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Front Cover: The cover artwork is a stylized photo by Steve Buffington. “An image of a Christian leader is the rope braking device used in repelling. If its integrity is compromised, your life could be in danger. However, a braking device that functions as its creator intended allows risks and activities unable to be experienced in any other way.”
THE SEARCH FOR EFFECTIVE CHURCH SENIOR LEADERSHIP DURING ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITION: PARISHIONER PERCEIVED QUALIFIERS FOR AN EFFECTIVE SENIOR PASTOR

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ABSTRACT: This is an analysis of a religious organization of the Southern Baptist Christian denomination experiencing a leadership transition period. Significance is to assist in defining motivating factors of selecting a new senior pastor for a congregation of approximately 600-800 active members who recently surrendered their executive leader of 37 years to retirement. This study is important because the church is losing membership at an accelerated rate, and much of this attrition is due to the ineptness of the previous pastor in the pulpit, from a parishioner’s perspective (Fowler, 2016). Finding an effective pastor is fundamental for the institution to survive. By interviewing current members of the leadership transition team within the organization, one may find their underlying elements of selecting an appropriate senior pastor to lead the organization. After examining these determinants, conclusions were drawn that uncovered facets of servant leadership that were deemed necessary to shepherd the congregation. Studying these rudiments could provide useful information to similar churches or other non-profit organizations, from a practitioner perspective, which might be in the same situation.

KEYWORDS: Religious Leadership Search, Qualitative Analysis, Servant Leadership, Leadership Theory, Semi-Structured Interviews
The Search for Effective Church Senior Leadership During Organizational Transition: Parishioner Perceived Qualifiers for an Effective Senior Pastor

Church attendance has been revealed to provide benefits to society. Mental health has been addressed, with hypotheses being validated regarding positive impacts of religion on a person’s overall psyche (Ellison, Boardman, Williams, & Jackson, 2001). As church attendance and membership declines in the Western hemisphere (Franck & Iannaccone, 2014), it could be important to facilitate research which attempts to increase participation. This study could have a positive impact on church involvement by defining the underlying constructs of selecting a leader who encourages increased and continued attendance within the church. While there are many styles of leadership in religious organizations, the perceptions of the congregation on what qualifies a leader to potentially be effective are varied. By examining a congregation that is searching for a new senior leader, one can define what their discernments are concerning the potential leader’s validity.

THE ORGANIZATION’S PARTICULARS

The Baptist church utilized in this research project, is a relatively large, traditional religious congregation with approximately 1,500 members. It is located within a major metropolitan area in the southern United States of America. The church provides weekly religious services to the community at large. It also offers a child care center, with a large indoor playground facility, which is utilized for children’s parties and multiple family activities. Correspondingly, this organization is immensely involved with ministering to prison families through a non-profit organization, which provides clothing, meals, emotional, and spiritual support to children and spouses of incarcerated individuals. The organization also hosts numerous activities related to family involvement and personal enrichment. Participation is encouraged by offering men’s and women’s bible studies programs, mother’s day out, senior citizen musical ensemble, rhythm band, choir, praise team, orchestra, theater, technical team ministries, life groups (Sunday school), shut-in ministry, preschool, and youth groups. The religious organization at one time operated a private Christian high school on its campus. However, since membership and support has been in decline over the past five years, the school ceased to exist approximately two years ago. The church is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention association. However, it no longer advertises its affiliation on the location’s marquee, and this is a common trend within the current religious community (Von Der Ruhr & Daniels, 2012). Through outreach programs, which address the necessities of the local citizens, including holiday presentation activities, visitation programs, and child care, the church has established itself as a resource providing substantial servant-based offerings to those in need. These contributions are evident within the church’s mission to “love Christ, love each other, and serve the world.” Through this mission, the church’s vision, as communicated by a senior member of the worship staff, is to “serve the community in a manner that reflects the love of Christ and to love and serve our fellow man.” The mission, as well as the vision of the church, are service based, which reflects the servant leadership style (McClure, 2016) of Jesus Christ.

