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**A STUDY OF HOW EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAMS
CAN BE DEVELOPED IN CONGREGATIONS**

By

Thomas Peter Fleming

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Saint Louis, Missouri

May 15, 2015

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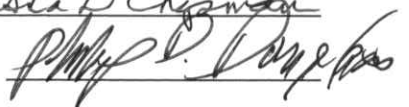
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. To gain this data, the following primary research questions were used: 1) What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations? 2) What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations? 3) How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations? 4) Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?

The researcher conducted a thorough review of literature, including academic literature from the world of business studies, where there has been intense interest in leadership development. Systems theory, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence in leaders and organisations were areas in academic literature that are pertinent to developing leadership teams. It was also necessary to consider approaches taken to leadership in theological/ecclesiastical literature. This strand of research yielded many examples of attempts to develop effective leadership teams, as well as rich veins of information and illustration in the secular world of sport, politics, and the military.

The researcher employed a qualitative approach to this study, selecting eight interviewees through “non-probability purposive sampling.” A small number of participants were carefully selected to yield a detailed picture of church leadership in a wide range of situations. The research uncovered six key strategies that lead toward the successful development of effective leadership teams. These strategies include watching, teaming, framing, communicating, experimenting, and mentoring. In analysing why these strategies might succeed, the researcher concluded that every approach or strategy must

have as an integral characteristic the tendency to enhance vision and unity among team members. Without these two factors all strategies will be significantly defective and likely to fail.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	7
Purpose Statement	14
Primary Research Questions	15
Significance of the Study	16
Definition of Terms	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review	19
Systems Theory and the Church	22
Adaptive Leadership	39
Emotional Intelligence	57
Biblical Insights	69
Conclusion	82
Chapter Three: Methodology	85
Design of the Study	86
Sampling Criteria	87
Data Collection Methods	90
Researcher Stance	93
Limitations of the Study	94
Conclusion	95

Chapter Four: Data Presentation	96
Eight Participating Ministers	97
Summary of These Eight Ministry Settings	104
Findings and Themes as They Relate to the Research Questions	105
Summary of Findings	146
Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations	147
Summary of Findings	150
Issues Which Hinder the Development of Effective Leadership Teams	152
Strategies Necessary for Developing Effective Leadership Teams	159
The Impact of Effective Leadership Teams	171
The Reasons Why Some Strategies are Successful	172
Recommendations for Practice	175
Areas for Further Research and Conclusions	179
Bibliography	182

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Chapter One

Introduction

“For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave.”¹

These words from “Prospice” by Robert Browning inspired Sir Ernest Shackleton and his men to accomplish some of history’s greatest feats of Antarctic exploration and endurance.² Shackleton is recognised as one of the world’s greatest Polar explorers and most effective leaders of men.³ He had the ability to think, anticipate, organise, cheer, and inspire. He was a character both steely and compassionate. He led through the most harrowing expeditions when all seemed hopeless. He inspired confidence and motivated men to almost superhuman achievements. Testing times and gifted leadership can be catalysts for great achievements.

Successful leadership in any sphere involves challenge, character, motivation, change, relationship, and growth. Leadership is always intensely demanding, and in the church of the twenty-first century, the enormity of the challenges often seems overwhelming. If the church is ever to flourish in the most difficult of secular times, the best leaders must bravely engage faith and every God given ability to inspire their members to work and witness together, not just for survival, but for growth. A great deal of this depends upon fellowship, unity and cooperation in creating a team. According to

¹ Louis Untermeyer, *Collins Albatross Book of Verse: English and American Poetry from the Thirteenth Century to the Present Day* (n.p.: Collins, 1973), 435.

² Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell, *Shackleton’s Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2001), 188 and 213.

³ *Ibid.*, 205.

George Cladis, author of *Leading the Team-based Church : How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*, “A healthy church leadership team with trusting relationships radiates health and vitality throughout the church organization and its whole system of relationships. Just as powerfully, a dysfunctional team radiates pain and dissension throughout the congregation.”⁴

Interpersonal relationships communicate themselves. Tension spreads unseen, and so does trust and genuine friendship. Church leaders face huge challenges as they seek to guide God’s people forward to fulfil the commission that Christ gave two thousand years ago. In the twenty-first century, the basic spiritual and emotional needs of people remain, but there are practical challenges that are new to ministry structures and organization. In an age of free choice and individualism, one of the greatest challenges is to “keep the fellowship” – to remain united in vision and purpose, developing healthy relationships among leaders and members so that personal and spiritual growth can be nurtured.

One of the traditions that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has developed over centuries is the “one man ministry,” which involves an individual minister carrying the weight of almost all responsibility for ministry in the congregation. This was never a healthy form of leadership. At the 2011 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Leadership Panel of the Board of Christian Training reported:

We live in a changing world and an unfortunate aspect of that is an unrelenting decline in Church attendance especially amongst the younger generation. Society is becoming increasingly secular and distant from God. The models and patterns of leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland often date from a by-gone era of “Christendom” when the Church did not face these challenges. Perhaps that is part of the reason why leaders are overstretched.⁵

⁴ George Cladis, *Leading the Team-based Church : How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), xi.

⁵ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 2011), 195.

The weaknesses in the traditional leadership structure of the PCI have been greatly accentuated over the past three decades, as many changes in society have rendered this model ineffective for growing vibrant churches.

We have enlarged our knowledge of the world, secured freedoms once only dreamed of, expanded rights, opened the doors of education, lifted hopes, and mightily multiplied our prosperity. But in order to enjoy these manifold benefits, we have had to pay some stiff costs. Modernization has also blighted our lives by cutting our connections to place and community, elevating our levels of anxiety, and greatly diminishing our satisfaction with our jobs. It has spawned pervasive fear and discontent. It has contributed to the breakdown of the family, robbed our children of their innocence, diluted out ethical values, and blinded us to the reality of God. It has made us shallow. It has made us empty.⁶

Large numbers of people have better education, greater social competence, access to technology and information, a heavy dose of scepticism and the confidence to express it. Changes such as these have caused considerable pressure as ministers have sought to adjust their leadership styles and maintain unity in their congregations. These pressures have often been very difficult for any who want to maintain things as they have always been.

Leadership styles that do not resonate with the wider community and church members will be ineffective and result in an out-dated church and leadership stress. In the General Assembly Annual Reports of the same year, statistics were presented of the overall numbers of families and members claiming a link with the denomination over a thirty-five year period. The figures are cause for deep concern to anyone interested in the health of the church. In the thirty-five years between 1975 and 2010, the number of families dropped from one hundred and twenty-eight thousand to one hundred and four thousand, representing a loss of twenty per cent. In the same period, the number of

⁶ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 12.

individuals of all ages dropped from three hundred and eighty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand (over one third).

Figures which present a very similar impression are available across the spectrum of churches in the United Kingdom. In 1979, church attendance in England stood at 5.4 million (11.7 per cent of the population). Nineteen years later, in 1998, this had dropped to 3.7 million (7.5 per cent of the population). This is a significant change, and the deeper concern is that it has happened so rapidly, and at a time when the population has grown.⁷

There is nothing new under the sun. Christians are often tempted to think that the challenges facing the contemporary church have never been encountered before. However, New Testament leaders also dealt with social and spiritual change and challenge. They had been commissioned by Christ, but after the ascension they no longer had his physical presence in a hostile world. Before leaving, he had warned them that they would be “brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities” and “handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and...hated by all nations because of me.”⁸

In the New Testament, small groups of believers and their leaders worked together to strengthen the church and drive its influence. There are many examples of this, including the leading group at Jerusalem,⁹ Antioch,¹⁰ and the many groups of individuals with whom Paul had contact on his missionary journeys.¹¹ Paul wrote openly

⁷ Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2001), 21-22.

⁸ Luke 12:11; Matthew 24:9.

⁹ Acts 15:4, 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13:1-3.

¹¹ Romans 16.

of his joy, struggles and anguish in ministry. He urged leaders to be firm and wise in their work with the church, where there was often tension.

Paul relied heavily upon others to help him. Reference is often made to Paul and Barnabas as a mission team.¹² It is also important to draw attention to the larger teams. As Paul was returning to Jerusalem, it is recorded that he was accompanied by seven fellow workers,¹³ while in his letter to Philemon, he mentions five other workers who were with him at the time.¹⁴

In Acts 20, Paul calls the elders of the church at Ephesus together to say farewell and also to urge them to watch over the flock and be aware of the problem of division.¹⁵ Later, he writes to the church and discusses the gifts God has given individuals in church leadership so that the body can be built up and held together in love.¹⁶ In his second letter to Timothy, he warns about quarrelling and division, emphasising that the Lord's servants must be kind, not resentful, and willing to gently instruct.¹⁷ Later he provides touching insight into his personal needs and practical circumstances – he needs company, his coat, and his scrolls. His need is urgent, and he wants Timothy to come quickly.¹⁸ In his letter to Titus Paul instructs him to appoint elders in each town to provide leadership in the churches.¹⁹

¹² Acts 13:13, 46; 14:23.

¹³ Ibid., 20:4.

¹⁴ Philemon 23-25.

¹⁵ Acts 20:28, 30.

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:11-16.

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4:9-15.

One of the clearest insights into the sense of unity and team in the early church comes from the very personal greetings given to many friends and fellow workers in Romans chapter sixteen. Of the thirty-seven people named or individually referenced, ten are described as workers or servants in the church. The expressions used are “fellow worker,” people who “worked very hard,” or “servant of the church.” Out of the remaining twenty-seven, there may be more who were fellow workers, but these terms are not used. It is very obvious that Paul shared responsibility and burdens with a great number of people who worked alongside each other in their different localities. This chapter provides a clear sense of fellowship, common bond, and united service among these people as they lead the early church. These were dynamic and effective teams.

It was crucial that the early church authorities were capable of leading believers from diverse and conflicting backgrounds. The church was a new phenomenon in the world, and society had little understanding of what it was. These Christians were to impact the world – to grow, to spread, and to influence society. The New Testament shows a full spectrum of church life and work, revealing churches with amazing generosity and willingness to suffer for the gospel, as well as exposing a darker side of these congregations, involving secret sin and greed. In this context, the leaders of the New Testament church exercised their leadership and worked to foster growth. By his practice and instructions, it is clear that Paul believed in team ministry, depended heavily upon others to play their part, and worked hard at maintaining relationships and effective leadership in the church. Without a close bond of mutual support, these leaders would have become isolated, intimidated, ineffective, and eventually extinct! There were few if any lone leaders in the New Testament church.

¹⁹ Titus 1:5.

Leadership for a vibrant and effective church in twenty-first century society must change its traditional approach. While the current world is a very different world from that of the first century, some structures in the early church will prove to be relevant for revitalization in the modern church.

Statement of the Problem

Surveying the PCI today, one can find numerous examples of ministers struggling, including lone leaders who are worn down with exhaustion and embattled leaders who are anxious with opposition. In 1996, this was recognised and widely discussed by the General Assembly in its annual reports.²⁰ The Divine Healing Committee spent three years studying the incidence of stress in the ministry and considering what might be the causes of this problem. Among their comments on the problem was the following:

...22 per cent of the respondents indicated an excessive level of stress. 9 per cent had already been off due to stress during the previous three years. 17 per cent had given prolonged consideration to moving out of full time ministry altogether, and for 3 per cent it was a case of both time off and considering a move out.²¹

Clearly, there is a significant issue here, and many struggle with the burdens of work and responsibility. In a final published report, entitled “Stress in the Christian Ministry,” the question was addressed at a number of levels, but two that have significance for this dissertation are the matters of what the report called “Structural stress,” and “Operational stress.” Structural stress is the administrative structure of a PCI congregation and the long-developed perception that the minister must do everything and be in sole charge of running the church. Some of the phrases used in the code (the rule

²⁰ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 1996), 233-235.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

book) of the PCI seem to infer this or at least have been interpreted in such a way. This inevitably places the minister in a pressurised position. The report called for work to be done to clarify the structures and governing responsibilities within a congregation. The assertion was made that it is:

...not impossible to draw up a more appropriate description that sets out more clearly the roles of the Teaching and the Ruling Elders, and of their relationship within the Kirk Session and congregation, and how these roles and relationship should work out in practice. Such a revision would go some way to correcting the false perceptions and expectations that exist today.²²

Closely linked with this, the term “organisational stress” referred to the fact that teamwork is generally not well-developed within PCI congregations. The following comments are taken from the same report. The following quotation is from a section of the report which has put together a miscellany of remarks and observations from Presbytery responses invited by the committee:

What concerned us most about the results of the survey was the perceived lack of teamwork in many congregations. In Presbyterianism the team is of crucial importance. This is true, but unfortunately in Presbyterianism the team is left undefined and so we end up with a problem: “the ONE MAN BAND concept is very strong.” “Many congregations, elders and ministers still see ‘clericalism’ as the norm. This is a mixture of tradition, inherited roles and what is most comfortable.” The omnicompetent minister is a faulty perception that must be changed in the light of Scripture and for the good of the Church.²³

The governing structure of typical Presbyterian congregations has not clearly required or encouraged a sharing of leadership responsibility, and this has resulted in “one man ministries,” weak concepts of team work, and ministers who often find it difficult to develop effective leadership teams to share burdens and responsibilities. Sadly, these problems are not confined to the PCI. There is ample evidence of similar

²² Rev. Ivan Hull, *Stress in the Christian Ministry* (Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Divine Healing Committee: 1977), 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

issues damaging churches and leaders in many denominations. Eddie Gibbs, professor of church growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, is well qualified to comment on the church in Britain and North America. He laments, “The casualty rate among church leaders has reached disturbingly high levels as leaders leave local ministry because of burnout, stress-related illness and disillusionment.”²⁴

Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor have written extensively on church leadership and transformation. In their experience of dealing with church leaders, they have recognised the fact that many are failing. They insist, “Far too many are fatigued and spiritually empty. The day-to-day stress of managing an institutional church – small or large – robs them of their personal spiritual vitality. In this condition, they simply cannot provide the effective leadership required to lead a congregation down a path of change.”²⁵

Gibbs also highlights the changing cultural conditions faced by the modern church. He believes that Christian leadership must change significantly if the church is to make an impact upon contemporary society. He lists changes in economics, which create great pressures upon the family, resulting in lower levels of commitment to church fellowship; changes in demographics, resulting in ageing congregations and greater ethnic diversity, therefore requiring a wider range of appropriate ministries; changes in information technology, resulting in leaders who cannot keep abreast with everything and who must therefore find and use more people with knowledge and skills to meet the

²⁴ Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next* (Inter-Varsity Press: 2005), 19.

²⁵ Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 3.

widening challenges, particularly in the areas of how community life is developing and how human relationships are conducted.²⁶

His chief conclusion to all this is that hierarchical leadership structure is not the most effective way to forward the purpose of any organisation in the twenty-first century. He insists,

Hierarchical organizations are too cumbersome and monolithic to operate effectively in a context of diversity and rapid, often unpredictable, changes. Networks, on the other hand, are flexible, responsive and empowering precisely because they have no control centre and are able to grow exponentially.²⁷

It is very difficult to lead an organisation without the active support of a small team of key leaders who carry authority among the members. John Kotter, world-renowned expert and author on leadership at the Harvard Business School, and Dan Cohen, principal with Deloitte Consulting LLC., have emphasised the need for “effective guiding teams” to provide leadership for change. In discussing this need in their book *The Heart of Change*, they list a number of companies that are failing due to the lack of a genuinely united and effective leadership team. In “The Blues verses the Greens,” they describe an enterprise created by the merger of two earlier companies. On the surface, the new leadership team, formed by executives from both companies, seems to be working together acceptably. In reality, there was a veneer of politeness covering deep issues that were being avoided, and everyone was watching their opposite number with suspicion. It was only with the help of a facilitator that open discussion began. Kotter and Cohen write, “This dynamic changed only when someone showed emotionally honest and open behaviour, spoke the unspeakable, connected to the feelings of others, and was able to do

²⁶ Gibbs, 46-48.

²⁷ Ibid., 55.

so without being shot down. Then a team that could drive change began (slowly) to form.”²⁸

Kotter and Cohen illustrate the need for guiding teams to be formed from people who carry authority and respect, as well as the skills and capacity for leadership. There must be honest and trusting relationships, with open communication and a growing bond and sense of togetherness. Such teams hold the potential to guide organisations through change to greater success. In his discussion of why leadership styles in the church must change, Gibbs reaches the same conclusion:

We are faced with a complex intertwining of issues. Consequently, we need interdisciplinary responses. That is one of the reasons why churches may be more effective if they move beyond the concept of a single leader to one in which leadership is exercised by a team with one individual serving as *primus inter pares* – first among equals.²⁹

The development of such a team is one of the most important challenges in ministry. Two simple proverbs emphasise the effect and blessing of relationship with fellow leaders.

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted ... As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”³⁰

Any church leader who addresses the challenge of creating effective leadership teams must deal with a number of issues that are common in most denominations. These challenges will now be discussed.

²⁸ John Kotter, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 41.

²⁹ Gibbs, 56.

³⁰ Proverbs 27:6, 17.

Theological Issues

There are many congregations where the session has no clear biblical vision of what the church should be. As previously discussed, there is a tendency within the PCI for main ministers to be placed in exalted positions, with unreasonable leadership demands placed upon them. Much of this has arisen gradually due to a deficient understanding of the church and biblical leadership. In addition, Kirk sessions often have elders who have been elected purely because of long familial attachments to the congregation, and these leaders can be motivated more by the desire to maintain tradition than to lead the church appropriately. The practical and spiritual qualities that are so clear in the scriptures are in danger of being forgotten in such circumstances.

Structural Issues

In many denominations, elected office bearers (often called elders) are recognised as the sole seat of authority in the local congregation. When this structure is applied rigidly, especially when it is also lacking in clear leadership vision, there is a significant hindrance to effective and creative leadership. There is little place for any other group to develop leadership potential. In every organisation, there is a need for different types of leadership, but when one group clasps to itself not just governance authority, but all levels of leadership, then the structure becomes obstructive. Additionally, it has been the experience of many congregations that the Kirk session can become ineffective, as the group can be too large, divided in opinion, and with few visionary people to drive the church forward toward change.

Authority and Communication Issues

In congregations where there are a number of full-time members of staff (in the PCI context this is almost always larger congregations of over 250 families), there is always a potential tension between full-time staff and volunteer leaders. The full-time staff must be careful to ensure that others understand and support the direction in which they are seeking to move. In every organisation, the need to ensure regular, clear communication is vital. Patrick Lencioni, a management consultant specialising in organisational health and executive team development, places great emphasis upon the need for clear communication throughout an organisation. In this way everyone in the organisation begins to “get” what is happening. He explains, “The only way for people to embrace a message is to hear it over a period of time, in a variety of situations, and preferably from different people.”³¹ In seeking to develop an effective leadership team, it will be necessary to take account of these potential problems, ensuring that clear communication happens consistently, and that volunteer/part-time workers are fully integrated into the leadership structure.

Personal Issues

In all teams, there are a variety of personalities. One of the central tasks of the team leader is to nurture a bond of unity, so that each member understands what unites the team and how individual preferences must often be set aside in the interests of synergy. Goleman writes about the major mistakes of leaders, noting, “Ignoring the realities of team ground rules and the collective emotions in the tribe and assuming that

³¹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 142.

the force of their leadership alone is enough to drive people's behaviour."³² In contrast to this, George Cladis writes of "Covenanting Teams" that "Ministry teams are communities that covenant to be in fellowship together and live out the love of God. The members of these teams covenant with one another both to be in a relationship of God's love and to agree on their purposes and plans and the ways to move toward their fulfilment."³³

His point is that being bound together by a common goal gives the team strength to overcome division and problems. Without reference to biblical concepts of fellowship, Goleman emphasizes the same point. He recognises that group decisions are normally superior to those of even the brightest individual in all but one circumstance, which is "If the group lacks harmony or the ability to cooperate, decision-making quality and speed suffer ... even groups comprising brilliant individuals will make bad decisions if the group disintegrates into bickering, interpersonal rivalry, or power plays."³⁴

Looking around the church in general, it is possible to find examples of congregations thriving under effective leadership teams. It is also apparent that there are sad examples of divided congregations, shrinking numbers and leaders at loggerheads.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. This required engagement with academic literature from the world of business studies, where there has been intense interest in leadership development. It will also be necessary to consider approaches taken to leadership in

³² Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 176.

³³ Cladis, 10.

³⁴ Goleman, 173-174.

theological/ecclesiastical literature. This strand of research yields many examples of attempts to develop effective leadership teams. There are also rich veins of information and illustration in the secular world of sport, politics, and the military.

A number of areas in academic literature are pertinent to developing leadership teams. These include systems theory, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence in leaders and organisations. In each of these areas, it is important to continually relate concepts and ideas about human behaviour to the scriptures which guide Christians in regard to the structure, relationships, power and purpose of the church.

Primary Research Questions

A major part of this dissertation has been taken up with original research, in which the researcher contacted a carefully selected group of church leaders and drew from them information and stories relevant to the task of developing effective leadership teams. To gain this data the following primary research questions were used:

1. What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?
2. What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations?
3. How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations?
4. Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?

Using these research questions, along with supplementary questions arising in response to information and opinion offered, brought out many incidents and approaches. These were then analysed and related to the themes coming out of the academic reading.

Significance of the Study

From the evidence of struggle in the ministry and decline in the denomination presented earlier, it is clear that the issue of leadership in the church is a significant problem. This has been recognised at the highest level of the PCI. In 2011, the *General Assembly Annual Reports* indicated, “The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is in decline and is facing a situation which is moving relentlessly toward crisis point. ... In the face of any crisis, effective leadership is absolutely imperative. Both the Bible and history teach this.”³⁵

The goal of this study was to show how the current literature on leadership and organizational development can correlate with scripture and be applied to congregational life. Additionally, the researcher sought to explore examples of best practice in church leadership development in the British Isles. The intended outcome was to provide information and examples for contemporary church leaders – in particular to show how the lone leader and the embattled leader can take steps toward developing effective leadership teams to take the church forward.

Definition of Terms

Congregation – The people of all ages who are considered members or adherents of the local church. In the PCI, full members have been officially admitted to communion following a profession of faith and a contribution to the finances of the congregation.

³⁵ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 2011), 195.

Effective leadership team – There have been many attempts to define the term “leadership team.” Patrick Lencioni gives the following definition: “a small group of people who are collectively responsible for achieving a common objective for their organization.”³⁶ For such a group to lead effectively, there will be many important features observable in the life of the team. Like the basic definition, these aspects have been expressed in many ways. In *The Advantage*, Lencioni brings clarity and simplicity to the fundamentals. He lists five behaviours that will be evident in a cohesive leadership team. These include trust between members, the ability to positively work through conflict, commitment to the cause (even when there is disagreement), accountability, and focus on results (achieving goals).³⁷ In contrast to this, it is not difficult to visualise an ineffective team – a collection of people who in name are working together, but in fact do not trust each other, are preoccupied with their own immediate problems or personal ambitions, who either explode or quietly clam up when there are differing opinions, who want to be left alone to do their own thing, and who are uninterested in the failures or achievements of the project. Sadly, these points can be illustrated from church life in many places.

In the context of the PCI, it is worth pointing out that in a situation that is less than ideal, an effective leadership team may not officially have the final authority in the congregation. This authority always lies with the Kirk session – the eldership. However, in cases where the Kirk session is not functioning properly, progress may have to be made pragmatically with an unofficial leadership team made up of various members. It may include a number of the ordained elders, and/or a selection of others who, because of

³⁶ Lencioni, 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 27-71.

their character, qualities, and personal influence, become de facto leaders. Such a group will be active in offering vision and leadership to members, seeking to engender unity, and supporting the general direction of ministry.

Minister – The person ordained and appointed to minister to or lead the congregation. In the PCI, this is the person at the top of the local congregation's leadership structure - the key leader. The term "minister" is used in this dissertation because it is the common term used in the PCI. In other denominations, the terms "pastor," "rector," "vicar," "priest," and "clergy" are commonly used.

Kirk Session/Elders – In the PCI, this is a group of men and women who have been elected by the congregation and ordained by the Presbytery to do the work of spiritual oversight of the congregation. This group is ordained to work along with the minister in the leadership of the congregation, and it is with this group that final governing authority in the local congregation lies. This is, of course, always subject to the higher authority of the Presbytery and the General Assembly. In larger congregations, the Kirk session can number up to fifty persons of widely diverging opinion, and therefore it can be difficult to unite and lead. In contrast, there are often cases in small congregations where the number of elders is small, and the elders are very old. The PCI does not currently operate any form of rotation of active ruling elders.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

“Rome groaned beneath an unremitting tyranny, which...was fatal to almost every virtue and every talent that arose in that unhappy period,” so wrote Edward Gibbon in his seminal work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, commenting on the lives of Emperors such as Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero.³⁸ Tyrants such as these had a view of leadership founded on power, fear, and command, and rarely in history have there been leaders so extreme. Yet until more recent times, leadership has been largely bound up with strong authority to make demands of people. Dean Williams, internationally recognised consultant, speaker, and educator on leadership and change, has written about leadership in the modern market place, saying, “The goal is to get the people to do what you want them to do. To show the way and get people to follow, this model suggests that leaders must craft a vision, motivate people through persuasive communication, be an example, and employ a system of punishments and incentives to sustain action.”³⁹

The emphasis is upon a leader, followers, and an imposed goal. There have been many terms used in recent decades to highlight leadership of this nature: directive, authoritative, autocratic. The term “scientific management” came to be widely used in the early years of the twentieth century. Henry Ford took the organization of production

³⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), 108.

³⁹ Dean Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 4.

lines, the breakdown of work to simple repetitive tasks, and a time and motion study to new levels of efficiency. Ford's main management consultant, F.W. Taylor, refined these methods and brought mass production to levels previously thought impossible.

Mass production had three significant outcomes in industry. The close and constant monitoring of work, management's distrust of workers, and worker's fear of management. As fear and distrust increased, workers' initiative, sense of responsibility, and satisfaction decreased. Work became impersonal and employees had little sense of ownership of the overall task. Professor of leadership and management at the Harvard Business School, Amy Edmondson writes, "Taylorism was ruthless. The individual's worth was measured by his or her contribution to the enterprise gains."⁴⁰ Dean Williams argues that this approach to leading an organization and managing people cannot function effectively in the complexity of modern organizations and communities that have emerged from the age of globalization. The method must no longer be "*leader-follower and goal* but the dynamic of *leadership-group and reality*."⁴¹

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. The leadership methods that have been briefly outlined above have also been experienced in church life throughout the centuries. Dick Keyes, director of L'Abri fellowship in Massachusetts, has explored cynicism in its many forms in modern culture. He recognizes that cynicism is directed toward the church for many reasons. The character of church leaders has at times led to a negative, alienated attitude in many toward the church. Keyes notes, "Complaints seem to focus on

⁴⁰ Amy C. Edmondson, *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 17.

⁴¹ Williams, 5.

arrogance, highhandedness and authoritarian leadership. I hear grievances about the minister as a CEO, who does not listen and who tolerates no criticism or alternate views. One might conclude that the church is a private club to uphold his ego and career.”⁴²

The research questions in this study focused on team-based leadership that can overcome these issues of alienation and negativity. They were intended to discover strategies or approaches that are used to create effective teams, the difficulties that are often encountered along the way, and to measure the impact that an effective team can have upon the wider group. The research also investigated reasons for the success of some strategies.

These questions pointed the researcher toward a consideration of how groups function – group dynamics and how individuals relate to one another while facing challenge and change. Interpersonal relationships are never simple in situations of change, uncertainty, and threat, but as leaders develop greater understanding of these relationships, they can avoid many pitfalls. Utilizing systems theory and understanding emotional intelligence helps leaders offer direction to organizations adapting to new circumstances and challenges. In view of the necessity for the church to adjust to the very real challenges to its existence in the 21st Century, three aspects of academic interest that are relevant to contemporary leadership will be investigated: systems theory, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence.

The researcher chose these three because of their very obvious application to the challenges of leadership in a church setting. While engaging with these areas of understanding and seeking to tease out applications, it is also essential to show how a

⁴² Dick Keyes, *Seeing through Cynicism: A Reconsideration of the Power of Suspicion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 207.

biblical understanding of leadership qualities and church fellowship relates to the analysis provided from these academic disciplines in the area of human behaviour. This will be done toward the end of the literature review.

