

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR MISSIONS

*A Biblical, Historical, and
Cultural Introduction*

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Preface

MARK'S COMMENTS . . .

If you are reading this book, then you are probably serving as a missionary or preparing to serve. Though you probably are not aware of it, this makes you part of the Modern Missions Movement. William Carey, pastor of a tiny church in England, launched the Modern Missions Movement with the publication of his pamphlet “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens” in 1792. He argued that Christians have a God-given responsibility to bring the gospel to the peoples of the world.

In this book we aim to continue William Carey’s work. Another book in the Encountering Mission series presents the biblical mandate for missions. In this book we focus on explaining Carey’s view of “Means.” Some believe that strategic planning is unnecessary; after all, the Holy Spirit will guide the missionaries to do what is necessary. Certainly, we believe that the Holy Spirit does guide Christians today; however, we fervently believe that the Holy Spirit can guide our planning as well as our work.

In Carey’s day some pastors rejected his pleas for the church to engage in missions. They insisted that God would bring people to salvation without human activity. Andrew Fuller, Carey’s mentor, wrote convincingly to show that God works through human instruments to accomplish his will and work in the world. Fuller and Carey persuaded most Christians in Europe and North America that God’s plan for world redemption involves human actions.

In this book we show you how to develop strategies to reach the people groups of the world for Christ. To do this, we define *strategy* and explain the difference between *strategy* and *methods*. From there we sketch the development

of missions strategy over two thousand years of church history. Finally, we explain how you can prayerfully develop a strategy that will take you from no believers to a vibrant cluster of churches.

I am delighted that I could collaborate on this book with J. D. Payne. For many years I have taught a doctoral-level seminar on missions strategy. Some years ago, J. D. was my student in that seminar. I also had the privilege of serving on his doctoral committee. He was an excellent student, and he has become an outstanding professor, missiologist, and author. He has surpassed his professor in many ways. He is an example of why I am thankful to my doctoral students over the years. They have taught me much about missions strategy, and this book reflects their careful scholarship and edifying writing.

J.D.'S COMMENTS . . .

In my heart this book actually began well over a decade ago. As a doctoral student, I had the privilege of being in one of Mark Terry's seminars on world evangelization strategies. I recall him commenting on the lack of good literature on missionary strategy. Unknown to him, it was at that moment that I began to consider writing such a book. And many years later, the thought of writing a book on strategy continued to haunt me. However, I clearly could not complete a satisfactory work by myself, and there was no kindred spirit with whom I could shoulder the load other than Mark Terry. He not only has a great missiological mind, a heart for the Great Commission, a wealth of missionary experience, and has been studying and teaching strategy for many years, but he is also a great friend who has significantly influenced my life and ministry. By then, however, Mark and his wife had returned to the field as missionaries, and he was teaching at a seminary in Asia. I contacted him and shared the idea for such a book. We took almost two years to discuss, pray, and begin working on this project. This book would not have been written without the influence of Mark and his willingness to share his life with his students. That said, it is truly an honor to have worked with him on this project.

Though in the past few years a handful of books have been written on developing strategy, we have to return to 1980 (or 1990 with the revised edition) to find a comprehensive work on missionary strategy, namely, Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser's massive *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*. We have been greatly influenced by their work, and in this book hope to follow their leadership by attempting to provide a comprehensive work for a new generation.

While numerous matters of strategic planning today are the same as those thirty years ago, one of the topics on the minds of many in the West is the

developing of missionary strategy in relation to majority world Christians. Though I began this book while serving as a seminary professor, I am now the pastor of church multiplication with The Church at Brook Hills (Birmingham, Alabama). Each year we send missionaries across the globe for short-, mid-, and long-term service. We also have partnerships with like-minded believers and churches in other countries. One topic that is on the hearts of our global disciple-making pastor and myself is: “What does healthy missions partnership look like between a church in the West and a church in the majority world?” We don’t have the definitive answer. Other churches, missionaries, and agencies are asking variations on this question today. This area of strategy development is a brave new world for many of us, and resources on the topic are few at this time. As case studies and guidelines are developed and shared broadly, Mark and I hope future authors will do a better job developing this important matter than we have done in this book.

Throughout this work we periodically draw attention to the importance of understanding and working with majority world churches on strategy development. However, even with the reality that missions today is no longer “from the West to the rest,” it is important to keep some matters in mind. First, in order to work with others on strategy development, you need to understand the foundations and mechanics of strategic planning. A failure to understand this process is likely to result in numerous unnecessary problems when working with others of different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, much of the foundational and practical components of this book are written with the Western individual and local church in mind. When doing strategic planning with a team composed of majority world believers, you will need to think through how some of the linear thought and values translate across cultural lines. Such is not an easy task in some contexts.

Second, in areas of the world where the unreached and unengaged remain, there are no majority world believers among such peoples with whom Western Christians can partner. Churches are yet to be planted. Most of this book is written with such contexts in mind, where partnerships are not possible.

We are extremely grateful to the Lord, who has allowed us to complete this project and commit this work to him, praying that he will use it to advance the gospel across the world for his glory. We are also thankful for the willingness of Baker Academic to publish this book. Jim Kinney and his team are to be commended for their hard work, gracious spirit, and desire to see good missiological writings come to the public. We have truly enjoyed working with them. Thank you, Jim. Also, this project would not have been possible without the labors of Scott Moreau, the editor of the *Encountering Mission* series. We have known Scott for many years. He is a true friend, one of the

world's leading missiologists, and an outstanding educator. He believed in this project and provided excellent guidance along the journey. Thank you, Scott.

