

Well, now, just how *tall* is your workplace organization? You know, when you see what the management specialists called an “org chart”—a picture-chart of boxes and lines specific to your organization that shows all the roles and offices like President and Manager and Clerk. So, again, how tall is your organization? Is it very tall? Like where the worker reports to the department manager who reports to the floor manager who reports to the store manager who reports to the local market manager who reports to the regional manager who reports to the Vice President who reports to the Senior Vice President who reports to the Executive Vice President who reports to the President who reports to the Board of Directors. Now, *that’s* a tall organization!

And here’s the key point: there are lots of serious problems inherent to tall organizations. Take communications, for example. Remember the “telephone game” you played when you were a kid? That’s where one person whispers a sentence once to the next person, then that person whispers that sentence to the next, and so on. At the end of the line of people, the last person announces what the sentence was—and, invariably, that sentence bears no resemblance to the sentence first spoken. We all laugh, of course. But organizations are tremendously dependent upon effective everyday communications...and the more people in the communications channel, the higher the chance of garbling key communications.

Now, those communications may be just because of inarticulate speaking and lazy listening. But, in all organizations, that garbled communication and confusion is often deliberate, because each of the multiple messengers have their own, self-modified version of what they want heard—one that serves the interests of the messenger, not the original sender. Know what I’m talking about? Of course you do! The solution? Minimize the number of people in the communication line—make your organization more flat!

But communication is the least of the problems of the tall organizations. How about nimble responses to important, critical situations, like serving clients in medical crisis situations that are truly time-sensitive? That’s why health care organizations created emergency rooms and hire ER doctors. “Hey, this isn’t a common cold we are talking about, this guy is bleeding badly—this situation can’t wait for two weeks for a visit to his general practitioner!” The ER room, if it’s operated well, immediately identifies the immediacy of the need and, if warranted, connects the patient and the doctor immediately. Heart attack? Come right in! You see, what has happened here is the move of a big, tall-structure hospital to carve out a much more “flat” organization in the case of life-threatening emergencies.

And, how about the extreme costliness of tall organizations? So, here the question: in your experience, are all the multiple managers and corporate officers in your organization fully productive? Would the customer really experience any true loss in service, if, say, about a dozen managers or executives in your organization stopped coming to work for about five years? Well, many of us have strong confidence as to the correct answer to that!

Here’s some history. For millennia, most business organizations were really flat: you went directly to the village shoemaker and the village baker and the village doctor. So it was with what we would now call nonprofits: the church had one pastor and he lived in the parsonage fixed up for him just down the street. Those were the ultimate flat organizations, right there in the village. But then organizations started creating complex systems in service to their customers, delivering cars and houses and ice cream bars.

You see, the Industrial Revolution that started several hundred years ago brought a lot of that type of complexity, and that helped create a lot of prosperity worldwide! But the ongoing ingenuity of the Industrial Revolution also displaced old, established ways of doing things—that’s what famed economist Joseph Schumpeter labeled “creative destruction.” And some people really hate creative destruction! But very few of *those* people are clamoring for horses and horse manure on city streets instead of cars!

So, there is always a sharp tension created with inventions and process improvements and technological progress—the displacement of old ways and people who do not update their outdated skills. The current digital era is just like that now. There are far fewer travel agents now than thirty years ago—you know, the people you would call on the phone to help you book airline flights and hotel reservations and rental cars. These travel agents have largely been displaced by self-serve software on the internet, like Expedia and hotels.com. And that means the “supply chain” of travel—the totality of people and process needed for you to travel efficiently—got flatter. And that’s one of the key reasons why travel largely got less costly.

Sometimes in these cases of technological change, the workers aren’t displaced. Instead, the workers change their skill set in order to survive and thrive. A car mechanic decades ago knew how to expertly wield a wrench and, yes, diagnose the car’s problem. Nowadays, a car mechanic absolutely must know how to astutely read a computer diagnostic machine. Still need the person, but with a different skill set.

Market-leading companies and their related supply chains are changing the way business is done. And almost all of the change is grounded in technological change—often digital change via smartphones and laptops and the internet and so on. This type of change threatens people and companies who don’t want to change because of their power or their status or their income. In the world of consumer goods, Amazon has led the way in the U.S. regarding how an updated supply chain can work: yes, people, companies, and the supply chain itself have been altered. Such as more delivery people, fewer retail clerks. This is true for nonprofits, too. Who had heard of satellite churches with a livestream feed twenty-five years ago?

But you know who fruitfully perfected the change from tall organization to flat organization, once and for all, don’t you? Of course, you do! It was...and *is*....Jesus Christ!

You see, even the chosen people—the Jews—had an organization structure that was too tall. There were high priests, and God arranged that Jews had to go through those high priests in a sacrificial system, making offerings for various reasons. But the big event was annual, and the Jews hoped that the animal sacrifice made on their behalf would be well-received. The Jews always had to work through their high priest. And the Biblical writer to the Hebrews makes clear that *the Jesus way* is the better covenant!

But what’s funny is that Israel actually tried to improve governance by asking God to give them kings like the Israel’s neighbors had. Through his servant Samuel, God warned the people of Israel that they wouldn’t like the price they would pay for this “taller” organization created by putting a human king like Saul or David or Solomon between the Israelites and God. And much of the Old Testament goes on to document all the problems that this taller organization scheme created, especially in the latter centuries.

In this Old Testament era, God only had a limited number of clearly direct or “flat” relationships, if we might call them that, with Adam and Eve, and Moses, and Abraham, and chosen Old Testament prophets. Then came Jesus: *the one mediator*. Every person who calls on the name of Jesus and believes then has a direct, flatly-just-the-two-of-you relationship with Christ...you with all the appurtenant benefits of status as a citizen in the Kingdom of God: salvation, eternal life, healing, ambassadorship to every person in your spheres of life. And your indwelling by the Holy Spirit. And your complete reconciliation to the Father through Jesus! Pity those who simply go through the motions of cultural Christianity—no, *Jesus is alive!*

This was the ultimate flattening of an organization: nothing between the believing person and God! God directs your steps...He answers your prayers...He is an ever-present Friend. But, sadly, many Christians inherit and are taught to use the old model, too, with false, inadequate mediators like traditions, priests, governments, and dead, institutionalized churches placed between them and God. Many are stuck playing the telephone game when Jesus has created a direct access line! So. Is Jesus your direct supplier? And what does your workplace organization look like...flat or tall? What supply chains have *you* chosen to live with? The end consequences of those choices are deep!

A&A: Application & Action

1. The Bible teaches that Christ Jesus is the one mediator between God and men. What does your spiritual life look like...is it as flat as God intends, with direct, daily relationship and clear communications with Jesus? Be specific.

2. What does your Christian community look like...does it encourage direct relationship with Christ as the one mediator, for you and for others? Be specific in your observations.

3. What does your workplace organization look like...is it poised for future greatness with a fittingly flat, efficient structure? Is it flexible, nimble, ready for further technological adjustments before competitors exploit its weaknesses? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being "very efficiently flat," what is your workplace's score? Explain.