

Church Planting Catalysts for Gospel Movements

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Many pastors and missionaries are crossing the globe, teaching, encouraging and resourcing with good intentions, but questionable effectiveness. Other church planting catalysts, especially those that work within a denominational framework, manage systems like assessment, church planter boot camp, financial support, coaching, and others. They try to maintain some church planting momentum but rarely achieve movement. Dr. Paul Gupta from the Hindustan Bible Institute, calls for another type of church planting catalyst, one that contributes to the apostolic advance of gospel movementsⁱ: “expatriates have an even greater role to play: equipping and mobilizing thousands in these newly planted churches to be on mission for God. As a trainer, consultant, and facilitator, expatriates may serve the national church to develop a church-planting movement, or to equip that movement with the essential leadership skills and resources to grow mature, dynamic Christians and churches” (Gupta 2000:98).ⁱⁱ

This article is an attempt to contribute some best practices of church planting catalysts that contribute to gospel movements, based on fifteen years of experience, reading and reflection. I served first as a church planting catalyst for Latin America, then was asked to develop others globally. These are some practical outworkings of the apostolic model of church multiplication that my co-author Craig Ott and I have laid out in the book, *Global Church Planting – Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*.ⁱⁱⁱ

When I began this journey in 2000, my toolbox consisted of Biblical concepts, experiential knowledge of what not to do, limited coaching skills, and a firm conviction that God could bring about movements like He did in the New Testament era. In 2001, I received a call to teach a church planting course in Southern Brazil. We wrestled with new paradigms of lay

movement during five packed, taxing, and unforgettable ten-hour days under a canopy in the sweltering July sun. I almost fainted while teaching, and had to retreat to my cabin to recover and finish the day. I was translating my English notes into Spanish on the spot as I taught; and the Portuguese-speakers graciously struggled along to comprehend my fledgling Spanish. Humanly, it didn't feel like a success. But they were hungry for a way to start many new churches that did not require salaries and buildings. When we talked about God's work through church planting movements, the question emerged, "Why are we not seeing this kind of movement? Why are so few churches planting others?" They humbly confessed the reasons in the box below.

1. Lack of missionary vision
2. Excessive preoccupation with the established church
3. Faulty theology or missiology - reflection and teaching
4. Not disposed, not willing to pay the price
5. Lack of conviction or of call
6. Inability to work on a team or independence
7. Satan doesn't want it
8. Lack of financial and human resources
9. Lack of motivation and leadership
10. No adequate church-planting strategy
11. Lack of training for church planting
12. The church doesn't beat with the heart of God
13. Sin and spiritual coldness

This led to a time of confession and calling on God. Afterwards, one man declared, "Today is the first day of a new church planting movement in Brazil." The final day, after the teaching was over, a few of the leaders went off and drafted a resolution. The entire group signed it, pledging to do everything in their power to become God's movement agents and multiply disciples, leaders, and churches. Later the entire association of churches adopted the same pledge, and chose a national church planting catalyst to lead their efforts. Training was contextualized, workers mobilized, and church planting accelerated. My missionary colleague,

who introduced me to this group of Christian leaders, had been praying for a church planting movement for years. That week in July was a catalytic moment.

In chemistry, to “catalyze” is to join substances together to produce an increased reaction. Church planting catalysts are experienced church planters, who come alongside local kingdom partners, with strategic inputs and resources, in order to mobilize workers and catalyze a gospel movement. Catalytic moments often occur when outside facilitators bring in “just-in-time” ideas, inspiration and resources to a group that is pregnant with missional impulse. Together they then join hearts and hands to produce an increased reaction, resulting in changed lives and new waves of disciples and kingdom communities. Catalysts can serve as activators who provide a pathway and empowerment for emerging leaders toward multiplication ministries. What elements tip the scale toward multiplication and movement? We have found **these five critical inputs, when sustained over time, support movement development** (see graph).



Catalytic Input #1: Relationships of Trust

Catalysts are willing to invest in fraternal relationships built on trust and mutual encouragement. Those relationships must be real; and they must be nurtured. They build on the things that transcend culture and are nurtured by the humility and respect that views partners as equals who can learn from each other. If you see a long-term partnership that has produced fruit for the

gospel, you will often find, at its core, this kind of mutually edifying relationship which is centered by a common desire to advance a gospel movement.

We must remember that the relationship is not just a means to an end. Catalysts plan extra time before and after equipping events to meet with leaders, their teams and families. Many times shared trials are the instruments God uses to forge and grow these relationships. Lost luggage, sickness, cultural challenges, spiritual conflict, and other forms of adversity can bring partners into a deeper level of trust.