Systems Theory and the Church

Donella Meadows in her book, *Thinking in Systems*, explains that the world is composed of many types of systems. She lists a range of familiar systems – a school, a city, a factory, a national economy, a human body, an animal, a tree, a forest, and the earth. She gives the following definition, “A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.”⁴³ In each of the systems listed above it is obvious that there are numerous interconnected elements organised to achieve various purposes. The same can also be said for a church.

To begin to understand how any system works, how it may be developed, and how it may be improved, it is vital to understand the individual elements, their interconnectedness, and the system’s function or purpose. In terms of human organizations, such as a church, systems analysis helps identify elements such as individual members and material components like buildings and finances. Often elements that seem insignificant and pass almost un-noticed are in fact critical factors in an organization’s development or decline.

Systems analysis can become very complex, but the systems method of thinking helps leaders evaluate the interconnections between elements and identify behaviour patterns that either help or hinder the organization’s overall purpose. Understanding the parts leads to a greater understanding of the whole. In particular, systems analysis

⁴³ Donella H. Meadows and Diana Wright, *Thinking in Systems* (London: Earthscan, 2009), 11.

stimulates open questions about what functions might be possible, and allows leaders to be “creative and courageous about system redesign.”⁴⁴

Sub-Systems

The individual elements referred to above interlink into groupings known as sub-systems. There are usually many sub-systems within an entire system or organization. These sub-systems take on a life of their own and can function with a large measure of independence while still contributing positively to the system’s overall purpose and life. Examples of these are different departments in a factory, such as materials procurement, production, stores, freight, research and development, strategic planning, sales, and directors. In a church, the sub-systems will range from youth, worship/music, pastoral care, eldership, mission, and usually many more. There will also be informal groupings such as a number of young families who happen to be friendly with one another, or a group of members who are particularly keen on certain styles of Church music or emphasis in preaching.

Sub-systems interlock with each other in a hierarchy, and leaders must maintain the correct level of control and freedom over each sub-system. Meadows and Wright explain,

To be a highly functional system, hierarchy must balance the welfare, freedoms, and responsibilities of the subsystems and total system – there must be enough central control to achieve coordination toward the large-system goal, and enough autonomy to keep all subsystems flourishing, functioning, and self-organizing.⁴⁵

Leaders must actively encourage sub-groups within the whole system to fulfil the tasks that only that particular group can achieve. This must be done for the purpose of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 85.

maintaining the overall vision and function of the system. When the sub-systems take on a life of their own and ignore overall function then the system will become dysfunctional.

Churches often face problems of this nature. The groupings listed above may be seeking resources from the overall budget that are difficult to find. There can be tensions as each group feels its work is worthy of greater support. Similarly, some of these groups may need help from a certain number of members. These members may be torn between which group or activity they are able to fully support. Tensions can rise and sub-systems can become protective of their own areas or projects to the detriment of others.

Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor have many years of pastoring, counselling, and leadership experience in a church context. They have co-authored *The Leaders Journey* in which they apply systems theory to church life. People in church are emotionally connected to one another in a living system. There is a “wired-togetherness”⁴⁶ where church members constantly interact with one another. Leaders must understand the rules governing these interactions. By doing so, many pitfalls can be avoided, as Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain,

Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership. The reason for this is simple: leadership always takes place in the context of a living system, and the system plays by a set of observable rules. If we are to lead in that context, we need to understand the rules.⁴⁷

The viewpoints, attitudes, and emotions of others always affect leaders. These deeply rooted outlooks and traditions develop slowly over time, become embedded, and are very influential to the fundamental nature of an organization. Leaders’ level of

⁴⁶ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 31.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30.

understanding about these traits and how leaders endorsed or questioned these traits will determine the general wellbeing and future direction of the system.

In 1914 when Ernest Shackleton was forming a crew of men to face many months of darkness in the frozen deserts of the Antarctic he searched for men who were not just adventurers, but more importantly those who would be loyal to each other. His approach to interviewing was unconventional. He often asked as much about their temper and whether they could sing, as about their experience of adventure. “How candidates answered was more important than the content of their replies. The Boss was listening for enthusiasm and for subtle indications of their ability to be part of a team.”⁴⁸ Morrell and Capparell summarize his approach to team building, “Hire those who share your vision. ... Surround yourself with cheerful, optimistic people. They will reward you with the loyalty and camaraderie vital for success.”⁴⁹ Shackleton was creating a system, a team of men, which would be tested to the limits of human endurance. Above everything else each member had to form healthy, unbreakable bonds, with each other.

The Big Picture

Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky, who serve on the faculty of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, have written extensively on leadership issues and have developed insights that apply very powerfully to the responsibilities and pressures of church leaders. All leaders have felt the pressure to conform to the way things have always been done (or how people think they have always been done). In explaining systems thinking, Heifetz and Linsky show how the mores of any social system can be so powerful as to render leaders like puppets on string. Only as

⁴⁸ Morrell and Capparell, 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

leaders understand this powerful equilibrium of the social system can they begin to change the system effectively. Heifetz and Linsky use the analogy of “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony”⁵⁰ to emphasize that gaining the widest possible perspective on an organization is vital to understanding what is happening within it. Leaders need to gain understanding of all group relationship nuances, all facets of past experiences, all the differences and tensions between people, and even all individual members’ hidden, unexpressed longings.

This is well illustrated by another example from the leadership of Ernest Shackleton. The *Endurance* had been sent ahead from London to Buenos Aires while Shackleton finalised his arrangements. By the time he arrived in Buenos Aires the crew had been by themselves for over three months. Shackleton did something that must have seemed strange at the time. Instead of settling in the ship immediately he stayed for several days in the nearby Palace Hotel. He was standing back and observing. In fact there were issues among the crew and also administrative red tape at the port that needed dealt with. These few days of assessing the problems on board paid dividends. Shackleton approached the highest authority in port and obtained all the necessary permissions. He then proceeded to sack four of his crew who he had observed were not suitable for the rigors of crew life on a polar expedition.⁵¹ All this was done before getting engrossed in the daily hubbub of preparing to leave for the South Pole.

⁵⁰ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 51.

⁵¹ Morrell and Capparell, 85.

Resilience

Just as a yacht can have a keel loaded with ballast, bringing stability and the capacity to self-right itself, so every human system has deeply embedded traditions and practices that keep the system constant. Donella Meadows identifies this as inbuilt resilience or the ability of self-organization. “The ability to self-organize is the strongest form of system resilience. A system that can evolve can survive almost any change, by changing itself.”⁵² An organization that can adjust, experiment and innovate has an innate resilience against problems and dangers. This resilience is a stabilizing factor.

It is important to note that there is a subtle, but important difference between creative resilience adapting to challenges, and stubborn resistance against challenges. The first will make positive change possible, the latter may in some circumstances be protective against genuine dangers, but in other circumstances can result in an organization being encrusted in tradition and losing its health, effectiveness and ability to adapt. A leader’s major task is to assess whether the resilience is protective against damaging influences, or whether it just blind, unthinking resistance, preventing development and progress toward a better future.

Leverage Points

When leaders seek to introduce change to the system, they need to understand that there are often leverage points where small changes can be made which bring significant results. This idea is commonplace in popular thinking, as Meadows and Wright say,

It’s embedded in legend: the silver bullet; the trimtab; the miracle cure; the secret passage; the magic password; the single hero who turns the tide of history ... We

⁵² Meadows and Wright, 159.

not only want to believe that there are leverage points, we want to know where they are and how to get our hands on them. Leverage points are points of power.⁵³

The problem is in finding these leverage points – they can range from how information is communicated and to whom, to introducing a new idea or paradigm to the organization. Each and every system (including church systems) will have its own sub-groups with differing responsibilities and staffed by a unique set of people. The leverage points will rarely be obvious, but a major task of leadership is to find, understand, and use them with the purpose of enabling the entire system (i.e. the organization) to achieve its purposes.

As an illustration, Meadows gives a number of examples of leverage points relevant to global trading. One in particular has a strong bearing upon any church. She proposes paradigms as very significant leverage points. She defines a paradigm as “The mind-set out of which the system – its goals, structures, rules, delays, parameters – arises.”⁵⁴ This deals with what people believe, how they think, and the rationale for how they act. To bring a paradigm change will rarely be simple, but paradigm shifts hold the possibility of significant and lasting change. She explains,

You keep pointing at the anomalies and failures in the old paradigm. You keep speaking and acting, loudly and with assurance, form the new one. You insert people with the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power. You don't waste time with reactionaries; rather you work with active change agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded⁵⁵

Meadows illustrates this from the experience of Vaclav Havel reflecting on the process of change that brought about the Czech Republic,

I had wanted to make history move ahead in the same way a child pulls on a plant to make it grow more quickly. I believe we must learn to wait as we learn to

⁵³ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 164.

create. We have to patiently sow the seeds, assiduously water the earth where they are sown and give the plants the time that is their own. One cannot fool a plant any more than one can fool history.⁵⁶

The most astute leaders will have learned patience and be able to build up those whose thinking and outlook is creative and progressive. Over time ideas take root, and also over time individual people influence others. Step by step change will come. There will be periods of slow and almost unseen change, and occasions of rapid transition.

Models

The process of developing leadership and making change will be laborious. Most often, it will proceed in small increments. Meadows points out that, in her own experience, paradigm change has come when a model of the system has been built that lifts minds out of the existing system to see an entire new system.⁵⁷ In terms of church life, this can be illustrated by pointing to many of the new non-denominational churches that have arisen in recent decades and the significantly different paradigm by which they function. These groups have challenged norms and in many cases enabled others to see new ways of facing challenges. They have often been used as a lever to introduce change in more traditional churches.

At the 1984 General Assembly of the PCI, a well researched report was presented on the development of what was then called “Special Fellowships.”⁵⁸ These new groupings had been developing in many locations around Ireland. Established churches were concerned and saw these special fellowships as taking away membership from them. The report sought to understand both the dangers and excesses these groups

⁵⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly. Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 1984), 241.

engaged in, but also to recognise why there was a felt need among many younger Presbyterians for something of greater spiritual reality. The General Assembly's annual report explains,

Might it not be that what is happening around and beyond the fringes of the Church today is summoning us to repent of that complacency which keeps us from being as open and obedient to God as we might have been? And could it be that God is rebuking our pride by doing something which does not quite fit in with our ideas of how things should be done?⁵⁹

In the following three decades, PCI received a succession of reports and initiatives responding to many of the lessons that could be drawn from the growth of these special fellowships or new churches. In September 1990, after a number of years of preparation, a special assembly was held in the University of Ulster, Coleraine. The declared purpose of this was to, "...impart a renewed vision to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, freeing us FOR more effective service, and FROM outdated and unbiblical traditions, and renewing our life, witness and worship to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing situation."⁶⁰

This special assembly opened up many questions and made possible fresh questioning and thinking about the mission of the church in the future. Since this time, the church has regularly thought and discussed how it must respond to a rapidly changing world. During the 350th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the PCI,⁶¹ a number of seminars were held on the issue of secularism. Also, the PCI receives many on-going reports from agencies such as the Strategy for Mission Committee, which between 1992

⁵⁹ Ibid., 249..

⁶⁰ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Report of the Coleraine Assembly Committee* (n.p.: PCI, 1991), 1.

⁶¹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p: PCI, 1992), 91.

and 1998 shaped much of the thinking about future developments.⁶² The PCI has continued to seek ways of responding to the changes and challenges faced in contemporary society.⁶³

These reports clearly show that the drivers for change have been both awareness of a problem (i.e. loss of members) and observing models that show a new way of doing things. These new paradigms challenge past assumptions. They also show that adaptation and change is possible and, when properly managed, desirable.

Five Disciplines

Peter Senge is founder and director of the Society for Organizational Learning and senior lecturer at MIT. He believes that the ability of individuals and groups to learn and adapt to new challenges is the most crucial factor in the survival and success of any organization. In *The Fifth Discipline*, he outlines five disciplines that are essential to produce “innovative learning organizations.” These include shared vision, mental models, team learning, personal mastery, and systems thinking. Senge names systems thinking as the most significant because it holds all the disciplines together. Systems thinking is, “the discipline that integrates the disciplines, ... By enhancing each of the other disciplines, it continually reminds us that the whole can exceed the sum of its parts.”⁶⁴ It is only when leaders begin to understand the system that they will be able to learn how to properly relate to each other and co-operate in moving forward effectively.

⁶² Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 1998), 252.

⁶³ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Structures Review Panel: Report to the General Assembly* (n.p.: PCI, 2014).

⁶⁴ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, rev. and updated ed. (London: Random House Business, 2006), 12.

Senge writes, “A learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it.”⁶⁵

To encourage continual discovery among the members of an organization, leaders must actively cultivate each of the disciplines. Each discipline that Senge identifies helps give impetus in building organizations that are learning and continually enhancing their ability to achieve their goals. When organizations consistently develop and use shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery while constantly evaluating everything through the lens of systems thinking, they set themselves apart from the more familiar authoritarian and controlling organizations.

Personal Mastery is all about developing a personal mind-set and outlook that is perceptive and visionary – focused on values of truth, creativity, patience, and open-mindedness. When an organization welcomes and desires individual development, questioning and inquiry, challenging the status quo, and creating new visions and positive progress, individuals grow in personal mastery.

Mental Models can be defined as deeply held internal assumptions of how the world works, images that limit people to familiar ways of thinking and acting. Often individuals may not even be fully aware of their mental models, but they do have a major affect upon how they act. Mental models are very important, but they need to be questioned and understood. People must carefully consider the reasoning that underlies their actions.

In the learning organization, there will be regular and open inquiry, helping each individual to express their views and explain why they hold them. When organizations encourage systems thinking, people will think more broadly, leading to “mental models

⁶⁵ Ibid.

that recognize longer-term patterns of change and the underlying structures producing those patterns.”⁶⁶ Meadows’ concept of paradigms is very similar to a mental model. Both Senge and Meadows recognise that the assumptions, beliefs, and practices of paradigms or mental models are hugely influential in any organization, shaping and sometimes limiting what that group of people can do.

Shared vision is defined by Senge as, “Pictures that people throughout an organization carry. They create a sense of commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities.”⁶⁷ An organization must genuinely share vision rather than impose it from on high. As many people as possible must be actively involved in creating the vision because they must own the vision and believe in it. Senge says, “Vision becomes a living force only when people truly believe they can shape their future.”⁶⁸ Again, there is a strong need for systems thinking, so that people come to see how the current reality and vision has been shaped, and how they can begin to work on the forces in the system which shaped that reality and can shape a future vision.

Team learning happens when a group of people unite in their purpose, and each offers their own abilities and insights to complement one another’s contributions. It is always difficult to create and maintain an effective team. When people come together and begin to critique progress and share ideas, defensiveness is inevitable. Problems are often seen as having been created by some action or inaction of a team member. Discussion of these issues can quickly degenerate, and some will quickly resort to a defensive routine to protect from threat or embarrassment. These defensive routines invariably prevent

⁶⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 215.

learning. The key leader must ensure that the team is a safe place where reflection, inquiry, and dialogue is natural and not condemnatory. When these qualities are part of team life, members are given respect, feel free to be wrong, and are more willing to learn and develop.

Senge, like Meadows, believes that systems theory helps leaders identify both opportunities for organizations to evolve, and also reasons why change is often hindered. It has already been noted that Meadows wrote about self-organization or resilience.⁶⁹ In other words, people become set in the ways and practices of the organization and cannot see another way of developing or changing. They tend to fit in with what they imagine is expected. Senge also describes this controlling aspect of an organization,

The nature of structure in human systems is subtle because we are part of the structure. This means we have the power to alter structures within which we are operating. However, more often than not, we do not perceive that power. In fact, we usually don't see the structures at play much at all. Rather, we just find ourselves feeling compelled to act in certain ways.⁷⁰

These tendencies are often protective against risky over-reactions, bringing stability. However, this stabilizing tendency can also hinder needed development, bringing stagnation. Either way it is important to recognise that “the system causes its own behavior.”⁷¹

The systems outlook constantly reminds leaders of the big picture. It demands that everything be questioned and understood in relation to the whole because “Structure produces behaviour, and changing underlying structures can produce different patterns of

⁶⁹ Meadows and Wright, 159.

⁷⁰ Senge, 44.

⁷¹ Ibid., 43.

behaviour.”⁷² Thus, structural explanations of why things happen in an organization are the most significant. These focus on finding and understanding underlying causes that bring about certain patterns of behavior. When leaders find the underlying causes, they open up possibilities of significant change.

Senge writes about the need to understand “dynamic complexity, not detail complexity.”⁷³ Rather than gaining a simple summary of a situation at one particular moment, processes of change must be traced. When examined, these processes will reveal numerous interrelationships and patterns of change. There are many important questions that will help tease out how a system works – What are the main elements in the system? What is the purpose of the organization? What elements make it less effective in fulfilling the purpose? What outside factors affect the organization? How well are the various parts or departments in the organization co-operating? What conflicting interests and personalities exist in the organization? What adjustments can be made to facilitate progress? As these questions are answered the structure and complexity of any system comes into focus. Many layers and relationships interlock, and the degree to which these co-operate and advance together in harmony will dictate the organization’s effectiveness.

Commonality or Coercion

The following quotations from the world of sport beautifully express the high ideals of effective teamwork and a healthy system,

What made the personalities of nine different men on bikes meld into a single agreeable entity? Reciprocity is the answer. Too many people (especially bosses) demand or try to foster teamwork without grasping its most crucial aspect: a team

⁷² Ibid., 53.

⁷³ Ibid., 72.

is just another version of a community. The same principles apply to any communal undertaking, whether you are talking about a community garden, a neighbourhood watch, or racing around France: if you want something, first you have to give it. You have to invest in it.⁷⁴

The leader of any team has a special role in setting an example through serving and has the possibility of discovering the strength and joy of community. The quotation above continues, “I don’t just do it so that they’ll do the same for me in the Tour de France. I also do it because it feels better than solitude, its more gratifying than riding purely alone.”⁷⁵

These words are memorable quotations that express a great deal of truth, but they also powerfully illustrate the difficulty of genuinely managing a healthy system and creating an effective and enduring team. Against all claims of outstanding team harmony and concord, the author of these words—Lance Armstrong—has now been shown to be a cheat and manipulative bully.

Seven times winner of the world’s hardest bike race, cancer survivor, inspiration and superhero to millions, Armstrong had for years strongly denied and effectively defended himself against almost constant accusations of doping. Eventually years of intense investigation burst the bubble, and the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) found Armstrong guilty of cheating throughout all of his years as a tour winner. The investigation demonstrated that Armstrong’s achievements along with his team, “were accomplished through a massive team doping scheme, more extensive than

⁷⁴ Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2004), 166.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

any previously revealed in professional sports history.”⁷⁶ It is now an accepted fact that Armstrong’s personal ambition and use of pressure, fear, and coercion drove the teams that he led. As the secrets began to come out, many former teammates went public to reveal just how difficult it was to handle the team’s stress and deception.

Tyler Hamilton, a top rated cyclist and former Armstrong team member, wrote about life under Armstrong’s leadership. He said, “Lance had always been secretive about his methods; even back when Kevin and I were in the inner circle, there was always the sense that there was one more circle we weren’t seeing.”⁷⁷ Hamilton’s entire book is an exposé of the cheating and intense pressure exerted upon team members to collude. Over time, this proved to be damaging professionally and personally to many of those team members. Hamilton wrote, “Secrets are poison. They suck the life out of you, they steal your ability to live in the present, they build walls between you and the people you love.”⁷⁸

What has emerged from this period in cycling is a picture of widespread and highly sophisticated doping within the entire system of professional cycling. Because doping had become almost the norm, if a cyclist wanted to compete for prizes at all, he had to cheat. Another Armstrong teammate confessed his struggle, “Early in my professional career, it became clear to me that, given the widespread use of performance enhancing drugs, by cyclists at the top of the profession, it was not possible to compete at

⁷⁶ U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, *Report on Proceedings under the World Anti-Doping Code and the USADA Protocol. USADA V L. Armstrong* (Colorado Springs, CO: USADA, October 10, 2012), 5.

⁷⁷ Tyler Hamilton and Daniel Coyle, *The Secret Race: Inside the Hidden World of the Tour de France: Doping, Cover-Ups, and Winning at All Costs* (New York: Bantam, 2013), 225.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 330.

the highest level without them. I deeply regret that choice and sincerely apologize to my family, teammates and fans.”⁷⁹

Overall, the governing body turned a blind eye to this issue. This created additional internal and external pressures. It appears that Armstrong and his coaches and doctors were simply the best in every aspect of the sport and the additional aspect of deception. Armstrong held his team together, and they were very effective at winning races. However, his main levers seem to have been force of personality, coercion, fear, and ostracism. This leverage worked for a few years (time frames in sport are short anyway). Armstrong’s cycling team is an example of a system with many sub groups: administrators, cycling teams, staff members, medics, and riders. The subgroups lived in an unsustainable tension. The countless divisive issues could not be buried forever.

The following words from Peter Senge echo much of what Lance Armstrong wrote about team life, “There is commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another’s efforts. Individuals do not sacrifice their personal interests to the larger team vision; rather the shared vision becomes an extension of their personal visions.”⁸⁰ Members of a good team will align with each other – but it must be genuine rather than forced, contrived, or imagined. This alignment takes time, hard work, honest communication, and trust. For a church leader to create an effective team, he or she must understand systems and the myriad complexities that they contain.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 362.

⁸⁰ Senge, 217.

Adaptive Leadership

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela describes his thinking as he wrestled with the challenges and changes faced by the opposing sides in the closing years of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Toward the end of his twenty-seven years in prison, it had become apparent to him that a significant change in approach was needed to effectively bring about freedom for everyone while avoiding disaster,

We had been engaged in the armed struggle for more than two decades. Many people on both sides had already died. The enemy was strong and resolute. Yet even with all their bombers and tanks, they must have sensed that they were on the wrong side of history. We had right on our side, but not yet might. It was clear to me that a military victory was a distant if not impossible dream. It simply did not make sense for both sides to lose thousands if not millions of lives in a conflict that was unnecessary. They must have known this as well. It was time to talk.⁸¹

Mandela had the perception to realise that both sides in this conflict were ready for change. The reforms, on both sides, needed to be far-reaching and radical. There was no other figure alive who would have been capable of leading this nation to such adaptive change. Mandela pioneered a path for adaptive leadership that modern leaders must learn from and follow as they lead in a rapidly changing, globalised world.

A Changing World

In the past, many organizations continued their activities for long years at a reasonable level of success and internal contentedness. However, in a rapidly changing modern world, this is now almost impossible. Every aspect of human interaction, morals, and belief are now the subject of vigorous critique pressure for change. The impact of globalisation, technological advance, and post modernity means that the status quo no longer holds sway. Any organisation that refuses to subject itself to questioning and

⁸¹ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography* (London: Abacus, 1996), 626.

development will either become unable to communicate with the wider world and therefore irrelevant, or unable to reproduce itself and therefore extinct.

Adaptive leadership is about helping an organisation navigate through a period of discomfort or disequilibrium, to reach a place of greater stability and effectiveness or equilibrium. There have been periods in history when leadership faced much simpler challenges: slow or unnecessary change with an obvious next step. Today, this is not the case. Heifetz and Linsky state, “Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions.”⁸²

Technical or Adaptive Problems

Decisions which are relatively simple and do not require thinking that is radically innovative are defined as technical problems. Adaptive problems are more significant and difficult. Cambridge Leadership Associates, which developed from the work of Heifetz and Linsky, expresses the differences between the two as follows:

Technical problems can be solved by an authority or expert. They have a known solution. Adaptive Challenges are quite different. They have no known solution – the skills and answers are outside your repertoire. Adaptive Challenges are those you have to grow into solving and require mobilizing people’s hearts and minds to operate differently.⁸³

Managers are the specialists in finding solutions to technical problems. They depend upon already existing knowledge and skills, and apply them to the problem. These old skills may have to be used in new ways, but essentially solving technical challenges brings nothing new to the table. When one encounters a problem (or

⁸² Heifetz and Linsky, 13.

⁸³ Cambridge Leadership Associates, “Adaptive Leadership,” accessed September 1, 2014, http://www.cambridge-leadership.com/index.php/adaptive_leadership/.

opportunity) of a different order where existing skill, knowledge, or technology is ineffective, then leaders must seek greater change and new solutions. Adaptive leadership, "...helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is being able, both individually and collectively, to take on the gradual but meaningful process of adaptation. It is about diagnosing the essential from the expendable and bringing about a real challenge to the status quo."⁸⁴

Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, consultants in the field of missional leadership and authors of, *The Missional Leader*, discuss very similar themes and relate them to the church in the twenty-first century. They have developed a model of missional leadership that accounts for the changes and challenges that have been previously discussed. They recognise,

Through much of the twentieth century, congregations thrived in a relatively stable and predictable context where churchgoing was the accepted norm. Denominations did well as a source of identity for people. Throughout the century denominations invested heavily in producing leaders with a highly developed capacity to perform the requirements and expectations of a church in this stable, predictable environment. The result is multiple generations of leaders with little experience or knowledge of how to lead when the context tips out of stability into discontinuous change.⁸⁵

In fact for many centuries, the church faced predominantly technical problems as it sought to maintain its witness in societies that were stable and largely sympathetic to a general Christian outlook. In stark contrast, the church today exists in a world that is subject to globalization, instant communication, financial opportunity/hazard, and moral/spiritual subjectivism. These rapid and radical changes present the church with huge challenges. This necessitates adaptive change, "experiments, new discoveries, and

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 40.

adjustments from numerous places in the organization.”⁸⁶ One of the greatest challenges for church leaders today is to be able to see this. For too long many have struggled to apply technical solutions to adaptive problems and the results have been frustration, exhaustion, and the slide into irrelevance.

The Cycle of Decline and Development

Roxburgh and Romanuk have developed a model of missional leadership that helps in understanding how the church must adapt to modern life. They present a framework to, “Assist leaders in understanding the adaptive shifts in leadership style required amid such change.”⁸⁷ In addition, the model helps congregations identify their stage of change and then understand what is required to adapt and to progress.

The model is composed of three major zones of church life, and each zone has two parts—upper and lower. Roxburgh and Romanuk assert that every church will in time cycle through each section of the model. This cycling is a healthy process as the world the church inhabits is constantly changing. To remain relevant the church must adapt. The three main zones are performative, reactive, and emergent. Colours have been suggested for each zone to symbolise aspects of the churches condition in these periods. The colour blue is used in the performative zone as it suggests strong predictable performance of certain essential activities in the life of the church. Red is used for the reactive zone indicating crisis or threat to the well being of the church. Green is used in the emergent zone symbolizing health and new growth.

⁸⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, 13.

⁸⁷ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 40.

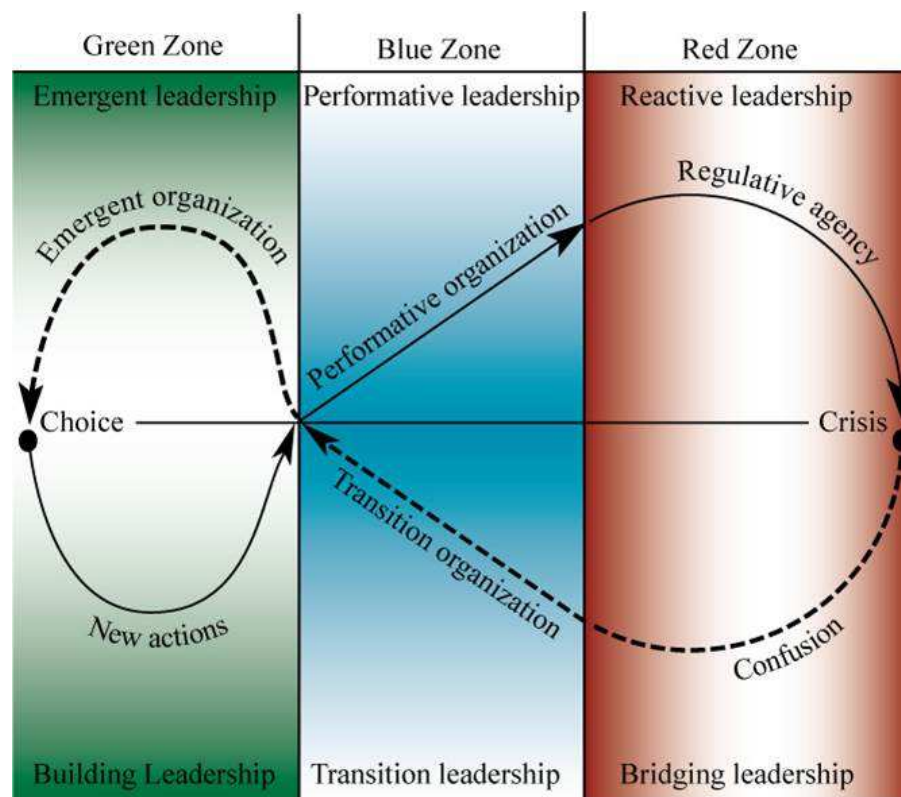


Fig 1. Three Zone Model of Missional Leadership.⁸⁸

The performative upper zone describes where many churches were about fifty years ago. Such a congregation had “the organizational structures, skills, and capacities required to perform well in a stable environment such as the middle decades of the twentieth century.”⁸⁹ Churches in the performative zone focus upon utilizing already existing skills and capacities to maximise growth. The goal for the performative zone is to pass on well-established knowledge and practice to new leaders and workers. The performative zone is about effectively performing well-defined and accepted practices in a stable environment where society and success is predictable. Churches in the lower sector of the performance zone are coming out of a period of crisis and need the stability

⁸⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁹ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 45.

that can come from the consistent performance of activities such as well organised worship, Bible teaching and pastoral care. The crucial need in this sector is to find stability and regain confidence after a period of crisis.