The church has resided in its current location since 1986, when a new building was constructed, and the organization moved from its previous location, situated three miles south of the current locale. The church’s senior pastor, who served the congregation for more than thirty
years, recently announced his retirement, and the church is currently in the process of searching for a new servant leader. While the congregation currently maintains an enrollment of approximately 1,500 members (600-800 active), it is important to note this is a reduction from the nearly 5,000 members it boasted approximately five years ago. At that time, two services were offered every Sunday in the sanctuary, which seats 1,100 parishioners, and both sessions were usually carrying approximately eighty-five percent capacity, based on visible observation and attendance records. Today, the church offers a combination traditional and contemporary service on Sundays, and the auditorium is only about thirty-five percent occupied. The church has been in decline for a number of years, and much of the reason is based on the diminished performance and aptitude of its senior leader (Fowler, 2016). With no leader at the helm, the search has begun to find a successor. This is a difficult task, however, important. As in business, it is pertinent for the church to choose an effective leader (Silzer, Church, Rotolo, & Scott, 2016) to improve its diminished probabilities of survival.

SYNOPSIS OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Selecting an effective leader is not only advantageous, it is necessary for persistence in the religious organization world. Much research has been focused on the effectiveness of pastors (McKenna, Yost, & Boyd, 2007), however studies are few on perceived qualifiers for discovery of such leaders. It is quite possible that many leadership styles could be utilized in the context of steering a religious worship organization. However, for the purposes of this study, servant leadership is the anticipatory theory the research will uncover. Outside of leadership theories, existing literature also reveals qualities and experiences that effective leaders should possess in the religious realm.

PASTORAL EXPERIENCE

Studies have probed into asking members of the cloth to describe what they perceived were the most pertinent qualities for a pastor to exhibit for effective development (McKenna et al., 2007). By implementing some of these findings into the context of an organization looking for a possible respectable executive, it could provide advantage to the process. However, one must remember that those who usually select the senior leaders of the church are not necessarily leaders themselves. Having a proactive strategy, possibly influenced by qualities proscribed by those in the pulpit with experience (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010), gives additional insight into the search process.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Obviously, not everyone leads an association in the same manner. This is no different in the non-profit or religious organization. To find the right leader for a congregation, ones involved in the search need to be cognizant of which leadership style will and will not be effective for their particular situation. It is quite interesting to note, in some religious circles, operative leaders may exhibit qualities that are considered non-religious or quite on the fringe of secular activities (Walters, 2015). For example, a leader in a religious organization may be a very effective time manager and delegator of authority. However, he could lack spiritual cognition that is evidently necessary in this type of institution. Is this effective in most churches? It would be hard pressing to say so.
However, if it works for one, it may work in another. By studying effective leadership styles within the clergy (Dueck, Ansloos, Johnson, & Fort, 2017; McKenna & Eckard, 2009; Zikmund & Lummis, 1998), the committee becomes more knowledgeable and may be able to make better informed decisions.

**SERVANT LEADERSHIP.** “The theory of servant leadership emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities” (Northouse, 2012, p. 219). Without question, in a religious organization, or a Christian one to be specific, this theory certainly holds merit. Christ, the basis for a religion that has survived millennia, harbored servant leadership as imperative for success in life (Mark 10:42-45, New International Version). This passage, as well as others within the text sacred to Christianity, provided the basis for servant leadership in organizations that serve within its context.

Many characteristics come to mind when attempting to define servant leadership. However, these qualities, not necessarily religious in nature, can help define what servant leadership should be for the church. Many authors have regurgitated Greenleaf’s seminal work (Greenleaf, 1977) defining servant leadership. Ten definitive qualities are representative of a servant leader, which include effective listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to personal growth, and building community (Spears, 2010). It could be assumed that an effective servant leader for a religious organization to exhibit these characteristics.

**CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP.** Exhibition of a leader’s charisma fosters the propensity for parishioners to follow and be committed to the organization’s vision and mission (Gebert, Heinitz, & Buengeler, 2016). A charismatic leader facilitates “emotional arousal” (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010, p. 544) in followership. This in turn allows perception of subordinates to believe the leader is effective in his abilities to guide an organization.

Not only was Jesus considered a servant leader, he also exhibited qualities of being charismatic in nature (Mcgrath, 2006). Again, in the context of the Christian church, this quality could be illustrated, to some degree, by the religious organization’s leader’s attempts to replicate this property. Charisma-based leaders exhibit traits including “articulating a vision, presenting an ideal, displaying exemplary behavior, emphasizing ideology, and promoting a collective identity” (Reave, 2005, p. 661) that promote followership. Obviously, this is a goal of many church organizations as visions and ideals are foundations for their potentially efficacious operability (Ward, 2010).

**DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP.** Leaders who follow a developmental path promote a “culture in which members feel a sense of ownership of the organization’s mission and objectives, while conflict is dealt with openly and systematically, rather than ignored, avoided, or handled in a typical win-lose fashion” (Gilley, Shelton, & Gilley, 2011, p. 397). In a church, the parishioners should feel a connection of proprietorship in what the institution intends to accomplish. Developmental leadership should facilitate this connection, along with additional leadership styles.

Not only should the organization progress, but leaders should focus on their own advancement to facilitate successful direction (McKenna et al., 2007). While this is not a
traditionally researched topic contextually in religious organizations (Dollhopf & Scheitle, 2013), developmental leadership has its place in the corporate world, and could provide additional insights to the expansion of a spiritual institution’s progress and reach.

SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

Outside of leadership qualities and experience, spirituality must come into question when searching for a new pastor. A personal relationship with the divine and abilities to interpret scripture are qualities which are pertinent for competent religious organization pilotage (Beeley, 2009). While this might not be a leadership style or theory, it is an important factor because of the religious foundation of the organization. Congregational members will certainly be more apt to follow a leader who is authentically spiritually founded (Nauta, 2007) than one who is not. Keeping this in mind is relevant to selecting the appropriate shepherd for the flock.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As this is a negligibly observed research subject, the conceptual framework for this exploration was constructed on previous research of historical leadership styles and qualifiers within the context of religious organizations. Very little empirical evidence (Mubasher, Salman, Irfan, & Jabeen, 2017; Pearse, 2011) of perceived qualifiers for leadership searches in religious organizations was found while reviewing literature for this study. Also, suggestions for this type of research to commence were non-existent. To discover and analyze the perceptions of those involved with searching for a new pastor, the following research questions were presented for the study to answer, in the context of determining what type of leader is acceptable for the organization to pursue:

What demographics should an effective leader of a traditional, yet contemporary protestant church possess?

1. What type of experience and/or tenure is appropriate for the pastor to possess?

2. How should an effective pastor lead his flock within this organization?

3. What job duties and expectations do you have for the new pastor?

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative case study which explores one religious organization that resides in the southern United States. The research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the primary investigator’s university. The review of literature found gaps in research concerning parameters in selecting effective leadership for a church organization. This became the foundation for conducting a qualitative case study with a church that is in the process of finding a new senior leader. A case study is usually conducted over a period of time and will focus on a particular instance or experienced circumstance (Yin, 2013). This study was facilitated over a period of four months.
RESEARCH DESIGN

The actual problem of the research subject is what will drive the questions necessary for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Because of the scenario presented to the researcher, a critical case (Bryman & Bell, 2015) study is implied. As a specific goal has been defined to find an effective leader for the organization, the researcher is exposing the perceived qualities the potential leader should possess. The qualitative interview guide was created based on these determinants and the questions the study attempts to answer. The guide was divided into three different subsets to include personal and historical questions of the interviewees, demographic questions concerning the potential leader, and open questions that facilitated free dialogue between the participants and the interviewer. The first section of the guide was structured to facilitate communication to uncover the interviewees’ demographic information and historical context (see Table 1).

Table 1: Interview Guide Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and Historical Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How long have you been a member/involved with this church?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 What is your role in the leadership transitional process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 How are you involved with the church? Are you a member of a Sunday school class, choir, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 What is the current climate of the church? What changes have you seen in the recent past?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 How do you feel about the effectiveness of the church fulfilling its mission/vison?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 What would you like to see happen within this church?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following, the second set of questions (see Table 2) were asked to define the demographics of a desirable leader for the church.

