EIGHT STEPS TO TRANSITIONING TO ONE OF FIVE MODELS OF A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

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Abstract

Theories of change and theories of changing[1] are insufficiently studied, hence often inadequately understood by the ecclesial academy. The few theories that are available are based on an author's experience with singular process model developed from similar homogeneous contexts. However, the present author, reflecting on case studies over a ten-year window, strengthens the argument for a holistic, eight-step model as first developed by John P. Kotter at Harvard University. Whitesel argues that the eight-step process model is resident and visible in ecclesiological change. He then suggests that the requisite change objective for many churches will be a heterogeneous, multicultural model, which will intentionally or unintentionally follow one or more of the five classifications.

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[1] There is an important difference between *theories of change* and *theories of changing*. The latter, and the focus of this article, investigates how to control and manage change. *Theories of change*, however, seek to understand how change occurs. I have discussed *theories of change* as well as theologies of change in the book, *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007). For a fuller treatment of the differences between *theories of change* and *theories of changing*, see Warren G. Bennis, *Changing Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH BY THE ACADEMY.

In my literature review on ecclesial change,[2] I found that prominent (e.g. megachurch) authors who customarily tout one model that has worked for her or him pen most popular books on church change. Subsequently, overall general principles of organizational change in the ecclesial context are contextually bound and may be too narrow.

In addition, a *theology* of change/changing is poorly understood. Yet, both the Bible and church history are replete with ecclesial change, e.g. from old covenant to new covenant (Heb 8:13, Col 2:16–17) and from monarchies (1 and 2 Sa, 1 and 2 Ki), to oligarchies (Judges), to syndical forms of government (the council of Jerusalem, Ac 15:1–12).[3]

To establish a theological context for church change, I penned three chapters in the book, *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church*. This current article will assume that either the reader has read those chapters or will consult them later. Subsequently, the present discussion will be delimited to the theory and practice of changing with one of five potential multicultural objectives.[4]

A CASE STUDY BASIS FOR RESEARCH.

Reliable and valid process models usually arise from examining and comparing numerous case studies. In this regard, the best organizational researcher may be John P. Kotter, former professor at Harvard Business School. Having read hundreds, if not thousands, of student case studies, he began to formulate a process model that would explain successful change. His seminal article in *Harvard Business Review* titled, "Leading Change: Why Transfor-

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[2] This article will expand some of my previous theorizing as represented in two of my books: *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church* and *The Healthy Church: Practical Ways to Strengthen a Church's Heart* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2013). In addition, my initial thoughts on the "How to Change a Church in 8 Steps" can be found in my article of the same title in *Church Revitalizer Magazine* 1 no. 5 (2015): 44–45.

[3] P. Schaff and D.S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 504.

[4] I embrace the term multicultural in lieu of multiethnic or multiracial, because the latter carry important implications for reconciliation between cultures that have been polarized by violence and bigotry. My coauthor Mark DeYmaz and I in *re:MIX – Transitioning Your Church to Living Color* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016) spend several chapters addressing the importance of multiethnic and multiracial reconciliation. The reader of this present article should consult our more exhaustive treatment there. Thus, the present article will be delimited to general procedures, processes, and plans that can result in a multicultural church regardless if that cultural mix is ethnic cultures, affinity cultures, generational cultures, social economic cultures, etc.

mation Efforts Fail," created a seismic shift in the way organizational theorists and practitioners applied the change process. His theory of changing as reflected in his eight steps for leading change became a staple for the study of organizational change in business schools and increasingly in seminaries.

In my position as professor of missional leadership for over a decade, first at Indiana Wesleyan University and then at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, I have been afforded the opportunity to also study hundreds of student case studies on ecclesial change. I have observed that ecclesial change follows very closely Kotter's eight-step model. In this paper, I will briefly explain how Kotter's model can inform a process model for ecclesial change.

OUTCOMES: FIVE MODELS OF MULTICULTURAL CHURCHES

As mentioned above, a delimiter for this article is that I will consider objectives with more colorful (i.e. multicultural) outcomes. I do this because of my research interest and because it is of growing relevance to homogeneous churches in an increasingly heterogeneous world. I employ the term multicultural in the broadest sociological sense and a list of ethnic, generational, socioeconomic, affinity, etc. cultures as relevant to this discussion can be found in *The Healthy Church*, pages 58–59.

In a previous article for *The Great Commission Research Journal*, I put forth in detail five multicultural models as a contemporary update of the historical categories of Sanchez.[5] I also demonstrated some of these models afford a more comprehensive and reconciliation-based approach. I then evaluated each model through a ten-point grid of "nomenclature, mode of growth, relationships, pluses, minuses, degree of difficulty, creator complex, redistribution, relocation and reconciliation."[6] This present article will assume that the reader has access to this article for further reading. An overview of the five models will frame the process model's objectives.

