

The church as blueberry pancake

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It was either [Rocky Supinger](#) or [Greg Bolt](#) that turned me on to marketing guru [Seth Godin](#). I subscribed to his blog and read it with interest. I often find in his posts compelling connections or challenges for the church. I've considered writing posts that tease out these connections, so here's a first attempt.

[Today Seth contrasts organizations he calls *battleships* and those he calls *blueberry pancakes*.](#)

The typical industrial-era organization is like a battleship. Hundreds or thousands of people onboard, and most of them are essential—but most of them aren't actually directly responsible for the work that we hired the battleship to do. Without the fuel people, the navigation team, the folks in the med corps and on and on, it doesn't work.

The battleship can go far, with impact, and change the course of history. While it has exactly one captain, it's the synchronized work of more than a million people (when you think about all the machinists and support folks back home) and it works. It does what we ask it to do.

By contrast:

The typical professional services company, on the other hand, is a lot like a blueberry pancake. While there's an essential support team, the firm is all about blueberries working in parallel. Each blueberry can work independently, and sometimes they even work on projects that might have conflicting outcomes or views of the world. I don't care how many people report to you. I care about how connected and how brave you are.

As the firm gets bigger, it doesn't get thicker. You don't make a better pancake by making a thicker one. You make a better pancake by hiring ever better blueberries.

And, as you've guessed, most of the blueberries don't know exactly what they'll be doing in six weeks, and most don't work from a manual about the industry's best practices on how to do what they do. It's hard to measure blueberries, but a talented and motivated one can also change the world.

Using these categories, it seems to me that mid-20th century mainline Protestant denominations (and mid-councils like presbyteries) have been operating like battleships. In fact, through *institutional isomorphism* these denominational structures were intentionally modeled on industrial-era corporations.

But given the changing realities of our denominations and churches, and the rapidly changing contexts of ministry in which we find ourselves, these structures are anachronistic and cumbersome. What we need more than anything is agility and creativity.

What would it look like to re-envision our denominations (and mid-councils) as blueberry pancakes? Instead of complex organizational structures, what if our churches were like creative and innovative blueberries working in parallel, held together loosely by the pancake?

Is this a vision of connectionalism we could buy into?

Originally posted at [Vest's blog](#)