

# Enacting Community in Our Theological Schools

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A theological college and seminary is the place where a servant of the Lord starts his journey to be equipped to serve his believing community. It is the place where many inferior habits are unlearned and godly characteristics are cultivated. Respected characteristics are developed for the sake of God's kingdom and his church. Energizing community through the relational mandate, the theme of this ICETE Consultation, is crucial to the success of building a biblical community. Each institution needs to build up a culture that is relational. With a relational structure, theological education will be energized.

Enacting community focuses on people who can work out the goals of the community. If the team leaders and the core followers in the theological community have good relationships, the performance and management levels will surely rise to a higher level of effectiveness. There is this Chinese saying about relationship (*guanxi*) that goes, “*you guanxi jiushi mei guanxi; mei guanxi jiushi you guanxi.*” The saying means: “With *relationship* there is nothing to be concerned about, but without *relationship* there is much to be concerned about.”

## 1. Biblical Examples of Enacting Community

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are some examples of enacting community. While there are three significant groupings in the Old Testament, priests, prophets and wise men, there are few extant examples of their interaction. I will focus on two persons serving as leaders of a community in the OT, and on Jesus leading his disciples in the NT.

**a. Moses as the Servant-Leader.** Moses has both a public life in the Egyptian court (40 years) and a private life in the wilderness (40 years) before God calls him to serve. As a great leader with good educational background, and experiential training in the wilderness, his readiness to face challenge can be seen in the way he activated community in the fight against the Amalekites. (Exod 17:8-16). Look at the social relationships in his community as he faces the challenge.

1. *The Leader as the Enlister of Followers:* When Moses wants to tackle the Amalekites, he first forms his community. Aaron and Hur are his helpers. Moses also initiates and picks Joshua as his subordinate to fight against the Amalekites (Exod 17:9). Prior to the event, Joshua is just an ordinary person and simply a *nobody*. Nothing is written about him. After this event, Joshua has become a significant *somebody*. A leader dares to recruit followers to tackle the issue together.

2. *The Leader as the Communicator of Instruction:* Moses gives clear instruction to Joshua. He asks him to choose some men to go and fight the Amalekites (Exod 17:9). Joshua would have free hand in choosing his colleagues and subordinates to work with him. Joshua would in turn be an enlister and communicator, telling his colleagues what to do. Moses ensures that his recruit Joshua would hear his

additional instruction with regards to the enemy (Exod 17:14). Since the channels of communication are opened, many matters can be done properly. With communication, a leader is transparent to all.

3. *Leader as an Agent of Change*: Moses together with Aaron and Hur go up the mountain. When Moses' hands are tired, Aaron and Hur move stones underneath Moses. When the posture of the leader has to change, his two assistants have to change too. The small group, consisting of Aaron and Hur, needs to change their strategies, as the need arises (Exod 17:10-12). A leader is an agent of change. The willingness and eagerness to change definitely will help in activating community.

**b. Nehemiah as the Servant-Manager**: Nehemiah is known to be an effective executive and proficient manager. In his memoirs, we can find many principles of his role in enacting community.<sup>1</sup> As a cupbearer, his role in the Persian court trains him to be a resourceful administrator. With his inner circles of brothers, men and servants, he could have easily rebuilt the wall. But Nehemiah pushes the project through with the participation of the whole community (Neh 3).

1. *The Leader as the Commissioner*: An active community is indeed in need of people to fulfil the tasks to meet the challenge of the day. After the rebuilding of the wall and the setting of the doors, Nehemiah proactively moves forward to appoint the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites (Neh 7:1). Although his direct need is to appoint only the gatekeepers for guarding the gate, for future needs in the community he also assigns the singers and the Levites. He also designates Hananiah to be in-charge of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The reason for choosing a man of integrity who loves God to be the leader for Jerusalem, is really a biblical norm for effective leadership (cf. Exod 18:21; Acts 6:3). Right appointments and fitting job distribution allow an active community to function properly.

2. *The Leader as the Communicator*: Nehemiah gives simple instructions for the community as to when to shut and open the door, and the guidelines for recruitment of guardsmen for the wall (Neh 7:3). The former is for the goal of the operation, while the latter is for the personnel in the operation. Owing to the communicator, the community would know the rationale behind the instruction, and the way to sustain the duty of guarding the wall. Success in enacting community depends on the clear understanding of the situation through accurate communication.