The reactive zone is a period in church life when, after a time of stability, discontinuous change has become prominent. The church is struggling to maintain itself, and it is coming to crisis. The old methods that functioned well in the past are no longer effective, and among the members, there is a mixture of hankering after the past, confusion, and perhaps anger at the leadership's seeming inability to maintain the life and health of the congregation. Roxburgh and Romanuk describe the typical leader seeking to navigate through this difficult reactive zone,

Leaders work harder, for longer hours, and with fewer resources at what they have been doing all along. They find they must address ever more crises with little time to imagine alternatives. But the answer is not trying harder and working longer. ... Productivity declines, creativity disappears, and stress grows. As the congregation or denomination moves deeper into crisis, leaders face demands to put out fires, manage dysfunction, and furnish solutions. These demands leave them with neither time nor energy to do the job.⁹⁰

Church in the reactive zone will inevitably face crisis. The leader must help people see that “performative strategies, values and approaches will never work. Decisions must be made and actions taken that no longer fit an established paradigm.”⁹¹ The adaptive leader must seek to bring together all shades of opinion in the church “into a place of dialogue and engagement amid crisis.”⁹² Predictably in the uncertainty, there will be both radical and traditional voices, and this spectrum presents considerable challenge for the adaptive leader. Roxburgh and Romanuk observe, “It is in the tension of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 49.

⁹¹ Ibid., 54.

⁹² Ibid., 55.

managing the polarity that the potential for creativity and new life can begin to emerge from among people themselves. But this is not an inevitable or evolutionary process; the congregation and its leaders must consciously choose this direction.”⁹³

As leaders and members come together in honest dialogue, with commitment to one another, and for the fellowship of the church, they will begin to move out of crisis and into the lower section of the performative zone. To achieve this, leaders must help everyone to identify and agree on the key elements of the congregation’s life that must be maintained and strengthened. Some examples of these key elements are worship, preaching, fellowship, prayer, and community involvement. These must be done with excellence and form a bedrock of stability so that people become confident to be creative and take risks. Roxburgh and Romanuk write about members making transition;⁹⁴ they begin to make changes of mind and attitude in response to the situation they find themselves in. Careful adaptive leadership makes this transition possible.

The emergent zone in the missional leadership model begins to apply when a congregation becomes confident enough to innovate and take risks. This zone is, “characterized by creativity, energy, and the birthing of new forms of mission and ministry as it enters, listens to, and engages with the community in which its people are located.”⁹⁵ Building upon the stability and trust that has developed during the transition from crisis and confusion, the leader will draw the church into a period of experimentation. Initially there will be much discussion, many variant ideas, periods of activity, failures, and reviews. Eventually, a more clear and stable approach will develop

⁹³ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

as the most effective new behaviours and arrangements become established. It is necessary to provide the emerging organization with some stability. Only over time does a clear structure and plan develop. Emergent zone leaders—adaptive leaders—focus on the abilities to,

...manage ambiguity and don't need the quick closure of a solution or a large plan. ... create an environment where failure is permitted because they know it will happen often. It's more important to create a culture that values and permits risk. ... keeps the congregation free of hierarchy and top down or expert authority. ... sees challenge not as a crisis or exception to be managed but as opportunity to be embraced. ... learn to cultivate engagement and experiments that release the missional imagination of the people.⁹⁶

Roxburgh and Romanuk have succinctly summarised and applied much of the thinking regarding adaptive leadership outlined in the literature referred to above. The model they have developed has application in many church situations, and leaders facing the challenges of finding ways forward for their congregations will find consideration of the six stages of development a very useful tool in understanding both where the church is and how it can move forward.

Five Stages of Change

Once an understanding of what stage of development a congregation has reached, Roxburgh and Romanuk offer a model of missional change⁹⁷ which helps leaders understand the path of change and how it is never straightforward. They illustrate this model by drawing a comparison with sailing where the direction of a boat changes regularly as it navigates a course into the wind. The context of change in the church is the upper emergent zone of the missional leadership model, where the most significant adaptations and advances are made. Change rarely takes place in a straight line and each

⁹⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 83.

of the five stages they outline will take varying periods of time depending upon the circumstances in each congregation.

The first stage of change is awareness of the issues and problems that challenge the church. The second stage is an understanding of the roots where these issues came from and how different people react to them. The third stage of change is an evaluation of how the church is currently working, and how it can begin exploring other possible activities to address the adaptive challenges that lie ahead. The fourth stage is experimentation: beginning to try new approaches to church life. This is not just changing or revamping activities, but working with entirely new methods. It is about testing and discovering what is most effective in breathing life back into the local church. The fifth stage of change is commitment; mistakes will be made and discounted, while successes will be recognised and adopted. Very soon more people will begin to gain confidence that there is a way forward. A new way of being church will emerge.⁹⁸

Roxburgh and Romanuk sum up the impact of working with this model of missional change,

As the initial experiments bear fruit, others in the congregation begin to see that it is possible to imagine and practice new habits and actions without destroying what they know and love. This encourages increasing confidence in the change process and starts to change the culture of the congregation, gently shifting it from a reactive or performance zone toward an emergent zone culture. The process takes time, but it embeds new habits and values in the congregation from the bottom up rather than the top down.⁹⁹

Having outlined this process in detail, it is important to reiterate the vital distinction between technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges simply require leaders with authority to instruct people to apply the methods they have always

⁹⁸ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 81-105.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 101.

been using more effectively and vigorously. The models of missional leadership and change recognise that something more profound is needed – new thinking and approaches that may be very different from previous strategies. This will rarely be easily seen or achieved. Heifetz and Linsky identify, “the single most common source of leadership failure ... is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.”¹⁰⁰

Leading people to understand the degree of change necessary for growth is a complicated challenge. As Heifetz and Linsky say, “In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy. You have to counteract their exaggerated dependency and promote their resourcefulness.”¹⁰¹ Heifetz and Linsky candidly explain the difficulty and challenge of this leadership approach, “Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, to experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures.”¹⁰²

Illustrating their point, they detail Linsky’s involvement in the early stages of the Northern Ireland peace process. On one occasion, Linsky was involved in lengthy discussion with a number of the opposing political parties. At a tense meeting when some of the protagonists began speaking to each other for the first time, it became clear that each side, while wanting to move forward, was very aware of its own emotional and political baggage. They each shared the same type of problem, “They understood that the

¹⁰⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰² Ibid., 30.

way to peace meant giving something up, but each of their factions wanted to be represented by someone who promised not to yield anything.”¹⁰³

In this—and many similar situations—the chief negotiators are out ahead doing difficult work engaging with the problem/enemy, gaining new insights, and being challenged more deeply than ever before. The rank and file do not have the same experience and become suspicious of any change or compromise – they do not see the need to change. They only want others to change so they can retain or increase their advantage.

Teaming

Amy Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School, acknowledges these challenges in any organization. In her book *Teaming*, she brings together insights from systems theory and adaptive leadership approaches to show how leaders today must bring together many individuals to learn, develop, co-operate, and make progress.

Many organizations today are complex adaptive systems – groups that are dynamic, adaptable, diverse, self regulating, and often unpredictable. She uses the term teaming to describe “a way of working that brings people together to generate new ideas, find answers, and solve problems.”¹⁰⁴ Group members must be dependent upon each other, developing interpersonal skills to help deal with disagreements and tensions, and keep on wrestling with problems and ideas until they find resolutions.

The challenge for adaptive leadership is very great. Edmondson states, “Today, people engaging in teaming at work need to be responsible, accountable individuals who

¹⁰³ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁴ Edmondson, 24.

respect each other, understand the inevitability of conflict, and accept the responsibility to sort through such difficulties.”¹⁰⁵ Leaders must hold these groups together, encourage the freedom to experiment, stimulate questioning and critical analysis, protect and value the individual, and reassure that learning comes from both success and failure. Trust and respect among team members is vital to team interdependence, wellbeing and learning. Edmondson says, “Unless people are aware of their interdependence with others for accomplishing whole jobs, teaming cannot get underway.”¹⁰⁶

Four Teaming Behaviours

Roxburgh and Romanuk’s model of missional change has parallels with Edmondson’s list of four behaviours which drive teaming success. She asserts that there are four specific behaviours that drive success in teaming: speaking up, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection.¹⁰⁷ Edmondson outlines the value of each of these behaviours showing how they contribute to healthy teams that make progress in the challenges they encounter.

Speaking up is foundational to all progress. There must be open and honest communication between all team members to draw in all the skills, insights and experiences of individuals. Edmondson explains, “Speaking up is particularly crucial when confronting problems or failures of any kind. When people are willing to engage with each other directly and openly, they are better able to make sense of the larger shared work and more likely to generate ideas for improving work processes.”¹⁰⁸ This

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 53.

behaviour is not one that comes easily. In reality most team members are slow to speak out because there is the fear of looking foolish or appearing unnecessarily confrontational. The leader is responsible to nurture a spirit of freedom and safety in the group to allow each to share their views and ask critical questions in an atmosphere of respect and unity.

Collaboration is fundamental to any team as there must be mutual respect and shared goals. Each individual must co-operate as the team works, discusses, and searches for better ways of moving forward. In larger organizations, this applies not just between individuals but also between departments.

Experimentation is all about constantly finding ways of improving. There will be constant trial and error. There will be a willingness to make mistakes and move on. When this behaviour is present in a team, it will open up all kinds of insights and possibilities for improvement.

Reflection “is the habit of critically examining the results of actions.”¹⁰⁹ There will be the speaking up and openness to learn and improve. This can happen both in more organised plenary sessions, but also as work is on-going. In many activities there is instant feedback and immediate learning is possible.

Edmondson emphasizes execution as learning as a key concept; that is creating “a way of operating that is deliberately and consciously iterative, where action and reflection go hand in hand.”¹¹⁰ For this to happen each of the three previous behaviours must be freely happening; “people work together to diagnose and identify problems, to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 222.

brainstorm possible fixes, and to experiment with solutions.”¹¹¹ Leaders in learning organizations set directions but then encourage everyone to be actively engaged as thinkers, learners, and contributors to the process. Edmondson states, “These four behaviours are pillars of effective teaming ... leaders who themselves embrace these behaviours make it easier for others to act in ways that support teaming.”¹¹²

Approaching Conflict

Inevitably, all teams have tensions and conflicts. Often a leader’s first instinct is to find a way to minimise the conflict as it is assumed this will have a negative impact upon the team. Roxburgh and Romanuk write about this issue in the context of church life. “We have trained pastors to minimise conflict. Culture and families teach us to avoid it, neutralize it, give in to make it go away. We learn to dread conflict and demonize others with whom we differ, rather than accept and deal with the conflict.”¹¹³

However, conflict is not so simple, Ignoring or minimising issues does not solve them, and rushing to confrontation only exacerbates the division. The most difficult response is to actively pursue a resolution. This course of action demands the highest qualities and skills of a leader, but it also holds the prospect of finding new and better ways of developing the organization and moving forward. Edmondson writes,

Management researchers who study conflict in teams have concluded that conflict is productive, as long as teams stay away from the personal and emotional aspects of conflict. Task conflict – a difference of opinion about the product design – is useful. Relational conflict – personal friction or emotionality – is counterproductive and should be avoided.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid., 224.

¹¹² Ibid., 56.

¹¹³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 135.

¹¹⁴ Edmondson, 70.

This is a clear distinction between two types of conflict, but in reality it is very easy for task conflict to spill over into relational conflict unless great care is taken to ensure that team members practice the four behaviours for healthy teaming. Leaders can defuse difficult situations through helping people understand the type of conflict they are facing, keeping communication open especially on difficult issues, and constantly reminding people of their shared goals.

Heifetz and Linsky write about creating a holding environment where tension's heat can be controlled as difficult issues are addressed. They explain,

A holding environment is a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart. Creating a holding environment enables you to direct creative energy toward working the conflicts and containing passions that could easily boil over.¹¹⁵

Patrick Lencioni, management consultant and business author, has written extensively on organizational health. He asserts that it is the greatest advantage that any company can achieve.

The kind of trust that is necessary to build a great team is what I call *vulnerability-based trust*. That is what happens when members get to a point where they are completely comfortable being transparent, honest and naked with one another ... When everyone on a team knows that everyone else is vulnerable ... and that no one is going to hide his or her weaknesses or mistakes, they develop a deep and uncommon sense of trust. They speak more freely and fearlessly with one another and don't waste time and energy putting on airs or pretending to be someone there're not. Over time this creates a bond that exceeds what many people ever experience in their lives.¹¹⁶

When team members are more interested in understanding and supporting one another rather than blaming others then the group becomes a healthy organization where all the other skills and abilities of individuals will be harnessed and applied to advance

¹¹⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, 102.

¹¹⁶ Lencioni, 27.

the activities and goals of the organization. This will result in the organization moving forward and achieving its goals.

Framing

Linked with the issues of organizational health and conflict is the challenge of framing. All team members have frameworks of understanding about how their team functions. These frameworks are usually subconscious presuppositions that may have developed over time. Edmondson uses the term framing¹¹⁷ to describe the task of a leader who is working to help team members think about, develop, and advance their work.

A significant challenge for the leader is to deal with self-protective frames that team members have developed as a defence mechanism when someone questions or criticises another team member. If someone is seeking to offer adaptive leadership in an organization, they will inevitably be involved with helping team members reframe or develop new ways of thinking about the work. The assumption behind this is that, “it is difficult to change behavior to obtain different results without changing the underlying cognitions that give rise to and support the desired behaviors.”¹¹⁸ Put more simply, “How we think shapes our behavior.”¹¹⁹

Edmondson explains, “Project leaders need to foster a shared understanding of the goal, the purpose, and desired behaviors.”¹²⁰ They must consistently strive to help everyone understand their personal role and importance to the overall goal of the group.

¹¹⁷ Edmondson, 83.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

How everyone thinks about the work and how all are prepared to co-operate are the essential factors leading to improvement and success. Everyone in the team is important.

Relational Leadership

Strong personal relationships lie at the heart of any successful adaptive change in an organization. Perhaps above all else, the adaptive leader skilfully nurtures and protects these relationships when many tensions mitigate against the openness and positive attitudes that are foundational for unity and change. Heifetz and Linsky see this as thinking politically. They explain,

Partners provide protection, and they create alliances for you with factions other than your own. They strengthen both you and your initiatives. With partners you are not simply relying on the logical power of your arguments and evidence, you are building political power as well. Furthermore, the content of your ideas will improve if you take into account the validity of other viewpoints – especially if you can incorporate the views of those who differ markedly from you. This is especially critical when you are advancing a difficult issue or confronting a conflict of values.¹²¹

It is vital to develop partners. In addition Heifetz and Linsky stress other key strategies: keep the opposition close, accept responsibility for your part in the problem rather than shifting blame everywhere else, acknowledge the pain that others feel in the loss that change brings, model sacrificial behaviour rather than demand it of everyone else, and accept that there will always be casualties among those who simply will not or cannot change.¹²² They say,

The lone warrior myth of leadership is a sure route to heroic suicide. ... You need partners. Nobody is smart enough or fast enough to engage alone the political complexity of an organization or community when it is facing and reacting to adaptive pressures. Relating to people is central to leading and staying alive.¹²³

¹²¹ Heifetz and Linsky, 78.

¹²² Ibid., 85-100.

¹²³ Ibid., 100.

At the 1995 Rugby World Cup final held in South Africa, Nelson Mandela engaged in some of the boldest public symbolism and adaptive leadership the world has seen. Just one year into his presidency, he crossed boundaries and adopted symbols that spoke more powerfully than any words. At the time of Mandela's death, Mick Cleary, rugby correspondent for *The Telegraph*, reflected,

He was acutely aware of the significance of the tournament. This was a chance to bridge the cultures, to extend hands across the great divide. He was vilified by his own for even thinking of doing so. Yet from the moment he acceded to the Presidency in 1994, he made it an imperative to show that he was prepared to turn his back on old prejudices, that if South Africa were not to descend into civil war, reconciliation, not confrontation, had to be top of the agenda.¹²⁴

Having worked tirelessly with his own people and his former enemies and having gained their trust and respect, Mandela walked onto the pitch at the final game wearing the Springbok rugby jersey. At that time, Springbok's rugby jersey represented both the badge of honour of white South Africa and was one of the symbols most hated by black South Africans. His joy, his confidence, his humility, his sacrifice impacted an entire nation teetering on the brink of catastrophe. He won a nation over. His life experiences of prejudice and conflict, combined with his generous spirit had made him ready and able for the tasks of leading his divided nation away from the catastrophe of a race war and into democracy and peacemaking. He saved his nation in its time of greatest danger. He powerfully modeled so much that is essential in adaptive leadership. In the *Telegraph*

¹²⁴ Mick Cleary, "Nelson Mandela Seized the Opportunity of the Rugby World Cup 1995," *Telegraph*, December 6, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/10140763/Nelson-Mandela-seized-the-opportunity-of-the-Rugby-World-Cup-1995.html>.

obituary following Mandela's death, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was quoted, saying, "If this man wasn't there, the whole country would have gone up in flames."¹²⁵

Adaptive leaders search for innovative, new solutions as their organizations encounter challenges and difficulties that arise out of changing circumstances in society. More often than not, the only effective solution is to find completely new arrangements and methods rather than working harder at what was done in the past. Bringing adaptive change is often a process, and it is always demanding and stretching. Key to making successful adaptations are the issues of open communication and positive relationship referred to above and illustrated by examples from the life of Nelson Mandela. If these are ever to be achieved, leaders must develop and use their emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, observed, "Leaders without emotional intelligence cannot lead effectively because they cannot connect with the people they are trying to lead."¹²⁶ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee have researched and written extensively on the role of emotional intelligence in leadership. The opening pages of their book, *Primal Leadership*, outline the importance of "the emotional impact of what a leader says and does."¹²⁷ They assert that this aspect of leadership is of first importance in all groups and organizations across history and culture, saying, "Throughout history and in cultures everywhere, the leader

¹²⁵ "Nelson Mandela Obituary Part One: One of the Most Inspiring Figures of the 20th Century - Telegraph," December 5, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/8286419/Nelson-Mandela-obituary-part-one-one-of-the-most-inspiring-figures-of-the-20th-century.html>.

¹²⁶ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 31.

¹²⁷ Goleman, 4.

in any human group has been the one to whom others look for assurance and clarity when facing uncertainty or threat, or when there's a job to be done. The leader acts as the group's emotional guide.”¹²⁸

Definition

Emotional intelligence is about the qualities of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill. Tim Sparrow, founder of the Centre for Applied Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Amanda Knight, Director for the Centre, have defined EI in the following way, “Emotional intelligence integrates feeling, thinking and doing. It is the habitual practice of thinking about feeling and feeling about thinking when choosing what to do”¹²⁹ They give a more specific working definition stating that there are three habitual practices bound up with EI. These are: “using emotional information from ourselves and other people; integrating this with our thinking; using these to inform our decision making to help us get what we want from the immediate situation and from life in general.”¹³⁰

In practice, this means that the emotionally intelligent person will notice feelings –both personal and those of others, pay attention to them, think about their importance, and take them into account in decision making. The emphasis is on the multifaceted nature of EI. Sparrow and Knight use the term emotional intelligence as shorthand for, “All those related, but separate variables which together characterise the behaviour of

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁹ Tim Sparrow and Amanda Knight, *Applied EI: The Importance of Attitudes in Developing Emotional Intelligence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 29.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 32.

those people who integrate their feeling and their thinking when choosing what to do, and therefore excel at self management and relationship management.”¹³¹

Emotional Intelligence in Organizations

When the members of a group interact with each other with emotional intelligence, an environment is created which leads to organisational health and effectiveness.

Goleman further explains the importance of EI in any organization:

In any resonant human group, people find meaning in their connection and in their attunement with one another. In the best organizations, people share a vision of who they are collectively, and they share a special chemistry. They have the feeling of a good fit, of understanding and being understood, and a sense of well-being in the presence of the others.¹³²

This is a description of an emotionally intelligent organization. Emotional intelligence is about how individuals understand themselves and each other and how best to communicate and cooperate. Emotional intelligence is about healthy relationships.

The Significance of the Emotionally Intelligent Leader

Emotional intelligence is needed throughout entire organizations. However, it almost always begins with the leader and multiplies from there. A leader will interact with individual members of the wider organization either with resonance or dissonance. Resonance is when two or more people are on the same emotional wavelength. Resonant leadership happens when the leaders “passion and enthusiastic energy resounds throughout the group.”¹³³ When a group has such a leader, “people feel a mutual comfort level. They share ideas, learn from one another, make decisions collaboratively, and get

¹³¹ Ibid., 33.

¹³² Goleman, 218.

¹³³ Ibid., 20.

things done. They form an emotional bond that helps them stay focused even amid profound change and uncertainty.”¹³⁴

In strong contrast, dissonance in a leader rapidly creates tension and disharmony, “Dissonant leadership produces groups that feel emotionally discordant, in which people have a sense of being continually off-key. Just as laughter offers a ready barometer of resonance at work, so rampant anger, fear, apathy, or even sullen silence signals the opposite.”¹³⁵ Many problems arise when leaders and organizations have low emotional intelligence. In these circumstances, discord and ineffectiveness begin to mushroom. However, every challenging situation can be managed. Herrington uses the illustration of a reservoir to explain how the anxieties and tensions in every system or organisation can be kept in control by emotional intelligence. Emotional maturity is like the wall of a reservoir. Tension or anxiety is like the water behind the wall. Herrington explains, “The larger the reservoir (that is the greater the degree of emotional maturity), the more anxiety it can contain without spilling over and producing a problem for the system.”¹³⁶ Emotional maturity is protective of organisations, enabling tensions to be managed in creative ways so that positive relationships are maintained and the goals of the organisation forwarded.

Emotional intelligence can be applied to numerous issues that churches are facing. Peter Steinke shows how the insights of systems theory and EI help churches understand problems in organizations. He explains,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 33.

When anxiety is high, resilience is low. Behaviours are extreme and rigid; thoughts are unclear and disjointed. Anxious people speak harsh words or cut themselves off from others through silence. To manage their threatening situation, people hurry to localize their anxiety. They blame and criticize. ... A system that maintains its stability by reactivity alone will not be stable in the long run. Continuous reactivity creates three processes that prevent the system from being resourceful and flexible – a shrinking of perspective, a tightening of the circle, and a shifting of the burden. Consequently it is not apt to repair itself, plan for the future, and find a new direction.¹³⁷

Sadly there are countless examples of churches that seem to have been overwhelmed by anxiety and division arising from the challenges of living in modern, secular society. This problem is compounded when there is traditionalism and unwillingness to explore new perspectives. If there are low emotional intelligences and sinful attitudes among leaders and individuals in the fellowship, then stagnation will likely mark the congregation. In many cases, churches react by battenning down the hatches, cling on desperately and becoming bitter against both the outside world or any other church which seems to be growing and moving forward positively.

Thankfully there are many practical steps to be taken to develop a greater emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) in any organization. Emotional Intelligence is “highly influential of our personal and organizational outcomes, and is something we can do something about.”¹³⁸ People can change and develop if they are given help and vision of what is possible. It is often the case that before rising above fear and becoming willing to embrace change, there is a period of crisis, pain, and hardship. Sparrow and Knight say, “Learning to live with change, to embrace it and not be frightened by it is a task for

¹³⁷ Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 43.

¹³⁸ Sparrow and Knight, xiii.

us all, and involves not so much cognitive abilities as appropriate feelings and attitudes.”¹³⁹

Three Steps Toward Emotionally Intelligent Organizations

Leaders must rely heavily upon emotional intelligence as they face the challenges of change in their organisation and the world. Goleman seeks to plot the path forward. He outline three key steps in seeking to create an emotionally intelligent and effective culture: discovering the emotional reality, visualizing the ideal, and sustaining emotional intelligence.¹⁴⁰

Discovering the emotional reality means coming to understand what everyone in the organization views as essential. Goleman names it the “sacred centre.”¹⁴¹ It is vital that the leader understands what is widely accepted in the group as important and that these feelings and beliefs are treated with respect. Only when leaders genuinely honour these values can they make effective attempts to help others see if something has to change. People must be genuinely brought into a conversation about the system and its culture if they are to grasp the dream and the possibilities of positive change. Goleman explains, “Both the coaching style – where a leader deeply listens to individuals – and the democratic style – where a group in dialogue builds consensus – can ensure that people are brought into the change process in a way that builds commitment.”¹⁴²

When the truth about the cherished values of the organization is clear, the main leaders can see that changes are needed. Then, there must be a bottom up approach.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁰ Goleman, 218.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 219.

Leaders from every level of the organization must be engaged in conversation about the current situation and the future vision. A significant part of the conversation will be focused on identifying cultural norms that hinder performance. This aspect will likely be difficult and require the most sensitive touch. This process will take time but ensures that everyone participates in dialogue and growing hope about what might be possible. Even with the most painstaking preparation, change is by no means guaranteed. There must be a point where people are willing to move forward and take hold of new possibilities.

Visualizing the ideal is the second stage in building the resonant organization. This is about helping everyone develop and share a new vision or dream. As Goleman explains, “The movement needs to be directed: toward the dream, toward collective values, and toward new ways of working together.”¹⁴³ Once again, the leader carries the main responsibility for giving shape to a vision. A good vision can grip the attention of group members as they grasp what might be possible and the constructive changes that will follow. Group members need to attune – to “see, feel and touch the values and the vision”¹⁴⁴ and actually own them personally. In all of this, people are more important than strategy. The goal must be to “create connection by focusing on what people really want and need, and by deliberately building a culture that supports good health in the tribe. When a leader focuses on people, emotional bonds are created that are the ground in which resonance is sown.”¹⁴⁵

Sustaining emotional intelligence focuses upon the leader living and acting in such a way as to embody the very soul of the organization. When a leader (or group of

¹⁴³ Ibid., 220.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 221.

leaders) has clarified a new vision and begun to communicate it, the main challenge will be in getting it accepted and established. The leader must consistently and practically demonstrate the new values and vision by attitude, actions, and example. Vision must then be followed up by changes in structure and system to match the vision and make it tangible. Goleman explains, “Change the rules, if need be, to reinforce the vision.”¹⁴⁶ Goleman writes about the myths and legends of resonant leadership. By this he means the overall influence of a great leader, “Leaders have an enormous impact on the overall emotions of an organization, and they are often at the centre of the organization’s stories.”¹⁴⁷ The emphasis is upon the inspiration of a resonant leader opening people up to new possibilities, and then through changes to regulations and practices, the new vision is fixed in a structure that will become accepted by everyone.