Table 2: Interview Guide Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 How much pastoral experience should the new pastor have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Is specific tenure at one location important? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Approximately what age pastor do you feel the church should have now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 What educational qualifications should the new pastor have, if any?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final set of questions (see Table 3) in the semi-structured interview guide provided enablement for open conversation concerning the wanted qualifiers for an anticipated senior leader of the congregation.
Table 3: Interview Guide Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. While a pastor serves on Sundays by delivering a message, what do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you feel the pastor should be engaged with during the work week? For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>example, can you provide examples of expectations he should be involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in, such as visiting the elderly/sick, preparing for a sermon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counseling, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Of the weekly job duties, you mentioned, which do you feel are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most pertinent and spent the most time on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What is the primary role of the senior pastor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How would you like the new pastor to effectively lead the church?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the style of leadership (hands-on, laid-back, fast-paced,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitator, CEO?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What do you feel are the most important qualities for our new pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to possess? Feel free to express your opinions on as many qualities he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should own, and elaborate if possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. If you had to pick the most important quality from all the qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you mentioned a new pastor should possess, what would it be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What makes a good pastor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Anything you would like to add? Do you have any questions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions from the guide provided a semi-structured framework that facilitated open and free flowing conversation with the interviewees.

PARTICIPANTS

The Baptist church in the study currently has approximately 1,500 members in its congregation. Out of this number, nearly 400 parishioners attend on Sunday mornings for a singular worship service. These numbers are quite reduced, as records from nearly five years ago exhibit. Previously, the church averaged 2,000 attendees on Sundays, out of almost 5,000 members. The population of the church is aging, as younger families have migrated to other religious organizations, or have abandoned attending services all together. However, the current demographics of the church contain about 90% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, and 5% African-American members.
RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE

As this is a church in leadership and operational transition, and the study is focusing on the leadership selection criteria, recruitment was based on employing individuals within the organization who were involved in the search and selection processes for a new senior pastor. A transitional leadership committee was formed by the organization approximately one month prior to the beginning of this study. The team includes twenty members of the congregation, who were selected based on visibility, active church participation, and serving in the community. To coincide with members of the congregation, existing staff members are included within the transition team. The entire population of the transition team numbers twenty-five members.

Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was utilized for this study. To garner an acceptable anonymously procured sample, a blind copy email was sent to members of the transition team to facilitate responses of whether they would like to participate in interviews, which involved identifying qualities of a potential innovative senior pastor.

Out of twenty-five members of the transition leadership team, positive responses for inclusion in the study numbered sixteen. As a rule of thumb, sample size of 5-50 is generally accepted as appropriate for qualitative interview studies (Dworkin, 2012). For this study, two members of the current staff, and five members of the transition team were interviewed, as thematic redundancy, or saturation, was achieved after five interviews.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

An interview guide was created for the semi-structured consultation. Questions were developed and implemented to facilitate interviews that would encourage open conversation. Interviews with the participants were carried out at the church campus, per convenience of the participants. A small classroom was utilized, which had a table and two chairs facing each other. The investigator utilized a smart phone to record the conversations. A laptop computer was also used to display the questions for the interview guide to the interviewer. Additionally, a legal pad was utilized to capture field notes and make notation of additional questions that might be necessary during the interview process. The interviewees were given an overview of the study’s intentions, and a consent form was reviewed with the subjects, and they signed their names to enable agreement with participation in the research project. The participants were given a list of the questions about five minutes prior to the interview session’s commencement. This allowed the subjects to use a hard copy to take notes, and to enable creation of questions of their own.

To begin the interview, the recording device was started after the interviewer notified the subjects of the discussion launch. During the conversations with the participants, additional questions were formulated and presented with free flowing and quite relaxed conversation. To conclude the interview, the researcher asked the participants if any additional comments were needed, and if any questions had materialized which might need to be addressed. The interviews took approximately 35 to 50 minutes to finish. After completion, the investigator secured his handwritten notes and computer in a locked leather satchel, then left the campus for his residence.
DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher procured audio recordings of the participants’ interview dialogues. The recordings were in standard mp3 format, which were audio reviewed through Windows media player for clarity. The audio files were uploaded to Trint.com to assist with automated transcription. The mp3 files produced raw text documents, which had an accuracy of approximately 85% command compared to the audio recording. The investigator then edited the raw text transcription by comparing the Trint.com text with the audio file. Verbatim dictation was utilized during the transcription process. Once the text files were completed, they were exported to Microsoft Word format and uploaded to a MAXQDA12 qualitative analysis software project file. The interviewer also added field notes to separate documents which were uploaded to the MAXQDA12 project. Multiple themes were found to correspond between the documents, and color coding was implemented to differentiate between subjects. A level of saturation, or redundancy was discovered as no additional themes were evident after the fifth interview’s coding and analysis.