Of course, we must also thank our families for their encouragement, prayers, and support during the writing of this book. While they did not spend the time researching and writing as we did, their influence is found throughout these pages. Without them, we would not be where we are today, and the book before you would not exist.

Strategy Defined

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone, thinking that you knew what the person was talking about when you realized that, even though you were both using the same terminology, your definitions differed? Such situations are frustrating and sometimes even embarrassing. For that reason, rather than assuming that you already know the definitions we have in mind, we begin with a chapter that focuses on the question, “What is strategy?” In order to answer this question, we will define important foundational concepts and ground the discussion by touching on several important historical matters.

The notion of strategy has its roots in the fields of military science and marketing. An internet or library catalog search using the word *strategy* is likely to yield a list of resources related to warfare and how to succeed in the corporate world. While such fields do not directly relate to the missionary labors of the church, as will be noted, these fields still offer some helpful insights for understanding missionary strategy.

One of the earliest writings on the topic of strategy was specifically related to military tactics. *The Art of War*, written in China by Sun Tzu, is believed to have been written 2,500 years ago. Over the centuries the notion of strategy became coupled to warfare. It is not uncommon to find definitions of strategy related to knowing how to take the offensive against an enemy or

to defend against an enemy's incursion on the battlefield. While a wealth of information exists about military strategy, we are not addressing strategy from this perspective. Granted, being engaged in missionary activity is a spiritual battle, but we war not against flesh and blood but "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). And, yes, since all truth is God's truth wherever it can be found, we can learn from military strategy.

The second major area related to strategy is that of the business world. While the realm of business has its own way of conceptualizing and operationalizing strategy, its foundations are never far removed from military science. For example, Richard Luecke notes this historic connection: "Businesspeople have always liked military analogies, so it is not surprising that they have embraced the notion of strategy. They too began to think of strategy as a plan for controlling and utilizing their resources (human, physical, and financial) with the goal of promoting and securing their vital interests" (2005, xii).

While the corporate world did not begin writing books on this topic until 1971 with the publication of Kenneth Andrews's *The Concept of Corporate Strategy*, today a plethora of books exist on marketing strategy (Luecke 2005, xii). As I (J. D.) write this chapter, in my study are titles such as *Choosing the Future: The Power of Strategic Thinking* (Wells 1998); *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Dixit and Nalebuff 1993); *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (Collins 2001); *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* (Kim and Mauborgne 2005); and *Strategy: Create and Implement the Best Strategy for Your Business* (Harvard Business School 2005), just to mention a few. As with military science, while there are certain truths found in the world of business strategy that the church can take captive for the sake of kingdom advancement, that is not our focus.

The church is not selling a product, marketing a commodity, or launching a new service for the consumer. The church is not in competition or at war with another church, for there is only one church. The church is not a corporation but rather a family. It is not a nonprofit organization but a body of priests on mission until Jesus returns.

Over the past thirty years, within American evangelical circles, the church has been guilty of embracing the world of corporate America and drinking too deeply from the well of business strategy. We have marketed worship services, children's programs, Bible studies, and sermons—just like businesses do in promoting their jeans, soft drinks, or hamburgers. While we reference writers

whose primary audience is not the church, we want to be clear that we are not writing from the perspective of Wall Street, Madison Avenue, or a five-star general. Rather, we write from the perspective of kingdom citizens seeking to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20) by calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21) and to serve him through local churches.

WHAT IS STRATEGY?

It is helpful to start by listing a few common definitions of strategy, without getting distracted by each definition’s military, marketing, or missional emphasis:

- “Strategy is a plan that aims to give the enterprise a competitive advantage over rivals through differentiation” (Luecke 2005, xiv).
- “The overall planning and conduct of large-scale military operations” (“Strategy” 1983, 672).
- “A plan of action” (ibid.).
- “Strategy is simply the means agreed upon to reach a certain goal” (Wagner 1983, 106).
- “A strategy is an overview of how we will go about something” (Dayton and Engstrom 1979, 100).
- “The process that determines how your ministry will accomplish its mission” (Malphurs 2005, 167).
- “Strategy is basically betting the farm on who the company is and what it intends to become” (Wells 1998, 65).

All these definitions have in common the notions of a *future orientation* and a *plan for process*. To understand strategy, it is important that these two commonalities are kept in mind. While wise strategy development involves a healthy understanding of the past and present, it moves us beyond history to future actions and results.

Future Orientation

Strategy involves the future. Although a team learns from the past and recognizes what it is in the present (e.g., its talents, gifts, passions, resources), strategy belongs to the future. Strategy is about how to accomplish something desired. If it is the Lord’s will that tomorrow arrive (James 4:13–16), the team will plan to do this or that. Dayton and Fraser note this future orientation: “If we are going to get on with the business of world evangelization we need to have a way of thinking about the future. Since we cannot predict it in any

SIDEBAR 1.1
RIGHT STRATEGY

In the following excerpt Donald McGavran writes about some of the components of healthy strategy.

Right strategy tailors mission to fit each of the thousands of separate communities, so that in it the Church may grow. There is no one humanity in which the Church grows. The one world we often speak of is made up of numerous ethnic units, suddenly brought close together but not yet fused into one race. . . .

Right strategy will also take church growth with life-and-death seriousness. Right strategy will not so focus attention on “many good things to do” that church growth is not desired. . . .

The continual checking of every aspect of Christian mission against the church growth achieved is the *esse* of right strategy. Methods of church and mission work, systems of training missionaries, forms of ministerial and pastoral training, ways of producing tens of thousands of unpaid leaders, church mergers and co-operative enterprises of various kinds, institutional expressions of the faith—all these must be checked against the growth of the Church. . . .

