cosy nest for everyone, with their clarity and commitment of stand making workaholics out of some and cynics out of others, a church must not strive primarily to be pleasers of men. Church leaders must not lead by promulgating politically correct messages. If the church atmosphere is more like relaxation therapy than confrontation with truth, something is fundamentally wrong for Jesus said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own”(John 15:18-19a).
8. ***The Myth of Strategic Planning.*** Making things work by experimentation rather than by following any textbook on corporate strategic planning is the hallmark of visionary company. Such a finding is reassuring to churches who feel like country cousins in a world of global corporations. Instead of going for MBA pyrotechnics, churches should just give the visionary companies’ “Let’s just try a lot of stuff and keep what works” (Collins & Porras, 1994, 9) a try.
9. ***The Myth of the Outside CEO Saviour.*** According to Collins and Porras (1994, 10), “visionary companies have “dashed to bits the conventional wisdom that significant change and fresh ideas cannot come from insiders.” Forget or delay getting a turnaround CEO from outside. Bite the bullet and let the Spirit work from within.
10. ***The Myth of Beating the Competition.*** Leading the church into being the community God wants it to be rather than being better than the church next door ties in with biblical values -- with the value of being called rather than being driven, being perfected rather than being compared.
11. ***The Myth of the “Tyranny of the OR”.*** Conservative church leaders may fear that adopting new methods will cost them their soul, while the so-called progressive ones may be more apologetic about their church’s obsolescent practices than steeped in apologetics. The Japanese have turned it into a precise art-form: they have kept their culture while absorbing

advancements in technology and management science. Likewise church leaders can work toward the synergy that comes from keeping the faith and trying the new -- so long as the medium does not mangle the message.

12. ***The Myth of the Mission Statement.*** Crafting a mission statement or making a banner out of the Great Commission will not make it happen. The church needs to say it and live it.

How Then Should the Church Develop?

Apart from urging wariness and watchfulness in handling the tools of management science, our analysis prescribes how churches should develop. There are three routes to take, namely being technology, marketing or organization-driven.

The technology or product-driven companies are strong on their product quality and product development -- to the extent that one US electronics company used to market its product on the premise, "If the customer is smart enough he'll buy it. And if he doesn't, he's stupid." Such companies tend to spend little time and effort to market its products and develop its organization, believing that the product will sell itself. Organizational inertia will widen the gap between its technological sophistication and the way it reaches out to its customers and manages and develops its people. Churches cannot afford to be smugly product-driven, though the Bible is a great product. They cannot justify boring sermons by avowing a greater concern for substance than for form. They cannot think globally while refusing to act locally just because the message has universal truth. If Christ became the Incarnate Word to reach out to man, the church must customize the delivery of its message to reach out to different countries, cultures and communities.

Does it then mean that churches should be marketing and customer-driven? We have cautioned against being customer-driven, whether the customer is an internal or external customer. The church leader must attend to the members, as Christ must begin with the people closest to Him in the crowd. But Christ's respect for his followers, many of whom were of inferior social standing, is not to be confused with the too common political practice of pandering to the base wishes of the lowest common denominator. While the church leadership must act locally, it cannot be over-emphasized that customer focus must not be the first priority. Putting customers first lets the torch of modernity enter the Christian citadel by the front door. Practising customer-driven leadership is really massaging egos rather than pruning them with the glory and grace of God

Customization must heed Marshall McLuhan's 1964 famous dictum, "The medium is the message." While he is disliked by social scientists and his ideas are now seldom discussed, according to Charles Van Doren (1991, 356-59), his central idea that "the medium through or by which a communication is communicated affects the content and effect of the communication" is undeniable. Churches are increasingly using the stage play to communicate the message of Christmas and Easter. But just as a stage play becomes a different work when it is transferred to film, the gospel narrative when preached from the pulpit becomes different when presented on stage. A free-flowing service gives a different colouration to the same theme conveyed in a precisely scripted service. The answers may not be forthcoming but when he decides to use a different, perhaps more accessible, medium, every church leader must ask the question - not

whether the medium would affect the substance but “How will it enhance, adulterate or simply change the message?”

By the sheer Americanization of corporations, they are becoming more market-driven while sustaining the technological and product edge. Few are organizationally driven. By this we mean that few companies are as painstaking in developing the fibre of its organization as it has been in presenting its fabric. For instance, technological, marketing or other business reasons have led companies to merge but without much regard for how the two former organizational subsets are gelling together (M&A, standing for Merger & Acquisition, is sometimes more like murder and acquisition).

Generally companies develop a product from the marketing and product technology perspectives, and treat organization development as an after-thought. Though companies may proclaim people as their most valuable assets, in effect they manage people as their most valuable utility. Values-based leadership⁴ is a positive but infant development. Against the previous tide and anticipating emerging trends, the Christ-led approach is distinctly organization-driven: it focuses on how to keep the band of disciples together and get them reach out to others together. While most organizations are either skeptical of the impact of being organization-driven compared to being technology or marketing-driven and chary of becoming too inward-looking to be of any use, Christ spent his time developing those who would listen, not winning over those who thought they knew better.

