

A NATURALISTIC INQUIRY INTO THE EXISTENCE OF COGNITIVE FIXATION
IN PROTESTANT PASTORAL DECISION-MAKING

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined cognitive fixation in protestant pastoral decision-making. The participants included ten Protestant pastors from different churches in Texas. Through naturalistic inquiry, data were obtained from face-to-face interviews and observations. A constant comparative method and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data for emergent themes. The first theme revealed a more complex reality than had been suggested previously in the literature. Cognitive fixation was seen to take place in interactions amongst pastors, church structures and traditions, lay leaders and congregations. Key elements influencing pastoral cognitive fixation were the church's decision-making structure, lay leaders' thinking, and congregational traditions. The second theme suggested that cognitive fixation plays a role in how pastors perceive challenges. The third theme illustrated how special circumstances may have helped many pastors overcome cognitive fixation. Future research should include a comparison of mainline denominational practices to the approach of non-denominational churches, as well as case study approaches allowing investigation of interactions among pastors, lay leaders, and members during the actual decision-making process.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Armando and Luisa, for believing in me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Could cognitive fixation be one of the obstacles preventing churches from being responsive to the ever-changing demands of society? This study explores the existence of cognitive fixation on pastors' thinking processes. Similar studies have been conducted on other populations, including engineering faculty (Linsey, Tseng, Wood, Schunn, Fu, & Cagan, 2010), engineering students (Jansoon & Smith, 1991; Viswanathan & Linsey, 2013), expert tax practitioners (Marchant, Robinson, Anderson & Schadewald, 1991), physicians (Graber, Franklin & Gordon, 2005), and expert programmers (Adelson, 1984). Scholars argue that cognitive fixation impacts creativity and the consideration of alternatives by limiting the number of choices made while thinking (Chrysikou & Weisberg, 2005). Although there are many definitions of cognitive fixation in the literature, they all share the following common elements: mental blocks (Smith & Linsey, 2011; Smith, Ward, & Schumacher, 1993), the inability to produce alternatives when facing a challenge (Chrysikou & Weisberg, 2005; Youmans & Arciszewski, 2012), and producing only one solution to a problem (Bilalić, McLeod, & Gobet, 2010; Luchins & Luchins, 1959). Therefore, the definition of cognitive fixation used in this study will be the cognitive inability to produce more than one solution to a challenge, thus preventing the exploration of further alternatives.

Research on creativity has traditionally evolved around factors that assist with the production of creative outcomes; these factors come in various forms, such as processes, people, products and environments (Rhodes, 1961). A study of the effects of

cognitive fixation, however, provides a different perspective. The phenomenon of cognitive fixation offers an explanation for why an individual delves deeply into only one possible solution (de Bono, 1970), and why they might feel constrained from considering different alternatives. An example is when a person continually solves a problem in the same way, even while seeing less and less effective results over time (Smith, 2003).

The existing research on cognitive fixation that most closely relates to church settings deals with *groupthink* (Primeaux, 1997). Groupthink is defined as group behavior that ignores alternatives because of group pressure, leading to a deterioration of mental efficiency and reality testing (Janis, 1972). An example of groupthink might be if a pastor encourages a congregation to consider alternatives for an upcoming Christmas celebration due to economic constraints but influential lay leaders of the congregation insist that the program not change from the expensive, traditional manner in which it had previously been conducted. Under this pressure, the congregation agrees with the influential lay leaders and succumbs to the program being done in the traditional manner, despite the need for a less expensive alternative.

Research has demonstrated the existence of cognitive fixation in a variety of fields. This study explored whether cognitive fixation similarly affected the thinking of pastors during their decision-making processes. Researchers have previously highlighted the need for pastors to become aware of their thinking processes in order to meet the changing needs of their congregations and of society (Kinnaman, 2011; The Barna Group, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Cognitive fixation is a relatively recent field of study. Though the earliest studies date back to the early 1990's, most of the research in this area has been conducted in the last 15 years. The majority of studies in cognitive fixation have been carried out in the fields of psychology (Smith, 2003; Smith, 1994; Smith & Linsey, 2011, Smith & Blankenship, 1991) and engineering design (Chrysikou, & Weisberg, 2010; Linsey et al., 2005; Purcell & Gero, 1996). A small number of studies have been performed in the medical field, on government organizations (Janis, 1972), and large business corporations (de Geus, 2002; Stempfle, 2011).

Studies most closely aligned with the direction of this work are those examining leaders within the fields of medicine and business. De Geus (2002) points out that leaders of corporations either change over time by adapting, or resist evolving and instead fixate on old paradigms or practices that have become ineffective and now yield negative impacts (Stempfle, 2011). An example of such occurred when the prevailing thinking of the leadership team at Kodak became fixated on the importance of continuing to work exclusively with chemical films. The cognitive fixation of their thinking caused them to miss the digital revolution (Lucas & Goh, 2009).

In the medical field cognitive fixation has been seen to occur during doctors' initial diagnoses. Many physicians find it difficult to think beyond their first impressions during diagnostic situations. This type of fixation may arise because a doctor's prior beliefs and expectations lead to an inadequate or limited selection of data, which in turn misdirects subsequent reasoning and problem solving (Croskerry, 2002).

Because cognitive fixation has been found in the leadership of both the corporate and medical arenas, it can be hypothesized to also exist in protestant pastoral decision-making process. Its existence in church settings may perhaps explain some of the challenges faced by churches today, such as perceptions of irrelevancy by potential church congregants. Current statistics show that close to 60% of young people who went to church as teens stop attending after high school. Some of the reasons reported by the millennial generation include seeing religious organizations as overprotective, repressive, and exclusive (Evans, 2013; Kinnaman, 2011), thus indicating a misalignment between what young people are looking for and what the church can provide. Stempfle (2011) argues that corporations at times face similar misalignments between the corporation's perceived purpose and their customers' desires. He provides the example of IBM, which assumed that potential consumers of computers were restricted to large corporations, and therefore failed to see the need to develop personal computers. Stempfle suggests that a possible reason for this misjudgment might have been cognitive fixation. The Barna Group (2006) sheds light on cognitive fixation in the church, describing as a misalignment between the pastors' views of the congregants' priorities in life, and the congregants' actual priorities. A survey was conducted of 617 pastors, querying them on their perceptions of their congregants' priorities in life. Results showed that pastors believed 70% of the adults attending their churches placed God as their top priority. When the same survey was given to 1,002 congregants, the results revealed that only 15% of the congregants placed God as their top priority (The Barna Group, 2006).

A U.S. Congregational Life Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) suggests that a type of cognitive fixation can be seen in pastors' and congregants' views on shared leadership (Carroll, 2006). The study focused on the pastors' empowerment level, specifically, on their ability to inspire members to lead ministries rather than allowing the pastors to remain wholly in charge. Out of the 434 congregations surveyed, researchers identified 351 congregations in which both the pastors and their congregations had both participated in the survey. Researchers conducted a 45-minute telephone interview with each one of the 351 pastors and compared their results against the survey data of the associated 351 congregations. The results showed that pastors ranked themselves at an empowerment level of 75% and at a "take charge" level of 4%. The laity's view on their pastors represented the opposite perception; pastors were ranked at an empowerment level of 50%, with a "take charge" level of 20%.

Researchers have collected evidence of cognitive fixation occurring in churches in the form of groupthink. Groupthink was identified within the church leadership structure of the Catholic Church and, it has been argued, played a role in how that leadership has dealt with controversial issues. (cf. Primeaux, 2005, 1997). Other theological literature on church groupthink suggests that the ecumenical movement (the initiative to bring together churches of all denominations and all other religious organizations into one world church) has elements of groupthink (Walsh, 1989). Another form of groupthink has been identified in how current pastors administer megachurches (Cain, 2012), leading one scholar to comment that these pastors function more like

“church cruise directors” than traditional religious leaders (McHugh, 2009). McHugh reasons that the formation of a megachurch requires a larger-than-life pastor with an expansive personality, an individual who is able to hold the church together through the force of his or her charisma. Groupthink comes into play when churches identify organizational success as the hiring of a pastor with this level of presence and charismatic power (McHugh, 2009).

Although no studies conducted on pastors’ decision-making and cognitive fixation could be found in the literature, a few studies did hint at its occurrence. For example, Newton (2005) argues that when pastors claim to be “answerable only to God” or refuse to respond when their actions are questioned, they stand to make decisive errors in judgment that will affect the trajectory of the church. Regarding pastoral decision-making, Newton adds that the considerable demands on a pastor’s time and the need to make quick decisions affect the pastors’ thinking, leading them to rely more on personal past experiences and to not consider others’ perspectives. Because pastors engage in many roles (such as teaching, preaching, visiting the sick, taking administration, and supervision of the lay ministry) they tend to use personal experiences as the basis for their decisions, rather than taking a more consultative approach and involving the elders of the church.

Other studies have shown how using certain communicational codes in church settings tend to hinder or stop communication. For example, “keep the faith,” when expressed by the pastor, can be interpreted by the congregation as “God told me so.” Moreover, this type of code stands in direct opposition to the use of secular thinking,

which focuses on visible facts (McNamee, 2011). Such codes may contribute to cognitive fixation and impact individuals' understanding of different perspectives. Conrad (1988) provides the following example of code use in a church setting when, in response to the church's financial difficulties, pastors use the "God is testing you" code as an explanation. Conversely, lay leaders explain decreasing financial donations by referring to a declining economy. The use of these types of communicational codes can contribute to fixation in the decision-making process; the pastor may not even be aware of the difference between his or her code and the codes used by the congregants.

Some research on church leadership has employed qualitative methodologies. Qualitative studies have been conducted on charismatic and transformational leadership (Penn, 2011), church outreach (Barnes, 2011; Alex-Assensoh, 2004; Miers & Fisher, 2002); pastors' leadership styles (Edwards, 2000), and pastoral belief systems (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Primeaux, 1997). Other researchers have used quantitative methodologies to study leadership thinking and decision-making in areas such as pastoral learning agility (McKenna, Boyd & Yost, 2007; Nauss, 1995, 1989), clergy effectiveness (DeShon, 2010), pastors' leadership styles (Rowold 2008), a church's social involvement in the community as opposed to evangelism (Kanagy, 1992), and biases in ministries (Nauta, 1988). Though cognitive fixation is alluded to in many of these studies, none focused directly on the presence of cognitive fixation as an element in pastoral decision-making.

Corporations (de Geus, 2002) and the medical field (Croskerry, 2002) have both acknowledged the importance of understanding how cognitive fixation hinders effective

thinking and decision-making. Understanding cognitive fixation in these fields may also facilitate understanding of pastoral thinking and decision-making. As churches are currently facing the issue of flexibility and adaptation issues in their search to find relevance in contemporary times, it is important to explore the role cognitive fixation might play within pastoral thinking and decision-making.

Statement of the Purpose

This study sought to understand the extent of cognitive fixation and the presence of fixating factors within the processes of pastoral thinking and decision-making. The research also sought insight into how cognitive fixation and fixating factors such as expertise and previous experience might occur in pastors' thinking and decision-making.

The following research questions guided this study.

1. To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?
2. What types of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

Dissertation Design

This study is structured into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic along with the background and related research questions. Chapter II is dedicated to a review of the literature on this subject. The research literature offers the reader the foundation upon which this study is based, including descriptions of cognitive fixation as it occurs in different environments. Chapter III details the methodology of this research,

and offers a description of the participants, the setting, the data collection procedures, and methods of analyzing the data. Chapter IV summarizes the findings of this study. Finally, Chapter V presents a summary of the study, its conclusions, and a discussion of the research findings. This final chapter also describes the limitations of the study as well as implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review is organized into the following sections: 1) defining cognitive fixation, 2) factors contributing to cognitive fixation in individuals, 3) factors contributing to cognitive fixation within groups, 4) related research in the church domain, and 5) possible solutions for overcoming cognitive fixation. This review serves as a foundation for exploring the existence of cognitive fixation in pastoral thinking and decision-making.

Defining Cognitive Fixation

Cognitive fixation is one of the phenomena most often studied with the field of creative cognition in psychology due to its association with one's mental operations (Ward, Smith & Vaid, 1997). The literature on cognitive fixation uses varied terminology to describe the phenomenon such as functional fixedness, design fixation, mental set, and groupthink.

When cognitive fixation is discussed with respect to the use of objects, it is commonly referred to as functional fixedness. Functional fixedness occurs when a person is unable to use an object in an original way to solve a problem, but continues to see it used only in its traditional way. This relates to preconceived notions in the use of objects hindering the user from discovering non-traditional and creative uses (Purcell & Gero, 1996). For example, in one study participants were given a set of objects such as a candle, thumbtacks in a box and, matchsticks (see Figure 1) and asked to solve a

problem. They were unable to perceive that the box holding the thumbtacks could also be used as a part of the solution (see Figure 2) (Duncker, 1945).

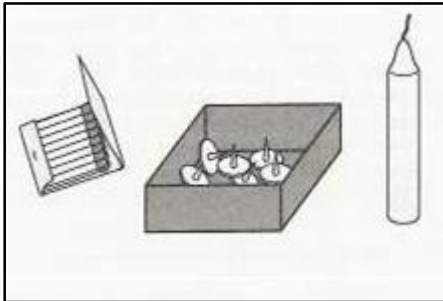


Figure 1. Candle Challenge
(reprinted from Duncker, 1945)

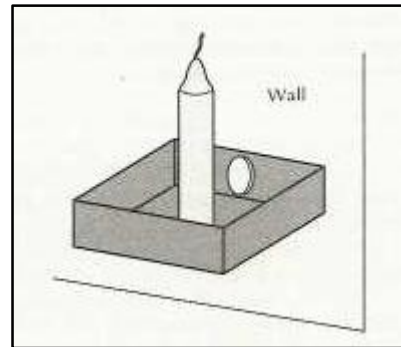


Figure 2. Candle Solution
(reprinted from Duncker, 1945)

When cognitive fixation happens in the design process, it is called design fixation. When participants in a study were presented with a design challenge and flawed examples, they continued to produce designs that incorporated the example's design flaws instead of creating output that solved the design challenge and eliminated the flaws (Chrysikou & Weisberg, 2005; Jansson & Smith, 1991).

Cognitive fixation is referred to as "mental set" in the business arena. It is a mental predisposition to solve a problem in a certain way, even though easier and more effective solutions may be available. When repeatedly given similar challenges, participants in a study designed a formula to solve a problem. When certain underlying aspects of the challenge changed, these participants continued using the formula instead of trying to find more effective solutions because the formula still appeared to be effective (Vallée-Tourangeau, Euden, & Hearn, 2011; Luchins & Luchins, 1959). This type of mental rigidity has also been identified with other tests measuring an individual's

ability to shift or maintain perceptual sets; examples include the word-color test (Stroop, 1935) and the card sorting test used in the Wisconsin Card Sorting Task (WCST), (Harris, 1990). In the WCST, participants must infer the rules of a game and notice when those rules change from their experience playing that game, and not due to any information received beforehand.

Groupthink shares some of the elements of cognitive fixation. It occurs when the dynamics a group may experience influence its members to fixate on the leader's idea without first looking into possible alternatives. This may happen under certain circumstances, for instance, when working under a charismatic leader (Janis, 1972). A group is vulnerable when it is protected from outside opinions, and when group members share similar backgrounds and experiences. (Janis, 1972).

Whether cognitive fixation is studied in psychology, engineering, medicine, or business, there are three shared elements that consistently appear: mental automaticity, mental blocks, and mental stagnation. In mental automaticity, individuals are unable to break from traditional patterns of thinking and problem solving, even though the underlying elements of the problem may change (Bilalić, McLeod, & Gobet, 2010; Luchins, 1942). Though this becoming mired in one's problem-solving approach is a very specific form of fixation, the term is also more generally applied to that which inhibits creative thinking or problem solving (Smith & Blankenship, 1991). The second element of cognitive fixation is the "mental block," an impediment to reaching the goal of a mental activity or operation. In this case, participants are presented with an example, but find it difficult to produce ideas beyond variations on the example given (Smith,

Linsey, & Kerne, 2010). The third element of cognitive fixation is mental stagnation, which is influenced by prior knowledge and expertise (Wiley, 1998; Hinds, 1999; Hinds, Patterson, & Pfeffer, 2001; Smith, 2003). The ideas that emerge are those available within the range of the person's expertise or recent experiences, therefore limiting the number of alternatives available (Chrysikou & Weisberg, 2005).

Cognitive fixation most often results in two different instances. Though it is mainly studied in the field of idea generation (Smith & Linsey, 2011; Smith & Blankenship, 1991), it also emerges when defining or tackling a problem (Weisberg & Reeves, 2013; Ohlsson, 1992). One may become mired in the way a problem is framed, leading to a mental block or inability to find alternative solutions (Smith, 1994). An example is the nine-dot problem. In this task, participants are asked to joined nine dots with four straight lines without lifting their pencil from the paper as in Figure 3 and 4 (Kershaw & Ohlsson, 2004; Chronicle, Ormerod, & MacGregor, 2001). Most participants find this problem difficult to solve because they interpret the nine dots as defining the area within which they need must work, and assume that they must reach a dot to start a new line. Some researchers suggest that this way of interpreting the problem may come from childhood exercises involving "connecting the dots" (Kershaw & Ohlsson, 2004).

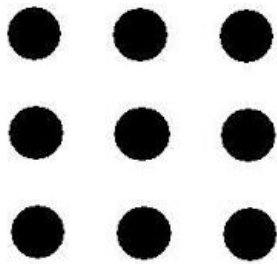


Figure 3. Nine-Dot Problem

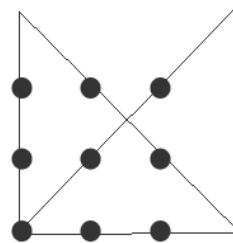


Figure 4. Nine-Dot Solution

The definition of cognitive fixation used in this study is the inability to produce more than one solution to a challenge due to mental blocks that prevent the exploration of alternatives.

Factors Contributing to Cognitive Fixation in Individuals

The literature suggests that the factors of expertise (Bilalic, McLeod & Gobet, 2008; Wiley, 1998) and automaticity (Öllinger, Jones, & Knowblich, 2008; Smith 2003; Luchins, 1942) are usually present in cognitive fixation in individuals. Expertise or advanced knowledge can act as a fixating factor in tasks involving memory and problem solving. Various studies (Öllinger, Jones, & Knowblich, 2008; Croskerry, 2002) have shown how expertise may act as a fixating factor in problem solving. In the cases evaluated by these researchers, expertise made learning a new procedure or approach more difficult because automatic expert behaviors had already been established for the same tasks. Novices tended to learn faster because they did not have the level of automaticity that expertise requires (Wiley, 1998). Wiley's experiment suggests that the

influence of domain knowledge may be harmful when the type of task requires remote associations that need to be considered in novel ways. In Wiley's experiment, participants with greater volumes of baseball knowledge obtained lower results than novices when their baseball knowledge suggested alternative solutions. More knowledge led them to greater levels of fixation, hindering them from making the appropriate associations.

Research in other domains has produced similar findings. Chess experts' recall of randomized chess boards tends to be worse than non-experts when asked to perform in the same type of exercises (Chase & Simon, 1973). Recent studies in chess have confirmed the fixation effects of expertise, but found that cognitive fixation decreases as the level of expertise increases. Therefore, top experts may be able to overcome the tendency to report only typical solutions (Bilalic et al., 2008). It is also well documented that doctors give more accurate diagnoses than third-year interns; however, they perform at a lower level when recognizing or remembering the information they were given to make their decisions (Patel & Groen, 1991). In a different domain, experienced accountants were found to perform at a lower level than novices when adapting to new tax law. These experts failed to consider new information because of the blocks created by their previous knowledge (Marchant, Robinson, Anderson and Schadewald, 1991). In the same domain, expert accountants found it difficult to adapt to a new accounting method. However, a small number with advanced problem-solving skills managed to adapt to new methods by de-biasing costs (Dearman & Shields, 2005). In a related

domain, auditors tended to show mental rigidity in structured tasks, but were more adaptive in poorly structured tasks (Rosman, 2011).

The automaticity of mental sets is also a factor contributing to cognitive fixation in individuals. This happens when repeatedly solving a problem in the same way blocks the perception of changes in the problem's structure that require different and more effective solutions (Öllinger, Jones, & Knowblich, 2008; Smith 2003; Luchins, 1942). This type of problem – also called an algorithmic problem – requires the same type of thinking every time the problem is faced (Puccio, Murdock, & Mance, 2010). For instance, cooking pasta or changing a flat tire requires application of the same formula or procedure that has been tested and proven effective. Problems that are routinely solved with a proven procedure, create a way of thinking that automatically seeks the particular formula already proven to be successful. A common example of automaticity is found in the health sector. Physicians experience cognitive fixation when they make cognitive errors. For instance, studies in this field have discovered that physicians are not good judges of their own performance. They have the tendency to form opinions solely on the basis of early information, and show a reluctance to change those opinions when given new and important information (Redelmeier, Ferris, Tu, Hux, & Schull, 2001). Cognitive errors in diagnosis have been attributed in large part to a failure to consider alternatives after an initial diagnoses is reached (Graber, Franklin, & Gordon, 2005). The clinician's prior beliefs and expectations lead to an inadequate selection of pertinent data, which in turn, results in the misdirection of subsequent reasoning and problem solving (Croskerry, 2002).