The Cultural Assimilation Church: A Creator Complex

The model is not actually multicultural but is listed here because of prevalence. This is a church where a dominant culture absorbs smaller or less powerful cultures into the behaviors, ideas, and products[7] of the domineering culture. C. Peter Wagner observed that such congregations opened "their doors for the ethnics [sic] to come into *their* church and worship in *their* way, with predictable lack of success."[8] He came to describe this malady as

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5   D. Sanchez, "Viable Models for Churches in Communities Experiencing Ethnic Transition," (unpublished paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976).

6   "Five Types of Multicultural Churches: A New Paradigm Evaluated and Differentiated," *The Great Commission Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014).

7   P. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1976), 25.

8   C. P. Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1979), 162 (emphasis original).

a "creator complex"[9] where a dominant culture will subconsciously attempt to make over people from other cultures into the image of the dominant culture.[10] To understand the attraction of assimilationist churches, one must consider three types of cultural adaptation.[11]

Consonant adapters: These are people who willingly adapt to the behaviors, ideas, and products of another culture. Assimilationist churches may grow more readily among people who embrace consonant adaptation. Unfortunately, their goal is not subcultural preservation or even appreciation, rather the absorption of subcultures into a dominant culture. The loss of indigenous arts, histories, and traditions creates a world less rich in variety and complexity than God designed.

Selective adapters: They adapt to another culture but do so only partially. They love their cultural traditions and so bring into the new mixture some of their traditions and arts. Examples can be found in Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut's *Immigrant American: A Portrait*.[12] Selective adapters historically founded and fought for immigrant variations in the American church, e.g. the former Norwegian Lutheran Synod, now the Evangelical Lutheran Church Synod.

Dissonant adapters: They adapt very little to the dominant culture, preferring the familiarity and reassurance of their own culture. An African-American friend that wears his tribal dashiki to church in America may exemplify this. Dissonant adapters often share a concern that their cultures are being sidelined, if not minimized, by both selective adaption and consonant adaption. They typically prefer a worship service where their culture is celebrated, preserved, and sanctified rather than blended (more on blending below).[13]

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[9] Ibid., 96.

[10] See examples in Robert Jensen, "White Privilege Shakes the US," in Paula S. Rothenberg, *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth, 2002), 103–106.

[11] See R. G. Rumbaut, "Acculturation, Discrimination, and Ethnic Identity among Children of Immigrants," in *Discovering Successful Pathways in Children's Development: Mixed Methods in the Study of Childhood and Family Life*, ed. T. S. Weisner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8; and C. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study of Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Orbis Books, 1979), 113.

[12] A. Portes and R. G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant American: A Portrait* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996).

[13] Questions for further study include:
- Does the proliferation of social community over the Internet strengthen or undermine cultural subsets?
- Does the proliferation of social community over the Internet strengthen or undermine consonant, selective, and/or dissonant adaption?

As noted, the assimilationist church may not connect with either the dissonant adapter or the selective adapter. Moreover, the creator complex in the assimilationist church may make it homogeneous. This is exacerbated if a subculture feels it is not being treated equally or fairly in a church (whether that subculture is a generational youth group culture or a Spanish-speaking culture). As a result, the subculture is likely to break away from the parent church and form an independent organization. While some will note that this proliferates the overall number of churches, it has been my observation that many of these churches are often too small and underfunded to survive. They may result in too many unplanned church offspring, which often do not survive.

The Multicultural Blended Church: Indeterminate Color

Here the goal is an organization that celebrates its variety with distinct cultural segments sprinkled throughout worship services. Because not all cultural artifacts are discarded, but some are retained, the result can be a new cultural experience (i.e. a blended culture). Blended worship might include a seventeenth century hymn played on contemporary instruments of guitars and drums, or Caribbean folk songs sung by a choir. The result can often be a less than appetizing concoction, especially to dissonant adapters. John V. Taylor, Africanist and bishop of Winchester summed this up by stating, "We do not want the westernization of the universal Church. On the other hand we don't want the ecumenical cooks to throw all the cultural traditions on which they can lay their hands into one bowl and stir them to a hash of indeterminate colour."[14]

In addition, this model does not break down as many cultural barriers, because people attracted to these services already appreciate a mixture of cultures. Usually only consonant and selective adapters are drawn to this type of church. Personally, I find this type of church rewarding, but this is probably due to my travels as well as the international makeup of my students.

The Multicultural Mother/Daughter Church: Cultural Apartheid?