Catalytic Input #2: Prayer Foundation

An African saying goes, “We cannot walk where we have not prayed.” We told the story of missionary in Southern Brazil who prayed with others for years for a church planting movement. That kind of praying gives birth to vision and action. A gospel movement is something that *God* initiates and invites us to participate in. It is bigger than any one person or team, and can only be accomplished in his power. In the spiritual battle, inevitable for movement advance, prayer functions like the head of the spear penetrating the darkness. Without it, no new gospel beachheads can be won. Prayer not only paves the way for ministry, it *is* the most elemental and foundational ministry. Through it, catalysts and their partners discern the heart of God, praying through each step of the way with, asking God for power, direction, unity, and wisdom, throughout every phase of the partnership.

Catalytic Input #3: Partnership in Training

A third catalytic input is partnership in training.^{iv} Catalytic training not only conveys knowledge and skills, but produces change - mediated by new understandings and paradigm shifts. Fresh understandings of God’s mission and a rediscovery of the nature and purpose of the church, can

catapult learners forward. This kind of training is not an end in itself; it serves to catalyze the gospel movement.

We are finding that training is most effective when it is part of a long-term equipping partnership, rather than a one-time event. When partners grow together in their understanding and commitment to the multiplication of kingdom communities, they are more likely to assess results and plan strategically together. In the context of trusting relationships and shared movement vision, learners can be expected to apply the basic training before being invited to more advanced modules. We recommend successive equipping modules based on outcomes in the field (outcome-based training). Evaluation and selection is the responsibility of the local group. With counsel for external catalysts. The goal is that some effective planters become trainers and catalysts and reproduce the training in other regions.

For this to happen, the content cannot be “canned.” Biblical principles that apply globally must be adapted to the local context. People have distinct literacy levels, learning styles, and educational cultures. Those create expectations and preferred learning environments. Because cultural insiders know best what will be effective locally, when external catalysts seek dialogue about the content and shape of training events, this allows for the possibility of a true partnership.

Catalytic Input #4: Shared, Sustainable Resources

Human, financial and technological resources can catalyze movement, or bring it to a grinding halt.^v Partnership in training generally implies working together to find the resources needed. The end goal is that national churches will own and support the training, and movement, through local resources. So if the training is patterned after Western conferences, with nice hotels,

copious meals, and comfortable auditoriums, it will always depend on outside funding. Thus, in many places, the training is held in a place of worship and participants stay in homes of friends or on mattresses in classrooms. If the first generation of training involves people from the different regions, outside help may be needed for transportation and lodging. But all involved should contribute, relative to their ability. The principle is this: Shared investment leads to shared blessing.

Catalytic Input #5: Coaching for Movement Advance

Job number one of catalysts is to reproduce themselves. External catalysts cannot coach many church planters in other countries, but they can coach a national catalyst who, in turn, will coach several church planters. Training alone may produce good ideas. But training plus coaching leads to implementation and fruitfulness.^{vi} The reason for that is that coaching help bridge the gap between good intentions and strategic implementation. External catalysts model coaching to facilitate discovery during the training. Planters meet in smaller regional gatherings for review, evaluation, and peer learning. When peer review and coaching is not possible, follow-up may take the form of a visit or a call from a catalyst. The coaching approach, modeled during church planter training, is then more fully described and practiced during the Training of Trainers.

The idea of multiplication necessitates mobilization and deployment with “on open hand.” Controlling leadership styles will eventually put a limit to reproduction. Thus the stage must be set by examining biblical models of empowering leadership, before a true coaching approach can take hold. This is especially true in cultures of high power distance. Even so, the practice of coaching will vary somewhat in form, especially where spiritual authority presumes age, wisdom and experience.

Best Practices of Gospel Movement Catalysts

We have defined church planting catalysts as *experienced church planters, who come alongside local kingdom partners, with strategic inputs and resources, in order to mobilize workers and catalyze gospel movements*, and we have seen some things they bring to the table to catalyze movement. The way they work will be shaped by their gifting and wiring, as well as the contexts in which they serve. However, here are five general *Best Practices of gospel movement catalysts*: (1) They think and work from a movement perspective; (2) they develop and empower local leaders; (3) they multiply workers generationally; (4) they grow church planting networks; and (5) they work collaboratively with other catalysts. This is not an exhaustive list, rather a good starting point.

Best Practice #1: Movement catalysts think and work from movement perspective.

