

Article

Operationalizing the Vision of Catholic Social Thought Using Change Management

Stephanie Ann Puen 

Theology Department, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City 1108, Philippines; spuen@ateneo.edu

Abstract: In Catholic social thought, magisterial documents emphasize the “See, Judge, Act” method in reflecting on social issues. While action is an important aspect of this methodology, aspects of Catholic social thought, as seen in the teaching of magisterial documents, has focused primarily on principles and the “judge” part of the method, where one reflects on the current social context in light of Catholic social thought and gospel values. This paper reminds Catholic social thought of the importance of obtaining the commitment of the people within the community in order to put Catholic social thought principles into practice structurally and that obtaining this commitment will require listening and responding to motivations, fears, values, and concerns of the people when handling conflicting goods at stake, while also offering helpful tools and resources for the work ahead. To obtain this commitment, this paper proposes how the discipline of change management offers tools for those putting Catholic social thought into practice and handling the fears, values, and concerns of the people involved. Specifically, the tools of stakeholder, culture, and ADKAR analysis in change management help practitioners implement projects grounded in the principles of Catholic social thought.

Keywords: Catholic social thought; change management; conflict; stakeholder analysis; culture mapping; ADKAR analysis



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1. Introduction

In Catholic social thought, magisterial documents emphasize the “See, Judge, Act” method in reflecting on social issues. While action is as important an aspect of this methodology as the “see” and “judge” aspects, Catholic social thought, as seen in the teaching of magisterial documents, has focused primarily on principles and the “judge” part of the method, where one reflects on the current social context in light of Catholic social thought.

Thus, this paper proposes how the discipline of change management offers tools for those putting Catholic social thought into practice, enriching the methodology of “seeing”, “judging”, and “acting” by addressing conflict and change in the “acting” aspect. Specifically, the tools of stakeholder analysis, culture mapping, and ADKAR analysis in change management help practitioners implement projects grounded in the principles of Catholic social thought.

This paper first discusses the “See, Judge, Act” methodology as one way that people put Catholic social thought into practice. Second, this paper discusses the importance of obtaining the commitment of the people within the community in putting Catholic social teaching principles into practice structurally, which requires responding to deep-seated motivations, fears, values, and concerns of the people. Lastly, the paper then elaborates on change management, specifically the tools of stakeholder analysis, culture mapping, and ADKAR, analysis, as a way of enriching this particular methodology in Catholic social thought.

2. See, Judge, Act in Catholic Social Teaching

The “See, Judge, Act” methodology is attributed to Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers in 1912, and highlighted in the magisterial document *Mater et Magistra* by Pope John XXIII in 1961:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done. . . . These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act. (John XXIII 1961, sct. 236)

The current Pope Francis also follows this pattern and method in his work *Fratelli Tutti* in 2020 and *Laudato Si'* in 2015. In *Laudato Si'*, for example, where he describes the current state of the environment in dialogue with the natural and social sciences (seeing), reflects on this current reality in light of the gospel and Christian tradition (judging), and then offers broad proposals for education, dialogue, economic and political reform (acting) in the end. Francis notes that “theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract, unless they are grounded in a fresh analysis of our present situation, which is in many ways unprecedented in the history of humanity” (Francis 2015, sct. 17).

There is still a need for contextual recommendations on how exactly to put the “see” and “judge” parts into action, given the emphasis on the need for contextual action at the grassroots. Magisterial documents in Catholic social teaching have also reflected this emphasis this, stressing that:

The Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another. For such a task the Church offers her social teaching as an *indispensable and ideal orientation*, a teaching which, as already mentioned, recognizes the positive value of the market and of enterprise, but which at the same time points out that these need to be oriented towards the common good. (John Paul II 1991, sct. 43)

Francis’ proposals, for example, focus on dialogue or broad areas of concern such as education or care for the family rather than very specific policies; while the *Laudato Si'* may mention, for example, the Basel Convention on hazardous waste or the internationalization of environmental costs and some concerns related to these strategies, there is not much mentioned on how these would be put into practice specifically by local communities or across nation-states (Francis 2015, scts. 168–171). The focus is instead on the principles and vision: that of human dignity and the common good, which ought to guide people’s ways of living with each other and with the rest of creation; human dignity in Catholic social thought is understood as the acknowledgment and respect of the intrinsic value and transcendence of the human person, no matter who they may be, as reiterated by Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis 2020, scts. 15–24). On the other hand, the common good is understood “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” as underscored in *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965 (Second Vatican Council 1965, sct. 26).