Right strategy will devise hard, bold plans for planting churches, and will put them into execution. . . .

Right strategy recognizes that church growth is an exceedingly

detail, we can only consider the future and our actions in it in broad terms. But think of them we must” (1990, 24).

Strategy includes an attempt to discern what the Lord would desire to be accomplished among a particular people, population segment, village, tribe, or city. The focus of strategy is not on the present realities but rather on future possibilities. Strategy allows the team to look down the corridor of time, asking, “Lord willing, what will become of these people?” Strategy forces the team to think in terms of the practical outworking of the power of the gospel to transform an individual, family, tribe, or society. Strategy helps the team members discern where to go in their efforts.

Plan for Process

Strategy involves making plans. The future orientation component of strategy is a dream or a vision—but not the process of getting to the vision. Strategy therefore includes not only prayerfully discerning future realities but also developing a plan of action to reach them. Strategy assists in putting feet on future desire. It helps move a team from where it is to where it believes the Lord would have it go.

The plan to reach a vision involves a process. A strategy is typically not a

complex process and cannot be commanded. . . .

The Church can develop right strategy in mission. All she has to do is to observe what has taken place in the hundreds of matchless laboratories which a hundred and sixty years of modern missions have provided. By amassing knowledge, by pooling the common experience of missions and churches, by assembling the evidences of instances where the Church was planted, where it grew, where it stopped growing, and where it never even started, she can discern which processes in which specific circumstances receive God's blessing and which do not. Right strategy will spend large sums of money and the lives of some of its best men and women in intensive research into the most effective ways and means

of reconciling men to God and of multiplying churches. . . .

Right strategy can be discerned, learned, taught and executed. When it is, the enormous potential in today's missions will be realized. When it is, the confusion and frustration that mark so much mission today will happily become a thing of the past. (1965, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What aspects of McGavran's understanding of "right strategy" were surprising to you? Why?
- What are the dangers of a strategy focusing attention on "many good things to do"?
- Do you agree that right strategy can be "discerned, learned, taught and executed"? Explain.

single-step event that results in the fulfillment of the vision. Strategy involves a process of major steps as the team climbs the stairs to reach the desired end. And along the climb each major step taken will consist of several smaller, minor—yet important—steps along the journey. While this journey may not be a linear one (e.g., many times several steps will happen simultaneously), the outworking of a strategy involves a procession, and movement from point A to point B, and so on, until the team reaches the vision on the horizon.

Our working definition of strategy throughout this book is the following:

Mission strategy is the overall process describing what we believe the Lord would have us accomplish to make disciples of all nations.

While this book is not the place to address the debate revolving around the definition of "mission," we need to explain the term and its relationship to strategy. We understand mission first and foremost as related to making worshipers for the Creator and, therefore, mission strategy as related to the process of seeing such disciples made.

First, mission is derived from a conversionistic theology. From Genesis to Revelation, the metanarrative of the Scriptures is that all creation has been affected by the fall. While God will create a new heaven and a new earth (Isa.

65:17), the redemption of people through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross is primary in his mission. The promise to crush the head of the serpent via the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) was fulfilled with the death and resurrection of Jesus. From the promises made in the garden, and more clearly defined with Abram (Gen. 17), to the wedding of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7), the Creator is glorifying himself by building his church (Eph. 2:19–22) as men, women, boys, and girls repent, confessing Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:11).

Second, the Father's means of redeeming fallen humanity is through the gospel being proclaimed (1 Cor. 1:21). As the Spirit works his regenerative process in the lives of people who come face-to-face with the exclusive truth of Jesus, they leave the kingdom of darkness and enter into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). And while this proclamation is the means by which God works, the medium that brings this good news to people is his church (Acts 13:47). The redeemed have not been made into kingdom citizens to be disengaged from the rest of creation. Rather, as priests they are called to proclaim his truth (1 Pet. 2:9), make disciples of all peoples (Matt. 28:19), and be his witnesses (Matt. 5:14–16). Such are the primary responsibilities of kingdom citizens.

Third, while there are many excellent activities that kingdom citizens can be involved in to bring glory to God, the primary New Testament teaching is that the mission of God is first and foremost to do evangelism that results in the birth and growth of churches. The kingdom advances and Jesus builds his church numerically as people are converted. We recognize that the mission of God includes matters such as healing, casting out demons, caring for the poor, and issues of justice. But we would add that such matters either follow conversion, with newly planted churches carrying out such tasks, or are done to open doors for the calling of others to repentance and faith in Jesus, as observed throughout the Gospels and Acts. Service and conducting social ministry are both necessary and extremely important but should be carried out in the world so that the peoples of the world may come to declare the greatness of God's name (Ps. 47).

TYPES OF STRATEGIES

Not all strategies are created equal. Although many missionary strategies share similar visions, goals, and action steps, diversity exists regarding the philosophies on which such strategies are conceived. It is these philosophies that influence the strategy from planning to execution.

Henry Mintzberg notes that a 1962 *Harvard Business Review* article “offered literally hundreds of models of a process by which strategy could supposedly be formally developed and operationalized.” Despite these numerous

approaches, Mintzberg concludes, “with some specific exceptions . . . these built on a single conceptual framework, or basic model, differ less in fundamentals than in levels of detail” (1994, 35).

So, although there are a multitude of paradigms for strategy development, many of them can be reduced to a few ideal types. In 1980 Dayton and Fraser developed a taxonomy of strategy that differentiates strategy based on the underlying philosophy. They categorized strategies into four types: (1) Standard Solution, (2) Being-in-the-Way, (3) Plan-So-Far, and (4) Unique Solution (Dayton and Fraser 1980, 17–18).