These three steps – discovering the emotional reality, visualizing the ideal, and sustaining emotional intelligence – are essential for the leader who hopes to bring change to any organization. Such leaders will bring people together into relationship, be the catalyst for developing new vision and the desire to achieve it. Goleman says, “These kinds of leaders build with positives: They craft a vision with heartfelt passion, they foster an inspiring organizational mission that is deeply woven into the organizational fabric, and they know how to give people a sense that their work is meaningful.”¹⁴⁸

Emotional Triangles

In seeking to understand why interpersonal relationships within organizations are often fraught with difficulty, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor in, *The Leader’s Journey*,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 222.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 223.

relate insights from systems theory and emotional maturity to an organization's micro level. They write about "Emotional Triangles"¹⁴⁹ which they describe as the "molecules" of emotional systems. They note that just as two people relate to each other, they will almost always share their thoughts with one other person, creating three person triangles. Among any group of people, there will be numerous interlocking triangles. As thoughts and attitudes are shared within and between these triangles, there is a strong impact upon a community or group such as a church. These triangles can work positively or negatively, and the information shared about one person in a triangle will impact how other individuals (and other triangles of people) relate to that individual.

This is a very significant issue for any leader seeking to unite the group and move it forward in a positive way. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain,

The greater the leaders capacity to see the system and watch the process by observing the triangles, the greater the leaders capacity to remain a calm presence and make a difference in the congregation's life. It is when we do not understand what is happening around us that we grow most anxious. Every living system has a myriad of triangles operating interdependently and simultaneously, thus making the dynamics in the system highly complex.¹⁵⁰

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor give particular examples of emotional triangles both in scripture and typical congregational life. Jesus encouraged certain triangles when he advised how to behave in situations of tension. Speak first directly to the individual, then if necessary for resolution draw another person in, should this not work seek to share the matter with the wider church.¹⁵¹ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor offer another slant to this teaching, explaining that there are triangles that leaders are best to keep their distance

¹⁴⁹ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 52.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵¹ Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17.

from, rather than be drawn into an alliance that may present problems. When Jesus was asked to arbitrate between two brothers in a dispute about an inheritance, he declined to be drawn in to one side or the other.¹⁵²

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor give a number of examples of typical church emotional triangles: a church member complaining to one staff member about another; asking someone for a comment in the knowledge that it will create an ally supporting one view point against another; one individual asserting to the main leader that “everyone” is expressing a negative opinion about some matter.¹⁵³

Differentiation

The emotionally mature leader is able to see these triangles, understand their importance, and help everyone work through them. It is important to “de-triangle” or remain “differentiated,” that is to remain “emotionally connected to the other two players while being emotionally neutral about the symptomatic issue.”¹⁵⁴ It is vital to remain composed, aware of what is happening, not rushing to take sides, not counter-attacking under provocation, not taking responsibility for the relationship of the other two, not withdrawing or becoming silent, but instead leaders must maintain open relationships with all sides. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor explain, “Part of the arsenal of effective leadership is the wisdom to see the anxiety in the system for what it is, the serenity to take a more objective view of what is transpiring, and the courage to act on principle rather than react to pressure.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Luke 12:13.

¹⁵³ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 65.

These are some of the challenges and skills required at a micro level of leadership. It is in these basic building blocks of the emotional system that problems begin to grow, but it is here also, that leaders can fashion solutions. The level of difficulty for the leader is very significant and, requires great maturity, and high emotional intelligence. In a church situation, where missional change is required, it is vital to have a leader, "...who is self aware, authentic, and present to the realities and concerns of those being led. An emotionally aware and mature leader is best equipped to navigate the complexity of discontinuous change."¹⁵⁶

Relationship Capital

The term "relationship capital"¹⁵⁷ is used by Burns, Chapman and Guthrie in their book *Resilient Ministry*. This is authority or influence based on the relationships that the leader has. They explain that "It is derived from the relational status one has in a community."¹⁵⁸ When accrued by a leader, this capital carries significant influence among members of a community. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie suggest there are three elements in building relationship capital. These are "intentionality, time and vulnerability."¹⁵⁹ Leaders should be deliberate in seeking to build strong and trusting relationships, especially with other influential members of the organization. This will demand time and it will include informal social contact as well as formal working co-operation. The willingness to be vulnerable and open to scrutiny is very important.

"Pastors who only share in generalities and don't expose the realities of their own human

¹⁵⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 127.

¹⁵⁷ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 214.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 213.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 214-216.

struggles will not create authentic relationships.”¹⁶⁰ While formal authority gives a leader power to make decisions, it is relationship capital that has more long term effectiveness in creating the personal links that can lead to healthy organizations and change.

The Influence of Emotional Intelligence

A very powerful illustration of many of these aspects of emotional intelligence is seen in the leadership of Abraham Lincoln. During the American Civil War, many of the nation’s leading politicians were locked in rivalry, but Lincoln offered leadership that rose above personal differences and animosity. Biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin writes in summary of Lincoln’s achievements,

This, then is a story of Lincoln’s political genius revealed through his extraordinary array of personal qualities that enabled him to form friendships with men who had previously opposed him; to repair injured feelings that, left untended, might have escalated into permanent hostility; to assume responsibility for the failures of subordinates; to share credit with ease; and to learn from mistakes. . . . His success in dealing with the strong egos of the men in his cabinet suggests that in the hands of a truly great politician the qualities we generally associate with decency and morality – kindness, sensitivity, compassion, honesty, and empathy – can also be impressive political resources.¹⁶¹

These qualities are of immense value in working with differing personalities in any life situation. Such qualities are essential if leaders are ever to exercise emotional intelligence. Perhaps never was the power of his character, the generosity of his spirit, and the wisdom of his mind, more clearly seen than in his second inaugural speech. Lincoln gave the speech in March 1865, just before the end of the Civil War. He knew that though bloodshed might be ending, the immense task of healing and uniting a divided and hurting nation still lay ahead. Once again, Lincoln illustrated emotional

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 216.

¹⁶¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2009), xvii.

intelligence, knowing that someone must lead the divided nation beyond hatred to bring healing, harmony, respect, and peace. Lincoln called upon his fellow countrymen,

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan - to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.¹⁶²

Lincoln is credited with being one of the great political leaders in history, and without his mighty influence, America may never have recovered from the Civil War.

Biblical Insights

The academic literature does not use the biblical concept of “fellowship,” but many of the values being described in three major areas of leadership study are akin to those seen in any healthy, Christian fellowship: systems theory, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence. The missing element in secular literature is an emphasis upon the bond of belonging and love that comes through Christ’s influence and power. Christ takes the system to a higher level than will ever be likely in the secular world. The following section considers each of these leadership study areas in the light of relevant, scriptural principles and illustrates them with actual examples drawn from the Bible. Ultimately, the church is to be shaped and guided by scripture rather than secular ideologies of organization and leadership theory. However, many of these business practices do not conflict with, and may even have a genesis in, scriptural values. Recognising that this is true, church leaders can usefully study insights and practices from the world of business, focusing and refining them further by biblical precedent, instruction, and insight.

¹⁶² Ibid., 699.

Systems Theory

There are many biblical examples of an understanding of human relationships in terms of groups or systems. People are bound together in close associations where one can help the other. King Solomon showed an understanding of these important human relationships. In his writings he stated, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted ... As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”¹⁶³ Reflecting on loneliness he wrote, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour; if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”¹⁶⁴

In teaching his disciples, Jesus indicated that there was a “system” in the kingdom of God. He used the imagery of a vine to show the relationship between himself and his disciples—the church. Christ is the vine (main part of the plant), and his followers are branches that must attach and draw life from the main plant.¹⁶⁵ In this system, drawing upon the resources of a close bond and relationship with Christ leads to the church’s success and fruitfulness. There is an active interchange and on-going connection between believers and their Lord. This emphasis upon relationship is further shown in the prayer of Christ for the church. John records the words of Jesus as he prayed for the unity of his followers, “that all of them may be one.”¹⁶⁶

The imagery of the vine and the prayer of Jesus give a clear picture of relationship both within the Godhead and throughout the church. Authors in the business literature

¹⁶³ Proverbs 27:6, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.

¹⁶⁵ John 15:4-5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 17:21-23.

referenced earlier in this chapter define the inter-relationships among a group or organization as being a system. We do not need to adopt language from the secular business world without thought, but it is clear that there are applications and insights in this literature that help us analyse the church, and indeed offer fresh insight to instruction that is already available through God's word. From scripture, it is clear that in divine/human relationships, there is a unity of purpose and an interconnection between Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and church. George Cladis in his book *Leading the team-based church* refers to the Trinity as an illustration of how relationships should function in the church. "The divine community of the Trinity provides a helpful image for human community that reflects the love and intimacy of the Godhead. Hierarchical distinctions in human community give way to a sense of the body of Christ, with each part equal and important."¹⁶⁷ He views the Trinity as a model of what a church community should be. The earthly life of Christ and the community of the early church are further illustrations of how a system can function. It was Jesus who prayed most clearly for his church, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."¹⁶⁸

Significant parts of Jesus' ministry were about disturbances (sometimes called disequilibrium) in the system. For example, Jesus warned his disciples that they would be thrown out of the synagogue.¹⁶⁹ As a Jewish boy and young man, Jesus himself had been very much a part of the system of Judaism in Israel. He also spent much of his first year in public ministry visiting and speaking at the synagogue. However, his teaching and actions often challenged the status quo and brought him into conflict with many of the

¹⁶⁷ Cladis, 5.

¹⁶⁸ John 17:21.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 16:2.

prominent leaders. One of his first recorded public appearances was in the synagogue at Nazareth.¹⁷⁰ He read the scriptures and began to teach. Initially, there was a very positive response of amazement, but the people's response turned to fury as he began challenging the status quo – the system.

Throughout the gospels, there are numerous examples of these tensions within the system. In Luke chapters five and six, the Pharisees question and criticize Jesus about his associations with outcasts, his apparent disinterest in fasting, and his seemingly lax Sabbath observance. Jesus confounded his critics, and clearly communicated that changes to would be necessary. When he commented about the need for new wineskins, he challenged the old system and asserted that change was coming through his ministry.¹⁷¹

Tension grew as Jesus continued his ministry of teaching and action. Luke, perhaps, most succinctly captured the divided opinions and tension just after Jesus had healed a crippled woman on the sabbath. “When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.”¹⁷²

Jesus was part of a system, but not captive to it. In his ministry he drew key people together to begin the work of forming a radically new system. Mark records his first public declaration, “Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come, he said, The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Luke 4:14-30.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 5:37-38.

¹⁷² Ibid., 13:17.

¹⁷³ Mark 1:14-15.

In the early days of the church, members had a deep bond of love, unity, and co-dependence among themselves.¹⁷⁴ Christ taught and prayed for exactly this dynamic. The church held regular meetings for worship and fellowship. The church shared material possessions and grew its numbers significantly. Healthy relationships formed with few hindrances to growth in this system.

The Apostles Peter and Paul give many instructions regarding leadership in the church. Much of the academic literature has drawn attention to the importance of leaders setting the direction and standards of an organization. Biblical examples mirror this emphasis upon the importance of leaders in the system. Elders are to be appointed in churches, and they are to be people who have earned respect. Peter urges elders to be careful shepherds, caring for the flock and setting a positive example of willing service.¹⁷⁵ In this context, he also instructs those who are being led, particularly younger members, to submit to and respect the leadership. Paul emphasises to Timothy that overseers are to be leaders whose personal and family lives are well ordered, and whose reputation in the community is good and above reproach.¹⁷⁶ Paul also urges Titus to appoint elders who have the same qualities and who are “self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.”¹⁷⁷ All of this advice is about establishing an organizational system.

The case of the church at Ephesus is of particular relevance when it is considered in the light of systems analysis. Paul had stayed there briefly at the end of his second

¹⁷⁴ Acts 2:42-47.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 5:1-5.

¹⁷⁶ 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

¹⁷⁷ Titus 1:8.

missionary journey. He left behind Priscilla and Aquilla to carry on the fledgling work.¹⁷⁸

Early on his second missionary journey he returned and spent two years there

evangelising and building the church. He would have been very familiar with the church

family there, and he found great fellowship with his “fellow workers in Jesus Christ”¹⁷⁹

At a later stage he reveals insights to some of the disequilibrium in the system. Writing to

Timothy who was a later leader of the church in Ephesus he names three men who had

been the cause of much trouble and harm: Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander.¹⁸⁰ Paul

was aware of a variety of tensions in this church, and so he urged Timothy to be faithful

in his leadership and, as has already been noted, to be active in appointing elders –

leaders who will shape the system. The comments of Patrick Lencioni could almost arise

directly from these examples. Lencioni writes,

If an organization is led by a team that is not behaviourally unified, there is no chance that it will become healthy. It's kind of like a family. If the parents' relationship is dysfunctional, the family will be too. That's not to say that some good things can't come out of it; it's just that the family/company will not come anywhere close to realizing its full potential.¹⁸¹

Adaptive Leadership

In challenging the Jewish system, Jesus exercised adaptive leadership. His

teaching on the kingdom consistently confronted the system and caused considerable

disequilibrium. For example, Jewish leadership exploited many as they came to the

temple for worship. The leadership lacked true righteousness. Hypocrisy was rampant,

¹⁷⁸ Acts 18:19-21.

¹⁷⁹ Romans 16:3-4.

¹⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:14-15.

¹⁸¹ Lencioni, 19.

and there was more interest in commerce than prayer. Also, God's people forgot their mission to every nation because of their extreme nationalism.

At Jesus' birth, during his ministry, through his commission to the disciples, and after the resurrection, Jesus revealed that God has a plan for people from every nation. In contrast to the narrow nationalism of the Jewish leaders, Jesus' purpose was to reach out to every culture and make them part of his rule. This was an adaptive challenge for people steeped in one traditional and narrow culture.

The early church faced another adaptive challenge with the tension between Greek and Hebraic Jews. The Greek widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, and the church had to find an adaptive solution. The apostles created new office: deacon. The apostles created the office of deacon to relieve them from waiting at tables. They adapted the system by finding a fair and workable solution.

Acts 10 recounts an even greater adaptive challenge for the young church: reaching out to the despised Gentiles. Peter who came from a strongly Jewish culture was challenged by God through a vision. Then at the same time he received an invitation to visit the home of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion and a Gentile. Peter visited Cornelius, an action that could only have happened by God's clear guidance. In Jerusalem, some believers began to criticise and divide over Peter's visit. Peter explains his actions and initially this seems to satisfy. Later, the issue surfaces again because it has not been fully resolved. Old tensions and prejudices still need to be brought out into the open and finally resolved.

Following Paul's first missionary journey, some believers from Jewish backgrounds came to the largely Gentile church in Antioch. They began urging the

practice of Jewish customs, causing conflict and debate. Acts 15 records the great disequilibrium.¹⁸² The Council of Jerusalem convened to address the issue. Church leaders carefully and thoroughly discussed how to unify the church, under the guidance and grace of God. Ultimately, the whole church agreed that Jewish legal requirements would not be imposed upon the Gentiles. The church adapted; it recognised and approved the basis of mission to the entire world, as Jesus had commissioned.

It is again important to note that all three leadership aspects are included here. The system that held sway among the Jerusalem-based Jewish cultural church had to be recognised and adapted to new circumstances. In order for this to happen there had to be the exercise of significant emotional intelligence under the guidance and grace of God. In church leadership, these key aspects of effective leadership are important, but leaders must also always keep in mind the guiding and enabling Spirit of God who leads and empowers his people.

Further scriptural examples of adaptive leadership are numerous. Moses was commissioned at the burning bush to return to his people, share a vision with them, lead them out to a new place, and form a new nation.¹⁸³ God's people had lived for generations in slavery, adapting their lives to a measure of acceptance of their conditions. Bringing change was an immense step, yet Moses came sharing a hope and vision of a new life. In pursuing a plan for adaptive change as opposed to technical changes, Moses had to share the vision and nurture hope among the leaders.¹⁸⁴ As he did so, the people's hope and faith rose. Throughout this period of time, Moses had to exercise high levels of

¹⁸² Acts 15:24.

¹⁸³ Exodus 3:1-10.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 4:29-31.

leadership skills and faith as he dealt with the Egyptian system of dominance and the Israelite system of bitter subservience and weakness.

Ezra and Nehemiah faced similar challenges as they led a downtrodden nation back to a place of confidence and strength. The remnant in Jerusalem was in a dire situation.¹⁸⁵ The city had been destroyed and the people disgraced. Something new was needed. Nehemiah had the burden and a vision. He understood the system and went to the balcony to get an overview.¹⁸⁶ Then Nehemiah dealt with key people and shared the vision. Like Moses, he was what Daniel Goleman calls a resonant leader.¹⁸⁷ Nehemiah took time to form his own plan, but he then carefully shared the plan with other key people. He had to face off opposition – the wider system of other tribes and nations who didn't want the wall rebuilt. They did all they could to disrupt through threats, a letter, diversions, and deception. In all of this opposition, Nehemiah worked to keep his people united and moving toward change that would restore pride, strength, and faith among the nation.¹⁸⁸ Not only did he succeed in the rebuilding project, but in tandem with Ezra, he called back to God a people who had lost faith and become careless in their devotion. Ezra reads and applies the law of God; he restores the worship of God; the people make a binding agreement together to remain faithful.¹⁸⁹ An entire nation was changed.

Each of these biblical examples bears out the need for leaders to give high priority to understanding circumstances, events and influences and then develop a clear plan for

¹⁸⁵ Nehemiah 1:3.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 2:11-12.

¹⁸⁷ Goleman, 20.

¹⁸⁸ Nehemiah 2:17-20.

¹⁸⁹ Ezra 8-10.

the future. The King James version of the words of Solomon captures this need, “Where there is no vision the people perish”¹⁹⁰

Emotional Intelligence

Joseph’s life gives many insights into the value of emotional intelligence. As a young man, he showed little understanding of how a family system worked. Indeed, the same could also be said for his father Jacob. In Genesis 37, the family is fraught with tension and division. Jacob greatly favoured Joseph, who received and also flaunted his special treatment. Joseph was quick to tell his father anything that was wrong about his brothers. Over time, attitudes developed to the place where, among the brothers, there was hatred instead of kindness.¹⁹¹ Joseph added to the animosity by blurting out dreams about his brothers bowing down to him in servitude. The teenage Joseph showed a complete lack of emotional intelligence. All resonance was gone, and he was headed for trouble. Eventually, Josephs’ brothers sold him as a slave and trafficked him to Egypt.

Over time, and many hard knocks, he rose to prominence and developed great wisdom, insight, and sensitivity in dealing with people. Joseph eventually held great authority in the Egyptian ruling system. He offered political and administrative leadership to the Pharaoh, and after many years, when the occasion came, Joseph reached out to his estranged brothers to help transform attitudes, to bring genuine repentance and emotional freedom, and to move the entire family to safety and honour in Egypt.¹⁹²

More than anywhere else in the Bible, Jesus Christ exercises emotional intelligence that arose out of divine wisdom. He had power and authority but also

¹⁹⁰ Proverbs 29:18.

¹⁹¹ Genesis 37:2, 4, 8.

¹⁹² Ibid., 45:4-15.

magnetism. Jesus resonated with all types of people, drawing them to himself. He called twelve disparate men from a wide range of backgrounds and melded them into a group who eventually led and shaped an organisation that after 2000 years is still growing and influencing humanity around the world.

There is much to glean from the way Jesus handled the most difficult and trying circumstances. Throughout his public ministry, people regularly challenged his authority and attempted to trap him in situations where he could be isolated, compromised, and condemned. When the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery to Jesus, they tried to goad him into starting an ad hoc public stoning.¹⁹³ When the Pharisees asked a politically charged question about paying taxes,¹⁹⁴ Jesus perceived the tensions that lay behind their questions, avoided reactionary and inflammatory words, and responded in ways that disarmed these confrontations. Jesus waited until his time to fight the central battle, and ultimately he won. Jesus dealt with many interlocking, emotional triangles. Some were utterly opposed to him, many sat on the fence, while others wanted to support and defend him. Jesus always saw the emotional reality behind the triangles, controlled anxiety by his stable emotions and mature leadership, and helped his followers visualise a new ideal community in God's kingdom. In doing so, Jesus demonstrated deep emotional intelligence and divine wisdom.

Jesus spoke of emotional intelligence in the qualities he enumerated in the sermon on the mount. He spoke of meekness, mercy, purity, and peace-making.¹⁹⁵ Jesus urged his

¹⁹³ John 8:1-11.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 22:15f.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 5:3-9.

followers to live lives marked by love for God, neighbours, and even enemies.¹⁹⁶ Long before the term had been coined, Christ displayed and described emotionally intelligent behaviour. In biblical terms, emotional intelligence is grace filled godliness.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament, Christ's followers are encouraged in the same thinking and conduct. In Philippians 2, Paul uses Christ as an exemplar, urging that "your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus."¹⁹⁷ After urging believers in Rome to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God, Paul goes on to list behaviours and qualities that are pleasing to God and reflective of his grace and generosity.¹⁹⁸ In many ways these requirements define emotional intelligence.

The activity of mentoring is one that has a strong link to both emotional intelligence and also systems analysis. The importance of leaders proactively developing relationships with key church members has already been noted. This helps build a strong system of relationships and will also help group members develop insights and personal qualities as they are modelled and encouraged by the leader. An outstanding New Testament example of mentoring is that by Barnabas of Saul.¹⁹⁹ Barnabas the well recognised leader in the Church took the newly converted Saul under his wing and introduced him to the other church leaders at a time when there was great suspicion of Saul. Initially, for at least a full year, Barnabas spent time with this new believer working together in consolidating a new church at Antioch, and also engaging in a mercy mission

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 5:43-48; 22:34-40.

¹⁹⁷ Philippians 2:1-8.

¹⁹⁸ Romans 12:3-21.

¹⁹⁹ Acts 9:27.

to the church in Jerusalem.²⁰⁰ Some time later the church leadership commissioned and sent them off on mission work which in due course became a major advance of the gospel in the Roman world.²⁰¹ During these early years of Saul's Christian experience Barnabas was the mentor, and from this encouragement emerged the greatest missionary evangelist the church has known. The mentoring role played by Barnabas illustrates many of the points alluded to earlier in the literature review on topics such as teaming, emotional triangles, relationship capital.

These biblical examples and commands illustrate and parallel the key themes arising from the secular literature. However, the biblical examples are more than simple examples of laudable qualities or skills. They are also convictions. The biblical characters demonstrate beliefs about God, about what he requires, and about what is true. The biblical examples illustrate skills and qualities that practically assist Christians in dealing with all manner of testing situations, and they also reveal core convictions that add further strength to their leadership. As Mohler writes,

Charisma is a great gift, but it cannot substitute for conviction. The same is true of personality skills, gifts of communication, media presence, and organizational ability. None of these things can qualify a Christian leader when conviction is absent or weak. ... The importance of convictional intelligence in the life of the leader comes down to the fact that our intellectual habits must be aligned with Christian truth and knowledge.²⁰²

From these biblical examples and numerous others not cited, it is clear that there are strong, practical, and biblical reasons to understand and develop systems awareness,

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 11:25-30.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 13:2-3.

²⁰² Mohler, 32, 34.

adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence. Leaders can do so under God and his grace.

Conclusion

It is important to recognise that the three themes of systems, adaptive leadership and emotional intelligence are inseparable from each other. In order to have effective leadership, there must be knowledge of systems and adaptive change combined with emotionally intelligent interactions to create healthy organizations.

The New Testament image of the church as the body of Christ illustrates the confluence of systems theory, adaptive leadership and emotional intelligence.²⁰³ While it may be possible to define and discuss them separately, in actual real life situations they work together and must all be present in healthy leadership. A body is living and can achieve many goals. In order for the body to work effectively, all the parts must co-ordinate. There is total inter-relationship and unity in a healthy body.

Paul uses the human body as an illustration of the spiritual body of the church. First, there is a system in the body. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul tells how the church, as the body of Christ, is made up of many parts.²⁰⁴ All of these parts have significance and interdependence. The foot and the hand, the ear and the eye belong together and need each other. Second, bodies have the ability to change and adapt to different circumstances and cultures. Just as any healthy body grows and develops, so Paul writes of the body of Christ being built up, reaching maturity, being stable, and doing its work.²⁰⁵ Third, in a body, all the parts are unified and communicate between

²⁰³ Ephesians 4:11–13, 15–16.

²⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.

each other. For example, the head, hand, and foot all have a close connection. This inter-relationship must be unhindered for the body to function.

The body parts illustrate how the relationships between church members ought to function. Individuals from diverse, and sometimes conflicting, backgrounds have been brought into loving and working relationship with each other. Christ and his disciples first demonstrated this fellowship. This was a complex system. Over time the church had to grow, develop and adapt to countless challenges. This diverse and growing body of people could only progress as they lived in healthy relationship with each other – illustrating emotional intelligence. These three major themes are distinct subjects and have been described individually, but the metaphor of the church as a body is a clear illustration of the fact that they are inextricably linked.

This chapter began by recognising that as circumstances change, an organization can become anxious and stultified in its work. This often leaves members feeling alienated and helpless. If these problems are to be overcome, there needs to be a high level of effective leadership. In examining the writings of many in the field of business management, it has been shown that understanding systems theory gives insights into why and how organizations run into problems and what potential paths can be taken to navigate through the difficulties. In addition, it is clear that a high level of skill in adaptive leadership is necessary to begin moving forward in effective ways to new and better things. The third major theme of this chapter was emotional intelligence: the skill or ability to unite people and hold them together. The leaders who want to lead organizations through problems to a new place of success will have to display the resonance that comes from being emotionally intelligent. Such leaders, with a deep

²⁰⁵ Ephesians 4:12–16.

passion for their organization, its members, and its goals, will enthuse and excite those they lead. They will become the catalyst that creates united teams of people who will rise to every challenge, embrace the changes needed, and enjoy levels of success that would be impossible without such leadership. As the review developed, and insights from various practitioners was analysed, it became clear that the three major themes of review overlap in many ways and cannot be thought of in isolation from each other.

This literature review also briefly explored biblical examples and commands showing that many of the skills and approaches adopted in the business world actually have precedent in the Bible. The life of Christ perfectly exemplifies human qualities and relational skills that are effective in dealing with people in any context, and most especially in leading people into all that God has ordained for them.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. The literature review in this chapter has shed much light on the subject. The other major part of this study was to carry out qualitative research in a number of particular cases of church leadership. In the next chapter the methodology used in this research project will be presented.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in their congregations. One of the fundamental assumptions is that, due to pre-conceived ideas about leadership, it is common for ministers to have problems developing a mode of ministry which is truly team-based. Linked with this is the assumption that congregations do not easily accept new forms of leadership. This has already been addressed by the PCI General Assembly Reports of 1996 and 2011.

In order to address the purpose, the literature identifies three main areas of focus that are pertinent to the attempt to transition from “one man ministry” to effective team leadership. These include systems theory, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence (EI). To examine how these issues are relevant in practice, and to provide data for consideration, a number of interviews with experienced church leaders were conducted. The following research questions were used to draw out this information:

1. What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?
2. What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations?
3. How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations?

4. Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?

Design of the Study

This study is qualitative in its approach. Rather than seeking large quantities of data from which statistics can be extracted, this study focuses upon a small number of carefully chosen participants who meet the criteria of being able to speak from their experience of developing church leadership teams. Qualitative research is essentially interpretative, and the researcher seeks to understand the process by which people form their opinions and develop their practices. When one understands how things have happened and what people think about them, then one is in a better position to see how positive change can be effected.

This type of research has a number of characteristics that are outlined by Sharan B. Merriam in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. First, qualitative researchers seek to understand how people “make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”²⁰⁶ This type of research is focused upon the perspective of the participant. Second, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis.”²⁰⁷ This is a personal, responsive approach to gathering information, and an individual researcher has to gather and grapple with the information. Third, there is usually fieldwork – meeting with people, questioning, listening, and communicating. The fourth characteristic is that this research is inductive, building from the raw information given to an opinion or belief. As Merriam teaches, “Qualitative

²⁰⁶ Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 7.

researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field.”²⁰⁸ Fifth, the results of this type of research are not based on statistics, but on descriptions and quotations. As Merriam notes, “Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon.”²⁰⁹

The adoption of this approach dictated that much of the researcher’s time was spent conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews. These were semi-structured, following a broad plan, but allowed the researcher enough flexibility to follow wherever the participant led. Interviewees were selected based upon the likelihood that they would be able to share pertinent insight and experience regarding the task of team building. There was open questioning, encouraging expression of opinions and feelings, as well as particular examples of their experience.

Sampling Criteria

The approach taken in selecting interviewees was “non-probability purposive sampling.”²¹⁰ A small number of participants were carefully selected to yield a detailed picture of church leadership in a wide range of situations. The goal was to choose “information rich cases”²¹¹ from whom the greatest amount of information would likely be drawn. Maximum variation sampling was used so that it is possible to see how effective teams have been developed in widely differing contexts.