Thus, while the Catholic church has much to offer in terms of guidance and recommendations, communities and organizations on the ground also have an important role to play in adapting these recommendations and principles, as it is important to consider the context of the community when putting said principles into practice. Many communities look for guidance as well on how to implement the principles of Catholic social teaching, as the communities may not have the training, time, or resources to do so. Because of the need for guidance in implementation, dialogue between Catholic social thought and other

disciplines is critical, in order to find tools and frameworks that can help implement the visions that Catholic social thought offers. (John Paul II 1991, sct. 59).

3. Putting Catholic Social Thought into Practice: Handling Conflict and Conflicting Goods at Stake

Putting Catholic social thought into concrete and actionable projects requires obtaining the commitment and “buy in” of those involved, such as the church, theologians, and local communities, including those who may not necessarily believe in Catholic social thought—the “hows” and the “whys”, given that putting Catholic social thought into practice will entail changes in the way communities, the political economy, and institutions are structured. The aspect of change in the action part of the methodology is not as explored in the methodology of Catholic social thought and in Catholic theological ethics.

Obtaining this commitment to change and move forward in one direction requires a healthier attitude towards conflict, as the plurality of voices will bring about differences in direction, ideas, and concerns. While change and conflict are not the same, change often brings about some level of conflict due to differences in understanding of whether or not change is needed, and if it is needed, what sort of change should be adopted. Trying to change minds and hearts, offering alternative value propositions, or changing leadership and strategies will surface different values, ideas, fears, concerns, and motivations that need to be addressed, and being able to engage in and handle these is important in order to act (Didinsky 2017, pp. 101, 144–57).

However, in the body of Catholic social teaching, there still seems to be a reluctance to confront conflict and its role in effecting the changes described in Catholic social thought. Within Catholic social thought and theology, peace and harmony have been the focus, and the concept of conflict itself “has received relatively little consideration in Catholic theology, during the Second Vatican Council, and in its aftermath . . . apparently, conflict does not seem to fit easily into the usual categories of theology, for example, virtue and vice, sin and grace, Christology and Pneumatology” (Hinze 2020, pp. 40–41). Can we see grace in organizational conflict and change in that it may help us move towards the Kingdom of God? As theologian Brad Hinze notes, “conflict is understood in terms of particular occasions or broader patterns of life in which the interests, desires, identities, and rights of individuals and groups are not being perceived, recognized, and respected by others. The offer of God’s grace in these instances can elicit an examination of conscience and a repudiation of prejudice and behavior that provide the conditions for conversion and transformation, repentance and healing . . . under certain conditions and with appropriate qualifications, [we can] properly speak of the power of God’s grace at work in situations of personal and collective conflict” (Hinze 2020, p. 42). A more nuanced attitude towards conflict is thus crucial in helping flesh out Catholic social thought in its recommendations and work towards justice.

As mentioned in the first part of this paper in Francis’ work, the concept of dialogue and engagement is one method that Catholic social thought emphasizes as important in handling conflict and change towards the common good, that people may learn from each other and address conflict and uneven power dynamics; however, “in order to stay in dialogue, it is essential to learn how to work with our own anxiety . . . feelings are the glue that connect the mind and the body, persons, and entire systems. Anxiety, a particularly strong connector in us, between us, and within groups . . . mobilizes us to action in response in response to a perceived or real threat. We may be conscious or unconscious of the anxiety that fuels our choices and behavior” (Hunsginer and Latini 2013, p. 166). Without addressing these fears and anxieties, handling changes and conflict within the Catholic church will be difficult, as these anxieties will continue to fuel misunderstanding and stall any way forward towards reconciliation or change.

If Catholic social thought is open to engaging conflict and change, what approaches, frameworks, or principles from conflict management and organizational development literature might be helpful in managing not just power but also the fears and anxieties of

those involved? Such frameworks or principles help clarify what is at stake, especially in such a large institution with many varying and at times conflicting goods and concerns, many of which may not be clearly articulated or understood (Stone et al. 2010). Obtaining this commitment requires tools that are not present in magisterial teaching. Thus, there is a need to turn to other disciplines to enrich Catholic social thought and its work towards justice and the flourishing of creation.

4. Handling Conflict and Conflicting Goods Using Change Management

One such discipline is change management, a field within the managerial sciences and organizational development that offers theories and tools to help organizations move from their current status to a particular goal or vision. Change management posits frameworks to help articulate how to go about handling the change in order to yield positive results for all. While such tools have been critiqued as simply reifying a top-down approach, imposing ideas, and simply reinforcing the status quo rather than actually helping facilitate much-needed change, they can still be helpful, provided that certain “fences”, criteria, or principles guide the usage of said tools. Thus, such tools are utilized, not in a political, economic, or social vacuum, but rather grounded in the principles of Catholic social thought that highlight human dignity and the common good.