Age also has been determined to be a factor in perseverative errors; an example can be seen in participants asked to use the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST) (Rhodes, 2004). As has been explained previously, this test requires participants to infer the rules of the game as participants play it. A meta-analytic review of the WCST suggests that age differences in the number of errors made is largely caused by a decline in working memory (Verhaeghen, Marcoen, & Goossens, 1993).

Factors Contributing to Cognitive Fixation in Groups

Cognitive fixation also happens in groups. At a group level, factors that contribute to cognitive fixation include risk avoidance (Argyris, 2010), bias (Shaneyfelt & Centor, 2009), and stereotypes and beliefs (Sassenberg & Moskowitz, 2005); it results in behaviors such as evaluation apprehension (Kohn, 2011) and groupthink (Eaton, 2001; Primeaux, 1997). Groupthink may emerge when a group feels a high moral calling, that is, a strong sense of moral superiority. Conrad (1988) discussed this groupthink theme of moral superiority in his naturalistic study of six Southern Baptist churches. He attributes the dynamics of church decision-making to members' secular and spiritual identities, dissonant elements in the group's ideology, and biblical frames of reference. Conrad explains that these churches viewed themselves as superior because they refused to touch alcoholic drinks, required baptism by immersion, and rejected a centralized hierarchically structured wall (such as one based on the authority of the Pope), all within a biblical framework alluding to Christ's confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Moreover, a group may also come to rely on collective rationalizations or put pressure on dissenters to conform (Eaton, 2001; Janis 1972). For

instance, group pressure in a Catholic congregation led a pastor to maintain costly Christmas services even when they were poorly attended because the congregation considered it the right thing to do (Primeaux, 1997). Additionally an illusion of invulnerability and unanimity may lead a group to make ineffective decisions. For instance, the management team of Marks and Spencer was led by such an illusion of invulnerability and unanimity, as well as a strong belief in the rectitude of the upper levels of their administration. It resulted in their insulating themselves from outside influences and making decisions based solely on past successes. Their illusion of invulnerability came from seven years of high profitability and a tried and tested formula for success. However, this led to management insulating themselves from external communications and ended in a loss of reputation and stock market valuation (Eaton, 2001). Finally, in groupthink the group exerts pressure against divergent views, screens out external information contrary to leadership opinions, and self-censors its own thoughts that deviates from the group consensus (Manz & Neck, 1995).

The lack of a hierarchical organization that provides checks and balances for leadership may also be a factor in group cognitive fixation. Houghland and Wood (1979) suggest that inner circles may emerge in churches when the traditional, that is, ministerial, leadership or congregational forms of control do not work effectively.

Evaluation apprehension is another factor contributing to cognitive fixation within a group. In this case members of the group prefer to agree with the leader or suggest tried and tested options because they feel threatened by leadership (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Collaros & Anderson, 1969). In studies where brainstorming groups

both with and without experts were compared, groups without experts experienced evaluation apprehension in the form of a lower level of originality and practicability of ideas (Collaros & Anderson, 1969).

Risk avoidance is yet another factor in cognitive fixation. It occurs when people are confronted with an unpopular or professional risk. They prefer to unconsciously accept the status quo rather than take risks (Argyris, 2010, 1999). Argyris (2010) suggests that executives in upper-level administrative positions prefer to submit to decisions made by corporate leaders they strongly believe to be wrong, rather than disagree with them and risk losing their employment. Risk avoidance has also been studied in relation to how belief systems in corporations act as fixating factors for new ideas and creative solutions. Researchers examined how psychological factors constitute the creative climate of a company, such as collective belief in the importance of the creative freedom, and the building of trust such that employees feel empowered to share their creative ideas and find healthy ways to debate (Ekvall, 1999). Other behaviors that illustrate risk avoidance in the corporate arena are expressed through phrases such as: “if it’s not broken don’t fix it,” “don’t rock the boat,” or “it’s not my job to suggest improvements.” These phrases all showcase a belief system that prevents creative change from taking place (Amabile, 1998).

Preconceptions resulting in prejudicial thinking in the business arena can also act as fixating factors in creative behavior (Sassenberg & Moskowitz, 2005; Rudman, Ashmore & Gary, 2001). Such preconceptions include the definition of a creative individual, what such individuals are creative about, and when and how to they should

exercise that creativity (Robinson & Stern, 1997). When a part-time employee came up with a solution to a problem faced by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, that constituted a savings of \$1.4 billion, Massachusetts set up a program to encourage cost-saving ideas from other state employees. However, the state employees' unions believed that such a system would lead to merit pay and lobbied successfully against it.

Additionally, Robinson & Stern (1997) offer an account of how a chemist working in a pharmaceutical company licked his finger after an experiment and discovered Nutrasweet, a sweetener that eventually became a company of its own with sales of over \$1 billion in 1996. This success made possible by a company leadership body willing to forego the belief that they were solely a pharmaceutical company and instead risk entry into the food market arena.

Cognitive fixation in groups may also happen through cultural biases. Health organizations such as the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and many others issue clinical guidelines to help physicians apply updated best practices based on new evidence. However, industry bias has affected the trustworthiness of such guidelines. The guideline format focuses substantial attention on a single disease and little attention on particular patients. Patients seldom suffer from one single disease, and therefore guidelines hinder a physician's understanding of the complexity of most diagnostic situations. Many guidelines lead to a one-size-fits-all mentality, thus making recommendations inflexible (Shaneyfelt & Centor, 2009, Boyd, Darer, Bould, Fried, & Wu, 2005). The groupthink effect of guidelines goes beyond their limited usefulness. At one time, a high dose of steroids was the standard treatment for acute spinal cord injury,

but neurosurgeons were not convinced (Lenzer, 2013). The results of a poll of 1000 neurosurgeons indicated that only 11% believed that this treatment was safe and effective. Yet when asked if they would recommend the treatment 60% stated that they would out of fear of a malpractice suit (Lenzer, 2006).

Related Research in the Church Field

Earlier research has described a type of fixation that appears in church leadership called groupthink. This takes place when pastors are heavily influenced by members' opinions (Primeaux, 1997). Rosander, Granstrom & Stiwne (2006) understand groupthink to be based on a developed framework called the bipolar groupthink model (Granstrom & Stiwne, 1998). This bipolar model synthesizes Janis's (1972) groupthink characteristics into two groups: omnipotent and depressive. In omnipotent groupthink members perceive themselves as morally superior and consider others outside the group as incapable of contributing valuable work. Members in depressive groups feel inadequate and powerless because authority is located outside the groups. Rosander and associates (2006) researched three religious groups: the Jesus Movement, team-work-based Lutheran groups, and bureaucratic Lutheran groups. Their research suggests that less-structured religious organizations tend to be at greater risk of omnipotent groupthink, whereas highly structured religious organizations more often experience depressive groupthink.

Other related research suggesting the presence of cognitive fixation deals with charismatic and transformational leadership within small African American churches. Cognitive fixation occurs when pastors' perceptions of their role and strength of their

personalities, – especially in American megachurches – influence the choices their churches make about decisions concerning community involvement (Barnes, 2011; Alex-Assensoh, 2004; Nauss 1995). Other research has investigated the influence of bias in ministry by conducting a survey of 382 protestant pastors. The survey incorporated four scenarios that included both positive and negative experiences. An example of a negative experience was a comment from a congregant expressing dissatisfaction after a pastor’s ministry visit. The results showed that pastors tended to associate positive experiences in the church with their own internal factors, while negative experiences were associated with external factors; the result was self-enhancement and self-protection (Nauta, 1988). Nauta argues that the attribution of negative experience to an external factor may be influenced by a pastor’s concerns regarding public loss of face.

The studies most closely aligned with this research are pastoral groupthink studies (Rosander et al., 2006; Primeaux, 1997), the existence of powerful and influential small inner circles in the church (Hougland & Wood, 1979), and a survey on ministry and bias involving protestant pastors (Nauta, 1988). Other literature has looked into how church leaders and board members make decisions. Goetz advises the practice of discernment for overcoming the detrimental effects of Robert’s Rules of Order that sometimes create an adversarial system within the church (Goetz, 1995). Schaller (1995) looks into how past experiences affect current decision-making in the church, and how traditions influence leadership behavior. Many churches use Robert’s Rules of Order to run their meetings. Originally published in 1876, this system was designed to “assist an assembly to accomplish in the best possible manner the work for which it was designed”

(Robert, Robert, Evans, & Honemann, 2011). Some studies have identified the particular issues in Robert's Rules of Order that hinder decision-making (Susskind & Cruikshank, 2006; Susskind, McKernan & Thomas-Larmer, 1999). These works explain how a fixed mindset may prevent a congregation from moving beyond an established strategy and into a consensus-building framework. In one reported case, a congregation wanted to retain a tradition of using Robert's Rules of Order as the voting system, insisting that the rules made the church more democratic. The arguments against the use of Robert's Rules of Order included the notion that the church may not have been designed for majority rule, and that the majority did not necessarily align with the unhappy minority. A final critique on this system is that it puts too much power in the hands of the most skilled members. These members tend to be process experts and may use the rules to their own benefit (Susskind, 2006). However, though these studies hinted at the presence of cognitive fixation, none dealt with the explicit phenomenon of cognitive fixation in pastors thinking and decision-making. Consequently, there is a need for greater understanding of how cognitive fixation impacts pastors in these ways.

Overcoming Fixation

Whether in business or in the church, leaders have used new frameworks to bring change and innovation to their organizations. This section examines how leaders have used different strategies to overcome cognitive fixation in business and the church. The first challenge to overcoming cognitive fixation is that individuals often are not conscious that they are, indeed, fixated (Linsey, Wood & Markman, 2008 ; Smith, Ward & Schumacher, 1993). Beliefs that may hint at cognitive fixation include those such as

“if it isn’t broken, do not fix it,” “don’t rock the boat,” and “it’s not my job to suggest improvements.” These phrases illustrate how one might fail to recognize the possibility of and responsibility for improvement (Amabile, 1998).

Overcoming Fixation in Business

Different trends on innovation and strategies have developed over the last twenty years that address the problem of cognitive fixation. They challenge traditional paradigms and belief systems about the nature and scope of innovation (Ulwick, 2005; Kim & Mauborgne, 2005), innovation systems (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke & West, 2008), market segmentation (Ulwick, 2005), innovative business models (Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann, 2008), product scope (Ulwick, 2005; Brown, 2008), and management (Hamel & Breen, 2007).

A business trend that is breaking the old paradigm of in-house innovation is open innovation. Evolving beyond companies developing their own research and development facilities and internally developed products (examples of the old paradigm), open innovation offers a system where purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge accelerate internal innovation. External ideas are combined with internal ideas, as well as internal and external paths to market (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke & West, 2008). Procter and Gamble’s newest strategy is to outsource 50% of all of their innovations. Spinbrush, an electric toothbrush that retails for \$5 was invented by four entrepreneurs in Cleveland. Procter and Gamble also intends to share new ideas and prototypes invented in-house, even with their competitors, if internal business units do not use the new ideas within three years or origination (Chesbrough, 2006).

Other strategies of innovation target customers, encouraging them to better understand their latent (rather than their alleged immediate) needs. Ulwick (2005) uses an ethnographic and facilitative approach to discover the types of functions or jobs a customer wants to get done. He found that the jobs customers desired completed with regards to a potential product were different from the satisfaction they derived from the products currently used. In his research, those functions were deconstructed and examined separately in 'job maps.' These maps included definitions, locations, preparations, confirmations, execution, monitoring, modifications, and conclusions. (Bettencourt & Ulwick, 2008). Ulwick defines the process of data gathering and prioritization of a customer's needs as a part of this innovation strategy. He conducted a series of facilitated interviews with certain customers and employed the Opportunity Algorithm, a tool that views potential innovations through the lenses of importance and satisfaction. Tasks that are considered to be of great importance but with a low satisfaction rating were seen to offer the most significant opportunities for innovation (Ulwick, 2002). The type of reframing that happens with this innovation strategy is a departure from the traditional process of superficially segmenting the market, according to level and types of sales.

Design thinking constitutes a different approach to customer value creation. It is a strategy that combines ethnographic, psychological, and social studies of the customers' needs within the bounds of what is technologically feasible and able to support a viable business strategy in the to market. This methodology seeks to empathize with the customer and design prototypes that can be quickly tested to discover the extent

of customer satisfaction. These prototypes are then refined to better meet customer needs (Brown, 2008; Moggridge & Atkinson, 2007).

The blue ocean strategy has been suggested as a way of overcoming the traditional mentality regarding the meaning of a market. Traditional markets (also called red oceans) are characterized by competing in the existing marketplace, beating the competition, exploiting the existing demand, and making value/cost trade-offs. The blue ocean strategy reframes this model as finding a new and uncontested marketplace, making competition irrelevant, creating and capturing new demands and breaking value/cost trade-offs. An example of how this strategy reframes the approach to innovation is Cirque du Soleil. This company combined the fun and thrill of circus experience with the intellectual sophistication and artistic richness of theater. Cirque du Soleil removed certain high-cost circus elements, such as the use of animals, and improved on three core circus essentials: a tent, clowns, and acrobatic acts. It also added key Broadway show elements such as a prominent theme and an elaborate music score. The final result was a unique entertainment offering that created a new market.

Another approach to redefining innovation is the reinvention of business models. When Apple launched the iPod in 2003, it was not the first company to produce a digital music player. Already there were a few digital offerings on the market. However, Apple prepared a new way of providing low-cost music that could be downloaded from the internet (iTunes). iPod/i-Tunes became a \$10 billion product accounting for 50% of Apple's revenue. Apple did not provide fresh innovation through their product (iPod) but instead through their new business model: the iPod/iTunes synergy. Reframing a

business models requires a fresh look at the customer value proposition, profit formula and the identification of key resources and processes (Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann, 2008).

Google provides a fresh perspective to managing innovation results in a radical transformation of the traditional beliefs and paradigms. This company has made innovation a core pillar of its operations through key innovation initiatives. In 2007, when the estimated success rate for new products was at 20 out of 100 Google had a budget of \$1 billion dedicated to research. This figure would be unacceptable to a company or venture capitalist preferring strict criteria for new product development (the “sure bet” mentality). Instead, the innovation philosophy at Google centers on many small teams that have the time with resources to invest in new projects. Engineers at Google are encourage to use up to 30% of their time to develop core or fringe projects of their particular interest. Other key characteristics of this management model promote widespread and low-cost experimentation, as well as competitive innovation rewards. The team that produced the successful Smartads software that increased click-throughs by 20% was given \$10 million from the Founders Award (Hamel, Breen, 2007).

A different way to bring innovation to a company is the process of serendipitous recombination. In trying to develop a new photographic film using nitrocellulose, scientists discovered that the solution they were using had hardened unexpectedly. They noticed that the solution could also take color easily, and as a result they studied the possibility of developing it into a new lacquer for use on automobiles. This new product eventually reduced the car-lacquering process at GM from two weeks to two days. Other

examples of this type of reframing include an occurrence at 3M, the company that created Post-it Notes. Post-it Notes were the result of a failed attempt to create a different type of adhesive. Relatedly, Pfizer's Viagra was first a failed type of cardiovascular medicine. In all of these cases, the key cognitive skills evidenced by the company's management were the ability to recognize that a failed product might have other uses, and the willingness to find a receptive manufacturer capable of developing that new product (Hargadon, 2003).

In the healthcare industry, many methods have been studied to help de-bias clinicians' thinking processes. Metacognition – or thinking about one's own process of thinking – is one of the strategies regularly employed (Croskerry, 2000). Highlighting the types of cognitive errors usually made by clinicians is another way of tackling this problem. This has included the study of the diverse biases that clinicians tend to experience at work (Croskerry, 2002). Additionally, high-fidelity simulations have been suggested as another possible way to improve the quality of decision-making in healthcare personnel (Satish, Streufert, 2002).

Overcoming Fixation in the Church Field

Recent studies (de Villiers, 2013; Kaiser, 2011) on decision-making in the church have suggested that church administration should return to biblical foundations. These foundations include using elders in the decision-making process and determining their number and role according to their spiritual gifts (Nehrbass, 2011). Johnson suggests that the New Testament offers a way of testing the validity of scriptures through

leadership and a congregation of faith. He also introduces the work of the Spirit, present in the New Testament as a way to overcome some sources of fixation when he states that

When bylaws and customs, or codes and unreflected Scripture citations replace the testing of the Spirit in the church, or, more tragically, when the church proceeds on the assumption that there is no work of the Spirit to be tested, then the church may reveal itself in the process of reaching decision, but it won't be as a community of faith in the Spirit (138) (Johnson, 1996).

The work of the Spirit is clearly found in the book of Acts when Peter gives testimony about what God did at the Cornelius' house. He describes a vision given by God, a timely invitation from servants in the Cornelius' house, and a witnessing of the Holy Spirit that fills the gentiles in the same way the Spirit did with the Jews earlier on at the upper room. It came as a great surprise to faithful Jews that the benefit of the gospel was also for the gentiles (Acts 10).

Over the last 40 years, only a few studies have been published on what makes a successful church (Dever, 2004; Macchia, 1999; Swartz, 1996; Callahan, 1983). These views cover many different topics ranging from the biblical understanding of leadership (Dever, 2004) and servant leadership development (Macchia, 1999) to functional structures (Swartz, 1996) and pastoral and lay visitation (Callahan, 1983). However, Kaiser (2011) offers a different approach based on the New Testament, this approach focuses on three key components of decision-making in a successful church. He breaks away from previous paradigms by focusing on the basics: 1) communicating the Word of God, and 2) being led by the Spirit of God to 3) fulfill the mission of God. Kaiser creates

a questioning schema helpful in understanding the different layers of activity in the church and how they build one another. He begins with: “has the congregation been growing numerically?” and ends with: “has this growing, evangelistic, reproducing, globally missional, biblically faithful congregation been seeking the face of God in all that it does?”

Other church leaders have gone beyond those parameters in an effort to see the church transform the community. They state that the purpose and success of a church is not found in the number of members, size of its staff, or amount of its budget, but rather on the level of transformation that can be seen in the community in which the church serves (Pope, 2006). This includes a transformation in the seven spheres of influence in society. These spheres are politics, education, media, family, business, arts and entertainment, and religion. The purpose of the church (according to these church leaders) is to transform society such that it is empowered and shaped by God’s principles and power (Wallnau & Johnson, 2013).

Another alternative to developing group decision-making in the church is congregational discernment. In congregational discernment, groups are facilitated through a session of silence and prayer before engaging in dialogue leading to decision-making. This practice has helped groups focus on what is relevant, deeply listen to one another, and enhance consensus when reaching decisions (Frykholm, Churches, & Agreed, 2007; Goetz, 1995). Support for the communal discernment approach is also found in the theological work of de Villiers, who suggests that communal discernment

the biblical approach to handle controversy, as can be seen in Acts 15 where the debate was whether circumcision was a required sign of salvation (de Villiers, 2013).

Finally, Strauch (1995), in his study of biblical church leadership suggests that the church needs to return to a decision-making model based on pastoral, qualified and shared leadership. He notes that the biblical principle the apostles exhibited was “first among equals.” This is the principle Peter’s leadership demonstrated and it was based on the works of a servant rather than a title or a position to be yearned for.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Qualitative inquiry was selected for the study as it facilitates the discovery and understanding of underexplored psychological phenomena (Willig, 2013). Though the primary focus of this study was pastors' thinking and decision-making processes, the study also explored personal and group factors that influenced leadership decisions. Thematic analysis of the narratives, as a way to discover themes or patterns within data (Boyatzis, 1998; Daly, Kellehear & Glicksman, 1997), was used as an analytical research method as it helped to bring understanding through "the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world" (May, 2002). Thematic analysis was also used to examine the "hows" and "whys" of decision-making processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This methodology allows for the researcher to be flexible in the data collection and adjust the design as needed through the study.