Declaring that he is not a practising Christian, management philosopher James O’Toole asserts, “The ultimate measure of Christ’s leadership is that the movement he founded continued to spread after his death. In fact, from the moment of his first conversions, Christianity belonged not to Christ but to the Christians” (O’Toole, 1996, 11). We may not agree with his last sentence, but his emphasis on discipling, from a non-Christian perspective, is perceptive. Christ, he adds, realized that he must create disciples, who each must become a leader of leaders (O’Toole, 1996, 11).

The idiom, “preaching to the converted,” suggests that the intra-family effort is needless but, according to philosopher-minister Dallas Willard, that is precisely what says Christian leaders should do more of. Responding to the call to disciple-making leadership, he says, will effect changes beyond the confines of churches. To reach out, Christian leaders must not do outreach but should do what they have failed to do: make disciples, in the New Testament sense of the term. Sounding quite iconoclastic, Professor Willard asserts:

Ministers pay far too much attention to people who do *not* come to services. Those people should, generally, be given exactly that disregard by the pastor that they give to Christ. The Christian leader has something more important to do than pursue the godless. The leader’s task is to *equip saints until they are like Christ* (Eph 4:12), and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job (1988, 246, italics in the original).

We have come full circle. Management science is not a Christian discipline, certainly not a Christian invention. In sizing it up, we urge watchfulness as well as openness. Watchfulness

because it can do good and thereby tempt us with idolatry, because of the mental laziness that leads us to go for what works rather than what's right, and because even corporations need to spot the witch doctors. Openness because we must not swing into the NIH syndrome, for as the 19th century minister George MacDonald wrote, "Truth is truth, whether from the lips of Jesus or Balaam" (cited in Lewis, 1946, 27).

Just as we wander into open and unfamiliar grounds searching for ways to avoid the pitfalls and minefields, we discover that a new trend in management science has turned to spiritual, even Christian, roots. Values-based leadership, once patronizingly viewed as an unbusiness-like excursion or shot down as subversive intrusion, is gaining a toe-hold into the corporate chambers. Now the more profound management gurus are preaching the value of putting values above expedience and techniques.

Just as we are exploring the world of practical management, a small band of management thinkers have discovered our world of values-based discipling. Just as mega-churches are drawn toward the multinational CEO model of leadership, hard-nosed business leaders are seeking the secrets of Christ's leadership success. Just as Christian leaders are trying not to be too heavenly to be of earthly use, corporate chiefs are looking for heavenly inspiration to lift them out of mundane management into exhilarated leadership.

Management science as a carrier of modernity cannot and should not be ignored. It is naive to embrace it wholesale as biblical stewardship. Vilifying it is throwing out the baby with the bath water. The battle-lines must be made explicit, and we must know where to pitch battle and where to work things through.

We should use core biblical values as a compass for navigating through the tides and trends of the day. We may even set the pace by taking back the initiative for developing a values-based, indeed Christ-centred, leadership.

Facing the facts and fads of management science has taught us that modern is not always the best. Latest is not the greatest. The constancy of biblical truth is the ultimate and practical test.

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Endnotes

¹Wright (1994a). Wright expanded his thesis in *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology* (1946b).

²The term "management science" is used broadly to cover a systematic body of management knowledge and practices developed through theory and research using conceptual and research tools borrowed from the more mature scientific disciplines. Coverage is not confined to such tough-minded subjects as quantitative methods and operational research nor does it exclude the more tender-minded approaches of tapping the intuition or experience of CEOs and other organizational practitioners. While there is great art in managing people, much science is needed to bring order to the complexity of this art. Similarly, putting scientifically researched principles into practice is considerable art form. We prefer this term to "management art" because the field of management is drawn toward the mainstream of science and its methodology (even if purists may question whether it will ever meet rigorous scientific criteria, and critics brush it off as a potpourri of homespun wisdom, showbiz, hastily churned out and speedily abandoned "findings", quack corporate remedies, and tough-minded business know-how). The growing number and status of management schools, professors and journals -- financially owing to the support of industry -- attests to the enhanced credibility of management as an applied science in the eyes of both academia and industry. Retreating to "gut feel" and the school of "hard knocks" as the sole justification for one's management practice is no longer a credible defence, and common sense and practice is being tested as hypotheses in organizational studies -- thereby affirming the shift of the subject toward a more scientific platform.

³The blurb by Sam Keen appears on the back cover of Harper Perennial edition published in 1994.

⁴Values-based leadership is best represented by James O'Toole (1996). While the book has been hailed as a "deeply philosophical and eminently practical study of leadership of change" by no less than James McGregor Burns, it is still a rare gem amid the proliferation of standard how-to management primers that organizational leaders rely on.