Standard Solution

The Standard Solution strategy is an approach to strategy development that holds a particular strategy constant. The rationale for this strategy is that the means we used to accomplish the task worked well in the past, so they will continue to work in the future.

While people using this philosophy of strategy development attempt to eliminate the unexpected and make strategic planning into a science, the reality is that the Standard Solution paradigm falls short on many levels. Past successes are no guarantee of future successes, and we may note several reasons for this.

First, this approach assumes that the ways of the Lord are constant. Though this is certainly true in certain matters regarding God’s character and nature, it is not always the case with the working of the Spirit. For example, the apostle Paul attempted to enter Asia Minor and Bithynia, and the Spirit interrupted his plans (Acts 16:6–7). Based on what is known of the apostle’s work in the book of Acts until this point, few people would contend that the apostle was attempting to work outside the Spirit’s will. Rather, for some unknown reason the Spirit interrupted Paul’s plans to take him to Philippi to plant the church in that city.

An example of this paradigm would include taking a tract-distribution strategy that the Lord used greatly in a highly literate part of the world and applying it in a predominately oral setting. Although the gospel message contained in the booklets is God’s Word, relevant for everyone, the strategy would not be as effective when applied to a society primarily composed of oral learners.

Second, the Standard Solution strategy fails to take humanity and society into consideration. Missionary strategy is about reaching people with the gospel. While people can be predictable, that does not mean that they are constants. People are sentient creatures. They receive stimuli, process them, and react. They are not robots and do not always respond in the same manner.

Finally, the Standard Solution strategy fails to take culture into consideration. No one can become culturally neutral during the strategy development

process. In their attempt to engage peoples with the gospel, missionaries must recognize that the cultures of those peoples are often different from their own. Whenever they work with different peoples and population segments, they encounter different contexts, worldviews, communication and lifestyle patterns, family dynamics, social and political influences, and religious diversity. When a strategy works well in one context, there is no guarantee that it will work just as well in a different context—even one that is only marginally different.

Being-in-the-Way

Strategists who use a Being-in-the-Way philosophy advocate that those making plans get in the way of the Holy Spirit. Proponents aver that the Spirit, like the wind, blows with no one knowing where he comes from and where he is going. Advocates often use Isaiah to support this perspective:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.
“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa. 55:8–9)

While this concept and passage might be used to proof text an argument against making any plans, the biblical picture is far richer than a simple declaration to make no plans and has much to say about the need to make plans for the future.

Dayton and Fraser note that the Being-in-the-Way philosophy allows missionaries to succeed every time, since they take no responsibility for their actions: “The net effect of this approach eliminates failure. Whatever happens is God’s responsibility. Anything that happens is God’s will. . . . A hidden assumption of this approach is that proper spirituality cuts out the need for human forethought” (Dayton and Fraser 1990, 15).

The Being-in-the-Way philosophy can easily devolve into supporting a strategic antinomianism, offering missionaries a license for laziness. Missionary activity, by its very definition, is engaging. There is no room for a laissez-faire approach to making disciples of all nations.

Plan-So-Far

While this paradigm, for no disclosed reason, was omitted from Dayton and Fraser’s revised edition of *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*,

it was addressed in the original version. Those who follow this philosophy of strategic planning advocate making plans to get the work started but leaving the process and results to the Lord.

This model could be visualized with the image of missionaries standing at the top of a hill with a large boulder. They begin to push and shove to get the rock moving, but little more. Once the stone is rolling down the hill, they step out of the way and have no further involvement. Dayton and Fraser illustrate: “An example would be the agency that after negotiations with a local government received permission to begin a craft industry in a country. However, the agency made no specific plans as to how it would relate to the Christian churches that were already in the country, churches that in their view were a mixture of Christianity and animism” (Dayton and Fraser 1980, 18).

Unique Solution

The final paradigm offered by Dayton and Fraser is the one that they (and we as well) advocate. Those who advocate the Unique Solution philosophy recognize both the science and the art of strategy development. Rather than supporting a model for strategy development that treats peoples as automata and social change as predictable and known, those using this approach offer strategists both parameters to guide planning and freedom for the work of the Spirit.

SIDEBAR 1.2 **WINNING STRATEGY**

Judith M. Bardwick, founder of Bardwick and Associates, a management consulting firm, describes some of the elements for a healthy business strategy.

For strategy to succeed it must anticipate, create, and guide change and create commitment in the organization’s members. It should be so plausible, clever, bold, and achievable that in itself it generates a conviction that even if the journey is hard, it is worth taking because the strategy has created a major competitive advantage. Defining the business of the business shrewdly and wisely and creating a

convincing strategy for winning are critical in terms of persuading people that they have real leaders and that success will be achieved. (1996, 136)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What elements (if any) of Bardwick’s recommendations are applicable to the development of mission strategy?
- Do you disagree with any of her recommendations for use in missions? Why?
- What is the importance of *success* in relation to strategy? What is success when it comes to mission strategy?

The Unique Solution approach offers a middle way between the Standard Solution and the Being-in-the-Way. This paradigm allows for the wisdom and knowledge that come from knowing what has worked throughout history in reaching people, while allowing for the Spirit to work as we labor to innovate and contextualize our strategy to the world of the people, both today and tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

We hope that as you read this book you recognize that while there are important routine and predictable aspects of mission strategy, reaching the world with the gospel is built on a principle Paul Eshleman, chairman of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group, notes: “What has become clear in many strategic discussions is that world evangelization is not so much about materials, tools and techniques. It is about love, compassion, prayer, holiness and obedience” (Eshleman 2007).