Participants

In this purposive sampling, participants were selected from a pool of pastors from Protestant denominational churches in Texas. Pastors chosen for this study led congregations consisting of a minimum of 50 members and a maximum of 1800 members, and had served in a full-time position for at least five years in at least one church during their careers. The choice of smaller congregations was made to increase consistency as the particular dynamics of megachurches may differently affect pastoral decision-making. In addition, size of congregation is a factor in how pastors interact with their congregations and lay leadership teams. In smaller congregations, preaching and

pastoral roles, such as visiting the sick, are emphasized, however, as congregations increase in size, pastors tend to focus more on sermons, vision casting and strategizing (Keller, 2008). A criteria of five years of experience was used as pastors often leave ministry within a five-year period (Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 1998). In addition, pastors acquire important expertise over five years and expertise may influence decision-making as suggested by studies on cognitive fixation (Wiley, 1998; Smith 1994, 2010). Other studies on expertise (Palmer, Stough, Burdenski & Gonzalez, 2005) have similarly used five years of experience as criteria. Additional research on the impact of pastoral experience on pastoral priorities (e.g. Stevens, Loudon and Pascal, 1996) suggests that pastors with extensive experience (50% of the participants in their study had more than 15 years experience) show less interest towards understanding missions, and church potential. It is suggested that experienced pastors are more likely to be focused on inward needs of the congregation than are pastors in ministry for a shorter period of time.

This study focused on the experiences of ten pastors. Pastors from different denominations, genders, ethnic groups, and experience diversity were deliberately chosen. Potential candidates for interviews were obtained from online or printed directories. Church Directories such as *Peace Magazine Church Directory*, and Churchfinder.com were used. As Catholic churches, Jewish synagogues, and Muslim mosques are administered very differently than are Protestant churches, this study focused only on Protestant churches. Protestant churches were also chosen in to obtain a reasonable sample, because they are more common in Texas than are other types of

churches, mosques, or synagogues. The researcher contacted pastors from all 103 Protestant churches listed in the *Peace Magazine Church Directory* with a description of the study and a request for an interview. Follow up emails were sent approximately 15 days after the first email. A total of 21 pastors replied to the email recruitment. Twelve pastors agreed to participate in the study and nine declined to participate, most due to lack of time. One pastor replied that he did not have the time as he was “a solo clergy person serving a sizeable congregation” but recommended pastors from churches of the same denomination. Three pastors originally agreed to participate, but did not subsequently have time to meet with the researcher. The researcher only found one female pastor serving in the area researched. Though African American pastors were invited, only one volunteered to participate in the study. Hispanic pastors were not chosen for this study as Hispanic churches tend to be too small to qualify.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym (Gender)	Self-reported ethnicity	Number of years pastoring	Number of churches served	Age	Church Size	Denomination
Malcolm (M)	White	5	2	38	200	Presbyterian
Paul (M)	White	5	2	38	80	Pentecostal
Charles (M)	White	6	2	33	100	Presbyterian
George (M)	White	11	1	38	1800	Independent
Landan(M)	White	12	1	46	225	Pentecostal
Victor (M)	White	15	2	58	1100	Methodist
Michael (M)	White	15	3	50	50	Baptist
Sandra (F)	White	19	3	52	600	Episcopalian
Stuart (M)	African American	20	2	48	240	Methodist
Timothy (M)	White	28	5	56	400	Methodist

Each pastor lead a congregation ranging from 50 to 1800 members, had from 5 to 28 years of pastoral experience, and had served between one to five different churches during their career. A brief description of each pastor is given in the following section.

Malcolm

Malcolm had pastored in two Presbyterian churches for the last five years. During the time of the study, he had 200 members in his church, at which he had been working for one year. Malcolm had a degree in kinesiology and discerned his call to

pastorate four years earlier while being heavily involved in church life working as paid staff.

Paul

Paul had been working in different churches over the last 16 years. He had worked as an assistant pastor in churches in Mississippi, Georgia, and Texas. He had been previously employed fulltime as a pastor for seven years. However, he took part-time employment to financially assist the church. His congregation was a mixture of three congregations that had decided to unite as different pastors had retired over the previous few years. Paul pastored a Pentecostal church of 80 members.

Charles

Charles served as a pastor for six years in two small Presbyterian churches. During the time of the study, he was pastoring over 200 members in his church. He had formal training in religious studies, a Masters in Divinity, and continued his training in clinical pastoral education. As part of his experiences with his first church he had to help the congregation through a process of restoration due to Hurricane Ike.

George

George had been a pastor for the previous 11 years in one of the largest local churches with 1800 members, most of them students. He had a B.Sc. in engineering and had worked as an engineer for 18 months before entering ministry through an internship. He then pursued his Masters in Theology from a major theological seminary.

Landan

Landan has been the pastor at a local Pentecostal church for 12 years – ever since its founding. His church had 225 members. Landan had a secular job most of his working life until he felt called to full-time ministry. Previous to his pastoral employment he studied in a variety of fields, including marketing and engineering, and later pursued studies in biblical counselling. He had been involved in the design and construction of three different buildings for his church during his tenure.

Victor

Victor pastored a Methodist church with 1,100 members. He had been a pastor for 15 years but worked as a policeman before joining the ministry. He had experience pastoring a small congregation. Victor had gone through the long process of ordination that started in 1996 and ended in 2010. He graduated with studies in counseling psychology.

Michael

Michael had been pastoring for 15 years in three different small congregations that belonged to the Baptist denomination. His church had about 50 members. He worked part-time during each of his pastorates even though he considered himself a full-time pastor. He had a Bachelors in Theology.

Sandra

Sandra pastored an Episcopalian church of 600 members. She had served as a pastor for 19 years in three different churches. Sandra came to pastoral work with experience in social work through prolonged employment in a hospice. Sandra's concern for the needy motivated her to enter the ministry to deal not only practical concerns but also with spiritual needs. She managed a major change in her church including the sale of a property and the hiring of more staff to meet the needs of the congregation.

Stuart

Stuart had been pastoring over the previous 20 years. A graduate from a major Methodist theological school, he had worked in three churches and had pastored in two of them. He had previously been a paid staff at one of the largest Methodist churches in Texas when he felt called to start a new church in a low SES neighborhood. At the time of this study, Stuart was pastoring a Methodist church of 240 members.

Timothy

Timothy had served in five different Methodist churches in various states as a full-time minister. He led a congregation of 400 members and had been a pastor for 28 years. Timothy felt the call into ministry at the age of 19. He graduated from a historic traditional seminary in 1987 and was ordained in 1989. He has pastored mainly small and medium-sized congregations.

Context

The pastors interviewed led ten different churches. Six churches were mainline Protestant denominations and included Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches. Each of these denominations have a central governing body that trains through their own theology schools, and assigns pastors to churches of the same denomination. Bishops or superintendents within these denominations supervise the work of a group of churches within a district or parish. Churches in these three denominations are highly structured in terms of church governance and perform church functions through committees that are led, in most, cases by lay leaders. These denominations have written policies that regulate the role of the pastor in guiding the church respectively referred to the Methodist Book of Discipline, the Presbyterian Book of Order, and the Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer. In these churches lay leaders and committees can be assigned much decision-making power. Pastors typically ensure that leaders and members closely follow the doctrinal guidelines that the denomination has established.

Other churches, most notably, Southern Baptists, do not define themselves as denomination but as a group of independent churches joined by shared values and theology. However, they also have a strong committee structure that has the authority to hire or fire pastors. Other churches such as the Pentecostal church and Grace Bible church work independently within their network. Although Pentecostal churches are considered a denomination they function as a more fragmented and decentralized group. Although Pentecostal churches have committees and elders, their church government is less structured and thus allows the pastor greater decision-making power. Grace Bible

churches also function independently, even though their governmental structure is traditional and the board of elders has the authority to hire and fire pastors.

Although an in-depth analysis of the denominational complexities of church governance is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that the authority granted to congregational members may influence the type decision-making that pastors exercise in the church. Pastoral decision-making may be delimited by the decision-making authority held by the pastor, by the denomination, or by the denomination's culture, and traditions. For instance, Baptist traditions rely on the congregational mode of governance. This means that decisions ranging from membership to doctrine, worship, and finances are made by the entire congregation, or are delegated to specific members or groups of members of the congregation (Norman, 2005). In contrast, the Presbyterian tradition appoints long-term elders that work alongside pastors to make decisions in different areas such as worship and congregational care (Tucker & Gray, 1986). The Methodist Church has a hierarchically structured system where bishops appoint pastors to different congregations and then pastors work with lay leaders appointed yearly to leadership committees. These lay leaders to manage the church, while the pastors make sure that they fulfill the guidelines within the Methodist Book of Discipline (Tuell, 2010).

The Human Instrument

The primary instrument for this study was the human observer. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that humans are specially qualified for naturalistic inquiry because of their ability to (a) adapt to the environment so they may fully investigate a phenomenon,

(b) understand the holistic context of a phenomenon, and (c) seek a deeper understanding of unusual responses. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), to establish trustworthiness the human instrument must be familiar with the phenomenon, have a strong theoretical and conceptual knowledge, take a multidisciplinary approach, and demonstrate investigative skills. The researcher for this study was uniquely qualified given his past church experiences as an elder both in a church in Singapore and in Texas. In those positions, he became familiarized with “church thinking.” Second, graduate courses in cognition and creative cognition helped the researcher understand the theoretical psychological perspective behind cognitive fixation. Third, his background in research on creative thinking and the multidisciplinary nature of the literature review offered him a broader perspective of the study. Fourth, courses in qualitative research methods have provided the necessary investigative skills for the researcher of this study. The researcher therefore possessed the necessary competencies for this type of research according to the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework.

The researcher acknowledges his own positionality in this study as he belonged to a denomination with its own conception of the purpose of a church and the role of the pastor. Some of these non-secular beliefs included:

1. The Church is not a building but a group of people.
2. The Church’s purpose includes a broad scope activity which includes every person in every sector of society including different nations and ethnic groups.

In addition, the researcher’s positionality regarding human cognition was:

1. Human beings are inherently creative and have the potential to consider new alternatives.
2. Human beings can change the way they think and their ability in metacognition (thinking about their own thinking and deep reflection on thinking processes) through training and practice.

The researcher's professional epistemology was post-positivistic as it retained the idea of objective truth, even though it acknowledged that such knowledge is based on human conjecture and possible biases. As the researcher was himself a minister, he attempted to bracket his preconceptions of the data (Tufford & Newman, 2012) using several methodological techniques through the process of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected in the following three ways. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted from a purposive sampling of ten pastors. The interviews allowed pastors to share useful information and experiences about their decision-making processes. Second, one executive or ministerial meeting in which the pastor was actively involved in decision-making was observed by the researcher. This method has been documented as "observation of task performance," a technique for representing expert knowledge (Ericsson & Smith, 1991). Observation notes were compiled during these meetings for analysis. A reflexive journal was kept regarding the progress of the research. This helped the researcher to become aware of his own positionality his own biases in analyzing the data. Third, a reflexive interview took place with the pastor after

the meeting to understand the decision-making process that the pastor used during the meeting. Questions used during the follow up conversation were the following:

1. What were your objectives when going into the meeting?
2. How did you engage in decision-making process?
3. Is there anything you would have done differently?

The follow up interview thus helped the pastors reflect and report on decisions that were made, factors that contributed to those decisions, and on the interaction of the lay leaders during the decision-making process. This method also helped the researcher validate the observed data against the feedback received from the observed participant (Gubrium & Holstain, 2001).

The researcher used a reflexive journal. This tool assists researchers in their research development as they capture reflections, insights and new perspectives that open up in data interpretation and analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Memos included a description of certain events before, during, and after the interview that were useful to understand the stories that pastors shared. For instance, two pastors did not show up to the interviews and they had to be re-scheduled.

The researcher's analysis of this journal including the memos was part of the data collection and analysis. The reflexive journal was kept to help identify any value judgments that might have impacted the analysis of the data. It included 21 pages of reflection written the same day the interviews took place. Ten memos were added to the journal to record key information that happened before, during or after the interviews.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews with each participant were conducted face-to-face in the pastor's church office. In eight of the interviews the pastor's office was selected as venue of convenience as it was a private space that allowed better communication. However, two pastors preferred to meet outside the church at coffee shops. Interruptions took place in two interviews but did not affect the quality of the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) as the basis for inquiry. The semi-structured interview format allows participants to go beyond the initially interview questions into what Rubin and Rubin (2011) describe as extended conversations and conversational partnerships. In these interviews, pastors felt free enough to bring additional information into the conversation and to ask questions of the researcher. The researcher suggested finishing all interviews with a prayer for the church and pastor involved. Those prayers were welcomed by all of the pastors.

The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. The interviews produced transcripts 187 pages in length. After each interview was transcribed, it was shared with participants to ensure accuracy of the content. Field notes were taken during and immediately afterward interviews so that non-verbal behaviors could be recorded. The field notes were collectively 27 pages in length. The researcher followed all procedures as detailed by the Human Subjects IRB at Texas A&M University. All participants signed consent forms before the start of the interviews approved by the Human Subjects IRB at Texas A&M University.

Follow-up communication with participants was conducted through email with all participants. Subsequent contact with participants was initiated to clarify content, continue to gather insights, and ask additional questions that the research process and the reflexive journal might have stimulated. Six out of ten participants replied to emails providing corrections to the transcripts. These corrections included data about the size of the church, biographical data about the participant, and their precise involvement in decision-making on financial issues. Using email for this purpose provided time and flexibility for the participant to answer questions, as well as a record that could be used as additional data. Following the IRB-approved consent process, participants were ensured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms.

Meeting Observations

The purpose of observing pastoral decision-making behaviors during administrative meetings was to clarify and find support for the data previously acquired through the interviews. Eight out of ten pastors conducted administrative meetings in the church premises that included lay leaders. Two pastors declined the invitation for the researcher to observe the meeting due to lack of time. Meetings lasted two hours and attended by an average of eight lay leaders. These meetings highly structured and each lay person took a turn to report on progress of their ministry. In some meetings, the pastor presented church progress, including results obtained through recent church activities. In other meetings the pastor acted a facilitator to help the flow of decisions being made by the group. Most meetings used Robert's Rules of Order to help the decision making process. Notes were taken at the meetings by the researcher following

the Observation Protocol (see Appendix B) to identify behaviors suggestive of cognitive fixation. However, analysis of these notes provided no supporting information on cognitive fixation. This may have happened because of the limited decision-making authority granted to the pastors in those meetings according to the bylaws of the church. In addition, as lay leaders were running those meetings, the pastors often acted more as facilitators more than getting involved in the decision-making process.

Data Analysis

All transcripts were processed for analysis. The researcher inserted pseudonyms, dates of interviews, page numbers, and headings on the transcripts. In addition he made notations on the reflexive journal.

Data gathered from interviews and meeting observations, were analyzed using the constant comparative method suggested by Glaser & Strauss (1967). In addition, Huberman and Miles (1994) systematic processes were used, including writing margin notes in fieldnotes such as comments on pastors' reflections. Other processes included writing reflections in the reflexive journal on larger themes that the participants were covering in the interviews, and noting patterns and themes.

Data were unitized systematically. First, the researcher identified discrete ideas from interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents. Unitizing helps to break the information down into small units that stand alone in the absence of additional information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These units were listed line by line using page breaks. As this process was taking place the researcher wrote down comments about possible categories. All the units were printed on 4" by 6" index cards including the

pseudonym of the pastor, page number, and unit number. This process generated 723 cards.

The units were grouped into categories using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Units were sorted out to see whether they would fit any category already generated or whether a new category would have to be defined. The first categorization exercise yielded 54 categories. Categories were evaluated for overlap and to establish key relationships. Relationships were found amongst those 54 categories, creating larger categories. These larger categories were each given a tentative definition. Twenty large categories were subsequently generated. For instance, the units regarding traditions in worship service, preaching and events were categorized under “traditions in the church.” These definitions were captured in the reflexive journal. Then, the categories were analyzed for consistency.

After all data were analyzed, three clear themes emerged regarding fixation. The first theme revealed a more complex reality than suggested previously in the literature. The second theme suggested that cognitive fixation plays a role in how pastors perceive challenges. The third theme illustrated how special circumstances helped many pastors overcome cognitive fixation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is necessary to confirm the accuracy of the findings from the standpoint of the viewer, the participant, and of the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It involves verifying information using multiple sources of evidence (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Trustworthiness in this study was established through the use

of triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Persistent observation involved paying close attention during the interviews and identifying the most salient points when they arose, allowing the researcher to probe for further information. It also included the researchers' notes and deciding how to proceed with follow-up questions. Through persistent observation, the researcher was able to identify details that are most relevant to the focus of the research study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For instance, follow up questions were asked to delve into stories that might reveal cognitive fixation. In particular, questions were made about how specific actions decided by the pastor compared to similar actions in the past, how learning had taken place and to what extent new programs broke traditional approaches.

Triangulation helped establish trustworthiness through the comparison of multiple sources of data (Denzin, 1978). Data obtained in interviews were checked against data coming from observations of administrative meetings (Merriam, 2009). Comparisons also came from interactions with the same person at different times via follow-up emails (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checks were conducted immediately following each interview and through subsequent communications. The first informal member check followed the interview when the researcher summarized points made during the interview to check for any misunderstandings. A second follow-up member check consisted of providing the participant a transcript of the interview for clarification and the opportunity to correct or delete any sensitive information. Each of the descriptions written in Chapter IV were

reviewed by each of the participants. Six of them sent corrections on some of the data including their ages, size of church and ministerial background. A meeting to provide a researcher description of the results was offered to all participants. Five of the pastors who agreed to meet and review the findings, found them useful and interesting for their ministry practice.

Peer debriefings were used to enhance the accuracy the research through the identification of possible researcher bias and to confirm insights and emergent themes. The peers included a researcher and another doctoral student with experience and knowledge in qualitative research methods. One peer also had experience in church decision-making. During peer debriefing meeting observations, pastoral interviews, and emergent themes were discussed. The peer debriefing process occurred multiple times during the study to identify missing data, to check for consistency and to corroborate the final themes (cf. Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent of cognitive fixation in pastoral thinking and decision-making, and the possible factors underlying such cognitive fixation. The following research questions guided this study: (a) to what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes? And (b) what types of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

This chapter is organized into two main sections. The first section presents a description of each participant's stories regarding their life experiences related to decision-making in the church. The participants' responses were derived from face-to-face semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that is used throughout the Chapter. The participants' stories are presented in alphabetical order of their respective pseudonyms.

The second section includes data gathered from staff meetings. Observations from pastoral decision-making during staff meetings can be useful for understanding the context in which pastors make or delegate decisions.

Participants' Stories

Landan

Landan was in his mid-40's and had been working as a pastor for 15 years in the same church. He has studied at different higher education institutions and accumulated

all at the same church. He has studied at different higher education institutions and accumulated over 169 credit hours, but at the time of the interview he had not yet obtain a degree. He took courses in mechanical and civil drafting, architecture, business, and even engineering. He was a business owner for a number of years before selling his business to enter the ministry full-time. At the time of the interview, he had been a full-time pastor for six years. He felt that his experience in business and the broad topics he studied helped him to understand the people who came to him with their problems. He believed that God was preparing him so he could deal with the students attending his church. His background allowed him to connect with people in various and different ways. On this subject, he mentioned that:

“...even though it’s not on a spiritual level it still connects us. And sometimes I think that if we connect only on a spiritual level, we don’t really connect because most people aren’t too spiritual. But if we can connect on a material level, as time goes by, I can draw them into a spiritual level.”

At the age of 23, he felt the call to serve God and began by helping the church in any possible way he could, from painting, to driving the church bus, to teaching Sunday school. He was an exception in his denomination; the elders of the church allowed him to start a church in the city without any prior pastoral or evangelistic experience. He started in his living room with only three members, and has since then acquired additional knowledge by pursuing a degree in biblical counselling.

When asked about the big challenges that helped shaped his ministry, Landan shared that the first trial came when he asked his congregation of 35 to 40 (with only 16

working adults) to take on a \$70,000 church-building project. He presented this mission with full confidence that God would provide the funds for the building. His belief was that if there was a need and he and his congregants did their part, God would do whatever else was needed for the acquisition of the building. He believed that he could use this occasion to build his own faith and spiritual relationship with God. In fact, the challenge had stemmed from his own denomination requiring he focus on the building project. At that time, Landan's church did not have enough money in the bank to pay the monthly \$1,500 rental for the building they were using.

Landan described on a second challenge to his leadership that had occurred in the last 12 years. Some of his closest relatives became part of his church staff. The rules of the church were clear: there was a dress code for ministers who preached or taught from the pulpit. On one occasion, one of the staff members did not follow the dress code and was forbidden from ministering that night. Landan confronted the staff member, but the staff member did not consider it of particular import. Landan felt his authority was being challenged, especially when the staff member, who had become upset, took an unscheduled holiday. Since this again was breaking ministry protocol, Landan was forced to reprimand the individual. The situation deteriorated to greater acts of insubordination; the staff member did not want to take care of Sunday school classes. A week later, Landan decided to fire the individual. The staff grew angrier and in response, left the church. Landan noted how their departure created a vast void and a substantial amount of work. "In that time of great need, every leader in the church stepped up to help. The leaders are still performing those roles today." When the staff member left the

church, quite a few other people also chose to leave. Landan was also starting a new church in a neighboring city: church attendance declined from 250 to 150 in one month.

