

- FOR FAITHFUL IMPACT

Congregational Experiments

INTRODUCTION

What will we do?

Most of the “doings” of past efforts are ready for reinvention. God is doing a new thing in our world and in God’s church. In order to find the path forward, there is a call to follow the Holy Spirit into new ways of life.

Figuring out what to do always starts with contextual intelligence. Listening and empathizing to understand what God is up to is step one. Themes will surface and new ideas will be generated through this listening. These new ideas will be focused into one experiment as a place to begin. This experiment is the first prototype. It is something to test to bring hope, inspiration, and a few new practices. This first prototype will not be perfect. The hope is that it will drive new experiments into a future direction. The inspiration is that it will point to a living God. The practices are new behaviors.

How to use this tool?

This is a tool to clarify assumptions and expectations that may not be known or shared until the experiment is tested. This clarity can begin to generate conversation and innovation within your group.

Consider appointing a facilitator to lead the group discussion in order to keep the conversation moving forward and to ensure that all voices are heard.

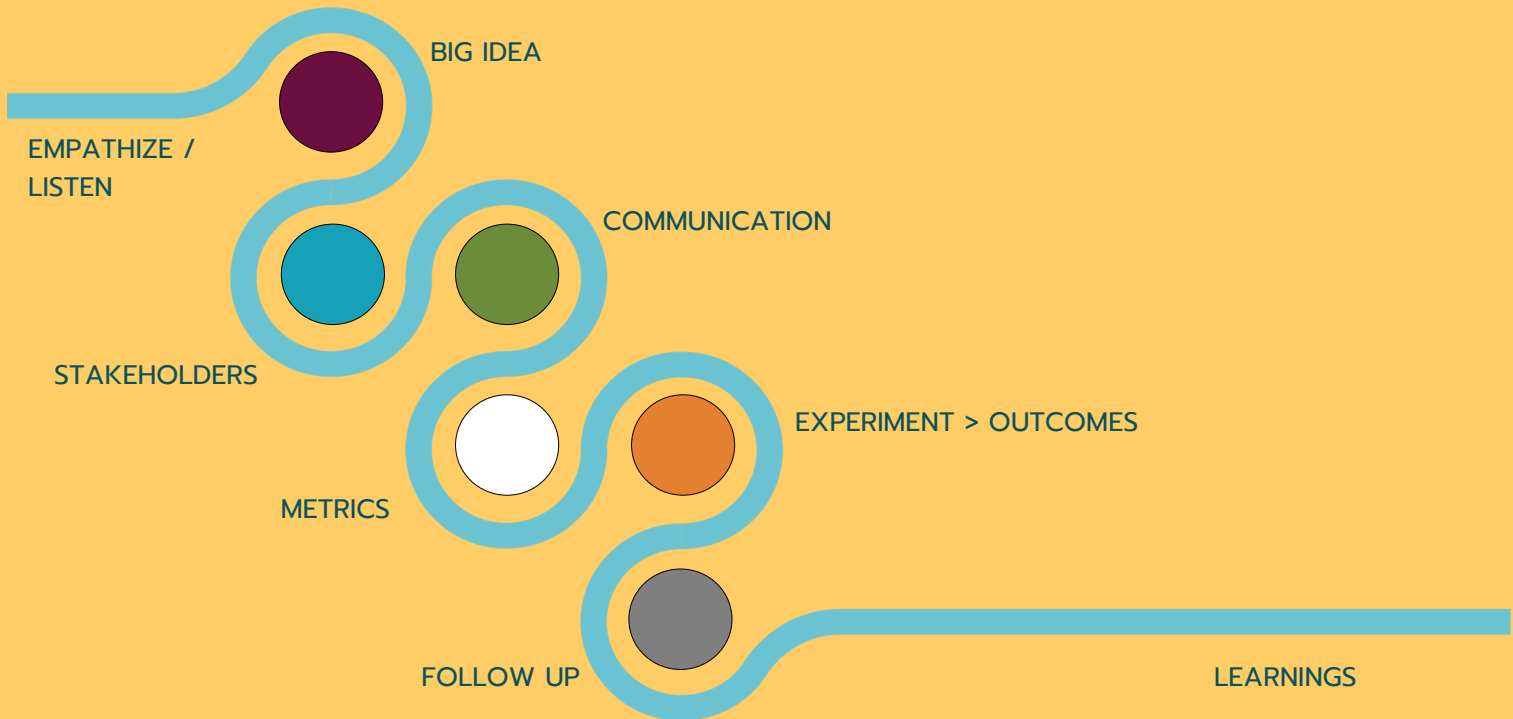
We recommend that you take no more than two hours at any one sitting for this exercise. In our experience, a key ingredient for creative conversations is freedom to imagine. This includes a combination of energy and direction. Additionally, time constraints can actually help push toward consensus and agreement.