Apart from our obedience to Christ, we can do nothing of any significance for the kingdom (John 15:5). Apart from our faithful service to him, the components of strategy development are of little value. It is our prayer that in the process of developing mission strategies you will become more conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), relying on him as you assess your situation, make your plans, and implement your action steps.

The Crafting of Mission Strategy

The development of mission strategy is a process that involves obtaining a vision from the Lord for reaching a people, understanding the missionary team's present realities, and developing the steps to move the team from where it is to where it believes it needs to go. In chapter 1, we described strategic planning as both a science and an art. Before proceeding any further, we need to address some of the fundamental matters related to crafting strategy. In this chapter, then, we explain how strategy development is both science and art, offer our definition of strategic planning, and address some paradoxes related to planning mission strategy.

CRAFTING STRATEGY

Recently the concept of strategic planning has developed a reputation for being a task that occurs in the sterile environment of the boardroom, with no option for change once the strategy is brought to the place of service. Some understand strategic planning as rigid, scientific, structured, bureaucratic, and linear in its application. They view it as based on research that is divorced from reality.

To provide a better image to communicate the planning of strategy, Henry Mintzberg advocates the notion of “crafting” a strategy. While we agree that crafting probably suggests a better image, it should be understood that

whenever we refer to strategic planning or planning strategy we do not advocate what Mintzberg fears. Throughout this book we use the terms “crafting” and “planning” interchangeably. Provided we are able to explain our understandings of these concepts, we see no difference between the two when it comes to developing mission strategy.

Mintzberg notes, “Smart strategists appreciate that they cannot always be smart enough to think through everything in advance” (1987, 69). Circumstances change. What was once a predictable situation transitions to another reality. Of course, this situation should not be a surprise to the mission strategist since strategy in particular involves people, who are not always predictable.

Following his conviction regarding smart strategists, Mintzberg reveals the significance of the artistic side of planning by drawing on the image of a craftsperson. This is where the necessity for fluidity and flexibility come into the strategy development process. This side of planning is necessary to deal with and respond to the challenges posed when we attempt to reach peoples and societies. Mintzberg writes:

At work, the potter sits before a lump of clay on the wheel. Her mind is on the clay, but she is also aware of sitting between her past experiences and her future prospects. She knows exactly what has and has not worked for her in the past. She has an intimate knowledge of her work, her capabilities, and her markets. As a craftsman, she senses rather than analyzes these things; her knowledge is “tacit.” All these things are working in her mind as her hands are working the clay. The product that emerges on the wheel is likely to be in the tradition of her past work, but she may break away and embark on a new direction. Even so, the past is no less present, projecting itself into the future.

In my metaphor, managers are craftsmen and strategy is their clay. Like the potter, they sit between a past of corporate capabilities and a future of market opportunities. And if they are truly craftsmen, they bring to their work an equally intimate knowledge of the materials at hand. That is the essence of crafting strategy. (1987, 66)

It is this metaphor of crafting that we believe is the most beneficial for developing mission strategies, for contained within Mintzberg’s model is the reality that strategists must have knowledge of the past and the present as they anticipate the future.

Past knowledge of the working of the Spirit among the people, in the church, the team, or the organization is important. Since the past influences and guides future behavior, strategists need to know history. This includes knowledge of the significant historical matters that presently affect a group’s receptivity to the gospel. Past knowledge allows team members to recall their

individual pasts and reflect on how their pasts will affect the present and future outworking of the strategy.

Present knowledge of what the Spirit is doing is also important. Where is the Lord at work, so that the team can join him? What are the major socio-cultural issues affecting life and decision making among the people at this very moment? Is the team serving in an area where the largest employer in the town is threatening to move to another country for cheaper labor? How do the people in the community view decision making? Does the city encourage diversity or fear change? What are the gifts, talents, passions, and interests of the team members? There are a multitude of questions that a team can ask about the present to assist it in crafting strategy.

From a humanistic perspective the future is uncertain. And even from a theological perspective, while we know that the Lord holds the future in his hands, we do not know all the details of tomorrow—or even if time will continue. The mission strategist is like a sailor with a telescope. Although the telescope provides the sailor with a different perspective, it will not allow him or her to see around the curve of the earth’s surface. The boat on the horizon will come into view mast first, and then only as the boat sails closer will the hull be observed. Similarly, the strategist cannot predict what will happen tomorrow, let alone next month or the following year. Because of this reality, there is always a major element of uncertainty in strategic planning.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Without planning, strategy is forever locked in the ironclad cage of theory. While planning is no guarantee that action steps will be taken to implement the strategy, without it strategy remains within missionary hearts and on computer files. Aubrey Malphurs notes that strategic planning is a process involving both thinking and acting (2005, 30). And here, within this understanding, we see the wedding of the theoretical (thinking) and the practical (acting). Dayton comments, “Planning is seeing *things as they are* and then trying to describe *things as we want them to be*” (1980b, 17, emphasis in original).

Throughout this book our understanding of strategic planning, or strategy development, is the following:

Strategic planning is a prayerfully discerned, Spirit-guided process of preparation, development, implementation, and evaluation of the necessary steps involved for missionary endeavors.

Before we continue, each of the phrases in this definition needs to be explained. These concepts will be clarified throughout this book; for now it is important to have a basic understanding of this definition.

Prayerfully Discerned

The development of mission strategy is a supernatural process. While resources abound on the development of military and business strategies, mission strategy is dynamically related to the Father of mission. Before a team begins to think through and develop a strategy, it needs to pray. Prayer must precede and remain an essential part of strategic planning. The Lord of the harvest works through the prayers of his people to guide in strategy development. If strategy is from the Lord, then prayer is a part of the process of knowing, understanding, and accomplishing what the Father has in mind in making disciples of the people.