RESULTS

The facilitator of the study identified 21 different coded thematic instances within the interviews. These themes were divided into four subsets. Also, biographical sketches, or portraits (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), were created of two interviewees to give a snapshot of the biography and inner psyche of the participant sample. Each portrait subject was serving as staff of the church and have been employed by the organization for over seven years each. The two participants were chosen for portraits because of the wealth of biographical information that was given to the interviewer. This provided a colorful insight into a portion of the researched sample. Pseudonyms were given to protect their anonymity.

SAUL

Saul was born and raised in the southeastern area of the United States. He was reared in a Christian home in a two-parent household. His father worked outside the home, and his mother owned and operated a beauty shop from a converted garage at their residence. Saul attended a public high school where he was involved in music, which included the choir and band organizations. He played and marched with a trumpet during high school football half time shows during the fall months. After high school, Saul attended a regional undergraduate university in the state of Alabama and graduated in four years with a music degree. He also met his fiancé at school, as she was also a student at the college, and they married during his senior year of studies. They are still married after over thirty years of wedded bliss.

Saul and his wife moved to different locations over the years as they were involved in church music ministry. After a period of a few years, they started a family, moved to Texas, he enrolled in a local seminary, and graduated with his master’s degree after four years of study. After serving in many congregations from multiple locations in the United States, Saul and his wife have been at the current church for over twelve years. He said, “I came here in February of 2004. So, I just
celebrated my 13 years of being involved here as a staff member and ministerial staff associate pastor in charge of music and worship ministries.” With a tenure of this magnitude, Saul is aware of the pulse of the church.

Saul serves as the music minister of the church. He has ownership of many duties within the organization. He said,

I'm responsible for the planning and implementation of the worship service corporate worship service on Sunday. And there are many facets of that. Of course, there's music selection and there's planning ahead. We have communication with our music leadership during the week, and we do a weekly newsletter. I write it, plan it, then edit it and email it. I also have it presented to the choir on Wednesday rehearsal. I plan that, as I said the service is a part, and there's visual aspects of the service and audio aspects of the service. There's meetings between me and my associate to be sure we're on the right track. We're on the same track. We have a Tuesday deadline of all our orchestra music that has to be pulled for the Sunday service and instrumental music by noon on Tuesday. I have a secretary who comes in and pulls music for that. So, I have to be sure that's taken care of. We have a choir rehearsal on Wednesday. I'm responsible for being sure that we have all the selection ready for the list. My associate pulls the music for that rehearsal on Wednesday. We also have a staff meeting every week.

After multiple years of experience in gauging the health of a church, Saul is cognizant of the current climate of the organization. At the existing location, he has been witness to the deterioration of the church’s morale by the diminishment of its service abilities. Saul said,

I'd say fulfillment is very low.” However, with the prospect of a new leader coming in to revitalize the church, he senses optimism and hope within the congregation. I think people, are for the most part, feeling positive and encouraged. There is some water, that undercurrent of uncertainty, which I think probably is normal for this type of transition especially when you've had a pastor who's been in a church for 37 years. I think it is positive.

He believes that once a new leader comes into the fold, the climate will change for the better, and possibly growth will occur. He has many ideas on the qualities the new pastor should possess, and how he should lead the staff and congregation. Saul said,

None on our staff are looking for someone to come in and micromanage or be authoritarian in that sense. We're looking for someone to give parameters, or you know, let's get on the same page for the same time. Give us and give myself the freedom to move forward in the vision that's reflective of the pastor. He's going to have to have his own vision and through his nurturing of the staff that vision should become very apparent. And those of us on staff should be committed to helping him realize that vision. So, I think that's his function. That's the question, what his leadership style should be? The leadership style should be less authoritative and more team building and more inclusive. You know in my personal experience I think it's important to avoid the boss role even though they are the boss. You know, you get a lot more traction through being inclusive being a part of a team than when, you know, demanding certain things.
Saul also knows that the new pastor will need to be engaged in study during the week to produce a contemporary yet foundational message which will be useful to the congregation. He said, “the message, which should be his number one priority, needs to be relative to the congregation. Is this something I can use today?”

In conclusion, Saul has a significant role of the transition activities of the organization, as a member of the key staff. He has a deep love for the church and the congregation, as his life has revolved around serving the parishioners of this institution for many years. He only wants to do what is best for the health of the organization, as he facilitates a liaison role between pastoral search teams and staff.