3. *The Leader as the Comforter (Encourager) of People*: Names are important in activating community, for they represent people who are involved in the work. After Nehemiah's project of rebuilding the wall, God moves in his heart to register people by families. He suddenly discovered the genealogical records of the first returnees. The records of names are written down for encouragement to that generation, and perhaps even the next generation. The two listings of names, one for the first returnees (Neh 7:6-73), and the other for those who lived in Jerusalem (Neh 11), are testament to the active participation in the community. The active community needs *people* to work out the project.

**c. Jesus, Disciples and Community**. Jesus has a close relationship with his twelve disciples. He lives and works with them. He prays for them before choosing them to be his disciples.

1. *Giving Ample Time*. Jesus gives full attention to his disciples. He walks and talks with them, explaining to them the mystery of the Kingdom. On most of the sessions of his public appearance, the disciples are with him. While Jesus may teach in parables, he would explain the meaning of the parables to his disciples. No wonder his disciples learn their lessons well through his guidance. Time spent with them brings results. Time is very vital in the relational mandate in the community.

2. *Gathering an Intimate Group of Threes*. Jesus is known to gather Peter, James and John, giving them special attention. These three learn much more from him than the rest of his disciples. With this closer walk with Jesus, they in turn did their best when they were called to serve. A core group, that has the same vision and mission, can help in fulfilling the mandate of the community.

3. *Growing a Committed Body Life*. Jesus shows his disciples the meaning of love with the washing of the feet of the disciples. During the Olivet discourses, his action and teaching leave a strong imprint on his disciples and the church. It is the motivation to implement body life within a community.

In all the three biblical examples, fulfilling the relational mandate starts with the leader. The leader is a people-centred person. The task that he needs to achieve is related to people. He needs to effectively work through them, for them and by them. He is a communicator, and willing to give ample time to his followers and community.

## 2. Basic Essentials for Enacting Community

As a community, the theological college and seminary need to build up *relational capital*. Although relational capital is a business management term, in the context of the theological college and seminary, it refers to a category of intellectual capital that is created and maintained by having, nurturing and managing good relationships within a community of students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

To build up relational capital, the community needs to work as a *network organization*. Whereas an organizational chart may direct the flow of a community, a network organization focuses on social relations in a community to cope with problems in many unstable conditions. Interaction can run laterally as well as vertically. Compared with vertically integrated organizations, a network organization is characterized by greater agility and adaptability. Communication and interaction between people of different ranks are regarded as lateral consultation. In the setting of the theological college and seminary, not only the administration is tackling the problems, but faculty, staff and students are all involved in the interaction of issues facing the community. Thus the interaction can run both vertically, from administration to staff and students and laterally within the given echelon.

Another related element of relational capital is called *strategic alliance*. A strategic alliance is a long-term partnership and agreement between two or more organizations to pursue agreed upon goals while maintaining independent organizations. The process in strategic alliance would include strategic development, partner assessment, contract negotiation, alliance development, and alliance execution.<sup>4</sup> In setting up a theological community, the alliance could include both internal relationships, and external relationships with sister schools and other partner organizations.

**a. Advancing a Family Atmosphere.** In the context of the theological college and seminary, giving some attention to the strengthening of relational capital would reap significant results. It would be lovely to develop a family atmosphere in the community. The President, along with administrative leaders and faculty, are the *dependable parents* in the community rather than the *authoritative supervisors*. They are the *caring persons*, rather than the *corrective officers*. It is true that an organization needs its leaders to accomplish the task. A *task-oriented organization* seeks to measure the accomplishment of duties; involving orders to be carried out, and steps that need to be taken. But the leaders could also be confident and affectionate, respectable and acceptable. A *relation-oriented organization* measures its success in the participation of leaders and members. Building effective relationships can form the theological college and seminary into a loving school.<sup>5</sup> Big brothers and sisters act as the people helpers in the community. Allowing a venue to express their wishes, desires and even grievances encourages a two-way communication between the administration and the student body. At times, if suggestions and reason for rules and regulations can be stated by the big sister of the student body, the community can better implement such rules and regulations. From time to time soliciting the various perspectives of the community in a friendly manner makes the school a favourable place for communication.

