ABSTRACT

RISK-TAKING LEADERSHIP

by

Dennis Ralph Oetting

The purpose of this study was to explore and discern those distinctive characteristics that set apart risk-taking leaders within the church from the general leadership population. A wide spectrum of leadership material from both sacred and secular sources was reviewed and analyzed.

The study includes interviews of eleven risk-taking leaders mostly from the area surrounding Houston, Texas.

The major results of the study showed the following: (1) risk-taking leaders focus on God, not on risks; (2) risk-taking leaders internally sense God directing them; (3) risk-taking leaders are bold; (4) risk-taking leaders build consensus; and, (5) risk-taking leaders reframe perceived failure.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

RISK-TAKING LEADERSHIP

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A Dissertation

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I want to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to Abundant Life United Methodist Church for allowing me to experience the following: the thrill of the opportunity to pursue my Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary; the environment in which a risk-taking leader can flourish; love and grace larger than my failures; and, constant prayers for me and my family. I want to express special appreciation to Mrs. Barbara Newsome for her typing and retyping of various manuscripts on this pilgrimage.

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Finally, I thank God for the treasure in my wife, Donna. Despite mental and physical absence during the work on this dissertation, her love and provision for our family has never been stronger. I dedicate this dissertation to her with all my love.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Background

Robert Quinn, along with others, would claim, "If you are not risking your job, you are not doing your job" (156). Leaders who walk down corporate hallways or pastors who stroll down church aisles realize the reality of risk. Why are some leaders more inclined to take risks while others are comfortable with only moderate levels of risk? Though some leaders prefer to believe that nothing can be done about the awful problems they discover, a time often occurs when they take on a challenge because quite simply it is the right thing to do. Risk-taking leaders embrace the understanding of no written guarantees and no insurance policies that protect them from failure. Risk-taking leaders assume the necessary risk because something must be done.

In my Christian era, I have modified and adopted the business slogan to say if you are not risking your life for Jesus Christ, you are not doing your ministry. While I have not yet risked my physical life, my life in terms of ecclesiastical career, reputation, control, ego, and status have been put at risk. Risk became a reality for me with a move to the lone star state.

I moved to Houston, Texas in the summer 1979 after graduation from the University of Missouri with a degree in engineering. I had a wonderful corporate career at Westinghouse Electric Corporation for six years before starting seminary at Southern Methodist University. Making the transition from the corporate setting to the sanctuary was eventful and even quite unnerving. During those days, I was acutely aware of God's guiding Spirit that kept nudging me and pushing me to make the decision to go into full-time, ordained ministry. Months before making the formal move to begin seminary, my

company offered me a promotion to corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that only served to complicate the situation. Despite intense feelings of not being suited for ordained ministry and being quite uncertain of the entire United Methodist system, I pursued full-time ministry, accepting the risks.

Following the call of Christ to go into full-time ministry was in some ways similar to yielding my life to Christ as a fully-devoted follower during the early 1980s. I had lived a classic wild and hedonistic lifestyle. This way of life just seemed natural, and, besides, all my friends were doing it. However, deciding to follow Christ entirely caused me to yield gradually, not abruptly, all areas of my life to his lordship; this surrender was not done easily. I can still recall one time sitting alone in my condominium wondering if I would have any friends or even have any fun now that I was following Christ. Lots of questions, unknowns, uncertainty, and even a significant amount of fear were present in my decision. Looking back, I am immensely overjoyed that God gave me the grace and power to follow our Lord despite the cost.

I thought those types of feelings, concerns, and fears would subside after making the two big decisions to follow Christ and go into full-time ministry. I serve a wonderful God and have a dynamic journey discovering throughout my spiritual pilgrimage that God still nudges and pushes me continually to make courageous decisions and to count the cost. After all these years, risk-taking leadership continues to be required in my life.

While serving as an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas, I inwardly felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to take the next step in ministry assignment. I sensed clearly and received confirmation from others that I would be a great choice to plant a new church. For more than a year, I felt starting a new church was

apparently not going to materialize, and yet God opened a door. Even though some thought the risk was too high and the challenges of starting a church too great, since I could have been assigned to an already-existing church, I followed what I sensed was the leading of God.

In the summer 1992, following the prompting of God, my wife Donna, two year old son Luke, and I moved to Clear Lake, a suburb of Houston, Texas. I was appointed by my bishop and district superintendent to start a new church, Abundant Life United Methodist Church. Having no members, no building, and no budget, I was quite simply following what I felt was God's will for my life. Many said I was naïve; others were inclined to attribute my leading to folly, but I believe God was using me as a pastor to live out the kingdom.

I started worship in a living room the very next Sunday after moving to Clear Lake, and Abundant Life United Methodist Church was born. After a few months, the decision was made to worship in a school. We worshipped in a variety of different schools until we moved into our first building four years later. After meeting in a school for about two years, the time came when I sensed a crucial transition and a defining moment for me as a leader.

The Clear Creek Independent School District had a clause stating a church could meet in a school for a maximum of two years in conjunction with receiving the approval of the local principal. As a church, we petitioned the school board for permission to meet for another year and received a waiver. However, as a church that had only 150 members and had acquired four acres and then two additional acres on which to build, a time came for risk-taking leadership.

Despite being cautioned that a church with approximately $150,000 in annual revenue could not afford a $1.25 million facility, with God-dependent faith, we launched into a building program. After a sacrificial effort on the part of many, a half million dollars was pledged to the building fund, which enabled us to persuade a bank to loan money despite the reality that the church was highly leveraged. My desire or intent was not to finance the church's expansion in this manner; however, under the circumstances I did not seem to have any other alternative.

One underlying dilemma that existed from the beginning of the church plant was the suspicion and generally unfavorable response by my district superintendent and others concerning the nature of this contemporary congregation. A church that did not use hymnals nor say the Apostles' Creed was held suspect by many who were more accustomed to a traditional Methodist worship experience. This, in my mind, added increased pressure and stress, as some in the United Methodist hierarchy would probably have been pleased if Abundant Life had failed. Especially in the early years of Abundant Life, I sensed the increased pressure that in the minds of many I had perhaps embarked on a journey that was going to stall or stagnate somewhere along the path.

Now, having been in our building for four years and adding approximately two hundred parking spaces, completing the second floor to provide an additional eight thousand square feet of education and office space, another risk seemed inevitable. During the early life of the church, Abundant Life worshipped in a school and had only one Sunday morning worship experience. Now Abundant Life has three Sunday morning worship experiences—at 9:00, 10:10, and 11:20. In a worship space that accommodates approximately 340 seats, we currently average 150 people at 9:00, 250 people at 10:10,

and two hundred people at 11:20 for a Sunday morning attendance of six hundred in worship and an average 225 children in other parts of the building during the Sunday morning activities. Where do we go next?

While more buildings could be placed on our piece of pie-shaped property, these could only serve as a small, intermediate step. A worship center with seating to handle eight hundred people could be built on our property, but the maximum allowable parking will only accommodate 350 cars. We already shuttle approximately twenty-five families from across the street at the local grocery store, and that is only marginally effective. Much needed education space could be built on our site allowing more room for adult, youth, and children's activities that, in the minds of many, are a top priority.

The current status of the church is that we are experiencing a plateau or even a small decline during the first five months of 2000. An expansion team that was formed in the summer 1999 and that conducted extensive analysis in the fall 1999 recommended the church seek a larger site on which to relocate. The expansion team examined items such as planting another church or even becoming a dual campus church, but in the end relocation was the way God was directing. This is quite a visionary move and involves risk-taking leadership on behalf of the church. The recommendation to relocate was initially trumpeted by me and then by other leaders in the church.

Attempting to relocate a nice, wonderful church located on six acres is a bold and visionary move. However, some people in the church have vocalized the following opinions: this is not the right step to take at this time; Dennis just wants to build a mega-church; we should try to build people and not buildings; or, we could still put more buildings on our present site. Indeed, what motivates and drives a church to make such a

daring move as relocation when other more comfortable and convenient alternatives are readily available?

Analysis of the Problem

The average mainline denominational pastor is expected, and in some churches required, to perform in a variety of roles. He or she is expected to do all or some of the following: sermon preparation, administrative work, visitation, prayer, worship, counseling, committee meetings, and evangelism. This complex and often confusing expectation is compounded by the reality that getting good grades on papers and exams about ministry in seminary does not ensure a pastor will be able to apply that knowledge and be an effective minister.

This ecclesiastical milieu is further complicated by the reality that most pastors do not have the gift of leadership. George Barna's research indicates that only 6 percent of senior pastors claim they have the gift of leadership (Today's Pastors 122). In today's world the number of leaders serving as pastors is extremely low, and risk-taking leaders are even harder to discover. For many, discerning God's true calling in life and ministry gets confused with the ever-present, climb-the-ecclesiastical-ladder mind-set that embraces the notion of keeping everyone happy with the hope of being assigned to a larger church.

Without a clear sense of God's vision for the church, including the employment of risk-taking leadership, the church is likely to go through a series of motions that reflect good intentions but miss the heart of the true calling to expand God's kingdom. Risk-taking leadership is the indispensable quality that must be present in all church leaders if they are to minister effectively in this postmodern culture.

Risk-taking leaders tend to fall into the category of innovators and early adopters on the basis of the bell-shaped curve of innovation as articulated by Everett Rogers (263-66). Innovators and early adopters are by nature quite venturesome and actually respond to the daring and the risking. These folks are able and ready to cope with uncertainty and are willing to endure setbacks and criticism. Unfortunately, seminary education and normal, routine, pastoral ministry do not focus on dealing with change and bringing innovation into churches. Thus, most pastors and church leaders alike have very little training or models to observe regarding risk-taking leadership.

The problem for many pastors, and in particular for me in my local, church setting, is to continue to forge ahead with risk-taking leadership when the status quo or fulfilling preconceived parishioner expectations seems like a natural course. In my experience, the factors of facing criticism, possible failure, enduring the pain of rejection, and other discomforts tend to lower the level of risk-taking leadership for most church leaders. For me, in some ways, the answer is found in Jesus' admonishment to count the cost. As Jesus states, "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27, NIV).

The project I envisioned focused on risk-taking leadership skills. How does a leader continue to embrace appropriate levels of risk? Risk-taking decisions are even further complicated by the reality of assuming risk even when apparently enjoying success. The dilemma for me is to identify what type of risk-taking leadership is required to get a church of six hundred attendees to take the next step and relocate. Specifically, the focus was on the risk-taking leadership required to effectively relocate and expand a nine-year-old church. At a time when some church planters might be susceptible to the

seven-year itch or tempted to enjoy a season of slower-paced ministry, I sensed the call of God to dream a new possibility. This project entails how to deal with change in the transition, how to have values embedded under changing circumstances, and how to risk and still act responsibly and more. The paramount issue is evident: what kind of risk-taking leader will be required to make such a change? What type of risk-taking leadership is necessary? What will be the cost?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the self-described qualities, practices, and principles required of Christian, risk-taking leaders in local ministries. This study utilized the contributions of both secular and church writers as they explored the nature of risk-taking leadership in a variety of settings. The study also explored Scripture for examples of risk-taking leadership and examined church history for those who would be acknowledged as risk-taking leaders.

Further, this study attempted to analyze risk-taking leadership through various lenses: the lens of biblical and contemporary risk-taking leaders, the lens of leadership in the corporate environment, and the lens of local church perspectives. These filters provided the basis for distilling the qualities, practices, and principles of today's risk-taking leader.

Research Questions

This study utilized the following research questions.

Research Question 1

What are the essential qualities and practices of today's Christian, risk-taking leaders in the greater Houston area?

Research Question 2

What are the common biblical and historical principles and examples of a risk-taking, Christian leader?

Research Question 3

What other factors, from research and experience, play a significant role in the life of a Christian, risk-taking leader?

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, risk-taking leaders are defined as those who are able to articulate a vision of ministry and embrace the accompanying risks associated with the vision. In short, they must be leaders in that they take the lead and move people to follow without being overly simplistic; they must incorporate significant risk.

The principles of risk-taking leaders include more of the intangible aspects of a risk-taking, Christian leaders. The principles include an understanding of faith and fate, the provision and promise of God, the purpose of the church and ministry, and the appropriation of supernatural miracles, among others. The principles of risk-taking leaders are those inner-core convictions that drive and compel risk-taking leaders. The qualities and practices of risk-taking leaders are meant to refer to the thoughts, habits, attitudes, and lifestyles of those who demonstrate risk-taking leadership. Such things as prayer life, time management, personal style, communication methods, and setting of priorities are among the qualities and practices to be noted.

The risk-taking component of risk-taking leaders is meant to focus on the willingness of leaders to take risks. Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath identify five rungs on the ladder every leader climbs (Ascent of a Leader). They claim everyone has a built-in

"risk-index" that is somewhere between 0 and 1.0. If you are afraid to get out of bed in the morning, your risk index is 0, and if you will jump out of an airplane without a parachute, your risk index is 1.0. They claim that leaders on the fifth rung of the ladder (the highest level of leadership) need a risk index greater than 0.5. "Leaders who aspire to the fifth rung must continue to take risks, because taking risks identify and develop fifth-rung leadership. The tough challenge just keeps getting tougher as the years roll by" (149). The fifth rung, where leaders discover their destiny, involves the heart-felt desire of leaders to leave an enduring legacy. Leaders want to get to the fifth rung and will generally make choices to get there despite the risk.

A distinction is evident between what I would call a leader and a risk-taking leader. Inherent in the nature of genuine leadership is an understanding and appreciation for risk taking; however, the degree of risk taking as experienced by leaders in local church ministries is generally marginalized. That is to say, most pastors and church leaders will not really risk by putting resources, energy, time, people, and reputation on the line. To qualify as a risk-taking leader, the cold possibility of failure must exist involving the potential loss of something valuable. In other words, the risk-taking involved in painting the restroom in the church lobby is not the same as the risk involved in transitioning a church to a seeker model from a traditional model.

This understanding of risk is often associated with risk aversion or risk tolerance. Tom Spradlin has been quite helpful in providing definitions of risk from a more or less corporate perspective (1-7). As leaders consider the possible outcomes of their actions, they embrace risk, which is the definite possibility of an undesirable outcome. Sometimes leaders become risk neutral. Generally someone who is risk neutral will

incorporate long-term odds and will decide according to long-term expected outcomes. Companies and certain leaders are often prone to be risk averse. Accordingly, they value options at less than their expected outcomes. When thinking about risk aversion, a significant reality to ascertain is that various leaders have different attitudes regarding risk (1-7).

Some leaders and decision makers attempt to develop an index or scale that yields a risk tolerance. Essentially, risk tolerance describes a leader's attitude toward risk. Thus the greater the risk tolerance, the more uncertain the results of a certain decision will be to its desired outcome. If leaders have a high risk tolerance they are more willing to move forward in spite of an unpredictable outcome.