This tool can be used over and over with each iteration of the experiment.

Possible Meeting Outline:

- **15 minutes** Identify themes from your listening.
- **15 minutes** Focus in on one big idea based on your themes from listening.
- **45 minutes** Put together concrete steps for the experiment.
- **20 minutes** Read the five factors and tips together. Set metrics that the group see as innovative for the congregation. (If people get stuck on a factor, set it aside and come back to it later.)
- **15 minutes** Name the stakeholders in this experiment that can inform your communication plan with clear talking points and stories.
- **15 minutes** Review the metrics and when designing future iterations, prepare to shift based on the outcomes produced.

Quick Start!	Action: What will we do?	Reflection: How will we know?
Empathizing / Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Listen to scripture <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to people in the congregation <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to people in the neighborhood	Identify the themes that have surfaced multiple times.
Focus on one big idea.	Based on themes, what is the one big idea that calls for more learning? <input type="checkbox"/> Why does this matter? <input type="checkbox"/> What problem is being solved? <input type="checkbox"/> How is the idea a possible solution to this problem?	Imagine the smallest behavior change that will lead to the biggest impact.
What are the concrete steps?	<input type="checkbox"/> Research: What needs to be learned, researched, or discovered before testing the idea? <input type="checkbox"/> Listening: Who can be interviewed to gain clarity about the idea? <input type="checkbox"/> Resources: Who are the partners needed to carry out the idea? What funding is needed? <input type="checkbox"/> Time: How much time will it take to build and test the idea? <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership: Who are the people needed to put this idea into action?	Consider gathering smaller steps together based on the timeline and the people engaged. Name small wins for possible, hoped-for behavior shifts.
Who are the stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/> Who are the people groups that will benefit from the idea? Why? <input type="checkbox"/> Who are the people groups that have the most to lose if this idea doesn't happen? Why? <input type="checkbox"/> Who are the people groups that are counting on the leadership to do something new, even if they don't realize it yet? <input type="checkbox"/> Who are the potential partners working on similar ideas? <input type="checkbox"/> Who are the people groups that may never experience God's grace if the relationship is not started through this big idea?	Build a relational map (see page) noticing all the intersections in the congregation and the neighborhood that relate to the experiment. Wonder together about one or two primary stakeholder groups.
Communication Plan	Internal and External <input type="checkbox"/> Who needs information about this idea? <input type="checkbox"/> What do they need to know? <input type="checkbox"/> When do they need the information? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the best way to communicate this to them? <input type="checkbox"/> Who is responsible for executing this communication? <input type="checkbox"/> When will there need to be follow up?	Design ways to articulate talking points that manage resistance. Tell stories to spark imagination to engage a wider circle of support.



big idea

Build the big idea offering hope, inspiration, and practices into an experiment, step-by-step. Answer these questions.

