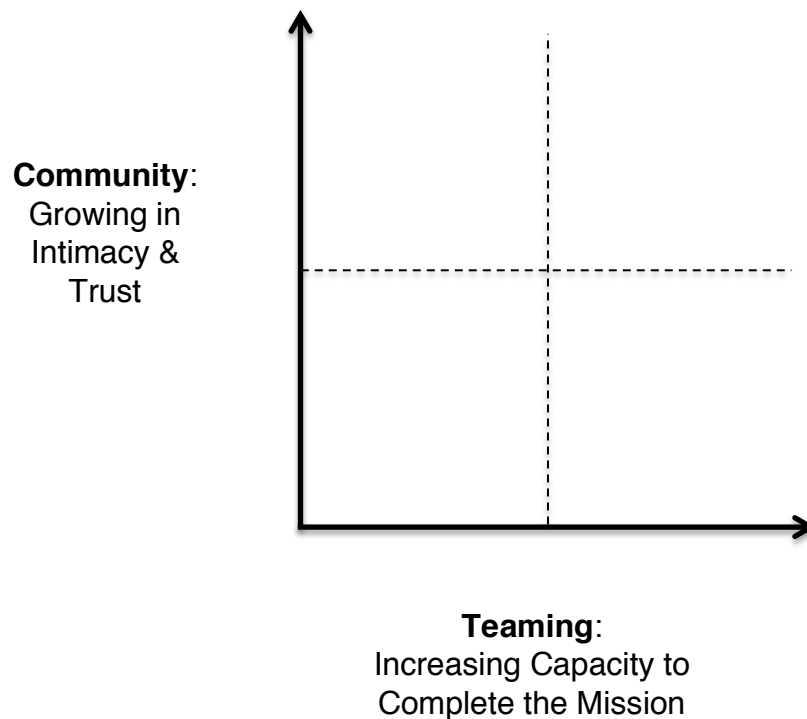


Communities and Teams

One of the perpetual challenges that groups face is expectations. The question - “What kind of group is this?” - is something most people are always asking. Unfortunately, sometimes even our Kingdom values can heighten rather than lower tensions:

- “Doesn’t Jesus want us all to love each other? Isn’t unity what John 17 is all about?”
- “Isn’t the mission of introducing people to Christ the whole point of following Jesus?”
- “Isn’t our fellowship THE way people will know about Christ?”

“Teaming” and “community” are two common terms we use to describe ways that people group together. “Team” emphasizes completing a task together. “Community” focuses more on relationships within the group. They are not mutually exclusive but do describe different goals. One way to think about it is like this:



In addition to having different goals, growing as a team and growing as a community also have different patterns. M. Scott Peck describes **community growth** in 4 stages:

1. *Initial community* - At the beginning, most groups work hard to avoid conflicts. Trust is still being built and safety has yet to be established. Often, during this stage, people do not share their individual preferences, and differences are not fully visible.
2. *Chaos* - As the group begins to share more fully, real differences begin to emerge. The tension caused by this difference can sometimes lead to well-intentioned but misguided attempts to “heal” the unity or “convert” those who see things differently. An authoritarian leader can usually circumvent chaos, but doing so can prevent deeper community from ever forming.
3. *Emptiness* - The 2 ways out of chaos are **organization** and **emptiness**. Emptiness includes the hard work of working through and working on the barriers to communication, things like expectations, assumptions, prejudices, theology, the need to “fix” or control, motives, etc. This is hard work, so there is a constant temptation to pull back and simply “organize” a way around differences.
4. *Community* - Vulnerability and quiet dependency on each other are some of the marks of mature community. These qualities cannot be faked or pushed, which is why communities can never be “launched” or simply “started.” Community is not something that comes about by decision or intention but is the end result of engaging in the work that leads to deeper relating. It is something that a group of people must work at to achieve. It cannot be forced or assumed.

Team formation follows similar stages, but because the goal - completing the mission - is different, the stages are also slightly different. Bruce Tuckman, in 1965, outlined the model that is still used by many organizations today.

1. *Forming* - At this stage, individuals are gathering information about each other and about the task at hand. Goals and assignments begin to be handed out. Conflict is avoided. Those more familiar with the task and its associated practices begin to model behaviors and share knowledge. New friendships begin to form.
2. *Storming* - As the group discovers the deeper problems and challenges underneath the tasks, people begin to share differing ideas on the task, which can lead to conflict. Learning to listen to each other and exploring solutions at depth becomes critical.
3. *Norming* - When the “storm” is navigated successfully, new norms can emerge. The outcome of the norming stage is a mutually owned, agreed upon plan.
4. *Performing* - Mature teams are marked by the smooth accomplishment of tasks. There is an efficiency and interdependence that makes the experience both successful and enjoyable.

These two goals are not mutually exclusive. In fact, neither one can be fully achieved without the other: the best teams will always develop some level of community, and most communities will also have some level of tasks to complete.

The big questions, then, are not about choosing one way or the other, i.e., do we want “just community” or do we want “just teamwork,” but...

- 1) What sort of mix or ratio of community and teaming will we pursue?
 - Do we *primarily* want to pursue becoming a community?
 - Is achieving the tasks of the CityLife Teams Commitment the most important thing?
 - Or maybe, it is a solid mix of both: “*communitas*” is the word that some people use to describe the kind of community that is formed around a shared challenge, task or mission. Some missiologists suggest that the best way to pursue all of the tasks Jesus has put before us is to organize around his mission. This does not mean “mission at any cost,” but it does mean using the pursuit of mission as the “organizing principle” for most decisions.
- 2) What kind of organization or structure would best support our goals?
 - One word picture that might help with organizing is the difference between a football team and a track team. A football team must operate with a high level of integration. It is truly a team sport. A track team, on the other hand, is a group of individuals: long-distance runners, sprinters, people who do the field events, relay teams, etc. The team does not win by coordinating as a whole but when each individual performs well.

With CityLife Teams, part of the answer to these questions is already built in: CityLife Teams and the CityLife Teams commitment are built around mission as their organizing principle, and that means the pursuit of “community” cannot be an end in itself. Because there are other tasks that need to be pursued, a strong measure of teaming will be required.

On the other hand, in terms of organizing, the options are wide open. It is not a given that the team will pursue all of the tasks of the commitment together at all times. It is possible, for example, that the team may decide to relate to a group of people outside the CityLife Team all together, or they may decide to encourage and pray for each other as each member pursues building relationships among their own friends and co-workers. After the initial orientation phase, the team might decide, for example, to pursue serious Bible study and accountability with each other, or they might decide to encourage each other’s pursuit of Jesus in some other way (team prayer or team service projects, for example). They might decide to meet not to do anything together but as a way to “check-in” with each other and ask “how’s it going?” or to share ideas.

NOTES

- Don Bartel inspired many of the ideas in this paper. The overview of M. Scott Peck’s 4 stages of community comes from his notes from a workshop on this topic.
- Information about Bruce Tuckman’s ideas on team formation are found many places online.