There are various tools in change management that have been proposed since the start of the discipline in the 1960s, when psychologist Kurt Lewin wrote about a three-step model of change (Lewin 2015). This paper discusses three in particular that would be helpful in dialogue with Catholic social thought, in response to the concern of handling conflict and disagreements: (1) stakeholder analysis, which emphasizes the importance of individual agents who have a stake or interest in the vision or goal and thus dovetails with the emphasis on the human person and human dignity in Catholic social thought; (2) culture mapping, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the ethos in which a person or groups of persons is trying to enact change and thus dovetails with the emphasis on the common good and work on structures in Catholic social thought, and (3) ADKAR analysis, which gives a framework of how to implement changes within a community in ways that prioritize human dignity and the common good.

4.1. Stakeholder Analysis

In Catholic social thought, the well-being of all, and not just a few, is a cornerstone of the Catholic social vision, as seen in the understanding of the common good in *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council 1965, sc. 26). Attaining the common good requires ethical care for the dignity of creation, including people and the environment, as helpfully recounted in *Laudato Si'* (Francis 2015, sc. 65). Moving towards this well-being requires some way of identifying and understanding the diverse needs of the communities, which stakeholder analysis can help in clarifying. Stakeholder analysis is a key tool that helps identify key needs, wants, and expectations of the various organizations or individuals that directly or indirectly affect or are affected by a particular project: “herein lies a large portion of our project risk and viability, and ultimately the support that we must effectively obtain and retain” (Smith 2000). Stakeholders in this regard are different from the traditional and more narrow understanding of shareholders in economist Milton Friedman’s shareholder theory. While the Friedman understanding of shareholders is confined to those directly financing or owning the responsibility (Friedman 2007), stakeholders include more people, such as workers and employees, customers, or local communities.

Stakeholder analysis highlights the importance of understanding the individuals and their interests or what is at stake for them in a situation. This analysis gives space for people to articulate their fears, concerns, and motivations in a constructive way. Management scholar R. Edward Freeman, who wrote the landmark text *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* on stakeholder analysis, defines a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, p. 46). The more obvious stakeholders are those directly impacted by

the business, such as the employees, customers, and business owners; however, there are more indirect stakeholders that need to be taken into account—“effective social relations requires more than constructive relations with those that have a stake in your success, like your customers, employees, suppliers, and local communities. It also demands astutely engaging shapeholders—political, regulatory, media, and social activist actors that may not care about an organization’s success, but have significant ability to shape an organization’s risks and opportunities” (Kennedy and Calleja 2016, p. 81).

Given the hesitation with conflict and even change in Catholic social thought, the Catholic social thought’s preferential option for the vulnerable and marginalized, and the limited resources communities might have when trying to apply principles of Catholic social thought in their daily lives; two important questions are raised when engaging with stakeholders and shapeholders: first, who counts as the stakeholders and shapeholders that need to be considered and how are they prioritized in a given project? The second question is, to what degree should competing claims be given priority? How does one order these competing claims?

Management scholars Ronald Mitchell, Bradley Agle, and Donna Wood offer a framework for responding to these questions, which can also be used in Catholic social thought. They first identify and group together the stakeholders and shapeholders according to three criteria: first, the power dynamics present; second, the legitimacy of the relationships; and third, the urgency of the stakeholder or shapeholder’s claim (Mitchell et al. 1997, pp. 859–62). The first criteria asks about the kind of influence that stakeholders or shapeholders have, taking into account “agency, resource dependence, and transaction costs . . . [however], power alone does not help us fully understand salience in the stakeholder-[community] relationship. There remain stakeholders who do not have power, but nevertheless matter” (Mitchell et al. 1997, pp. 863–64). Thus, the legitimacy and urgency of the claims of stakeholders and shapeholders need to be taken into account when prioritizing the different interests at stake from various stakeholders and shapeholders. After identifying these stakeholders and shapeholders, one can ask if they are for or against a particular project, how much influence they have on the outcome, and their level of knowledge or ignorance on the project, which can be put into a stakeholder/shapeholder register (Turner 2009, p. 78).

These criteria dovetail with what Catholic social thought expresses in emphasizing the preferential option for the poor, the vulnerable, and marginalized, as well as the different relationships and levels of power and influence that people have. The stakeholder register helps communities articulate the information found through the framework, while also identifying other considerations of these stakeholders and shapeholders, such as opportunities or threats they hold to the project. Stakeholder analysis, when performed well, also gives stakeholders and shapeholders a chance to feel heard and involved, giving them an avenue for participation, in line with the value of participation in Catholic social thought (Hollenbach 2002). This avenue of participation helps them articulate their concerns, fears, and anxieties, while also making them feel heard and appreciated rather than ignored on the sidelines. Using the framework of Mitchell, Agle, and Wood operationalizes this preferential option, while also surfacing the very different and very real relationships among people and communities, and how this affects the people and projects putting Catholic social thought into practice. This is achieved in ways that are not overwhelming or too broad that it becomes too unwieldy to actually do, which theologians using Catholic social thought ought to consider when suggesting ethical considerations.

These criteria also ensure that the ideas and stakeholders considered do not remain simply among the elite, given the critique that such tools may only end up reinforcing the status quo. Stakeholder analysis engages shapeholders as those who, as mentioned, do not have power yet matter, so that the process of resolving conflict and change is not reduced to an imposition of the ideas of those in power, but genuinely facilitates the grassroots movements happening, in order to support the focus on accompaniment and dialogue in Francis’ work and in Catholic social thought.

4.2. Culture Mapping

It is not enough, however, to understand people and their interests and concerns. People are agents who act within particular structures and cultures, which Catholic social thought also emphasizes. Thus, tools to understand the systems and cultures at play that may help or hinder change ought to also be used. We thus turn to culture mapping as another tool to complement stakeholder analysis in enriching Catholic social thought.

Culture mapping, given its name, entails understanding culture, a “set of meanings and values . . . that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices” of a particular community (Massingale 2010, p. 1). These values, meanings, and attitudes are often hidden, and include the very real fears and anxieties people and the Catholic church face when working for justice and social change. Understanding how these fears and anxieties are interrelated and how they may be feeding and interacting with one another will help deepen one’s understanding of what is at stake and thus theologize and respond accordingly.

Culture mapping involves identifying the various groups that represent the subcultures found in a community, and to meet each group to identify the cultural enablers or blockers that affect the way people might react to change (Gray 2015). The output of each meeting describes the vision of that particular group, how the group moves towards that vision and what behavior they do or do not do, and what enables or blocks those behaviors. What enables or blocks these behaviors can be formal and explicit, such as rules or incentives in the group, or it may be less formal and implicit, such as unwritten rules, or even the habits and routines of the members of the group (Gray 2015).

Often, this is performed with an outside team in order to facilitate more honest conversation and dialogue on ethics, including better communication, so less is lost in translation and perception among the people: what exactly is being said? What is not being said? Communication is a big aspect of culture mapping, and expectations of communication across cultural groups can vary—while one group might focus on explicitly saying all that is needed to be said, another culture might rely instead on its members being able to “read between the lines” and pick up on cues, even if things have not been explicitly said. When these two cultures begin communicating or are communicated to, one might not be reading enough into the situation, while the other might be reading too much into the situation, leading to a breakdown in communication rather than movement towards better change. Thus, the importance of facilitation as well as understanding the different aspects of the culture.

Identifying and understanding the cultural enablers and blockers is also helpful in assisting conversation so as to avoid the blockers, while also tapping into the enablers to help foment the change and encourage the group to embrace, rather than reject, certain ideas or behaviors. In Catholic social thought, such systems and structures can encourage people to do the good, or do the opposite. Structures of sin, as they are called, can reflect or reinforce sinful behavior, while structures of solidarity can reflect or reinforce grace-filled behavior (John Paul II 1987, scts. 36–40). Catholic social thought emphasizes the need to understand these structures and their linkages to the human person’s actions and being, as “culture shapes human and organizational behavior . . . and shapes ideas” (Bartunek et al. 2006, loc. 3654). In dialogue with Catholic social thought, culture mapping can thus help map out these structures and linkages in concrete ways, helping flesh out what structures of sin or structures of solidarity are in a particular situation or community. Mapping out such structures includes understanding the power dynamics at work, in order to avoid reinforcing the status quo, in the name of solidarity.

Accounting for both individuals and structures is crucial in change management, and so stakeholder analysis and culture mapping are key parts of frameworks that help organizations understand aspects of change on an individual as well as structural level. These tools are part of an overarching process that raises specific questions about how Catholic social thought is put into practice on a concrete level, one of which is discussed in the next section.

4.3. ADKAR Analysis

Lastly, any form of change prompts people to ask why the change is necessary, and what will happen if they do or do not change, and how exactly to move from the current state to the state they want to be in. Thus, organizations began looking for some process to guide them in handling the changes they needed to improve themselves. In response, ADKAR analysis is a process used to manage the change process itself, supporting the people as they transition from their current state to the desired state. ADKAR analysis uses stakeholder analysis and culture mapping, among other tools, to support people as they move in a particular direction.