Keeping in mind the desire to evaluate how leadership teams have grown in differing situations, the selection criteria for this research was as follows. Each

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 61.

²¹¹ Ibid.

interviewee had major responsibility in developing and managing a leadership team. Examples from a number of different denominations were sought. In every case, the individual interviewed was from an evangelical and reformed background. In each case, the interviewee was from a congregation that stands out as an example in its denomination or community type of how effective leadership teams can be developed. Also, a wide variety of community circumstances were studied. For example – congregations in large cities and smaller communities; congregations in England, Scotland, Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland; congregations that are large and others that are smaller; congregations with large teams (note that in the British Isles this will be around four to six full time staff), and others with very small volunteer teams; congregations that are relatively new and others that have long traditions.

Eight participants were interviewed, covering all these variations. In gathering the names of interviewees, the researcher drew upon personal knowledge of congregations, their activities, and their leadership. This was relatively simple within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as the researcher actively ministers in this small denomination. In seeking out congregations of other denominations and in other parts of the British isles, the researcher networked with previously known church leaders and also researched church websites to determine the leader's and congregation's suitability.

Participants were contacted directly by telephone in the first instance, and then, if they were willing to help, by a letter which explained the process. To aid gathering of basic information, participants were asked to complete a brief contextual survey before their interview, in order to confirm the type of congregation and leadership with which

they were involved. In this way, it was possible to ensure that the selection criteria were met. The following are brief details of the participants and their congregations.

Andrew leads a long-established Church of England (Anglican) congregation in the north London area. He has been in the congregation for fourteen years. It is a large congregation, and there is a leadership team of seven full-time staff and six part-time staff. The church is a leading Evangelical Anglican congregation in the south of England.

Bob leads an Anglican congregation, established under fifty years ago in the south London area. He has been in this congregation just over two years. The church is a large congregation, and there is a leadership team of twelve full-time and five part-time staff. In the last couple of years, they have taken significant steps to re-develop the leadership structure of the congregation.

Chris leads a long established Church of Scotland congregation in the north of Scotland. He has been in the congregation for fifteen years. The church is a large congregation. The staff team consists of five full-time workers. This congregation is Presbyterian, and therefore, of similar ethos to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

David pastors a long-established Independent Evangelical congregation in inner city Glasgow. He has been in the charge for twenty years. Four full-time staff members serve the church, and the congregation has been transitioning its ministry and leadership, seeking to find ways of touching the socially deprived and student population's in the area.

Eric ministers in a Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) congregation. He serves in a small town in a rural area of the Republic of Ireland. He has been in this charge for eleven years, and is the only member of staff, though he does have on-going help from an

independent evangelist who is also a member of his congregation. It is a traditional congregation that has undergone significant growth and change over the past decade.

Frank is minister of two small PCI congregations in a completely rural area of the Republic of Ireland. He has been in the charge for seven years, and during this time, there has been significant change in the nature of one of the congregations in particular. He is the only full time member of staff.

George is minister of a PCI congregation in the city of Belfast. It is a congregation that is growing again after years of stagnation. He has been in the charge for eleven years and there is one full time and four part time staff.

Henry is in one of the largest PCI congregations in a town in Northern Ireland. He has been in this charge for 20 years, and there is a full-time staff team of six. This is an older congregation that has an innovative ministry and outreach.

These eight participants provide a flavour of innovative church leadership in a range of types of congregation in the UK. Their shared experiences illustrate how leadership can be effectively developed in any situation. Their stories also show that there is no one solution to the problems facing the church.

Data Collection Methods

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for data gathering. In each case, there was a need for specific information, but much of this information was gathered in advance through the written survey, followed by some specific, structured questions. The major part of the interview followed the general pattern dictated by the research questions, using an initial introductory question. The questions then moved to a less structured interaction, which picked up on participant responses in order to explore them

more thoroughly. This approach made it possible to highlight and explore common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the range of participants. Merriam recognizes three types of interview (highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured), and she recognizes that while qualitative research will mainly utilize the semi-structured, there is a role for all forms of interview. She explains, “In most studies the researcher can combine all three types of interviewing so that some standardized information is obtained, some of the same open-ended questions are asked of all participants, and some time is spent in an unstructured mode so that fresh insights and new information can emerge.”²¹²

The following interview questions were used. The first question enabled the participant to provide some basic information and start the interview in a relaxed way. Following this, each main question was directly related to the three research question areas. After the leading question, there were follow-up questions, and after that, the interview became unstructured in response to any information or views shared that seemed to be of particular relevance. The questions were put in slightly differing forms depending upon whether the interviewee had instigated a new team or had simply been further refining an existing team.

1. Tell me about the leadership team as it currently stands in your congregation?
2. Tell me about how you began to develop (or have been developing) this team and its ministry?
 - a. How did you identify potential leaders?
 - b. How do you mentor and encourage your leaders?

²¹² Ibid., 75.

3. Tell me about any obstacles or difficulties you have had to overcome as you saw your team make progress?
 - a. How have you sought to help the team and the members of congregation deal with these issues?
 - b. Over time how has the team been accepted in the congregation?
4. What has been the main impact of this team upon the congregation?
 - a. Give me some example stories of how this team have influenced the congregation? (Think particularly about the team's impact upon older "power bases.")
 - b. Give me particular examples of how relationships have been improved through this team?
 - c. In the areas where there has been positive development, what do you think has been "the secret?"

These interviews were recorded on an Ipad, and then personally transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible after the meeting. Each interview was then analysed in turn. Notes were made along with comments and observations. The goal was to identify units of data and sort them into common groupings. There had to be constant comparison of different pieces of information to find properties or examples of practice and behaviour. This data would then be sifted through and considered to discover categories or themes of recurring patterns of practice and behaviour. The goal of this constant comparative method is to formulate theories that explain what is going on in the organization. As Merriam explains, "When categories and their properties are reduced and refined and then linked together by tentative hypothesis, the analysis is moving

toward the development of a theory to explain the data's meaning.”²¹³ In addition to analysis of the interviews, most interviewees were able to supply printed or electronic information about their congregations and their team's activities. This proved to be very valuable and in most cases, this material was available before the interview took place.

Researcher Stance

There are a number of areas where the researcher's background and experience may have coloured his understanding and attitude toward this research. The researcher is a minister of the PCI and engaged in the daily work of church leadership. Thus, he risks being caught up in the immediate and pressing, and not be able to see “the wood for the trees.” He is serving in a larger than average congregation (400 families), with two other full-time staff and four part-time staff, as well as a large number of voluntary elders and leaders. His situation is very different than the experience of many fellow ministers, and because of this, the researcher has to take care to understand matters that seem of less importance when one is engaged in a larger congregation (and thus able to see the bigger picture throughout a denomination). The researcher has gained many insights to ministry in small rural congregations, as he spent eight years ministering in two small congregations in County Donegal. Hopefully, this experience has helped mitigate potential bias or misunderstanding.

The researcher works also from an evangelical and reformed outlook and therefore is likely to understand the needs of the church through the lens of a biblical perspective alone. This should not be a significant problem, as all those interviewed came from the same theological viewpoint. However, when reading secular literature, the researcher had to take care to “receive light from any quarter,” no matter what the source.

²¹³ Ibid., 192.

Limitations of the Study

One of the potential limitations of this work is in the area of its applicability. The research aimed to gain a flavour of what is happening in evangelical and reformed churches in the British Isles, as well as a focus upon a range of situations in the PCI. Thus, the limitations must be kept in mind as the conclusions from this research will not necessarily apply in every situation. The reader must critically assess the conclusions and take up aspects of the study that can be applied in differing local contexts.

The choice of a wide range of samples from within and without the PCI has been deliberate and based on the belief that there are many lessons to be learned from other places which have been more innovative and less constrained by tradition. While this may limit applicability in some areas, it will provide challenging examples and thought-provoking ways of adapting conclusions to the local church wherever it is found. The choice of which ministers to interview may also limit the applicability of the conclusions. Those interviewed were of well above-average ability and experience in leadership and ministry. In addition it is worth noting that this research was carried out among male ministers only. This was not a deliberate policy, rather those deemed relevant to the goals of the project simply happened to be of the male gender. While the identity of these participants is not being made known, the reader may feel that what these people have achieved is beyond them and therefore tend to discount the relevance of the conclusions. Since interviews were not held with ministers leading unsuccessful teams in disrupted congregations, there will be less information on how one can work through or avoid failure.

Conclusion

This study focused on finding specific approaches that can be applied to leadership needs in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In seeking to achieve this, effort has been made to survey a range of congregations outside the PCI and beyond the shores of Ireland. This is in the hope of discovering approaches that may be more innovative and less constrained by the familiar. Those participants chosen for interview from the PCI were a cross section of ministers working in very different circumstances and for differing lengths of time in their charges.

Throughout the interview process, the goal was to discover and add to the main strategies and approaches that have been adopted in developing effective leadership. When the differing approaches were identified, then difficulties and how they can be addressed were explored. The interviews also sought to expound upon the positives that a good team generates and also if there are particular reasons why some approaches are successful.

The goal was to discover the range of successful approaches that have been adopted with the hope of finding that some of these approaches may be relevant in other situations. Additionally, and more importantly, the survey and analysis searched for common factors that are essential in developing effective leadership teams in all circumstances.

In the next chapter the eight interview transcriptions will be analysed using the four research questions as a framework under which specific information and opinion can be categorised. The goal of this is to show how the practical leadership experience of the participants relates to the themes that have emerged from the literature review.

Chapter Four

Findings

The previous chapters of this dissertation have outlined some of the major challenges for leadership in churches today, discussed literature which has an application to these problems, and given details of the research element of this work. The purpose of this project was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. The researcher contacted a carefully selected group of church leaders and drew from them information and stories relevant to the task of developing effective leadership teams. The following primary research questions have shaped the content and direction of the project:

1. What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?
2. What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations?
3. How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations?
4. Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?

Eight clergy from varying denominations and settings were interviewed. In the search for principles that would be applicable across a wide variety of churches, the researcher decided to utilize church leaders from significantly different situations.

Among these eight interviewees were two Anglicans ministers from England, one minister from the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), and one from an independent evangelical church in a large city in Scotland. Four Irish Presbyterians were also interviewed. Two of them minister in the Republic of Ireland, one in Belfast and the last in one of the larger towns in the province. This selection represents a very wide range of church settings. All of these leaders come from an evangelical background, and all are recognised as good leaders in their differing circumstances. In this dissertation, each has been given a pseudonym, and specific details that would identify the congregations have not been given. Basic details of each participant are given below to enable a better understanding of the significance of what they shared regarding their work in offering leadership to the church.

Eight Participating Ministers

Andrew

Andrew is an Anglican vicar of a large and long-established Church of England parish in North London. He has been in the congregation for fourteen years. He leads a team of seven full-time and six part-time staff, plus many volunteers. As in all Church of England parishes, there is a Parochial Church Council (PCC) that numbers about thirty members who have the role of setting policy and determining the church's general direction. They normally meet four times per year. There is also a smaller "standing committee" of PCC members. This committee meets in between the main meetings and acts as a sounding board to ensure that there is sufficient reflection on particular initiatives. There are also two church wardens, which are senior lay people who are elected for four years to help the smooth running of many practical aspects of church life.

There are also a small number of committees with specific responsibilities for the church's mission, property maintenance, and finances.

Currently, the church is hoping to create another committee called the "Social Justice Team" which will develop community involvement initiatives. In this congregation, there are very positive working relationships among the members. The congregation has had a long and active involvement with overseas missions. It has also attracted a significant number of professionals who work in highly influential jobs in London. This congregation has exercised significant influence among evangelical Anglicans throughout the Church of England as well as exercising a wide range of ministries in the community, while also being twinned with a smaller outreach centre nearby. Looking to the future, Andrew is seeking out potential leaders and offering them training provided by the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), an Anglican training ministry. They are also seeking to use CPAS material to prepare key members to act as mentors to others.

Bob

Bob is an Anglican Vicar of a large and relatively new congregation (being formed under fifty years ago) in suburban South West London. He has been in the congregation for just over two years. Like all Church of England parishes there is a Parochial Church Council (PCC) holding final authority over the activities of the congregation. Bob has a staff team of twelve full-time and five part-time members. In the short time Bob has been in his position he has been working hard toward significant restructuring of the leadership. In a governance review document presented for consideration at PCC it is proposed that the future leadership structure should have three

levels of governance: the parochial church council responsible for vision, values, strategy, policy and resources; secondly, management team/s to implement strategy and exercise management and; thirdly the staff team/ministry leaders who will be responsible to carry out the operation of strategies and plans. Bob envisages a PCC of about thirty members meeting about four times a year. The management team, which he also referred to as an “eldership group” or “executive,” would meet monthly and be composed of about eight members, three of whom would be full-time staff, including himself.

It is proposed that these are the formally recognized structures of governance, but it is also clear from interviewing Bob that it is envisaged that there will be other groups who voluntarily take on all kinds of responsibilities around the congregation.

Bob is seeking to draw greater numbers into taking responsibility rather than leaving engagement and decision-making to a few. There have been tensions between the PCC, the staff team and some individual members. Offering adaptive leadership has been a major aspect of Bob’s two years at this parish, but, additionally, there have been many demands in maintaining the ongoing range of ministries typical of a lively congregation with many expectations from members.

Chris

Chris is a Church of Scotland minister (Presbyterian) in a city in the North of Scotland. He has a congregation of some 350 members that has been in his charge for fifteen years. During this time there have been significant changes as the eldership has been encouraged to move from a position where they often simply rubber-stamped what the minister required, to taking on more responsibility and being actively engaged in decision-making and in ministry. Over time, additional staff have been taken on and

currently there are five full-time workers, which include the minister, an assistant minister, an administrator, youth and student worker, and a pastoral worker.

Relationships in the team are good and there is a strong emphasis on developing the life and witness of the congregation through biblical preaching. Being located in a busy city centre street, the leadership are working at ways of reaching the thousands of all ages and creeds who pass through their doors daily.

David

David has been pastoring an independent evangelical inner city church in Scotland for twenty years. There are around three hundred people in regular attendance. The congregation has a long history and a very well-established and active involvement in both local community work and overseas missions. David has a full-time assistant pastor, a youth development worker, and an administrator. The main leadership structure is based on elders and deacons. They are divided into nine ministry teams, each taking up specific responsibilities. The elder acts as a mentor, and the deacon takes the role of leading the ministry team. In consultation with David and the assistant pastor, each team recruits a number of working members. In this way a large number of church members are actively involved. David places strong emphasis on the need to develop and maintain good relationships among all these group members. This works out practically not just in the conduct of meetings where each member is encouraged to be fully engaged, but also in deliberately holding social occasions for group members to grow in friendship. The church premises are also being used by two local Christian community groups who are doing practical work among those with needs such as debt problems. Other local churches help share in this ministry.

Eric

Eric has been minister for the past eleven years of a Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) congregation in a large town in the Republic. The congregation has been there for many generations but, before Eric came there were fewer than fifty people in the congregation meeting in an old and fairly dilapidated building. Currently there are over three-hundred people with many others on the fringes of the congregation. There are six elders who are all active in offering their service. Eric is the only full-time member of staff, though for most of these eleven years he has had constant help from an evangelist (funded by an independent organisation) who is also a member of the congregation and one of the elders. This connection has been a very important working relationship. In tandem they have seen much growth in both evangelism and building the church. The congregation is multicultural with a large number of members who have come from other nations seeking work in Ireland. These people have been fully integrated along with a significant number who originally came from nominal Roman Catholic backgrounds. The congregation outgrew its small town centre building and has now built a modern centre for worship close to good roads and new housing.

Along with his elders, Eric has a resolute focus on the key issues of teaching the gospel and loving the people. The church is not constantly seeking to expand the range of activities in the congregation, rather the emphasis is instead on developing a love and devotion for God and his word, a warm fellowship, and a sense of being united in Christ. Each of the elders takes an active role in leading house group fellowships, as well as shouldering the responsibility of decision-making in kirk session. In addition to these key leaders, there is also a church council which is composed of all elders, committee

members and a couple of key leaders in each area of the congregation's work (i.e. children, youth, ladies, pastoral, etc.). This council meets about three times per year spending time in fellowship, prayer, and vision sharing. This council has contributed to a real sense of everyone working together, united in Christ for the cause of the gospel.

Frank

Frank is a PCI minister in two small rural congregations in the Republic. He has been there for seven years. These are long established congregations where membership goes back generations as tends to be the case in farming communities. There are very few completely new families moving into the community. New members of the congregation tend to come through marriage to an existing member. The larger congregation has thirteen elders and about 150 families considered to be members and the smaller has seven elders and about half the number of families.

There have been some very difficult issues over the seven years in both congregations. In each case Frank has been helped greatly by a small number of elders with whom he has formed deep bonds and trust. In both congregations there has been something like an inner circle of elders who have been the most supportive and most willing to take on responsibility. There is also a small number of younger members who are showing signs of future leadership potential. In the last number of years it has been possible to have extra help first from a one-year intern who gave a lot of energy to youth work, and more recently from a worker from a local independent outreach organisation who has given time to further develop children's and youth work. The most significant encouragement has been the recent election of a number of new and much younger elders

in the larger congregation. This has changed the atmosphere and brought a more creative and visionary emphasis to kirk session meetings.

George

George is a PCI minister in a congregation in suburban Belfast that had experienced much decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He has been the minister there for eleven years during which the congregation has experienced considerable encouragement and growth. It has shifted from being thought of as an elderly congregation to now having a predominance of young families. George leads an eldership of nineteen, almost all of whom have been elected during his ministry – a very unusual situation in PCI, which tends to have elders serving for their active lifetimes. This is a very active kirk session that takes considerable responsibility in leading small fellowship groups, and meets on average every two weeks for fellowship and training. In addition, George has five other staff members, though only one is full-time. There is a full-time ministry intern, a student assistant, an administrator, a ministry co-ordinator and a pastoral visitor. There are clear plans to develop the ministry co-ordinator post to full-time. The congregation is growing and there is a strong expectation that members will be committed to involvement in congregational life, as well as placing an emphasis upon proactively developing future leaders.

Henry

Henry is the minister of a large PCI congregation in one of the larger towns in N. Ireland. He has been in his charge for twenty years and has an eldership of around forty and full-time staff of six, including himself. The staff team are composed of an associate minister, an assistant minister, pastoral worker, youth worker and children's worker. In

addition, there are other part-time and intern posts. The staff team changes from time to time as members move on to other posts. The significant structure of leadership in the congregation is shaped by six sub-committees tasked with looking after key areas and aspects of the life of the congregation. These committees are led by elders and each has a member of staff actively involved as well. Originally, every elder was assigned to a sub-committee, but over time this has changed with some elders dropping out such that now the committees have power to co-opt new members with relevant skills and interest.

Henry acts as “line manager” to each of the employed staff, meeting weekly as a team and also organising extended work days about three times per year for prayer, reflection, and planning. The link between staff members and the eldership is seen as very important, and to a significant degree this is kept healthy and lines of communication kept open by the active involvement of staff members on each sub-committee. This Presbyterian congregation is a long-established one and because there is a large eldership group and a large church committee (responsible for finance and fabric matters) there are many challenges related to moving forward through tradition to new ways of doing things while also keeping members united and positively engaged in the life of the congregation.

Summary of These Eight Ministry Settings

In this survey five different denominations have been included in four different national/cultural situations; that is, two English Anglicans, one Church of Scotland, one independent congregation (Congregational), two PCI in the Republic of Ireland and two in N. Ireland. Seven of these have been in urban settings ranging from the city of London (a major world financial centre with a population of eight million), to a mid-sized town with a population of approximately seventy-thousand. The other minister who has two

congregations is located in a completely rural farming area typical of a large number of PCI congregations.

Of the eight congregations surveyed four employed five or more full-time staff. In two cases the minister was the only member of staff, while in the other two situations there were respectively two, and three full-time staff. Four of the congregations employed a number of part-time staff. (Note that part-time staff such as caretakers are not being included as they do not have responsibility for leadership or ministry development.)

In terms of length of service there is also a significant range. One minister had been in his charge for two years and another for seven. Two had been in their charge for eleven years and two for twenty. The other two had been in their charge for fourteen and fifteen years respectively.

One of these congregations was relatively newly established by comparison to the others. All the others have been established for many generations. Two congregations were in a precarious position numerically in the last decade, and both of these have experienced an almost total renewal of leadership and leadership structure. In both these cases the respondents commented that this was possible as things had been at such a low ebb. All of the other congregations have been experiencing changes to leadership, though to less radical degrees and speeds.

Findings and Themes as They Relate to the Research Questions

Similar or overlapping comments that emerged from the interviews will now be drawn together under theme headings. It should be recognised that each respondent spoke from his own experience and circumstances and there were many unique facets in their responses. It was possible to collate these under simplified headings, though inevitably

some of the individual nuances were lost. This loss was unavoidable in the quest to discover principles that would be applicable in a wide range of situations.

First Research Question

“What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?”

The interview questions invited respondents to state and explain the approaches they had taken to leadership in their congregation(s) and, in particular, how they went about developing and improving the leadership of other key members and/or bringing in outside help. Emerging from the answers were nine themes or activities that any church leader will have to consider when engaging in leadership development.

Engaging with Pre-existing Leadership Structures

In every situation analysed there was a pre-existing system of some kind. Leadership structures and methods were well established. In fact all of these went back a long way and some were more static than others. In most of the congregations there were a significant number of older and more traditional members who could remember a time when church life was simple and also central to individuals and the general community. Whether it was an Anglican parochial church council, a Presbyterian kirk session or an independent deacons' group, each minister had to engage with this governance structure and offer leadership that would enable it to adapt to a form that is more fitting for the challenges facing the contemporary church. In addition to these formally recognised leadership structures, there were also examples of influential individuals or informal groups of people who exercised influence over the congregations. Notably, there was

often a certain amount of overlap between the membership of the formal group and the unofficial group.

Andrew was working with a small group of staff, church wardens, and a few other PCC members looking at strategy and vision. He was not looking for radical new solutions that would change the entire tenor of the life of the congregation. In his words, “It is like secateurs in a rose garden rather than a complete hatchet job. There is some pruning and shaping.” A number of the others have experienced quite radical change. George had, for example, over an eleven year period seen his eldership almost entirely changed. There were only three of the original group of more traditional elders remaining and these were aged in their 70s and over. The others had been replaced by younger and more progressive elders who were willing to be flexible and inventive. This process had happened gradually, and the freedom to do this had been very much because of careful leadership and time provided for members to see that new ways ahead were safe and would bring growth and positive benefit.

Eric and Henry had also experienced this even though their congregations are in very different areas and circumstances. The common denominator has been gradual development, carefully avoiding sudden unplanned and radical changes in direction, and helping members to see for themselves that change is for the better. At the other end of the spectrum, Bob was moving quite rapidly and radically toward a root and branch “governance review” which he hoped would simplify and streamline the leadership structure. In this case, time alone will tell whether he was seeking to move too quickly. It is clear that he was drawing key leaders into the decision-making process. There had been consultation and careful preparation before attempting to make decisions, but in

comparison to the other congregations reviewed this was much more rapid change. He had experienced tensions between various leadership groupings, and how this finally works out remains an open question.

The complexity and extent of these challenges for leaders was highlighted in the comments of a number of respondents who spoke of members struggling with changes both within and beyond their churches. It is clear from the respondents that among established members there was a widespread feeling of what might be called double disequilibrium. Committed church members were struggling with anxiety over changes in society that seem to militate against the church, but also changes to cherished traditions within the church as new directions were being introduced. One example was given by Chris who spoke about defensiveness in the congregation against change, and “the entrenched idea of that which God would bless, and it was basically only what he had blessed before.” Chris needed to work hard in commending new plans to traditional members who were familiar and settled in established methods. This task was particularly difficult when some of those members were appealing not just to their preferences, but also to what they sincerely believed God would bless and, more pointedly, what he would not bless.

George spoke similarly about the early days after he had come to his congregation. “There were fifty pensioners in a drafty 450-seater building. I was praying and asking others to pray that God would send us people who are crazy enough to join this dead thing. That is what it was. Me being there did not make it alive.” He had to work with those elderly members, presenting a vision to them that would allay fear and point forward. He also had to present an attractive vision to potential members. A

significant part of his interview was about this tension. Frank spoke about one of his congregations where there was a complete lack of any clear vision or leadership. He was left to get on with the work, which most of his elders and older members saw as maintaining things as they were. The election of new elders was a crucial development: “With the new group coming along I had the opportunity to sit down at pre-ordination training with them;...once they came on board with a new beginning in Kirk Session we were in a new phase.” The interview went on to detail the new opportunities that arose following this refreshing of the leadership structure. What was encouraging was that the existing elders seem to have accepted the changes.

Each of these leaders was working in an established system. In each case it was clear that the system had an inbuilt, regulating predisposition that tended to maintain the organization as it had always been. There are times when this can be a protective strength against reckless change, but more often due to the changes in society, retaining methods from previous decades may be calcifying. Each leader was seeking to exercise what Heifetz and Linsky call “adaptive leadership”²¹⁴ to help develop new approaches to the world of the twenty-first century that would make survival and growth possible.

Preaching and Vision

In every interview on the issue of strategies for leading change each respondent at some point spoke about preaching and its importance in developing vision. Through pulpit ministry, vision was being presented and in each case it was seen as a vital element in building vision and leading toward a sense of united purpose.

Three times Chris referred to preaching as a central work in seeking to help people see the “idolatry” of clinging to “the spiritual baggage” of past practice and

²¹⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, 55.

tradition. When asked to reflect upon the changes brought about in the church, Chris said, “Preaching has also been a big part of changing people and developing [the church’s] ministry. I have encouraged people to stop thinking individualistically and start thinking ‘us’ not ‘me.’ Preaching is a major help.” Chris was opening minds to a biblical vision and offering direction and hope for a positive way forward. Eric also expressed the same thoughts on preaching, and added a strong relational emphasis: “I have said to young ministers that there are two things that are key to pastoral leadership. One is to teach and preach the gospel, and [the second is] to love the people. Those two things together are a powerful combination.... I think that is the key to the church going forward.” George also expressed the same thoughts, “I hope to offer vision-led leadership. I think when you preach long enough about what the scriptures call us to be as the people of God. If you preach and say here is what God wants us to be, and then you look at what we are doing and where we are. Usually it speaks for itself.” He went on to explain how he has been calling on the congregation simply to take small steps toward the vision. Movement is what he is looking for and it does not have to be dramatic or too rapid.

When asked about how he helps members in his small rural congregations work through challenges before them, Frank commented, “I think perhaps the main arena is in the pulpit, on-going preaching.” He had spent considerable time preaching on the theme of unity and love within the congregation, basing his preaching on 1 Corinthians 13. He sensed that this lesson was something he ought to come back to repeatedly.

Relationships

As with the previous theme, it was again the case that every interviewee asserted that good relationships are essential in maintaining the openness and trust needed if

change is to be achieved in a constructive way. This applied across the board to staff teams, voluntary leadership teams, and also among the wider membership.

David had been handling stresses brought on by increasing numbers of new members, which inevitably added to the range of relationships and to noticeable change in the atmosphere of the fellowship. Maintaining relationships with older, long established members who were uneasy or doubtful about this growth was important. David devoted time to what he called “key influences in the church,” meeting personally with them, giving opportunity to express their feelings, and seeking to make the positive side of this growth clear to them.

In one of his congregations, Frank had been working through a major moral issue amongst his leaders. These issues are difficult anywhere, but perhaps more so in a small and more isolated community where everyone has close knowledge of each other. The issue had been very divisive and also personally stressful for Frank and a number of the other leaders. He shared,

I have kept close to my two clerks [i.e. secretaries of kirk session]. They have been superb. I don't think I could have got to where I am today but for their support. I have also had a prayer relationship with people within the session. Not with everybody.... So even within the Session, if you want to put it like the twelve disciples, there were also three who were...close[r] [W]e have been able to spend time in prayer together.

Frank clearly stated that he would have broken down if it were not for this small group. The matter was still difficult and divisive, but Frank was confident that it would be handled wisely while maintaining the fellowship.