They see the big picture and realize that God-sized results require great prayer, great faith, great cooperation, and a great vision for multiplication - rather than addition. They partner with people to impact entire cities, regions, and nations over several generations. This means that they do things in ways that favor indigenous forms and sustainable reproduction. Training must be reproducible, offered in the heart language of learners, and adapted to the learning style and educational level of those who will pass it on. The delivery system should use technologies and methods that are locally accessible and scalable to the outlying regions. The goal is for it to become a grassroots movement, led by national catalysts and trainers. This diagram contrasts movement perspective with the typical local ministry perspective.

Movement perspective	Local Ministry Perspective
Harvest focus	Local church or ministry focus
Scope: the world	Scope: the neighborhood or city
Reproducible, sustainable, scalable strategies	Strategies based on local target group
Broad cooperation is imperative	Cooperation is optional or “in-house”
Impacting many generations	Impacting this generation

The type of ministry found on the right column, local ministry, is very positive. An example would be a multi-venue church that is impacting a city. But the billions who have never heard the gospel will only be reached when many ministries like the ones on the right come together to launch the type of movement found in the left column. Gospel movement catalysts, like the apostle Paul, are constantly looking to the “regions beyond” (2 Cor. 10:14-16, Romans 15:23-24). And like Barnabas and Paul, they mobilize people from the harvest and develop them for new harvests.

Best Practice #2: Movement catalysts develop and empower local leaders

Steve Addison reminds us that, to create movements, “God takes the initiative. God chooses unlikely people, far from the center of ecclesiastical power, and He works to remake them inside out. He inspires innovative insights regarding His mission, and how it is to be carried out. Biblical truths and practices are rediscovered. A growing band of ordinary people emerges who have heartfelt faith and missionary zeal that knows no bounds... movements change people, and changed people change the world” (Addison 2011: 22, 29).^{vii}

God is stirring gospel movements all over the world, and he is using young, emerging, kingdom-minded workers. Empowering catalysts are needed to come alongside them before the

traditionalists and naysayers can get to them and quench their fire. Many have remarkable missionary impulse, but little experience, and even less theological education. Their desire is strong, but biblical teaching and ministry modeling may be lacking. They need tracks to run on, and someone to come alongside at critical junctures in their ministry. That is what catalysts provide through their equipping and coaching.

However, they need to do in an empowering way. Catalysts should never try to become the engine that drives the advance, nor the caboose that just goes along for a ride. They should not take over the controls, or tell their local partners what to do, but teach biblical principles and share fruitful practices to help them figure out how to move forward. And they don't abandon them afterwards, but respectfully coach them as they implement the plans they have made.

Best Practice #3: Movement catalysts multiply workers generationally

They follow the principle in 2 Tim. 2:2. They find experienced practitioners who have a heart to raise up a new generation of kingdom workers, then they invest in them. For this to occur, teaching good content is not sufficient. External catalysts must reproduce themselves in local catalysts. They build in such a way that local leaders can carry on the work. Their vision is to develop, empower and release a new generation. They function like scaffolding, creating a framework that allows themselves to be replaced by emerging national leaders. Then they work with and through local partners in such a way that the spotlight is not on the catalyst, but on what God is doing through local people. That doesn't mean that external catalysts won't be needed in

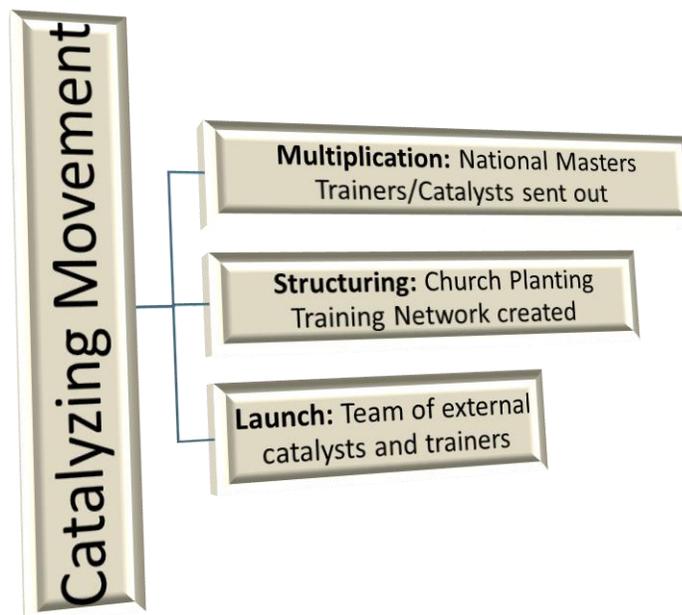
the long term, but rather that they will never be the “motor” of the ministry, only mobilizers and mentors. So *job number one* of catalysts is to reproduce themselves in others.