MARK

Mark was raised by an adoptive family in the southcentral section of the United States. He grew up in a two parent Christian home. His father worked outside the home and his mother stayed at home to raise her son. Mark graduated from high school and was very active in theater during his formative years. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in theater from a regional university in Texas.

Mark worked during and immediately after college in theater productions as a character actor as well as in production and technical aspects of the art. He was involved with facilitating theatrical productions at theme parks as well as community theater. Eventually, Mark felt led to pursue the ministry, and he enrolled in a communications program at a Baptist seminary, and graduated with a master’s degree in the early 2000’s. He has been employed at three different churches over the previous seventeen years and has served his current congregation as the creative arts director for quite some time. He states,

I have been on staff here for twelve years. I'm the creative director for the church. So basically, I oversee anything that's sort of creative and artistic with the church. I produce all of the elements for Sunday morning, like all the lighting, all the video, and all the technical crew and make sure all that comes together. I create all the graphic designs that are used in the church, all the publications, oversee the website, and all the social media.

Mark, with his wealth of experience in the current organization, has realized the negativity the church has been experiencing. He stated, “whereas two or three months ago, there was a feeling of dread. There was a feeling that this organization is not going to make it.” However, he is also quite positive with the way the church is experiencing a new vitality with hope and encouragement that a new senior pastor will be taking hold of leading the church soon. “Now there's an energy amongst the staff. We are excited about it. You can feel it in the people who come to church here. They have an excitement about him that has not been seen in a long time.” He feels the church is beginning to turn from the negativity to a positive light as the search moves on.

He also has opinions on what type of leader the church should select. He wants to see the new director of the religious organization have a vision. Mark states,

I think the first thing we need to do in addition to getting a new leader in is to develop a vision. There's not one, and we haven't had one in a long time. There isn't a direction of
where to go. There's not a roadmap of where we want to be in five years, 10 years, or 20 years.

Mark believes the incoming minister should not be too old and have relevant messages. Mark proclaims,

I mean, someone in their early thirties wouldn't really fit this church. Our average age is late 40s. I think you need someone that can come in and blend in with that. So, I would personally think, you know, late 30s early 40s up to about 55 years old. You know, I still think that if a person came in and they were 60 but they were still being relevant, you know their messages were being relevant to issues in the world today. You know, instead of just telling me a Bible story, tell me why that Bible story is relevant today. What can I take today and apply it to my life on Monday? Don't give me a Bible lesson or a Sunday school lesson, give me practical advice. In my experience, pastors that are older don't do that because that's how they were taught. But the ones coming up today, the younger ones, are.

Leadership style of the incoming pastor was also a concern for Mark:

The CEO mentality won't work here. That's not how our staff is. And that will ruin everybody's life. That's not how our congregation is. I will say the leadership that we've had over the last many years has not been that way and so that's the mentality of the church. But it's been taken to extreme to the wrong side. You know you need someone to come in and go here's my ideas how do we make this work as a team?

In his 40s, Mark still has opportunity to see the transition process through with the church, and to continue in facilitating assistance with its growth over many years. He looks forward to the opportunities of change for the church.

THEMATIC DISCOVERY

While coding the manuscripts, 21 themes were defined. The 21 different themes were separated into four subgroups which held similar qualities. The frequency percentages of the 21 different themes are illustrated in Figure 1.

The different subsets of the codes were developed based on commonalities between the different incidents. Four subsets were created to group similar codes together which is illustrated in Figure 2.

Within the transcribed documentation, the 21 themes comprised of 280 different highlighted lines of text. The four subsets of the 21 themes include church climate, pastoral demographics, pastoral qualities, and job roles. These are all pertinent lines of text which have relevance to selecting the correct leader for this organization. Of the 21 themes realized, the top four include his ability to deliver a contemporary and relevant message to the congregation, develop and deliver a church vision, have a servant-based spirit, and be a nurturer with multiple skillsets. He also needs to develop and implement a vision for the church.
Figure 1: Code Incident Frequency

Figure 2: Codes and Subgroups
**Pastoral Demographics and Life Qualities.** The pastoral demographics were defined by four different codes within the text. These codes help to answer the first and second research questions. Four primary subsets that include skillsets, education, previous tenure, and age were realized.