Landan reflected on these events, saying:

“...when the events took place, I had to go back and re-evaluate what motivated me. Was it growth? Was I being motivated by just numbers? By people, just filling up the building? Or was I being motivated by true spiritual things, by God’s principles or by doctrine? I probably spent the next year self-evaluating, but more than evaluating what God was doing, God was looking into my heart because I was seeking Him daily, even hourly.”

Landan decided to follow his spiritual principles and church doctrines when making difficult decisions. However, he saw a change in the way he began building leadership, transitioning to an environment where “everybody has a voice.” This was challenging as people joined the church who were accustomed to pastoral leadership who controlled with “an iron fist,” and where pastors would make all of the major decisions “no matter what.” Landan preferred to run ideas past the entire leadership team of seven to ten leaders. This was difficult for leaders to adjust to because they were not used to having their opinions heard. This represented a paradigm shift for several of the older leaders. Landan gave one example of how this worked in a recent event. Children who had been part of a Sunday school class instead of the worship service were told to join the main service to worship God together with their parents. This was a proposal brought to the leadership and congregation over a month before it was attempted.

Landan explained that this change was introduced so that parents could exemplify worship to the children.

On the subject of keeping old traditions alive, Landan did not believe that a key aspect of worship for the denomination had been changed. He explained that exuberance does not necessarily hinder the preaching of the Word of God. Even though worship time extended to 45 minutes, the extension did not hinder the time allocated to preaching (as had happened in other churches). He believed that during worship time, some people were being blessed. However, during the time allocated to preaching, everyone in the church was being blessed. His point was that he had overcome the denominational argument of “let the Lord have His way” and avoid preaching in favor of worship, was replaced by an assigned time for preaching.

Landan’s approach to outreach changed over time. His strategy of knocking on doors was replaced by street evangelism, a Christmas concert, and a Thanksgiving dinner. He explained that his ministry emphasized building relationships with the community, their neighbors, and coworkers. His approach was to stop doing any “advertising or work that is unprofitable.” He attributed this type of thinking to his business experience. He felt he needed to be able to recognize when mistakes were being made saying “You know what? It didn’t work. We just threw away \$1,000 or we just threw away two weeks of effort or whatever.” Landan learned from his effort. For instance, he decided to eliminate a Thanksgiving dinner because it was not successful. However, the congregation complained and he encouraged them to put the effort into it and not simply “sit there and just waste our time, making all this food for ourselves and

looking at each other.” The encouragement worked and people invested effort into making the dinner successful.

Landan recognized that as a person, he might not be described as having a long attention span. If he found something did not work, didn’t want to “waste time on it.” He knew that the church was aware of this style, admitting that at times he “failed to continue things that did work.” He gave reasons such as a lack of planning or setting things up properly. For instance, the church held a prophecy conference that was very successful, attracting 400 people. The following year it was discontinued because as he put it, “I forgot to schedule it.” He further explains that the reason for this type of mistake was like the lack of a full-time secretary. He emphasized that not having such an employee “really, really hurts” and that he cannot “manage... anymore by myself.” Landan described the pain of risking his church seeing a decrease in numbers because of his fault, even though he wanted his congregation to grow, to see more people getting to know the Lord, his church, and his denomination. When talking about what prevented him from hiring that particular person, he mentioned a lack of finances; he would have liked to pay the person \$40,000 to \$50,000 annually. He explained that “a workman is worthy of his wages.”

When asked about whether he had seen groupthink in the church, Landan explained that he witnessed a herd mentality emerging, he communicated to the leadership the need to make sure the church remained focused on “souls and making it to heaven.” He gave an example of challenging leaders not to build their own kingdoms in the church by bringing “their favorites” into their teams.

Landan described dealing with disagreements. Landan by mentioning scriptural principle of “working together in the spirit of peace until coming to unity.” He tried to let the group come to the point where “the authority of the Word” would speak to them. He explained that though “everyone has a voice” in his church, the lay leadership was aware that the pastor was responsible for the final decision. Landan expressed his philosophy of leadership as one endeavoring to empower leaders by listening to them and delegating them the authority to make their own decisions. For instance, with projects such as the Fall Festival, common practice was to set a budget and designate the pastor as a helper, assisting with problems the leader of the project might find difficult to solve. Lay leaders built their teams, but he pastor led the teams through personality assessments. This was done to encourage diversity. Landan shied away from what he termed “micromanagement,” stating that “it drives me crazy.” He sought only to insert himself long enough to ensure that the project was going in the right direction and “being organized properly.” He admitted that sometimes he did contribute with ideas or plans, but did not mind if they were not implemented; he explained that they were “just events” and did “not direct the whole church.”

Landan described his philosophy of getting people involved in the church. In the same way it takes people seven minutes to get an impression from a business, Landan argued that in the church he had seven days to “connect with someone who is a guest in the church” and seven weeks to get that person involved. He recognized that as simply his unique “way of looking at things, a weird way.” But he employed specific criteria to select future lay leaders. They needed to be faithful in attendance and willing to help

with small things. For example, he might ask a teenage guest to take out the trash to see whether it would be done quickly. Also tended to focus more attention on young men, as he felt that was where most work needed to be done. As for the older congregants, he explained that most tended to be “set in their ways” and that “it is very difficult to move them out of that,” but if “they really want to get involved, I will get them involved.” Yet he emphasized his work with the young, to “get them trained and learn ethical behavior, to learn the willingness to work and readiness to put their ‘hand to the plow.’”

Landan admitted that his decision-making process included deciding whether the path he chose “fits the word of God,” when it did, he moved forward. Weekly 30-minute classes were regularly held to observe who was being attentive and giving input, and who appeared to be coasting, an attitude he described as “aggravating.”

Landan expressed his philosophy of church structure when commenting on his approach to solving conflicts. He made reference to the biblical example offered by Moses. Moses had two people with whom he had close relationships. As Landan put it, “it was almost like a pyramid,” and that was the structure he used himself to keep the lines of communication open in his organization. For instance, it was suggested that he use the “house-group” method of ministry in his church; every member would be assigned a house group. After some consideration he decided against it because “it wouldn’t be conducive for 90% of the people.” He further explained that “the societal norm for the church is to be in a building. The paradigms of society really drive the congregation. They can’t drive ministry or leadership but it drives the congregation.” To further elaborate on this point, he stated that people would not come to a church without

air conditioning or without cushions on the seats. He shared that he runs new ideas through some “personal filters.” For instance, he shared his personal experiences with his father who owned nine businesses and grew up with the “understanding that if you are going to succeed, you’ve got to keep the customer happy.” Examples he gave of how he employed this philosophy including keeping the church clean, because the congregation would “not want to see cobwebs everywhere.” Also, they want to hear quality music,” and sit on “comfortable pews.” Landan explained that he took his “understanding and business education and brought it to the church.”

Continuing his description of his decision-making process, Landan said he accepted both “crazy” or good ideas to the leadership meetings so that the volunteers would get credit for their ideas, could offer input and different perspectives, and people could buy into them to help get them implemented. Landan’s final criterion was always to see whether or not the idea agreed with doctrine. He told the congregation from the pulpit that “you should be thankful that I love and respect the word of God more than you.” He explained that he was not “interested in pleasing them if it’s going against the word of God.” He also ran decisions past the four and five elders in his church to see other aspects of important issues, and used the internet to research topics.

Landan’s style of decision-making can be characterized as looking for information first, then counsel from senior leaders, and finally testing new ideas with the congregation to see how they might react to any changes. He expressed interest in building and empowering leaders and ministers to continue the work by paying attention to church members’ abilities, talents, character and motivation to lead.

Ministry Meeting Observation

Landan's approach to his weekly leadership meetings was to include some teaching on leadership skills. At this particular meeting, the room was organized in rows. The men sat on one side and the women on the other. The men were all dressed formally, with suits and ties, and the women wore appropriately formal dresses. Twenty six people from young to elderly composed the team. Landan directed the entire meeting and spoke the majority of the time. The leaders did not bring any materials with which they might take notes, and no handouts were distributed. The leaders asked questions regarding the logistics of some of the events that would take place in the following weeks. The purpose of the meeting was mainly to update lay leaders on the church's activities, and to teach servant leadership. It was not a strategic meeting, so only minor decisions regarding logistics (in this case, about the Christmas dinner) were made.

Charles

Charles was 33 years old and had served as a pastor for six years in two different churches. He had formal training as a pastor, receiving a Master's degree in Divinity. He pastored a medium-sized church outside the city. He explained he did not choose to become a pastor, but instead believed that God chose him to do the work. He felt that this notion was later confirmed by other people, throughout his studies.

At the time of the interview, Charles was working in a church in a location affected by a major hurricane. Several members lost their houses, and the church was also damaged. He remembered working and ministering to many people who had

suffered losses. A few years after the event, those who remained in the city mostly recovered. At that time, he faced a challenge from one of the members. This person had taken a deep interest in helping a local family, and wanted the church to get involved as well. Charles, working with the leadership, explained to the member that church involvement would not be appropriate, and that they would not follow the member's chosen course of action. As a result, that member left the church. Charles believed that the member became too personally involved in helping people, and that "sometimes even if you think you are doing the right thing, you have to have some boundaries." In this case, the member tried to tell Charles what to do, and when he explained that he would not follow her instructions, the member got upset. Charles recognized, then, that she had a "high need to control people." Even though he refused to follow her suggestion, he subsequently made sure that other people in the church agreed with him.

During the discussion about the difficulties members faced in leaving traditions behind, Charles commented that such resistance is, perhaps, human nature. Sometimes "we don't even know why we are doing that." After spending some time thinking, he shared an example of a church project that involved distributing blankets to children in a children's hospital. He believed the project died because there was no "connection" created outside of the church; they were doing something in an effort to reach out, but instead they were "inward focused." He recalled, though, that some members did miss the program after it was discontinued because they had "emotional connections" with the project. However, those who were not directly involved did not have a problem with the change.

Charles talked about how people influence decisions. In his denomination there were committees or teams that allowed the congregation to get involved. The members of these groups were not considered elders, but they were still able to contribute. In one instance, a person who prepared the church bulletin was out of town, so Charles decided to make some changes. At a subsequent meeting after the person's return and despite other members of the group making positive comments about the changes, the person complained. Because "he had respect" in the community, others who had once thought favorably about the changes began to agree with him. The issue ended with a negotiation between the two parties.

When asked about how he handled naïve proposals from immature members, Charles referred to older and more experienced members who had advised him to counsel the person one-on-one. He concluded that he "would not want a person singled out or to feel bad if he or she is trying to serve," but also recognized that "maturity is important for leadership." After some probing about dealing with specific difficult cases of immaturity amongst long time parishioners, Charles stated that he would deal with them one-on-one, and try to understand their perspective. He added, though, that sometimes "people are just difficult." When those cases arose, he would make sure he was in agreement with other leaders, and "let someone else control it from the side." In the position he held at the time of the interview, Charles was the youngest adult member of the congregation; he recognized that "sometimes it's not going to work my way." He felt it was important to yield to others' views, at times, because otherwise the task would not get accomplished; his members would think "oh, he's too young. He doesn't know

what he is doing.” He shared that even with a title, authority was not a given. Charles brought up another example: the types of songs the congregation preferred to sing. He tried to suggest new songs but sometimes “there is resistance” because congregants “won’t try” something new. However, Charles didn’t want the “same people to sing the same song.” Sometimes he would suggest trying the song for a month; he remarked that people would eventually go along with the change, even though there was initial resistance.

When asked about resistance to change, Charles mentioned that one thing he tried to bring with him from his last church was the notion of pastoral care. Pastoral care uses a team to visit people in the hospital, make phone calls, and coordinate the delivery of meals. He admitted that in the past it was not successful, and reasoned that one of the causes could have been a lack of clarity in his leadership. However, he also stated that “the church doesn’t know what to make of it because they are not used to it.” The members ask “why are you calling me?” because they may not want to be disturbed. He believed it could be a cultural issue, but intended to continue to try to employ the practice because “it is a good thing” and “biblical.” Charles also recognized that he could do a better job training the members of his ministry, but that he was new, “starting something from scratch,” and it would take a “while to get used to something new.”

When asked about the traditions that were retained even though they seemed irrelevant to the vision of the church, he emphatically answered: “the whole structure of the church. Yes.” Then he added that there were “a lot of little things,” and explained that programs usually died because people got tired of participating or because the

participants lost their original purpose. As a result, the program would become “an end in itself instead of serving God.” Charles gave an example of a Thanksgiving dinner that was discontinued because it was a huge project to feed 700 families, and yet there was “no real connection to the people.” As he put it, it became an act of “well, here is the meal,” and left at that. Another factor that helped him in his decision to stop the project was “the person in charge didn’t have the energy to do it.” Charles explained that it cost the church more to relate to people than to give them a handout; he felt people “like to do the physical effort, but not the emotional effort.” However, he remained convinced that members had to invest themselves in other people, because that was what “God wants us to do.”

When asked about tried and tested programs that gave progressively diminishing results but were difficult to change, Charles explained that many programs die “a natural death” but that “there are always people who don’t want things to die.” He had a desire for his members to have “a vision to start something new” that would involve them personally. However, he found that only 5% of the congregants were likely to start new projects. He added that it tended to be the same ten people who would do everything, and explained that it may be human nature or because these same people repeatedly volunteered, but the rest of the congregation tended to step back and say “well, we’ll let them do it.” As an example, Charles brought up Sunday school programs that in his opinion were “not very good” and yet had not been changed. He suggested that home groups would be more effective, but realized that the group running the Sunday school would not want the change, either due to sentimentality or fear that a change might cause

the system to “fall apart.” He quoted one member as saying: “well, we always had Sunday school when we were children at this time and in this way, so that’s how it should be for our kids.” Charles reflected on this behavior, hypothesizing that members might not be aware of their conduct, and that the way they behaved might be more important than the content. One of the solutions he offered to was to have new groups begin new projects, while older groups continued the more established programs. Then, he felt, some of the outdated practices would “die a natural death.” He also described how groups involved in older programs and led by influential members tended to get angry when new groups did well. Such groups became jealous, even when he reminded them that “they were not doing that well” before the new groups were formed. Charles had seen this behavior in other churches and in other programs, as well.

The conversation led Charles to provide several strategies that helped him to overcome reluctance to change. He built relationships with people before suggesting change, because “if they trust you they will let you try something new and they will realize that you are not trying to take something away from them.” He also engaged people in conversations in ways that convinced them that they were the ones coming up with the new ideas. The moment they put the idea into “their own language it [became] easier for them to accept change.” Charles shared that he needed to plant the seeds of change by talking to his congregation during his sermons, in written communications, and by holding one-on-one meetings; then he could see the seeds of change grow. However, he recognized that there would always be individuals who were “not going to change no matter what, and you have to figure out how to deal with them or hope that

they leave.” At that point Charles seemed to realize that this assertion might only be his idea and that he might be wrong; he concluded that “you need a lot of prayer and discernment before you have the great ideas to go forward.” He explained that there were times when “we just have to act on faith” and pray to God, leave it in His hands and have the full conviction that that was God’s intent.

Charles recognized that some people behaved differently when talking to him one-on-one, as opposed to in groups. They tended to be more “domineering” in group settings. However, he did not have a solution for that. He had not encountered deceitfulness in this change in behavior, but he had seen “strong dominant voices” influence other members, getting them to change their minds and follow what the individual suggested. It was usually an older person who was respected in the group. However, the role of the pastor had certain boundaries and members respected them, so usually they left the final decisions to Charles. For instance, he had decision-making power on everything concerning the worship services. That meant he had to find ways to work with people to get things done.

When asked how he would settle a disagreement between members with different scriptural interpretations, he shared that he would encourage them to study the subject with him and discern the best approach based on the history of interpretations. He added that the denomination has several hundred years of commentaries to use as resources.

Since Charles belonged to a mainline denomination, his style of decision-making was influenced by the traditions, committee structure, and decision-making process as it

pertained to the church. He expressed interest in developing ministries that might empower members to get involved in future pastoral work.

Ministry Meeting Observation

The leadership meeting took place around a table. The leaders present were involved in different types of ministries. On average, the leaders were 20 to 30 years older than the pastor. An agenda and handouts were distributed. After a time of devotion and prayer, the meeting began with an approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. The whole meeting was highly structured. The participants knew exactly what they were supposed to do, and the types of outcomes desired. Several times the pastor asked if anyone had questions in order to ensure that everything was clear. Different leaders gave reports on the activities they were conducting, including reporting data such as the number of people participating in their respective activities. The pastor gave choices to the leaders regarding some pending business relating to officers. One of the programs the congregation had decided to invest in was an appreciative inquiry designed to help them understand the vision for their church from the members' perspective. The pastor talked about another program and offered to buy food with his own money if it would entice people to come. One of the leaders, however, stated that it would not be necessary. The pastor also asked permission from the leadership team to take four days leave so he could preach at other locations to which he had been invited. At the end of the meeting, the pastor joked that he was sorry I had not been able to attend a meeting with more decision-making, such as the worship team meeting where he discussed the selection of songs with the worship leader.

Michael

Michael was 50 years old and had pastored for 19 years in three different churches. Originally, he felt called by God but resisted. It was not until he told God “yes, I will surrender to the ministry” that he felt peace within him. He had been very involved in church education and music ministries. He felt that God has been training him throughout the years to bring him to the city to serve as a pastor this last year.

Michael agreed that there were times when he decided on a subject but it was difficult for the congregation to follow. He mentioned as a pastor he needed to cast the vision before others buy in. However, he was working with volunteers instead of “paid help.” He felt that one could not demand volunteers to do things, and that it was God’s responsibility to put it in the heart of the members to do those things “at the appropriate time.” He stressed the “need to set a good example” and God would work things out. He added that he would not ask people to do things he was not willing to do himself. There was no job too small, such as taking out the trash or changing light bulbs.

During the discussion about conflict in the church because of traditions, Michael mentioned that he would be preaching about the need to do away with traditions that hinder the preaching of the gospel the following Sunday. He added that God’s commands and principles remain, but that the methods needed to change because people changed. He mentioned that the reduction in the congregation over the last few years had made him notice that some changes were necessary. Some of those changes were in the time of service, and conducting Bible studies outside the church hours in other locations. He believed that one of the keys to success was to get out where people are instead of

expecting people to come to the church. He has had a few opportunities to see how the new Bible study groups have created new connections. Additionally, Michael mentioned that they were stepping out of the church for other activities, such as participating at a Halloween event, where 3,000 people got to learn about his church. Future projects included reaching out to other churches outside the city in the same denomination that wanted to visit their location and help with the outreach ministry with university students.

Michael also experienced the congregation resisting change when the pastor wanted to move on into something new. He explained that some years ago, in a different church in East Texas, the water they were using had a nasty smell. He suggested to the lay leaders that they change the water system, but they did not see the need for it. He added that God started to work on the problem soon after some the ladies were washing the dishes and asked about the smell. Michael brought to their attention that he had been talking for a few months about changing the water system. One of the ladies straight away called her husband, a deacon in the congregation, and told him “you fix this and you fix it now.” Some men decided then it was time to change the water system. Michael reasoned that “the problem with folks many times is they don’t have the right motivation; they don’t see themselves as part of the vision. They have other things in their minds.” He added that he has experienced times where he suggested an action but nobody followed up on it. Then, a year later a congregation member suggested it and everybody agreed it was a wonderful idea. Reflecting upon this issue he concluded that

“the idea has to sit with folks for a period of time before catching on,” because we have to wait on God’s timing for God to move in people’s lives.

Michael mentioned he is not the only one coming up with ideas, and members also influence decisions. Some ideas for Bible classes have come from the congregation. A deacons gave him a book about prayer, and suggested that it could be used for teaching. Though people do not tell him what to preach, he recognized that when people are interested in knowing something they are “more likely to listen and get something out of it.” The women in the congregation are usually very good at bringing up things regarding kids or decorations that men tend to overlook. He admitted that he “is really big on brainstorming,” so when people come up with workable ideas they sit down to figure out what God wants them to do with their gifts and talents. He believes that his role as a pastor is to “help each individual member find that place of service that God wants,” and to help them with the obtain training and resources needed to do that work.