In social psychology, there are *specific types of relationships*, and there are also *levels of relatedness*. In a theological community, there are definitely specific types of relationships. The relationships are between faculty, staff, and students. Each one has its role to play. But if we focus on the levels of relatedness, relationships would improve from *unilateral awareness* (the individual views the

outward characteristics of others), to *exchange relationships* (people seek to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs), and to *communal relationship* (people respond to each other's needs over the course of relationship). The following is a chart to differentiate between the levels of relatedness in the exchange relationships and communal relationships:

**Differences Between Exchange and Communal Relationships<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Exchange Relationships</b>	<b>Communal Relationships</b>
When we help the other person	We like the other person who pays us back immediately.	We may dislike the other person who pays us back immediately.
When the other person does us a favour	We don't like the person who does not ask for immediate repayment.	We like the person who does not ask for immediate repayment.
When we are working with the other person on a joint task	We want to make sure that our contributions can be distinguished from the other person's contribution.	We don't make any clear distinction between the work of the other person and our own work.
When the other person may need some help	We keep track of the other person's needs only when we expect that person to have an opportunity in the near future to take care of our needs.	We keep track of the other person's needs even when that person will not have an opportunity in the near future to take care of our needs.

In the loving community, the communal responsiveness to each other's needs is the emphasis. Deeper relationship is the core value. We improve from the strict cost accounting of benefits, keeping careful track of people's input, to communal values.

In a traditional organizational set-up, some faculty and staff, and even students may choose to be passive observers in their roles within the school. The school needs to create an atmosphere for them to be active participants of the family. A slogan, such as "you are proud of the school when you enter, and the school would be proud of you when you go into ministry" can add to the urgency of their participation. Opportunities are given for members of the community to lead. In the faculty and staff prayer meetings, all members of the faculty and staff take turns in leading the prayer meeting. Likewise in the greater community, students have equal chance to preach at the chapel. In the classroom settings, the faculty need to give more group work inside and outside of the classroom to improve the interpersonal relationships of students. A group task would encourage students to come together for discussions and come up with a proposal for the presentation, or submission of papers. At times, the Academic Dean can schedule some team teaching opportunities of the faculty. The team teaching can enhance not only the learning of the students, but also the relationships between the two teachers will improve tremendously. Some experts can be invited occasionally by the teacher. This allows outside experts to come in to assist in the training of the students. Thus, another level of relationships, a relationship between the school and the experts, is being built up. If the *participatory channels* are opened, all members would be willing to lead and participate in the life of the theological community.

Developing an institutional culture is very important. If "family" is the shared value that the school wants to pursue as its institutional culture, then an off-repeated phrase "we are a family" needs to be stated as often as needed. Actions need to be taken to illustrate this common value. Members of the family can share their joys and sadness. Privileges and responsibilities can be stressed from time to time. The *hidden cultures* of the school can be avoided with the loving family atmosphere. Hidden cultures refer to those unwritten values internalized by some members of the community that do not represent the most desirable values and practices sought by the institution. For instance, the institutional culture may already develop into a "friendly" relational culture, wherein members are given some freedom to spend their study time, but some members of the theological community would stick to strict rules and

regulations requiring all to study in the library. Sometimes the hidden cultures may benefit a community, but in most cases, it only benefits a few members of the community. All the members need to be reminded from time to time about their roles in the community and the accepted values of the community. If a hidden culture suddenly surfaces, members of the family need to confront it with truth and grace. In a family setting, everyone is important. Roles need not be reversed, but functionality of each member should be re-oriented toward the greater family.

Exit interviews and periodical visits of alumni are the best place to improve the enacting community of the theological college and seminary. Topics such as memorable events at the school, areas that need some change, can turn the alumni from giving criticism to creating concern for the school. The loving care that a student received at the school will definitely be an asset. The relational capital is therefore improved, with alumni as the strongest supporter of the school.

**b. Building a Network Organization.** The theological college and seminary normally runs the school with a fine curriculum, and with coherent policies and high standards. The organizational chart clearly defines the roles and duties of each member of the administration, faculty, staff and even students. It would be quite chaotic if no orders were to be followed. As an organization, the administration and management of the school will have to execute and implement their decisions. Under traditional circumstances, the decisions are vertically implemented. But if the theological college and seminary can shift to a network organization, knowing that both vertical and lateral consultation are good for the betterment of the school, smoother relationships will follow. The decisions could still be implemented, but with greater acceptance by the community. Smoother interpersonal, and intrapersonal relationships can be developed. Suggestions on the implementation of decisions can happen quickly if the channels of communication are opened.

It is quite normal that some members of a community will stand out as natural leaders in time of crisis management. Under normal circumstances, each organization will have some who will show potential leadership skills. Their skills should be used for the improvement of the school. Allowing a venue for lateral involvement of the community will definitely improve the community. In the network organization, faculty and staff are equally important. If faculty are given opportunities to improve their teaching skills, staff should have opportunities to improve their skills during the time spent at the school.

In a traditional residential setting of theological college and seminary, the Dean of Men and Dean of Women often serve to discipline the dorm residents. In the network organization, a Chaplain or Dorm parent whose role is take care of the personal walk of students with God would definitely change the focus of emphasis. Instead of ruling over the students, the Chaplain can serve as friend of the students. The Chaplain will certainly serve as mentor and coach of the students. A few mature leaders may be selected or may take turns to help out the spiritual life of the community.

A weekly *Care and Share* group can be encouraged for faculty to listen to the successes and struggles of the community members.<sup>7</sup> As the facilitator of the group, the faculty member is the servant-leader of the small group. A little love sown reaps big results. Annual short-term mission trips of the school can be channelled through this grouping. Interactions can be encouraged by occasionally joining a few groups together. With weekly mentoring through caring and sharing, the involvement of the network organization is greatly enhanced.

**c. Cultivating Strategic Alliances.** The active community should form as many strategic alliances as it is capable of doing. Cultivating relational capital through strategic alliances is a win-win approach. There should be an overall plan to reach out and bring parties in for a greater goal.

The first group is the alumni organization of the school. Theological college and seminary should put in ample time to cultivate good relationships with the alumni association. As satisfied students, accomplished pastors and scholars, they will be the ones speaking on behalf of the school. Continuing education for the benefit of alumni can be given from time to time. The alumni can be invited to the school functions to lead sessions. Opportunities for joining consultations in the country or outside the

country can be encouraged. The alumni association can represent strong relational capital for the theological college and seminary.

The second group for strategic alliance are the churches in the locality and other national districts. The ethos of the school needs to be revisited from time to time. Who are the stakeholders of the school? Donors may come and go, but the churches that call our alumni to serve should be our strategic alliance. Listening to their goals and desires will definitely make the curriculum of the school more relevant to the changing times. Listening to their criticisms so as to improve the school curriculum and training is a win-win approach. In order to enact community for the theological college and seminary one or more members should be designated to link up with churches, church organizations and para-church organizations.

The third group for strategic alliance is the theological association in our respective regions. Since the formation of Asia Theological Association (ATA), theological colleges and seminaries have improved their standards. Viable options for Asian scholars to stay in the East for training have become a reality through the establishment of Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST) in several regions. In AGST-Philippines alone, we have 120 students PhD/EdD/ThM students at any one time. Schools in Asia that join ATA have benefited from ATA's Triennial Consultation, and its occasional theological consultations in Asia. Recently, countries in West Asia have started to join ATA. Linking schools to a greater community, such as ATA, OCI, Langham Partnership, and ICETE will allow our theological education to be at the cutting edge in training.

Conclusion:

Responding actively to the *relational mandate* of theological education can enhance and expand the work of the theological college and seminary. Conscientiousness in building the *relational capital* of the theological college and seminary will reap results in connectivity and productivity for all concerned. May our teaching achieve its global interactive potential through the use of modern wireless technology, but at the same time may we continue to be responsive in developing our relationships with each other. Let us continue to be sensitive to enacting community in our theological schools, so that they are relational and functional communities, emulating our God who also functions in relational mode with humankind since creation till the end of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Too Shao and Rosa Ching Shao, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Asia Bible Commentaries, (Manila: OMFLit, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Hanani is the abbreviated form of Hananiah, see Shao and Shao, pp. 169-170.

<sup>3</sup> For "Relational capital" as management terminology, see [www.12manage.com/description\\_relational\\_capital.html](http://www.12manage.com/description_relational_capital.html)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.12manage.com/description\\_strategic\\_alliance.html](http://www.12manage.com/description_strategic_alliance.html)

<sup>5</sup> Management books usually measure the success with the performance in the organization. See Pam Jones, *Managing for Performance: Delivering Results through others*. (Harlow: Edinburgh Gate, 2007), pp. 55-104.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Sharon S. Brehm, and Saul M. Kassin, *Social Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), p. 260.

<sup>7</sup> At the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines, a weekly *Care and Share Group* encourages multi-channel communications in the community. Faculty are requested to take care of a small group on a Thursday. Uttered prayers, shared testimonies, and happy moments are treasured by the each group member.