Operational Design For Effective Church Management

Brigid Appiah Otoo and Edward Fekpe

Abstract—The design of a service, including churches, does not only impact its administration and performance but also its sustainability. This paper explores how the design of a church, as a service fits within the three-stage conceptual framework of a generic operations design: the concept, package, and process. The findings are expected to highlight the critical success factors in church design and management where success is measured in part by the number of followers and value that they derive from the services offered.

Keywords— *church, operations, service design, management*

I.   Introduction

A major part of a society's identity has always been the belief in a supreme being who rewards and punishes according to one's choices in life. In a less developed country like Ghana, religion is an incurable part of the culture even though its nature remains very dynamic. Through the influence of adventurers from the west and then colonialism, most Ghanaians have embraced the Christian and Muslim religions as more acceptable methods to venerate the Supreme Being. Christianity especially has seen a rapid growth in its followership as well as denominations in recent years. Consequently, there is a very keen competition amongst both the orthodox and charismatic churches to win over and maintain their followership.

With the rapid growth of churches comes a growing demand for their effective and efficient management. The design of a service has an impact on its management and performance. One of the aims of the design activity of a service is to develop and maintain an environment in which the organization can achieve its strategic objectives as well as establish and manage an efficient and effective system. In effect, services must be designed with these management dynamics in mind to ensure success. One such service is the church, which falls within the nongovernmental-organizations (NGO) category. Though noncommercial, the church can be considered as a type of service because their followers (or consumers) derive some form of psychological value from it.

The aim of a good design from operations management perspective is to satisfy customers, communicate the purpose of the product or service to its market, and bring financial rewards to organization (Slack et al., 2010). Therefore, the church as a nonprofit service can be described as a process that takes in a set of input resources that are transformed, or used to transform other resources, into outputs that meet the

organization's strategic objectives. This transformation model is as shown in Fig. 1. Thus, by carefully designing the church as a service, its management is able to meet the followers' (or customers') requirements and the strategic objectives of the church as a whole. These requirements (of followers) and the strategic objectives (of the church) such as hope, wealth, prosperity, and political influence form the outputs of the church.

To derive these outputs however, the church requires a set of inputs that are similar to the input variables of other service organizations. Churches depend on the growth in the number of its followers, which has a direct impact on the other transformed input i.e., funds generated. As such, followers are encouraged to invest in the work of God in order to succeed as individuals. This is often supported with biblical verses like Luke 6:38- *"give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and*
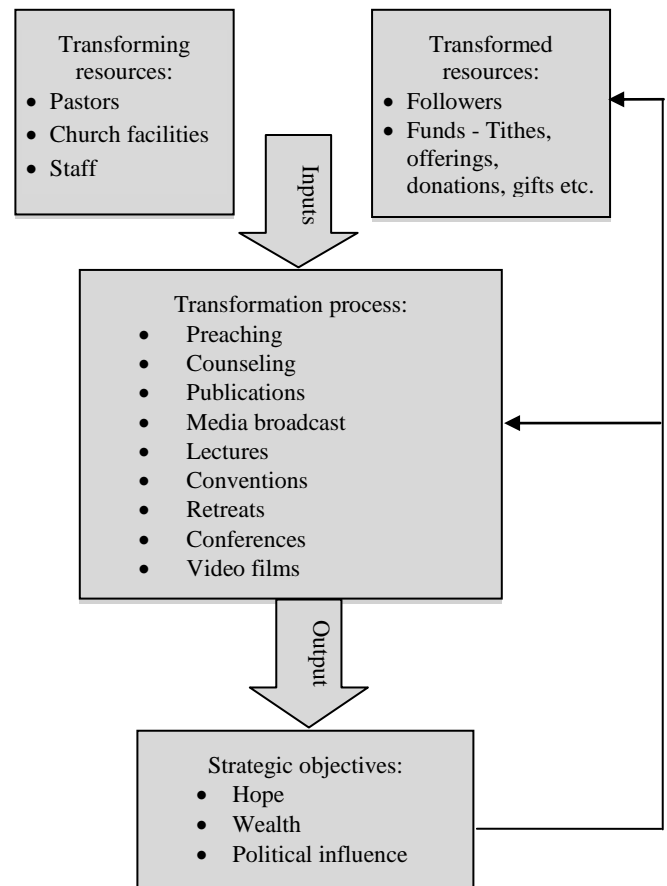

Figure 1. The Church service as an input-transformation-output model (Bonsu and Appiah Otoo, 2014)

Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration
Accra, Ghana

running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." Followers respond by donating generously to the church with the hope of receiving God's blessings for material well-being. Again the church encourages this by using biblical verses like Malachi 3:10 – *"bring ye all the tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."* It is worth noting that, the financial expectations from members of a church cut across everyone including the poorest members who as a result may become poorer with the hope of a wealthier future. Bonsu and Belk (2010) noted that both the rich and poor adherents see hope for material prosperity in the Pentecostal message.