1. What is the idea? Use as few words as possible to describe the idea that will shift behaviors.

- Is there a problem the team is trying to solve?
- Imagine the smallest behavior change that will lead to the biggest impact? (Practices)
- Why does this idea matter?
- How is the idea a possible solution to this problem?
- What does hope look like?
- What is inspiring, pointing people toward the movement of the Holy Spirit?

2. What work needs to happen before focusing on the experiment?

- Research: What needs to be learned, researched, or discovered before testing the idea?
- Listening: Who can be interviewed to gain clarity about the idea?
- Resources: Who are the partners needed to carry out the idea? What funding is needed?
- Time: How much time will it take to build and test the idea?
- Leadership: Who are the people needed to put this idea into action?

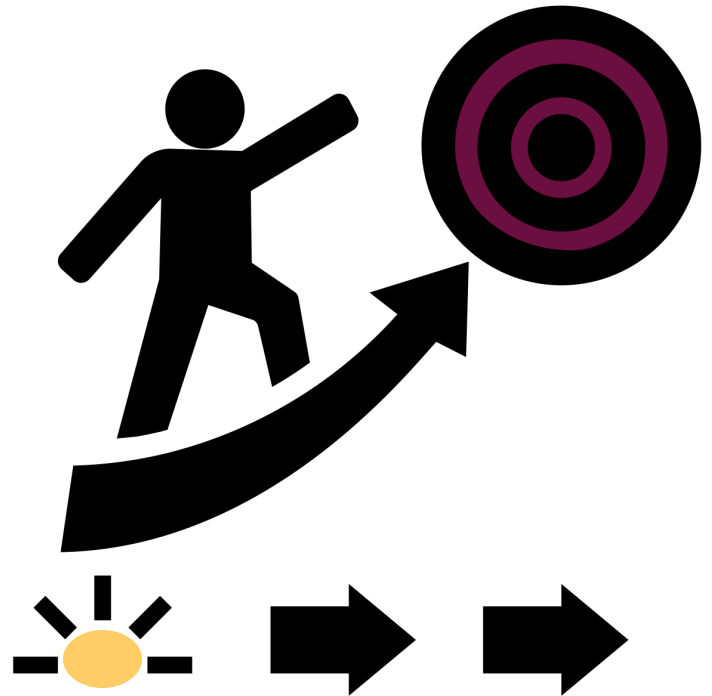
Note: At this stage, don't overthink the financial plan for the idea. There is more information on page 15 regarding budgets and finances.

What themes have emerged in your listening?

What problem are we trying to solve?

- What behavior will the experiment change?
- Whose behavior will be changed?
- Why does this have the potential to solve the problem?

Consider the smallest behavior change that will lead to the biggest impact.



Thinking about innovative experiments and behavior change:

The point of an experiment is to discover something new by doing something new. This implies innovation and innovation implies doing something new. New behaviors. Think about incremental behavior changes rather than monumental shifts. Half steps that lead to bigger commitments become great experiments.

Example #1:

If the problem we want to solve is to *build tighter relationships between the preschool and the congregation so families feel welcome at church*, listening starts by empathizing with parents of preschool children. Interviewing parents can spark new ideas for possible experiments. Selecting which experiment gets tested is easier when we know what behavior we want to change. Ideation can focus on parenting, spiritual practices for the home, projects shared between parents and the congregation, and on and on. The effective shift from tons of ideas to the actual experiment is a hard look at what behavior the experiment would produce.

Answering the question “what kind of relationship matters?” is helpful. Getting clear on what it would take for “families to feel welcome at church” is even more interesting. This may require behavior change for the people who are already at church, rather than the behavior change of the parents. Is there an experiment that could engage this behavior change?

BIG IDEA

What is the first experiment to test?
Remember: Hope, Inspiration, Practices
Give the prototype a tentative name.

Other steps?

Write out this idea, noticing all the steps from design to implementation. Are there other questions to answer or to hold in a parking lot for later?

Leadership?

Who are the people needed to put the idea into action?

Is there a need for permission?

Who will be impacted by this idea in a positive or negative way?

