

NCD Profile Plus

Interpretation Exercise for Sample Report: *A Local Church*

What is this document?

This is a commentary on the sample NCD Profile Plus report entitled: *A Local Church*. The sample is of an actual church.

The purpose of the commentary, when combined with the introduction in the sample Profile Plus report itself, is to explain how to use the report in an effective manner to identify accurately the obstacles impeding healthy church growth.

NCD is about continuously identifying obstacles to all-by-itself, healthy growth and removing them. Profile Plus not only offers a detailed "snapshot" of the current health of the church (in this case November 2003), but places that result in the context of previous "snapshots" as well. This means that immediate obstacles can be identified as well as longer term health issues that are emerging over time but may not be evident by doing only one "snapshot".

There are so many different combinations and permutations of questions contained in the graphs that this commentary cannot offer a comprehensive analysis of the issues. It is more about illustrating a recommended approach.

Before you begin reading this commentary

To avoid misreading the graphs, it is vital that you thoroughly read *How to use Profile Plus* on pages 2-4 of the Profile Plus Report before working through this commentary. Assumptions are made based on your understanding of that section. Note section 2.2 in particular as this approach is used in the commentary.

Profile Plus is a visual tool

Profile Plus has been designed principally as a visual tool. The statistical results are presented in such a way that you learn about the dynamics of the life and health of a church through the graphs. You will find that your attention is drawn to aspects of church life just by looking at the graphs.

There is a pattern followed throughout. You begin with a static picture of the present situation (eg. page 6). This is followed by what has occurred to the health of the church since the last profile (eg. page 7), which in turn is followed by the dynamic picture of the church's health over time (eg. page 8).

The dynamic picture, which comes from doing regular profiles, shows up trends (eg. page 17), cultural patterns (eg. the lines on page 14) and "sticking points" that require more effort to address than other issues (eg. Q23 on page 14).

The overall impact of the visuals is to help you capture the sense of a dynamic living organism which is constantly changing over time. Understanding this dynamic not only helps identify issues in the present but points to what is emerging.

So working through the graphs, noting points of interest and beginning to ask questions about what you are seeing is the best place to begin your analysis.

The five most helpful graphs

The most helpful information for identifying the obstacles to healthy growth is contained in the following five graphs. Once you have explored these graphs, you will find that they naturally lead you to other graphs.

Front Page Overview (page 1)

A maximum of four sets of profile results are shown.

In August 2001, the Minimum Factor was Gift-oriented Ministry (44). The Maximum Factor was Empowering Leadership (70). The average was 57.875. That is, add up the eight characteristics and divide the total score by eight.

By working on implementing NCD, significant changes have occurred by the time of the current (5th) profile in November 2003. The Minimum Factor is now Passionate Spirituality (68) and Empowering Leadership is the Maximum Factor (85).

Except for the 3rd profile, progress on the average has been steady, reaching 74.25, a change in two years of just over 16 points.

The number for the Min-Max Difference has been volatile (26, 11, 27, then 17). This number represents the difference between the lowest and highest stave on the NCD barrel. A higher number means that more energy is required to sustain growth over the long term. A trend downwards is desirable, because lower numbers mean less energy to sustain any growth being achieved. It is hard to say at this point whether there is a positive trend or not for the sample church.

Empowering Leadership has remained the Maximum Factor throughout. The church leadership has consistently wrestled with the NCD issues raised in each profile. Not only have the overall church results improved but the leadership has become more empowering through the process. This is a common occurrence with NCD in churches where leaders are effectively addressing the principal health issues over time.

Quality Characteristic Current Profile (page 6)

The results show the church is in the top 15% of churches in the country for all eight Quality Characteristics. The results are evenly spread between 68 and 85, though Empowering Leadership continues to stand out as the principal strength of the church.

A brief look at the following page (page 7) shows that in the period since the previous profile, significant improvements in health have occurred in a number of areas, most prominently Need-oriented Evangelism. This characteristic had been the church's previous Minimum Factor, so it shows clearly what has been achieved by addressing the issues identified in the last profile results.

Current Minimum Factor: Passionate Spirituality (page 15)

Passionate Spirituality is the current Minimum Factor - the least healthy Quality Characteristic. Identifying and removing the key obstacles identified from this graph will contribute significantly to overall healthy growth.

It is evident visually that that most of the questions are well above average (60 or above). Focus falls immediately to Q84 - *times of prayer are an inspiring experience for me* - the only question to rate below average at 46. This question is a good sample issue to explore.

The result is somewhat puzzling given the high results for other questions related to prayer (Q13 and Q59). Also, people are clearly experiencing God in their lives (eg Q34 and Q75), and are optimistic and enthusiastic (eg Q43 and Q68).

However, if one looks at the changes since the previous profile results (page 16), it is evident that something is happening in the life of the church. This graph offers a striking visual image showing Q84 has jumped by 20 points, accompanied by significant rises in the application of Scripture to everyday life (Q51), people experiencing the transforming influences of faith in everyday life (Q34), thanking God for that (Q59), and being willing to tell others (Q75).

This sense of change occurring is reinforced by the Dynamic Progress chart for Passionate Spirituality (page 17). Up until the current profile, the visuals for the previous profiles show a clear cultural pattern. Yet the current profile shows a clear break with culture, offering results that are generally higher and more consistent. This suggests some significant breakthrough in Passionate Spirituality.

So while Q84 rates below average now, it has improved significantly as part of a broader set of changes in the life of the church related to Passionate Spirituality.

