

MANUAL OF MODEL BUILDING
The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago

Models, Are For Mission

1 This manual seeks to share with the colleagues of the Spirit Movement, and colleagues of the church at large, some concepts and techniques of long range missional church planning called "model building." It presumes, for the sake of brevity, that its readers are already members of local congregation cadres, and that they are already deeply emersed in the painful struggle to build meaningful, effective models for the work of the church in the coming decades.

2 In the coming pages, we will say first, something about what model building is, insofar as it is a developed technique. We will describe something of the operating characteristics of models, then draw a rough picture of the overall process of building them. Then the process will be broken down into its several parts, illustrating the analysis with examples that have proven their usefulness in the past. Finally, we will suggest some areas of "edge" model building.

What a Model Is

3 A "model" is simply a symbolic representation of some aspect, dimension or series of aspects and dimensions, of reality. It can be rendered either two dimensionally, as in a chart or diagram, or three dimensionally, as in a small scale physical representation. Or, a model can be as intangible as a mental image. The fact is that everyone operates out of models of this kind. If one sets out to buy a house, find a job, eat breakfast or perform any other conventional act, he is operating out of a model, unconscious though it may be. Anyone who has ever been served green scrambled eggs on St. Patrick's day discovers quickly how explicit some of his unconscious modles really are.

4 This is precisely the point at which the concept of model building gains value for everyone. It compels us to be intentional and self-conscious about the subject of our model building. A family about to purchase a house with a full catalogue of criteria for what makes a "good" house is more likely, in the long run, to be satisfied with his purchase than one who announces to the real estate agent that they want "lots of lawn and a garage and blue shutters." The latter would also presumably prefer that the food did not leak. But, never having brought their true model to consciousness, they may not realize that they even had one until they had lived in the house for a month/ and discover defects. Models, therefore, systematize our intentionality.

Freedom Is a Model

5 Or, to say the same thing slightly differently, the model is the bridge between a once(?) and future situation. If, for instance, one decides to do something about "the problem of slums", the only possibility is to build a model, however abstract, of what the situation will be like in the future, and then build the model of the method of getting from "here" to "there." But it is the model which gives the freedom to act. Human will takes form through models. The better the model, the better the chances of accomplishing the deed. In this sense, being human is the ability to build and execute a model.

Models Are Temporal

6 Models have meaning only with reference to time. They may describe the past, the present, or the future. Or they may describe a flow of activity over time. They may describe the process of the transformation of the past into a future situation.

7 Models of the past and the present function descriptively and analytically. They tell what went on in the past so that we can learn from it, avoiding it or imitating it, whichever we desire. But more than this, by building a model of the past or present, we change our relationship to it. In building the model, we isolate and assemble those elements of the situation which we have determined to regard as important. By accepting some, rejecting others, we decide which past we will learn from. Everyone does this, but with varying degrees of intentionality. Advocates of both Marxism and capitalism have decided that the most important elements of history are economic. Their models of the past are economic. And in so doing, they have taken as very different relationship to their past than others more interested in things cultural. They have decided that the past they are going to learn from is the economic past, and in so doing, they have already determined to a very large degree, the direction of their future.

8 A model of the future will in large measure, reflect the models of the past. But beyond this, models of the future function predictively or prescriptively. Either they seek to extrapolate from the present course of events into some future time, or they describe some future situation regarded as desirable, and make the demand upon us that we bend our activities so that the description is fulfilled.

9 A model which describes the transition from a past state of affairs to a future situation is called a "flow chart" or a "time line." It can be as simple as a list of steps to be taken into order to get a job done, or as complex as a complete document listing primary and secondary goals and detailing all the necessary strategies and tactics necessary to accomplish "victory" in World War II.

10 A missional community has use for all these types of models in various mutations and in various combinations. Once the missional goal has been selected and articulated, of course, it determines the appropriateness of all the other models.

Models Are Corporate

11 Perhaps the most important single thing to be said about the activity of model building as described here, is that it is a corporate effort. It is a planning methodology which seeks to cultivate the best creative efforts of the group members. But individual creativity, for its own sake, is never a primary value. Rather, the goal is always to increase the effectiveness of the group as it works toward its missional goal.

12 Model building is the process of building a group consensus. It is never "democratic" in the formal sense of the term. A vote is never taken to determine a point at issue. Rather, until a consensus is reached, the group remains open to all ideas and values. A vote, used under these circumstances, is inherently divisive, for before it is even possible to take a vote, the opinion of the group has already been polarized. When completed, the "ideal" model is a rational structure holding every value in a rational field of relationships with every other value.