A multicultural mother/daughter church often arises when a subculture becomes polarized from the dominant culture in a church. The dominant group often decides it is best for the subculture to "start their own church." In the name of "planting" a church, cultural apartheid occurs. While this does offer a community more church options, as mentioned above, they are often too small to survive or influence the mother church. This model also does little to reconcile cultural differences, because the subculture is often seen as second class and as a result, has little influence upon the mother church.

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[14] J.V. Taylor, "Cultural Ecumenism," *Church Missionary Society Newsletter*, November 1974, 3.

The Multicultural Partnership Church: Patron and Stipendiary

A fourth type, as described by Al Tizon and Ron Sider in their book, *Linking Arms, Linking Lives*,[15] occurs when a healthier congregation partners with a church of a different and often less dominant culture. An admirable tactic, it unfortunately does little to break down cultural walls since the physical and interpersonal distance between the two congregations is great. The struggling church, often in an urban area, will be perceived as the stipendiary of a wealthy patron. With this model, a church does better to share the wealth, but it does little to create reconciliation between cultures because of distance and the patron-stipendiary relationship.[16]

The Multicultural Alliance Church: A Church of Equals

The alliance model is a heterogeneous organization led by an inclusive and balanced alliance drawing from the different cultures it is reaching. The alliance honors cultural differences by embracing multiple, culturally different worship services that are led by a heterogeneous organization. Daniel Sanchez, in his early work on multicultural models at Fuller Theological Seminary, describes this as one church "comprised of several congregations in which the autonomy of each culture is preserved and the resources of the congregations are combined to present a strong evangelistic ministry."[17] Such a church may share assets such as budgets as well as leadership duties with culturally integrated and balanced boards. A strong respect and appreciation of cultural differences often results when leaders are forced to work together to run a church.

Offering multiple homogeneous worship options not only better preserves the different cultures involved and reaches dissonant adapters, but also allows the church to reach out to multiple cultures simultaneously. Manwell Ortez[18] rightly points out that this model can result in culturally separate worship silos. However, this risk can be met when a church

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[15] R. J. Sider and A. F. Tizon, *Linking Arms, Linking Lives: How Urban-Suburban Partnerships Can Transform Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2008).

[16] At this juncture, it is important to keep in mind what John Perkins calls the 3Rs of a healthy church (*A Quiet Revolution: The Christian Response to Human Need, a Strategy for Today* [Urban Family Publications, 1976], 220). The first R is *relocation*, i.e. that the church should be relocating in the community of need rather than retreating to the suburbs and distancing itself. The second R is *redistribution* and indicates a redistribution of wealth and power. This can be addressed by suburban/urban partnerships. The third R is spiritual and physical *reconciliation*. Perkins points out it is not one or the other but both if churches are truly to be bearers of the Good News.

[17] Sanchez.

[18] M. Ortez, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996).

overcomes cultural walls by running the church together rather than just pew sharing. I have often stated that "you can't reconcile cultures by simply sitting next to each other in a pew and sharing one another's songs. You must share your life and your leadership." Running a church together forces congregants to collaborate with people of different cultures to organize, administrate, and tackle the *missio Dei*.

EIGHT STEPS TO TRANSITIONING TO A CHURCH

OF LIVING COLOR

Toward any one of these models, my experience has led me to believe that Kotter gives us a helpful roadmap. His seminal model for leading change was based upon years of studying management school case studies. In a similar vein, for over a decade, I have compared and contrasted Kotter's model with my seminary students' case studies. The following is a brief introduction to Kotter's process model based upon that comparison:

Step 1 – establish a sense of urgency.

Kotter found that people will not undertake change unless they feel there is some urgent pressure propelling them forward. It is important for the leaders of the church to ascertain and explain this pressure. It can be the pressure of a dwindling congregation, dwindling finances, or a change in culture in the community, but urgency is the key. Kotter found that people will not be motivated to undertake change unless they feel there is no other option. As explained below, the visionaries (e.g. leaders/pastors) often feel they need to create the vision first. Kotter found that they only need to share the urgency. The vision (the next step) is more collaborate in creation.

Step 2 – build a powerful guiding coalition.

Kotter uncovered that change cannot be led by one person or one visionary. It cannot be led by a coalition that only includes change proponents either. It actually takes a coalition of people from all cultures in the organization for successful change to occur. Change will more likely occur if the vision includes input from all cultural gatekeepers, including the naysayers. I have found that including some of the gatekeepers and naysayers in the guiding coalition does not actually undermine the coalition; rather, it gives it the ability to develop a broader consensus for change.[19] If you only fill the guiding correlation with people who favor the change, then the change will

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[19] B. Whitesel, *Staying Power: Why People Leave the Church over Change and What You Can Do about It* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

polarize the organization. In addition, Dyck and Starke found that break-away organizations and group exit can result if the naysayers do not have a voice.[20]

I have found this "broad coalition" sadly missing in most church change paradigms but readily evident in success stories. I described in *Staying Power: Why People Leave the Church Over Change and What You Can Do About,* twelve examples of churches that changed in a unifying manner by embracing collaboration in the change process.