When asked about resistance in adopting ideas from other churches into the new church he mentioned he has seen it. One of the ideas he adopted from another church is giving praise reports. He found that members are quick to have prayer requests but not to give praise reports about something God has done for them that week. He still continues to request praise reports as he feels his congregation needs to learn to be grateful people. He reasoned that the more attentive people are to see God at work the more grateful they will be, and “the more likely you are to be working with Him.” He added that people are reluctant to give praise because it is a different type of contribution than requesting prayer. Michael spoke another example where he encouraged the members to try to host

Bible studies in their homes with a group of people instead of at the Sunday evening service. He helped them get it started and, even lead it, but after a month the Sunday evening service resumed. He concluded that it was too different for that particular congregation. However, that system of Bible study outside the church building that did not work in his previous church is working now for his congregation.

Michael has experienced times when traditions were kept though they seemed irrelevant to the vision and mission of the church. Sunday night service was difficult to change because of tradition even though there were old widows who lived out in the country and did not like to drive back home in the dark. After some time, the church changed the service to a time for lunch together with afternoon worship. That worked for a few months until people got tired and wanted to do something else during that time. The fact was “they wanted to get back to that tradition”, that is, go back to a Sunday evening service. Michael shared how the congregation insisted on having the service on Sunday night because as they put it “we have always had service on Sunday night.” He added that he has talked to other pastors who “have run into the same problem.” A change from Wednesday night to Thursday night faces opposition because “we’ve always met on Wednesdays.” In reflecting on traditions, he shared that they are good as long as we remember why we are doing them and they serve a purpose. He concluded that the reason often given by the congregation to keep traditions ““that’s the way we’ve always done it’ is not a good reason to do something.” This is something he has heard many times. He provided one more example of resistance when wanting to vary the style of music by combining hymns together with some contemporary Christian music so a

blended style of worship could “touch and impact the hearts of people across generations.” They replied that “they didn’t want to talk about that.”

Michael shared that his church also needed to address programs that give less results over time but are difficult to change. He referred to a training course in his denomination. However, most people find the training material dry. The method used at that time was to break the material into different parts so that people could read them. He reasoned that “it is not a popular teaching method among the younger people today,” and compared it to “interactive discussion and small group discussion,” which is “highly more effective.” But when trying to change the method, he found resistance because the members of the congregation argued that it was “the way we’ve done it.” He replied to them that it is not about showing up to a class but about “getting something out of it.” Michael has used a different method by teaching the Bible slowly and contextually, which he finds more effective. An 80-year-old lady one day told him “I have learned more about the Bible in doing what we are doing in the last few years than in most of my 80 years in the church.” He felt this is because he keeps people in context, talks about the culture, and builds a story that people can understand. Michael has experienced changing styles. He has had times where he implemented changes in teaching and the congregation saw the value, and other times when the congregation did not like the change. He reflected that “apparently, the older we get, the less we like it.” He explained this with a metaphor saying that the same way our body starts dying as we get old, people get old spiritually if “you are not continuing to grow and mature.”

At the mention of delegated authority in the denomination, he agreed that if the members are not willing to grow, they have the authority to get stuck in the same thing they have always done. Michael concluded that “it’s when you’ve got to rely on the Lord,” and that is the reason there is so much burnout among ministers. He also blamed Satan for leading men to stop having a desire to read, because “reading is still one of the key ways of taking information and preparing a foundation for growth.” However, when asked about the need to serve in order to grow, Michael had an epiphany and said that “a key problem that I’ve seen in churches is that we’ve become more educational institutions rather than business working units for God’s kingdom... because we certainly have a job training people. They need to know the principles of God’s word. They need to know who God is and how He operates but we’re supposed to be doing something with that.” Michael concluded that people need to observe and see what other leaders are doing and do the same because otherwise “you are not learning from others.”

Many years of experience have influenced Michael’s decision-making style. He consults his leaders and congregation when making changes, and is fully aware of the people’s constraints to change. He has adopted a more practical approach to ministry in his teaching, and believes in empowering members who have already started Bible studies outside the church venue.

Ministry Meeting Observation

The business meeting took place in the sanctuary with over ten members present. It was a relaxed atmosphere that included joking and laughter, a devotional, prayer and praise items. Michael reported that praise items were a difficult thing for some members

to think about and share. The meeting was mainly about events that would take place that Christmas. The pastor often asked for members input with no success. The members mainly asked clarifying questions regarding the programs. The decision-making methodology called “The Robert’s Rules of Order” was followed to vote on decisions to be made. The pastor also challenged the leaders to get involved saying that the “time is now” to make a difference in the city. He also requested members to let him know of others who may have been hospitalized. The pastor went over the pending issues of the church regarding participation at denominational events and support of one denominational school. Overall the meeting was to inform members of what was going on. The few things that members voted on regarded logistics and church programs that had been previously agreed on.

Malcolm

Malcolm was 38 years old, and had been to seminary in his denomination but had previously obtained a degree in health and kinesiology. He pastored two churches over the last five years.

The conversation started with talk about his call into ministry. He mentioned that after resisting God for a few years he discovered he had that gift that God wanted him to use in the church “to build up and empower leaders in order to act within the church.” Before making that decision he had been very involved in the church as a volunteer, and as paid staff.

He gave two examples of big challenges he had to face in the church. Both included dealing with difficult situations. In the first instance, a member collapsed

during worship. He had palpitations so they called the medics while he suggested they play a few more hymns. On the second occasion he brought peace to two elders that were attacking each other verbally and on the verge of getting into physically violent. He called a five-minute break and talked to each one separately to see whether it would be necessary to postpone the meeting. They changed the topic of discussion and returned to it later on with a different perspective.

Regarding his present engagement his biggest challenge is to face “a considerable mortgage on the building,” as a result of theft by employees before his arrival. The second challenge was to educate people not only on the Bible but “how to be a mature, responsible adult.”

Malcolm described changes the church had to make but were difficult to understand. An example was a recent meeting where a participant had strongly disagreed on the time of payment for moving expenses for a former pastor who had left the church. This was despite “four conversations with leaders in nine weeks over the terms. He also mentioned changes that have been successful such as limiting meetings to two hours that used to take three and a half hours in the past to “honor everyone’s time and energy.”

Malcolm noticed resistance to change in the church. In his denomination one third of the elders rotate every year. This means there is a constant need for education on policy and procedures. He tried to provide this education in his previous church, by starting team building training, but the lay leaders resisted the change claiming they knew what they were supposed to do regarding the rules and regulations pertaining to the denomination. Malcolm mentioned that the rules are found in a book that changes

every two years. He questioned the elders on the content of the book to determine their knowledge base, and got no answer. He then reasoned with them that ,“you need to come (for the training)” but they refused. He summarized that the situation as “there has always been resistance to being educated and grow as disciples in the church.”

With further probing into the congregations’ resistance to change, Malcolm recalled an example when on Christmas Eve when he forgot to include the song “Silent Night” as the last song of the service. That produced “a huge uproar” in the congregation because they claimed, “we always do this.” He tried to solve it on the spot, suggesting they play and sign the song then, as the organist was available. But they replied “no, it’s supposed to be as part of the service.” The pastor brought up the example of elders refusing to take communion to the homebound members that were unable to attend church services. When the elders came up with the excuse that the pastor is the one who should be doing that, he replied to them that even in the church service he just breaks the bread and the elder takes it to the congregation. However, the elders were still resistant to participating even in the presence of the pastor.

Malcolm described using his authority to get things done. He commented that “he tries not to exercise authority in that way” because it may cause dissension. He preferred to reason with them, which can be more empowering than a top-down approach. The pastor confided that he has seen people leave the church for many reasons, be it theological, a stewardship issue, or a difference in the direction of the mission. However, the reason of obedience “because you’ve been ordered to do

something” was not a good enough reason for him. He concluded that if he has to mandate people to do things he would have failed because he would have crossed a line.

Malcolm also noted that the congregation influences many decisions because most decisions are made in committees comprised of members. It does not matter whether some people are too excited or opinionated about a certain view because everything is “weighted by the congregation.”

During a discussion on bringing new methods to a church and finding resistance he commented that “he always enjoys asking the ‘why’ questions.” One of the traditions he questioned was a large shell given to newly baptized members with scriptures. He asked the leaders why they were doing it and the reply he heard was “because we have always done it.” He probed further and asked them “what does it mean to you?” but he did not get an explanation. He invited the ruling board to decide whether to continue with the tradition. He found great resistance, so he challenged them to explain it to him in order to continue, or otherwise for the tradition be continued outside the worship service. He said, “since I organize the worship service I am open to it but I need you to tell me why you do it.” The group conceded because they were able to keep the tradition outside the worship service. The pastor was “really surprised” that nobody came back to talk to him about reinstating the practice.

Malcolm’s approach to community service has been to ask the congregation about the type of service that brings unique value and does not duplicate another institution’s services. This has led members to stop previous duplicative service being done because “that’s what we do,” and to consider the possibility of changing. An initial

move in this direction happened with a clothing drive that another denomination had stopped. They held a clothing drive twice a week instead of the previous once yearly event with increased participation from donors and helped many families.

Malcolm described tested programs that give decreasing results. He felt that it happens with Sunday school. There is great resistance to people changing that education hour. He wondered whether a different time of the week would be better. However, the people who do not come for Sunday school were not suggesting an alternative time. He concluded that the challenge is “how do people get excited about learning what they say matters to them?”

On the subject of how his studies may have influenced his way of approaching his job, Malcolm made the connection that the same way that lack of physical exercise has an effect on brain activity, a shallow prayer life has an effect on other parts of the life of a Christian. His studies have also helped him design activities for different types of people. He had to make up rules that would fit the participants so that everyone would enjoy the games. Similarly, he is looking at how to get different people involved to be part of the solution, to consider alternatives and what alternative could be ‘the most suitable’ given a set of resources and constraints. This will help him understand people better and how to get them involved.

Malcolm shared a personal example on how people approach problems in an automatic way, which gets less successful results over time. He has changed the way he prepares his sermons. He used to start the message and exegete the Hebrew or the Greek into English but it was not working for him. He decided to try a different style and

deliver the exegesis at a different point. The previous method was like “putting blinders on a horse on a cart that didn’t go anywhere else.” He felt this was hindering him from using his creativity to expand on the concepts using different illustrations. The congregation used to congratulate him on his sermons before the change but now their comments have become more specific about what they like about the sermons. And the congregants are still talking about those points a few days later, which leads him to believe that “they are still thinking about them and trying to figure out how to apply them to their lives.”

A major breakthrough in his life that may have affected his job involved the topic of stewardship. He realized that working off “a cash basis” was productive for managing his family’s budget. When the topic came in church about of raising funds, he suggested they use the money for debt reduction. The suggestion was warmly received, which has changed his perspective, the way he talks to people about finances, including how he ministers to couples that intend to get married.

Malcolm’s decision-making style has been influenced by his experience in church. He has seen how difficult it can be for members to change traditions but he has managed to introduce procedural changes to meetings and has brought a more thoughtful approach to initiatives concerning ministries in the city. He has also used his own experience to change the way he ministers to couples regarding financial management and to make his preaching more practical and applicable to the members of his church.

Ministry Meeting Observation

Malcolm had mentioned that he has restricted meetings to two hours in order to be more productive and make better decisions. About 20 leaders met in a room around tables that had been arranged in a rectangular shape to use all the space available. It was a highly structured meeting following the Robert's Rules of Order. Malcolm facilitated the meeting using a language that allowed him to clarify issues and find common ground ("the way I understand this issue," or "what I am hearing here is"), but at the same time acknowledging his limitations ("this is beyond my knowledge", or "that is the information I had.") He also asked members to offer different views on different topics such as purchasing church insurance or hiring new staff. The pastor was able to contain and manage the irritation one of the members who seemed not to have paid attention to the details regarding the relocation of former staff. The meeting moved along quickly with members voting on different issues. The leader of the Korean group spoke at the end mentioning the importance of directing visitors to meet with the pastor. Though Malcolm did not decide directly on the outcome of the events, he managed the meeting to ensure that the meeting was run according to the regulations of that denomination.

At the end of the meeting Malcolm asked for feedback regarding his decision-making style. When asked what he would do different next time he said he would be better prepared with more relevant data regarding some of the topics, and appreciated the idea of "conditional approval" of actions to be taken pending on confirmation of data.

Paul

Paul was 39 years old and has been serving in ministry over 16 years. He worked under four different pastors in previous churches. When he was 12 years old he felt the call to ministry when he felt the need to stay in church all day to pray.

One of his biggest challenges involved starting his current church from scratch. They have remodeled four different buildings and moved to three different locations in the three years as they have grown. Other churches have merged with his as their pastors have retired and he currently leads a congregation of over 80 members. Paul commented that his congregation has gone through many changes over the years but everyone has been very understanding in the change process. They are “behind all the decisions that have been made to this point.”

The only conflict has come from the reluctance of members and lay leaders to adhere to the high standard of leadership. The lay leaders expected to get involved in ministry. Evangelistic ministry requires a higher level of commitment than some were willing to make. Some people left the church at one point, because they did not want to commit to the higher standard. Other people have been asked to leave the church because they “just wanted to come against the direction of the church as a whole.” Several lay leaders and members became confrontational, questioning the pastor’s leadership when he tried to explain the process to them. But Paul is still in touch with them, encouraging them to serve the Lord. He recognizes that he is “very direct” because he sees the vision clearly but not everybody may want to follow him. He decided to

terminate services of two members employed by the church to care for the lawn and facilities because of their neglect to other duties.

Paul encourages the congregation to give input on some of his decisions. Most recently, he has been gathering information regarding the possibility of adding one more service on Sunday. Since it would be a greater sacrifice for members who live far from the church, he is seeking their opinions and thoughts.

He commented on the unique challenges of ministering in his town. One of the members initiated the idea of helping people in laundromats pay to wash their clothes, and at the same time, inviting them to visit the church. After spending one hour canvassing in the community they came back with money still in their bags. People did not want free money. He commented that the city is “basically a saved community.” However, regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he explained that “it’s quite challenging for this community to understand that the Spirit of God is real, it’s for them, and they can receive it.” The pastor related facing situations in his city when he had been in a “difficult place” of asking members to find another place of worship. In his previous churches he had to call the police because of violence or take bullets out of a gun because of threats, but he never had to ask a member to find another place to worship. He found this issue important because “the productivity and growth of the church” depends on the unity of its members. He has had to make those tough decisions when some members were criticizing his leadership behind his back and leading people astray. He believes he made the right decision, “the one that God would have me make” even though it has affected some of the members and the finances of the church. He

concluded that “it is a good thing that you don’t have to be a member of this church to go to heaven”, and that “there is a time when we will see the results of the decisions that have been made.”

Paul has not experienced traditions being kept even when they seemed irrelevant to the vision, even though, things have changed for pastors over the last years. He mentioned that “they used to say that you don’t make any major decisions until you have been there for five years” but now the approach is different as people know things will change. He has made all the changes upfront, as not to “create a fake persona” that would have to be corrected later. He communicated from the pulpit that he would not keep any tradition without a purpose. For instance, they do not have a Sunday night service like many of the congregations of the same denomination. They kept Wednesday service, after some members mentioned that “the community expects you to go to church on Wednesday, so at that time they will work with you.” Paul commented that he has not kept many traditions nor tried many approaches from the past in this new church. If an approach does not work he would change it. For instance, he stopped holding yard sales and car washes for fund raisers and provides dinners instead because they are more profitable.

Paul mentioned that in many churches pastors cannot make decisions without the board but in his case it is the opposite. For most decisions they just trust him to decide. However, for major decisions he would discuss the idea with them. He was not expecting the board to delegate the decision-making authority to him. He mentioned that he was open to suggestions from the board at any time because he is not a “one man

army.” Sometimes he has to “pull it out of them” when it comes to sharing opinions about decisions to be made. He keeps them informed of decisions such as renting the use of church premises to other congregations. But if it is about “planting trees” or “painting the sanctuary a different color” the pastor’s team would “just do it.” The trust level and working relationship applies to the trustees. If they looked into selling the property, the trustees would be praying with the pastor about it. The decision would be made as a group.

The church is considering new outreach projects in the community. They have helped the Twin City Missions pantry in the past. They would like to have their own, but they do not yet have the resources to do it. He has seen how food pantries work in previous churches. One of them had even a “walk-in freezer” to distribute frozen goods. His past experiences have influenced where he puts his efforts. He elaborated on two other projects he has been involved in. At one time, he invested \$ 1000 to bring a child evangelist and organize an event but there were no children in the apartments they targeted, but the people who attended were mainly college students. He also planned a concert for 300 people, but only 60 came. He has turned his efforts from projects to building relationships in the community. These relationships take longer, but they give better results. He added that families that do not go to their church know and appreciate their services. One person in the community thanked him because he had been of help to “keep his marriage together.”

As a new congregation that has merged three churches, Paul’s decision-making style is not heavily influenced by tradition. As a leader of his congregation, he has the

trust of the board to make most of the decisions. However, he delegates different ministry activities to his ministry team and involves the leaders in the team to weigh in on his decision-making.

Ministry Meeting Observation

The participants at the meeting were the pastor's wife, office manager and youth pastor. He listened to ideas and suggestions from the different participants regarding the different events and programs that the leaders were heading. He was continually supportive of different approaches with sentences such as "that works for me", and "I am fine with the bake sale," while showing support of the delegated authority he had conferred on them. Phrases such as "let me know what you decide on" showed how much he trusted the team in the selection of the Christmas program. His approach to decision-making was to listen to different options, ask questions for clarification and making suggestions, even offering his house for a fund raising event. His support for ideas such as running a talent show to raise funds came from statements like "I think it's a great idea." He concluded the talent show was a great idea that could generate a lot of money for the church, as it had been tried successfully twice before. Paul showed trust in the youth pastor to preach on two consecutive services. Paul ended the meeting with a time of teaching on leadership using the book "the Fred factor." The participants received the message well, as it shed light on the factors of effective leadership such as awareness, motivation, action, and impact.

Timothy

Timothy was 56 years old. Even though he was not brought up in a Christian family he felt the call to ministry at the age of 19, four years after giving his life to Christ. He has worked as a pastor for 28 years in many small and medium sized churches. He currently pastors a 400 member church.

Some of the biggest challenges he faced as a pastor were the \$ 1 and \$ 2 million fund raising programs to build church facilities. He added that the greatest challenge is to raise people up as leaders, discerning their gifts, and working with staff. He shared that he has not had any conflicts with people undermining his ministry or with boards that were asking him to leave like other pastors.

Timothy stated that his denomination has a structure for decision-making based on reason, experience and tradition, and Scripture. He noticed that conflict arises when people equate Scripture to the rest as it allows them to “substitute their own opinion, and not what God has said.” He added that sometimes committees become “black holes and inefficient” because they do not seem to “really follow where the Holy Spirit is leading.” He gave an example of how his leadership had gone through a “year-long process” to discern whether or not to build a new sanctuary in order to have unity if not unanimity.

He has not experienced members’ reluctance to move into new things, in part, due to his approach to introducing change. He likes to discern the right time for a project. This led him to wait two years to build trust and get to know people before introducing anything new. He disagreed with methodologies that introduce changes by merely making announcements or taking surveys because they fail to consider the

position of the congregants. He also did not see much value in using the pure form of the Robert's Rules of Order since the group dynamics of the church encourage discussing issues before motions are passed. Timothy's rule is to wait if they are not "at a place where they have consensus." That allows time for people to pray about it and build patience so that everyone can discern God's will. He explained "you want to show people that unity matters." He mentioned that they may not achieve unanimity, that is, "people may vote for something but not agree completely" but trusting that "this is what the group believes in as the goal and objective."

Members' influence most of his decisions. He does not dictate or force people to do things but brings issues to the body. He recognized that checks and balances for his decisions may be wrong, especially in matters concerning money which he prefers not to "touch it or count it." But the finance committee is the one bringing people together to compile a budget based on the input of all the committees and staff. The approved budget gives the authority to spend money.

Timothy has not experienced much resistance to new changes. He has tried to get people involved and get their buy-in. He believes in building trust before making changes and sowing seeds. The biggest change the congregation had to accept was his five ministry team structure. The administrative structure has remained the familiar denominational structure.

He has a different view on church traditions' relevancy to the mission of the church. Timothy reasoned that traditions do not need to match the mission of the church. That means the pastor has to discern what traditions are "a waste of time." For instance,

his church had a Halloween Carnival tradition that involved a lot of effort and some money. They distributed candy and had people dress up in funny “or sometimes weird costumes.” He reasoned that it was not the calling of the church and was ineffective. He went to say jokingly that “if it brings people to church I will dress up as anything!” People were surprised but they stopped the tradition after seven years. He concluded that it is difficult to give people permission to stop doing what is “a waste of time or ineffective.” This approach has resulted in a new direction for the children’s ministry. He also made a major change in the worship service that is more according to a Scriptural pattern and was waiting to how “people react to that.”