13 This is not to say that individuals should not make use of model building methods. When working individually in conjunction with a corporate effort, an individual can often provide the "break open" insight that allows the group to move creatively in a new direction. Individual models can be of enormous value as one struggles to bring clarity and simplicity out of a difficult situation. But without the corrective functioning of a group interchange, individual models may simply re-inforce a set pattern of thought which may very well have major errors or deficiencies. Only in a group effort is it possible to overcome individual "blind spots."

Three parts of the Model Building Process

14 Model building has been described as a three step process:
In the first step, the group solves all of its problems, then begins to talk about implementing the model. This rarely takes more than an hour.

15 In step two, the group has a good laugh over the neivete, the idealism and the blatant absurdity of its first efforts. Then commences two weeks to several months of tedious model construction, collecting, sifting, organizing and reorganizing the information available. The genuine long-range solutions almost never correspond to the obvious answers, and the true rational framework will begin to emerge only when the quick solutions have been exhausted.

16 The third and final step occurs in the midst of the struggle to put the initial model into practice. The final form of the model congeals under the pressure of the encounter between fact and theory.

The Flow of the Model Building Process: Brainstorming

17 The first thing any group must do in order to construct a model is to find out what it, as a group, knows about the problem it has undertaken to solve. This is the brainstorming phase of the process. It can be opened in many ways. If, for example, a model is to be built for a total community reformulation project, the group leader might ask, "what are the problems of this community?" If the model is to be a more limited scope, he might begin with a positive probe; "what are the elements that must be part of a truly contemporary order of worship?" If the group is more experienced, he might begin by asking each individual to present his two, three or four "key structures for dealing with the problem."

18 No matter how the issues are raised, the group will immediately "mount the horse and ride off in all directions." This is exactly what ought to happen. Everyone gets out his or her pet answer or private axe. The leader lists everything on a blackboard the group.

19 During this stage, the objective is for the leader to keep the mood light and the responses flowing light and fast. If it helps, he can rephrase the initial question, opening up new directions, eliciting insights the group members did not know they had. Any answer given is good and acceptable. The list will quickly become exhaustive, but the leader stays with the task until he senses that the group is nearly exhausted on this particular exercise. In most instances, the group will be astonished at the amount of wisdom at its disposal. At other times, it will be clear that more information is needed. But in the beginning, this is not a matter of great concern. A group involved in model building will be highly sensitized to acquire new ideas and relevant information.

Gestaltting the Corporate Wisdom

20 The "model" as such really begins to take form during this phase of the process. The task here is to re-organize the information gathered through the brainstorming process into a logical and tightly coherent "field" or "gestalt."

21 Under the understanding of model building currently in use, this is done primarily through the use of a series of two dimensional charts. The immediate objective is to find that series of between three or five categories (and sometimes, but very rarely, more) beneath which each relevant item of data gathered during the brainstorming can be subsumed. If, as an example, the group had been wrestling with the problems of suburban politics, the job would be to find the three or five key problems in which all the others were rooted. If a partial, and very inadequate brainstorming list looked like this:

community apathy
 poor public political education
 inaccessible elected officials
 no relation to city affairs
 no regional planning board
 inadequate policing
 gerrymandering
 unrepresentative school board
 bad commuter service
 atrophied community civil service
 no live connection to state politics
 no contact with national politics

no structures for community decisions
 power concentrated among wealthy
 anti-political religious moralism
 high taxes
 men have no time to participate
 rich/poor division of community
 no effective links w/ neighborin.
 towns
 no public recreational facilities
 no ~~public~~ plan for community
 development
 unstable population-corporation
 influence

then one way of organizing the data might be this:

Internal Political
 Structure

inaccessible officials
 gerrymandering
 atrophied civil service
 no comm. decis. stru.
 wealth-power concentra.
 lack of partic/time
 rich/poor comm. divis.
 no comm. develop. plans

External Community
 Relations

no city pol. connect.
 no reg. plan board
 no state connections
 no national connect.
 no national connect.
 no links with neighbor
 towns

Community
 Political Education

poor pol ed.
 anti-pol. moralism
 one party newspaper
 TV/radio impact
 unstable population
 community apathy

Community Service Structures

inadequate policing
 non-rep. school bd.
 bad commuter service
 high taxes
 poor recreational fac.