Eric spoke of close relationships amongst the leadership. He shared that for a very long time there was one elder with whom he met weekly “to pray and plan and think through things.” This has broadened out to the whole eldership group of six, though it

was also clear that without careful leadership it could have been more difficult. He explained, “We have always had good relations in the leadership. Any of the potential for bad relationships left. One of them left during that time. [i.e. the discussions over a new building] It was essential because we could see the fractures coming at that point.”

The importance of emotionally intelligent relationships cannot be overestimated as the example and influence of these bonds of fellowship among key leaders and influencers in the church inevitably percolate out from the centre to others. This theme emerged in one form or another in every interview.

Structure, Communication, and Taking Responsibility

A theme which arose out of the dialogue with respondents was that of the vital need for open and on-going communication among leaders and with the wider congregation. Good relationships cannot be nurtured and maintained without constant two-way communication between members and their leaders. Related to this was an emphasis on the need to engage more members in being actively at work in the life of the congregation – to get a genuine “buy in.” To ensure that communication and member involvement was improved, most of these ministers had also made changes to the leadership structure in their congregation.

In the process of a thoroughgoing governance review in Bob’s congregation, steps were being taken to organise a congregational conference where grass-root members would be encouraged to participate in refining the vision for governance as it was emerging. Bob was very aware of the need to help the average member to participate, share their own experiences, contribute to shaping the vision and in the long run become more hands on in practical ways. He recognised that, “[i]n the past many did not have a

clue as to what was going on – this included even people in leadership. This was especially so for young people;...they feel alienated.” This conference was something that had not been attempted before. In a similar vein, but on an on-going basis in David’s congregation, there were occasional congregational meetings where major ideas developed by the eldership were presented to the membership and they were invited to engage in questioning and discussion helping to formulate ideas. The goal was very clearly to encourage a sense of ownership over every aspect of the life and mission of the congregation.

An excellent example of how to engage all leaders in the challenge of keeping the vision as the main priority and of finding ways to develop this vision together came from Eric who spoke about introducing a completely new level of church leadership (i.e. new to PCI.) In addition to eldership (spiritual leadership) and church committee (maintaining buildings and finance), Eric introduced a “church council.” This council was composed of all elders, committee members, plus two main leaders from each separate organisation in the congregation. This quite large group met three times per year. The format for these meetings was to take most of a day during which there would be Bible teaching, sharing, prayer, reports of work, consideration of the “big picture” through a SWAT analysis, and eating together. These council meetings resulted in greater levels of fellowship and understanding of what each group in the congregation was doing, which led to more clarity when it came to developing vision and plans for the way ahead. Through the introduction of one new level of leadership, meeting just three days per year, a completely new conduit of communication was opened up that has developed a sense of unity and purpose in all of the sub-groups in the congregation.

In the congregation in which Henry has been ministering, there had traditionally been a very large kirk session of, at times, up to seventy elders! In a host of ways, this structure was an almost impossible one for decision-making. Gradually over the years the kirk session was downsized. This process was achieved in a low-key way by the “natural wastage” of deaths or retirements, and not holding elders’ elections to replace the loss. The kirk session continued its responsibilities, but a new approach was developed by creating sub-committees which carried responsibility for particular areas of the congregation’s work, for example: youth, children, mission, pastoral, fellowship, etc. Gifted elders who had an active concern for each aspect of work were appointed to chair these groups. At the beginning, the sub-committees were composed only of elders, but over time those who were less interested dropped out and the committees were able to co-opt new, more committed members from the wider congregation. The result of this process was increasing numbers of those who were actively involved with the work of the congregation. This effort was being driven forward by elders who were actively engaged and offering their leadership, while fresh ideas and energy were being added through recruitment of other members from the congregation.

The role and importance of salaried staff teams will be discussed more fully below, but is mentioned here as it is so immediately linked with the development of sub-committees of the kirk session in Henry’s congregation. To ensure that no one was being left out of the process and that the most effective communication was taking place, each staff member was assigned to a sub-committee. The tightly knit staff team which met together each week was able to feed into the sub-committees and also to report back to

staff meetings. This system resulted in better streamlining of planning and a more unified vision of where this large congregation ought to be going.

In his city church, which had been in decline, George also made some significant changes to the leadership structure. It has already been reported that almost all of his elders were relatively new as well as much younger than those who had ceased to serve. In addition to this fact, George led his elders to the decision that they would focus their main attention on developing small fellowship groups throughout the congregation. They determined that in order to make this endeavour work, they as elders would need to meet once a month for training and fellowship. They cancelled their normal evening service and instead began to hold what they call “Learn to Lead.” It is a fellowship and training time for the elders during which they share together about their lives and personal spiritual growth. They pray together and George introduces the themes for home group study for the coming weeks. This system has ramped up the importance of what George calls the “mini churches” and has emphasised to the elders the importance of their role as leaders.

George spoke very strongly about the issue of believers taking responsibility to be active and to serve within the church. He was very aware of the danger of what he called “Christian consumerism” and how churches can give the impression that when someone becomes a new member, everything will be done for them. The success and attractiveness of a congregation is sometimes judged by what the leaders can offer to the members. George was adamant that this impression must be avoided: “Everyone will have to play a part. Our congregation would not be a very welcoming place for a passive Christian. This is for people who want to move from passivity to activity. This is a real shift in culture.”

In spite of this daunting emphasis, George has seen large numbers of people come into his old building, with less than perfect music and many other inadequacies, and still create a vibrant and growing congregation.

Core Leadership

In four of the situations being investigated it became clear that there were small groups of core leaders who were very influential among the wider leadership and entire congregation. In what follows here, it also becomes clear that these groups were not always formally recognised, and there was significant variety in how these groups are structured and function.

Frank deeply appreciated the warm personal relationships and support of a small group of key elders in each of his congregations. This close bond did not include all the elders – but he seems to have been able to avoid divisiveness that could have come through being closer to some than to the rest of the group. This core leadership was both affirming for Frank who was facing some formidable challenges, and also set a standard in the congregations to which others could look. Frank believes that the positive witness of life and attitude of these elders spoke to many of the members and was deeply influential.

Eric spoke about the value of a close relationship with one other significant elder in the congregation. This man was also an evangelist working independently in the general community. A strong link of friendship between the two developed and in numerous ways they complemented each other in work and supported each other in prayer, fellowship, and church-building. For example, they met together weekly “to pray and plan and think through things.” When one was not able to fulfill an engagement or

duty the other would deputise as far as possible. Any people who were contacted through general evangelistic work were directed toward the church, where they could be taught and built up in faith. As well as being moral and spiritual support to one another, they were also a model and example of supportive friendship for others. One result of this is that close relationships have grown between most if not all elders in the congregation, and this is being modeled for the entire congregation, many of whom are new Christians and needing a practical example to follow. From this core relationship between two significant people in the church much fruit has resulted.

Henry shared about having two outstanding elders in key positions. Both his clerk of session and deputy clerk were men of excellent character whose work and personal influence have been very significant in enabling Henry to lead in the way he has. Much of what they do is unseen, yet has real impact. The positive working relationship with these men, along with others on the staff team, has made moving the congregation forward much easier than it would otherwise have been.

As Bob was working toward far-reaching revision of governance, he was drawing upon the wisdom and support of a few older and wiser heads in the congregation who were willing to offer advice and insight on how plans were progressing and how people were reacting. While these people were only consulted on an ad hoc basis and did not seem to form a recognisable core or group, none the less, Bob found this gave moral support and the courage to press on.

Staff Teams

Four of the leaders interviewed had significant staff teams. Bob had a full-time staff of twelve, Andrew had seven, Henry had six and Chris had a staff of five. In

addition, they each had other part-time staff. In each case they held a weekly staff meeting for fellowship, prayer, exchange of information, and planning. Over and above these meetings that lasted around one hour, each minister sought to be available to his staff at any point of need. In two congregations there was a daily time of staff team devotions for about twenty minutes, which team members took turns leading. In one situation there was also a more formal annual review procedure in place, whereby each member of staff reported on work done and progress made. Three of the ministers also sought to enhance fellowship and personal friendship in the team. Bob and Chris held a weekly reading group where they would take an hour for open discussion of a book that they would all have been reading together. Henry held a half-day away three times per year for prayer and planning. In addition to this short retreat, he has had full retreats spanning two or even three days. This implementation has been very intentional and the kirk session has set aside a budget for such team development and other training.

In two of the congregations, there were part-time management posts that were created to help all the various ministries in the congregation work together effectively and harmoniously. In Andrew's situation the post was called an "operations manager" and in George's case, a "ministry co-ordinator." George explained that they were in the process of turning another post into a full-time responsibility. The post of the ministry co-ordinator (MC) had the role of encouraging, facilitating, and streamlining all ministries in the congregation. This individual would not actually do hands-on ministry, but would be focused on helping each element of ministry in the congregation to be as good as it can be. This person is responsible to hold together all the ministries in the congregation, help them flourish, remind them of the overall vision, and help them feel part of a bigger team.

In both cases, these were recognised as important posts that could easily be undervalued, as they were not seen as being at the “coal face.” In all the other congregations there was awareness that this type of role had to be fulfilled. Without such a post it came down to the minister or some of the key leaders to inculcate that sense of unity of purpose across the board. To a degree, this was happening in Henry’s case through the involvement of staff members in each of the major working groups. In David’s case it is possible to see that the elders leading the ministry teams are also exercising such a role – but only because they regularly come together to consider and pray through the “big picture.” This work can be carried out without a dedicated staff member, yet in the cases of Andrew and George there was a strong feeling that this was a strategically important role, and worth paying for even if it meant foregoing opportunity for a more “hands on” post.

Experimenting

As David worked at finding a way to move his long established, solidly evangelical congregation on from their traditional ways of doing things, he concluded it would be unwise to force through a radically different way of organising ministry in the congregation. Together with his elders he developed ideas of how work and ministry could be divided into eight ministry areas and delegated out. It was proposed that they begin a number of experimental ministry groups. David explained, “We went to the church and said we want to pilot these teams for a couple of years. We will come back to you for an evaluation, and if these don’t work we are going to be saying together, guys these don’t work, let’s get rid of them. So we didn’t just dump them on the church. We were making it as easy as possible.” He went on to say, “There is a kind of natural

resistance to any change, so you have to cast the vision so folks have time to understand and to question it and to fully buy into it.” In due course, the congregation did fully discuss how this experiment had progressed and they did vote to continue and develop this approach. By engaging the entire congregation in discussion, review, and modification they benefited from the corporate wisdom of the entire body, and also enjoyed a sense of unity and ownership in decision-making.

Leadership Development

Each of the respondents was deeply aware of the need to develop the next generation of leadership in their congregation. Even though the eight congregations were very different in character, each had specific needs for fresh leaders and each minister interviewed was seeking to address those needs in quite different ways.

Andrew and Bob were probably the most similar in approach. Both were ministering in Anglican congregations in suburban London. The Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS) is an Anglican resource organization that produces some high quality material to help church leaders in ministry. Both Andrew and Bob have made use of “Growing Leaders,”²¹⁵ a ten month leadership development course which grounds potential leaders in the theology, skills, and character necessary for leaders in churches. An integral part of this course is to set up mentoring relationships where mature leaders in the congregation are put together with newer potential leaders to help them reflect upon and consolidate what they are learning through the Growing Leaders course. With reference to the same material, Bob spoke of being careful about who was invited to take on responsibilities and how they ought to be mentored.

²¹⁵ James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life and Jesus* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2004).

Chris spoke about “head-hunting” members when there was a leadership need to be met. He and the staff team would spend time considering particular individuals and whether they could help. The process seemed to be less about leadership development and more about putting suitable people into jobs. While this is not about training, there is still an element of development as individuals learn on the job. On the other hand, Chris also spoke about sixteen young men who had potential for preaching, and so he and another staff member are working with them to hone their ability at sermon preparation and public speaking. They are then being given the opportunity to preach. These are not just future preachers, but also men who can, in time, exercise other forms of wider leadership.

David spoke about the eight ministry teams developed in the congregation and how “[a]lways the leaders are encouraged to look for an apprentice.” The team leaders are expected to delegate responsibilities to see how the apprentices get on, and David explained that he oversaw a “rolling programme of investing in training of group leaders.”

Eric did not give a strong emphasis to intentionally developing leaders, yet it was clear that a significant number of leaders had emerged and been recognised as gifted. As they were appointed to positions, they were also learning on the job. Eric gave emphasis to the training of young people. In fact, his current key youth leaders had come to the fore through the work of a temporary intern who was given the task of developing youth work and identifying potential leaders. This intern worked with six young people and gave them responsibility and feedback on their work. One of the results is that these six are now three married couples! (It is worth saying that there is no evidence that this was part

of a deliberate plan.) Eric said, “They now lead the youth work. They have been wonderful. Our youth work is absolutely booming. We have run out of space on Friday nights. Most of the young people come in from the community. We have thirty-forty of them coming in from completely outside the church.” Eric also commented that he is not being driven by expectations but more by the Holy Spirit and the provision of God. “If you don’t have leadership for a particular activity, then you do not need to engage in that ministry. We don’t feel we have to have every organization that other churches have.... I think God supplies the leadership for that which he is calling us to do. He does not call us to do what we cannot do. So I am kind of relaxed about it.”

In two small rural congregations Frank felt potential development was being hindered by the lack of leadership. For a number of years he has brought in outside help. One was an intern for one year, and more recently there has been a worker with an evangelistic organization who is willing to give a proportion of time to local congregations. These workers have been used to get things moving and draw out potential in some church members. This process has happened more noticeably in one of his congregations. In addition, Frank has had a very positive mentoring relationship with one of his new elders, which is now bearing significant fruit as this elder is passionate about youth work and, along with Frank, is now running a small group with the goal of developing future young leaders.

In George’s congregation the ministry co-ordinator has an important role in working with leaders. He explained, “We do training and equipping and envisioning with leaders in charge,” that is, with people who are already in leadership. There is also a clear strategy of working toward the next generation. The age profile of the congregation

currently shows a significant number of young people in the fourteen-eighteen age range.

George said,

The mid-teens are those who we are seeking to mentor. We are not trying to entertain young people to keep them in church. We are offering training and challenging them to follow Jesus. Some will leave because they are not interested. We are going to disciple those that stick around. These mid-teens are going to be trained in preparation to become the next generation of leaders. This training is on the job description of the Ministry Coordinator.

Some years ago Henry, in collaboration with his clerk of session, put in motion a process of providing leadership training and mentoring. They called it “Leadership Essentials,” which is a three module course that runs over an eighteen-month period. The course has been held twice in the last four years and so far about twenty people have completed it. It was advertised in the congregation, though only those who had been in membership for at least two years could apply. Most attendees were personally encouraged to join as they were showing leadership potential. During the course there were classes in a range of topics and also a study to be carried out personally and with one other course member. Henry takes encouragement from the fact that a number on the first course were elected to the eldership. He commented that this was “[n]ot primarily because they did Leadership Essentials, but perhaps our hunch was right, and these were people who were emerging leaders.”

In each of these eight situations there has been intentional work at developing current and future leadership. In some cases it has been a little more ad hoc, while in others it was seen as a major part of the strategy of the congregation. In all cases it was viewed as important and it is clear from the information gathered that this strategy has been effective in bringing out the potential in individual members. Many have been

drawn into active involvement with the result being that individuals become more influential and the areas of work that they commit to have begun to flourish.

Timing

This category is less about human strategy and planning and more about taking opportunities, responding to providence, and discerning God's purpose. There are examples here of how significant steps forward were made through seemingly mundane activities which were of secondary importance to the wellbeing of the church, but which motivated people to action and eventually stimulated practical gifting and spiritual concern for the growth of the church.

There were three examples of how challenges in renovating buildings brought about greater engagement and commitment to the spiritual work of the congregation and to developing teamwork skills. Chris spoke of a period of leadership development about ten years ago when there was lengthy discussion about making alterations to their main building. Much of this involved finance, negotiating with architects and discussing design, but also there was also the consideration of vision and the purpose of having a certain type of building. A small working group carried most of the responsibility. The process led into a much wider conversation about the mission and ministry of the congregation, and over time greater vision developed. These changes to the fabric of a building also opened up new possibilities in mission and new engagement of some key leaders in the church.

Henry found himself in almost the same type of situation when a group of a dozen or so office bearers had the task of carrying through a major building project. The congregation had to be persuaded of the validity of the work and it took a long time to

reach sufficient consensus to move forward. Henry made the point that a number of these office bearers who had been involved for years in the life of the congregation felt that this challenge had brought them closer to others and was more fulfilling than anything else they had been involved with. While agreement was not easy to reach, there was a real sense of commitment in the group and wider congregation as the work progressed.

Frank also referred to the sense of united purpose that emerged through a building project and how this also led to a greater sense of purpose in ministry. One of his congregations has benefited notably in their regular worship through meeting in a modernised building that is more conducive to fellowship and interaction. Frank's story is another example of a leader responding to mundane and practical challenges and leading people forward to more important spiritual work. With reference to the election of new elders, Frank spoke about "entering a new phase" whereby he could attempt things that would not have been possible at an earlier stage. He has taken the opportunity to lead this group of elders forward in deeper consideration of their spiritual responsibilities in the congregation. This would have been impossible at an earlier stage without the addition of new members.

Eric's comments, referred to under the previous theme of leadership development, are in essence the same point. He does not allow himself to be pressured by expectations alone to go in a certain direction. He accepts that until the right leadership is in place there is no value in struggling to go forward. He emphasised that the Lord would provide for what they ought to be doing, and that the provision itself was part of God's guidance and timing to which they should respond.

The first research question was, “What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?” In reporting and expanding upon the dialogue with the respondents it has become clear that each in their own way has been active in approaching leadership development. There have been a great variety of approaches, yet also much overlap. The practical steps which some have taken are very different from others, yet many of the conditions necessary for leadership development are the same. Understanding systems, creating vision, maintaining positive relationships, drawing existing and potential leadership into committed involvement, all these are necessary along with many and varied practical steps depending upon the local circumstance and opportunities.

Second Research Question

“What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations?”

This topic will help clarify just how challenging it can be to implement the strategies that have been outlined. Returning to the diagram of Roxburgh and Romanuk in *The Missional Leader*²¹⁶ referred to in chapter two, the main difficulties hindering progress occur in the red zone amidst crisis. In this phase of a church’s life the effectiveness of older established methods has declined, there is anxiety and the realisation that things are changing, yet a positive way forward is not generally seen or accepted. This phase is the territory of conflicting opinion and practical difficulty. In the interviews many of these were voiced. Again they will be grouped under generalised headings.

²¹⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 41.

Passivity

Chris was very aware that for years of his ministry his eldership took on little responsibility. They were happy if he was to push forward developments, and they seemed to see themselves as a kind of final authority to give the go ahead to an idea and then sit back as the minister implemented it. He said, “There was no real leadership at all from the elders and deacons and there was a strong sense of compliance.” He made the comment, tongue in cheek, describing how in the “typical Presbyterian situation that the minister is more like the Pope!” His view was that this passivity was his biggest issue to overcome. Frank also expressed the very same sentiments. Speaking of the elders in one of his congregations he said, “[T]hey took a more traditional rural approach where essentially the minister was the chief of staff. He headed everything up and they were happy to say yes and back it. Folks were not happy to initiate anything.” His elders, almost all from farming backgrounds, were for a long time not just content to let him get on with the work, but determined that he should, as that is what they paid him for!

Interpersonal Tensions

Andrew referred to the early period of his ministry in the congregation when he had invited a leadership advisory organisation to carry out a study on the leadership of the congregation. To put it mildly, the results were disconcerting. Andrew recounted that after spending a day with the staff, the facilitator came to the conclusion that “[w]e were a fairly dysfunctional team.” The truth was that the team had not worked well for some time. Appointments had been made during the time between Andrew’s predecessor leaving and his own arrival. There was a church plant associated with the main congregation and the leadership of this group, who were officially under the authority of

the main congregation but had become a law unto themselves. They sought to remain aloof, and when they did come to staff meetings tended to avoid taking part. Ultimately a number of members felt the need to move on, and Andrew is content that the current team gels well and that there is a good degree of trust.

Frank has also dealt with many tensions between individuals. These have also been referred to above under the theme of relationships. A major moral issue concerning one of the elders arose and for an extended period of time there was tension. The situation was not clear to begin with, and then later there was fear of intervening and making it worse. Coupled with this concern was the hope that the issue might go away if left alone, and the unwillingness to confront the problem as it was just too difficult. These tensions can be very debilitating, distracting, and stressful. Thankfully, the issue has been resolved by the kirk session asking the elder in question to step down. As difficult as this situation has been, Frank continues to have contact with the elder concerned and also to lead the kirk session forward in dealing with the other “normal” issues of congregational life facing them. Frank faces a continuing issue in the same kirk session where the clerk who is genuinely visionary and progressive is viewed as an outsider by some of the others who have a long family history in the congregation. The clerk of session came from another nearby congregation about twenty-five years ago, but is still viewed as what older members call a “blow in.” Frank has been working at supporting his clerk of session who has so much to contribute and has been a tower of strength to Frank in many difficult situations.

In a similar vein, Chris has had to deal with older members and some elders who are trying to protect what they see as their territory and ways of doing things. Eric

likewise has faced the same tensions. Thankfully, in both these congregations the tensions have been reduced as some have quietly left, and the remainder have moved more to the periphery and away from power.

Community Change

In the Republic of Ireland there has been great mobility of people. Eric's congregation is genuinely multicultural, which has been a blessing. However, since there has been a recession some have moved back to their home countries or to other places in the search for work. The result is that the congregation has lost some key leaders and future leaders.

Linked with this loss was a major problem caused by the collapse of the property market. Due to the growth of the congregation Eric had been leading toward building a new worship centre on a greenfield site. However the deep recession in Ireland seemed to change everything. For a time the idea seemed financially impossible, but in spite of all the uncertainties the congregation united and went ahead. It was a major challenge that seemed to cut off all possibility for a new beginning, but with a real sense of faith and unity they went ahead and are now continuing to flourish in their new purpose-built premises.

Congregational Change

Previously, under the theme of relationships, it was explained that David had encountered difficulties in dealing with members complaining about the changes brought about by rapid growth. If one has to have a problem in a church, most church leaders would pray that it would be this one! However, it is not without some challenges that require sympathetic handling. If a significant number of older, more established members

become unhappy and in any way unwelcoming, then the new growth will soon disappear to some more welcoming fellowship. This issue was a danger in David's congregation where some of the older deacons were becoming uneasy with the growth. He explained, "One of them used to let rip every now and again and say he did not know the people in the church. I always responded saying that isn't it wonderful that there are new people in the church. This is what we have been praying for for years." Related to this growth were the changes being made to the leadership structure in David's congregation. This change also caused a certain amount of unease and David explained the process of small experimental steps with review by the congregation. He said, "There is a kind of natural resistance to any change, so you have to cast the vision so folks have time to question it and to fully buy into it. That is the process we used." A period of testing, dialogue, and reassuring was required to maintain relationships and keep the door open to progress.

In speaking about the difficulties he had faced, Chris used the term "defensiveness." He said "change was seen as a criticism and people got very defensive about stuff." Difficulties emerged if there was any attempt to change the way things were done. In addition to preaching, Chris felt he had to take a personal approach, such as "a one to one basis with people who were finding change difficult, and recognise pastorally that some of your folk find change very difficult and talk it through and make sure they know there is no animosity and the defensive problem does not need to be there." Chris linked this with what was explained above about some who believed the only things God would bless were the methods and activities that he had blessed in past generations. While it was Chris who expressed this difficulty most clearly, others shared that they had dealt with the same kind of issues.

Traditionally in the PCI the major role of the elder was to visit members in their homes. Typically each elder was assigned up to fifteen families (sometimes more) whom they would visit, usually to distribute information about a forthcoming communion service (often held just twice per year). This need explains why some larger congregations had such large numbers of elders – there was one elder to each district. This approach is usually deeply embedded in PCI congregations, and there has been resistance from traditional elders to any attempts to change this. George was faced with tension over this issue. His older and more traditional elders felt that this practice had to be maintained, while younger elders resisted this rigid and often quite formal approach. George commented, “I negotiated different ways of being an elder. I did not say to the older elders – your ways of going around doors with communion tokens is wrong. That is still valid, ...but have you noticed this network of small groups in the church?” Chris appealed for freedom to allow different approaches to be taken. This appeal was fully discussed at an elders’ conference where the decision was taken to allow diversity without reproach. This change seems to have been accepted in the congregation and is allowing freedom to develop pastoral care in ways that are appropriate to both the elders and their members. In fact, this is a major issue throughout PCI that has received a lot of discussion in an effort to move the whole denomination forward. George’s work has been important in helping people to see a bigger picture and different ways to do things.

Under the theme of fear about change and new directions, George also faced a particularly difficult personal challenge that arose without warning from some of his older elders. Three of them had cherished a youth organization that had been very strong in the days of their own youth. They were very disappointed when this organization was

not continuing to flourish, and they felt that George as minister should have done more to address this problem. There was a personal attack on George at a meeting of the kirk session that was difficult to handle emotionally. As a result of this George sought to apply Matthew 18:15 where Jesus advises individuals to directly deal with difficult issues and sin. He had a significant conversation face to face with these elders trying to help them see the dangers of idolising the organizations and activities of the past, while missing the bigger picture of what God is doing today. This type of difficulty is common to many congregations, but, in taking the approach that he did, George stated that he believed these sorts of criticisms and general bickering over lesser issues were less likely to occur as they would be dealt with directly, and with respect.

Unwieldy Leadership

Henry spoke about having a kirk session of about seventy elders and the problems in decision-making: “One of the obstacles in leadership in a large church structured the way ours is – and we inherit this from the past – is the time it takes to reach consensus.” There are just so many ideas and conflicting opinions that setting new directions can be very drawn out. Henry efforts to address this issue, by reducing numbers and also setting up smaller sub-committees, has been detailed above. Similar problems were expressed by Andrew and Bob, both of whom lead Anglican congregations. Andrew said, “Because we are Anglican we have a governmental structure. There are two church wardens who are, if you like, the senior lay folk of the church.... The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a body of about thirty people, quite a large group, and in that sense, in terms of governance, it is not a good model.” Bob offered, “The church council and trustees board is about thirty people, which is just too big. So making decisions is just about impossible, and so

the default position is that it rests with the staff team, which I think is probably inappropriate.”

Another facet to this issue was that certain leadership groups wanted to micro-manage staff members. Bob spoke about some congregants coming on to the PCC and imagining they could direct and check up on the daily or weekly activities of staff members. Bob was working hard to “clearly define and manage expectations and roles” of PCC members. A similar issue will be returned to under the theme of decision-making authority below.

Decision-Making Authority

In discussion Henry recognised that there were practical and sensitive issues to be managed in the relationship between the kirk session and members of the staff team. The issue of who is really in charge is a genuine one. Who sets the direction? Who calls the shots? Henry referred to a book he had read where the author wrote about what he called an accelerator/brake effect. There were times when the staff team saw something they wanted to pursue and tried to put their foot on the gas, however, the eldership wanted to put on the brake. Likewise, there are times when the eldership wants to move forward, but the staff sees problems and tries to put the brake on. The result of the accelerator/brake effect is a bumpy ride! Henry admitted, “We have never quite cracked just how much staff needs to go back to elders for approval.”

In general terms, the direct involvement of staff in sub-committees prevents major problems, but, none the less, there can be problems. Ultimately in PCI, the kirk session is the ruling body made up of ruling elders. There have been times when some of Henry’s elders have asked the question, “If we are not leading by ruling, then what are we doing?”

It is a difficult issue and Henry suspects that eventually they will have to move to a structure where the staff team has more power to develop strong proposals and the eldership will act as an advisory body as well as the final decision-making body for major new developments. Some years ago Henry had been on sabbatical and had spent a few days at Redeemer Church New York where he met some members of the leadership team. He commented, “They have a smaller eldership there than we would have. They have a massive staff. They said that in the congregation...there had to be a recognition that the church had to be staff-led rather than elder led.” This idea very much ties in with the thinking of Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, who explained, “As a church gets larger it must entrust decision-making to fewer and fewer people just to maintain the same level of progress, decisiveness, and intentionality it had when it was smaller.”²¹⁷

This issue was also elucidated by Bob. It was an issue he had faced in the general course of his work, but was especially pertinent since he was in the middle of the governance review. No final position had been reached, but he was aware that it needed to be made clear so that the tensions he was aware of could be relieved.