The other types of inputs are the church's facilities (assets), their trained staff and pastors who tend to be their inspirational leaders as well. In Ghana, most of the pastors are the founders of their churches with their own strategic objectives, mission and vision for their churches. The operation of the church is therefore often tailored to suit this vision (Bonsu and Appiah Otoo, 2014).

Design of services is goal oriented: it aims to define the nature and value/benefits the service can bring to its customers. It also defines the components, which make up this nature and how they can be brought together to achieve the requirements of customers. Many researchers however question the value in allocating time and resources to designing a service before offering them to customers. Some researchers have studied the theories that contribute to the structure and operational strategy of services. Few have studied the design of nonprofit organizations such as churches for the benefit of their efficient management and sustainability. Some researchers have concentrated on the management of nonprofit organizations such as churches but have not explored how the design of these services impact their successful management. This paper explores the applicability of a classical service operations conceptual framework to church design with particular focus on the nontraditional charismatic churches.

II. Literature Review

Stark and Bainbridge (1987: 42) defined religious organizations as social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and exchange supernaturally-based general compensators. Wuthnow, (1994a: ch. 1, 1994b) noted that regardless of the origin and nature of their beliefs, the survival and growth of religious organizations depend on access to resources from the external environment. The material resources of interest to religious organizations include not only physical and financial assets, but also the size of followership or number of adherents, and their levels of time commitment and effort. Miller (2002) observed that the conditions surrounding the founding of a religious organization are critical to initial success but may not sustain a competitive advantage in a dynamic religious economy. Zaleski and Zech (1995: 440) noted that 'religious congregations exhibit a rare

combination in the nonprofit sector: mutual benefit activities supported by voluntary contributions'

A good design satisfies customers, communicates the purpose of the product or service to its market, and brings financial rewards to the business (Slack et al., 2010). The chosen design should help the organization to meet the expectations of customers, and satisfied customers bring in financial rewards. According to Chase (1996), Rust and Chase (1999), Bowen and Hallowell (2002), research in service operations management began to take its shape in the late 1980s. Literature in this area has been traditionally modeled as wait-related measures or customer satisfaction related measures (Wang et al., 2012). Anand et al. (2011) investigated the tradeoff between outcome (quality or reward) and efficiency in managers' decisions customer intensive services like healthcare, personal services, financial and legal consulting. Gloppen (2011) explored the core competences and the value of service designers as perceived by leaders in service organisations in an exploratory, collaborative workshop context.

Voelker (2012) identified lack of research into the antecedents of service quality. Although churches in the developing world are characterized as nonprofit organizations, there is a very keen competition amongst both the orthodox churches and charismatic churches to win over and maintain their members. The successes of churches are largely dependent on their design. A well-structured service design to meet the expectation/needs of customers would provide the organization a competitive edge over the others.

Jenkins and Kavan (2009) noted that the central difference between orthodox or mainline churches and other churches is that they are less likely to have a conversion message as their focal point. They tend to be more inclined toward social service than proselytising. In contrast, Pentecostals view the 'born again' experience as the heart of Christianity, and Pentecostal leaders are more concerned with winning people to Christ than with welfare provision.

According to Bonsu and Belk (2010), church members use both direct and subtle promises of material wealth to attract and encourage new converts. The authors also noted that members of some churches are eager to share their hope for material benefits through religious cum economic proselytizing. The growth of Pentecostal churches in Ghana can be attributed in part to the exploitation of the fundamental concept of give and God will bless you according to the extent of your giving.

Miller (2002) in discussing the formation, strategies, and performance of religious organizations noted that religious organizations face conflicting pressures regarding innovation. Miller (2002) further noted that the nature and viability of a religious organization's strategy is defined by how it responds to pressures of (i) credible commitment and social perceptions of legitimacy (ii) inimitability as a means of sustainability, and (iii) market segmentation and product positioning. The conditions surrounding the founding of a religious organization are critical to initial success but may not sustain a competitive advantage in a dynamic religious economy. This

paper examines the impacts of design of church as a service on its success and sustainability.