These distinctions become quite valuable because most projects cannot be repeated, and even if they could, most leaders risk less over time; exactly how much less depends on the leaders' attitudes toward risk. Keep in mind that a leader's attitude toward risk varies from leader to leader, and even for a specific leader, an attitude may vary over time.

Sometimes risks, or the developing of risk tolerance, can be understood through decision analysis. Decision analysis is a structured way of discerning how action taken in a certain situation could lead to a desired result. Often, decision analysis involves the construction of models or even mathematical representations of numerous variables regarding a particular decision. Herbert Kindler has developed a diagram that conveys the risk-taking and decision-making process (see Figure 1).

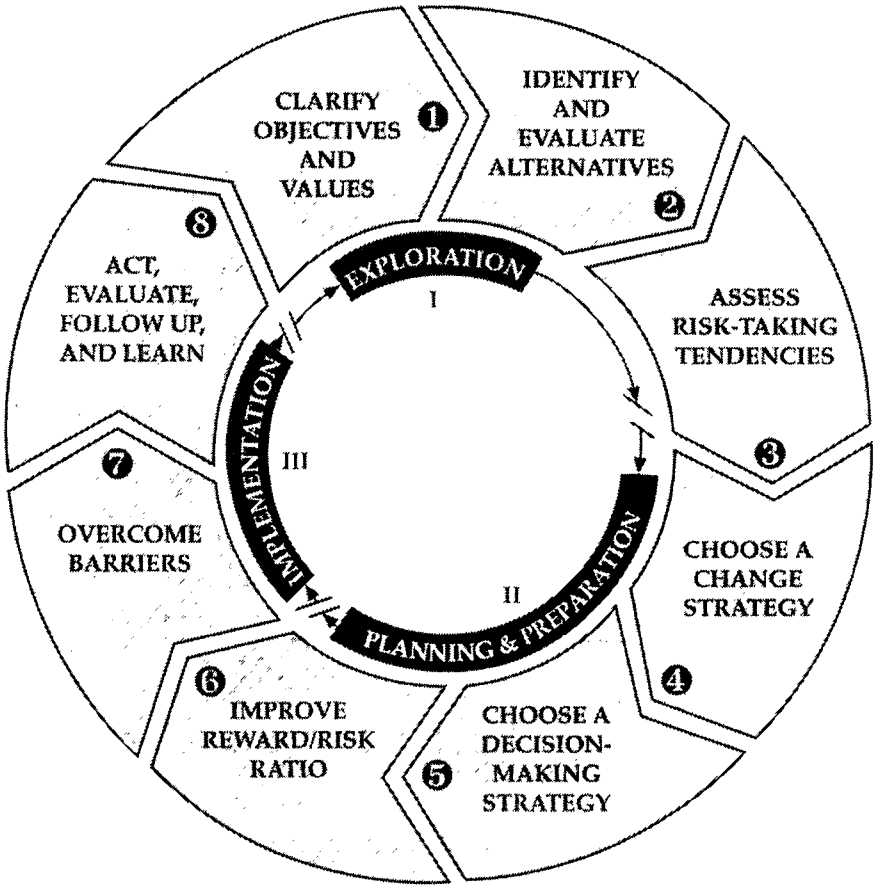

Figure 1

Kindler Decision-Making Process

Source: Kindler (5)

Diagrams, flow charts, and decision matrices allow an individual to determine a course of action based on empirical data and quantifiable inputs. They are beneficial by allowing the making of objective decisions while minimizing the effect of emotion or the mood of a moment. These types of charts and data provide a source of confidence that an individual is not flippant in leadership decisions. A proven model is employed in order to minimize uncertain outcomes.

Can risk-taking leaders reduce decisions to simply an empirical process? The key element for the risk-taking leader in a church environment is the discernment of risk and faith in a context of Christian beliefs. A supernatural and intangible component emerges for risk-taking leaders: faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1, NIV). Risk-taking leaders live and make decisions everyday in a risk-faith crucible. In this environment, leaders develop the attitude and ability to embrace risk. The following diagram represents the tension between risk and faith (see Figure 2).

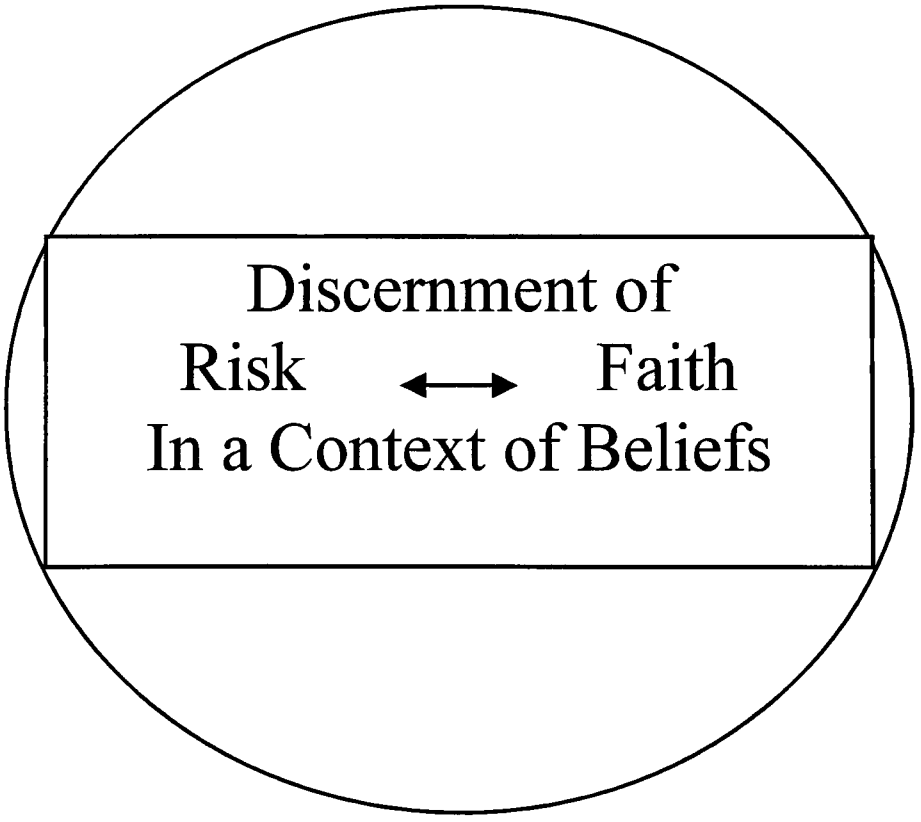

Figure 2

A Leader's Decision-Making Process

The next logical question emerges: can a tool be developed to determine the magnitude of the inherent risk in a particular decision? Terry Muck, through extensive surveys, can at least point to the statistical probability that a particular ministry decision will ultimately cause a pastor to leave a church. Generally, local church pastors make only a few difficult decisions in a year. The short tenure of many pastors has proven that certain decisions have led to the dismissal of a pastor or even church splits (153-59).

However, even Muck is quick to assert that every decision involves numerous major and minor variables, many of which cannot be quantified: past history, the nature and character of certain individuals, the group dynamic of particular church boards and church staffs, and certain highly influential families. Yet, the tension between risk and faith cannot simply be reduced to empirical formulas, risk tolerance scales, or even decision charts. An impossible scenario, even comical, is to imagine Moses standing at a burning bush trying to fill in his decision analysis chart when God calls him to go back to Egypt to set God's people free. In my own personal experience, while empirical analysis is quite beneficial and appropriate, the sway factor has always been the prompting of God. Risk-taking leaders in the context of following Christ realize and depend upon the inexhaustible supply of power available from God's Holy Spirit. Muck offers a penetrating perspective: "The knowledge of when to take a ministerial risk is essential; the willingness to invest the hard work to make that risk work is crucial. But only God's blessing insures any kind of effective ministry" (166).

Methodology

The data and information that undergirds this study was received through an interview process. The interviews were typed and transcribed in order to provide

empirical data for analysis. Interviews were conducted in person through questions and answers.

Subjects

I conducted eleven intensive interviews with pastors and Christian leaders in the Houston area who have demonstrated risk-taking leadership in their ministry. These leaders were chosen after having met the prescribed criteria and through my own personal friendships and networking. The majority came through the United Methodist denomination though I was able to be multi-denominational in scope. They largely came from the Houston area though one interview was conducted on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama.

The five criteria established in order to qualify for an interview were

(1) They must have had at least five years of ministry experience;

(2) They must be recognized as leaders by their peers, followers, and others in ministry;

(3) They must have led their ministry through an expansion that required astute, risk-taking leadership;

(4) They must have faced a significant amount of risk in their leadership; and,

(5) They must demonstrate a willingness to be transparent and open in regards to their own leadership.

In order to overcome any of my personal bias, I asked ten other Christian leaders to identify their own list of top five, risk-taking leaders. Out of this list of fifty, I then identified and interviewed eleven individuals. The leaders interviewed included such persons as William H. Hinson, former pastor of the First United Methodist Church of

Houston; Ken Werlein, pastor of Faithbridge, a United Methodist church that is a two year old church plant in Houston; and, John Bisagno, a retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston.

Variables

The primary variable in the proposal was the ability or willingness of those being studied to acknowledge and live out the "risk-taking" aspect of their leadership. While all leaders assume risks, attempting to discern the degree or the amount of risk was held somewhat in tension. Other more minor variables included age, theological persuasion or distinctiveness, gender, spiritual gifts, size of church, ministry experiences, and denominational affiliation.

Instrumentation

I used two sets of documentation. One included background information for the purpose of providing insight into the experience and history of each person being interviewed. This background information also yielded valuable clues into the degree of risk embraced by each leader. The second set of documentation consisted of questions to which I asked each participant to respond. Each person interviewed received the questions in advance in order to provide them with adequate time for reflection.

Data Collection

The data collected required the following steps: (1) identifying risk-taking leaders through personal inquiries and networking; (2) seeking approval for a personal interview through written and phone contact; (3) mailing questions in advance and confirming the date and time of interviews; (4) conducting and taping personal, on-site interviews, as much as possible; (5) transcribing the personal interviews; and, (6)

reflecting on and analyzing the responses of the personal interviews in order to ascertain conclusions regarding the beliefs, qualities, and practices of risk-taking leaders.

I had some trusted colleagues evaluate my analysis of the interview responses in order to downplay any personal bias I might have exhibited in my interpretation of the participants' responses. Further, I pilot tested my research questions and interview questions on a pool of several persons in order to discover any unforeseen shortfalls or blind spots.

Delimitations and Generalizations

Risk-taking leadership incorporates many factors. This study focused on the qualities, beliefs, and practices of those who have demonstrated risk-taking leadership. The focus of this study was not to ignore or devalue other significant areas of leadership including but not limited to vision-casting, coalescing a team, leveraging limited resources, and building unity. I sincerely believe, in this particular time in history, the risk-taking aspect of leadership is extremely critical as it applies pointedly to our churches' struggles to thrive in our postmodern culture.

Even though this study emerged out of my internal need and past experience and from observations regarding the crucial need not only for leadership but also for risk-taking leadership, I believe the principles and insights gleaned from this analysis will have application in a large variety of leadership settings.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the current literature in the field utilizing the following format: introduction, corporate literature, church literature, theological understanding, research methods, and conclusion. Also in Chapter 2, under the corporate and church literature,

the subcategories of dealing with change, the necessity of vision, and understanding failure are explored.

Chapter 3 provides a more detailed enunciation of the design of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the interview findings and offer a summary with appropriate conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Everyone these days, at least those in positions of influence, is talking about leadership. Bookstore shelves sag under the weight of book after book being added to the pile. Cassette tapes and magazine articles abound with information about leadership. Churches are offering conferences that focus entirely on leadership. Anyone can obtain literature on servant leadership, visionary leadership, strategic leadership, team-building leadership, or coleadership. Information abounds about what makes great corporate leaders, political leaders, military leaders, and nonprofit leaders.

Having noted the seemingly overworked subject of leadership, why have I chosen to focus another effort in this area? I believe leadership is important; leadership is key. In my particular life experience and church ministry, risk-taking leadership is often the most distinguishing ingredient between effective and ineffective ministries. The process of this dissertation has increased my potential and ability to be the risk-taking leader that God would want me to become. With deep passion and whole-hearted conviction, I believe risk-taking leadership is crucial to me and to God's kingdom. I do not, however, desire to learn and practice leadership in order to achieve greater prominence or position. Rather, out of a surrendered heart and desire to lead, I want to maximize my effectiveness with my one and only life.

The literature in the field of leadership is broad and full of variety. Many are aware of the crucial importance of leadership.

> The need was never so great. A chronic crisis of governance–that is, the pervasive incapacity of organizations to cope with the expectations of their

> constituents—is now an overwhelming factor worldwide. If there was ever a moment in history when a comprehensive strategic view of leadership was needed, not just by a few leaders in high office but by large numbers of leaders in every job, from the factory floor to the executive suite, from a McDonald's fast-food franchise to a law firm, this is certainly it. (Bennis and Nanus 2)

Secular sources, as they apply to corporate settings in particular, have refined and studied the notion of leadership. One way to narrow the literature in the field is to examine the writings from corporate hallways.

Corporate America

The rapidly changing conditions in today's business environment have made unprecedented demands on leaders. These demands are complex and often require radical rethinking of corporate purposes and priorities, visions of the future, and the functions of organizational life. The need for leaders, risk-taking leaders who can achieve results, is urgent.

General Leadership Observations

James Kouzes and Barry Posner surveyed more than 2,600 top-level managers from all over the United States to determine precisely what constitutes superior executive leadership. They reported the result in their book, The Leadership Challenge. They identified five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart (8-14). Their book and other books in this genre examine how leaders get extraordinary things done in organizations.

Interestingly enough, some secular books on leadership are beginning to deal with spiritual issues or at least some implication of a divine or greater purpose in life. Writings from the corporate arena are correct in diagnosing today's cynicism,

fragmentation, and shifting relationships that cause people to look to some sense of the sacred in their everyday lives. Peter Drucker, viewed by many as the managerial guru of the 1980s and 1990s, has even focused a significant portion of his energy on the spiritual or nonprofit sector.

A subcategory of the books on secular leadership focuses on the talents and abilities of a particular individual to model for other leaders the requirements of an effective, risk-taking leader in today's world. For example, the book Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will cites Jack Welch of General Electric as such a model. This book's themes of empowering workers and then expecting a lot out of them, obliterating bureaucracy, and continuous improvement are transferable skills and insights that can be adapted to any organization (xxv-xxvii). Books of this type mix drama, humor, and ideology with practical examples on how to succeed in the rough and tumble of today's business environment. Business leaders acknowledge the challenging effect of reading accounts such as Welch's transformations at General Electric as they simultaneously examine their own organizational structure and operations.