Throughout the interviews, many facets of difficulty were expressed and the themes listed above give a sense of the breadth of problems that can arise. In each case the respondents had worked hard to overcome difficulties, often at great emotional cost to themselves. Frank spoke about two occasions when there was great tension. One was linked with sectarianism in the community where some people accused a number of the

²¹⁷ Tim Keller, *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2006), 13, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/527e3407e4b0f4289e504bc8/t/55130f44e4b0767ae4f72a9f/1427312452174/Church+Size+Dynamics.pdf>.

elders of not caring. The other was a very difficult issue among the eldership, which Frank explained,

This past year we were put under huge pressure regarding one of the elders.... In a peculiar way there is that common suffering that pulled us together and strengthened us in a very tangible way. We were broken following that final meeting. Myself and some of the elders were in tears, broken by the whole thing. But I believe God in his grace solidified our leadership as a result of that.

George spoke about the occasion at their kirk session when without warning he was accused by an older elder of not advertising a meeting properly. He shared, “That was so out of character. I was very hurt by it.... I had to go and have this conversation with three elders in their eighties.... I had to say to them – I am the guy you are trying to shoot down.” By addressing the issue proactively and face to face George believes that it has now been put behind them, and that people know that if personal frictions and conflicts arise, they will be addressed in this manner.

The strategies and general principles of leadership outlined in answer to the first research question are relevant to dealing with all of these difficult issues. Using the strategies listed has also helped reduce the stress of dealing with difficulty.

Third Research Question

“How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations?”

Once again, the responses will be reduced to a number of recurrent themes. As with previous questions, this results in leaving out some subtle nuances from each situation, but it does point to substantial outcomes that can be expected in other congregations where effective leadership is being applied.

Building Trust

When an effective leadership structure is in place there is a growth in trust throughout the organization. This theme was specifically mentioned by two of the respondents. In reality, it is probably true to say that it underlies many of the examples referred to in this chapter, though not stated explicitly. Andrew explained that his staff members were generally well-accepted because, in his own words, “they have got credit in the bank.” He was referring to credibility built up over a period of time leading members of the congregation to trust them with new or risky things. He painted a picture of a congregation that had become generally trusting of its leaders and willing to move with them. He spoke of a staff member who is “[h]eld in huge affection. He has made a very positive impact, just because he has given himself.” This member and the staff in general have earned relationship capital by consistency and sacrificial commitment to the wellbeing of the congregation and its individual members.

George spoke about his first years in the congregation. He was in his early thirties and working with elders well above twice his age. He explained, “It was like doing church with my grandparents.” He proceeded carefully and initially changed very little. As time progressed, people saw the shared vision they had based on the gospel and the early results of his leadership. His approach (and no doubt, his character) seemed to earn a lot of trust. He shared, “I think once they saw that and were sure about it, they came to trust.” The result was greater openness to experiment. Initially George had earned the trust and as he began to build a team of volunteers, and later of part-time and full-time staff, that trust continued to grow.

Momentum and Motivation

Over time Andrew has witnessed increasing numbers of people engaging in the work of the church. He stated that there is “a good sense of the team being part of all that is going on. Partly because we always delegate out. Responsibility is widely dispersed – so at times it is hard to define who is the leadership team and who is not. We have so many people involved in different ways.” Andrew provided an excellent example of an occasion when he had been away for some months on sabbatical and returned just before Easter. He was amazed and delighted to find that a huge outreach to the community had been organised called “A Walk Through Holy Week,” which was a multimedia retelling of the Easter story. In this wealthy and secular community they drew in over one-thousand visitors including hundreds of school children, some from Muslim backgrounds. The leadership’s point was, “We saw that across the congregation, people [were] committed to making it work.” He was particularly pleased that this had happened without his direct involvement – the team was motivated and momentum grew.

Developing Future Leadership

Leadership development has been outlined in detail under the first research question. Working at this is not just a strategy, but clearly brings a result. Each of the respondents was able to share something about this strategy and the results they had experienced. Andrew and Bob had used the Growing Leaders course produced by the Church Pastoral Aid Society; Chris had given training in preaching and opportunity to learn through experience to a number of the young men in his congregation; Frank spoke about his investment in one young man who is now a key elder and voluntary youth worker; George shared about a well-worked out curriculum that he seeks to draw all

young people into; Henry has developed his own leadership essentials course which about twenty members have completed, and several have since been elected to eldership. One further example is sufficient to make the point. With reference to the changes made to leadership structure and team, David commented, “We are seeing younger people taking more responsibility. The bulk of our congregation is under forty. We did a survey a number of years ago and we have 65 percent involvement. We place a really high value on folk getting really involved.” This is a congregation where commitment is growing, members are actually giving up time to serve, and increasingly younger members are being given the challenge of responsibility. Future leaders are arising. Each congregation in this study is also experiencing that response, though not all to the same degree.

Change

The previous three points are all about positive change. There are many facets to change and it would be impossible to simplify them all. The fundamental point is that all living things grow and change, including organizations. However, it is also true that for this positive change to take place, sometimes there must be pruning. Three of the respondents mentioned this requirement specifically. While speaking about older members who warmed to the gospel and the changes, Eric also recognised this was not true for everyone: “Others felt uncomfortable with a complete change of congregation and others from a different culture and different ways of doing things. Gradually these slipped away from the church and remained absent.” He was deeply thankful that it had been a quiet removal. George had also experienced the same as he challenged people to active discipleship: “I can sometimes almost see it on their faces, they are going, ‘What was that all about?’ which means that they don’t join us. They go up the road to the

church with the bigger band and lights.” Andrew had encountered this among disengaged staff members: “[T]hey would appear at staff meetings but not really take part.” In this particular case, the difficulties were only resolved when those team members left.

On a much more positive note, all the respondents spoke about change in a positive way. It is impossible to encapsulate everything but some of the main aspects of change are as follows. Andrew, Bob, and Henry have seen significant change to leadership structure and governance. It is probably true to say that in the cases of Bob and Henry there is still more to come. Chris and David have seen members becoming increasingly more involved in service. Both Eric and George have been blessed to see numerical growth in what seemed like dying congregations. Frank has experienced some renewal of his eldership, both through stressful and difficult decisions and also through the addition of enthusiastic new elders. The changes reported are all about the growing life and vigour of these congregations.

One final example will be given. Ireland in the past was a very sheltered, and in many ways, closed society. There was little cultural variation in the community and the church usually reflected this. Eric was able to report a significant change to this norm with the election of the first African as an elder. For some time there had been a very real mix of races in the congregation, but when one of the members from a different cultural background was elected to a key leadership position, this was a strong sign of positive change and of the inclusiveness of the congregation.

Informal Leadership

One impact that is particularly difficult to quantify and rigidly define is that of who exactly the real leaders are. In some situations it is clear, while in others it is not.

There are always those who are publicly recognised as leaders with formal responsibilities and authority. In addition, there are often individuals who exercise significant influence informally through their character and willing engagement with members and activities, which is exercising leadership through personal and spiritual qualities.

There are situations where this issue is fraught with tension and there can be individuals pulling against each other. In all the situations surveyed there was formal, clearly-defined, leadership authority – the group who had the final-decision making power. However, most of the respondents recognised that there were individuals who, through their personal influence, were exercising powerful informal leadership. Andrew is quoted above as saying, “At times it is hard to define who is the leadership team and who is not.” Such people are spiritually-minded, progressive members who through the influence of their character, exercise leadership without having any formal authority. Many of these leaders emerge as a result of on-going Bible teaching about Christian character and specific leadership training and mentoring. Members such as these bring all kinds of hopeful possibilities for the future of any congregation.

There are potential pitfalls in these two spheres of leadership. Some may begin to exercise their influence through strong personality that may not be marked by Christ-like qualities. This issue is illustrated in the experience of Bob and Frank. Bob spoke about tensions that had developed between staff team, church council, and some individuals, which resulted in leadership that “is not clear, nor is there that wise eldership function happening. This unofficial leadership does not actually have executive responsibility and

the ability to affect things.” This situation was not good and he was working to find a positive way through tensions to better decision-making.

In other cases there was also informal leadership making a very positive impact. An example of this is the small group of elders that Frank was so thankful for. These men were both formal leaders, but also personally influential through their Christ-like character and willingness to serve. However, even in these situations there are dangers. Frank explained, “In kirk session there is the large group, but also a small group within that. You have to be very careful about that.” He was aware that he needed to work to avoid the impression of a secretive inner circle of power that excluded some elders.

The impact of an effective leadership team has been shown under these five headings. Trust has been built, without which a congregation can never be a healthy organization. Examples have been given of members being motivated to service and momentum growing. Each congregation has been developing future leadership – some in small ways, others more significantly. Change has been happening – sometimes in difficult and negative ways, but even the pruning has resulted in potential for growth. Informal leadership has been noted – leadership that arises not out of formal authority, but from the relational capital that grows from consistent positive involvement with other members for the good of the whole congregation. The five themes referred to above are quite general and the impact of such leadership teams will never be the same in two differing settings. However, from what has been shared by the respondents, it is to be expected that when there is an effective leadership structure in place there is a very strong likelihood of positive benefit to the congregation and individual members.

Fourth Research Question

“Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?”

The main focus of this question is on finding reasons for the positive outcomes that flow so readily from good leadership. From the examples given throughout this chapter a number of themes arise.

Clarity with Simplicity

This chapter has returned again and again to themes such as vision; biblical preaching; commitment to the gospel message; and prayer and dependence upon God’s provision. George spoke about “vision-led leadership” and preaching about “what the scriptures call us to be as the people of God.” Chris pointed to the preaching ministry as a major factor in “changing people and developing their ministry.” Eric spoke with determined clarity, “[T]o the best of our ability we have tried to keep the gospel at the centre. We have doggedly refused to shift from the gospel.” He went on to speak about harnessing the gospel message with a love for people, describing this as the key to progress (i.e. the reason for success). Throughout that particular interview Eric showed his conviction that methods and effort are secondary issues; what really matters is the presence of the living God: “We pray week in week out ‘Lord, will you be among us’.” His closing words in the recorded interview were, “You can get away with many flaws, [be]cause we have them. Many, many flaws, but when people say God is among you, you have got something right at that point.” Frank made similar points:

This might sound very basic – but in all of this there has been a prayerful approach, you know, that unity in spirit. In many of the cases there has been a crisis, so we have been working our way through it and we have been at a loss to know what to do; maybe even within myself I’ve felt a sense of panic.... We have

been part of a network of praying people. I really do sense that. I am not just saying that out of triteness. I genuinely believe that.

Each of these leaders in their own way has been persistent in pursuing what they see as crucial for the life of the church. They have been keeping the main thing the main thing. With clarity, they have seen what really matters and what is secondary. There has been an impressive simplicity in their determination to emphasise these things.

Clear and on-going communication has been a vital element in helping members understand and buy in to the vision of the leadership. Among any group of people there are usually multiple opinions and inclinations about how the organization should proceed. These can often be in tension with one another. The leaders interviewed spoke about reiterating the vision and goals of their congregation regularly, which has been vital in helping all to see the way forward.

Competence with Unity

There was a pervading theme in the interviews of the importance of having in place an organization that is well-managed, efficient, and led by people who are genuinely at one with each other. These conditions are both practical and spiritual needs. When there is a healthy, functional system everyone is drawn in and cared for.

Toward the end of his interview Bob began to speak of “body ministry” as the only way to do biblical ministry: “It is fundamental. Humanly speaking, it is just sensible – I would just die. There is enough pressure anyway, but it would be impossible any other way. I would also impoverish the community if I were trying to do everything.” He recognised that people need to be set free to use their gifts. A vital role of the leadership was to order itself in such a way that this freedom would be possible. Chris spoke of the cultural shift that had taken place as the growing staff team were able to “organize things

and catalyse other people to get involved. That sort of adaptation across the congregation has been a major shift.” The sense of unity with his clerk of session was very important and the progress could not have happened without that support. Chris gave additional important insight into that sense of being together as a fellowship: “[P]eople are less scared of making a mistake. From early days we have spoken about permission to fail; ...people have been encouraged to go out of their comfort zone.” He went on to say that the sense of doing things together and of fellowship “has increased enormously.”

The unity that many of these leaders spoke of was not just a spiritual thing. A number of them explained that unity and fellowship develops at a social level as well. David spoke about being out the evening before the interview playing ten pin bowling and having a meal with some of the elders and deacons. He explained how, for him, one vital key to effective functioning of leadership teams is “the quality of relationships, so what we do is we seek to develop those relationships intentionally, by having social activities.” Frank picked up the same theme about developing mutual openness and vision “as we meet, and as we drink coffee and go for walks, just talking, talking, talking about what is on our hearts and exciting us.” The sense of unity, open and honest relationship, and shared responsibility were important for him.

Character

Character is not a strategy, but a quality. It is, however, impossible to have strategies that emphasise clarity and simplicity, competence and unity without the human quality of good character. In fact, this is ultimately a spiritual matter of becoming more and more like Jesus. These things cannot be kept apart.

Andrew expressed it most succinctly, “Some individuals build faith in others through their personalities, through their own lifestyle as well as what they do.” He gave the example of how his children’s minister, whose wife has just had their second child, and his family arrived just after the service started “and got a great applause and cheers – they are held in huge affection. He has made a very positive impact, just because he has given himself.” Here is someone who has invested himself with people and built significant relationship capital among many in the congregation. Those bonds have grown and the congregation was deeply appreciative of him and expressed it at a special time in his life, but perhaps more importantly in willingness to support and follow the lead he is offering in ministry among children and families.

Frank spoke about the young elder with whom he has had such a fruitful mentoring relationship: “There is a very clear link between [name of elder] being regenerated and then pouring himself into these young people.... He longs to see them knowing Christ.... I would say that if the Holy Spirit had not been working in [the elder’s] life we would not have had this impact.” The changes that have taken place in his character are now speaking clearly to others at Bible studies, social occasions, and at one to one meetings.

George spoke about the “badges of orthodox evangelicalism” that often get emphasised – things like numbers at morning services or mid-week prayer meetings. In contrast to this he went on to say, “For me the badges are the quality of the life of our community.... The role of the church is to be the light of the world, that others see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.” For George, the recurring question for the church must be “how could we more demonstrate the beauty of Jesus?”

It is very difficult to find essential and case-specific reasons for success in any venture. In certain situations there may well be such factors, however, it is more likely that the general conditions listed in answer to this last research question will always be present in any successful congregation. It is also likely that these strategies and qualities will actually be at least as important as any case-specific reason.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative research project has investigated how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. The four research questions have focused on strategies, difficulties, impact, and reasons. The eight interviewees provided a large amount of information and rich material that has been difficult to summarise. The complexities of each situation were deep and the variety in the eight examples has been wide. The different approaches have been thought-provoking and while the conclusions can only be generalised, the overlaps and similarities are sufficient to show that there are some significant principles and approaches to be adopted in any situation where a church leader wants to think through the issue of creating an effective leadership structure for the congregation. The themes arising from the interviews have revealed significant links between issues highlighted in the literature review and the practical approaches taken on the ground by the leaders and congregations who have been studied. It is to these links that the final chapter will turn.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. The reason for such a project arises out of the problems and challenges that are facing the church in the twenty-first century.

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, evidence of the decline in church attendance was given along with comment on some of the reasons for this. It was noted that throughout the last number of decades in the United Kingdom, church attendance has fallen significantly. In 1979 attendance in England stood at 5.4 million (11.7 percent of the population). Nineteen years later, in 1998, this had dropped to 3.7 million (7.5 percent of the population). This statistic reveals a disturbing downturn, and the deeper concern is that it has happened so rapidly, and at a time when the population has grown.²¹⁸

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has experienced similar decline in numbers, causing much concern, which has been the subject of much discussion and report at the general assembly of the church:

We live in a changing world and an unfortunate aspect of that is an unrelenting decline in Church attendance especially amongst the younger generation. Society is becoming increasingly secular and distant from God. The models and patterns of leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland often date from a by-gone era of “Christendom” when the Church did not face these challenges. Perhaps that is part of the reason why leaders are overstretched.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Gibbs and Coffey, 21-22.

²¹⁹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 2011), 195.

The fact that many leaders are overstretched has been recognised within the PCI for many years. Sadly, there are many examples of ministers struggling with tensions and weariness, and this frequently comes to a critical stage. In 1996, this issue was recognised and widely discussed by the General Assembly in its annual reports.²²⁰ The Divine Healing Committee spent three years surveying ministers and studying the incidence of stress. In drawing conclusions on what might be the causes of this problem, their report to the assembly contained the following comments: "...22 percent of the respondents indicated an excessive level of stress. 9 percent had already been off due to stress during the previous three years. 17 percent had given prolonged consideration to moving out of full-time ministry altogether, and for 3 percent it was a case of both time off and considering a move out."²²¹

When close to a quarter of ministers in PCI feel they are under great stress in their work it is vital to understand why, and whether steps can be taken to mitigate this. Much has been written on the reasons underlying these problems. In his book *Leadership Next*, Eddie Gibbs notes the changing cultural conditions that bear down upon church leaders, members, and activities. He lists economic pressures on families resulting in less commitment to church activity, demographic changes in age profile and/or ethnic diversity, and increasingly sophisticated information technology which impacts how people communicate and interact with others.²²² These and many other factors arising out of a rapidly changing and increasingly restless society tend to make leadership much more complex and demanding for anyone called to ministry in the modern church. For

²²⁰ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 1996), 233-235.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

²²² Gibbs, 46-48.

the vast majority of people who no longer have a realistic commitment to a church there is the feeling that the church no longer meets their needs or speaks relevantly to the community.

The difficult task of the church leader is compounded by disequilibrium – the realisation of committed church members that the faith and values they cherish is no longer accepted in the community. In fact, the present author has called this double disequilibrium due to members feeling not only the wider community rejecting their outlook and values, but also feeling disconcerted by the changes within the church as numbers decline and leaders seek to make well-intentioned changes to traditional ways of doing things. Three of the interviewees in particular referred to this type of issue as they spoke about the work of interacting with members who were anxious about falling numbers or about new approaches to church activities that they were not familiar or comfortable with. David gave a particularly clear example of this situation: “We did have some older deacons who were kind of stuck in the mud and one of them used to let rip every now and again and say he did not know the people in the church.... We found that some of the older deacons could not hack it, so we had a number of the older deacons go, which was the best thing that happened to us.”

Leaders are struggling with pressure to maintain what many of their members demand in church life. They also wrestle with deeply worrying trends in society. Often they are struggling alone, or at least carrying the vast bulk of the work themselves. The final chapter will focus on the challenge of creating a team that can share the burdens, bring a fresh vitality of relationships, and broaden the appeal of the church.

Summary of Findings

The literature review of chapter two examined three areas of academic interest to those who are writing on leadership in the business world. Systems theory has shown the importance of understanding the myriad relationships, behaviour patterns, presuppositions and beliefs within an organization. The study of systems gives insight to anyone seeking to help an organization change its way of functioning. Adaptive leadership sheds light on the nature of change needed in any organization. In particular it points to the fact that, in the rapidly changing world we inhabit, organizations don't so much need to improve efficiency, but to completely transform their vision, thinking, and practice. The study of emotional intelligence has shown that one of the most significant factors in successful team life is open, respectful, and positive relationships. Emotional intelligence is the relational air that keeps a team alive. Where there is emotional intelligence amongst team members it is possible to have creative examination and even criticism of everyone's ideas in the search for good decisions. These three topics have been individually explored, but it is also important to keep in mind that they can rarely, if ever, be considered independently. Each discipline interrelates and sheds light on the others.

The literature review concluded with a review of biblical material on the topic of leadership. Since the church has originated out of the work and word of God, and since God has clearly used chosen leaders throughout the entire history of humanity, it is essential to consider examples and guidance from the scriptures. The word of God is the primary source of guidance for church leadership. It has been important to note how

much the academic material has actually revealed and confirmed the value of biblical approaches to Christian fellowship and leadership.

This dissertation has highlighted detailed interviews with eight church leaders in active ministry in a wide variety of congregations. This inclusion was to ground the study in realistic contexts, particularly to give illustration of the key study themes in a UK church context. These interviews have been shaped by the following four research questions:

1. What are the main strategies ministers use to create effective leadership teams in congregations?
2. What issues make it difficult to develop effective leadership teams in congregations?
3. How have effective leadership teams impacted the life and vitality of congregations?
4. Why have some strategies used by ministers to create effective leadership teams been successful?

These questions invited the participants to explain the strategies and approaches they had used in their work, with a particular focus on the issue of developing leadership. They were also invited to talk about difficulties encountered and how they sought to address those. It was important to assess the impact of the approach they had taken and if there were any obvious reasons why they had experienced success in what they are doing.

In this final chapter the findings from the literature review and the qualitative research will be discussed in relation to each other and summarised with reference to the project purpose statement. Conclusions and practical applications will be presented with

the particular purpose of relating these findings to the role of ministers working in the PCI.

In brief, this study has shown that there are ways to develop effective leadership teams which help create healthy churches that maintain biblical foundations and find ways to speak to, be heard by, and make a positive contribution to contemporary society.

The summary which follows will be shaped by the themes of the primary research questions. The subject matter (though not the actual wording) of each question will be used to create the main headings of this summary. Note that the order of the first two research questions has been reversed.

Issues Which Hinder the Development of Effective Leadership Teams

Throughout the literature review and the analysis of the interviews, many reasons for problems in leadership development have been illustrated and discussed. These can be categorised under five headings:

Changes in Society

In both the introductory chapter and the literature review, the study offered examples of change that have an impact upon the whole of society including the church. The list included change and development in technology, the economy, family life, working practices, and communication.²²³ These changes have had a multifaceted impact upon the church and its leadership. In the Western world people are generally more materialistic, under increasing pressure of work, and more caught up with plans and dreams about themselves. In churches, the result is members who are profoundly tired and stretched, keen to protect leisure time for hobbies and interests either personally or with their children, and generally less committed to time-consuming engagement in

²²³ Ibid.

church life. These traits were referred to specifically in two of the interviews in very contrasting circumstances. Andrew, in his congregation with a large number of professional people in the capital city of the UK, and Frank, in his congregation with a predominance of farmers, both spoke about the difficulty of getting people to commit to involvement. In Andrew's case he found people willing to give money so that others could be hired, while in Frank's case it seemed to be more a case of general lack of vision for what might be possible. In most of the other congregations there were additional staff working to do jobs that in the past would have been taken on by volunteers. This situation is probably just a fact of modern life, but it is worth pointing out that in at least three of these congregations there is evidence that when challenged with a vision it is still possible to motivate volunteers to a high level of commitment. While changes in society have made it difficult to develop church life in general and leadership teams in particular, it is still possible when members catch the vision and are biblically challenged about their values and priorities in life.

Relying on Technical Solutions

This is the tendency to imagine that the answer to the challenges facing the church today is to work harder, be more efficient, and to keep doing more of the same things. In fact, this problem is evident in the business world as well. Heifetz and Linsky have stated that "the single most common source of leadership failure...is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems."²²⁴ Those who are totally reliant on technical solutions to organizational problems do not understand the wider societal changes in thinking, values, and priorities that have taken place. Examples of this type of thinking emerged from some of the tensions that George

²²⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, 14.

had to work through in his congregation. Among the set of elders who were in place when he arrived in his declining congregation, there were feelings that the most important way to do pastoral work in the congregation was through the traditional “elder’s visit.” There was also a very strong emotional attachment to a youth and children’s organization that had been widely accepted and influential in a previous generation. Both these issues were difficult and differences of opinion were the cause of friction between elders.

In addressing these problems, George took the creative, experimental approach that Roxburgh and Romanuk commend: “As the initial experiments bear fruit, others in the congregation begin to see that it is possible to imagine and practice new habits and actions without destroying what they know and love. This encourages increasing confidence in the change process and starts to change the culture of the congregation.”²²⁵ According to George, he “negotiated two different ways of doing eldership,” allowing freedom for individuals to take their favoured approach. Over time this method will reduce tension and give opportunity for the most effective method to prevail. On the issue of the strong emotional attachment to the traditional youth and children’s organization, George took a more direct approach, confronting those who had been openly critical of his leadership and insisting that there be dialogue about the matter so that those who were unhappy would at least understand what was happening rather than continue to spread misconceptions.

²²⁵ Roxburgh and Romanuk, 101.

Inbuilt Resistance

All groups of people, including churches, have a built-in tendency toward what Meadows calls self-organization or resilience.²²⁶ In other words, people become set in the ways and practices of the organization and cannot see another way of developing or changing. They tend to fit in with what they imagine is expected. Not only are they oblivious to other ways, but when alternative approaches are proposed, there is defensiveness. It is not difficult to see how this tendency can intensify to the point where it becomes extreme conflict. In such cases, the organization will not only stagnate, but probably begin to disintegrate.

There can be times when resilience is actually protective of an organization, keeping it on course when certain influences draw it away from what it should actually be doing. This is when there is a genuine threat to the essential beliefs or activities of the organization. However, more often, resilience can become negative resistance or opposition to any development when real change is actually needed for renewal. This factor was mentioned in six of the interviews, though to differing degrees. Chris, Frank, and George had experienced the clearest examples of inbuilt resistance. Frank illustrated this issue with reference to one of his congregations in which some of his elders had negative feelings toward the clerk of session, viewing him as an outsider and much too radical in his views on the way forward. This situation was ongoing and Frank had not managed to fully address it at the time of interview. Eric gave an example of a lower level of this type of resistance. Some of the long-established members were suspicious and resistant to new ways, but the congregation had declined to the extent that most could

²²⁶ Meadows and Wright, 159.

see beyond their concerns to the fact that the new life coming into the congregation was positive and gave hope for the future.

Authoritarian Management

Dick Keyes, in writing about dealing with concerns of church members regarding leadership in their congregations, summarises much that has been wrong over the last thirty years. “Complaints seem to focus on arrogance, highhandedness, and authoritarian leadership. I hear grievances about the minister as a CEO, who does not listen, and who tolerates no criticism or alternate views.”²²⁷ This problem has also been reflected to some degree in the PCI. The 1977 report of the Divine Healing Committee reported the following comments: “Unfortunately in Presbyterianism, the team is left undefined and so we end up with a problem: the one-man-band concept is very strong. Many congregations, elders, and ministers still see ‘clericalism’ as the norm.”²²⁸ The result of these tendencies to place power and responsibility in the hands of individual leaders can take two forms. One is that there is an underlying sense of alienation and resentment among members who feel they are simply being herded along rather than valued as contributors. The other result is that members become increasingly acquiescent and passive, refusing to become involved in any significant way and therefore denying the fellowship the benefit of their energies and talents.

The first result of resentment mentioned did not figure prominently in the interviews, as none of the participants desired to take an authoritarian approach to leadership. In two of the situations, there was evidence of that traditional tendency to let the clergy take on the work by themselves, which results in passivity. Both Chris and

²²⁷ Keyes, 207.

²²⁸ Hull, 24.

Frank reported that it was difficult to get elders actively engaged because they were either used to being passive, or they actually believed that ministers were paid to do everything and there was no need for ordinary members to be involved. Neither of these men wanted to lead in an authoritarian way and, like all the others, were actively pushing their elders and other members to engage with the process of renewing their congregations and their leadership.

Ignoring Systems

The literature review has given ample evidence of how important it is to understand the system in which any group of people are interrelating. Herrington, Creech and Taylor have written,

Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership. The reason for this is simple: leadership always takes place in the context of a living system, and the system plays by a set of observable rules. If we are to lead in that context, we need to understand the rules.²²⁹

If leaders do not see how individuals relate to one another, or the deeply rooted outlooks and habits that are embedded in the group, they will not fully appreciate the strength of the system, its resistance to change, and how effective steps toward renewal can be taken. None of the interviewees mentioned the term “system” or “systems analysis” but there was plenty of evidence that each understood the importance of knowing people and developing real relationships, especially with those in leadership. In one way or another, they were all engaged in managing and developing the system they had inherited in their congregation. For example, Frank was very aware of his more traditional elders and members and the outlooks they had that made them cautious, even suspicious, of making changes in the life of the congregation. By gradually downsizing

²²⁹ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 30.

his eldership from seventy to around forty, and developing a number of sub- committees with a membership of both elders and other enthusiastic members of the congregation, Henry has seen significant development of the system lead to more effective handling of business and a greater range of work being attended to. Bob was engrossed in a governance review that would impact the way the system was constructed and functioning.