Timothy discussed the continued use of tested programs that give less results but are difficult to change. He mentioned that their approach on stewardship campaigns or fund raising has been difficult to change. They have tried different methods (debit cards) or different seasons (Lent season) to engage the congregation in making a pledge to give the whole year but were not very successful. He is trying to have a time of the year to teach about stewardship as part of Christian life so that “people have to face it” and “deal with it even if they don’t want to.” He reasoned that “you try to get people to that place... where they let the Holy Spirit speak to them and they take seriously what it means to make Jesus Lord of their lives.”

Timothy said that groupthink in the church, that is people who agree for fear of disagreeing or because they trust that someone else will have the answer, happened “all the time.” He noticed that to overcome, it a leader needs to realize that the members of the church have experience and wisdom. They need to be listened to because their way

of doing things “could just be the perfect approach.” He is aware of the challenge as he sees it “present all the time in everything we do.” Timothy emphasized his focus of “how you get there matters” as he invites people to be on board, giving them time to be part of discernment and asking questions. He hoped the leaders will reach a point where they become owners of their ideas and therefore buy into them. When working with his staff, he has sometimes stepped in to direct employees to go a different way. This is because “the person that has the ultimate responsibility is the pastor.” Sometimes he does not step in and requires the leader to make the changes in that area where they are dissatisfied.

Timothy’s decision-making style in meetings involves accountability, support, listening to each other, honoring each other, efficiency, and discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading you following the reason-experience-tradition within Scripture model. His priority is to value relationships before making decisions. He does not mind if the church fails to reach a decision as long as relationships are maintained. He reasoned that relationships are important because a church is made of volunteers who do not need to be there. That is why “you need to value people.” He also subscribes to an approach of empowerment that enables leaders to make decisions so that he can focus on how the decisions are made while seeing God work in people’s lives.

Ministry Meeting Observation

The meeting with Timothy, his associate pastor and other ministry leaders started with a devotional. It was highly structured and Timothy’s role was to keep the group on target. The hierarchical structure of the church has delineated the roles of the leadership

members. Most of the decisions are made out of the staff meeting at other ministry meetings. Timothy was listening most of the time, redirecting the conversation in order to facilitate the progress of the meeting. He expressed his preferences for certain ideas but more as a colleague than from his position of authority. At one point he expressed dislike for an idea to show the movie “Elf” for Christmas but mentioned he would not overstep his boundaries. This was appreciated later on, when the associate pastor publicly mentioned the decision for the choice of the movie was not the pastor’s but that of the ministry leader. Timothy’s style was to listen and clarify different positions, such as in the purchase of a larger screen to be approved by the Board of Trustees. He expressed a firm position on certain implementation issues such as the quality of the food for the church fund raiser “I want the food catered and someone good, so the member will say that it is extraordinary.” Since most decisions were made at earlier meetings the staff meeting was mainly to update each other and the pastor about progress on activities. Timothy comments at the end of the meeting underlined his desire for such meetings to be places to support and be accountable to each other, to pray together, show empathy and “direct the meeting” to “stay on track” and not “waste our time.”

Victor

Victor was 58 years old. He has been pastoring over 15 years in three different churches. He is an ordained minister within the denomination. He has a Master’s Degree in Counselling Psychology. Before changing careers he was very involved in church work while pursuing his career as a police officer. He mentioned that his job is basically

the same. Since his official title was that of ‘peace officer’ he is still restoring peace in chaotic situations as a pastor.

He mentioned that biggest challenge has always been dealing with people. He defined his job as “loving the unlovable.” He likes to receive, in his church, difficult people that even may have been asked to leave other churches. He added that in many churches you find two groups, the “old school” and the newcomers. The challenge is to enable both groups to work together.

Victor’s previous experience as a police officer helps him deal with important decisions the congregation finds difficult to follow. He learned to write ideas down and let them rest for a couple of weeks to see whether he would still be passionate about them. In the church he found that trying to implement an idea without buy-in from the congregation was “a waste of time.” He decided to share ideas, then keep quiet for a while and pray so that God would move people to want to take action. He can then facilitate the initiative that would be led by someone else. He sees himself more a leader that empowers, encourages and mentors other people into action. He reflected on this approach “you don’t do as much but you don’t have as many failures either because God is in it.” He does not assume he is the only person God speaks to.

Victor shared experiences about people wanting to follow traditional ways instead of embracing change. In one case the congregation managed to adapt to change in the worship from a pastor-led contemporary style to a choir-led traditional style during a few months. There was also the time the church venue had become too small that the previous pastor led the congregation to worship in a gym the church owned for

ministering to youth. There was a huge outcry and many people left the church. When Victor arrived the people that remained were still divided. They did not know whether to renovate the gym to make it into a sanctuary or go back to the smaller venue. The pastor suggested to take all the cash from the bank “put it in a big pile and burn it because it was causing too much division in the church.” He also suggested leaving the money in the bank and asked the members not to mention it for six months. Victor personally visited every member to find out what they would really want to do. Once the vote was taken they decided unanimously to renovate the gym.

They did not face the problem of starting a program that had been successful at a previous church but was not accepted in the new church. This would not happen in his denomination because they are, for the most part, led by lay people and not by pastors. Pastors are there to serve and facilitate leadership. He added that they do not work as CEOs and that if “you don’t have buy in from the congregation, you are not going to be successful unless you own the church or have a franchise sort of thing.” He concluded that in his church, pastors provide many opportunities for members to get involved but they do not force people.

He has faced the dilemma of keeping traditions that seem to be irrelevant to the vision of the church. He is sure it happens everywhere. He shared an example where the issue mattered to him. It was a Sunday school conducted by a church leader in a venue where they were selling alcohol. He approached the matter by not being confrontational but just by sharing his opinion through a story and praying that God would convict the heart of a leader to ask him more about it. Victor commented that tried and tested

programs may be difficult to change. For instance “if it’s the money people, you are not going to change it and you’d be crazy to try.” He found a better strategy: leave that group alone and try something different with a different group. He continued sharing about the popular mindset of church members that would not try anything new because as he put it “we can’t do that, we’ve never done it before.”

Victor’s style of decision-making consists of sowing ideas into people’s hearts and praying for God to speak to them. He sees himself more as a guide, who invites people to participate in ministry. He also believes in approaching people one-on-one to achieve unity, and in mentoring and helping leaders in the church take action in different ministries.

Stuart

At the time of the interview, Stuart was 48 years old and had served as a pastor for the last 20 years. He was born into a Christian family who attended church several times a week. He stated that he became aware of the existence of God and of God speaking to him at an early age.

He shared his belief that being a pastor was all about solving big challenges. In one of his church appointments, attendance was declining; he was challenged to close the church or “find new purpose and new life for it.” He decided on the latter option and the church not only survived, but thrived. He also faced a significant challenge with one church that numerically was strong but financially was quite weak. Eventually the group had to be disbanded and the members asked to join other churches. The congregation went through a significant change that they found difficult to accept. Their financial

situation forced them to share a building with another church, and they had to vote to change the service day from Sunday to Saturday. Though the vote passed, after they implemented the change 75% of the members left. However, they were also able to change their worship style from a choir-based praise to a worship style that personally engaged the members. On another occasion, Stuart served in a very prosperous church, and shared that these types of ministries were always led by demands from the congregation. In one church, there were separate ministries for accountants, lawyers, and entrepreneurs; a subsequent church had extravagant fellowships with abundant food several times a year, including feasts for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and many other holidays. Those events were "shaped by the needs of the people," as well as the members' training in Christian education and financial literacy. In high-income churches, the pastor enabled leaders to conduct ministries. Stuart believed his role was to "equip people to give them the spiritual resources they need to do the work God has called them to do." In low-income churches, he found that leaders tended to want more handholding in the ministries. The members did not see themselves as "self-initiating leaders." They wanted pastors who would come to their "birthday parties and listen to their problems."

Stuart wholeheartedly agreed that throughout his ministry, traditions were kept even when they were irrelevant to the mission of the church. For instance, congregations sang songs that "theologically do not make sense... in a form of English that is foreign to the people." Sometimes, the meaning of certain traditions had long been lost. Young people might not even know the purpose of Holy Communion. Even the terminology

used in many churches was outdated and irrelevant; he gave the phrase “church committee” as an example, arguing instead that they should be referred to as “work groups.” He offered other examples, explaining that there were many traditions attached to preaching. He considered much preaching to be “irrelevant, outdated, and ineffective” but said “we still do it, [the] getting up and talking.” He reflected upon this comment, explaining further that “the question is not ‘how do I become a preacher?’” but rather should be “how do I communicate truth?” The Bible “doesn’t say how we do that.” He added that in some churches they “at least have screens” so they can use visuals, a technique he felt was preferred by those aged 40 or younger.

Stuart felt that every church retained programs that had grown less effective over the years, but such practices were difficult to change. He continued that “preaching for 45 minutes” was an ineffective way to reach and connect with people, of “get[ting] them to understand and apply” the Word. He went on to say that investing a lot of money in buildings was another common church tradition, but “not necessarily the most effective way to reach people for the kingdom of God.” He questioned the usefulness of investing upwards of \$4 million in a building used only a few times a week.

Stuart also did not believe in the tradition of going to the pastor’s office and waiting there to talk to him. He felt it was “an outdated model.” He preferred for the staff to go out and meet people and relate directly to them. He concluded: “we are providing places for the leaders of the church to go in and hide from the world.” He enthusiastically agreed that a “convent mindset” existed, and added that the “church is the only institution that still does that.” Other fields, such as medicine, have found ways

to bring ER units to the people. He suggested that churches should become “community gathering places,” and also bring the church to where people gather “to do life.” He reflected that traditions have always influenced the way Christians measured the success of a pastor. They tended to believe that a big building or an office with its own shower were indicators of quality, instead of the impact the church had on the community. He confessed that as a pastor he struggled with that concept, because “you need to handle being judged by your peers as less successful, as you are using a different standard.”

He addressed the current relevance of the church, mentioning the use of movie theaters as church venues. He felt it was an excellent idea because “that is one of the places in our society” and “a great example of being innovative for the sake of relevance.”

The conversation then shifted to the issue of leadership. Stuart’s opinion was that leadership came from personality. A dictatorial personality led to a dictatorial pastoring style. He believed in teamwork and empowering everyone in the congregation. He said, “let’s get the ideas; let’s discover everybody’s talents and let’s all bring our resources to the table.” He did not mind if the resulting discussions included argument and debate. He believed that “fights [were] sometimes necessary for growth.” He went on to say that pastoral authority should not be based on the person’s previous successes, but rather on the role that person played in the body of Christ. He found questionable a situation in which a retired high executive from Exxon wanted to lead the church based on his previous success in the corporate world. Stuart believed in shared authority and accountability. He added that he would not undermine the authority of a person working

in maintenance regarding his or her decisions about changes to the building, nor would he countermand the authority of a Sunday school teacher placing chairs in a configuration they believed most conducive to learning. He concluded that everyone must submit to the authority of Christ and remain in “a place of humility so that they are willing to listen to others” and respect their authority. He remarked that the lack of a supreme earthly authority caused divisions in the American church. He felt that submission to Christ, so vital in his perspective, happened only when one had a “relationship with Jesus Christ.” He believed, “you know Him through His word and through His Spirit;” it was only then that “people submit to the body of Christ as this is what He commands.”

Stuart talked about the challenges posed by certain people who tended to dominate meetings. He shared that “every church has that,” and that it was the job of the pastor to take care of situations where people were ineffective and dysfunctional in their work but “influential, and their opinion holds.” He added that most pastors might not be equipped to deal with such situations, as they did not have the emotional and spiritual resources to know what to do. This led to “anger, depression, and moral failure.”

Stuart shared his style in decision-making and dealing with differences in doctrine. He did not like to get involved and take sides, because he believed people ultimately “want to win.” He remarked that “American culture is about winning,” and reasoned that people are not interested in being truly right, because that would mean knowing how Christ would handle that kind of debate. Instead, he did not engage in those types of debates. Rather, he tried to use such situations to draw people closer to

God. Stuart concluded that his approach “is not well appreciated or well accepted in the church” because people tended to be more interested in hearing him say who was right or wrong. He added that the church in America was split by politics, that the members made winning and losing personal. It was more than losing the argument, because their pride, ego, and self-esteem were all tied up in the argument, a mindset he considered “of the world.”

Stuart described his style of ministry as one of equipping church members to make decisions in their areas of authority, regardless of their respective backgrounds. He realized that many church traditions might not represent the most effective ways of communicating truth (such as a 45-minute sermon given in a church building). He was more interested in enabling his members to submit to the authority of Christ and participate in the types of ministries most needed by the congregation. When making decisions, he felt his first purpose was always to help people get closer to God.

Ministry Meeting Observation

Stuart belonged to a mainstream denomination. He mentioned that it was a pastor-led but laity-driven church. In the observed meeting, two lay leaders were at the head of the table; the assembly was attended by 20 leaders from various different departments. The church had not held such a broad meeting for a long time. Since Stuart had been at the church only a few months, he wanted to conduct a meeting that would help the leaders get in touch with their respective missions. He explained to the group the main objectives of the church: to be in prayer, invite people, connect with them, develop new members, and help them in service. He mentioned that his job was “to

remind you and help you see who you are in the Lord,” and “expand the decision-making and leadership responsibilities” such that the burden of running the church would not rest on just a few people. He called this the installation of a “let them do it mindset.” Stuart mentioned that it was the Holy Spirit that needed to drive their agenda. The church needed to “prepare ... for the next pastor” because “the work of the ministry does not happen around one person.” He mentioned that the church worked with “high mutual accountability and shared responsibility.” In the meeting, it was agreed that the executive committee would also act as a nominating committee to recruit people for ministry appointments that needed filling. The meeting was conducted using Robert’s Rules of Order to vote on motions. The pastor shared that “probably everyone in this room will be asked to serve in some capacity” because he felt it would lead them to “get into the community.” Stuart listened to the entire meeting, allowing the lay leaders to discuss the issues and vote on them. The denomination had a book of discipline displayed on the main table, but it was never used. At the end of the meeting, one of the ministry leaders spoke regarding ministry gifts, and provided a questionnaire on that subject. The intent was to discover and align the diverse gifts of the different leaders.

Sandra

At the time of the interview, Sandra had been an ordained minister for 13 years and the leading pastor at a local church for the last four years. Before being ordained, she managed a center where families stayed when their children were in the hospital. As the live-in manager at the center, she spent time with families experiencing low points in

their lives, but at that time she could not offer them sacraments. She became ordained in order to offer them the spiritual services of communion, baptism, and burial.

Sandra remarked that facing great challenges was an everyday occurrence for her. She then laughed at her comment. She believed her current church to be “a place of kindness,” where people did not gossip or fight with one another. If she made changes, people would often quickly respond in a positive fashion. It was the financial issues faced by the church that were her greatest concern.

When asked about important issues the congregation did not understand, Sandra returned to the topic of finances. She said she felt overwhelmed, because even though God provides, “you got to write a check, honey.” She went on to say that “you got to help God do that.” Her church had expanded from “just three people doing all the work and killing themselves, to six people on the staff.” When she asked for another priest, a youth minister, and an administrative assistant, no one disagreed with her (which she found surprising). The congregation “loved the idea” but did not understand that this meant they had to “put more money on the plate.” Sandra also mentioned that she had grown up in a tradition where congregants were made to feel guilty about not giving; ministers often used this type of language: “He just died on a cross for you. Can’t you write a check?” She refused to do the same in her church. At a later point in our conversation, she shared that handling finances was “the nature of the work.” There was some good in that, because it kept her thinking of her “dependence on God,” and that His subjects needed to trust Him.

Sandra remembered one significant issue that divided part of her church. The church went through hard times financially because they were dealing with a debt on a particular property. The solution was clear to her, and to most of the congregation. The property was sold. However, some of the members got very angry about the sale, even though the very survival of the church was at a stake. One family even quit coming to church over this issue. She reasoned that it was about legacy. Some people believed it was a good idea and gave money towards that particular property. To Sandra, the issue was more about “their personhood.” They wanted to be able to say that they “helped build that thing.” People became mired in the idea of erecting a building, more so than building a group. Sandra reasoned that most people in churches in the South still thought of such issues as a “Constantinian thing.” She concluded that a building was more tangible to them, a place where the congregant could “place his name on a plaque,” which was preferable to “spending money on a food program.” Sandra connected the sale of the property “at the height of the market” with the payment of a church debt and the hiring of more staff. According to her it was the right thing to do, but it was not understood to be so by everyone. She also brought up that she was the first female rector in the church, and that her gender may have been a factor. She mentioned that many families who got upset eventually came back, were once again active in the church, and continued to contribute financially. Sandra learned from this experience that “every decision [would not] be met with agreement and joy.” The process was a humbling but positive experience for her, as she struggled with the desire to make everybody like her.

Sandra's denomination was based on tradition. Meetings were based on a prayer book, a particular message, and communion once a month. The most significant changes to the church came in the late 1970's when a new prayer book was introduced, communion was switched to every Sunday (instead of monthly), and the church began allowing women priests. At the time of the interview, the denomination allowed a folk group to play on Sundays instead of the usual organist. However, they were not allowed to do anything more revolutionary. The reason, as Sandra put it, was "the bishop would not allow us to." Some of the biggest recent changes included extending the services to two hours, having the members raise their hands and sing with a praise band, and inviting the members to dance.

Despite their reluctance to change, Sandra described her church as the most flexible one in which she had served. As an example, she cited its involvement in interfaith conversations with other religious organizations. The church also worked with another denomination to help with a food pantry ministry once a month, participated in Habitat for Humanity projects, and helped the local Catholic church with an immigration network. She added that not everybody got involved, but those who didn't did not criticize those who chose to participate. Though she believed she was partially responsible for the increase in activity, she also felt that the congregation was ready to get involved, and joked that "a monkey could have been the rector of the church."

Sandra explained that the previous pastor had not been very involved with the congregation, and this lack of leadership might have contributed to the lay leaders' willingness to rise up and get involved. She felt that in the long term, though, the lack of

an involved leader could be dangerous. When she joined the church and heard about the existing ministries and the enthusiasm of the members involved, she was careful to give them affirmation and encourage them in their work.

Sandra shared that her church had tried to start a new service in the afternoons in an effort to attract students. They used a guitar instead of an organ, and the dress code allowed more casual attire. When asked about traditions that were retained even though they were irrelevant to the church's vision, Sandra reflected back on the dress code. She believed that what youth, especially, were supposed to do and to wear acted as "a barrier in some ways." She mentioned that in other churches people would "freak out" if the younger members attended in flip-flops or formal attire such as black shoes.

Sandra admitted that while she loved real books, she understood that some young members wanted to use their phones to follow up on the liturgy. Even though she loved tradition, she admitted that it could be a barrier to "modern people," and young people in particular. She continued that the language used in the prayer book in 1979 was at that point antiquated, and "removed from how people live now." She described the challenges associated with retaining the identity of the denomination, while resisting the urge to go back to the church's ways when the denomination began in the 1600's. She concluded that her current urban church did not struggle with those issues. They already had the participation of many students who did not care about formal attire when attending church. She added that there were between 20 and 30 students who liked to follow the traditional services, instead of the more contemporary types provided by other ministries of the same denomination. However, in her church they provided a variety of

services to different groups of people; the goal was that worship on Wednesday night “look[ed] different than worship on Sunday morning.”

Sandra found that there were ministries that were difficult to change, even though they received diminishing results over the years. She described a prayer meeting at 6:30am on Tuesdays that was attended by six people out of a congregation of 600. Yet she believed that if they stopped the meeting, “it would break their hearts.” She continued that people in the church lived on their memories of past successful ministries. People thought about the days 30 years ago when a hundred children would fill the Sunday school classes. They were, ironically, the same people who neglected to bring their own children to church on Sundays. Sandra’s church decided to have a combined Sunday school that was attended by more than 20 members of different ages. All participated in the activities. They had an outside female ordained minister from a different denomination who did “art gospel” and got members involved in crafts while explaining a Bible story.

In reflecting on her decision-making style, Sandra recognized that it was important to delegate, let people initiate ministries, and make their own decisions (while not having a complete hands-off philosophy). She believed it was important to let people continue to do what was “working fine.” However, the “trickier thing” was to “root out” a volunteer who loved the ministry but was not good at it.

Ministry Meeting Observation

The meeting took place at 1:00pm. Sandra had arranged for finger food to be available for the leaders present. The leadership meeting was attended by the associate

pastor, office manager, and four other ministry leaders from the administrative and finance departments. It was a structured meeting with a relaxed atmosphere that included laughter at some points. Sandra began with a meditation from the Bible. An agenda was handed out and leaders shared their reports on different topics. Sandra described certain budgetary points regarding a deficit “on paper” for 2015 that would be covered as financing came in later in the year. She said that they needed divine guidance to find additional funds, but that “prayers are working” and they had seen an increase.