SIDEBAR 2.1 **PEOPLE BLINDNESS**

The following passage is taken from Ralph Winter's famous 1974 presentation at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization:

I'm afraid that all our exultation about the fact that every *country* of the world has been penetrated has allowed many to suppose that every *culture* has by now been penetrated. This misunderstanding is a malady so widespread that it deserves a special name. Let us call it "people blindness," that is, blindness to the existence of separate *peoples* within *countries*; a blindness, I might add, which seems more prevalent in the U.S. and among U.S. missionaries than anywhere else. The Bible rightly translated could have made this plain to us. The "nations" to which Jesus often referred were mainly ethnic groups within the single political structure of the Roman government. The various nations represented on the day of Pentecost were for the most

part not *countries* but *peoples*. In the Great Commission as it is found in Matthew, the phrase "make disciples of all *ethne* (peoples)" does not let us off the hook once we have a church in every country—God wants a strong church within every people!

"People blindness" is what prevents us from noticing the sub-groups within a country which are significant to development of effective evangelistic strategy. Society will be seen as a complex mosaic, to use McGavran's phrase, once we recover from "people blindness." (1975, 221)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How does Winter's notion of people blindness affect the crafting of mission strategy?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages—as related to the development of strategy—of seeing society as a complex mosaic?

Spirit-Guided

The Spirit of God is living and active. He is at work in the lives of the missionaries even before they arrive where he has called them to serve. He provides leadership. For example, Philip was led by the Spirit to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29). We must also remember that the Scriptures note: “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps” (Prov. 16:9). Those laboring to develop mission strategy must understand the importance of walking in fellowship with the Spirit. Unconfessed sin that grieves (Eph. 4:30) and quenches the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) interferes with the development of strategy. The development and implementation of mission strategy are supernatural endeavors.

Process

Strategy involves movement. Teams wish to progress from where they are to where they believe their ministries should go. The development and implementation of a strategy do not occur instantaneously. Even the simplest of strategies requires an action step or two before the end vision is accomplished.

Preparation

It is important that strategists do their homework before developing a strategy. All the important elements of knowing oneself, the team, and the context are found in the area of preparation. Matters such as knowing the vision to be accomplished, the theological and missiological values of the team, and understanding the targeted people geographically, demographically, culturally, spiritually, historically, politically, and linguistically are part of preparation.

Development

Development involves thinking through the major and minor steps necessary to see the vision fulfilled. Although this element of strategic planning is still a theoretical construct in the beginning, it is nevertheless important to consider how the team will practically move from point A to point B. Teams consider the realities that must occur in order for each particular step to be taken and the desired vision achieved.

Implementation

Strategy is not meant to remain in a notebook on a shelf or in a document on a computer. It is intended to be implemented. Failure to implement the

strategy will result in failure in accomplishing what the team set out to do. Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan refer to this act as *execution*. According to them this matter is vital to the outworking of a strategy. They note, “You can’t craft a worthwhile strategy if you don’t at the same time make sure your organization has or can get what’s required to execute it, including the right resources and the right people” (Bossidy and Charan 2002, 7). The plans must be applied on location.

Evaluation

While the word *evaluation* occurs at the end of the definition of strategy, in reality it is a part of the overall process. It must engulf everything the team does, even before it arrives at its place of service. Evaluation begins when the vision to be accomplished comes onto the horizon. It continues through the establishing of goals. Evaluation occurs as action steps are taken to accomplish those goals. From start to finish, mission strategy must be immersed in the sea of evaluation. Strategists must be good stewards of the Lord’s resources. They want to know what is working well and not so well to reach people with the gospel and multiply churches. Evaluation helps in the process of making adjustments along the journey of implementing strategy.

THE BIG FIVE

In light of our definition, the planning involved in the crafting and implementing of missionary strategy can be summarized in five important practices. Some of these are evident in the definition above:

- Asking good questions
- Responding with healthy answers
- Applying wise action steps
- Evaluating everything
- Praying with diligence

Asking Good Questions

Strategists have inquiring minds. They want to know answers. They ask questions such as: Are we being faithful to the Lord? Is what we are doing the most Christ-honoring thing? What is working well in our strategy? What is not working very well? What do we need to change? How can we do a better job? Are we being wise stewards with all the resources and opportunities the

Lord has entrusted to us? What do we need to do first? What do we need to do next?

Strategists must also take the following questions into consideration whenever they begin the strategic planning process: What do we know about the context and people? What is the purpose of our team? What is the best way to reach these people with the gospel and plant churches? What are the barriers for evangelization? Does our team have the callings, resources, gifts, and abilities to execute the strategy? What are our immediate, short-term, and long-term goals?

Responding with Healthy Answers

Along with asking good questions, strategists must respond with healthy answers. Not just any answers will do, but only those that are true to the biblical and theological foundations for Great Commission activity, in agreement with missiological principles supporting healthy missionary practices, and efficient and relevant to the context. Here is where the theoretical begins to meet the reality of the field. According to Dayton and Fraser, “Planning should be thought of as a bridge between where we are now and the future we believe God desires for us” (1990, 293). Finding healthy answers will require intense research.

Applying Wise Action Steps

The application work is mainly done on location. Action steps involve the team’s movement from goal to goal on the upward stairway toward accomplishing the overarching vision (i.e., end vision). The application of the steps is obviously done in conjunction with knowing oneself, the team, and the context, for it is out of the knowledge of these three areas that the strategist is best poised to make wise practical decisions regarding the outworking of the strategy.