**RQ1:** What demographics should an effective leader of a traditional yet contemporary protestant church possess?

**RQ2:** What type of experience and/or tenure is appropriate for the pastor to possess?

Participant extracts as well as weight of each of the four codes within the subset are illustrated in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral Demographic</th>
<th>n=58</th>
<th>Participant Extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34% Skillsets</td>
<td></td>
<td>“combination of a great preacher and a great pastor. But there needs to be some solid elements of both of those really”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28% Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>“They should have at least a master's degree”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think the longevity is less important than the quality that was you know experienced in the time that he was there”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18% Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Upper 40s maybe no older than 50”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pastoral Leadership Qualities.** As this was a semi-structured interview, the research questions not only were answered, but were expounded upon. Within the pastoral qualities subgroup, the interviews really came forth with additional information on qualities they want to see in a new senior pastor, and not just what was asked by the interviewer. Many of the codes realized within the context of the pastoral qualities subgroup did not necessarily address a leadership style or processes that the research question was attempting to define. Eight different codes were realized within this subset. Their weights and extracts are illustrated in Table 5.

**RQ3:** How should an effective pastor lead his flock within this organization?

**Job Roles.** The job roles subgroup comprised of ideas the subjects believed were pertinent duties for the senior leader to facilitate. In other words, what is he supposed to do on a systematic basis? Interviewees believed the pastor should be spending quite a bit of time in intercession and prayer while preparing for the weekly sermon. They also believed that his job as a servant and deliverer of the message were very important roles. At the same time, they thought that he should not have to bury himself in day to day church administrative roles, which might diminish his abilities to lead and nurture the members of the staff and the congregation. Examples of job role themes and their weighted frequency within the subset are illustrated in Table 6. These qualities help to address the fourth research question.

**RQ4:** What job duties and expectations does the organization have for the new pastor?
Table 5: Pastoral Leadership Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral Leadership Qualities</th>
<th>Participant Extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% Contemporary-Relevant</td>
<td>“We need some fresh ideas”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22% Vision-Mission</td>
<td>“you have to know how to cast a vision”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Negative Leadership</td>
<td>“none of us on our staff are looking for someone to come in and micromanage or be authoritarian in that sense”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Team Player</td>
<td>“through being inclusive being a part of a team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% Flexibility-Openness</td>
<td>“open to new ideas new thought processes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% Life Balance</td>
<td>“balancing all that can be tough”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Sense of Humor</td>
<td>“A good sense of humor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Listening</td>
<td>“we need someone that’s going to be a listener”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Pastoral Job Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Role, n=56</th>
<th>Participant Extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39% Nurturing-Leading</td>
<td>“nurture the staff to be available to their staff”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% Servitude</td>
<td>“you invest in people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% Study-Intercession</td>
<td>“most senior pastors really carve out a big chunk of their week for study time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% Message Delivery</td>
<td>“shore up the body, be a strong speaker and preacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% Diminished Admin</td>
<td>“The administration of the church, I feel, is probably something that most senior pastors try to stay away from”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHURCH CLIMATE. Another coding subset was realized during the analysis, and it concerned the current and historical church climate. While this subset might not answer the research questions directly, it is important to note their existence, since it was so prevalent during the interview process. One may assume its frequency could have some impact on how the subjects answered the interview questions. It is obvious the climate has some bearing on their discernment processes. Four codes were realized, and their weights are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: Church Climate
**DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Through analyzing the texts of the interviews, one finds many qualities that the members of the leadership team of the church value in a senior pastor. It is quite interesting to note that many of the most frequently mentioned qualities the subjects brought forth did not coincide with clerical qualities. Many of the items discussed contained vernacular which one would expect when talking about a leader of a secular organization or business. However, this is not surprising, as many of the new operating models of successful churches are based on business instances (Von Der Ruhr & Daniels, 2012). One may be able to reflect on operating models of megachurches and realize they parallel many corporate strategies. In the case of this congregation, it is evident that they believe many of the successful leadership qualities evident in a corporate environment are pertinent for their cause. However, a spiritual element is obvious and is a significant driver to find the right leader of this organization. It is difficult to differentiate which of the two approaches, a corporate or spiritual strategy, is more important to the members of the church. Whatever the case may be, it is apparent that the interview subjects had thematic commonality with each other and should represent the consensus of the at-large congregation. The participants seem to be on the same page with their wants, and this could enable better cooperation and collaboration between the pastoral search committee members.