Some leadership books focus on theory, models, and understanding though they are supplemented with various illustrations from industry. Management of Organizational Behavior, coauthored by Paul Hersey, Kenneth Blanchard, and Dewey Johnson, is such an example. In this case, leadership is often analyzed in various styles such as situational leadership, attitudinal approaches to leadership, and transformational leadership (167-72). Some leaders passionately argue for a particular style of leadership that is most effective, that is, the style that maximizes productivity and satisfaction, growth, and development in all situations. Others would cogently argue, citing more

recent research, no optimum leadership style exists. Successful and effective leaders are able to adapt their style to fit the requirements of the changing environment.

Vroom and Yetton take the approach of describing a normative model, which demonstrates the specific decision process called for in different classes of situations. This model is described in terms of a decision tree and requires leaders to analyze the decision confronting them in order to determine how much and in what way to share their decision-making power with their subordinates (32-58). In this approach, risk-taking decisions are made in conjunction with others utilizing models and flow charts.

Some argue that leadership theories are lacking because insufficient scientific evidence supports their conclusions, and therefore believe more validated or empirical studies are necessary. A widely recognized work in this area is Organizational Culture and Leadership by Edgar Schein. The effort here is to clarify the concept of organizational culture and to show its relationship to leadership. The approach is to present an academically sound, balanced set of arguments based on empirical research. Leaders, according to Schein, create and modify cultures. This creation, evolution, and management of cultures are what ultimately define leadership. Schein provides a synthesis of theory and practice for modern times (1-15).

Dealing with Change

Noticeable in all secular books on leadership is the ability to introduce, manage, and respond to change as an essential component in risk-taking leadership. Spencer Johnson, in his book Who Moved My Cheese? writes in a short story format the critical necessity for leaders to deal with change. John Kotter has also written extensively on leadership as it relates to dealing with change. He, along with others, would argue that

strong risk-taking leaders are likely to be needed to unfreeze an organization and bring about the needed change.

Learning to be a risk-taking leader is, on one level, learning to manage change. Leaders will impose their beliefs and style on organizations, thereby creating or re-creating their culture. Organizations then act on that initiation, and the culture begins to take on a life of its own. However, unless leaders continue to evolve, adapt, and adjust to change, organizations will sooner or later stall or decline. Leaders, according to Bennis, attempt to lead better and better and better but are never satisfied. Leaders learn by leading, and they learn best by leading in the face of obstacles where they experience constant change.

John Kotter, in his book Leading Change, delineates an eight-stage process: establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the changed vision, empowering employees for broad-based action, creating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and achieving new approaches in the culture. Kotter claims successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight stages. These eight steps are doable in any organization and can bring about recovery and the desired change. In fact, the change process is not individually driven as Kotter claims:

> The solution to the change problem is not one larger-than-life individual who changes thousands into being obedient followers. Modern organizations are far too complex to be transformed by a single giant ... not by attempting to imitate the likes of Winston Churchill or Martin Luther King, Jr., but by modestly assisting with the leadership agenda in their spheres of activity. (30)

Most if not all authors writing about change in corporate America realize the change problem would be less bothersome if the business environment would stabilize or

at least slow down. However, most credible evidence suggests the opposite: the rate of change will increase, and the pressures on organizations to transform themselves will continue to grow over the coming decades. Thus, in order to survive in the coming years, leaders must learn how to welcome and thrive on change realizing that change involves risk.

Robert Quinn recognizes the tumultuous times of today. Change is everywhere, and people are surrounded by circumstances that seem to demand more than they can deliver. However, if this type of change is not to be superficial or cosmetic, it will require what Quinn titles his book: Deep Change. Quinn states that organizations and individuals are embedded in a dilemma. Groups and individuals alike have to agonize over the choice between making a deep change and accepting slow death, and as soon as that decision is made, other decisions must be made as the equilibrium is frequently and constantly being changed. Both personal and organizational changes are central to the notion of deep change. Further, organizational change always begins with personal change (15-25).

Dealing with deep change on the personal level requires the honest, often gut-wrenching work of confronting personal immaturity, selfishness, and lack of courage. Being able to deal with change, which is essential in risk-taking leadership, requires a constant monitoring of vitality level. In corporate boardrooms across America, an increasing awareness of taking care of oneself is becoming paramount in order to deal effectively with change (31-37).

Quinn is also quick to realize the significance and the necessity of risk in making deep change. In fact, Quinn asserts, "If you are not risking your job, you are not doing

your job" (156). Embedded in the minds of many corporate gurus is the understanding that dealing with risk is dealing with change.

Understanding how the change process works itself out in any organization can be extremely useful for the risk-taking leader. Everett Rogers has offered a change model consisting of five stages: innovators (2.5 percent); early adopters (13.5 percent); early majority (34 percent); late majority (34 percent); and, laggards (16 percent) (261-63). Essentially five categories of adopters emerge each with their own set of distinctions and peculiarities. Any risk-taking leader will want to factor in each segment of the adopters and adjust accordingly. Rogers offers numerous case studies illustrating how this scenario is implemented and experienced in a variety of companies.

The Necessity of Vision

Whenever the notion of risk-taking leadership emerges, the necessity of vision is close at hand. Kouzes and Posner realize the significance of vision as they claim followers demand leaders to be forward looking, have a sense of direction, and have a vision for the future. Vision addresses the future by creating a picture of what tomorrow might be like, but this vision must originate and be lived out by the individual. Kouzes and Posner view vision as

> an ideal and unique image of a common future. It is a mental picture of what tomorrow will look like. It expresses our highest standards and values. It sets us apart and makes us feel special. It spans years of time and keeps us focused on the future. (Leadership Challenge 27)

Quinn is quick to acknowledge that vision is much more than a plastic card bearing a vision statement. Generating a slogan that can be proudly displayed on corporate hallways is not the essence of vision. Rather, Quinn is quick to ask, "Who is willing to die for the vision?" (197). Often the word vision connotes something grand or

mystical, but the direction and imagined future that guide organizations need to be simple and even mundane according to Kotter (Leading Change 71). Any risk-taking leader realizes the power of vision and at the same time communicates that vision with deep sincerity and in a way that is easily understood. Peter Block recognizes the sentimental power of vision and he describes this dimension of vision: "It comes from the heart. A vision is in some ways unreasonable. The heart knows no reason. When our vision asks too much of us, we should begin to trust it" (122).

Vision, however, has become one of the most overused and least understood words in leadership literature. The word vision conjures up all kinds of images: people think of outstanding achievement; they think of audacious, exhilarating goals that galvanize people; they think of something that reaches inside them and pulls out their best effort. Here is the difficulty. Most companies know the significance of this trendy term and yet remain confused regarding its application. Collins and Porras believe living out the vision is more of a process: "To pursue the vision means to create organizational and strategic alignment to preserve the core ideology and stimulate progress toward the envisioned future. Alignment brings the vision to life, translating it from good intentions to concrete reality" (22).

Richard Beckhard and Wendy Pritchard realize the significance of vision:

> A vision is a picture of a future state for the organization, a description of what it would like to be a number of years from now. It is a dynamic picture of the organization in the future, as seen by its leadership. It is more than a dream or set of hopes, because top management is demonstrably committed to its realization: it is a commitment. (25)

Indeed, the authors promote the concept that in order for any lasting change to occur in a business or organization, the change must be vision driven (35).

Understanding Failure

Numerous business leaders recognize the need to change and the willingness to fail, both of which are essential in risk-taking leadership. Johnson and Johnson's chief executive officer, Jim Burke, states,

> I decided that what we needed more than anything else was a climate that would encourage people to take risks. If you believe that growth comes from risk-taking, that you can't grow without it, then it is essential in leading people toward growth to get them to make decisions, and to make mistakes. (qtd. in Bennis 97)

Many corporate leaders understand that taking risks is a matter of course and that failure is as vital as it is inevitable. In fact, these types of leaders are far from believing that mistakes are bad. They not only believe in the necessity of mistakes; they see them as virtually synonymous with growth and progress.

The possibility of failure is a constant companion that walks beside every real risk-taking leader, one willing to accept the necessary risk and the subsequent possibility of failure as the right thing to do. Change means taking risks and facing the possibility of failure. Undoubtedly, risk taking sometimes has a negative outcome. When leaders discover such an outcome, they must make conscious efforts to reevaluate, adjust, and not to fall victim to maintaining the status quo.

Perhaps Gottlieb Guntern and others have articulated the most significant aspect of risk-taking leadership from corporate sectors. From their approach, the perspective of future generations looking back over the present generation yields poignant conclusions:

> If we fail in that task [creative leadership] future generations will take a dim view of our courage and ability of justified risk-taking. They will take a dim view of our responsibility of making the necessary contribution to sustainable development. And they will take a dim view of a cowardly complacency which missed out on the opportunity of sowing the seeds of future successes when the time had come. (31)

Guntern provides the realization of failure of a different order: foregoing the opportunity.

Church Literature

Effective church leadership is difficult. In my own conversations with parishioners regarding what is most needed from pastors and church leaders, one word continues to rise to the surface: leadership. Congregations often clamor for leadership because of past, often painful, experiences. In my judgment, parishioners are often confused as to what type of leadership they desire. At times, I believe congregations voice their desire for leadership when in actuality they desire a return to yesterday when everyone was supposedly happy.

Because of the constantly changing world in which congregations find themselves, the overarching need is not only for leaders but for risk-taking leaders who will face the confusing cultural landscape and find a way to increase the effectiveness of their congregations or organizations' missions and ministries.

General Leadership Observations

A frequently discussed topic in the arena of church leadership is developing the leadership ability of those around the pastor. J. Robert Clinton, in The Making of a Leader, claims leadership development includes all of life's processes, not just formal training. Leaders are shaped by deliberate training and by experience. Clinton draws a distinction between leadership training and leadership development. Leadership training refers to a narrow part of the overall process, focusing primarily on learning skills while leadership development is much broader in scope (15).

The most prolific author and widely recognized name in this circle is John Maxwell. Maxwell and his INJOY organization have dedicated themselves to leadership

development. Maxwell quite frequently claims, "Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less" (Developing the Leader 1). Further, Maxwell frequently enunciates, "Everything rises and falls on leadership" (21 Irrefutable Laws 225). The key to success in any endeavor is the ability to lead others successfully, and Maxwell does promulgate the hope that leadership can be taught. He has the products, books, and tapes to do just that. Maxwell is extremely insightful, and his work is highly relevant for local, church pastors who are attempting to lead their churches to the vision that God has for them.

John Maxwell frequently claims that those closest to leaders will determine the success of these leaders. Acquiring and keeping good people is one of a leader's most crucial tasks. Procedures and methods for developing leaders are often stated as the defining characteristic of well-led churches. The pastor and church must create opportunities for growth and development. Maxwell would espouse that growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership (Developing the Leaders 1-15).

The Necessity of Vision

Central to Maxwell's writings, along with others from the local church sector, is the idea and power of vision in the life of the risk-taking leader. All effective, risk-taking leaders have a vision of what they must accomplish. Vision becomes the energy behind every effort and the force that pushes through the hurdles. With vision, leaders are on a mission, and a contagious spirit is felt among the followers until others rise up alongside the leaders and the leadership is multiplied. Lovett Weems claims that vision is the single most common theme in leadership studies. If a compelling vision is absent, or if the organization or church is not seeking a vision, then a vacuum is created. The result will be either no vision or, more likely, the presence of many small competing visions. In

either case, the church or organization declines (37-41).

For risk-taking leaders in the church, the guidance of the Holy Spirit plays a significant role. Intuition and discernment are central in the thought pattern of risk-taking leaders as the visionary process takes place. Weems describes the process in this manner: "Visioning is more relational and holistic than ordered and sequential. It is more intuitive than intellectual. It is more spiritual than scientific" (59). Risk-taking leaders pray for vision that comes from above, prompted, guided, and directed by the Holy Spirit. Risk-taking leaders' prayers are congruent with the writer of Ephesians: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (1:17, NIV). Vision is concerned about getting in touch with what God wants to accomplish through risk-taking leaders in order to expand their ministries.

Vision enables risk-taking leaders to be future oriented. Dallas Willard describes the excitement that comes to a life whole-heartedly following Christ:

> Those who have apprenticed themselves to Jesus learn an undying life with a future as good and as large as God himself. The experiences we have of this life as his co-conspirators now fill us with anticipation of a future so full of beauty and goodness we can hardly imagine. (375)

Vision fuels the possibilities of tomorrow in the lives of risk-taking leaders.

Many writers in the church would put vision as the defining characteristic of the effective leader. George Barna states, "Vision is part of the heartbeat of a leader; it is the insight that motivates his actions, shapes his thinking, defines his leadership, and dictates his view of successful ministry" (Church Marketing 120). Vision is probably the most overwritten and least understood subject in church leadership. While much of the writings in both the secular and the sacred world are in harmony in regards to the

visionary process, the risk-taking church leader passionately embraces the direction of God.

Pastors and other church leaders, especially those who reside in denominational headquarters, are prone to quickly underscore the power of vision. For many, the church goes lacking, and the kingdom loses its power because of the absence of vision. Vision allows us to see beyond the visible, beyond the barriers and obstacles to our mission. Vision fuels the emotion, captivates, and compels leaders to act. In writings and speeches, the power of vision is heralded as the answer to churches struggling to survive. Vision is the gift of eyes of faith to see the invisible, to see signs of the kingdom now, in our midst. For example, a pastor and congregation develop together a bold vision for that church to minister faithfully in the present and to do those things essential for the church to thrive in the years ahead.

Quite frankly, in my judgment, vision is essential yet overvalued and under-implemented by many church leaders and local pastors. Vision comes easy; fulfilling the vision is arduous. Leonard Sweet accurately diagnoses current mind-sets when he claims, "Now everyone has a vision, and those who don't are taken away. You can't run for garbage collector these days without a vision. Every corporation has one. Every individual has one. Every church has one" (130). Risk-taking leaders not only cast vision but implement vision as well.

Dealing with Change

Also frequently discussed and written about in church leadership is the ability of church leaders to deal with change. Indeed, change and leadership go together. Scripture would indicate the way things are in the world at any moment is never synonymous with

God's ultimate will. Leaders confront and negotiate the "not yet" quality with current church life. Christians possess a powerful theological grounding for change, and the argument is that no real change happens without strong leadership. One pastor gave the example of how someone in his church did not like the changes that were taking place in the church. Yet, at the end of the day, pastor and parishioner realized changes have taken place in the past and more changes will likely take place in the future.

Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr, former colleagues at the Union Baptist Association in Houston, Texas, have spent the past decade attempting to discern the leadership required to bring about change to declining congregations. They have determined that essential components of spiritual and relational vitality are key in order to provide a catalyst for change (16-27). The authors articulate an eight-step process for change: making personal preparation, creating urgency, establishing the vision community, discerning the vision, communicating the vision, empowering change leaders, implementing the vision, and reinforcing momentum through alignment. Change leaders are constant learners who are willing to take risks (13).

The capacity for the perpetuation of the church of Jesus Christ lies in its ability to experience continuous renewal and regeneration. History indicates a simple and familiar circle through which any local church tends to move. The movement generally goes from its initial vision to maintenance to decline. Often a time occurs when the church takes on many institutional characteristics and tends to lose its impact. Yet, this process leading to decline is not inevitable; it can change if a risk-taking leader arises and initiates change. In the lives of healthy churches and ministries, an endless flow of change occurs that can lead to positive results when implemented by a risk-taking leader.

Understanding Failure

In many church circles, talking about the possibility of failure is an unwelcome topic, similar to the feeling some people get when they sense they might be catching a cold. Generally, most church leaders who write books and sell tapes do not focus on the cold reality of possible failure. Though exceptions occur, leaders, in general, put failure somewhere in the background. Risk-taking leaders, however, realize the distinct possibility of failure, know they will experience some failure, and yet still have the capacity to lead courageously and effectively.

Failure in its proper context is a redemptive and character-building process. Risk-taking leaders know their journey is fraught with danger. The key to survival on the more dangerous path is to embrace the lessons taught by failure. When people allow failure to teach them humility, for instance, they discover a shortcut back to the road of truth (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 119). Risk-taking leaders understand that their responses to such failures prove and develop character. Indeed, ministry is not guaranteed: "Sometimes these ventures fail, but the leaders learn from experience and move ahead with more wisdom and sensitivity" (Herrington, Bonem, and Furr 97).

The hard reality of failure is that it costs something. The difference between leaders and risk-taking leaders is the cost they are willing to endure for possible failure. Risk-taking leaders know they risk losing what they might not be able to regain. Quite straightforwardly,

> These leaders may risk privilege–losing the perks they have earned. They may risk their power base–losing the ability to get things done. They may also risk things like title, reputation and applause. The higher leaders climb, the greater the risks, because their influence has expanded. The greater a leader's influence the greater the public's backlash can be, because the leader has more followers. The stakes have been raised.

(Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 226)

Risk-taking leaders know and have experienced the cost of giving something up on the journey on which God has called them to embark. One way to determine the level of risk-taking leaders is to ask them what they are willing to relinquish.

Imagine the revolution that could happen if conferences, tapes, and books were focused on or even dealt with the distinct and probable factor of failure in the life of risk-taking leaders. The older leaders become the less elasticity they possess; this includes not just physical health but also emotional, psychological, and spiritual health as well. Risk-taking leaders avoid over-dependence on patterns of safety and security that can result in loss of creativity, indifference, or even aloofness. Risk-taking leaders will always put themselves at risk of some kind of discomfort or insecurity. Risk-taking leaders avoid being foolhardy while at the same time understanding that sitting back and resting on their laurels are not an option.

Biblical Understandings

The cold reality of church life at the dawn of a new millennium is that ministry is more complex, debilitating, and arduous as compared to recent decades. What worked, and worked well, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s no longer has proven fruitful for many mainline denominational churches in the 1990s. In the spotlight at the cultural crossroads are local pastors who find themselves trying to lead local churches into a future that does not resemble the past. One fallout of this everyday reality includes clergy who, for one reason or another, find themselves at the end of the day discouraged, perhaps damaged, and ineffective as leaders of the local church. What has been lacking for many, I believe, is an adequate understanding and development of a biblical and theological basis of risk-

taking leadership.

When, like many, I discovered myself standing before the presence of God (Exod. 3:1-10) and answering the call of God to go into full-time, ordained ministry, the notion of risk-taking leadership never entered my mind. I was like Abraham following God in faith not knowing where I was going (Heb. 11:8). The focus was on God and saving others at all costs, making a joyful sacrifice with the implied assumption that I would just go to work and ministry would happen. After all, I was laying down my life, picking up my cross, and going forward in ministry like a lamb among wolves. Leadership did not seem relevant; I was thinking ministry.

Leadership is a spiritual gift given by God. "If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously" (Rom. 12:8, NLT). Yet in the current ecclesiastical milieu, a tendency surfaces to downplay the importance of leadership in the institutional church and to invalidate or curb methods or models in which a person is clearly identified as a leader.

In most cases, God has used a human instrument as a leader for change. Abraham and Moses were the risk-taking leaders associated with the old covenant and God's revelation through Judaism. God's promise of a unique people who would be priests to all nations was inspired through Abraham. The law that would mature and govern this people came through Moses. Israel went through cycles of obedience, disobedience, repentance, and return. God would use judges like Deborah, reforming kings like Hezekiah or Josiah, and prophets as risk-taking leaders for God's plan for God's people. Those risk-taking leaders would bring the people from their dead, institutional religion back into a vital, covenantal relationship with God. Those leaders inspired people to

return to the Lord their God.

One of the greatest examples of risk-taking leadership in the Bible is Nehemiah. Nehemiah was trying to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem so that it would be a safe place for all its inhabitants. The project would allow Jerusalem to once again reclaim its glory and proper place in the secular world much like modern-day, risk-taking leaders are attempting to restore the Church as a potent force in society. The people should have been excited and thrilled about Nehemiah's effort. After all, the rebuilding of the wall would allow the people to once again worship together without fear from their enemies. Nehemiah had to deal with change and criticism.

Some in Nehemiah's campaign did not want to get involved: "But their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors" (3:5, NIV). Some were upset with Nehemiah: "When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews" (4:1, NIV). Nehemiah had to face intense opposition: "They were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it" (4:7-8, NIV). I do not believe anyone would have criticized Nehemiah if he had given up because he was facing incredible odds. Nehemiah kept on course.

Nehemiah, as a risk-taking leader, first discovered his mission as being placed on his heart from God: "I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" (2:12, NIV). Nehemiah saw firsthand what God was placing on his heart: "by night ... examining the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire" (2:13, NIV). Later, Nehemiah was able to pass on the risk-taking vision into the lives of

his followers: "So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart" (4:6, NIV). Central in the life of this risk-taking leader was the confirmation and conviction that God had placed the task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem precisely in his life, and no other alternative was acceptable.

Indeed, throughout the life of Nehemiah, moments erupted when he had to rethink his efforts and strategy: "When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind" (5:6, NIV). Nehemiah was wise enough to ponder in his own mind and take his time before giving his response. Nehemiah looked failure in the face on numerous, difficult occasions, and yet he kept his focus on the task at hand. Nehemiah exemplified risk-taking leadership at its best. Yet, Nehemiah always knew from where his vision came: "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me" (2:18, NIV).

Paul's risk-taking leadership, evidenced in his missionary journeys and writings, brought God's message of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, throughout the Roman Empire. His pioneering leadership and influence have affected kings and kingdoms, calendar systems, politics and the arts, and literally turned the world upside down all because God chose to act and speak through those with risk-taking leadership gifts.

Throughout history, God has raised up leaders who have exemplified risk-taking leadership in calling the Church back to its proper relationship with God. In the fourth century, Augustine developed a systematic theology that gave the Church doctrinal stability in the midst of theological confusion. Martin Luther was God's leader in the sixteenth century in reforming the Church from its corrupt institutional bureaucracy. John Calvin and John Wesley were also used by God to fuel the fires of renewal

throughout the church. In more modern times, risk-taking leaders such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Billy Graham were and are God's leaders called and used by God to achieve a particular mission in a particular moment in history.

Paul's charge to Timothy reverberates throughout the centuries to every risk-taking leader:

> Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecies spoken to you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you. Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress ... and God will save you and those who hear you. (1 Tim. 4:14-16, NLT)

The biblical mandate is evident, and the need has never been greater for risk-taking leadership.

For the Church, which I love and to which I have dedicated my life to serve, the result is critically clear. Lack of effective, risk-taking leadership means decline and death. Not all leaders are equal, and, most deceiving, just because a person occupies a position of leadership does not imply one is a leader! Effective leadership is not about titles or degrees; rather, it involves being an agent of God to accomplish a particular purpose in a particular moment in history.

This dissertation involved a scrupulous examination of risk-taking leadership as it applies to ministry settings and, in particular, as it applies to Abundant Life United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas. The situation is crucial, the call is clear, and now is the time to "take the responsibility seriously."

Research Methods

The research method applied in this study was the semi-structured interview. This has distinct advantages over written surveys: if the interview is given, a concern

with a non-response is not an issue; the interview allows for deeper probing and reading between the lines; the interview gives clarification of terms and thoughts; and, it is also easier to avoid skipping over certain questions (Wiersma 196).

Even though the interview is more costly in terms of time and effort as compared to a written survey, the benefits of discerning passion and commitment from a live interview are enormously beneficial. In the same manner, while telephone interviews reduce time and effort, they do not yield the same result as a face-to-face interview in terms of nonverbal clues and emphases.

Generally in an interview, unstructured items are more desirable in that they allow more interpretation for the respondent (Wiersma 197). Each question, however, should be stated in its completed form utilizing unambiguous terms that are useful to the respondent.

Potential sources of error in the interview process, however, do exist. The individual conducting the interview must be able to adequately articulate questions and responses without giving nonverbal bias. The interviewer must be careful not to convey preferable responses or to cause feelings of suspicion or of being threatened. Also, the interviewer must be consistent in conducting each interview.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature on leadership is not lacking. Furthermore, leadership will continue to be a hot topic in the foreseeable future for the Church and the market place alike. Distinguishing between corporate leadership and Church leadership is natural, although at times distinguishing one from the other becomes difficult. In either case of leadership, numerous subcategories exist, some of which have been thoroughly

reflected upon and extensively researched. However, a void seems to exist for a more definite set of risk-taking leadership skills required for churches that are seeking to transition, to catapult off of a plateau, or in some way to significantly expand their ministry. I believe the time has arrived to dig further into the literature, into my own church setting, and to articulate the leadership required for risk-taking leaders.

The key principles regarding risk-taking leaders in particular tend to cluster in three subject areas: dealing with change, knowing the necessity of vision, and understanding failure. From the corporate boardroom to the inner sanctuary of the local church, the need and urgency for risk-taking leaders have never been greater.

Pastors and CEOs alike realize the need for risk-taking vision, which is the setting of a clear, focused, desirable direction that will take the church/organization to a specific destination. Risk-taking leaders understand this vision will bring about change; change is a task filled with all kinds of potentially explosive and divisive issues. Along the journey all risk-taking leaders embrace the reality of failure, yet failure is an expected event that all risk-taking leaders have experienced.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose

This study evaluated the self-described qualities, practices and principles required of risk-taking leaders in local church ministries in the Houston metropolitan area. The cry of the church and of many secular organizations in our modern culture is the urgent need for leadership. The leadership required to turn around those organizations, and in particular churches that have been in decline for many years, will be those leaders who are skilled in the art of risk-taking leadership.

Scripture and Church history contain numerous illustrations and models where God used risk-taking leaders at crucial times in history. This study's focus was to glean the qualities, practices, and principles of contemporary, risk-taking leaders. I suspect at certain moments in history unique qualities and habits emerge during the life of a risk-taking leader.

Statement of Research Questions

The research questions used in this study flowed out of the above-stated purpose. This study focused on three research questions that provided a foundation for discerning the unique characteristics of a risk-taking leader. The questions themselves were designed to get beneath the surface and explore, at deep levels, the make-up of the contemporary, Christian, risk-taking leader.

Research Question 1

What are the essential qualities and practices of today's risk-taking, Christian leaders in the greater Houston area?

This question targeted the needed and required qualities of leaders in risk-taking modes. Qualities are those characteristics and attributes that literally cause risk-taking leaders to be risk-taking leaders. This question also focused on the possibility of verified steps, habits, or routines that, if followed, will evolve people into being risk-taking leaders. Do certain procedures, if done repeatedly, enable people to gain or acquire the skills to become more astute in risk-taking leadership?

Research Question 2

What are the common biblical and historical principles and examples of a risk-taking, Christian leader?

The principles of a Christian, risk-taking leader include more of the non-quantifiable dimensions of leadership. David being prompted to take on the giant Goliath, Daniel being willing to step in the lions' den, Peter walking on water, Paul setting out on his missionary journeys not knowing what waited for him in various cities are examples of biblical leaders embracing tremendous amounts of risk. Local church pastors leading congregations into extension campuses, pastors bringing about transition from traditional to contemporary approaches of ministry, pastors launching out into new church starts are all contemporary illustrations of leaders who embrace risk. These risk-taking principles focus on the values lived out by both biblical and contemporary, risk-taking leaders.

Research Question 3

What other factors, from research and experience, play a significant role in the life of a Christian, risk-taking leader?

What incites a risk-taking leader to act when other leaders might act more slowly or not at all? What is the primary motivation of a risk-taking leader? Is the power of the

Holy Spirit of significant concern in providing the impetus for risk-taking leaders to act and to continue on in the presence of adverse circumstances? Further, can any distinguishing aspects be observed in these leaders' beliefs regarding their personal relationship with God? In the spiritual life of risk-taking leaders, does a more pronounced or accentuated dimension of discipline emerge in their personal spiritual life? For example, do risk-taking leaders spend more time in prayer or do they seem more inclined to sense direct messages from God in everyday life? Perhaps risk-taking leaders simply have more childlike faith and attempt greater things for God.

Subjects

I established five criteria that were met by the persons being interviewed: (1) they must have at least five years of ministry experience; (2) they must be recognized as leaders by their peers, followers, and others in ministry; (3) they must have led their ministry through an expansion that required astute, risk-taking leadership; (4) they must have faced a significant amount of risk in their leadership; and, (5) they must demonstrate a willingness to be transparent and open in regards to their own leadership.

The criteria verified the participants as having proven, track records and thus earning them the right to speak authoritatively on risk-taking leadership. Having achieved results in ministry, they could respond with real life answers to real life dilemmas. The focus was not what reads well in a book but rather what happens on the street.

I have used my own personal contacts and networking ability in order to establish a list of qualified participants. Further, I trusted God to present people who provided needed responses though at first their names were not considered.

Instrumentation

Two researcher-designed questionnaires have been utilized. The first questionnaire provided background information that yielded pertinent observations. This questionnaire aided in understanding and valuing the personal and ministry context of each risk-taking leader. This information also gave clues in extrapolating insight from responses to the interview questions. For example, the number of years in ministering gave insight to the myth that leaders generally only invite risk-taking leadership in a significant way during the early cycle of their leadership setting.