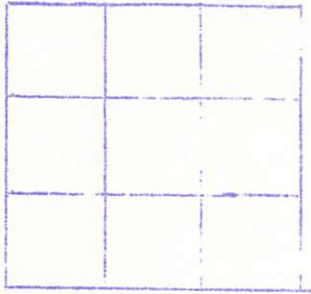
22 This is a beginning for the development of a model, but a very crude one. There are several very obvious problems with it. One is that several of the items could fit under more than one of the major categories, for example, "community apathy." This may certainly be a genuine problem, but it is likely that before it can be helpful, it will have to be reduced to more specific component elements. "High taxes" may mean that the group felt they were high without knowing what they were tused for, in which case it would be an educational problem, or it might point to graft, where it would be a problem of internal structures.

23 A more fundamental problem is that the lead categories are different in kind. That is, columns one and four refer directly to political structures, while two and three are of a more general type. This might point to the idea that all the categories should be referred to as structural problems. Or, it could mean that only one of the four should list structural problems, and that the other three should include such things as "Sociological Background" or "Decisions/ Making Communication." Still a third alternative would be to list the problems from the brainstorming session under "local," "regional," "national," and "global." All three approaches would have many problems. But futher brainstorming under each system may open up entirely new worlds to explore.

24 An exaple of one of the earlier models of 5th City is reproduced on the back page of this manual. It simply shows one kind of consistency, but it should not be assumed that this is the only kind of consistency worth striving for. Each problem, and the scope in which the problem is incompessed determines much about waht is a "good" or useful model, and what is a "bad" or non-functional one.

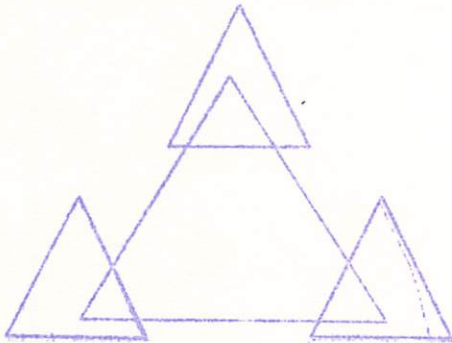
Models Take Many Forms

25 Finally, the two-dimensional chart models that are most convenient to use under most circumstances can take any plane geometric form imaginable. The guideline is to use the simplest possible form that can be used to say what needs to be said. Here are some of the most common forms used:



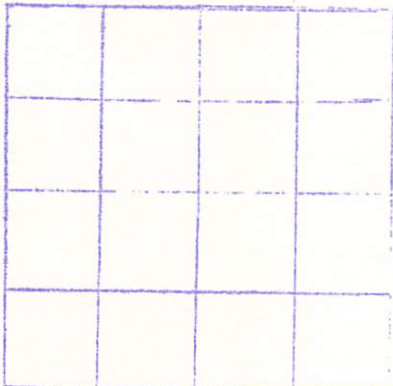
This is a "3X3". You can use a "2X2" if you like, but if the problem is that simple, you probably don't need a model at all. A convention that has developed among those familiar with Ecumenical Institute models is that you work in 2's when dealing with theoretical problems and in 4's and sometimes 5's when dealing with practics. This is not iron-clad, but it works out often enough to be worthy noting.

26 The "3X3" is exactly the same as the triangle model form for which the Ecumenical Institute faculty has become notorious:



As you can see from what has been done in the lower right hand corner of each model, each form is infinitely expandable, limited only by the size of the paper and ones ability to read small print. So a "3X3" can become a "3X3X3" or a "3X3X3X3."

27 Then, of course, there is the "4X4" which, as you might expect, looks like this:



Sixteen categories allows for a considerable stretch of the imagination.

28 The 5th City Model was originally worked out on the basis of multiples of 5, as much for the symbolic value of using that number as anything else. A common aesthetic variant is this one:

which is really no different than a simple "5X5" grid.

29 There is probably no simple geometric shape which has not been used in some model sometime. Concentric circles have been used frequently, but have been dropped unless the circular shape had something to say about the content directly.

30 In using these basic forms, the objective is to get a totally consistent image. That is, both the horizontal rows and the vertical columns spell out the dimensions of the reality being described. In many kinds of models, this works out to be very simple, because one row or the other will spell out a direct progression of time or space. Thus:

Where this is not the case, there is usually a long, hard struggle to develop a thoroughgoing vertical and horizontal rationality.

31 A final rule of thumb having to do with the selection of model forms might be this: In the early stages of model building, during the gestating of the brainstorming sessions, work to expand the mind of the group. If it seems too obviously simple to come up with a "3X3", press for multiples of four and five, even if some blocks have to be filled with "trash." These items can be corrected later as the model is worked and re-worked, and the value of discovering other kinds of valuable data not immediately evident is infinitely greater than the trouble and time it takes. But if, on the other hand, the brainstorming produces an overwhelming flood of information, work toward condensing the volume into one of the simpler forms, such as the "3X3" or the "4X4" or even a "4X3." Vertical and horizontal consistency may not be necessary in the early stages of the task.