By using this information, the members of the leadership transition team could correlate the evidence and implement it into the pastoral search plan. Involvement with additional members of the congregation and sharing the findings with exploratory focus groups could facilitate discovery of supplemental information that may deem beneficial to the church’s potential augmented health. This is a practitioner’s approach.
This study intended to uncover what type of pastor the church desires to lead the congregation. It is apparent that a servant leader is more aptly a facilitator of leadership within this group of parishioners than other theories would suggest. For instance, two of the primary qualities the interviewees desire is for someone to lead in a nurturing manner and focusing on servitude. These facets are primary to servant leadership theory. Will this type of leadership promote success within the organization’s survivability prospects? This waits to be seen. However, this is the type of leader the congregation obviously desires, and they would have propensity to follow a person that exhibits the qualities they yearn, which was evident in the interview data.

Forsaking self and focusing on the well-being of others is instituted within the results of the research project. Again, this is illustrated in the teachings of Christ (Matthew 16:24; Luke 3:11), who is the footing of the organization’s mission and vision. In the context of servant leadership, drawing attention away from personal agendas and focusing on others in the organization is a foundational concept. The organization desires to enlist and engage a leader that exemplifies the servitude of the primary facilitator of the institution’s direction, and that would be the servant leader, Jesus of Nazareth.

Instances of charismatic and developmental leadership were evident in the analysis results. The data shows that the members of the church desire someone to be open, flexible, and have dynamic qualities behind the pulpit. However, these qualities coincide with the primary servant leadership theory that is evident within the data. Overall, a servant’s approach is the primary focus of the parishioners’ desires in a new senior pastor. This is quite evident in two of the most frequently occurring themes including servitude and having a nurturer at the helm of the church.

Time and brevity were restrictions within the study. This research was completed during one moment in time within one organization. Also, the research was completed during a phase of transition, before the leader has been identified and assimilated into the congregation. It is possible that other religious organizations, within different denominations, could facilitate additional insights into what type of leadership is desired. The researched congregation embraces some facets of a successful corporate business model. However, it is possible for religious organizations adhering to more traditional operating models to garner different results. Will an organization that desires a corporate type of executive to lead their congregation have the same wants and desires as a congregation that is more fundamental? It is an interesting question to consider for possible future research. This study was qualitative in nature. It is possible that a mixed-methods research project, including quantitative elements, could derive an enhanced granular perception for motivators of responses given by the parishioners during the interview process.

As a practitioner, these results could facilitate conversations and development of pastoral leadership searches. Additionally, it implies that engagement with the congregation before a leadership search begins could be advantageous. The wants of the stakeholders should be taken into account.
consideration for a successful venture. Perceived effectiveness of an organization’s leadership is subjective to the stakeholders involved. If a leader is chosen, at least based in part on the desires of the congregation, accountability is shared amongst the entire organization.

While one type or style of leadership is not appropriate across all organizational platforms, discovering the type of leadership that is effective for their institution is imperative for success. Additional questions could be fostered from this study to adopt supplementary insights of not only servant leadership, but other effective leadership theories in the field.

Theoretically speaking, the study can add knowledge to existing literature in the context of servant leadership theory. While much research has been completed in the corporate and public sector, limited studies are available directed at religious organizations. Additional perceptions of servant leadership, and how it pertains to spiritual operational entities could strengthen a minimally considered topic.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Additional studies could include numerous organizations over an expanded period. Also, a before and after leadership assimilation research study could shed light on differences of perceptive qualities for an effective pastor, and those that have evolved during a leader’s integration and adaptation in the organization. Additional Christian denominations, non-Christian religious institutions, and diversified demographics could be analyzed. They could possibly divulge differing or similar results to this study.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of four months, this study discovered many facets of leadership that a transitioning organization desires in a senior pastor. It is obvious that the wishes and desires of the parishioners are cohesive and conclusive, as a servant leader is deemed appropriate for this Christian service-based organization. When an organization positions into residence a leader that exemplifies the qualities, skills, and experiences they desire, they are more aptly to follow. Possibly, a servant leader will provide the catalyst for this once thriving organization to rise from a period of diminished participation, and once again flourish as a healthy spiritual institution that serves its fellow man.

REFERENCES


**Theology of Leadership Journal**


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