III. Conceptual Model

Considering the importance of the design process to the success of a church's management, this paper explores the three main aspects to be considered when designing a church within the context of charismatic churches with data from Ghana. The three fundamental aspects of the design are: the concept, package and process. The concept is a clear articulation of the outline specification including the nature, use and value of the product or service against which the stages of the design and the resultant product and/or service can be assessed. It is important to realize that customers are buying more than just the package and process; they are buying into the particular concept. Most, if not all, operations produce a combination of products and services. It is this collection of products and services that is usually referred to as the 'package' that customers buy. Some of the products or services in the package are core and other parts will serve to enhance the core. By changing the core, or adding or subtracting supporting goods and services, organizations can provide different packages and in so doing create quite different concepts. The package on the other hand defines the combination of products and services that customers buy. The package of components defines the 'ingredients' of the design. The process determines the way in which they will be created and delivered to the customer (Slack et al, 2010).

The process, by which the identified components are required to achieve the defined concept, will be brought together to provide the service should also be clearly defined. The process must take into account the timelines needed to achieve the customers' expectations and the church's strategic objectives.

To stay competitive, the church's strategic objectives must be designed to meet their external and internal customers' desires for quality, speed, dependability, flexibility and cost. These objectives as well as the aspects of the church that must be captured during the design activity are examined in this paper using data from a number of churches in Ghana. The data used and discussion of the findings is presented in following subsections of this paper.

Irrespective of the church and its strategic objectives, defining the concept is the most important part of the design activity. This is because, by clearly articulating the concept, the design's package and process can also be defined. When designing the church as a service, it must be noted that unlike products, the church service is created and delivered simultaneously hence the delivery system needs to be designed as well. The concept must define the nature of the service and the target market as well as their customer's requirements and specifications. For example, the nature of the service may define the style (e.g. orthodox or charismatic), language used (e.g., Ghanaian or foreign) etc. To capture customers' requirements and expectations, churches should carefully design their sermons to address issues faced by their typical followers such as marriage, family, physical and emotional well-being, and wealth.

The major challenge of churches is that, due to the low barriers to entry into the industry, there is need for innovation and cost effectiveness, which must be reflected in the design of the concept. The church must evaluate its financial and managerial capabilities to determine if they can achieve their concept. Also, like most other services, the church service is highly visible to its customers hence it must be carefully conceptualized in order to stay competitive. A service package can then be defined in detail to capture the components required to achieve the defined concept. One way of defining this is by service blue-printing as illustrated in Fig. 2.

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Follower's actions **Line of information**	Arrive	Seated	Prays and worships	Listens to sermon	Gives to collection	Receives Benediction	Leaves
Contact person's action **Line of visibility**	Greeted and escorted by usher	Welcomed by member and given program	Choir/ singing band leads worship and prayers	Pastor/ speaker preaches	Ushers facilitate funds collection	Pastor shares blessings with members	Follow up calls to encourage active participation
Backstage contacts **Line of interaction**		Leaders hold regular strategic meetings		Pastor/ speaker prepares sermon			Administrative/ Accounting activities
Support				Marketing and Advertising services	PRO service		

Figure 2: A service blue print for a church (adapted from Stevenson, 2010, pp. 163)

IV. Data Collection and Analysis

The primary focus of this study is to explore the application of classical operations management principles the design of churches to facilitate management and ensure sustainability. The design of the data collection approach recognizes the peculiarities of the operation environment (i.e., multicultural with strong foreign influence, less developed country where literacy rate is low). This study was conducted with no preconceived hypothesis. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with leaders of a number of randomly selected churches (both mainline and Pentecostal).

A questionnaire with six (6) carefully chosen open-ended questions was used and shared with fifteen (15) church leaders in Ghana. The goal was to gather information about the strategic goals of each church, benefits expected by their followers and how they managed their churches to boost customer growth and financial efficiency. The responses were carefully reviewed and qualitatively analyzed to identify the themes relevant to the objectives of this study.

V. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings from the data and information gathered. The discussion is organized according to the three aspects of the service design activity as defined in the conceptual model.

A. *Concept*

The concept defines the nature and value of the church as a service. This is often embodied in the vision and mission statements of the church. Churches are religious organizations, which aim to bring people with common interests together in order to achieve the overall strategic objectives of the organization. The common vision for all churches interviewed (100%) was to spread the Gospel from the Bible. This was aimed at enabling their members to gain salvation through accepting the salvation message. These churches identify this value to be very important when defining the vison for their operation. Also, another vision cited was to unite believers as a community through fellowship. This is intended to enable churches increase their membership and hence sustain their propagation.