Step 3 – create a vision.

Though most church leaders start here, this should be the third step. It may be why change often fails. A vision should be created by the guiding coalition, not a narrow band of change proponents. Thus, step two is labeled a "guiding coalition," because it "collaboratively" leads and "guides" the organization toward the future, taking into account all cultures and perspectives. Because different groups within the church are represented, including the naysayers, vision typically is more palatable to a larger segment of the church.[21]

Step 4 – communicate the vision.

Often the vision is communicated via a static list of objectives. However, research indicates that utilizing a "narrative story" multiplies the chance of the change succeeding. Scott Wilcher has suggested that change is more than twice as likely to occur if a metaphorical story is attached to depict the change.[22] Wilcher found that traditional change methods[23] are only success-

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[20] See Bruno Dyck and Frederick A. Starke's research in "The Formation of Breakaway Organizations: Observations and a Process Model" in *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44 (1999): 792–822; with corresponding data in Frederick A. Starke and Bruno Dyck, "Upheavals in Congregations: The Causes and Outcomes of Splits," in *Review of Religious Research* 38 (1996): 159–174.

[21] My students, who tend to be younger pastors, often wince at the idea of including naysayers in the guiding coalition. The idea of making their case to those who are usually opposed worries them and often thwarts their reaching out to them. Yet, it has been my experience that these naysayers are not as negative as they are concerned. In guiding churches toward change, I have found that the naysayers' concerns will only grow if they are not heard.

[22] Scott Wilcher, "MetaSpeak: Secrets of Regenerative Leadership to Transform Your Workplace" (PhD dissertation, 2013).

[23] K. Lewin, "Group Decisions and Social Change," in *Readings in Social Psychology*, eds. E. E. Maccobby, T. M. Newcomb, and E. L. Hartley (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1958), 330–344; and J. P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," Harvard Business Review (1995): 59–67.

ful about 30% of the time.[24] However, when metaphors, such as narrative stories, are attached to depict the change process, the success rate jumps to almost 85%.[25] The communication aspect of the story attached to the vision thus becomes critical. The Bible is replete with stories that can serve as metaphorical agents for change.

Step 5 – give others power to act on the vision.

This means delegating to others the authority to change things (however, start with small wins; see step six). This allows change to take place through members of the guiding coalition, rather than one person who might become a lightening rod for criticism. As seen above, change is usually not successful when one person alone sets the vision, but rather succeeds when the guiding coalition is empowered to chart the way forward.

Step 6 – create short-term wins.

This is probably the most overlooked yet logical step. Kotter found that organizations that create short-term wins get more buy-in from reticent members. For instance, instead of launching a full-fledged Hispanic ministry, one client began with once a month worship led by Spanish-speaking members of the church. The opportunity for congregants to experience the validity and authenticity of worship in another language (or in different musical genres) on a short-term basis, can convince many people of their long-term legitimacy. I have often summarized this as "long term goals begin with short-term wins."

Step 7 – change systems, structures, and policies that do not fit the vision.

This means the organization must fundamentally and systemically change. This cannot be window dressing. Serious, substantial change usually must occur. A congregation may need to grow into one of the multicultural models described earlier. Regardless, it is important to reevaluate elements and programs in the church that cannot support the new direction. Too often, leaders want to hurry the process, feeling that if they start with eliminating ministries, the road forward will be easier. Yet, my case study experiences suggest it will not.[26] Systems and structures must change, but they should change as a result of a latter step in a process model that has been verified by short-term wins. While organizations must structurally change to transition into an organization relevant to changing environments, these systemic

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[24] J. Balogun and V. H. Hailey, *Exploring Strategic Change* (Essex, England: Pearson Education, 2008).

[25] G. R. Bushe and A. F. Kassam, "When Is Appreciative Inquiry Transformational? A Meta-case Analysis," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 41(2), (2005): 161–181.

[26] Whitesel, *Staying Power*, and *ORGANIX: Signs of Leadership in a Changing Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

changes will be more likely to occur if viewed as the last step of the process, rather than the first.

This article has sought to introduce the reader to a basic process model toward one of five objectives. For further research, I have created an online encyclopedia at ChurchHealth.wiki, where readers can search by word for parallel research related to this article.

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