Here are some suggestions for the church leadership as it looks at Q84. Is it able to identify what happened since the last profile to bring about the cultural breakthrough in Passionate Spirituality? How can the current upward momentum on Q84 and Passionate Spirituality generally be stimulated further? Considering Q84 on its own, can any specific underlying obstacles be identified and removed so that people are increasingly inspired in their times of prayer? Lastly, what issues from other Quality Characteristics might be related to this result?

These are questions that need to be discussed not only among the leadership but amongst the congregation itself (particularly those people who completed the

questionnaires). In this way the obstacles to Q84 can be identified clearly, along with their relationship to other issues impacting Passionate Spirituality.

Q84 is just one example of many issues that may be identified by exploring the Minimum Factor graph.

Current Highest 10 (page 33)

This graph can be called the Virtual Maximum Factor. It represents the areas in church life where the partnership with God in bringing about healthy growth is happening to the greatest possible extent.

Interestingly, although Empowering Leadership has the highest result, five of the top 10 questions relate to Holistic Small Groups. The results suggest that in small groups people feel they belong (Q46), can talk about their personal problems (Q16) and spiritual issues (Q37), and can actively participate (Q71).

Significantly, given the result for Q84 in Passionate Spirituality, there is a healthy result for prayer in small groups (Q27). Leadership would do well to explore with small group members what is happening during their prayer times and encourage them to go even further in their prayer with, and for, one another. It would also be worth exploring how group prayer might become a platform for more inspiring personal experiences in prayer. This is what Christian Schwarz means by "exercise your strengths".

While on the subject of prayer generally, the Highest 10 Changes graph (page 34) provides valuable input at this point. It identifies the ten areas that have improved most significantly since the last profile. Four areas relate to Need-oriented Evangelism (the previous Minimum Factor), one of which concerns prayer for those who do not yet know Jesus (Q72). Two other questions on prayer appear on the graph, both from Passionate Spirituality (Q59 and Q84). Something significant has been happening in the prayer life of the church, even though Q84 still rates the lowest question for Passionate Spirituality.

This collection of results suggests there is room for a broader, more holistic discussion by leadership: what is the intersection between evangelistic prayer (NOE), the prayer life of small groups (HSG) and the times of prayer of individual believers (PS) in the context of promoting the overall healthy growth of the church?

Prayer was the most obvious issue to track through on the Current Highest 10 and Current Highest 10 Changes graphs because of previous discussion on Q84. However, it is worth exploring other combinations of results on these graphs to identify further strengths in the life of the church.

Current Lowest 10 (page 35)

This graph shows the ten areas where the church is least healthy, irrespective of Minimum Factor. It can be called the Virtual Minimum Factor. It points to particular issues from across the Quality Characteristics that are impeding healthy growth and contributing to the Minimum Factor but may not be seen just by looking at the overall results.

Seven of the ten questions are below average, but none are in the lowest 15% in the country. The yellow dots show the four questions that appeared in the Lowest 10 graph in the previous profile and what scores they achieved.

The significance of these ten results is found not only in looking at them individually but in considering their relationship with one another. Looking at each in the context of the other nine can highlight specific obstacles not previously considered. Here are some examples.

First, two questions relate to preaching (Q26 and Q45). What does this tell the leadership about the preaching? Further, what connections might be drawn between preaching content and style in light of Passionate Spirituality issues in general and prayer in particular?

Secondly, the question about enjoyment of tasks (Q23) not only rates the lowest but has made no progress since the previous profile (see the yellow dot). Exploring the graphs for Gift-oriented Ministry (pp 12-14) would, of course, be valuable, but new insights could be gained by exploring this question in the light of Passionate Spirituality issues in general and prayer in particular. For example, what specific teaching could be given, and small group work prepared, which explored the connection between people enjoying what they do in the life of the church and having inspiring personal prayer times? How would these two issues feed each other?

Thirdly, what are the issues underlying the connection between Q87 and Q64? Further, is there a connection between these questions and the ones related to preaching (Q26 and Q45) or the question on programs for non-Christians (Q17)?

Attendance Growth (pg 5)

NCD maintains that focusing on improving the quality (health) of church life leads ultimately to an increase in quantity (number of attendees). It is important for churches to keep accurate attendance records so that quantitative growth can be measured. More than that, if there are fluctuations in attendance one way or another, it is often possible to trace this to particular health issues in the church's life, showing the degree to which church health impacts the number of people attending.

This sample is of a relatively young church. The attendance growth figures relate to adults; there are just as many children. The numbers show a plateauing between two and three years ago and then the start of a decline. Just prior to this time the church leadership realized the need to focus clearly on the obstacles to ongoing healthy

growth. This stimulated a turnaround and numbers began to increase again. Since that time, quantitative growth has been sustained.

Although adult numbers are still small, the growth rate has been over 100% in five years. In expectation that such growth rates will continue, the leadership has already commenced discussions about church multiplication.

A final word

This commentary is a very short introduction to the potential of Profile Plus as a tool for helping church leaders, NCD coaches and denominational leaders to identify and address the principle obstacles to healthy, all-by-itself growth in a church. It only covers a small number of issues that emerged from discussions of Profile Plus by the church's leadership.

Profile Plus is used most effectively in the context of discussion and feedback. Assumptions arising from its use should always be tested with a range of people in the church so that the leadership is clear about the issues and the priorities for addressing them.

The value of Profile Plus is that it offers more than a highly accurate picture of the current health of a church. For church leaders who realize that their church is constantly changing and do regular profiles as a result, it provides a dynamic picture of their church's development in health as the living Body of Christ.

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