Evaluating Everything

Evaluation was included in our definition; it is also the fourth major component in strategic planning. The evaluation of everything is an ongoing process. Strategic planners never rest from this component of planning. Such evaluation is necessary if planners are to stay focused on what the Spirit is doing. It also is a matter of proper stewardship. The strategist wants to be the faithful and wise servant (Matt. 25:14–30). Constant evaluation is not done to justify

a critical spirit but rather to reveal a desire to make the best decisions under the circumstances.

Praying with Diligence

Prayer must be a natural part of the strategist's life. Strategy development should be bathed in prayer. The practice of strategy development should be a supernatural event, requiring time with the Lord. Throughout this book we often make reference to the place of prayer in the development and implementation of missionary strategies. This repetition may appear to be

SIDEBAR 2.2 **THE ROAD AHEAD**

In the 1970s William R. Read wrote about his reflections on the development of a trans-Brazilian road system and its impact on the churches in the country. With five-year plans to settle five hundred thousand people in different villages along the four-thousand-kilometer road, Read recognized that such growth would provide many unique opportunities. He noted:

The magnitude of the church planting task among the new settlers and the problems that such an effort along this road will face in the next two decades is breath taking. Many of the foreign missions that are now working in Brazil are pursuing the policy, from a distance, of watchful waiting, taking time to examine carefully this highly fluid opportunity. At the same time, some mission leaders are making definite plans for exploratory survey trips into the Amazon Basin areas. These surveys will become the means by which these missions will be able to gather the information they need that will permit them to formulate a strategy for their church planting effort in this vast hinterland area. National church

leaders are anxiously following the latest reports that come out of this advancing road system. Some of these leaders are trying to determine what resources should be set aside for some adequate type of evangelistic endeavor that their churches can initiate in some of the more strategic centers. It takes time for many of the fast growing centers to be spotted in time for favorable consideration as "strategic" locations. Familiarity with the entire road system in all of its extension and vastness is a necessity in order to make many of these important decisions. (1973, 174)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Do you agree or disagree with Read that the development of a road is a critical matter as related to crafting strategy? Why?
- How important were the responses of the different mission leaders to the development of strategy in this part of Brazil? Explain.
- If you were a strategist for this area, would you have responded similarly or differently than the mission leaders? Explain.

an accidental redundancy on our part; however, we are intentionally repetitive. We are convinced that the prayer of a righteous person has great power (James 5:16), and such power is needed for the development and outworking of strategy.

THE PARADOXES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

The notion of paradox is ever present in the development of missionary strategy. There are at least eight seemingly contradictory elements of strategic planning that need to be addressed. Having an awareness of these components will assist the strategist in wrestling through the process of developing appropriate strategy.

God Is Sovereign but Works through Our Planning

While more is stated about this paradox in chapter 4, it must be noted here that crafting strategy is not an unbiblical act. Although God is in control of his universe and the outworking of his story of the redemption of creation, he works through the means of his church to make known his wisdom (Eph. 3:10). Throughout the Bible many of God's people developed plans: Abram, Moses, Joseph, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul, and so on. Even God sent forth his Son at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). Strategists commit all their plans to the Lord, allowing him to guide the process from beginning to end. Proverbs notes, "Plans are established by seeking advice; so if you wage war, obtain guidance" (20:18), and "A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way?" (20:24).

Strategic Planning Is Both a Linear and Nonlinear Process

Models for strategy development are typically presented in linear fashion. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is difficult to convey a nonlinear process in a written format such as a book, just as it is difficult to draw a three-dimensional object on a piece of paper. The task can be accomplished but comes with challenges. Similarly, when describing strategic planning, it is much easier to explain: "first you do this . . . second you do that . . . third you do this," than it is to describe a process that involves simultaneous or other nonlinear events. Second, many elements of strategy development require a linear approach. Certain steps in the overall process cannot be envisioned and planned for by a team until previous steps occur; sequential steps are a necessary part of the entire process.

Strategic Planning Involves Both Rigidity and Fluidity

Daniel J. Isenberg correctly notes that strategy development requires “the ability to remain focused on long-term objectives while staying flexible enough to solve day-to-day problems and recognize new opportunities” (1987, 92). Strategy development is both a *determined* process and an *emerging* process, involving both certainty and uncertainty. Therefore, crafting strategy is a messy process. On the one hand, teams will be able to make decisions through God-given wisdom knowing the likely outcome in advance. On the other hand, teams will often have to take action with little knowledge of the future. While all strategy development involves faith, it is in the times of uncertainty that faith is stretched.

Mintzberg found that some of the most effective strategies involved both control and flexibility (1987, 70). Some elements of a strategy will remain constant, while others will demand that a team readjust as it makes progress. There will be times when a team will be able to apply its action steps exactly as it developed them, but there will be times that will call for “experimentation” with the action steps. Like the person who uses a long stick to strike the ice on a frozen pond to see if it is safe to walk across, strategists will more often than not have to develop their strategies in reaction to the circumstances around them as they take their steps toward their goals.

