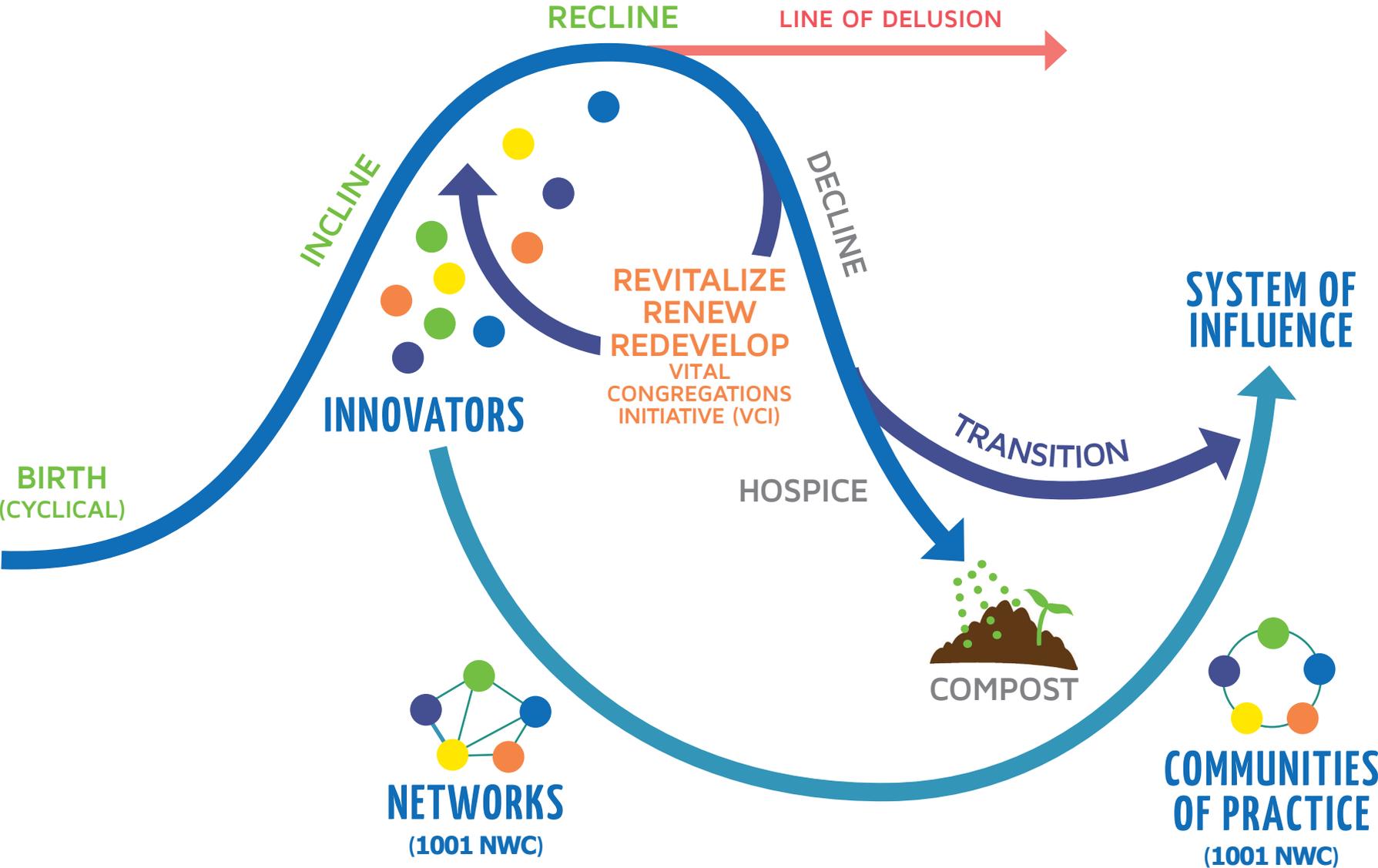


TWO LOOP LIFE CYCLE FOR CONGREGATIONS



Revision of Chris Corrigan's "A Theory of Change: Living and Dying in the Church of the 21st Century." Unpublished slide deck from EDGE weinar. Provided by Rev. Erik Samuelson.

	Incline	Recline	Decline
Time Orientation	Future	Present	Past
Motivation/Drive	Vision	Program	Structure
Attentional Focus	Community	Congregation	Core
Actions	Innovative	Routine	Complacent
Risk Propensity	High	Mid-Low	No
Governance Decisions	Faith & growth in faith	Resources	Indecision
Giving Posture (\$)	\$ = investor	\$ = provider	\$ = preserver
Why people serve/lead?	Service thru gifts	Service/slots	Service/default
Where do ideas come from?	New, outside (experimental)	Established (track record)	Incumbent (worked for us)
Who is fueling people growth?	New to faith	Transfer	No growth

Two Loops Life Cycle for Congregations

by Erik Samuelson, edited by Corey Schlosser-Hall

All organisms and organizations (yep congregations and presbyteries too) have a life “cycle.” Even though the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its many incarnations may be eternal, individual congregations, ministries and presbyteries are not. While the **Body** of Christ may perpetuate, individual **bodies** of Christ do not. As living organisms grow and mature, they peak and eventually begin to decline and die. In a non-organic, mechanical worldview, perpetuity is the goal. Dying and death are to be avoided at all costs. Western churches have typically operated out of a mechanical worldview, hoping they will continue in perpetuity. However, perpetuity is an illusion, which organic reality shatters when church decline inevitably begins. Without engaging death, resurrection doesn’t emerge.