The second questionnaire, which was field-tested before being actually employed, served to guide the interview process. I attempted to have each participant respond to the question exactly as worded before including additional information. The intentional effort was made to gain consistency in the answers so that fair and accurate comparisons were made among responses.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

After having selected and confirmed each interview with the preapproved participant, I conducted at least a forty-five minute interview. I used a microcassette recorder so that the interview could later be transcribed. I confirmed the completion of the background questionnaire, ensured a favorable setting, and started the interview.

I analyzed the results through a variety of methods. I read and reread each response in order to get the spirit of the participant. I grouped all the answers to research questions one, two, and three and looked for similarities and/or differences. I discovered categories of responses including trends and key words or phrases that seemed common among many of the responses.

I employed other colleagues, along with a group of six people from my church that made up my research reflection team, who examined my groupings of responses and other key insights gleaned from the accumulation of the data. The intent was to minimize any personal bias that I exhibited in the interpretation of the results. That is to say, these findings are accurate in that others, without my prejudices, agreed with the conclusions validated by the data.

I also culled from the data other ancillary observations that emerged in the data analysis phase. In other words, some things totally unexpected surfaced and provided some intriguing possibilities for future investigation.

Variables

The variables that affected the result of this research study need to be mentioned. Some variables are more influential than others though some variables are negotiable in effect.

The age and ministry experience of each participant constituted the largest and most noticeable variable. The more experienced pastors and leaders may have discerned the ability to be bold in decision making in contrast with pastors or leaders who do not have the advantage of several decades of experience in making decisions. The gift to reframe experiences of failure is possibly a skill that is only cultivated over time.

The awareness and sense of the Holy Spirit's prompting in the life of a risk-taking leader constitutes a significant variable. Often the work of the Holy Spirit is mysterious, even elusive. For some leaders, who spend disciplined time in reflection, the leading of the Holy Spirit is clear and direct. For others, who tend to be more action oriented with their faith, the presence and prompting of the Holy Spirit might be vague and hurried.

The variables of ministry setting, culture, denominational orientation, theological persuasion, spiritual giftedness, and gender must be acknowledged. Theology and denominational distinctions may influence risk-taking actions, particularly in the area of making bold decisions. A leader's ministry setting and culture may aptly influence the ability to communicate change and cast vision. Do significant variances occur in risk-taking action from a pastor in San Francisco as compared to risk-taking action from a pastor in the Bible belt? These variables must be noted and taken into account as the data is analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The purpose of the interviews was to discern the principles, qualities, and practices demonstrated by risk-taking leaders in local ministries throughout the Houston metropolitan area. During the period of October 2001 through January 2002, I interviewed eleven risk-taking leaders in face-to-face meetings. Each interview, though only scheduled for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes, lasted well over an hour and even two hours on occasion. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. All interviews took place in and around the Houston area except for the interview with Dr. William H. Hinson, which took place on the back porch of his retirement home on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama.

Transcribing each interview was enormously beneficial for evaluation and for connecting common threads relating to the lives and ministries of the different individuals. Having transcribed all the interviews, I then laid out all the transcripts on my dining table and color-coded them for the purpose of determining common leadership styles. The transcripts were also extremely helpful for my research reflection team, a group of six individuals from my local church, as together we discussed my findings and the interviews. The members of my research reflection team were able to give unbiased feedback regarding my findings and their own observations. Hours were spent comparing and contrasting our findings and searching for clues uncovering insights that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Profile of Participants

All participants have unique gifts serving God in diverse settings. Some

participants are in the early years of a church plant while others have retired after a long tenure at one particular, local church. One church averaged three hundred in attendance while one church had ten thousand in attendance. The following figures give the characteristics regarding the variables of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant/ Age	Education	Ministry Exp. In Years	Gender/ Race	Spiritual Gifts	Theological Persuasion	Worship Attendance
John Bisagno Age 70	B.S. D.Min.	40	Male Caucasian	Leadership, Preaching, Evangelism	Wesleyan, Evangelical	10,000
Paul Clines Age 37	D.Min.	11	Male Caucasian	Leadership, Preaching, Faith	Wesleyan, Evangelical	325
James Furr Age 48	B.A. M.Div. D.Min.	25	Male Caucasian	Teaching	Evangelical	N/A
Jim Herrington Age 48	B.S. M.A.	25	Male Caucasian	Leadership	Evangelical, Moderate, Charismatic	N/A
Bill Hinson Age 67	M.T.S. D.Min.	40	Male Caucasian	Leadership	Wesleyan, Evangelical	3,000
Jim Jackson Age 55	B. S. M.Div. D.Min.	32	Male Caucasian		Wesleyan, Evangelical	1,800
Jim Leggett Age 36	B.S., M.Div.	11	Male Caucasian	Teaching, Knowledge	Wesleyan, Evangelical	1,008
Rob Renfroe Age 46	B.A., M.Div.	21	Male Caucasian	Encouragement, Exhortation	Wesleyan, Evangelical	2,000
Ed Robb Age 51	M.Div.	23	Male Caucasian	Leadership, Administration, Preaching	Evangelical	2,090
Steve Wende Age 54	D.Min.	30	Male Caucasian	Leadership, Preaching	Wesleyan	3,000
Ken Werlein Age 35	B.S., M.Div.	8	Male Caucasian	Leadership, Evangelism, Preaching, Healing	Wesleyan, Evangelical	700

Age and Education

The average age of the participants was fifty (see Table 2). Two persons were

retired and aged sixty-seven and seventy. The youngest individuals were thirty-five, thirty-six, and thirty-seven, respectively. Based on my own personal observations, and not intending to be flippant, each participant looked younger than his age.

Each person interviewed had a minimum of a master's degree, and five of those interviewed had earned doctor of ministry degrees. Others had further graduate study, and two of them were, at the time of the interviews, pursuing a doctor of ministry degree.

Ministry Experience

The ministry experience presented by each participant was quite varied. The average time of years in full-time ministry was twenty-four (see Table 2). Two of those interviewed had over forty years each as a local pastor. Collectively, these findings represent 260 years of ministry. Bill Hinson and John Bisagno each have over forty years of ministry experience. John Bisagno had over twenty-five years as pastor of First Baptist Church Houston before his retirement. Bill Hinson had eighteen years of consecutive ministry at First United Methodist in Houston before he retired. Ed Robb has twenty-four years of consecutive ministry at Woodlands United Methodist Church. Ken Werlein has the shortest tenure of four years in his current pastorate at Faithbridge United Methodist Church.

Table 2

Participant Profile Averages

Variable	Average Characteristic
Age	50 years
Education	Masters Degree
Ministry Experience	24 years
Gender	Male
Race	Anglo
Spiritual Gifts	Leadership, preaching
Theological Persuasion	Evangelical, Wesleyan
Worship Attendance	2,394

Current Ministry Status

Two of the participants interviewed were serving in parachurch organizations. These two participants serve in consulting roles to local churches. Two of the participants had recently retired, within the past three years, having served as pastors of mega-churches in the local Houston area. Three of the participants are pastors of churches planted within the past five years. Some of the participants have also served as trustees or on the board of directors of various ministries throughout their years in ministry. Basically, nine of the eleven persons have or are currently serving as senior pastors of local churches.

Worship Attendance

The average worship attendance in the churches of the nine participants, excluding those two individuals serving in para-church organizations, is over 2,300

persons (see Table 2). These averages include First Baptist Church Houston, formerly pastored by Dr. John Bisagno, which averages over ten thousand persons a weekend. The numbers also include a start up church with an average attendance of approximately three hundred on Sunday. Six of the participants have churches averaging over a thousand per weekend in worship attendance.

Theological Persuasion

Each participant was asked on their Participant Background Questionnaire which of the following theological group(s) would best identify them: reformed, Wesleyan, evangelical, moderate, liberal, or charismatic. Each participant identified himself as evangelical.

Seven of the participants also identified themselves as Wesleyan (see Table 1). Two of the participants described themselves as charismatic. Interestingly enough, no one identified himself as liberal or reformed.

Even though all of the participants identified themselves as evangelical, the evangelical camp appears to encompass a variety of theological perspectives. The absence of moderate, liberal, or reformed persuasions could have resulted from the fact that the recommendations for interview participants were received from evangelical church leaders who generally would not identify themselves as being moderate, liberal, or reformed.

Also, the fact that some participants selected only one theological persuasion while others selected two or three, was probably a reflection of the difficulty some faced in determining their theological stance within evangelicalism.

Gender and Race

Every participant interviewed was male and Caucasian. I had anticipated interviewing women and African-Americans as well as Hispanics during the process. I did experience difficulty in getting people of color recommended because apparently, minorities are perceived to have a void in the area of risk-taking leaders. Scheduling minority interviews was further complicated by the reality that those minorities who were recommended were high profile and quite visible, which made scheduling an interview with them problematic.

Spiritual Gifts

The Participant Background Questionnaire also asked participants to identify their spiritual gifts (see Appendix C). An open-ended question asked, "What is your top spiritual gift?" Seven of the eleven participants listed leadership as one of their top spiritual gifts. Others listed encouragement, teaching, preaching, and administration. One participant did not respond.

Receiving a high number of responses listing leadership as their top spiritual gift was not surprising since the participants were identified as risk-taking leaders. Even though the New Testament does not list risk-taking leadership as a spiritual gift, risk-taking leadership is certainly implied as being a dimension of the spiritual gift of leadership.

Qualities and Practices

Research Question 1 focused on the qualities and practices of risk-taking leaders. This question was instrumental in gleaning those habits or routines utilized by risk-taking leaders in the decision-making process. Some risk-taking leaders were able to articulate a

more discernable process employed when engaging in risk taking. Others just seemed instinctively to take certain steps even though they had not formally given thought to a discernable process. The findings cited were evidenced by all of the participants to some degree. The participants portrayed different degrees of giftedness in these areas, though all participants utilized these abilities at various times in their ministries.

Building Consensus

Risk-taking leaders realize the significance and vital necessity of working with and through people. John Bisagno, in his judgment, recognized the reality of Baptist churches in particular, having numerous and sometimes power-hungry committees. However, Bisagno was not concerned because he believed, "There are talented and God-loving people on those committees." He stated, "They love the Lord and love our church as much as I do, and they have wisdom." When John Bisagno would have a dream or an idea, he would ask the people on the committee, "Here's what I am thinking. How do you feel?" Bisagno knew to take issues to key people first and then to larger groups.

Ed Robb, pastor of the Woodlands United Methodist Church, knew internally to speak with leaders on the finance and building committee when the possibility arose to sell their existing church and relocate even though they were in the middle of a building project for a children's building. At first, some of his key leaders thought they were "kidding around," but then, after study and prayer, agreement started to emerge from their key committees. Robb also realized the significance and blessing of having progressive, forward-thinking leaders on his various committees. Robb did offer one clarification: "When I say consensus, I don't mean by that you have to make everybody happy or that the entire congregation will see it the same way. ... You cannot make

everybody happy. You will never get there."

Paul Clines, church planter in the Houston area, realized that consensus is paramount when presented with a risk-taking decision. In the midst of his capital campaign for his first building, a real estate broker presented to him and to the lay leaders what seemed an unbelievable deal: trade his existing church site of fifteen acres for twenty-five acres and net $500,000 in the bank. This, combined with the realization the twenty-five acres was located at the intersection of a main freeway, seemed like God was doing the miraculous. Yet, following several meetings more questions than answers had been raised, especially with the issue of getting access to and from the property. After a few weeks, Clines and the church's leadership decided to continue with the building program on their existing property. Clines realized the church had not united in taking what appeared at first to be an open door from God.

Throughout the interviews, risk-taking leaders communicated that they rarely acted alone. While an idea or vision might first originate in the mind of a risk-taking leader, if they could not influence those in leadership circles, the risk was usually not embraced. Risk-taking leaders would generally get others to embrace the risk as well. As one participant also noted, most risk-taking leaders would first seek out those who were early adopters and garner their support before taking the next step.

Time with God

Jim Herrington found himself at a prayer conference in Seattle in 1998 where he just could not sleep at night. Herrington had been in prayer concerning the direction of his life and ministry. During those times with God, he sensed a turning point was imminent. Jim Leggett, before starting Grace Fellowship, spent extensive amounts of

time in personal prayer. Leggett believes, "Having spent time with God means risks are actually reduced if you are hearing from God to do something, the pressure of taking the risk actually falls on God." Leggett's saying is "don't take Jim-risks—take God-risks."

Throughout the interviews, participants would refer to prayer or time alone with God as one of the most influential avenues God would use when making risk-taking decisions. Setting aside time with God was especially paramount early on in the risk-taking decision process. Participants spoke of time with God not only in making gutsy risk-taking decisions but also in cultivating an awareness of God's presence and protection during the entire risk-taking process. Rob Renfroe talked of time with God as being crucial after leading his church in a relocation project and experiencing a degree of burnout. Risk-taking leaders routinely practiced spending time with God, whether in prayer or simply in solitude and meditation. Most often, they felt they should have more time with God.

Communicating Change

Risk-taking leaders understand dealing with change is essential if needed risks are to be embraced in order for action to occur and results to be achieved. Jim Jackson communicated change when he was putting video screens in his sanctuary. Some folks commented, "Big churches don't do that, look at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas or St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Houston, we just do not do that at Chapelwood." Jackson realized change was necessary. He focused on being a church of the future twenty-first century, versus the twentieth century, and for a new paradigm of doing ministry in the twenty-first century. For Jackson, the issue was to communicate the need for relevant ministry and worship.

When Rob Renfroe arrived at Mission Bend United Methodist Church, he quickly realized the church sat on only 2.9 acres, had minimal parking, was in significant debt, and wanted to build a children's building. Renfroe sensed that relocation was the best option and needed somehow to refocus the congregation's attention. He told his congregation:

> I know what we need to do. No, we are not going to build a children's building. We are going to relocate and have a capital funds campaign. A lot of people are going to think that is not what we need to do, but in my heart of hearts, this is what we need. I do not know if I can be successful at convincing you this is what we need to do. I know, without a doubt, we could build a children's building here. And all of you would be very proud of yourselves and very proud of me. And then our church's potential would die right there; we would never be bigger than this little lot right here. And, after a couple of years, I would go tell the bishop that my time here was done, and that I had done a very good job. We built this wonderful building, you all loved me, thought I was great, and now would you please send me to a bigger church. I can do that, and I will leave and you will think I am a hero. And the next person comes and the church begins to plateau and die, and you will blame him, not me. I do not think that is the right thing to do.

Renfroe had to practice the act of communicating change through the use of storytelling from the pulpit. Indeed, most risk-taking leaders would use narrative on Sunday morning as a tool in communicating change.