These five factors are significant challenges for any leader who is seeking to revitalize the church and lead it forward into greater strength and successful ministry. Some of these are unavoidable issues that must be addressed, while others can be avoided by being aware and taking a different approach. The felt needs and hopes of people in society are changing and one result is that fewer people feel they want to be involved with a church. In addition, it has been noted that even committed church members are less willing to give their time and energies to church life. Since the needs and pressures of life are changing significantly, it follows logically that how the church responds practically to contemporary challenges will have to adapt significantly.

To insist that the only response is simply promoting old methods more vigorously is to completely misunderstand the questions people are asking and the needs they have. Church leadership today must be able to reassure members that while fundamental spiritual needs and the gospel message are unchanged, the approaches taken to communicate these things and to revitalize the contemporary church ought not to be resisted. To achieve this without resorting to authoritarianism is very difficult. To slip into becoming dictatorial sadly results in people becoming disenfranchised. One of the greatest needs in the church today is for leadership that is united and membership that is

engaged and trusting. To achieve those goals is very difficult and will test the abilities of leaders to the full measure. However there are ways forward, and in the next section we will turn to these strategies.

Strategies Necessary for Developing Effective Leadership Teams

Leadership literature presents a wide spectrum of approaches to bringing change to organizations. In the literature review of chapter two, three major areas were outlined: systems analysis, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence. The following six strategies arise out of these and some of the other literature referenced. Often differing terms are used for methods that are very similar. In writing these concluding sections, it has been necessary to summarise and, to some extent, simplify the many approaches that can be taken. Each strategy will be explained with reference to the literature reviewed and the illustrations afforded through the qualitative research.

Watching

Systems theory teaches that all the individual personalities, habits, and circumstances in an organization are intricately connected. It is vital for the leader to study and understand every aspect of the situation if a way of bringing positive change is to be found. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor note, “Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership.”²³⁰ Heifetz and Linsky used the memorable imagery of being on a dance floor and then going up to the balcony to watch the dance and everyone there.²³¹ This is all about wide perspective as well as specific detail. The leader must be

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Heifetz and Linsky, 51.

able to see the big picture as well as how each element and each sub-group interacts with the others.

When Earnest Shackleton met his crew in Buenos Aires on their way to the South Pole he did not join them on board immediately. He stayed for a few days on land standing back and observing. In fact, there were issues among the crew that needed to be dealt with. These few days of assessing the problems clarified the issues. He proceeded to sack four of his crew whom he had observed were not suitable for the rigors of crew life on a polar expedition.²³² Watching and planning helped him make decisions which probably saved lives.

A similar incident of watching is found in the biblical account of Nehemiah coming to Jerusalem. When he arrived in the city he stayed there for three days, then made a night time inspection of the broken down walls. Only after that did he reveal his purpose in coming.²³³

In the early months of ministry in his Church of England congregation, Bob spent a lot of time thinking about the big picture. He made an effort to understand all that was going on and to see clearly how the circumstances and the key leaders all interplayed with each other. At the time of interview, Bob was engaged in a thorough review of the governance structure, which he hoped would lead to significant revision. Regarding his PCI congregation, George also spoke about the beginning of his tenure when he changed very little, but spent time watching and also reassuring. In the years since, his congregation has experienced consistent, small steps of change. That this process has happened is due in large part to the understanding and wisdom George has shown in

²³² Morrell and Capparell, 85.

²³³ Nehemiah 2:11-12.

handling the system and finding the best ways to develop and change. David spoke of his assistant pastor who came from a business background: “He is very good at kind of standing back and looking at trends and coming up with observations. So I would be saying to him, look this is what I am thinking, and he would go away and kick it around and come back with suggestions about...how it might work out in practical terms. So the structure is really down to his work.” Here are two people who know it is important to consider the situation, to think in terms of structure. The lead pastor shared some ideas, a vision. The assistant gave time to think about structure, strategy, and practicality. Between them, plans were made and eventually shared with the wider leadership who began experimenting and implementing.

Teaming

This term is used by Edmondson in her book *Teaming* to describe the creation and life of a team. She gives a list of four behaviours that drive teaming success; these are: speaking up, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection.²³⁴ It is all about bringing individuals with differing skills and outlooks together to interact and begin functioning as a team. In the modern world these groups will never be monochrome in appearance. The best teams will be composed of members of diverse backgrounds who are willing to learn from each other, co-operate, and conflict in order to create. Trust, respect, and a unified goal are all vital if teaming is to happen. One of the most difficult aspects of teaming is encouraging an honest, open conversation, so that every team member feels valued and safe in expressing opinions and concerns. The most effective team is where everyone is fully engaged, every opinion is carefully considered, and every mistake is treated as a

²³⁴ Edmondson, 52.

learning opportunity. In an atmosphere where support for every member is strong and it is safe to be vulnerable, each individual will offer themselves willingly to the team.

Sir Ernest Shackleton's recruiting interviews were at times eccentric to say the least. He would query applicants in what seemed a random way asking about their circulation, their teeth, or if they could sing. According to Morrell and Capparell, "How the candidates answered was more important than the content of their replies. The Boss was listening for enthusiasm and for subtle indications of their ability to be part of a team."²³⁵ They summed up his teaming strategy: "Surround yourself with cheerful, optimistic people. They will reward you with the loyalty and camaraderie vital for success."²³⁶

The Apostle Paul was someone who valued the concept of a team. His numerous comments in the final chapter of Romans about people he had worked with in many situations give us insight into his thinking.²³⁷ He wrote about "fellow workers" and "servants of the church." He had shared with these people responsibility, burden, travel, danger, and blessing. His comments betray deep feeling and a sense of teaming.

Both Andrew and Henry discovered through difficult experience that united, co-operative teams of members who care about each other and the goals before them are of great worth. In both these congregations there had been frictions on the staff teams which eventually led to members leaving. This unfortunate situation is always emotionally draining and distracting to progress. Both men also spoke of notable positive effects of team members working together and being both influential and warmly appreciated in

²³⁵ Morrell and Capparell, 60.

²³⁶ Ibid., 75.

²³⁷ Romans 16.

their congregations. Henry stated that the success they had experienced “[u]ltimately comes down to having good people. We have an excellent clerk of session. He is phenomenal.... My predecessor bequeathed to me good office bearers; so that has been the key. Without those office bearers whose head and heart were in the right place, I think it would have been much more difficult.”

The leader in any church must make teaming a priority. There are many types of teams, but no matter what structure is in place, it is vital that it is a healthy group with the qualities outlined for teaming. There was a range of teams described by the participants interviewed. Some were of paid staff, others were the kirk session or a smaller group of elders. Eric, for example, worked for quite a number of years with just one other main team member. Above all it can be said that a group with a high level of commitment to each other, with a positive approach to every problem and willingness to give all for the benefit of the church – this is the group most likely to wield the greatest influence for good. George Cladis, author of *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*, states, “A healthy church leadership team with trusting relationships radiates health and vitality throughout the church organization and its whole system of relationships. Just as powerfully, a dysfunctional team radiates pain and dissension throughout the congregation.”²³⁸

Framing

Framing is another term used by Amy Edmondson. She uses the word to refer to the process of helping a team see and develop its own presuppositions or understandings

²³⁸ Cladis, xi.

about purpose and methods; put simply, “How we think shapes our behaviour.”²³⁹ Others have written about similar ideas using the terms “paradigms”²⁴⁰ or “mental models.”²⁴¹ For a team to engage in framing they must be able to critically analyse their circumstances, their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. They must consider why they exist at all – their overall purpose. They must honestly recognise and openly talk about all these matters. The team leader has the very difficult responsibility of helping each member express deep thoughts and fears about what is going on. Out of this process will come an understanding of the framework and perhaps a realisation that re-framing is needed to make the organization fit for the purpose in the changing circumstances it finds itself in. This system is adaptive leadership – helping an organization understand itself and its circumstances and acting as a catalyst toward a period of “transition,”²⁴² leading into better and more successful days ahead.

Such a process took place at the Council of Jerusalem in the early years of the church.²⁴³ At this gathering of the apostles and elders, Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James addressed the meeting. There was lengthy and difficult discussion, but at the conclusion a clear understanding or framework was reached and communicated to the entire church. This was the most momentous example of adaptive leadership achieved in the early life of the church and it paved the way toward a worldwide church. Without this new framework, the church would have receded back into a sect of Judaism.

²³⁹ Edmondson, 111.

²⁴⁰ Meadows and Wright, 162.

²⁴¹ Senge, 192.

²⁴² Roxburgh and Romanuk, 40.

²⁴³ Acts 15.

The impact George has made on his congregation has had a large element of framing. They have transitioned from being a traditional, aging, and shrinking Presbyterian congregation to one in which the elders have accepted a much more active role in the leading and pastoring of small groups throughout the membership. These groups are no longer the domain of a small number of particularly enthusiastic people, but are now seen as basic building blocks of the entire congregation with every elder having a leading role in a group. It is a new way of thinking, a new way of doing church.

David's experience is an example of leadership in which much thought was given to the range of ministry needs and how those could be met. Over a period of time, eight ministry teams were developed to take responsibility for twenty-seven different areas of ministry. It was a new approach to thinking and acting on their responsibilities. Henry has had a similar experience in developing working groups composed of some staff, some elders, and other committed members. The range of activities has increased and the sense of responsibility has been shared as they thought through and revised their work. Eric had seen his congregation grow and, while initially he depended heavily on one particular member, much time was given to developing a larger team and greater sharing of responsibility. The congregation formed a church council where key leaders from every organisation in the church came together three times a year to share fellowship, consider vision, plan, and pray. Eric reported a congregation where a large number of the main body of members is fully engaged and behind the work. When asked about the team spirit and sense of fellowship in the congregation he said, "There is tremendous enthusiasm among our people."

Framing and re-framing is a major challenge for any minister who is seeking to lead the way forward to greater vitality in a congregation. It is not a one-off task. It will be an issue to be revisited often, and one that should be regularly on the agenda of the key team members.

Communicating

When the watching and framing process is well underway and a good level of understanding has been gained, another logical step comes into play. There must be communication throughout the system so that relationships are open and healthy. This aspect ought to begin with the key leaders, but reach out as quickly as possible to everyone. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor emphasise the importance of what they call “emotional triangles,”²⁴⁴ by which they mean groups made up of three individuals who share the same thoughts and attitudes. Each “corner” of this triangle has contact with other triangles in the system. Any organization is made up of dozens of these “molecules” of the emotional system. They emphasise the importance of the leader seeing and understanding these triangles and also being in relation to them so that information passes openly in all directions throughout the organization. Leaders with emotional intelligence have the vital responsibilities of keeping communication open, reducing barriers, and opening up minds and relationships to new things. Another aspect of this work is to remain “differentiated,” that is, separate or unbound by the opinions or demands of any one person or sub-group.

In the account of Moses returning to Egypt and sharing what God had told him about the deliverance of his people from slavery, Moses communicates with the leaders

²⁴⁴ Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 52.

and the people.²⁴⁵ Throughout that period, with the pressures of years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses communicated with his people, kept relationships open and yet managed to remain removed from the demands that the malcontents placed upon him on numerous occasions.

In his large PCI congregation made up of many leaders and individuals with their own ideas, Henry has managed to engineer a system that has open conduits of communication. This means that there is care taken to communicate as well as a willingness to hear other opinions in return. Sometimes this system has made the process slow and laborious, but it has ensured that, as far as possible, few feel disenfranchised.

David shared about the constant need to keep the spotlight on the main guiding principles and values of his congregation: “We work through our guiding principles ... with the church family, so that they would buy into these things. I and my assistant try to preach through these at least once a year, so they are being restated,...because we want folks to understand where we are at.”

Experimenting

Experimenting is a strategy to help advance the process of framing or paradigm change. Meadows writes of the value of creating a model of a system that can lift minds above the present circumstances to see an entirely new system or way of doing things.²⁴⁶ Jesus in training his disciples engaged them in a pilot project. He sent the twelve out two by two to go to the “lost sheep of Israel.”²⁴⁷ This and one other occasion with seventy-

²⁴⁵ Exodus 4:29.

²⁴⁶ Meadows and Wright, 164.

²⁴⁷ Matthew 10:5-8.

two of his followers was a success, and it paved the way for the main mission when he sent his followers out with the command, “Go and make disciples of all nations.”²⁴⁸

In the literature review, the example from PCI experience was given when the general assembly took time to consider “special fellowships.”²⁴⁹ These were seen as being in opposition to the traditional church and not something to be commended, but were also something to be learned from. Strictly these were not pilot schemes, but more like case studies from which lessons could be drawn. However, they certainly were (and still are) models which help the church see a new system and way of doing things. The PCI has engaged in a number of efforts to model better practice in worship and ministry. In the last twenty years a couple of major assemblies have been held, not for the conduct of business, but for fellowship, united thought, prayer, and worship. The purpose of these gatherings were to stimulate the wider church to see different ways of doing things and to give leaders a taste of what might be possible. It is very difficult to quantify the impact of these events, but they both had an experimental element about them as they sought to model another way of doing things in church.

In his congregation, David engaged in a period of experimenting as he and his elders worked toward introducing ministry teams to take on responsibility for work in the congregation. This test was clearly communicated and was presented as a pilot scheme to see how helpful it would be. It was time-limited and open to questioning and critique. The experiment was successful and the new system was adopted and is currently running effectively in the congregation.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 28:19.

²⁴⁹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *General Assembly Annual Reports* (n.p.: PCI, 1984), 249.

George has allowed for different approaches to eldership pastoral duties to be carried out. This allowance has been necessary due to strongly differing opinions regarding how things should be done; but, it is also an experiment and over time the more effective and manageable system will come to prominence. By taking this approach, George is giving time for watching and consideration with the belief that members will see and experience for themselves what is for the best.

If a leader gives attention to process and seeks to lead step by step toward the goal of a new way of doing things, it will allay the fear of things becoming too radical and beyond control. There has to be an emphasis on experimenting and finding the most appropriate way in each individual congregation. As more piloting takes place and more members come to see possibilities while still feeling safe, the more likely successful new approaches will be adopted.

Mentoring

Peter Senge gives emphasis to team-learning, which is where each member of a team offers what they have for the good of all.²⁵⁰ The main leader has a special role in this process, as he or she sets the agenda and atmosphere for the team. That leader has a special relationship with each member of the team, and in personal sharing and example will encourage and guide each individual.

In the interviews this influence was taken a stage further. In every case there was some example of impacting not just the existing team, but also leadership development for the next generation. In a range of ways, each participant talked about the emphasis on leaving a legacy of future leadership. The examples ranged from Andrew and Bob using a denomination-wide leadership training resource; Henry developing a “home grown”

²⁵⁰ Senge, 216.

course taught by himself and the clerk of session; George developing an on-going curriculum with young people in the congregation; and Frank intentionally mentoring individuals and developing personal friendship as well as helping the mentee lead small groups of young people, encouraging them toward leadership growth.

An outstanding New Testament example of mentoring is that by Barnabas of Saul.²⁵¹ Barnabas, the well-recognised leader in the early church, took the newly converted Saul under his wing, introducing him to the other church leaders, and spending time with him in the early days of his faith. From this encouragement emerged the greatest missionary evangelist the church has ever known.

If a legacy of leadership is to be built, church leaders must give priority to the role of mentoring and training the next generation. There are resources available, but the key factor will always be that special relationship and example set by the main leader. There can be few more encouraging things than to see a number of young people beginning to mature in faith and leadership skills and realising what they can achieve for the Kingdom of God.

These six strategies have been referenced in the literature review and it has been pointed out that, on occasion, various terms have been used for very similar concepts. The terms are of less importance than achieving the result of the concept. Each of the strategies has also been mentioned in the interviews. Here again the actual terminology has not been identical, but it is clear that between the eight participants there is evidence of many of these strategies being implemented in each case. Having outlined these key strategies, it is important to summarise their impact.

²⁵¹ Acts 9:27.

The Impact of Effective Leadership Teams

Throughout the literature review there were many examples from the world of business and politics of how effective leadership brought transformation to situations. Some of the most impressive examples came from the literature on emotional intelligence. When a team is led by someone who displays a high level of emotional intelligence, there will typically be a positive story told of great success or achievement.

It is difficult to encapsulate the results of effective leadership teams without being simplistic, but there are some notable motifs that stand out. For instance, there will be improved relationships and communication, resulting from giving attention to emotional intelligence, which is like the air we all breathe. Without that air, healthy team life is suffocated. With it, the team and the entire organization draws in the oxygen of mutual understanding and respect, which is an essential part of creating organizational health. Another major impact of effective leadership is a growing vision. Team members will begin to think, to imagine, to wrestle with problems and possibilities and eventually, a picture will emerge. It will have to be debated and tested, but in time it will crystallise and a new way forward will be plotted.

Through this process of relating, communicating, and envisioning, increasing numbers of members will begin to engage and unite. There will be synergy as people begin to act together, and momentum will build, which will lead to growth. This growth will take many forms – numbers, commitment, activities, finance, belief, etc. Additionally, hindrances and discord will be pushed to the side.

The example of Abraham Lincoln's leadership style is striking. Here was a man whose back was against the wall for much of his political life. Largely by the influence of

personality, he kept his team together and achieved great things. Lincoln's biographer wrote that his personal qualities "enabled him to form friendships with men who had previously opposed him; to repair injured feelings that, left untended, might have escalated into permanent hostility; to assume responsibility for the failures of subordinates; to share credit with ease; and to learn from mistakes."²⁵²

Here was a leader of colossal influence who brought together a highly gifted group of men with deeply differing temperaments and outlooks and managed to keep them together through some of the most stressful and dangerous times that American society has experienced.

In each of the interviews given there were instances of emotionally intelligent leaders exercising effective, thoughtful management. In the attitude and life they lived they have set good examples, and as such, have taken significant steps toward creating teams of men and women who are living out the same patterns and, in turn, making beneficial impacts upon their congregations. Over time such leadership teams are making possible transformations and life in places where it would not have been expected.

The Reasons Why Some Strategies Are Successful

It is important to comment on what success is in the context of this dissertation. The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. This is about leadership that stimulates church health and vitality. In reviewing the biblical literature, it has been shown that the purpose of the church is to be a community of believers who are becoming more like Christ in character and mission. Additionally, the church's purpose is about spiritual life and fellowship, growing faith in Christ, and commitment to each other. It is also about increasing service to and

²⁵² Goodwin, xvii.

the impact on the surrounding community. A vibrant church life is very likely to result in increasing numerical strength. Understanding the church in this way enables all strategies to be assessed by considering how effective they are in promoting these values.

The literature review and responses of the eight interviewees have revealed many of the hindrances to the development of effective leadership in the church today. These have been summarised under five headings in the first section of this chapter. Societal change has resulted in a large section of the community viewing the church as irrelevant, and many in the church having divided commitments. Leaders who have championed technical solutions to the church's problems have worked hard but with reducing effect and no movement toward making the message of the church more applicable to felt needs in the community. Many congregations have resisted leaders who advocate change, which can lead to unresolved conflict and on-going decline. Some leaders have alienated their members by an authoritarian approach. Leaders who have not attempted to understand the system that so influences every aspect of their church have often fumbled in the dark to find positive and acceptable ways forward.

Six strategies necessary for the development of effective leadership teams in congregations have been noted. These are watching, teaming, framing, communicating, experimenting, and mentoring. The impact of these strategies has been discussed in the previous section and as this dissertation draws toward a conclusion it will be instructive to consider why it is that these strategies lead to success. In an attempt to draw some clear conclusions, the present author suggests that a strategy will only be successful if it helps enhance two things – vision and unity. The presence of both of these factors is essential

in any effective leadership team. Both of these are, of course, multifaceted, and it is to these that the dissertation's attention now moves.

Vision

In this dissertation, the church-based context of leadership shapes what is understood by vision, which is gospel-based vision, moulded by the scriptural standards of the church. The principles of this type of vision originate from the Bible. The methods and applications of gospel-based vision will develop in ways that are culturally relevant to the community. Principles will always shape methods and, as such, the methods will be creative and innovative, but never in conflict with biblical principles.

As leaders and their teams work together to develop vision, and as this begins to be owned by the team and the wider congregation, clarity and motivation grow. This process does not come about by accident. There must be genuine engagement of the whole leadership team as the vision is refined and developed. The vision must not be imposed from above by a dominant leader. There may well be a strong leader, but that individual must do everything they can to involve the team in owning, developing ,and applying the vision. The entire team must constantly communicate the reasons for decisions as well as the hopes and dreams for the whole church. Through this process members come to see more clearly what they are there for, what the goals of the congregation are, and how individuals can play their part. Ample evidence has been presented from both the literature and the experience of the interviewees to show that it is essential to have a clear vision of the direction in which the team must lead. When this

vision begins to resonate with the members, then the congregation will grow strong. The ancient words of Solomon ring true, “Where there is no vision the people perish.”²⁵³

Unity

Once again, the context is Christ and his church. The unity being pursued is that which Christ alone can bring as he holds members together and unites them in service of the kingdom. As a leadership team seeks to develop strategies in their local context, this question must always be asked – does this bring us closer together, are we uniting in this venture? As leaders develop a vision, it must be applicable and it must be communicated. As the vision is shared, individuals will grasp it and this will be their source of unity and the catalyst for action. Inextricably linked with any successful strategy will be the tendency to create a united leadership team and united body of people who are moving forward with growing strength. Solomon’s words bear out the value and strength of living in unity: “Wounds from a friend can be trusted.... As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another”²⁵⁴ and “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”²⁵⁵ It was Jesus who prayed for unity in his church with simplicity: “[T]hat all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”²⁵⁶

Recommendations for Practice

The three major themes in the world of business literature have been shown to have a strong precedent in scripture and a relevant application in the work of leading the

²⁵³ Proverbs 29:18.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 27:6, 17.

²⁵⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.

²⁵⁶ John 17:21.

church. In this final section, it is the intention of the current author to suggest practical steps that can be taken toward developing an effective leadership team in a congregation.

Understanding

Understanding is a major part of systems analysis. There is great benefit to a leader in simply standing back from the organization and the activity, taking time to watch what is going on. To find a way forward, it is vital that leaders understand the system operating within the church and take time to affirm and strengthen all that is good, while also preparing to develop and shape that system for action. This process will include coming to know the members, their various groups and friendships, the emotional triangles, and their history. The leader will need to understand how the various sub-groups behave and what they believe about their purpose – their paradigms.

The Apostle Paul revealed his understanding of the church at Ephesus as he gave his instructions to Timothy to be careful about men who had caused great trouble and fallen away from faith.²⁵⁷ The church at Ephesus makes a particularly interesting study since it is referred to in five New Testament books. Studying the various characters involved, the stresses and strains in this church, as well as how Paul sought to address them shows the value of understanding. Many similar examples in the biblical literature were reviewed in chapter two. Additionally, there are many aspects to the task of forming this kind of understanding, which are also described in the literature review.

Envisioning

Envisioning is linked with adaptive leadership. If a church wants to significantly develop in order to regain spiritual health and vitality, there must be attention paid to attaining a clear understanding of what the purpose of that specific congregation is. The

²⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:14–15.

leadership must take time to develop a dream and a practical plan and the vision must have biblical content and contemporary relevance. Specifically, the leaders must do the fundamental things that the church of Christ was set up to do and there needs to be clarity about what the church is and what it is not. This will arise out of leaders being together in fellowship, prayer, and the study of the word. A relevant and effective vision will also be shaped by a fresh understanding of the congregation and the needs in the community. It is essential that the development of a vision be genuinely adaptive. To cling to visions and activities of the past and hope that will address the needs of the future is futile. It will take time to develop, but when it is clear it will be a significant guide point as the congregation adapts to the challenges before it.

Communicating

Communication is linked with both adaptive leadership and emotional intelligence. A leadership's vision must be shared because the members must be informed about it, understand it, engage with it, and adopt it. For this process to happen, communication must take place on a constant basis. The leaders must use whatever media is available – printed bulletins, electronic messages, and verbal explanations to the gathered congregation. In addition there must be one to one sharing and a percolating-down of the vision. Only in small congregations will the main leader be able to speak personally to everyone, which means the leadership team must be mobilized to make these personal contacts. But, the vision must also be taken up by ordinary members and discussed. This communication is about making adaptive decisions known and understood and it will almost always need to be done with care and emotional

intelligence as, for some members at least, this vision may seem foreign and even threatening to what they have been familiar with.

Uniting

Uniting is linked with emotional intelligence. From the top down there must be a desire to join in Christian fellowship under Christ to honor God in his church. All of the literature reviewed on emotional intelligence gave emphasis to the importance of how people interact with each other. How differences of opinion are handled and how decisions are reached must all be addressed with the overarching desire to remain a united fellowship. The strength of a united leadership team will impact a congregation in very deep ways and will nullify many a stress and tension long before it gets opportunity to fester. In addition to setting a positive example of unity in the team, it will be necessary for all the key leaders to actively engage in maintaining and strengthening unity between “ordinary” members. There will often be difficult conversations about doubts, problems, tensions, and divided opinions. More than anything, this kind of work requires resonance with people and emotional intelligence. It is work that cannot be brushed under the carpet in the hope that it will just be forgotten. The evidence arising from the interviews shows that when issues are addressed with grace and firmness, there is the possibility of a solution and the development of stronger bonds. The beauty and attractiveness of a united congregation communicates to the wider community so often fraught with division. Christ can be seen in the lives and attitudes of people who love him and one another.

Depending

In the work of God's kingdom, everything is shaped by and dependent upon the providence and the power of God. Scripture says that, "[u]nless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain."²⁵⁸ All of the academic business understanding and all the biblical principles will come to very little unless the Spirit of God inhabits and empowers the work. It is right and good to spend time studying to understand what is scripturally important, and it is also of value to receive insight from management practitioners who can offer instruction regarding organizational health. However, spiritual life does not come from academic study but from the power of God. To build an effective leadership team, there must ultimately be the living presence and power of God. Many academic insights will help leaders think clearly about needs and opportunities, but the dynamism to accomplish effective leadership in the spiritual work of the kingdom of God comes from on-going and total dependence upon the Lord of the church and the Spirit whom he has sent to enable his children.

Areas for Further Research and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministers develop effective leadership teams in congregations. This dissertation has proposed six key strategies that lead toward the successful development of effective leadership teams. In analysing why these strategies might succeed, it has been concluded that every approach or strategy must have as an integral characteristic the tendency to enhance vision and unity among team members. Without these two factors all strategies will be significantly defective and likely to fail.

²⁵⁸ Psalm 127:1.

Arising from these conclusions, a number of areas for further research suggest themselves. The value of experimentation or pilot projects has been outlined as an important lever that enables paradigm change. There is opportunity for further research on just how significant paradigms are, as well as how susceptible they are to development through the use of experimental pilot projects. Clearly linked with this is the issue of how to most effectively implement and embed positive developments arising from a pilot project. Given that most systems have an inbuilt resilience, it would be important to explore if there are any particularly successful strategies to establishing new organizational values and activities. One further area for research and development is the subject of mentoring. Because this dissertation is about developing leadership, and since it is clear that any healthy organization must find ways of bringing in new leaders, it is obvious that the development of effective mentoring schemes or programmes will be a very important part of preparing future leadership in a congregation. There is a need to research and develop better ways of mentoring future leaders who will be comfortable with the strategies and qualities outlined in this dissertation.

Finally, of everything that was read in preparation for this dissertation and from each of the interviews, there were many valuable and sometimes moving insights, but none more moving than the closing words from the interview with Eric. These will be the closing words of this dissertation because they effectively describe the need that all leaders have to seek the Lord of the church and work in dependence upon him:

I just said I am going to be down at the church on Saturday if anyone wants to join me. That became the pattern that has gone on twenty to thirty years. It is still the same here and we pray week in week out, "Lord, will you be among us." And it is interesting the number of people who have come to the church, and they never said it was my great sermons – I always hoped it would be – it was not the great music either; they said they sensed God's presence. Someone said that to me

on Sunday – we sensed God was here. That to me, we can't contrive that; despite bad sermons or inadequate music, or not always good organization, and many flaws, that somehow people sense God is here. That is the key – it is absolutely the key - the Holy Spirit.... It is God the Holy Spirit who leads and draws and directs. That's what I hope will be kept at the center. You can get away with many flaws, 'cause we have them, many, many flaws, but when people say God is among you, you have got something right at that point.

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