B. *Package and Management*

The package defines the components that make up the service as well as how these components are brought together to achieve the concept defined by the church. This subsection also discusses the key components that contribute to the effective management of churches and how the definition of the various aspects of the church could facilitate

In order to achieve the various values of churches and the benefits they give their customers, various components are required. These components include the followers, their financial contributions, infrastructural facilities, information (technical and market), as well as the preachers and other staff members. The followers who are the primary customers of the church as a service form the core components of the church. Their management is therefore extremely important for the success of any church. Various strategies are therefore adopted to ensure their proliferation. These strategies can only be successful if the target group is chosen carefully based on the clear definition and articulation of the church's nature and value they look to give their followers. This would form the roadmap for managing the followers as the church leadership works towards meeting the intended requirements from followers.

Information provided by the respondents identified a number of the ways that various churches managed their followers' growth. Most churches encouraged mass and personal evangelism with targets and deadlines for its members. The churches with schools instilled the values and teachings of their churches in the students to encourage them to join with their families. They also organize youth programs at the universities and sometimes financially support students to be their ambassadors on campus. This tends to be a popular and effective follower management strategy because, when students accept to join a church during their university days, they graduate to be loyal members who are willing to give back to the church. This is the strategy has been demonstrated to work well. With the advancement in communications technology, churches use social media like Facebook to promote their concepts to a wider network. Also, they invest in radio and television airtime to sell their messages to the community and promote their church to the audience.

Another important component of the church service through which followers can receive financial benefits is their fund generation. The success of managing this component is closely related to the success of managing the followers. While members are expected to contribute significantly to the funds of the church, church also solicit financial support from external organizations in pursuit of their charitable initiatives. The data gathered indicated that about 60% of the respondents mentioned church offerings and tithes to form a major part of their fund generation. Almost 30% of the respondents indicated that their churches appealed to recognized external organizations for financial support. It was also observed that, all the churches adopted some kind of cost reduction strategy in order to effectively manage their budgets. For example, they encourage volunteer work and communal labor as part of the service. They also encourage the prudent use of finances and strict adherence to the budgets.

C. *Process*

The way by which these components are brought together to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization forms the process of the church. This is often made up of various transformation activities, which churches adopt to engage with their customers. From the data gathered, 100% of respondents indicated the delivery of sermons to be the most important means by which they engaged with their customers (followers) to help increase their faith and hope. Most churches also engaged in prayer sessions and bible studies for its members to

build their faith and spiritually address challenges in their lives. Occasionally most churches organized special conferences and crusades with special themes to boost the morale of their members for church service.

The outputs of the process define how the expectations (or requirements) of the church members are met. These expectations include salvation, growth in faith, spiritual relationships, peace and happiness, problem resolution through spiritual intersession, and poverty alleviation, and enhanced prosperity. The churches attempt to meet the followers' expectations through preaching the word of faith, encouraging prayer and spiritual/biblical study. The respondents cited the benefits like salvation, hope for better future, material benefits, social networking, and security. However, the most frequent benefit respondents mentioned was material benefits (60%). The followers expected financial support from the church as well as spiritual support to alleviate their poverty. Only 40% of the respondents reported faith and hope in the God as the primary benefit. In general, the respondents rated a deep understanding of the Gospel to be an important benefit. Based on this understanding, they looked to 'grow' in faith and be able to share this with others through evangelism. It is therefore the requirements of followers (customers) to gain these values as members of the church.

Even though the above discussion indicates that strategies to manage the church's core components are critical to their success, it was observed that not much emphasis has been placed on designing the church. There is no evidence to suggest that the churches interviewed appreciate the importance of design in ensuring growth and sustainability. While proliferation of their followers is viewed essential, little thought is put into defining a target group for a new church with identified benefits for the customers. A carefully structured church design will make it easy for church management to know what appeals to their members and attracts them to the church. Also, the church will be better placed to articulate these benefits to prospective members.

VI. **Conclusions**

The findings of this research have helped us to extend the understanding of operations management principles beyond the classic services such as hospitality. Furthermore, the findings from the study highlights the critical success factors in church design and management where success is measured in part by the number of followers and value that they derive from the services offered.

VII. **References**

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About Authors:

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