Jim Herrington often uses a more analytical and/or systematic approach when communicating certain risk-taking decisions. Herrington is driven by his life-mission statement which gets expressed in conceptual terms when communicating change. For example, Herrington believes the church growth paradigm is a paradigm focusing on having people attend church and not on helping people become followers of Christ. He stated, "I have been in traditional churches all my life and then I lived through the transition of the contemporary church and began to recognize that the contemporary

church is just a traditional church in a different kind of drag." What is needed is an entire new way of thinking about church, utilizing a systemic approach. Herrington is convinced the home church movement is the appropriate means of developing disciples. Thus, he spends his time as home church pastor and executive director of Mission Houston.

Experiencing Failure

The most common routine employed by risk-taking leaders was the ability to re-frame an experience of failure. In fact, most risk-taking leaders could not articulate an experience of failure. Failure was generally recast by risk-taking leaders as a learning experience, a growing time, a period when the timing was not right, the wrong people were involved, and others. Risk-taking leaders readily admit they try numerous things that do not work yet rarely do they describe those experiences as failures.

Ed Robb, when asked, "What has been your biggest failure in ministry?" stated, "Frankly I have not even thought of that, because I have never thought of having a failure." Robb did share the example when an associate pastor convinced him to have a Sunday evening service that was the same as the Sunday morning service. The church tried it for a period of time and then finally Robb cancelled it. He remarked, "Perhaps we should have tried Saturday night or maybe the service should have been different than the Sunday morning service." Robb concluded, "I think of it as an experiment more than a failure."

John Bisagno, when asked if he had ever experienced failure, replied, "Yea, ... some things turn out to be mistakes." First Baptist was having three Sunday morning services when John felt that he could not physically continue to effectively preach three

times in a row. Therefore, he cancelled the first service and told people to go to one of the two later services. The early service had about seven hundred people in attendance, and about 150 to two hundred of those went to other services, but over five hundred people left the church because of the change. Even more significant to Bisagno was the fact that, in addition to losing those people, the perception of the church was that they were going backward and not forward by eliminating a service. The decision was a big mistake even though it was made in concert with other church leaders.

Bill Hinson, when asked about failure, responded, "Some things did not go as planned." He recalled,

> When the trustees made the decision to go with a dual campus, the news leaked out to the press and the church members read about it in the Houston Chronicle before hearing about it from their pastor. It was a terrible snafu. It made my life a lot more miserable.

Sometimes, something goes wrong with the plan.

Paul Clines, when asked about failure, responded, "My biggest mistake was starting Parkway United Methodist Church too fast." Clines stated some decisions he made were too emotionally based and he did not give enough forethought before taking certain risks. Clines wished he had "spent more time putting vision in people, raising leaders, getting more of the fundamentals of our church hammered into their souls before we went public. I was just impatient...." For Clines, impatience was more of a mistake than the experience of failure.

Principles

Risk-taking leaders also appear to possess a non-quantifiable dimension of leadership that is expressed almost instinctively. They have certain intangible, almost unconscious, ways of acting in certain situations. When the more run-of-the-mill leader

might be hesitant or reluctant, a risk-taking leader, without much analysis, simply knows what is the right direction. Research question 2 attempted to discern those innate values that are expressed overtly in the lives and ministries of risk-taking leaders. The majority of the participants exemplified the principles detailed in this study.

Acting in Faith

John Bisagno, who describes himself as clearly having the gift of faith, believes acting in faith is critical in the life of a risk-taking leader. When trying to discern whether to relocate an historic, traditional church from downtown Houston to the suburbs, Bisagno had to take a leap of faith. He described acting in faith like this:

> You can't go into a dark room, put your hand on the light switch, and say, 'If the lights would ever come on, I'd turn the switch.' You have to turn the switch first as an act of faith, then the lights come on. I think leadership leads people to take risks, because a risk is just another word in the Christian vocabulary for faith. And, again, I think there are no great decisions without risk and faith.

Bisagno says acting in faith comes naturally to him. However, he realizes that for other people acting in faith is tremendously difficult.

When Ken Werlein felt God's leading to plant a church called Faithbridge, he had to act in faith. The decision was not easy or made in a hurry, yet Ken felt it was the right thing to do. Werlein described his experience:

> I don't know that I took a lot of risks until Faithbridge. That was kind of my first big one, to step out into nothing. That's been a big one. Because we didn't have any money, didn't have any building, didn't have people, didn't have a core group, I just had to act in faith.

Steve Wende discovered, when his church in San Antonio was stagnating at eight hundred members, he had to make changes. After spending a week at the Alban Institute, the time came to act in faith. With the added impetus of reading a Lyle Schaller book a

day for five days, reviewing his Myers-Briggs personality profile, and hearing lectures during the day, Wende started to make changes. He stated, "We computerized our office, doubled the size of our parking lot, added two pastors to the staff, a whole bunch of program people, and spent money like water, money we did not have." Within five months, Wende's church started to grow again. In this scenario, outside influence gave Wende certain promptings; however, he still had to act in faith.

Incorporating Vision

Risk-taking leaders are extremely sensitive to a God-given and Holy Spirit-inspired vision for their ministries. Jim Jackson believes lack of vision is the reason for the scarcity of risk-taking leaders. He states, "I think if you get your vision from other people, then you will do what they are doing and there's not much risk involved in just trying to copy other people or other churches." Internally, according to Jackson, a risk-taking leader must be Spirit driven. Jackson asks the question, "Are you the kind of person who checks which way the wind's blowing? Are you a Bill Clinton who tries to find out which way the wind is blowing and do it that way? Or, do you see the way the wind of the Spirit is blowing and do it that way?" A vision that God has planted in one's heart is paramount in the life of a risk-taking leader.

Ed Robb, when discussing various types of leadership, articulated that the primary need in the church today is for visionary leadership. He stated,

> So you might have someone who's a strong spiritual leader, but who may not be a visionary in terms of the church from an institutional standpoint. That is, when I say institutional, I mean the church as a church body.... How to get from A to B, what do we do to reach more people, how do we get our next building built?

Being a visionary leader is of crucial importance for Ed Robb as he leads the Woodlands

United Methodist Church.

Vision also fuels the internal stamina and day-to-day ministry efforts of a risk-taking leader. Rob Renfroe describes vision in the life of a risk-taking leader:

> It gives them a longevity, an ability to hang in there, to do something difficult, to catch your breath if that's what is required, to be made of steel and just keep going forward and then go in and continue to push on.

Vision enables risk-taking leaders to stay on the course of risk when things look impossible. Vision comes from the heart; it is often visceral and spiritual in nature rather than logical and rational.

Just Thinking

Risk-taking leaders tend to have life-transforming moments when they would just think about life and ministry. In those often-unplanned times of reflection, God speaks to or prompts leaders to take or investigate new realms of possibility for life and ministry. In an unguarded conversation, driving in the car, or during a period of quiet at one's desk, risk-taking leaders have defining moments when they are just thinking.

Ken Werlein, in a conversation with other Beeson pastors, realized, "That is when God put a vision that surpassed the fear, perhaps because such a thought had never entered my mind." For risk-taking leaders, a light gets turned on and suddenly they have a whole new way of thinking about a particular situation. James Furr had a transforming thought that galvanized his approach to ministry when he realized, "One day a new insight came to me that what we had been doing in the past three or four years ... tends to assume too many things that are too often not the case." Sometimes risk-taking leaders realize their perception of reality is off base. This realization often happens in moments when they are just thinking.

Amazingly, the risk-taking leader subconsciously or intuitively draws upon past experience, incorporates newly-found data, assesses momentum in the church, and integrates this into a risk-taking decision, often in a matter of minutes. Even though Ed Robb took a considerable amount of time in convincing his church to relocate, he knew after a short meeting this was the direction to pursue. Bisagno would always build consensus with various committees in the church, but he often knew what the next step was in a "matter of minutes because it was the right thing to do." Risk-taking leaders often instinctively know what course of action to take after a few minutes of just thinking.

A Sense of Calling

Bill Hinson believes a sense of calling will fuel risk-taking leaders on nights when life seems hard, ministry is suffering, and they would be tempted to quit. Many, many times in Hinson's life, he would go through this natural exercise:

> I would go back to that starting place to when I was very, very sure of an experience with God, more real than breath. And, I would start there. I would linger there and go back until the old fire started burning again. And I would do this mental pilgrimage and see all the hinge moments in my life where Christ has made the difference and I would build on those like building blocks, and I know my calling is sure.

Risk-taking action springs from an internal sense of profound security.

Jim Leggett, as he planted his church and as he continues to give risk-taking leadership, maintains a bedrock belief of having one's calling connected with an intimate walk with God. Leggett would routinely respond with a phrase similar to this one: "Make sure God is calling you to it and pray, pray, pray, and more prayer." Having a high degree of connection with God through prayer gives validity and encouragement to live out the calling God is placing in your ministry.

Steve Wende experienced a sense of calling to not do what others might readily interpret as God's leading. Wende was approached by several influential and noted individuals to pursue a position as a bishop. That is, he was asked to agree to have his name put on the ballot. Wende and his wife talked about it, prayed about it, and fairly quickly decided that the answer had to be "no." God did not want him to be bishop. Wende was convinced, along with his wife and two prayer warriors, that God had called him to be a pastor of a local church.

Other Factors

Research questions 1 and 2 focused on the external and internal qualities of a risk-taking leader. Question 3 left the door open for those types of attributes and behaviors that did not fit into the above categories. The attempt was to discern threads of continuity among risk-taking leaders that might at first glance seem inconsequential. Since risk-taking leaders have some unique characteristics, the attempt was to ascertain any surprising attributes. The characteristics listed surfaced in varying degrees in the majority of the participant.

Identification with Biblical Characters

Risk-taking leaders tend to utilize various biblical characters as models when making risk-taking decisions. Their minds tend to naturally flow in and out of various biblical texts when articulating various risk-taking experiences in their lives. Sometimes an entire biblical story would serve as a model, and in other cases simply a particular biblical phrase or incident would guide the risk-taking process.

When Steve Wende describes his leadership style at First United Methodist Church in Houston, he envisions himself more as a Joshua leading the army into battle

down in the valley rather than as a Moses standing on the hilltop lifting his arms in prayer. Wende stated, "I am clear. I'm real clear. I am Joshua. Joshua prayed. He believed. But, his skills were as a general leading the army." Wende has people around him praying, but his definitive talent is being a leader envisioned as a general in the army, like Joshua.

When Paul Clines was planting Parkway United Methodist Church and pushing himself and his church out of their traditional roles, he stated,

> You cannot look at one person in the Bible that God used in a great way, that God did not also continually push out of their comfort zones: the story of Abraham, the story of Moses, the story of Joseph, David, Daniel, I mean just pick one.

John Bisagno, when he attempted to move his historic downtown church, which depended upon the grace of nearby businesses to provide parking as the church only owned approximately fifty spaces, warned repeatedly, "There may come a pharaoh who does not remember Joseph." By this statement, Bisagno was warning of the possibility of local business prohibiting the church using their parking lots on Sunday mornings, or even the possibility of local merchants being hostile or uncooperative with the church next door, in spite of the good the church does in the local community.

Bill Hinson, in recalling how he dealt with people who opposed the addition of a second campus, often referred to the challenges of Moses who put up with dispirited Israelites and yet still wanted to get all of them into the promised land. Jim Jackson, when he discussed the unique strength of Chapelwood United Methodist Church, as opposed to just copying other churches, would comment, "We are not going to be a David, trying to go into battle wearing Saul's armor." When Jim Herrington described his decision to become a part of the home church movement, he often identified with the

book of Acts and the stories of the early Church.

Focus on God, Not on Risk

When interviewing risk-taking leaders, most often they would be surprised over the amount of risk they had embraced in their lives and in their churches. Often, with a shrug of their shoulders, they would say, "Well, that is just what I thought God wanted me to do."

Jim Leggett, after hearing from God and soaking his thoughts in prayer, focused on what God was doing when he hired a youth pastor. He remembered his conversation, "Brian, I know that you are at the third most wealthy Methodist church in the Texas Annual Conference. I want to invite you to do something.... I have enough salary money to pay you for six months.... Do you want to come? And he did!" Leggett, in his mind, made his decision based on a God-risk not a Jim-risk.

Paul Clines when planting his church never thought about what would happen if his church did not prosper. He was following God's directions, and he knew "God will never abandon me, no matter what." Rob Renfroe, after successfully relocating a church, went to be executive pastor at First United Methodist Church, following God's prompting because he knew, "God is going to call me to something new." Ed Robb relocated the Woodlands United Methodist Church because "God opened a door; we had to."

Over and over in multiple interviews, participants would quickly and confidently respond that God had led them in a risk-taking decision and they never really thought about the risk or failure. Though sometimes the conversation sounded mysterious, and even mystical, risk-taking leaders found an inexplicable dependence on God that would carry them through the turbulent waters of risk.

God-fueled Boldness

Risk-taking leaders often sense a compelling boldness and urgency powered by the Holy Spirit in order to further the kingdom. Participants were quick to respond about the necessity and requirement to be bold as an essential ingredient of risk-taking leadership. The bottom line for many participants was quite simply, "Be bold."

Jim Jackson is adamant about being bold. Jackson cites the seventh chapter of Revelation when he says,

> The first category of people going to hell is cowards. If God is asking you to do something that is outside of your capacity to do, and you say 'no, we cannot do that' then, what you are really saying is 'we don't really need God around here, we only do the things that we can handle.'

Jackson is certain boldness must be a top characteristic of risk-taking leaders.

Bill Hinson believes boldness is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts, every time the disciples prayed, the Spirit brought the gift of boldness. Hinson declared, "As I go around the country preaching, the one thing that discourages me more than anything is the timidity of the preachers. I mean they do not have enough ego to say boo, let alone turn a church around." Hinson shared that every risk-taking decision he made required an act of boldness. For him, boldness is desperately needed to effect change in our society. This boldness for Hinson lies deep in his relationship with God. He stated, "It is hard for me to conceive of someone regularly being on their knees and really stretched out in service who doesn't receive more and more boldness in the Lord." For Hinson, one cannot be a risk-taking leader without boldness.

John Bisagno believes that a lack of boldness comes from insecurity in the life of the leader. He commented, "People are not risk-takers I think because maybe it flows out of their own personality and they see the potential for failure as a reflection on them—

what will people think." Being bold does come easy for Bisagno. He believes great risk takers do not care what other people think. Bisagno is bold because he puts God first with the belief: "I will go for it. If I die, I die." Boldness has just come naturally for Bisagno.

Narratives of Risk-Taking

During the course of the interviews, a number of amazing stories surfaced which personified risk taking in real-life events. These stories illustrate how some participants embraced and modeled significant risks in the course of their ministry. I relate these stories in hopes of capturing, at least in part, the degree and impact of risk experienced by the participants.

