



# CATWALK: Interpretive Consultant Training



*How to Use the  
Congregation Assessment Tool™  
and Interpret the  
Vital Signs® Report*

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## Section One:

# Introductions to both the CATWALK Training and Holy Cow! Consulting



## Holy Cow! Consulting

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*It is our mission at Holy Cow! Consulting to help every organization better serve our communities by using an evidence-based discernment process to become vital, healthy organizations in Christ.*

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Thank you for your willingness to be a part of what we do at Holy Cow! Consulting. We began this work in 1999, so we have been doing this for quite a while. We hope our experience with over 6,000 congregations around the country and our assessments will not only help your congregations but will help you in the work you do.

Let us know how we can help you as you begin working with our assessments and interpreting the results.

**For general questions** our office is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST.

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*Data-driven, mission aligned, striving to find what organizations' need to do exceptionally well*

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# VITAL SIGNS REPORT

## An Outcome-Focused Methodology

The *Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT)*<sup>1</sup> is an instrument that invites members to bear witness to their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations. This information is used to generate a *Vital Sign* report which provides leaders with a high level of organizational intelligence including:

- A read out on the fundamentals of the church's health along eight different dimensions.
- An identification of organizational culture including core values and patterned responses that can support or block success.
- A ranking of priorities based upon congregational energy designations.
- A financial and demographic description of the congregation.

We like to refer to the *CAT* as an assessment rather than a survey. It has been developed to support *evidence-based discernment*. Evidence-based discernment is a process of discovery which integrates organizational intelligence, core values, and an inspired imagination to establish a course of action. It is not an event or an episode; it is a way of thinking about leadership decisions. Evidence-based discernment is to be distinguished from other processes commonly utilized by churches leaders.

- ***Impression-driven*** processes tend to rely more on the internal thoughts and feelings of the persons in leadership roles to gauge reality.
- ***Anecdotally-driven*** processes tend to rely more on conversations with individuals or groups that are not necessarily representative of the entire church.
- ***Authority-driven*** processes tend to rely more on the perspectives of those in positions of power in hierarchical systems.

Research has demonstrated that none of these three alternatives provide leaders with even a modest degree of clarity regarding the perspectives, experiences, and aspiration of members. The attitudinal patterns that drive much of a church's behavior and are decisive factors in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) is a trademarked tool owned by HC!C  
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success or failure of a particular course of action are nearly invisible to those in leadership positions. In some cases, the reality of a church is either counter-intuitive or contradicts long held beliefs.

The promise of the organizational intelligence provided by the *Congregation Assessment Tool* is that it can unify leaders in a common understanding of the church as a system. Whether the application of the intelligence is employed for strategic planning, succession planning and management, ministry review, stewardship and resource development, or pastoral discernment, a fruitful outcome is more likely when leaders have a common understanding of the starting point.

Most planning and assessment endeavors in the church *are process-focused*. By process-focused we mean that they generally

- Specify actions to be taken (or not taken) often without clear expectations regarding results
- Articulate values and principles that guide the process
- Assign time frames and schedules for steps in the process
- Evaluate whether the actions were taken as specified

The *Vital Signs* report is *outcome-focused*. By outcome-focused we mean that it

- Measures the health and vitality of a church
- Measures the growth or decline in the number of persons in attendance
- Measures giving of time, talent, and treasure
- Identifies the factors that are having the greatest impact on the church so that energy can be applied in areas that are the best candidates for producing results

Theologically, process-focused systems tend to speak of being faithful, while outcome-focused systems tend to speak of being fruitful. Of course, both are important, but by and large, denominational churches have tended to emphasize faithfulness over fruitfulness. This is partly because outcome-focused systems require a means to measure whether the desired results have been achieved...or not. In addition, there is always an element of anxiety created in any system when effectiveness is measured, and clergy serving local congregations are not exempt from the manifestations of that anxiety, including avoidance of evaluation.

The *Congregation Assessment Tool* does not probe the history or the context of the church to seek an explanation for the results. In fact, it is most powerful when the interpreter of *Vital Signs* does not try to explain the results based upon his/her knowledge of the church since this would leave the interpreter open to the criticism of bias. For this reason, it is best that the interpretive consultant not engage leaders or members in conversations about the church, its history, or its issues prior to the presentation of the results. The interpreter needs to be able to

honestly say “No one has my ear. What I am sharing with you comes from the pages of your *Vital Signs* report.”

For these reasons, it is important that the organizational intelligence generated by the *Vital Signs* report always be integrated into an application resulting in concrete, measurable steps.

The *Vital Signs* report itself is indifferent to process. From the standpoint of the church’s capacity to impact the world positively as an expression of the Kingdom of God, what is most important is the degree to which it is vital and healthy. A demoralized, dispirited church will fail its mission and merely rehearsing the process that brought it there will not change that result. *Vital Signs*® invites a church to take stock of itself and, if a better outcome is envisioned, establish concrete steps to achieve those results. A preoccupation with process to the exclusion of outcomes invites paralysis and rationalizing.

## THE CONGREGATION ASSESSMENT: ONE TOOL, MANY USES



The Vital Signs report is an important source of organizational intelligence that informs a number of important processes at the leadership level of congregations. These cover the entire lifecycle of a church from pastoral start-up to pastoral discernment regarding the time to seek another call. However, the benefit of this resource cannot be realized without consultants who understand the information, are able to integrate it into their portfolio of services, and provide for meaningful application to the critical issues that local leaders face.

To achieve this level of service requires that regional associations/consultant groups be prepared to provide two distinct, but equally important resources.

- **Interpretive consultants** who are trained to make the information found in the *Vital Signs* report accessible to leadership teams.
- **Application consultants** who are trained to facilitate important processes for churches including strategic planning, succession planning and management, ministry review, etc.

In some cases, the interpretive consultant and the application consultant can be the same person. However, these roles call for different abilities in the persons serving in them. They also have different training requirements. In addition, it may be difficult to find volunteers who are able to invest the time and energy to do both.



It is generally best for a regional association to have a small cadre of folks who specialize in the function of interpretive consultants. By providing that service for different churches several times a year, they have ample opportunity to develop and maintain their skills. This allows application consultants to focus on what they do best using the input provided from the *Vital Signs*© and presented through the interpretation consultants.

## ***WHAT MAKES A GOOD CAT INTERPRETER?***

The *Vital Signs* is similar to a medical CAT scan which requires a skilled interpretation for the person to benefit from the results. Failure to provide a meaningful interpretation will compromise the value of the process for church leaders and potentially do more harm than good. For that reason, interpretive consultants are critical to the utility of the *Vital Signs* report. We call this training *CATWALK*.

As in any work, the people who make the best interpretive consultants are those who possess the necessary ability *and* the motivation to do it well. The necessary **abilities** include:

- ✓ A capacity for helping people benefit from constructive feedback, both strengths and growth areas.
- ✓ A facility in dealing with emotional reactions in a group without becoming defensive or acquiescent.
- ✓ An ability to communicate as a speaker to audiences of different sizes.
- ✓ A servant orientation deals appropriately with the power of information.
- ✓ A level of comfort with basic mathematical operations and a willingness to learn some simple statistical functions.
- ✓ An ability to intuit patterns and potentials in a situation.

From a **motivational** standpoint, people who make effective interpretive consultants tend to:

- ♥ Enjoy solving puzzles and piecing together clues to arrive at a comprehensive picture
- ♥ Take pleasure in a process of discovery and being surprised by unexpected results
- ♥ Love spotting strengths and uncovering potential in people and organizations
- ♥ Welcome opportunities to help people and organizations identify what has them stuck so that they can move forward in a purposeful way

Becoming an effective interpretive consultant is a skill which, like any skill, requires intentional development and involves these components:

- Motivation of the learner
- Opportunities for practice in the training process
- Immediate application
- Spaced repetition
- Feedback

Your *CATWALK* training to become an interpretive consultant will involve all these components.

# ***What to Expect from the CATWALK Training***

The training process for interpretive consultants is carefully designed to optimize the development of the skills required to be effective as well as provide a positive experience for both the consultants and the churches that are served.

Here is what interpretive consultants can expect in their training experience:

1. Training sessions require a significant allotment of time for learners to practice what they are being trained to do. Since the average interpretive session lasts 2 to 3 hours, giving all the individuals in a group an opportunity to practice each part of the session requires two days of training.
2. In order to maximize practice time, some preparatory learning must occur prior to the onsite training. Ideally this preparatory learning will include the observation of an interpretive session with a group of church leaders. In addition, the Interpreter's webpage with readings and the training manual for interpretive consultants will be emailed to consultants approximately 10 days prior to their training so that they can read assigned sections.
3. Ideally, training should be scheduled in conjunction with churches already in the assessment process so that newly trained interpretive consultants will be able to have an opportunity to apply their skills within 60 days of the completion of their training.
4. It is important that a regional association/consultant team only train the number of interpretive consultants required to prevent overloading any single person. Since interpretive consultants will only develop their skills through spaced repetition, they must be given at least 3 to 4 opportunities a year to conduct an interpretive session.
5. It is desirable for newly trained interpretive consultants to be teamed up with a more seasoned consultant for coaching during the first year.
6. An evaluation of every interpretive session will be conducted by Holy Cow! Consulting via an online survey.
7. Interpretive consultants may be asked to become part of an online network that will foster ongoing growth and development.
8. At the end of the training, some folks may decide that they are more energized by the work of application consulting and that they would prefer the work of interpretation to be left to others who are more motivated for that ministry.

Welcome to this important opportunity to strengthen your ministry to the church of Jesus Christ!