Time?

Realistically, how much time will it take to build and test the idea?

Listening?

Who can be interviewed to gain deeper clarity about the idea?

Research?

What needs to be learned or discovered before testing the idea?

What resources are needed?

stakeholders

Map the stakeholders. Think about people in groups that will feel the impact of the experiment. In other words, who will the experiment impact? Group people by their commitment, or absence, or roles, etc. This is the opportunity to take a step back from personal relationships to explore the kinds of people that this experiment is being designed to influence in some way. The more specific, the better.

Look at these two examples:

- *People who bring their children to our preschool* is better than saying *young parents*.
- *Single mothers living below the poverty line* is better than saying *mothers who live in this neighborhood*.

The experiment may reveal additional stakeholders over time. The point of this work is to fine-tune the target audience, to notice staff or other stakeholders who will be impacted, and to be sure the team is on the same page regarding the people this experiment will engage.

- Who are the people groups that will benefit from the idea? Why?
- Who are the people groups that have the most to lose if this idea doesn't happen? Why?
- Who are the people groups that are counting on the leadership to do something new, even if they don't realize it yet?
- Who are the potential partners working on similar ideas?
- Who are the people groups that may never experience God's grace if the relationship is not started through this big idea?

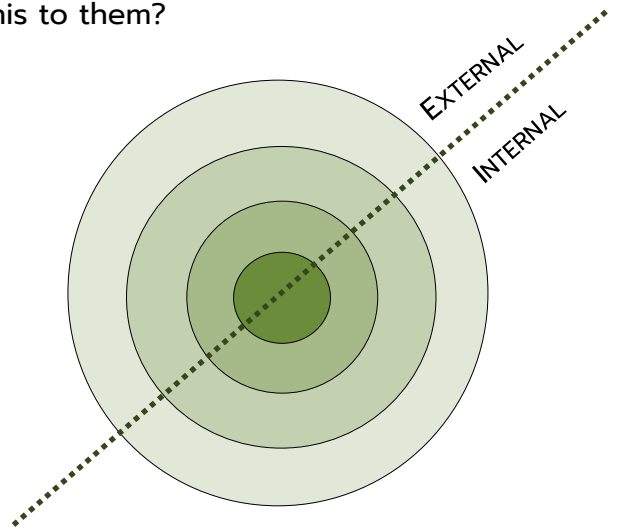
Example #2: Once the experiment is clear, focus on who is impacted. Notice the layers of impact that are not only involving people in the congregation. Which stakeholder groups spark hope, inspiration, and practices?



Make a communication plan.

Use these questions to design an internal and external communication plan. Internal plans are for the congregational leadership, the members, donors, or others who could be impacted by the idea. External plans are for the website, social media, new people, stakeholders, and potential partners.

- Who needs information about this idea?
- What do they need to know?
- When do they need the information?
- What is the best way to communicate this to them?
- Who is responsible for executing this communication?
- When will there need to be follow up?



BEGIN BUILDING YOUR EXPERIMENT!

Read this first and think about the five factors on the next page:

1. **Numbers?** Overfocusing on numbers is a problem. Numbers on their own can be colorless. They don't often hold the story of why things are the way they are. Purely qualitative measures sometimes don't tell the story of the range and reach of your impact. You need both quality and quantity.
2. **Lag or Lead?** Lead measures give you early warning signs of change. Lag measures tell you when something has already changed. Researchers like lag measures because they come with plenty of data to analyze, but it can be too late by then (ozone depletion, global climate change, trans fats). Measuring how much money people give and how many people show up for worship are lag metrics. They do not bring hope, inspire, or alter practices. Lead metrics, on the other hand, offer so much for the innovative process. Focus on where people have agency to make changes.
3. **Behavior shifts?** Experiments are meant to change the way people behave. Some require incremental, or low-risk shifts, while others are focused on shifts that feel like they are higher risk. What is low-risk for some congregations may be high-risk for others. The move from here to there is the metric to measure.