Sixty-Seven People Transferred Their Membership

One day early after his arrival in Houston, Bill Hinson looked out the church window and realized his church sat on only a half-block of land. He felt that the future was difficult to envision with no room for expansion. When a city block became available, Hinson sensed God was opening a door.

Hinson called a meeting with his reluctant group of trustees and gave each one of them a little package wrapped with blue ribbon. The package contained a pair of dice. Hinson told the trustees to carry the dice in their pockets and to realize they were "shooting craps with the future of the church by not buying the land." A week and a half later the trustees agreed to buy the city block if the money could be pledged in thirty days. The trustees signed a thirty-day option on the land.

On Friday, before the option was to expire on Monday, the church still needed an additional three million dollars. Hinson decided to have a second mile pledge. On that

Friday, he got a call from the realtor saying the option actually expired on that Friday, not on the following Monday. Hinson personally signed a contract for the land without informing the trustees, hoping that the needed money would be raised on Sunday.

When Sunday came the church was still a million dollars short. However, Hinson remarked how a lady told him to stop by after all the money had been counted. That Sunday afternoon she pledged a million dollars making the campaign successful. That week the church finalized the contract for the land. Yet, some people did not appreciate Hinson preaching so hard on money, and the same week sixty-seven people transferred their membership to other churches.

Hinson was extremely bold in his leadership and had an amazing gift to act in faith. Hinson was absolutely certain this was God's will for the church as he built consensus in a daring and gutsy manner.

Major Contributors Transfer Their Membership

When Jim Jackson came to Chapelwood United Methodist Church, he followed a pastor who had been there for thirty-six years. Some thought Jackson was only going to be the interim pastor. The previous pastor in his column to the church wrote, "We are flush with money, we have money in the bank, and I am leaving the church well-fixed financially."

During Jackson's first three months, ten of the top eleven givers left the church. Jackson stated, "All of a sudden you have these high power people leaving, and those big checks are not being written. You have got to sit steady in the boat and believe." Jackson felt compelled to expand the ministry of the church at the same time the church was experiencing a financial setback.

Jackson went to his administrative board and gave this notice,

> Let me be the first to tell you that people are going to be leaving.... You are just going to have to trust me that this happens.... We are going to come out of it. We are going to be fine, but short term, we are going to be in a mess.

Jackson then embarked on a very aggressive stewardship campaign for the annual budget. His words were, "We pulled out all the stops." Max Depree states the first responsibility of leadership is to define reality (11). Jackson was able to define the current reality and paint a clear vision of a hopeful future.

Components of risk-taking leadership that factored into this story are acting in faith that the annual budget would be pledged, communicating change to the administrative board, having the boldness to address a difficult situation, and incorporating vision into what the church could become.

We Had No Idea

When John Bisagno sensed God's leading to relocate his downtown church to the suburbs, he realized the church needed 3.5 million dollars to buy the land and complete the first phase of the building. However, from the time the church voted to move to the time the church was actually ready to sign the contracts and start construction, the church got caught in the largest construction inflationary period ever experienced in Houston, Texas. When the church opened the bids, the lowest bid was 8.1 million dollars.

Bisagno said, "I just about died." During the next couple of days, he sensed God saying to take the problem of the financial shortfall to the people. "We had no idea what to do next." He preached a sermon basically saying, "Here's the deal, it's your church and your money, you make the decision." Bisagno preached a sermon titled "We have come this far by faith." Bisagno said he has sung only two other times in church, but he

sang that Sunday. The choir came in behind him and sang a chorus of "Don't Be Discouraged." He challenged the people, "What shall we do?" He recalled, "And everyone stood up and cheered, everybody—they just yelled and hollered." Bisagno said, "Okay, let's go."

Two key points in this story are boldness and consensus. Bisagno exercised a tremendous amount of boldness to even entertain such a seriously impossible scenario. Secondly, Bisagno had the strategic instinct that consensus was essential if this risk was to be embraced.

Summary of Interviews

The analysis of the interviews has demonstrated certain consistencies and trends in the lives of the participants. Further analysis is given in Chapter 5. The data collected from the above interviews can be summarized in the following statements:

1. The participants experienced a significant time with God that enabled them to act in faith;
2. The participants were able to build consensus often by using vision casting;
3. Communicating change was essential for the participants, especially in re-framing any perceived failure as a learning experience;
4. Demonstrating boldness was critical in the lives of the participants. This boldness often originated out of a deep sense of God calling them to action;
5. Thinking about risk was not predominant for the participants. Rather, the focus was on living out what God wanted for their church or ministry;
6. Times of thinking, often not planned or calculated, proved invaluable for some of the participants; and,

7. The identification with biblical characters served as a model of preparing themselves for risk-taking action.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Time, experience, and results have verified the eleven participants in this study as risk-taking leaders who have led their churches and ministries with a courageous vision of furthering God's kingdom. Congruent with the purpose of this study, to glean the qualities, practices, and principles of risk-taking leaders, the experiences of the eleven participants were an invaluable tool and the prime source of information concerning risk-taking leadership.

Major Findings

In general, when times are stable and secure, leaders are not severely tested. Leaders may perform well; they may get promoted. Leaders may even achieve fame and fortune, but certainty and routine breed complacency especially in the church. In times of calm, leaders do not take the opportunity to burrow inside and discover the true God-given gifts buried down deep within themselves. In contrast, personal and church hardships have a way of making risk-taking leaders come face to face with whom they really are and with what they are capable of becoming.

Of the eleven participants in this study, the crucible of these risk-taking leaders' crowning achievements was some distressing crisis, unending change, or bold new venture. Only challenge produces the opportunity for leaders to become risk-taking leaders, and given the daunting challenges the church faces today, the potential for risk-taking leaders is monumental. I identified five major findings that gave insight into the lives of the risk-taking leaders interviewed for this dissertation.

Risk-Taking Leaders Focus on God, Not on Risks

Often by using parallels with biblical characters, the risk-taking leaders see God in their future as so big and compelling that the accompanying risks get pushed to the margins. These participants know, just like David, that God is much stronger and more capable than any giant they might be facing. The God who delivered David from the paw of the bear and the mouth of the lion will also guide the risk-taking leader to face and overcome the giants in their ministry. Paul Clines knows, deep in his soul, "God will never abandon me, no matter what."

These participants know cognitively that whenever they experiment with innovative ways of doing ministry, they put themselves and others at risk. One of the most glaring differences between the risk-taking leader and the more bureaucratic leader is the risk-taking leader's inclination to encourage risk taking rather than taking a safer course of action. Yet these participants never articulated the mind-set to go find a risk because they think their ministries or leaderships are too safe. Rather, risk-taking leaders, because of a moment when they were just thinking or spending a special time with God, knew a risk needed to be investigated and perhaps embraced because God was directing them.

All eleven participants took risk-taking action because they believed God was directing them, rather than acting out of a desire to achieve their own agenda or someone else's vision. In order to keep clear and concise the direction God was leading them, participants were willing to go down roads that were unexpected and at times even mysterious. These participants have felt as if they were and are stewards of God's direction for their churches to such an extent that risk does not come into focus because

God is at the helm. As Ed Robb comments, "This is what we need to do for the greater kingdom." God is able.

Risk-Taking Leaders Internally Sense God Directing Them

Over and over again, participants would refer to a strong, inward conviction of God directing their ministry. These leaders could not have convinced their churches, over the long term, to share in risk-taking action if they were not convinced of God directing them. These participants were sincerely urgent in their belief of God's direction. The internal belief that God is directing these risk-taking leaders is quite simply paramount and essential.

Secular literature even underscores the importance of believing in the project. Kouzes and Posner say, "The greatest inhibitors to enlisting others in a common vision is a lack of personal conviction" (Leadership Challenge 139). One of the extreme values of a face-to-face interview was the ability to spot the abundance of sincerity in the response of the participants. I could detect it in their voices; I observed it in their eyes; I noticed it in their posture. In the exchange of questions and responses, I discovered the attractive force of the participants' hearts. The individual inspirational stories suddenly became for me an engagement of heart to heart, spirit to spirit, and life to life as I, too, wanted to join their God-directed cause. These participants shared from their God-centered souls that truly galvanize others to want to follow. When Jim Jackson says, "The first category of people going to hell are cowards.... We have to do it," followers are engaged at a deep level.

From Moses standing before a burning bush to Nehemiah crying over the ruins of the city, these participants often drew upon an inner sanctuary that calmed their risk-

taking souls. The idea of embracing risk, communicating change, casting a challenging vision was not as daunting when they had a safe place in the midst of constant chaos. The participants seem to be capable to touch a reserve of God's presence and provision whenever risk-taking action seems too frightening or not favorable. Secular corporate writers do not have language or a belief system that allows for a God-directed, risk-taking action. Generally, corporate literature tends to refer to the bedrock of certain corporate values or a mission statement; whereas, these participants refer to the bedrock of divine direction.

Risk-Taking Leaders Are Bold

My findings indicate these participants have one defining characteristic: they are bold. When churches or ministries have a tendency to resort to self-pity, when churches are hurt by the stormy winds of cultural change, risk-taking leaders generally stand firm and issue a challenge for bold action. Further, participants were taking bold actions under conditions of extreme uncertainty and urgency. In fact, the participants exhibited bold change even while keeping in tension high degrees of ambiguity. Jim Herrington modeled this approach as his home church movement evolved out of a desire to make true disciples of Jesus Christ. In a day, when I, along with the majority of other North American pastors, envision building God's church by making disciples and using buildings and budgets, Herrington is devoting his time to home churches.

Participants articulated, directly with words and indirectly with passion, how in particular situations they had to discover their own unique courage and willingness to be bold. In other words, they could not draw upon someone else's experience or use a teaching from the latest leadership gurus; rather, they drew upon their own personal

ability to be bold. Finding a unique quality of boldness is something that the participants understand, and they know that finding a sense of boldness is not a matter of technique. Boldness is a matter of time and searching, discovered in the crucible of risk-taking action.

This biblical boldness exhibited by the participants was not reckless or random. The decisions made were tested against the mandates of Scriptures and through the filters of experienced leaders. These participants followed Steve Harper's advice: "The spiritual life must have an objective base. Private revelations must be scrutinized against a recognized and established norm" (28).

Drawing upon biblical characters or stories of the early Church, in particular from the book of Acts, the participants modeled the biblical sense of boldness. Secular literature cannot relate, as Holy Spirit-inspired boldness does not fit into a risk matrix. The participants demonstrated a quality of boldness that generally does not fit into corporate categories of risk. Bill Hinson claims, "Boldness is a gift of the Holy Spirit." Boldness is the intangible, distinguishable quality of a risk-taking leader.

Risk-Taking Leaders Are Able to Build Consensus

Through a variety of methods, the risk-taking leaders in this study were able to build consensus, first with a small but highly influential group of followers and then, like concentric circles, reaching out to the larger church and even into the community. In particular, John Bisagno, who built one of the earliest mega-churches in America, underscored time and time again the significance of getting support from key committee members, from the entire committee, and then from larger groups.

These risk-taking leaders animate the need to take a risk and manifest the purpose

so that others can see it, hear it, taste it, touch it, and feel it. In making the fear of risk seem manageable, risk-taking leaders ignite their followers' flames of passion. Making the full use of the power of language, these risk-taking leaders use metaphors and figures of speech; they give past examples, tell stories, and relate biblical parallels; they draw word pictures and recite slogans. From John Bisagno, "We have come this far by faith," to Bill Hinson, "shooting craps with the future," to Jim Leggett, "take a God-risk," these risk-taking leaders have issued an enthusiastic challenge to be part of a God-directed, invigorating journey into a risk-taking venture.

These risk-taking leaders have become astute at communicating the need to change and have developed the ability to rally people around the change process. Communicating change is one thing; building consensus to embrace the change is another. Quite simply, these participants foster change, take risks, and accept the responsibility for making change happen. More than anything else, these risk-taking leaders focus not on the change; rather, they focus on creating a new way of life. For example, imagine what life would be like when our church relocates, or can you picture us worshipping together in our new sanctuary. These risk-taking leaders have sought out God-inspired opportunities that embrace change by leading people in a whole new and fresh way of doing ministry.

Risk-Taking Leaders Reframe Perceived Failure

Each participant, even though they could recall experiences of failure, whether consciously or subconsciously, would reframe the event into something like a learning process, a discovery, a realization of using the wrong training, an understanding of making some poor assumptions and the like. Most participants would go through a

vigorous evaluation of the process and determine what could be learned and move forward.

This reframing of failure was essential in allowing the participants to remain energetic, optimistic, and resilient despite going through what sometimes was enormous upheaval brought on by the experience of perceived failure. The participants as they shared their respective stories always dispensed the quality of hope and possibility in their conversational patterns especially when discussing unexpected outcomes. The ability to reframe events enabled the participants to have the stamina to maintain a fast pace and juggle several demands simultaneously.

The ability to debrief every failure in a positive manner enabled not only the risk-taking leaders but also their churches or organizations to embrace innovation and change. My findings indicate a ripple effect for the church, as a pastor would model a safe arena in which to experiment and even experience failure. Indeed, these participants would turn the potential turmoil and stress of change and risk-taking action into a sought-after adventure.

Theological Understandings

Three theological understandings have surfaced from my literature research and from the interview process. These three insights provide a background in which risk-taking leadership can be clearly understood.

First, the biblical truth that God's people live by faith is uniquely positioned in the life of a risk-taking leader. The Old Testament variously defines faith as resting, trusting, and hoping in the Lord, cleaving to him, waiting for him, making him our shield and tower, taking refuge in him, etc. Psalmists and prophets present faith as unwavering trust

in God to save his servants from their foes and fulfill his declared purpose of blessing them. The New Testament portrays living by faith as death-defying hope, radical obedience, and heroic tenacity to cling to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews and 1 Peter present faith as the dynamic of hope and endurance under persecution. This dynamic does not compare to the corporate idea of risk management. In the corporate context, risk aversion is calibrated, risk analysis is performed, and desired outcomes are projected with certain degrees of probability. Corporate decision makers would possibly use the Kindler Decision Making Process, see Figure 1, page 12, as a model. Unlike the corporate model, the participants in this study often identified themselves as being people of faith, much like those discussed in the Biblical Understandings of chapter 2. For the most part, the risk-taking leaders interviewed in this study would strongly identify as God's people living by faith even though from time to time, some risk analysis would be utilized.