The proposed deficit was criticized by one of the leaders. Sandra mentioned that over the “last five years we have not experienced a deficit, but we have caught up.” Later on in the year they might have to reconsider stopping some of the ministries they conducted in the first half of 2015. Sandra explained that they would continue to encourage the congregation to pledge to the church, since the number of pledges had decreased over the previous year. The meeting used Robert’s Rules of Order more than once (but in a rushed fashion) to ensure that the two decisions the group reached were approved and recorded in the minutes. She expressed an appreciation for the leaders’ various ideas, such as keeping logs of the time spent by volunteers and volunteer hours to match with donations.

George

At the time of the interview, George was 38 years old and had been pastoring for 11 years in the same church. He had formal training at the Dallas Theological Seminary and served in a local congregation with over 1,500 members. He decided to try ministry work because he was heavily involved in other types of church work. His employment

outside the church involved dealing with people, so he tried a one-year internship at a local church. There, he found his passion and could see a better fit for his gift. That love for the ministry was also confirmed during his time in seminary.

George's church was run by a number of different groups. At the top, seven elders composed the strategic team that was responsible for 25% of the most important decisions. His church also employed other key people who were in charge of finances, human resources, and ministries. His church adopted a multi-site approach, which meant that members met at two different locations but shared certain resources. The total congregation of the church was over 5,000 members. George expressed that his church tried very hard to define different levels of authority. Different groups decided on issues without consulting the pastors. Even though the church had a hierarchical model, it was a flat organization where people could weigh in heavily on decisions depending upon their area of expertise. For instance, in the children's ministry the members who studied and taught early education at Texas A&M and had doctorates in the subject sat in on the decision-making groups to help, instruct, and give ideas and feedback.

George believed he faced significant challenges on a regular basis. He had witnessed a much accelerated growth in attendance, to the point that they could not fit any more people in the building. They had to decide whether to form a new church, construct a larger building, or try a multi-site approach. After one year spent on research, weighing the pros and cons, consulting various experts, and praying, they decided to try the multi-site approach; it was considered to be quite innovative for their historically traditional church.

The second great challenge George faced involved his assistant pastor. He had been hired to run operations and ministries in the new building, but soon after being hired found out he had cancer. The church helped him to get through his last two years of dealing with the illness before he finally passed away. Effectively, George had to learn about decision-making without an assistant. The challenge was to make many fast-paced decisions about organization and ministry structures without the manpower to properly research the options. The associate pastor was very experienced and brought with him great wisdom, but George could not count on him. George has since hired a new associate pastor who took over running the ministries at a strategic level.

George considered his decision regarding a multi-church site to be one of the more important decisions he had to make; it was also a difficult one for the congregation to follow. His job was to get the congregation excited about something “they had never seen, and it was very hard to imagine what it would look like.” They had detailed vision casting, and many one-on-one meetings with key people. Yet it was still a difficult decision, because it was a “leap in the dark.” Their traditional congregation and church elders were not used to changes of that magnitude. George described two advantages he benefitted from when dealing with this change. The first was mature elders who were willing to “take steps of faith that [were] very stretching.” The second was being in a university town, where there was “generally a greater willingness to think about problems from opposite perspectives.” He reasoned that the academic environment helped his traditional congregation be more willing to try new things.

Yet George described other people in his congregation who were not able to embrace change. For instance, the discipleship process used a model called Bible study, which was more academic than other approaches. However, he felt that what people really wanted was “to be at home and see people live their faith.” They wanted to know about the Bible, but not spend two hours examining a passage. Instead, they wanted to learn how to raise their children, have meals, and conduct fellowships together. They wanted to talk about accountability and encourage one another to walk in faith and purity. However, he continued, there was a group that had been leading the Bible studies for 20 years and they could not imagine doing anything else. The idea of moving to the new model was very scary for them. George explained that unlike other churches that closed down ministries, his church decided to give options to the congregation. They allowed the traditional Bible study to continue, but they also decided to put more resources into the home church ministry because they saw a greater need there. He recognized that though it was an inefficient model, they preferred it because it provided more places for people to lead, grow, develop their spiritual gifts, and disciple other people.

George described his church’s discipleship structure and vision for the church as focusing on developing coaches. These coaches then developed the leaders of the congregation. That had been the main approach for the previous 15 years, and had yielded an unexpected level of growth. George referenced the “budgetary reality” of his congregation; two thirds of the church were college students, and the congregation was bigger than the staff could support. This forced them to empower people. He brought up

their mission statement of “raising our next generation of leaders,” hoping that the leaders would do the work of the ministry instead of the staff.

The congregation often influenced George’s decisions. He remembered how the home church ministry was started by the congregation and staff, who believed that this was the type of ministry they needed in their lives. Another example was the Easter Extravaganza, which was a type of fair set up in the car park and designed such that the neighbors could visit with their children. Both the idea and the manpower came from the congregation. Moreover, once the associate pastor got sick, the leaders in the congregation stepped up and helped George in his day-to-day ministry. George concluded that the congregation “has often been able to have influence over decisions” and that influence was exercised at both the elder and deacon levels. He also described how their worship style had changed from traditional hymns to contemporary music led by a band of young musicians. He even mentioned that he often used Facebook to ask questions of the members, the answers to which he used as parts of his sermons.

When asked about the times traditions were retained even though they seemed irrelevant, he emphatically answered “yes, absolutely. I would guess every church does.” He shared the example of how the elders took turns leading the congregation in prayer. That is something that worked well with a congregation of 100 members, but became more difficult with a congregation of 1,500 because “it puts pressure on them and it does not work really well.” He reasoned that the main purpose was to connect the elders to the congregation, identifying them so that the congregation would know them. However, he felt that there were more effective ways to achieve the same goal, such as by using video

clips featuring both the elder and his or her family. George believed that a small church might keep traditions that no longer worked when the church grew in number, but “it is difficult for people to leave behind the form until they understand what the underlying purpose was,” and that there could be another way to accomplish that purpose.

George did not believe that a program not doing well was a valid reason to stop it. He mentioned that “it’s an opportunity for [the leaders] to lead in something they care deeply about.” There were a group of people in the church who were passionate about the Awana children’s ministry. The pastors allowed these individuals to get the project started. George explained that it was not a part of the vision of the church and no staff members were involved, but it was a great success and the pastors’ children even attended the ministry meetings. According to him, if the program complemented the church’s vision, the pastors preferred to empower the members to lead it. They did that by providing the resources, facilities, and anything else that was necessary.

Looking back into the church’s recent history, George summarized what he felt to be the key element that led his church: the huge increase in people that led to the change in venue and structure of the church, resulting in it becoming the first multi-site church in town. Other factors affecting his decision-making process were the high percentage of the congregation made up of students, and the sudden illness of his associate pastor. He reasoned that these types of factors could work to “drive” creativity and “grow faith.” He mentioned that “it is important for a church to always be stretched,” and “to give away ministry to people who are non-staff.” He also shared that the church had to connect with the students’ generation, as they were likely to be

experiencing new challenges; if the church “settle[d] into a comfortable routine” they could easily become obsolete.

George concluded that all of the challenges he faced led him to change his decision-making style. Given his academic background, he felt his greatest strength was analysis. However, he needed time to properly analyze problems and found that his rushed schedule required him to rely more on his intuition and to trust God for the pressing decisions he had to make on a daily basis. He became aware that “the Lord just kept adding responsibility on my plate” so he could not rely on his analytical abilities, but instead pray and trust God. He found that in his earlier years he had “misplaced pride” and too much trust in his analytical abilities. Now he trusted that God was working through him and “through the people” around him.

Emergent Themes from the Study

This study examined pastoral cognitive fixation in decision-making. Each pastor provided a unique perspective given their personal background, the denominational context, and the unique history of their local church. However, a data analysis of the interviews and meeting observations highlighted certain similarities. These similarities gave rise to the emergent themes and findings of this study. Three major similarities emerged, as follows: 1) cognitive fixation in protestant pastoral decision-making in the churches involved more participants than just the pastor, 2) cognitive fixation plays a role in how pastors perceive challenges, and 3) peculiar challenges in special church circumstances helped pastors overcome their cognitive fixation.

Emergent Theme 1: Cognitive fixation in pastoral decision-making in the church involves more areas than just the pastor, and is heavily influenced by the concepts of clergy and laity.

The first theme that emerged from participants' comments, observations, and insights was how cognitive fixation in the church impacted much more than just the pastor. It was experienced by both leaders and the congregation in different ways. Church structures delimited the types of decisions the pastors made. Victor, Malcolm, Michael, Charles, Sandra, and Timothy all belonged to denominational churches governed by the denominational committee structure. This structure included checks and balances and served to delimit the decision-making power of the pastor. For instance, in one meeting Timothy disagreed with a decision that was made regarding the choice of movie for a Christmas event, but he stated that he would "not step outside my boundaries." This revealed that cognitive fixation in decision-making was occurring at a level beyond that of the pastor. Lay leaders and congregations experienced cognitive fixation in the ways they learned, ministered, participated in decision-making processes, experienced worship, and performed outreach activities.

Since lay leaders were entrusted with decision-making powers, their willingness to learn and improve determined whether they would move beyond their current state to improve their ministries. For instance, Malcolm shared:

Our Book of Order ... is kind of the rules or discipline, the things that we follow that tell us what we can do and in some cases what we cannot do. Well, it changes every two years. And so if you knew it five years ago, it's different. If

you knew it last year, it might be different depending on when that two-year time frame happens. And so when people would say, ‘Well, we know what it says,’ okay, tell me about the directory of worship, which is the third of four sections. And what does it tell is the session’s decision on communion and what is the pastor’s decision on communion? And they couldn’t tell me. You need to come. ‘No, we’re good.’ And so there was always resistance to being educated and grown as disciples and that is a problem to me.

Malcolm confided that some leaders would refuse to administer communion outside of the church, even though they would administer it in the church:

For the leadership level, [it was important to take] communion to our homebound members, persons who are unable to get to worship and relay any given time. They’re just – their mobility is too low. Their mind is often very sharp, but they’re unable to come to worship. And so bringing what we call a Holy Feast of the Lord’s Supper to them, to their house, I had several other leaders – the ruling elders they’re like, ‘No. I’m not going to do that. I’m uncomfortable doing that.’

Michael shared an insight regarding how his congregation had not been able to move to more effective learning strategies:

Interactive discussion and small group discussion is highly more effective. It is much better received by a lot of different age groups, but especially younger age groups and young adults. In trying to change that though and say, ‘let’s do something different,’ yeah, folks would say, ‘Nope, this is the way we’ve done

this.’ And you try to make the case for it. Okay, but people aren’t learning anything. People show up because they’ve always shown up and they’re going to show up because they’ve always shown up at this particular time. They know they need to be here for this but they’re not really getting anything out of it.”

Michael noticed a pattern in his many years in ministry regarding congregants’ openness to change: “Apparently, the older we get, the less we like it. That’s been something that I’ve seen in my ministry.” In fact, age has indeed been shown to be a factor in mental rigidity (Rhodes, 2004).

Leaders can also become fixated on the ways they carry their ministries. George described the type of ministry still allowed in his church.

But we have a lot of folks who’ve been in our church for a long time, who are [from] more of an academic background. What they’ve done is they have taught Bible studies for 20 years and that’s what they do and they can’t imagine not doing that. And so for them, the thought of leaving that behind and moving to this new model is very difficult, very scary.

Sandra shared a similar story about a prayer group that had been meeting for a significant period of time.

“We have a little group that meets on Tuesday morning ... they’ve met 100 years on a Tuesday morning ... little prayer group. And it’s down to about six people because nobody wants to come to church at 6:30 in the morning on Tuesday anymore. But if we killed it, the little six who come, it would break their heart. This is probably true in all churches right now.”

Charles reflected on his attempt to start a pastoral ministry group to get leaders involved in hospital visitations commenting that the wider church doesn't know what to make of it because they are not used to it: "It's like 'why are they calling? Why are they calling me?' ...I could probably do a better job training....I was new with starting something from scratch."

Some groups of leaders and their mindsets posed challenges for pastors. They shared how it was difficult to get these leaders involved in the decision-making process. Landan struggled to get older leaders involved:

When I first came to them and their leadership ... I'd come to them; I'd say 'Hey, I need your opinion on this, what do you think?' They're like 'Why are you asking me? I don't know what to say.' So I've had to groom them to get them to expect me to ask them for their opinion first, and second I want them to freely state their insight and opinion ... I am talking about the older leaders. It wasn't an easy thing for them to accept. 'I got an opinion, it matters and I am going to be responsible for what I say.'

Paul pointed out how difficult it was to interact with leaders because they assumed that their opinions did not count, despite their pastors' openness when he shared that he is "very open to discuss with them and get their opinion and sometimes I got to pull it out of them. Like, "I want to know, tell me how you really feel about the situation" and they'll share with me."

Victor commented on how he struggled to interact with people, especially those involved in finance, to get them involved in his decision-making process: "Most of that

depends on who is in that group. If it's the money people, you're not going to change it and you'd be crazy to try. So you let them go and do their thing and then you do something different if you can."

Congregations also became fixated on certain ways of conducting church services; even small changes were not accepted. For instance, Malcom commented on his congregation's dismay at his choice not to include a certain song as the last of the Christmas service:

And Christmas Eve, I didn't know it; nobody told me. And so the first year being there back in 2009, I organized the order of worship and Silent Night was not the last song that we sang. And there was a huge uproar that 'we always do this.' Guess what? We still worship God. We're still alive. We can fix this for next year. You assumed I knew and I didn't and there we go. I said if you'd like to gather people around and talk to the organist, I'm sure they'd be willing to play Silent Night and we can gather together and sing. 'No. It's supposed to end with it.' I had no idea. And that amount of change was too much.

Stuart described difficulties with changing services from Sunday to Saturday.

We had to move our services to Saturday night instead of Sunday morning, and so that was very difficult... a difficult decision, very challenging for most people we lost, probably. They voted for it, but once the change happened and the demand of the new ministry context was upon them, we probably lost three-fourths of our congregation after that move ... yeah.

Sandra discussed the types of changes that her denomination had gone through over the years, and how it was counter to the denominational structure to allow significant deviations:

In the late 70's, when the church went to a new prayer book ... it was a new prayer book in '79 and having communion every Sunday, that was a big 'Whaaa?' and having women priests, that was 'Whaaa?' just wildly. And the older priests I know just talk about that time like it was the war. Talk about the battles ... So I don't, at any of the churches I've served I haven't, because the nature of the liturgy at the Episcopal church doesn't allow for wild sorts of swings. We change a little, like: 'Hey let's have a, we're going to have the folk group play this Sunday instead of our organist, or the organist is going to play this instead of that,' but it's nothing that's so revolutionary. It's not; that's just not the nature of our church. The bishop wouldn't allow us to ... we're all going to wave our hands and sing [or have a] praise band.

Many pastors also recognized that a type of groupthink tends to happen in church. This occurs when the group dynamics that people experience under certain circumstances, such as working with a charismatic leader, influence the group to fixate on the leader's idea without looking into possible alternatives (Janis, 1972). A group is vulnerable when it is protected from outside opinions, and when the group members share similar backgrounds and experiences (Janis, 1972). Timothy believed it "happens all the time." He tried to avoid it by waiting before his decision was made and praying about it. He asked questions based on his "personality and experience" to uncover

hidden reasons for disagreements. He added: “I gave recognition and honor to the person that didn’t think like everybody else.” Stuart went further, stating that he believed groupthink happened in his church “and every church has that, even healthy churches.” He discovered in a very short time that there were people who were “ineffective and dysfunctional” but “popular and influential,” and their “opinion holds.” He added that most pastors were not equipped to deal with groupthink; “they don’t have the tool and they don’t have the spiritual and emotional resources to know how to deal with that kind of conflict.” Stuart admitted that his way of dealing with groupthink was “hardly ever satisfactory to people in the church, because people in the church want to win. They do not want to win an argument; they want to win.” He explained that “American culture is about winning.”

Mental automaticity can also be seen in the type and manner of ministries carried out over the years. Some programs went far beyond their usefulness. In mental automaticity, individuals are unable to break from the traditional patterns or ways of solving problems, even though the underlying elements of the problem may have changed (Bilalić, McLeod, & Gobet, 2010; Luchins, 1942). For instance, Charles shared that:

When the programs have stopped, it’s usually because everyone is just tired of doing it. And sometimes it lost its purpose or it’s gotten away from the original purpose and it becomes an end in itself rather than actually serving what God would [have] wanted to do.

Charles gave an example regarding an outreach activity that was not fulfilling the purpose the church intended:

The example, I think, of something we stopped here this year was that [in] the Thanksgiving program ... they would give food to people. But there was no real connection to the people that we were serving, and it was just kind of like ‘Well, here’s a meal,’ and then they leave.

He reasoned that this was “because it costs a lot more of ourselves to relate to somebody, whereas just giving a handout and then running away ... it doesn’t involve us that much.”

Paul also discussed two different “tried and tested” outreach activities that offered little in the way of results. His solution seemed to have been influenced by prior knowledge and expertise (Smith, 2003; Wiley, 1998).

We went out into the community and we had balloons that we were giving out to the kids to invite them to a kids’ church, and I spent 1,000 dollars bringing in the best kids’ evangelist available, and I’m talking about top of the line. So, I know the ministry is going to be good and so we’re going to try to bring people, so we gave out balloons. We knocked on four apartment complexes and only found one family that had children ... one family. All of them were college students that were foreign students that were coming. So it’s all college and career and even some young adults that lived in these apartments, so it had changed; whereas five years ago, those apartments were more children-based and now they’re more college based. So that whole outreach didn’t work.

He also shared that

we did a couple of concerts; we did an outdoor concert. We had a big semi-truck. We lifted down the gate, the side of the whole semi-truck went down for a stage, and we had a concert. We had maybe 60 people come to it. You'd think there [would] be maybe 200 or 300. It's free. So we did win a family from the effort that is still a part of our church today.

Many pastors shared that congregants held on to traditions without knowing the real reasons for them. Malcom explained one of these traditions:

Apparently one of the traditions of the church was to... somebody knew calligraphy and so they would grovel on one of the larger shells like a clam shell and they would write on the inside of the clam shell a scripture passage. And they would always give it to a person who is newly baptized. So I asked, why do you do this? 'Because we've always done it.' Okay, so why do you do it? 'Well, I don't know.' So okay, what does it mean to you? 'Well, I knew that I gave one to my kids and so it's exciting to give it to somebody else.' But what does it mean to you? And there was ... there was no real explanation that I found. And people did it because they had always done it. And so I invited the ruling board to session to make the decision whether we continue that or not, and there was some great resistance but they couldn't explain to me why.

Emergent Theme 2: Cognitive fixation plays a role in how pastors perceive challenges.

The second theme that emerged from this analysis was that cognitive fixation played a role in how pastors perceived challenges. They tended to emphasize concrete issues, which included church buildings, financial issues such as budgets, fund raisers, and the number of members who attended or stopped attending church. As Landan put it, “the greatest thing that we have to be ... as a pastor is [someone who is] building faith and building strength and a spiritual relationship with God.” Instead, intangible issues such as spiritual development to help people know God better, did not arise that often. And when the topic came up, pastors did not develop their strategies or measurement of success.

When asked about the greatest challenges they faced, many pastors quickly referred to issues involving church buildings and finances. Smaller churches (such as those pastored by Timothy, Paul, or Landan) tended, over the years, to focus on buildings. Larger churches (such as George’s) faced similar challenges due to an unanticipated increase in the number of members. Landan described the issue involving a building they owned as one of his first great challenges:

... we were actually only running about 35 people and I was asked if we could afford to buy land and prepare to build a building (which is what we've got next door here), when we were only running 35 to 40 people and had no money in the bank. And so, that was something that kind of fundamentally shifted our vision and expectations because here we are running 40 people. I'm full time out in the secular world doing work, making a living. And then we're asked to see if we can

do this. Of course I was up to the challenge, but I wasn't sure if the church was up to the challenge because we're talking about a project that would be about \$100,000 for 40 people. At that point, our average age was only about 16, so not a lot of hardworking people. And so I presented that to the church and I felt ... I presented, of course, my confidence and faith in God to provide.

As a pastor of a young church, Paul shared a similar challenge:

In three years, we have remodeled four different buildings. This one, our latest one ... we have had three different locations in three years and because I started the church from scratch ... so we've grown it to having four acres of property here on the highway.

However, as George's church faced the decision to expand, they had to wrestle with the challenges involved in finding a new building for new members:

The biggest challenge that comes to mind was the decision to become a multi-site church. So I was here for just, really, a year or two before the conversation really began about what we do with the fact that we're out of room. So we couldn't fit the number of people who were coming. We're having to turn people away because there was no room in the building, literally, for them.