The chart on the next page offers examples of how shifts may move intentionally from low to high-risk behavior changes. The descriptions may need to be altered to fit the experiment or congregation. The work is to clearly identify the hopes, inspirations, and practices within the metrics.

How will we know if our prototype is good?



In the words of Shannon Hopkins, Rootedgood.org:

"This question implies measures. What does a good measure look like? What isn't counted doesn't count. If we don't measure what matters, then what we do measure *becomes* what matters.

When your measures are telling you the right things in the right way, it can be really energizing to see the effects of your work on impact.

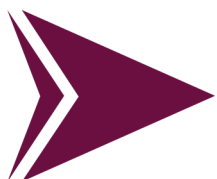
There is often a temptation to turn those measures into targets at that point in order to create even more impact. Don't be tempted by this. It frequently leads to gaming the measures. This is so well documented that it even has a law named after it: Goodhart's Law. Goodhart was a British economist who, in the 1970's, defined the law which states: "as soon as a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a useful measure". It's good advice.

And finally, just because something seems hard to measure, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try to measure it. That way lies the path to measuring only those things that can be measured, not the things that really matter."

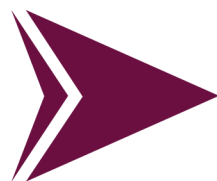


Five Factors

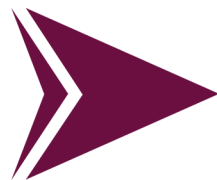
What are the factors that will drive your experiment and your metrics?
These are the ones we recommend beginning with.



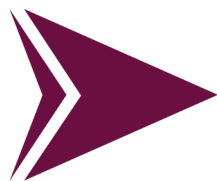
Innovation / Reinvention: How can this experiment spark new ways of experiencing God's love? How will this be a prototype that births new combinations of being followers of Jesus?



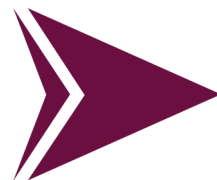
Relationships: How will the level of trust between the stakeholders change? Does the experiment intend to change current relationships in some way?



Gathering: How will Christian community, maybe even worship, be formed through the experiment? Are there practices and connections that will intentionally welcome people into the existing community or is a new community being formed?



Daily Life: How does the experiment impact values, habits, and meaning in everyday life? What is the hope for new ways of thinking, engaging, learning, or being when this experiment is complete?



Risks: How much risk will the congregation be willing to take to discover new ways of being church? Is the congregation open to engaging diversity of some kind, for example, younger generations? What are the non-negotiables?

M E T R I C S with Five Factors

(For each factor, fill in the blanks and identify the level of risk)

1. **INNOVATION/REINVENTION:** How can this experiment spark new ways of experiencing God's love?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk: Helping new people experience God's love through care, meals, clothing, etc.

Medium risk: Learning and creating in partnership with others to find new ways to be Christians in the world

High risk: Innovating and testing new ideas, in new contexts, with new people

2. **RELATIONSHIPS:** How will the level of trust between the stakeholders change?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk: Becoming more welcoming as we listen to our neighbors

Medium risk: Working with new partners to create new ministry with our neighbors

High risk: Collaborating with people from different cultures, ethnicities, and sexual expressions to reinvent church together

3. **GATHERING:** How will Christian community be formed through the experiment?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk: Engaging in acts of justice by partnering with other organizations in reducing human suffering and pain

Medium risk: Participating in daily practices reflecting on scripture, prayer, and other spiritual practices

High risk: Worshiping and reflecting on scripture with people from different cultures, ethnicities, sexual expressions to hear God's voice in new ways

4. **DAILY LIFE:** How does the experiment impact values, habits, and meaning in everyday life?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk: Increasing weekly worship practice

Medium risk: Participating in daily spiritual practices in our homes, at work, or with friend groups online or in person