Second, all the participants in this study practiced the biblical notion of discernment. Though discernment was not the focus of my research, throughout the numerous interviews, I noticed indirectly various discernment strategies. Ernest Larkins gives this summary of discernment: "Discernment is not one discrete act in the spiritual life, but rather the whole spiritual endeavor. Discernment is spirituality in the concrete because spirituality is precisely the Spirit acting within us and discernment is the awareness of that action" (9). The data collected validates the decision-making process presented in Figure 2, page 13. The participants lived in the tension of risk and faith and were able to discern their next course of action. For the risk-taking leaders in this study, the process of discernment is not the corporate process of sophisticated decision analysis,

rather discernment is listening to the voice of God and attempting to follow that voice with the risk-taking leader's entire life and with his or her organization.

Finally, the risk-taking leaders in this study modeled a significant amount of trust in their followers. I believe risk-taking leaders took their cue from people of Scripture like Moses, David, and especially the trust Jesus exhibited in his often obtuse and unfaithful followers. At times, Moses seemed to argue with God to continue to lead the people of Israel much like the participants kept on leading their churches even in the midst of opposition. As Jesus kept on believing in his disciples even after they all fled, so the risk-taking leaders interviewed here kept on loving people even if they were late adopters. Also, this study indicated risk-taking leaders were quite vulnerable to their followers. Moreover, the participants were willing to go first in demonstrating their trust and vulnerability. The biblical idea of trusting in others was often modeled with the utmost care by the risk-taking leaders interviewed for this study.

Limitations of the Study

Four noteworthy limitations of this study deserve mention: gender, race, theological persuasion, and age. While other minor limitations surfaced during this study, these four limitations were most noticeable.

Gender

The eleven participants were all male. This could have a bearing on some of the findings. My perception is that female participants would have placed more emphasis on a risk-taking leader's internal qualities as according to Gary Smalley, females generally tend to make decisions based more on feelings and intuition whereas males are more inclined to make decisions based on logic and rational thought (13-17). Of course, others

would disagree with these distinguishing characteristics between male and female. In that case smaller variances would be noted if females had been included in the study.

Race

Here again, the study is exposed to weakness by not crossing racial and ethnic lines, as all eleven participants were Caucasian. I suspect racial diversity in the participants would have resulted in the findings being slightly different. On the other hand, the findings might have received greater support. Based on my own limited experience in cross-cultural settings, I sense the risk-taking leadership findings derived in this study are essentially transferable despite racial origin.

Theological Persuasion

The participants in this study identified themselves as evangelical. Eight of the eleven participants identified themselves as Wesleyan and/or charismatic. One participant described himself as evangelical, moderate, and charismatic. Surprisingly, no other participant described himself as moderate or charismatic. I suspect if some of the participants would have identified themselves as Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, or liberal mainline Protestants, my findings could have been substantially altered. The issues of authority, embracing change, or taking risks are perceived and lived out in widely different arenas when comparing Eastern Orthodoxy to evangelical Christianity in North America. My belief is that liberal, mainline Protestant participants would yield results closest to the findings I discovered.

Age

The youngest age of the participants was thirty-five while two of the participants had already retired. A legitimate concern is the reality that the participants could be

viewed as being in the second half of their ministerial career. The recommendation process made nominating younger persons more problematic due to the requirement that each person should have a track record of at least five years of ministry experience and evidence of having exhibited risk-taking action. I cannot conjecture how the findings might have changed with younger participants. I suspect any variation would be nominal. At least one study confirms my suspicion that elderly adults make equivalent risk-taking decisions as compared to young adults. Furthermore, the elderly participants in this particular clinical experiment, relative to young adults, did not exhibit any slowing down in the speed of processing the information involved in making risk-taking decisions (Dror, Katona, and Mungur 67-71).

Suggestions for Further Study

The following topics would prove quite beneficial for further research and reflection. These topics surfaced in my own reflections during the interviews or in conversations with my research reflection team.

First, are risk-taking leaders born with these character traits or are these learned behaviors? Perhaps from childbirth some persons are genetically predisposed to engage in risk-taking leadership while others are born with a greater degree of hesitancy. From as early as interaction on the playground, the possibility might exist to ascertain if a girl or boy would develop into a risk-taking leader. On the other hand, could certain principles and practices, which distinguish a risk-taking leader, be acquired through various learning processes or through spiritual formation? Maybe close association with a mentor is key, or repeated exposure to other risk-taking leaders in a modeling relationship, or just constant learning from books, tapes, and seminars could serve as the

catalyst for development into a risk-taking leader.

Second, what relationship exists between risk-taking leaders' theological persuasions and the degree and magnitude of risk embraced by risk-taking leaders? For example, if more participants identified themselves as charismatic in theological persuasion, these risk-taking leaders might embrace even greater and more frequent risks. Perhaps if some of the participants had aligned themselves with a reformed understanding of faith, maybe some of the findings would indicate less of a dependence on the risk-taking leaders' actions and more emphasis on the sovereign hand of God. Just as interesting would be to evaluate risk-taking leaders in a Roman Catholic environment.

Third, what, if any, relationship exists between the risk-taking leaders' cultural settings and their ability to be risk-taking leaders? That is, what would risk-taking leaders be like in Africa, South America, or in Europe? Are the findings in this study only to be identified largely with white, middle to upper-middle-class pastors in the suburbs of America? Yet, possibly, or even probably, risk-taking leaders would be risk-taking leaders regardless of cultural context.

Fourth, what values, in the order of their importance, do risk-taking leaders consistently exhibit? For example, is the appropriation of the role and power of the Holy Spirit lived out at a value higher in risk-taking leaders as compared to others? Is the value of the local church as God's ordained redemptive instrument of utmost importance in the risk-taking leaders' value systems?

Fifth, how does one teach or coach risk-taking leadership? During the interviews, most risk-taking leaders would agree they manifest the qualities of a risk-taking leader, yet they had difficulty articulating how they became risk-taking leaders. Ask any one of

the participants, and I suspect they could determine if someone was a risk-taking leader or not, yet they have difficulty expressing how to develop into a risk-taking leader.

Implications for Existing Body of Literature

Almost universally institutions, companies, and churches today are preoccupied with revitalization and renewal. The question is what organization does not need risk-taking leaders who can cope with and produce change?

Throughout the world, groups of all kinds face almost unprecedented pressures for risk-taking leaders who will lead them through the complex and chaotic times in which we live. With each passing month, another book, tape, or article is published that will instruct and guide leaders on how to lead effectively into the next century. These resources are diverse, some are lengthy, others quite detailed, and most are indeed beneficial.

The void in the literature on leadership I detected was precisely the topic of this dissertation: church, risk-taking leadership. Corporate literature was quite open and encouraging regarding risk taking, while some of the church literature almost seemed reluctant to discuss risk taking. I suspect some of the church literature shies away from risk because of the distinct possibility of failure. After all, who wants to go to a church where the pastor or the church is a failure? Combined with this perception is the theological notion correct that if a project or church failed, God failed.

The source of my findings surfaced in eleven face-to-face interviews. These risk-taking leaders have prompted and pushed me into asking deeper and often gut-wrenching questions regarding leadership in the church. Risk-taking leadership is hard to define and even harder to quantify because it is part vision, part process, part results, and also part

art and intuition, part spirit, and only part management. I suspect a deeper and more penetrating question into the soul of a leader is a logical next step.

The implication for the existing body of literature, as a result of this dissertation, is namely that a more complete bridge needs to be built between leadership and risk taking as understood and practiced in the context of leading an organization, especially the church. This dissertation attempted to bring together risk taking and leadership from a ministry perspective. The interviews served as case studies that yielded illustrations and insights into the elusive link regarding risk taking and leadership.

Practical Applications

During the course of interviews, writing, reflection, prayer, and discussion, a number of practical applications became evident for anyone seeking to become a risk-taking leader. Some of these applications tend to be quite pragmatic and even simplistic while others are more conceptual in nature. Taken together, however, these insights would put one further along the road to becoming a risk-taking leader.

First of all, risk-taking leaders are a diverse lot with varying dispositions. Some talk a lot, and some are more reflective. Some are reserved while others are charismatic. These risk-taking leaders, in some ways, are the most baffling of all personality types. They have an element of mystery about them as to what exactly makes them a risk-taking leader. Intuition, flare, vision casting, building consensus, and sometimes even theatrical ability can come into play. Their risk-taking leadership gifts vary from church to church, organization to organization. No set formula exists. Therefore, anyone reading this dissertation can qualify as a risk-taking leader.

Second, pastors and church leaders must get comfortable with the idea of failure

and master the art of reframing any experience of failure. Corporate pundits are quick to mention the need and significance of failure. "Failure plays an important role in success" (Leadership Challenge 68). Yet in the church world, the positive nature of failure is viewed with reluctance. From the pulpit and the pew, Christians need not shy away from making changes and trying new ministries because they might fail. From Peter walking on water and then sinking to Moses being a murderer and a poor public speaker, the Bible is full of examples of people greatly used by God yet still having moments and experiences of failure.

Third, the church today cries out for risk-taking leaders with a radical heart that will enable Christians to follow God with this powerful and motivating characteristic: boldness. Many leaders are part of churches that demonstrate a tentativeness and uncertainty in their witness that is uncharacteristic of their message or history. I believe people are begging for the church, and in particular for the leaders of the church, to offer boldness in order to face the challenges of the day. If leaders today are not bold in their leadership, the church will have been unfaithful to that courageous biblical and historical heritage of leadership of which the church has been the beneficiary. The early disciples' prayer needs to be our prayer: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29, NIV).

Finally, risk-taking leaders should be encouraged to draw fresh energy and vitality from the stories of faith as recorded in Scripture. These biblical narratives should serve as models of faith and action that will encourage, propel, and galvanize a risk-taking leader to overcome any hesitancy and fearfulness. From private devotion to public proclamation, the stories of David and Daniel, Moses and Miriam, Peter and John must

find a growing place in the hearts and minds of leaders and followers alike. The scriptural stories of faith are not merely informational; they are transformational. Let these stories of faith become intertwined with every risk-taking leader's own story of faith.

APPENDIX A

Sample Letter

Dr. Jim Jackson
Chapelwood United Methodist Church
11140 Greenbay
Houston, TX 77024

Dear Dr. Jackson,

I am a doctor of ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary, and I am conducting research on the topic of risk-taking leadership.

My goal for the dissertation is to identify the qualities, practices, and beliefs of risk-taking leaders. I am particularly interested in determining what causes or motivates certain leaders to embrace a higher risk tolerance.

As part of my research, I plan to interview ten to fifteen risk-taking leaders whose ministries have been characterized as embracing ministry risks. My hope is that many church leaders will be encouraged and coached because you and other risk-taking leaders have taken time to participate in this study.

You have come highly recommended as a risk-taking leader. I am asking you to pray about participating in a forty-five to sixty minute interview process. I have enclosed a copy of the interview questions as well as a background questionnaire. I will be contacting your office and hopefully setting a time for an interview.

You can be assured your interview and questionnaires will be highly confidential. I plan on keeping written copies of the questionnaires and the interviews for approximately six months. The analysis of the data will be kept electronically for an indefinite period of time. Of course, your participation in this process is voluntary, and at any time you may decide not to participate.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Dennis Oetting

APPENDIX B

List of Interview Questions

1. What occasions do you have where you embraced firsthand a risk-taking experience?
2. What in your past would you cite as a risk-taking leadership decision?
3. From your experience, what are the essential qualities of a risk-taking leader?
4. Explain the practices, steps, or routines that you experience when making a risk-taking decision.
5. What specific principles do you employ when exercising risk-taking action?
6. What are three of your most significant risk-taking actions so far in your ministry?
7. What has been your biggest failure in ministry?
8. How have you been able to embrace and communicate change?
9. Can you identify any gut-level beliefs upon which you rely when making a risk-taking decision?
10. What guardrails or guidelines do you employ before moving into risk-taking action?
11. Why do you think leaders tend not to be risk taking?
12. Do you have any concluding comments about risk-taking leadership?

APPENDIX C

Participant Background Questionnaire

1. Name:

   Address:

   Phone Number:

   E-mail:

2. Church/Ministry:

   Address:

   Phone Number:

   E-mail:

3. Age:

4. Educational Background:

5. Ministry Experience:

6. How long have you been in your present assignment?

7. If you are a pastor, what is your average weekend attendance including children?

   1996 _____

   1997 _____

   1998 _____

   1999 _____

   2000 _____

8. What is the approximate size of your church/organization income?

9. How many people are on your staff?

10. What are the major responsibilities in your position?

11. What is your top spiritual gift?

12. With which theological group(s) would you identify yourself?

Reformed Wesleyan Evangelical Moderate Liberal Charismatic

APPENDIX D

Identification of Participants

Bisagno, Rev. John: Retired pastor of First Baptist Church in Houston where he pastored for over twenty-five years. Successfully led First Baptist to relocate from downtown Houston to the suburbs. One of the first pastors in America to pastor a mega-church. Currently lives in west Houston.

Clines, Rev. Paul: Planted Parkway United Methodist Church in southwest Houston in 1996. A Beeson pastor graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary in 1996. Spent five years as an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in Houston.

Furr, Mr. James: Founded Faithsystems, a training and consulting network, in 1999. Heavily involved in part with the Union Baptist Association in Houston and now a vital a part of Mission Houston. Has been adjunct professor for various colleges and seminaries. Co-author of Leading Congregational Change.

Herrington, Mr. James: Executive director of the Union Baptist Association in Houston, Texas from 1989-1998. Currently executive director of Mission Houston, which he founded in 1998. Coauthor of Leading Congregational Change.

Hinson, Dr. Bill: Retired pastor of First United Methodist Church in Houston where he led this historic downtown church into a second campus expansion. Author of several books. Currently, resides in his ideal retirement home on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama.

Jackson, Dr. Jim: Has been the pastor of the five thousand member Chapelwood United Methodist Church for eight years. Previously, he was pastor of the First United

Methodist Church of Lubbock from 1990-1994. Author of various articles and publications. Currently writing books on "Authentic Friendship" and "Freedom through Forgiveness."

Leggett, Rev. Jim: Planted Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church in 1996. Has a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering from Texas A&M University. Currently completing a doctor of ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Renfroe, Rev. Rob: Serving on staff at the Woodlands United Methodist Church as Associate Pastor. Successfully led Mission Bend United Methodist Church in multimillion dollar church relocation. Also, was executive pastor at First United Methodist Church in Houston for several years.

Robb, Rev. Ed: Started the Woodlands United Methodist Church in 1978 which currently averages over two thousand in worship attendance with a $5 million budget. In fall 2001, moved into new church campus after successfully relocating the church.

Wende, Dr. Steve: Started in July 2001 as the senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Houston. Pastored the University United Methodist Church in San Antonio for over fifteen years where he led the church in several major expansions.

Werlein, Rev. Ken: Planted Faithbridge United Methodist Church in North Houston in 1998. Currently completing dissertation as part of the Beeson Doctor of Ministry Program from Asbury Theological Seminary. Recently married in fall 2001.

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