32 The time spent during this gestating phase of model building is totally dependent upon the importance, in the total life plan of the group, of the model being built. Some can be hammered out in an hour, where others require weeks of work. Serious model building of any kind is intellectually and psychologically exhausting. Some who have become quite good at it claim that they can only take an hour or two at a time, because of the anxiety of virtually creating out of nothing. Different groups will require different lengths of time to do comparable tasks.

33 Filling Out the Model

33 Once the major categories have been established, the group can go on to fill out the model, carrying it out to three, and sometimes four and five levels. In theoretical models, the objective is to make the model comprehensive and inclusive. If the objective is to build a comprehensive construct of 20th Century theological wisdom, then the ultimate objective is to build a model with classifications for every single theological idea that has ever been spoken or written. Not that it would show all that. If it did, the clarifying and simplifying values of the model would be lost. But if it is truly comprehensive and inclusive in its design, then in principle it should be possible to do so. For example:

34 The filling out of a practices model, however, has a rather definite, necessarily progression which could be described this way:

In effect, when the group has constructed major categories of the gestalt, two things have happened at once: it has built the problem chart, or "problemat." And, it has built the goals chart, since the other side of the coin from a clearly stated problem is always a goal. If it isn't, then the problem has not been adequately defined.

35 In the chart above, the movement from left to right is from the broad to the particular. Therefore, the strategies refer to the more general overarching aspects of the project operation, while the tactics are the specific maneuvers needed to accomplish the strategy. To borrow from the military analogy, the strategies encompass the locations, the timing and the material to be thrown into battle. The tactics include troop deployment, military intelligence preparations and logistics. The programs are, in effect, sub-tactics, and detail the day-to-day operations and discipline under which the operations force will work.

36 In building a practices model, groups sometimes find themselves at a loss to distinguish readily what should be included under each of the four captions. For instance, goals are very frequently revealed as strategies for some larger goal if the context is broadened. - A restructured community may be a goal for the residents of the community, but viewed within the context of the universal mission of the church, it is hardly more than a minor tactic. The group has simply to define and limit its own context, decide what are goals, what are strategies and tactics.

Structures, Forces and Instruments

37 A useful and sometimes necessary supplement to a comprehensive project model is a relational chart of the problems/goals with the structures, forces and instruments needed to do the job. Such a model is basically only a modification of the strategies, tactics and programs complex, but one step removed from these abstractions. It is also most directly applicable when the model is aimed at broad, comprehensive social and cultural renewal projects.

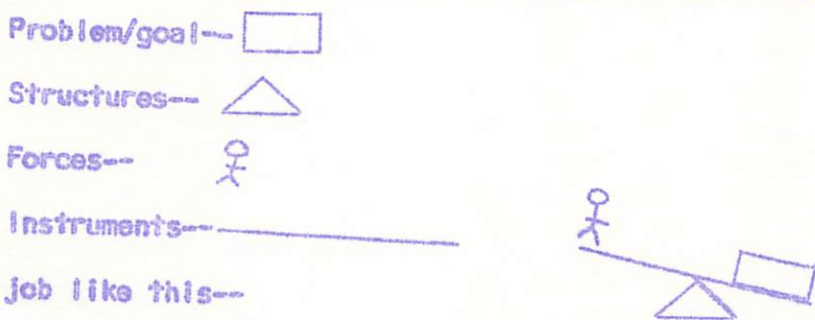
38 We say that the "solution" to a social problem is to build structures to deal with it, on a sustained basis. That is, the 20th Century response to the starving masses of India is the structures for adequate agricultural production and distribution, not the silver droppings of warm hearted-tourists, no even charity on an international scale. Charity is occasional, not structured. By structures, therefore, we mean institutions of government, community and even individual initiative.

39 In order to activate and build social structures, it takes people, troops. Structures require those who create and those who maintain. These are the forces. Any comprehensive model, therefore, must include a statement of the potential forces and available forces. What kinds of people are needed to do the job? Specialists? Dedicated churchmen? Suicide squads? Business and industry? Where will they come from? The local community? Imported mercenaries? Government? An operating project may require one or several types of forces.

40 Instruments are harder to describe. In the mechanical sense, instruments are simply tools. If you are building a house, hammer and saw are instruments. If you are building a community, there are other types of instruments. There might be a newspaper, or an assortment of buildings used for offices, youth centers, educational centers and a variety of other purposes. Particular kinds of symbols, flags, public art displays or model building all serve the purpose of instruments.