Developed by change management leader Jeff Hiatt, the ADKAR acronym stands for 1. Awareness, 2. Desire, 3. Knowledge, 4. Ability, and 5. Reinforcement. First, awareness is important, “where the person is aware of and understands the nature of change, why it is needed, and the risk of not changing” (Hiatt 2006, p. 5). This step is also where stakeholder analysis and culture mapping come in as helpful resources.

In the case of Catholic social thought, this step requires a community to understand the change, what is at stake, and what is needed for that change. The changes advocated for in Catholic social thought are grounded in a vision of society marked by ethical care for the human person and the environment (Francis 2020, scts. 5, 17, 57). The risks and change needed are both individual and systemic, which can be overwhelming for many who do not have the time or mental or emotional bandwidth to process the ramifications of not changing the way we treat each other or the environment. Thus, awareness seeks to lessen the anxieties behind the change—“survival anxiety must be greater than learning anxiety, and learning anxiety must be reduced rather than increasing survival anxiety” (Green and Cameron 2020, p. 52). The second aspect—desire, or the motivation to actually move towards change—also is an important aspect here, as awareness and desire go hand in hand in going beyond reluctance or objections to the ethical changes being proposed. The desire and changes of those at the local or grassroots level, based on the principles of Catholic social thought, guide the use of ADKAR analysis, serving as a reminder of what the process is working towards throughout its duration.

Second, knowledge is understanding of how to implement certain tools in order to realize the change, while ability is the presence of the actual skills and tools to do so. This includes the capacity to learn and access needed resources to develop knowledge and ability (Hiatt 2006, pp. 23, 32). In Catholic social thought, this would entail interdisciplinarity and a willingness to dialogue with other sectors and fields in order to implement change. This willingness to dialogue, which was not as present in previous documents in Catholic social thought prior to Francis, has become more explicit, especially under Francis’ papacy, with his encyclicals such as *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* citing scientists, leaders of other world religions, and other bishops’ conferences; however, this interdisciplinarity and willingness to dialogue are present in some issues, while not in others, and so more work needs to be done. In issues such as sexual ethics, there is more contentious debate rather than dialogue, given the differences in understanding of sex and gender between the Catholic church and the biological sciences.

Third, and lastly, reinforcement is key in strengthening the change and ensuring that change pushes through and any follow-through that is needed will happen. When there may be unintended consequences, it is important that these are responded to, with accountability systems in place (Hiatt 2006, p. 37). If they are negative, they need to be corrected; while they are positive, their connection to the change needs to be strengthened, in order to emphasize the causality. This ensures that positive change continues, and is not discarded for one reason or another, such as if there is a change in leadership or priorities. Changes in leadership and priorities can affect the development of Catholic social thought, as seen in the way documents and priorities have been articulated in magisterial documents as well as theological ethics, and so consciously reinforcing the positive changes in the documents will be key in ensuring that such changes and developments continue, while also reflecting back on whether there are unintended consequences that need to be rectified.

Future work in Catholic social thought should consider the question of how good changes can be further reinforced, especially when ethical action often requires a more long-term and sustained action, and not just a short-term solution.

In sum, the ADKAR model offers a process flow that raises questions in terms of what needs to be developed further in Catholic social thought, in order for it more successfully push forward change that supports the holistic well-being of creation, and not just the flourishing of a few. It also offers tools to respond to the concerns of the people in a more manageable way, and in a way that supports the people, rather than shaming or imposing on them. These tools raise questions about the way Catholic social thought envisions and works towards the changes it suggests.

5. Conclusions

To end, learning from the disciplines of conflict and change management can help operationalize and put Catholic social thought into practice through the “Act” part of the “See, Judge, Act” method, by responding to the fears and anxieties of those involved, as well as giving the tools needed to work for change in ways that do not alienate people, but rather involve and support them through the change. Admittedly, the principles from these disciplines will have limits, especially when the categories of sin and grace enter the picture. Feminist theologian Rae Sanchez notes, “analyzing church structures may cause discomfort for Christians because it entails using secular sciences to study the church as an institution;” however, the church runs the risk that such “arguments . . . [can] serve to justify the status quo and appear to render church structures immune to human critique” (Sanchez 2016, p. 40). Thus, while these two arguments are important to consider, a more open attitude towards conflict and change management, as well as frameworks from the social sciences in managing power and anxieties, when grounded in the principles of Catholic social thought, are still useful in opening up the conversation and moving the conversations in Catholic social thought, and even Christian ethics, forward.

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