Congregations and presbyteries have important choices to make when they plateau. They can double down on the status quo, shore up their resources, and maintain survival. They can seek to renew, revitalize, redevelop. And, they can prepare to die well and give birth to something new. The “Two-Loops Theory of Change,” developed by Chris Corrigan, depicts an organic model for living and dying in the church of the 21st century.

The two loops co-exist. The second loop—the innovation loop—begins while the first loop is peaking (recline), declining, and coming to an end. Congregations and presbyteries can acknowledge and support a second loop of innovative ministries as their first loop of established ministries peaks and declines. In many cases, individual congregants will be comfortable on one or the other loop, not both. And this is fine. But the congregation or presbytery ought acknowledge and steward both! There is an interdependent relationship between the two.

The document “incline-recline-decline.pdf” seeks to explain dynamics present in congregations/presbyteries in each of those stages. The remainder of this document will address the 2nd innovation loop and points of intersection.

In a two-loops paradigm, we provide hospice and palliative care for those who prefer the fading traditions and practices of the first loop while providing support for the innovators, networks, and communities of practice that emerge and form new systems of influence on the second loop. This implies developing a vision for the congregation/presbytery as a whole that is big enough to inspire those in hospice stage on the first loop to see themselves as future compost for second-loop ministries. However, those on the second loop need to appreciate the significant resources required to provide good hospice care for first-loop ministries.

The Two-Loops Theory of Change presents a formidable challenge for first-loop ministries that find themselves past their peak. Instead of considering two loops, many congregations insist there is only one loop, which is not a loop but a rise to success followed by an indeterminate straight line representing stable, solid ministry. Chris Corrigan calls this the “**line of delusion.**”

Alternatively, both loops of ministry can exist in a shared context. When a congregation entering recline or decline on the first loop, a second loop may be starting in their midst. **Wise congregations and ministries look for and support innovators** who may be imagining and engaging in new expressions and approaches to ministry. Those innovators may find or attract like-minded people and form networks or partnerships. Those networks may inspire and inform new communities of practice, which may in turn

form systems of influence. Furthermore, as communities of practice gain momentum and new systems of influence begin to emerge, people on the first loop may like what they see and transition over to the second loop. Renewal occurs when the community is able to recognize, honor, and engage the many co-existing elements of their organic system and find a sustainable and hopeful future through death and resurrection.

Two common places where inherited congregations and innovators “miss” the opportunity God is creating. When an existing congregation gets to “recline,” the leaders and congregants become pleased with what they have developed and spiritual leadership (session) turns much of its attention to maintaining the worship, ministry, programs, and facility that have served it so far. Often when someone who is an innovator brings a fresh idea to leaders in a “recline” or “decline” state of mind, those recline-decline leaders will almost unconsciously wonder—how can their *new* idea support our *existing* ministry. And when an innovator(s) hears that message explicitly or implicitly they often step back, step out because that’s not what they are being called by God to do.

Likewise, when an innovator senses “these people just want to perpetuate their existing ministry rather than support this new direction” they might be tempted to cut-off or drop-out from the existing ministry. However, if they maintain connection while innovating, the wisdom, people, spiritual and financial resources of first-loop ministries may become a rich blessing for their experimental, test-n-learn innovating into a new way of engaging the Gospel.

It’s worth noting for first loop congregations/presbyteries, the most likely point at which renewal, revitalizing, redevelopment can occur is just *prior to entering “recline.”* When they begin cultivating the mental and emotional “recline” leadership habits they will have a propensity to walk out on the line of delusion. If they are willing to acknowledge recline and decline are coming, and welcome God’s agency to renew, redevelop, revitalize ministry they can do that at a point when they have the spiritual, human, and financial resources to do it.

As congregations/presbyteries move down the decline curve toward completion and composting, renewal is less likely. When one **body** of Christ senses that their ministry is coming to a completion and they have fulfilled their calling, it is wisest to acknowledge that further up the first loop curve so that they can steward their resources (spiritual, wisdom, people, facility, financial) for renewal in other parts of the **Body** of Christ.

Sources:

Glatz, Greg. “A Two-Loops Approach to Congregational Transition.” Unpublished paper. United Centre for Theological Studies. Winnipeg, MB. Dec. 2014.

Corrigan, Chris. 2014. “A Theory of Change: Living and Dying in the Church of the 21st Century.” Unpublished slide deck from EDGE webinar.

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