41 Sometimes, certain kinds of instruments become structures when the initial building job is done. A newspaper might be an example of an instrument turned to become a structure.

42 A simple image to pull all four elements (problem/goal, structures, forces and instruments) together is this one, borrowed from elementary physics:



Do the job like this--

Then There is the Job of Gridding

43 A grid is a map-type model. That is, it is more directly concerned with space than with time, the location of things rather than the sequence of events. In the kinds of use we make of grid-maps, they are more important for telling us what is as opposed to what is needed.

44 Grids are both actual and symbolic. That is, a grid of a community represents the salient facts about who lives where, how, and how they are divided up. What salient facts are presented depends upon the purpose for which the grid is made and the insights of the grid-maker. A conventional zoning map is really a grid based upon types of housing available, and the separation between residential, commercial and industrial areas. A community planner will be more interested in the flow of traffic through the community; what places regularly attract people, what areas do they avoid, what streets and "short-cuts" do people use and why? When one has designed a grid, it should tell him roughly what his community looks like and where the things are located that are important to him for his purposes.

45 A grid which is intended to serve a primarily symbolic purpose is a kind of caricature of a map. Here the one who grids is after a general image of what the community looks like without attention to every knotch and squiggle. Angles are sharpened, straight lines accentuate border lines.

46 In general, a grid is simply an elementary tool for presenting information about an area in a compact image before a group. It can be as elaborate as any elaborate map, or as simple as four lines in a rectangle, depending upon the desired purpose.

47 If grids can be as simple or as elaborate as anyone could wish, they can also represent as small or as large a scale as might be desired. The kind of thing shown above is useful for getting a grasp of the local community. But a "reasonable" man of the 20th Century is concerned about his own local community only in the global context. If this be so, it will then be very useful to have a symbolic grid of the nation and the world, which is easily drawn and easily reproduced.

Putting Out a Timeline

48 Timelines, like spatial grids, can be both actual and symbolic. A family may construct a symbolic life plan, telling them when they will travel and where, when and how education will be continued, where they will be living and what they will be doing. But at the same time, they know that their actualization of that time line will depend upon innumerable and complex interacting factors. It's greatest value is in the direction the symbols offer.

49 By contrast, a military battle plan must be detailed and precise. There can be no deviations from schedule, save the deviations are built into an alternative schedule. Generally speaking, the shorter the time span covered, the more precise the time line can be.

Strategic and Tactical goals

Decision points prior to alternative courses of action

Critical path of action

Alternative routes to the same goal.

~~50//---The-time-spent-during-this-gestating-phase-of-model-building-is-totally-dependent-upon-the-importance,-in-the~~

-10-

50 In general, it must be said that no practical model is complete until a timeline has been completed for it. Unless it is located on such a timeline, it is no more than a dream.

51 A timeline is nothing more than a simplified flowchart, as used constantly in business and industry, in scientific analysis of phenomena, and, of course, in cybernetics and communication theory. A simple textbook on flowcharting should give most planning groups more than they would ever need to know in order to make their own plans in a quite sophisticated way.

The Model of the Models

52 These, then, are the important elements that have to be remembered in model building. They are each parts of a total, on-going model building process. Together, they make take only a few minutes of rapid sketching on a blackboard. Or, they may require years and years of hard effort, tearing down and rebuilding, and rebuilding again.

53 A model is always final. That is, so long as there is no alternative model, the group abides by the one it has developed.

54 But a model is always open. Which means that any time, the group can reconvene to consider alternative models, or necessary changes in the one in use. When a group is not following the model it has developed, it is usually a good indicator that further work needs to be done. But this is never begun in the spirit of "woe is us, what's happen to our spirit." Rather, it must be as objective as possible. "What has to be done to make this project work, so that we accomplish the goals we have set for ourselves.

55 The leader of the group building a model has much to do with the effectiveness of the corporate effort. There is no special type of person who can lead better than any other. What is crucial is that he is one who is determined to draw out the insights available in the group, and turn them to maximum benefit. He can be dominant and aggressive, or he can be a very passive kind of character. Usually, he should be one of the members of the group who retreats to his office or home after every model building session and wrestles with the content that has been offered, seeking new and more helpful way to organize the data. He can be a mild mannered fellow who drives the group with the sheer weight of his patience and determination. But he needs to know when to turn on and turn off, and when. And he should be able to shoot any "rabbit", and irrelevant subject that emerges to distract the attention of the group, at a hundred paces.

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56 So, let's put it together this way:

