

Lesson 5: The Value of an Experiment

Module 1: Getting Started

One of the most important components of the Neighborhood Connection Group process is the *experiment*. The action-reflection cycle will ultimately lead to the implementation of a ministry experiment.

Why an Experiment?

As I explained in the video, we live in a period of *discontinuous change*. That is, the kind of change that is unexpected and disruptive. It's the kind of change that requires *adaptive leadership*. And adaptive leadership means we will have to try new things.

As I've already mentioned, we weren't prepared for the world that we live in now. And that's not anyone's fault. Our seminary professors, our mentors, our pastors—none of them knew what the world would be like in the 21st century. They taught us what they knew. Unfortunately, what they knew wasn't *all* we needed to know.

So, we need to keep learning. And as we learn, we need to try things out. We need to experiment with new ways of loving our neighbors, new ways of making God's compassion and justice known, new ways of restoring shalom in the world.

As we conduct ministry experiments, we gain new knowledge. We learn. And as we learn, we get closer to the unique ministry to which God is calling us and our congregation.

A Word About Action-Reflection

We will learn more about action-reflection later, but for now let me briefly explain.

Action-reflection is a change navigation process that moves participants through a process of, well, action.... Followed by reflection. To the best of my knowledge, the first person to implement and name the process of action-reflection was Paulo Freire. He talks about it in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he explains the process as a way for the poor and oppressed to begin to change their society.

If the action-reflection process can be used to transform a society, it can also be used to transform a local congregation and community.

The Neighborhood Connection Group action-reflection process will look like this.

Action: Members of the group will engage in a local neighborhood activity. They will intentionally pay attention, have conversations, and ask questions, keeping their eyes open for the ways God is at work in their community.

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Reflection: The Neighborhood Connection Group will meet monthly to share stories, reflect, and pray together, asking God to reveal the ways God is at work in their community.

The experiment will not be a random experiment. It will be a meaningful experiment, based on what has been learned through the action-reflection process. In fact, the experiment itself is part of the action-reflection process. After the group engages in the experiment, there will be further reflection to see what the group is learning.

Reflect

When have you had to try something new (in ministry or in life in general)? Did it “work”? Did it “fail”? What did you do then?

What is the value in asking, “What did we learn?” rather than “Why did this fail?”