High risk: Advocating for justice and peace to change systems that keep people oppressed

5. **RISKS:** How much risk will the congregation be willing to take to discover new ways of being church?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk: Making incremental changes

Medium risk: Engaging new diversity and generations

High risk: Deconstruct traditions, not theology, to discover new ways of being church

WORKSHEET: M E T R I C S with Five Factors

(For each factor, fill in the blanks and identify the level of risk)

1. **INNOVATION/REINVENTION:** How can this experiment spark new ways of experiencing God's love?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk:



Medium risk:



High risk:

2. **RELATIONSHIPS:** How will the level of trust between the stakeholders change?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk:



Medium risk:



High risk:

3. **GATHERING:** How will Christian community be formed through the experiment?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk:



Medium risk:



High risk:

4. **DAILY LIFE:** How does the experiment impact values, habits, and meaning in everyday life?

Shift from _____ to _____



Low risk:



Medium risk:



High risk:

5. **RISKS:** How much risk will the congregation be willing to take to discover new ways of being church?

Shift from _____ to _____



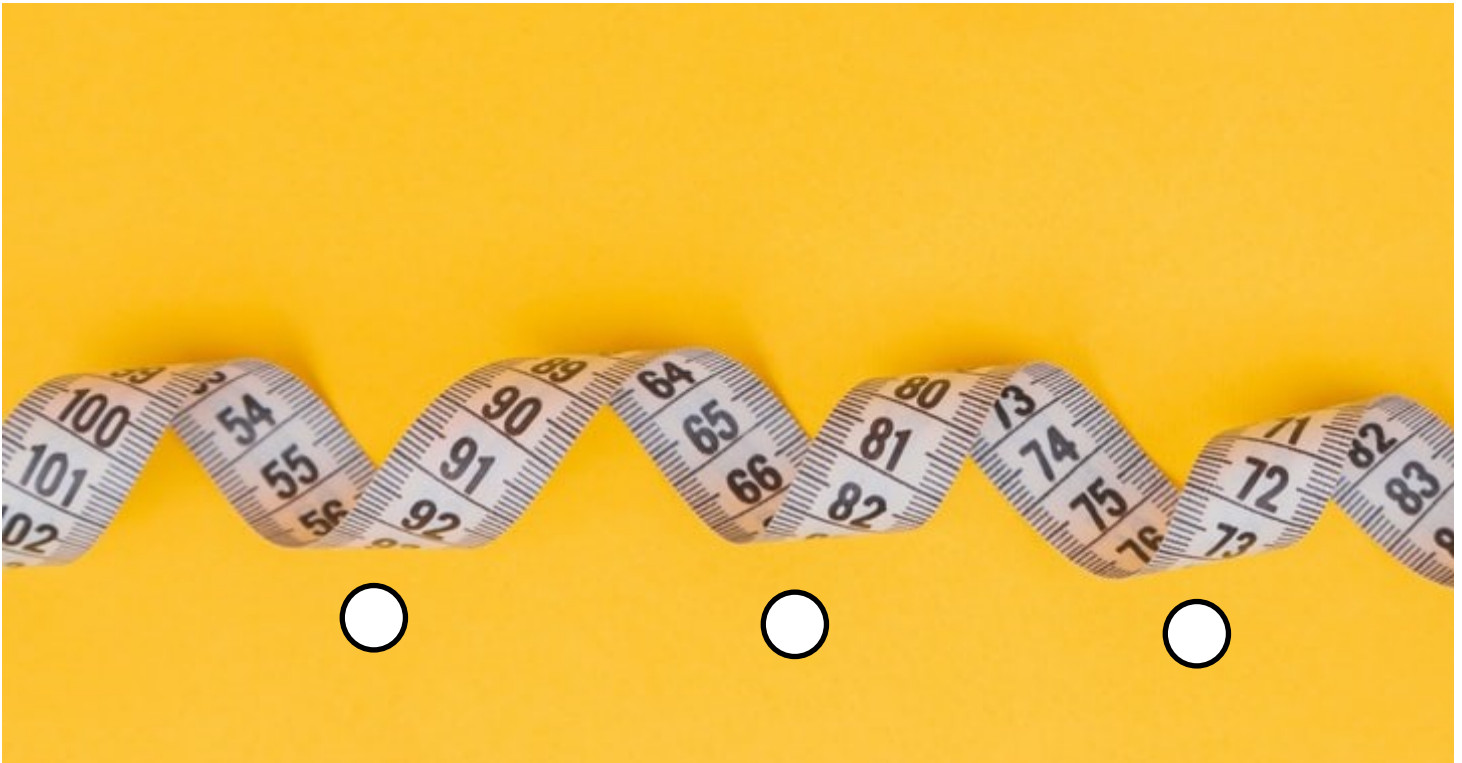
Low risk:



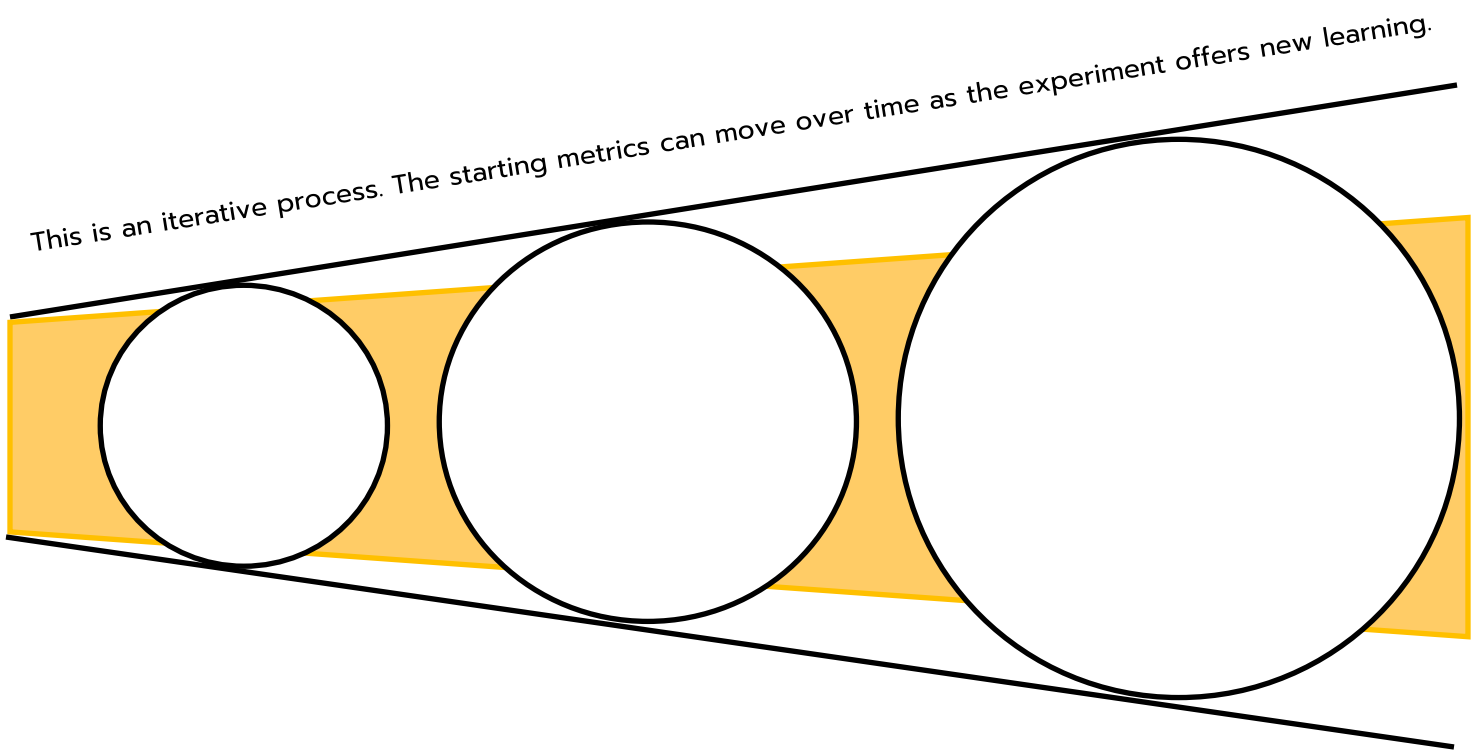
Medium risk:



High risk:



What factors matter to your experiment? Where are you starting and hoping to go?



Starting Point:

What are the behavior changes to measure? Which of the five factors are important? Which may not matter right now?

Mid Point:

What are the learnings? How will the metrics be adjusted? Which of the five factors are important? Which may not matter right now?

End Point:

What are the learnings? How will the metrics be adjusted? Which of the five factors are important? Which may not matter right now?

experiments >

outcomes

An outcome is the consequence of an action. **In this case the outcomes are tied to the risks identified when the five factors were considered on page 12.**

Example #3:

If five parents from the preschool share their faith questions in a video to be shown at church, there could be a variety of outcomes that vary in terms of impact:

- The video was seen at church and nothing happened.
- The video was seen at church and some people resisted what was heard by disagreeing, by being insulted, or by ignoring what was learned from these parents.
- The video was seen at church and has sparked new questions like: How can our congregation become a spiritual home for these people?
- The video was seen at church and more parents want a chance to ask their questions.
- The video was seen at church and the parents are forming themselves into a network of parents wrestling with faith questions.

Note: These examples move from thinking about the congregation to thinking about the stakeholders.

> If the anticipated outcomes do not occur, the experiment can be tweaked in real time. There is no need to wait to shift the course of action. It is also possible to expand the experiment to include more people or stakeholders throughout the process.

Managing metrics in real time is leadership. Use these questions to tweak what is happening if the outcomes are not meeting hopes, or if the outcomes were met too quickly and the hope is to expand the vision.

- What was the starting place?
- What metrics are hitting the mark?
- What metrics could increase or create new opportunities for innovation?
- What is happening in stakeholder groups? Are new stakeholders being revealed?
- How has the experiment revealed obstacles standing in the way? What needs to happen now?
- What are we learning that sparks new thinking and expands the experiment?
- How can this experiment iterate quickly?
- What new partners, networks, or stakeholders are ready for next steps?
- What should happen to build a stronger experiment to drive hoped-for outcomes?

The Holy Spirit is moving.

Reflection is the key to learning. Time between experiments is holy time for noticing where God is leading in and through the people in the congregation and the neighborhood.

- What new questions have surfaced?
- What new hopes are sparked?
- What has inspired?
- What practices are taking root?
- What does "next" look like?

This process can be used over and over as new experiments spark new metrics. The Holy Spirit is moving through our imagination, innovations, and commitment to being people who follow the way of Jesus. Ramping up risk as we trust that God has got us in this work is a good way forward.

A note about Money:

Experiments may have financial constraints that increase risk for some leaders, yet money is not one of the five factors or discussed as a metric. All that has been given is a gift from God. Experience has proven that money moves when God's people are responding to the call to serve more than themselves.

This is not to say that there are not real costs, financial concerns, or new economic models to be considered. The work ahead will cross these hurdles as they arise.

The surprises come when people who are not part of the congregation step up with a gift, or when buildings can be repurposed or sold to create revenue for mission. By opening up imagination around money, the typical, and often declining, practices for funding ministry can be released.

Generosity is a spiritual practice and can be embedded as such for any experiment as leaders boldly invest in new beginnings.



⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. - Philippians 4:8-9

Congregations  Lead
INITIATIVE

LEAD 
Living every day as disciples



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.