Transitioning Churches to Multisite—A Four-Frames Analysis

KEVIN STIRRATT, DBA, MBA

INDIANA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

OBJECTIVE

To enable a successful transition of Common Ground Church of the Nazarene from a single site to a multisite church model.

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Common Ground Church of the Nazarene desires to plant campuses through the multisite church planting model, in which a church adds locations that remain part of the same organizational structure. Though it had attempted four programs aimed at multiplication, Common Ground had not yet successfully transitioned to a multisite church planting model.

Diagnosis of the problem identified organizational development barriers to transitioning to multisite in all four of Bolman and Deal's (2017) frames: structure, human resources, political, and symbolic.

Four Frames of Organizational Development

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMES | STRUCTURE | HUMAN RESOURCES | POLITICAL | SYMBOLIC

Note: Bolman & Deal (2017)

DRIVING RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame analysis, what strategic intervention strategies can Common Ground Church of the Nazarene implement to successfully launch multisite church plants—beginning with a location in New Haven, Indiana, in 2024— while honoring its denominational bylaws and commitment to community transformation through social enterprise?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature revealed 17 best practices, which led to a nine-step organizational development plan. Top literature review findings included 1) symbolic language and imagery help the church make sense of the needed changes, 2) clear decision rights allow campus-level adaptation while protecting highly interdependent processes from disruptive change, 3) synchronous and asynchronous communication paths promote congregational unity across campuses, and 4) lead and campus pastor leadership skills must be supported by internal training processes. The literature review found no academic research to verify the practitioner-level advice around needed multisite lead and campus pastor leadership skills. Therefore, this study's primary research addressed perceived leadership orientation differences between lead and campus pastors.

multiply maturity calling

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory study was conducted using Bolman's (2021) Leadership Orientation Survey. An exploratory study is appropriate where little previous research about a problem has been conducted (Business Research Methodology, n.d.). Forty surveys from multisite campus pastors (27) and lead pastors (13) were analyzed for statistically significant differences in the perceived use of leadership orientations of multisite lead and campus pastors.

KEY FINDINGS

Lead and campus pastors operate in all four leadership orientations.

Lead and campus pastors operate at the same level within the structural orientation.

Lead pastors operate in the political orientation significantly more than campus pastors. †

Lead pastors have a slightly higher focus on casting a strong mission/vision than campus pastors and may operate in the symbolic orientation more than campus pastors. ††

Campus pastors have a higher focus on caregiving than lead pastors and may operate in the human resources orientation more than lead pastors. †††

Further research with higher sample sizes is needed to confirm the initial indications of this analysis, especially the differences between the lead and campus pastors in the human resources and symbolic orientations.

LEAD PASTORS **CAMPUS PASTORS**

Descriptive Statistics Summary Table: Bolman's Dimensions of Leadership Orientation by Role of Pastor (Mean Score Means)

ROLE/DIMENSION SUMS	M	SD	n	SE_M	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
CAMPUS PASTOR								
STRUCTURAL	2.68	0.48	25	0.10	2.00	3.86	0.79	0.07
HR	3.14	0.46	24	0.09	2.14	3.79	-0.43	-0.82
POLITICAL	2.56	0.50	23	0.10	1.79	3.64	0.29	-0.51
SYMBOLIC	3.31	0.43	25	0.09	2.57	3.93	-0.44	-1.14
LEAD PASTOR								
STRUCTURAL	2.71	0.48	13	0.13	1.71	3.43	-0.71	-0.09
HR	2.98	0.46	12	0.13	2.36	3.64	0.16	-1.18
POLITICAL	2.92	0.36	12	0.10	2.21	3.43	-0.57	-0.30
SYMBOLIC	3.40	0.34	12	0.10	2.79	3.93	-0.18	-0.68

Note. M= mean, SD= standard deviation, n= number, SE_M= standard error of the mean

Comparison Summary Table: Survey Items Reflecting Statistically Significant Differences by Multisite Pastor Role

SURVEY ITEM	MEAN DIFFERENCE (FAVORING)	t	d
MOBILIZES PEOPLE/RESOURCES TO GET THINGS DONE †	0.51 (LEAD PASTOR)	2.80**	.75
SUCCEEDS IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT AND OPPOSITION †	0.58 (LEAD PASTOR)	3.13**	.89^
COMMUNICATES A STRONG AND CHALLENGING SENSE OF VISION & MISSION ††	0.37 (LEAD PASTOR)	2.37**	.62
SHOWS HIGH SENSITIVITY & CONCERNS FOR OTHERS' NEEDS & FEELINGS †††	0.49 (CAMPUS PASTOR)	1.83*	.62

Note. t= t-score, d= Cohen's d
*p < .05 **p < .01 ^ LARGE EFFECT (d ≥ .80)

RECOMMENDATIONS

NINE-STEP ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Principles identified in the literature review and clarified by the exploratory study resulted in a nine-step organizational development plan to transition Common Ground to a multisite church model. Plan components are presented in order of their likelihood of success, with the most likely to succeed listed first.

1. Conduct a community listening campaign.
2. Create leadership skills training for lead and campus pastors.
3. Establish an endowment fund for multisite church planting.
4. Use symbolic language to unify the church around multisite church planting.
5. Implement multisite church governance polity.
6. Rearrange staff structure for multisite church best practices.
7. Establish a central services office.
8. Implement a centralized learning management system.
9. Update policies and procedures to clarify what should be duplicated among campuses and what can be adapted for local circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Common Ground needed to address organizational development barriers in all four of Bolman and Deal's (2017) frames. This study clarified multisite organizational development best practices from multiple industries and added a novel research approach using the perceived leadership orientation differences between multisite lead and campus pastors. The study revealed a statistically significant difference in using the political frame, consistent use in the structural frame, and potentially different use in both the human resource and symbolic frames, though additional research with a larger sample is needed to confirm this observation.

REFERENCES

Bolman, L. (2021). *Leadership orientation survey*. Lee Bolman. https://leebolman.com/leadership-orientations/

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2017). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Business Research Methodology. (n.d.). *Exploratory research*. https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-design/exploratory-research/

CONTACT INFORMATION

KEVIN STIRRATT
kevin.stirratt@gmail.com
260.999.8848
linkedin.com/in/kevinstirratt