Best Practice #4: Movement catalysts grow church planting networks

The task is immense. India alone has 1.3 billion people with 29 languages groups with over 1 million speakers. The State of Gujarat in Northwest India has 631 people groups and 6 million Muslims.^{viii} So no one church group or missionary organization can hope to do it all – it takes coalitions with a vision to reach the lost. Sometimes it takes an outside catalyst to help build trust and cooperation because of the distrust and competition that exists. The “big players” tend to grow networks under their umbrella, but keep other “big players” at a distance. That does not mean they don’t respect each other or that they disagree; but together they could accomplish so much more. Movement catalysts always try to broaden the tent with other like-minded people. They are not content to oil the wheels of the denominational system; they pull people together to storm the gates of hell.

In some cases, external catalysts come alongside a coalition that already exists, but in others, they help to create them. They want to see CPNs emerge as early as possible in the training cycle. The CPN selects apprentices, hosts training events, and empowers the regional church planting efforts. It may evaluate the results of one level of training, and give advice as to what is most needed in the following level. Some of the most exciting partnerships in training have arisen when several movement leaders have come together to do something greater than what any of them could have done individually.

In cross-cultural ministry, during the launch phase, the impetus and resources come primarily from the external team of catalysts. But during successive gatherings for learning and strategic planning, a church planting training network is formed. Finally local trainers are equipped and a Master Trainer is appointed to lead the charge into other generations of equipping and sending out church planters to unreached people groups or segments of population. This three stage progression is illustrated below.



Three Stages of Development in an Equipping Partnership

Best Practice #5: Movement catalysts work collaboratively with other catalysts

We don't want to see just "any kind of churches" planted, but healthy, reproducing ones that make disciples and transform their social environments. Other equipping resources, besides church planter training, are needed to strengthen churches and their leaders. Consequently,

catalysts function best on a team with other specialists that will bring their gifts and experience to the movements. The developmental needs of the movement must be discerned through prayer, assessment, and dialogue with national partners. What will strengthen this gospel movement?

In our Mission, our global team of catalysts has found the following themes helpful: Bible study and preaching methods, church health, leadership development, holistic ministry, organizational development and pastoral development. The movement perspective requires an integrated approach and teamwork. It takes wisdom to sequence and weave these themes together for movement development.

As we look over these five Best Practices, it becomes clear that this is not a job for independent spirits or freelancers ("free-lances" were not sworn to any lord's services, but available to the highest bidder). Church planting catalysts do not seek their own glory, personal success, or self-fulfillment. Since they measure success by gospel movement that produces life and community transformation, they are always inviting others to join forces for greater impact. They are not content to cross the globe as itinerant teacher-trainers, nor to run denominational church planting support systems. They are builders and reproducers, who are constantly taking others along, to develop them for greater impact. They are men and women who dream of gospel movements and are willing to work under a big tent. The role of a gospel movement catalyst may seem overwhelming. It is something catalysts grow into as they move forward with their apostolic partners. Fruitful catalysts cultivate this mindset: "We are here to be fruitful and multiply for Jesus' sake. There is no other way to spell success. Not numbers, not size, not buildings, not programs."

ⁱ For the purposes of this article, a gospel movement occurs when the gospel penetrates a city or region, in depth and breadth, so that disciples, leaders and churches are multiplied and entire communities are transformed. Church planting movements are a type of gospel movement, usually the crest of the wave during the rapid multiplication phase.

ⁱⁱ Gupta, Paul R. and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, 2006. *Breaking tradition to accomplish vision – Training leaders for church-planting movements*. Winona Lakes: BMH. The authors tells how, from a stagnant and ineffective formal training school for church planters, they started training centers to raise up a movement of church planters throughout India in order to plant 1,000,000 churches.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ott, Craig and Gene Wilson. 2011. *Global Church Planting – Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic.

^{iv} The word “training” is not currently in vogue; but we lack a better term to capture gatherings that reexamine God’s mission, facilitate conversations and strategic planning, and equip the workers to become more closely aligned with him in our development of reproducing disciples and kingdom communities.

^v See Garrison (2004) *Church Planting Movements* and chapters 4 and 18 in Ott and Wilson (2011) for the strategic use of financial resources to support movement development.

^{vi} When teachers received coaching following their class instruction, a Lilly Foundation study found that effective retention increased from 10% to 80% - Coaching Skills for Successful Teaching, Performance Learning Systems, Graduate Course Notebook, p. 3, quoted in a presentation by George Klippenes, the former Director of Church Planting, Evangelical Free Church of America in September, 2006.

^{vii} Addison, Steve. 2011. *Movements that change the world. Five keys to spreading the gospel. Downers Grove: IVP*.

^{viii} Mandryk, Jason. 2010. *Operation World*, 7th Edition. Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing.