Structure, Support, and Challenge is a paradigm developed by Donald Guthrie and Tasha Chapman, both PhDs in Education.[1] Structure, Support and Challenge are areas that exist *in tension* with each other [See Figure 1]. Learning and growth occur when the tension is equal.

Structure - The inanimate fabric that helps meet the challenge; the "system" of your organization (i.e. the system of government), policies and procedures, technical services, administrative processes, business plan, etc.

Support - The relational network that humanizes the challenge: the Holy Spirit, your team, intercessors, and supporters, retreats, mentoring, conferences, trusted relationships.

Challenge - **is both positive and negative:** Christ's Commission and the Cultural Mandate, the great and meaningful, rewarding work to which you are called, the thrill of the work when done with excellence (why you do what you do)…but also one so great as to be humanly impossible. On the other hand are task obstacles (i.e. 'big bears' like the economy, lack of resources) and people obstacles: opposition, problem/unhappy/sinful people, conflicts, unhealthy home life and work/ministry balance.

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HighSupport/High Challenge/High Structure = "Thriving". Ideas can be experimented with, taken apart and criticized safely, recombined and realigned, all at a very low cost. Things are getting done—often superbly—because though challenge is high, strong support and structure are present. In this place we increase in **Knowledge and Growth** (Fig. 1)
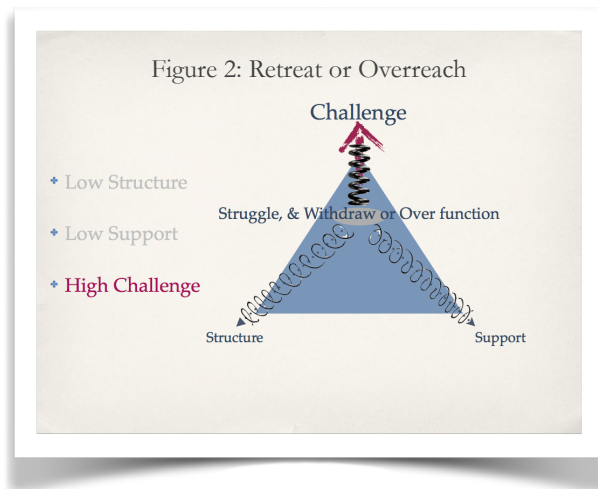

Figure 1: The Learning Organization

+ Structure
+ Support
+ Challenge

Challenge

Learning & Growth

Structure   Support

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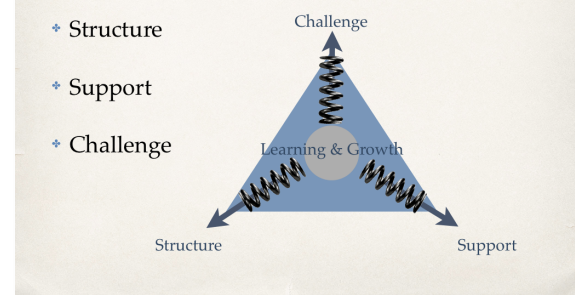
High Challenge/Low Support/Low Structure = "Aggressed or Overwhelmed" Due to the complexity of input we eventually learn that there will be no success in continued solo efforts. Characterized by paralysis or doubling down/over functioning; stress flows into the system including marriage and family. The way out is to ask for help. Seek help from key people, systems and resources. Don't try to do it alone. **Retreat or Overreach** (Fig. 2).

[Note: One of the great temptations of conscientious people is to overwork—to over function: "I need to do whatever it takes not to fail" and to redouble solo effort when challenge is oppressively high. Alternatively, where there is too much challenge, we are overwhelmed and shut down. *The counterintuitive step is to mitigate the challenge by slowing the pace slightly, seeking strong support, partnerships, community, and adding missing structure where needed.*]

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High Support/Low Challenge/Low Structure = "Confirmation of Work". In a cycle of doing only what we already know. It does not help

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[1] **Structure-Support-Challenge** is a paradigm to which I was introduced by Donald Guthrie at the Intersect Forum, an initiative of the Lilly Endowment exploring the convergence of challenges in business and ecclesiastical leadership. Asking who to credit for the SSC Triangle, Donald Guthrie says, "I initially developed the SSC triangle framework. Tasha Chapman and I have been building on it for several years. So I'd say both of us." I've added additional material based upon the work of Reid and Brigid: http://paei.wikidot.com/reid-brigid-mutual-dependence-of-challenge-and-support.

Structure-Support-Challenge - A Paradigm for a Learning, Growing Organization

Figure 2: Retreat or Overreach

Challenge

+ Low Structure

+ Low Support

+ High Challenge

Struggle, & Withdraw or Over function

Structure   Support

with any "anomalies." We get things done, feel good about our people, but we don't really learn or grow. **Knowledge Confirmation**

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High Structure/Low Challenge/Low OR High Support = "Classic Bureaucracy" excessive energy going into creating and maintaining structure, burdensome administrative tasks and procedures. Busy, but not going forward. **Knowledge Encumbrance**

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Low Support/Low Challenge/Low Structure = "Status Quo" There is little support for exploring new ideas, but also little in the way of challenges that force exploration. Not much is getting done, nor is much being learned. **Knowledge Stasis**

Where are we?

- Take 1 minute and rate your context from 1-5 (low to high) in S-S-C, each.

- In group, take 2 minutes and go around circle to share your numbers.

Further Reflection:

Organizations and groups tend to have a dominant style or culture — highly supportive, highly challenging, or highly structured.

What is your team's / organization's organizational culture?

What is your present challenge? Is it positive or negative or both?

What structures do you have / need?

What support do you have / need?