Mintzberg makes another important observation related to the necessity of fluidity in the strategy development process. Strategists need to be students of their context and fight hard against the familiarity that breeds contempt. Though they have the Spirit and wisdom, they still must recognize the responsibility to be vigilant and aware of the times. Strategists must not grow complacent as they move from goal to goal on the path toward accomplishing the vision. Although the changes that demand radical strategic shifts are easily observed, a subtle challenge occurs during the times of normalcy. And this challenge comes from familiarity with that norm. Mintzberg exhorts:

The real challenge in crafting strategy lies in detecting the subtle and developing discontinuities that may eventually undermine the organization, or provide it with a special opportunity. And for this, there is no technique, no program, just sharp minds in touch with the situation. Unfortunately, this form of strategic thinking tends to atrophy during the long periods of stability that most organizations experience. So the trick is to manage for long within a given strategic orientation yet be able to pick out the occasional discontinuity that really matters. (2007, 378)

Strategic Planning Involves Both History and Future

It is incorrect to assume that crafting strategy is an exclusively future-oriented activity. While the future is a major aspect of planning strategy, it is not divorced from the past or the present. Excellent strategy development requires that the strategist know what the Lord has used in the past to reach the particular people with the gospel. If the team is pioneering a new work, then knowledge of how the Lord has moved among similar peoples in similar situations is helpful.

Strategic Planning Is Both Art and Science

Sometimes strategy is referred to as both an art and a science. What does this mean? Consider, for example, the chef who describes cooking this way. The “art” of cooking is knowing which seasonings and spices complement one another, knowing by intuition and experience what types of chocolates to use with certain ingredients, and, of course, understanding the visual presentation of the food on the plate. The art of cooking involves wisdom gained over the years, discernment, impressions, and knowledge of one’s kitchen appliances and ingredients. The art is not always predictable.

The “science” of cooking, however, can be found in the knowledge of the chemical reactions that occur as starches and sugars break down at certain temperatures, the reason for blanching vegetables, and the functions of butter when used at different temperatures. The science of cooking involves the empirical knowledge gained from knowing about measurements, temperature, catalysts, and reactions. The science is generally predictable.

The development of strategy involves principles to guide and skills to be applied. Certain aspects of the process are conducted in a controlled environment (e.g., on a computer, in an office), but much of strategic planning revolves around the evaluation and revising of one’s strategy when the winds of change blow as the strategy is applied. Although there are mechanics of strategy such as articulating a vision, developing goals, and planning action steps, the work of the artist is also involved—hence, our previous discussion on the crafting of strategy.

Strategic Planning Is a Simple Process but Difficult to Execute

The process of strategic planning is not a difficult process. As already mentioned, much of it involves asking and answering the right questions. Strategic planning is not extremely complicated. The paradox is found in the execution. Strategy is meant to be applied, to be executed. The challenge of

progressing through the action steps necessary to achieve a goal is the real difficulty. Developing the strategy has some challenges, but the difficulty lies in implementing the strategy where the missionary serves.

Strategic Planning Involves Commonality and Customization

While all strategies have certain characteristics in common, each must be customized to the specific context and people. Dayton and Fraser were aware of this reality as they described the Unique Solution philosophy (see chap. 1), noting, “Strategies must be as unique as the peoples to whom they apply” (1990, 15). In other words, a one-size-fits-all approach to strategy development and implementation is unhealthy and unwise.

Consider an example from daily life. My (J. D.) oldest child is now riding a bicycle that she was not able to ride several years ago. I remember when she first started out on a very small bicycle with training wheels, not much larger than a tricycle. After she developed her riding skills and was physically able to touch the ground, my wife and I removed the training wheels. Shortly after that time she was able to ride a much larger bicycle. While she is physically not able to ride an adult’s bicycle yet, she is getting there.

It is important to note the parallel in this situation with strategy development. Just as my wife and I realized that our daughter had to have a customized bicycle appropriate for her physical and mental development, the development of strategy requires some flexibility on behalf of missionaries to the people. While the truths of the Scriptures never change from people to people, the strategic approaches must be customized to the contexts.

Strategic Planning Involves the Known and the Unknown

The church has two thousand years of missions history to draw from when it comes to understanding how the gospel spread and churches multiplied. Over the centuries numerous strategies have been used to advance the kingdom, with some working better than others. Biblical and missiological principles are also in place to assist in developing strategy. Yet even with the wisdom of the ages, every generation and context creates unique and unknown challenges to building the church.

In the United States the letter X has become a symbol for uncertainty. I (J. D.) am a part of Generation X, the generation that followed the baby boomers. My generation obtained this appellation from the title of a novel by Douglas Coupland (1991), with X representing a generation that has not figured out life, is in hiding, or is very uncertain. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *The X-Files* was a science-fiction television series, with

the X-files representing unsolved cases involving paranormal activity. So when we address the X factors in relation to missionary strategy, we are referencing that which is an unknown or uncertain factor.

Over the years I (J. D.) have invited church planters to speak to my classes about their ministries. On more than one occasion, I have asked them to discuss issues related to strategy, and on more than one occasion, I have heard the following statement: “Prior to going to the field, I had my strategy put together in a nice binder. However, shortly after arriving on the field, I realized that none of it would work. I had to discard all my plans and start over.”

While I do think that such is the case for some church planters, scrapping one’s entire strategy plan is rare. I also think that some church planters use hyperbole to shock students. My point is that strategies can be developed, but once the team begins putting those strategies into practice, the strategies will have to change. And here is the challenge: A team cannot constantly and accurately predict the factors that will lead to change in its strategy. They are an unknown. The only thing that a team can know for certain about the X factors is that they will force the team to make adjustments in its strategy.

Individuals, families, villages, towns, and cities are not static but rather dynamic. People are social beings, able to make decisions and act and react to the changes in their environments. Thankfully, for the mission strategist, the changes that normally occur are not to such a degree that a radical strategic shift has to occur often.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have provided an overview of the components involved in crafting strategy. Much of the rest of this book relates to and amplifies the contents of this chapter. In the next chapter we turn to some of the contemporary arguments against the development of mission strategy.