Paul had a similar experience:

For one, our fellowship hall. We can seat about 60 or 65 in our fellowship hall. Well, we have more people than that. So on Sundays, it's packed. Yeah, especially in the back where we try to eat. So a lot of times people just don't stay because there's no room; and so I'm ready to build. I want to expand and build

and we've got plans to build a new sanctuary, a new fellowship hall, but because of other decisions the finances aren't there now, so we've got to wait.

Building and financial matters are very much intertwined. As Landan put it:

The money that we have, we have put into building; we're building right now.

And that's been one of those challenges of that. I think, and from where I see it, from my experience, from ... and I don't know when it's going to change but I know, starting at about 125 people, there was always this monetary financial challenge of where's the money coming from and where's it going to go to?

Jonathan and Sandra also focused on the importance of a quick elimination of the financial burden generated by a church building. When asked about a major challenge, Jonathan's first reply was "Big challenge? There is a considerable mortgage on the building." He also came up with a solution:

And so when the question of the committee meeting came up of how could we use this money ... Well, it's always more expensive to pay back money you borrow than it is to spend money that you actually have. So my suggestion would be to put it toward debt reduction. And they seemed to warmly receive it.

Sandra also brought up the church's financial obligations towards a property as key to the survival of her church:

And the other thing that I was really surprised at when I first got here [was that] the church had property, owned a property that it did not need. And it was clear that it did not need it and the city wasn't going to allow the church to do what people had thought they can do with it. And literally the church was going to

close in a couple of years if it didn't get rid of that property because of the debt service on that property.

Timothy also referred to the financial challenges that were a part of a growing church:

The easiest examples would be building projects where I had the experience of raising over \$1 million, and having to build a family life center. That was a good experience. And then the last church I served, raising funds and borrowing the money, over \$2 million, to build a sanctuary and a children's building connected to that in Lumberton. So those were challenges of growing the church and facilities and all that.

Also on the subject of the church building, Stuart shared an insight regarding the influence of tradition:

I think building, putting a lot of money into buildings, church buildings, is something we've also done and it's a tradition, but not necessarily the most effective way. It is not the most effective way to reach people with it for the Kingdom of God.

Stuart also questioned and reflected upon possible reasons behind the seeming need to invest in buildings:

Why would you put \$4 million in a building that's only used once a week when you could be [in] a building that could become a community gathering place ... where people want to come, not just for church but to do life, like where people go to the movies ... The tradition is that and we measure people by that tradition.

Like, we measure the success of a pastor by, ‘Does he have a building? How big is the building?’ And then once you get inside the building, and then more people know about the church, the more sophisticated their assessment becomes. So the person on the outside who doesn’t know a lot about church, they say, ‘Oh, that’s a big church,’ because it’s a big building.

Sandra also reflected on why churches regularly seem to deal with a fixation on buildings:

It's like a post-Constantinian thing. I think most people in churches are still – at least in the south, I mean this is all I know because I have only been living in Texas – are still in that, kind of, Constantinian Roman Empire [thing. They] left big, beautiful things and we are not in that world any more. And so it's a collision of those worlds. And a building is so much more fun to look at and point to and say: ‘Look, my name is on that plaque there’ than ‘Hey we're going to spend this money and do more food service for people wherever.’ That's not as tangible or permanent. I mean, I get it.

Stuart gave a possible solution that he had seen employed regarding the use of buildings, but was still fixated on the same idea.

One of the more progressive things that I’ve seen over the past 15 years that I really appreciate ... our churches that get started in movie theaters. I think that’s a great idea because movie theaters, that’s one of the places in our society. In our era, movie theaters are big. Everybody likes going to the movies a lot, and so people who ... what a great place to be is where people [are] going all the

time, where they love to go and they go in. Then they see, ‘Oh, church meets here on Sunday, our Sunday night.’ Yeah, I think that’s great. I think that’s a great example of being innovative for the sake of relevance ... yeah.

Buildings were also a point of disunity in the church. Victor shared his experience in this area:

The church was too small for the congregation. It was almost like [a] standing room kind of thing so that the pastor moved the people from the white-frame church into the gym. He made the gym into a worship space. It was still a gym. It still had gym lights and gym walls and [a] concrete floor, but the people ... they just had chairs. They had set up chairs. It made the people who built the gym for the youth mad, so about half the church and people and almost all of the money left and went to another church.”

George commented on the positive effects of financial constraints:

The growth coupled with non-growth ... I mean, we’re very blessed financially but we have a much smaller budget than what our ... between two ... both campuses ... We’re [a] church for about five thousand. And so our budget for a church of five thousand is much below what the church in Houston or Dallas or Austin would have. And so like I said, we view that as a blessing in a sense. Because you have so many college students, but whenever you have a system and you give it less resources than it wants it forces you to be creative.

Timothy and Sandra also focused on financial issues as their first topic when interviewed regarding the challenges their respective churches were currently facing:

Probably in ways that we go about having a stewardship campaign, trying to raise funds for the budget which is about \$1.2 million ... It's very difficult, at times, to change; like, I know the culture we live in. Young people don't write a lot of checks. They pay things with a debit card (Timothy).

They tried a stewardship campaign in the Lent season, near Easter, and that didn't work so we went back to the more traditional time of October/November, right before Thanksgiving. I mean, they've tried different things. It wasn't a total disaster but we didn't think it was as successful(Sandra).

Timothy reasoned that this effort to educate members into giving was necessary because "about 20% of the congregation will do about 80% of the work and 80% of the giving." He noticed a general trend where:

The average giving over the last 30-plus years is about 2%. Two percent of the income of the average person, period. Some people don't give anything. But they expect everything to be here and expect staff to be here, but they don't give anything.

Sandra's church challenges revolved around financial issues as well.

The challenges I face here are more about managing the budget and being worried about money, and can we do this, and can we raise this money and can we pay off this debt ... can I hire this person? So that, the budget stuff, is what keeps me awake at night at this place, and not the personalities of the people.

When asked about issues that people find difficult to understand, Sandra went back to the members' understanding of financial contributions:

... Probably every minister feels this way. I'm still just kind of floored that people don't get that... I mean, God provides, sure, and you got to write a check, honey. You got to help God do it. So I've always just [been] kind of amazed. So the biggest thing I've introduced, I would say here is an expansion of the staff. The staff has doubled in the time I've been here. We have moved from just three people doing all the work and killing themselves to now we have six people on our staff, which is about right for a church this size.

As the pastor of a small church, Paul also focused primarily on church financial issues.

When you're a young church and it takes money to operate, when you tell people that are contributing financially to the church that it's not working out, it hurts and basically my family and I are supporting the church financially because [not everybody tithes]. Now you're seeing the real picture and not everybody that can is, and plus with the different congregations that have come together ... a lot of those [are] elderly and on fixed income and retired so they're not young adults where they have these careers. And some of the ones that do have careers are not being faithful in giving, so it's tough.

Stuart went through a more extreme experience. He started a new church in a marginalized community, and:

We planted the church. It did extremely well, but we were in an economically marginalized community. And so, we tried to ... I really made an effort to try to grow the church among the people. So numerically we were great, but we didn't

have the financial resources to sustain that ministry. So when I was appointed, asked to come and serve at [my current church], the members there decided to vote and disband, and they joined other churches [of the same denomination].

Finally, pastors focused on growing and retaining the number of members in their respective churches. Stuart mentioned that his church got to “the point when we were seeing on a good Sunday 140 people in service. On a lesser Sunday, we see about 120 people.” Sandra analyzed the proportion of the staff versus the number of households when she described the church’s financial issues.

We have three services on Sunday with 200, and then we have 250 households, so that makes us about 600 people. So, two priests, a youth minister, another administrative person, and a music person is about right for a church this size... It's so obvious that we're really rocking and rolling around here with more of the staff, and people comment on that but then they are not making the connection to: ‘Oh I get it; I should put a little bit more money in the plate.’ You know? So I don’t know how to help the people make that connection.

Landan described a dramatic situation regarding the number of people in his church, and his need for help:

So out of 225 people, I can't manage what I've got anymore by myself. I'm at a point to where if I don't get an assistant or a secretary full time in the next ASAP, two months or three months, then we're going to ... we're probably actually going to decrease in size instead of increasing.

In all of these cases, expertise could be a key reason for cognitive fixation (Hinds, Patterson, & Pfeffer, 2001; Wiley, 1998). Pastors tend to be brought up in a culture that determines the way they see challenges. This culture is rich in preconceptions and biases that affect how decisions are made (Sassenberg & Moskowitz, 2005; Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001). It is a pastor's job to be aware of the spiritual needs of the congregation, but when describing the challenges of their churches, they tended to fixate on tangible issues such as buildings, finances, or number of members attending the church (rather than on the intangible, spiritual issues of the congregation).

Kaiser's suggestion regarding growing from the one tangible paradigm can be seen in the question: "Has the congregation been growing numerically?" Traces can also be found in the more intangible paradigm represented by the question: "Has this growing, evangelistic, reproducing, globally missional, biblically faithful congregation been seeking the face of God in all that it does?" (Kaiser, 2011). Pope corroborates this church position, suggesting that the purpose and success of the church is not found in the number of members, size of the staff, or scope of the budget, but rather on the more intangible level of transformation seen by the community the church serves (Pope, 2006).

Emergent Theme 3: Peculiar challenges in special church circumstances helped pastors overcome their cognitive fixation.

A third theme emerged from the data analysis. Most pastors had a unique story to tell about peculiar circumstances that helped them think beyond their experiences and area of expertise to overcome a particular fixation. Some of these special circumstances

created the space for leadership to emerge, for a greater impact to be made by the elders in church decision-making (Nehrbass, 2011), and for the particular church to mature and fulfil its role in the community. When Landan suffered the loss of key spiritual leaders, other members stepped up to help.

But at that meeting, I had people step up out of loyalty and out of ... discernment would be the right word... out of discernment of what was really happening. I had people step up and say, 'I will take care of the music until you tell me otherwise' or 'I will take care of the young people for now.'

He went on to reflect on the results of those decisions:

Believe it or not, every one of those leaders stepped up at that time. Now, three and a half years later, most of them – if not all of them – are still in those roles, still trucking along doing exactly what they were intended to do and expected to do and intended in their own hearts. The church has grown.

Landan explained that he used the term “grown” to mean greater stability and strong leadership. For Landan, those were signs of spiritual growth that moved beyond tangible issues.

I evaluated spiritually by praying, fasting, and seeking counsel, looking to my elders, looking to the Word, and I believe that we have come away stronger ... We've come away stronger spiritually. We're more stable.

We've come away stronger in our leadership.

Sandra described how the previous pastor had frequently been absent, spending his time at a different location. That created the space for lay leaders to emerge:

I think that the person who was here before me ... it appears that this was not his first choice job. He was kind of disappointed that he was here at this parish and kind of acted like that. And his wife never moved here, and he was gone as much as he could be gone. He just wasn't really invested here. The good news in that is sometimes what happens in a parish, the absence of a strong leader ... strong lay leaders bubble up.

By the time Sandra became pastor of her church, she was already of a mindset that welcomed original initiatives. As an example, she described: "this interfaith thing. [It] was not there before, so it's something new ... yeah. At this church, [it] has been really well received." She also discussed how the leaders began working with other ministries in the city.

But this church has really embraced, like 'hey, we're going to start working. We work with First Baptist Church and we do a food pantry once a month with them.' And people are like 'oh, that's awesome.' And then we do habitat house and this immigration network that we are part of.

She reflected that her success was attributable to the flexible nature of the local church in which she served. "Again, this church is unusual in its ability to be flexible. And so this is the most flexible church I've ever served. And so, yay for that."

The unique circumstances in George's church helped him to cope with the death of an experienced pastor who had been hired to help him manage the church. The congregation had to help. In describing the situation, he said: "In the first years, especially when my executive pastor was diagnosed with cancer, most of the actual day-

to-day ministry was not from staff. It was through the congregation, because they really had to step up and help me when there was that need, and they did. They were there.”

Another key factor over the last few years was an accelerated growth in the number of members but not in finances, which he recognized as beneficial.

We were not prepared for the growth of our size of congregation. Part of that is the budgetary reality with two-thirds college students who typically have less money to give. We don't have the funds to staff at a level where the staff can do all the ministry. Some churches would look at that as a liability. We look at that as an asset because it keeps us from falling into the trap of trying to do everything ourselves. If we could have more pastors, then that would actually probably not be good for the church.

Both circumstances led George to look beyond and fulfill the church mission.

“So we live in that reality of we're bigger than what the staff can support, and so that forces us to constantly empower people. So our mission statement is raising our next generation [of] leaders to remind us that's the business that we're in. It's raising up the leaders who actually do the work of the ministry because we can't do the work of the ministries. It's way too big for the few of us on staff.”

Malcolm used the special circumstances around his church's finances to look into sound financial management in order to reduce the church's debt. That influenced the way he ministered to couples on financial issues.

And so when the question in the committee meeting came up of how could we use this money ... Well, it's always more expensive to pay back money you

borrow than it is to spend money that you actually have. So my suggestion would be to put it toward debt reduction. And they seemed to warmly receive that and so ... but my understanding of money has changed. It's a tool. But if you're using your hammer and you break your hammer, you don't pick up the part of the hammer that broke and keep using it. It doesn't work. You lose the lever. You use the tool. And so when we are spending beyond what we're actually able to do, then we're trying to pick up a broken hammer and use it.

Unique church circumstances helped some pastors look into decision-making from a perspective different from their own. Victor, Michael, and Timothy continued to pray that God would speak to the leaders and members. In other words, they waited for God's prompting of the hearts of the church members. As Victor related:

Yeah. I mean, this is a very powerful thought which means that when you receive a word or something that is from God, instead of jumping into it and trying to do it on your own as a leader, you believe that the church has been called to do that. You wait for confirmation. You pray about these things for people's hearts to be aligned to the work... I don't just assume that I'm the only person God speaks to.

Michael continued along a similar vein, saying: "It doesn't work very well with volunteers to demand that they do things. If I feel like that's what God needs to do, I need to trust that God's going to impress them with that at the appropriate time."

Timothy used this method to bring unity to the church and avoid rushed decisions pushed by impatient leaders.

We don't want disunity in the Church, so we're going to pray about it. We ask you to pray about it. We ask you to think about it and then we're going to come back to the next meeting and we'll bring it back. And then we'll see where we're at. By doing that, you disarm a lot of people who are impatient, who want to get things done yesterday and who think that the most important thing is getting that decision made when really the most important thing is discerning what God's will is and making sure that all the brothers and sisters in Christ are at that place that can be. Not everybody's going to ever be there because some people are not walking right with the Lord. Some people are somewhere else, but you want that. You want to show the people that unity matters.

Pastors would benefit from understanding these three themes in the following ways. First, it is important for pastors to accept the challenge to overcome cognitive fixation in lay leaders and congregations who hinder the church from providing a meaningful service to society. Second, pastors would benefit by becoming aware of how they perceive challenges and by focusing on developing intangible assets (that is, the spiritual development of the leaders and members in the church), so that they can become agents of change. This change of focus would affect the emphasis given to tangible facts such as church buildings and the number of rooms and facilities in the church. Third, pastors would be better equipped to recognize change and adversity as a catalyst for change in people's ways of thinking. An awareness of this progression would help them to engage in a metacognitive process in which they could clearly identify and overcome their own cognitive fixation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Increased interest in the application of cognitive fixation over the last 25 years has mainly taken place primarily in the area of design (Chrysikou & Wesberg, 2005; Purcell & Gero, 1996, Jansson & Smith 1991) and problem solving (Weisberg & Reeves, 2013; Ohlsson, 1992). Parallel research has taken place in the fields of medicine (Lenzer, 2013; Shaneyfelt & Centor, 2009; Graber, Franklin & Gordon, 2005; Croskerry, 2002; Patel & Groen, 1991) and in accountancy (Rosman, 2011; Dearman, & Shields, 2005; Marchant et al, 1991). However, there has been scarce research on pastoral decision-making, although limited studies have been conducted on groupthink (Rosander et al, 2006; Susskind, 2006; Granstrom & Stiwne, 1998; Primeaux, 1997; Hougland & Wood, 1979) and pastoral biases in decision making (Nauta 1988). This study investigated the specific phenomenon of cognitive fixation as part of pastoral decision-making.

Emergent themes provided an understanding of how cognitive fixation took place in pastoral thinking and decision-making. Research questions which guided the study were:

1. To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?
2. What types of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

Research Question 1: To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

Findings from this study provided a framework for understanding cognitive fixation in pastors thinking and decision-making processes. Cognitive fixation occurred within the cultural context of the church and amongst the social context of the members that belonged to it. The results obtained in this study were consistent with research by Gero & Purcell (1996) regarding functional fixedness. Pastors tended to fixate on a concept of church that emphasized worship services how they were conducted. For instance, pastors made changes in the use of musical instruments, (i.e. “the use of a guitar instead of an organ”), or dress standards (i.e. “people could come in their shorts and flip-flops or whatever”) as minimal incentives to attract people to worship services. Other pastors talked about the need for an extra Sunday service or to meet in houses for Wednesday services. In these cases, functional fixedness appeared to be manifested at a congregational level, such as when Stuart described losing part of his congregation when he changed the services from Sunday to Saturday in a new venue. Other results included pastors' use of language to refer to their congregations. Words such as “customers” and “volunteers” suggested a distance between the pastor and the rest of the congregants.

In some cases pastors' decisions making were influenced by their experiences. These experiences, in the case of outreach and fund-raising events, had had certain success. For instance, pastors continued to hold Thanksgiving, Christmas dinners or concerts with some positive results. However, success from previous events prevented committees from generating other solutions with greater potential. These examples are

reminiscent of research findings by Bilalić, McLeod, & Gobet, (2008) on how good ideas often block better ones.

Results from this study seem to confirm Rosander, Granstrom and Stiwne's (2006), and Primeaux's (1997) studies on groupthink in the church. In some cases, pastors acknowledged how some lay leaders may have felt intimidated and refused to contribute in the decision-making process. In other cases, some pastors shared how they had observed charismatic church members overtaking groups and creating cliquish or elitist groups by accepting only certain members. These groups tended to manipulate pastor's decisions on keeping church traditions, or the use of building spaces. In these cases the pastors had to find ways to overcome groupthink in certain groups within the church.

The results also illustrated how pastors also managed to break away from cognitive fixation and traditional patterns of thinking in certain situations in other ways. These situations allowed pastors to become more aware of their thinking patterns, allowing them to begin to think and decide in different ways. This finding was congruent with those found in studies by Lindsay, Wood & Markman (2008) and Smith et al., (1993) which pointed out that the first challenge to overcome fixation is to become aware that cognitive fixation was occurring. Pastors reported new ways of thinking in several different areas including preaching (e.g. Malcolm), ministry (e.g. Stuart), and Sunday school (e.g. Sandra).

Results from this study also corroborated Johnson's (1996) observation on "spiritual validation" of pastoral decision-making. Two pastors shared how they had

overcome wasting time or conflict without the necessary buy-in or agreement from their congregation. Instead of trying to convince people of their own ideas, these pastors reported praying that congregational leaders would hear from God the same messages that they themselves believed to have heard from God. Once congregational decisions were confirmed by both pastor and lay leaders, it was agreed that the decision was God's. This formula for decision-making, based on prayer, was also used in these congregations to achieve consensus in group decision-making.

An interesting finding was that in many cases, cognitive fixation appeared to be part of the denominational committee structures themselves in that they delegated authority to lay leaders. In these cases, the pastors' role in decision-making was transformed from influencing the content of decisions to advising on how decisions were made. Pastors watched to make sure that the regulations of the church were followed, and that decisions were made in an atmosphere of cordiality, unity, and mutual support.

Research Question 2: What types of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

The results of this study confirmed findings associated with studies on expertise. Expertise can sometimes limit options available to solve a problem (Hinds, 1999; Wiley, 1998). Pastors' expertise gained through their years of experience and training seemed to limit the way they approached church challenges. For instance, pastors had a tendency to focus on church services, which is a common area of expertise for pastors. For example, Victor emphasized his success in bringing back the church

from a choir-based worship to a traditional liturgy, which was taken primarily from the hymnal.

A reason for focusing on this area of expertise may have been shaped by the bylaws of the church, as pastors desire to keep within the boundaries of those documents. In addition, mainline denominations have written policies providing detailed instructions on how the church functions.

Results seemed to be consistent with research in automaticity in problem solving. Problems with automaticity experienced when individuals solve the same problems in the same way without noticing the underlying changes in those problems, thus leading to less and less effective solutions over time (Öllinger, Jones, & Knowblich, 2008; Smith 2003; Luchins, 1942). Pastors tend to experience automaticity when they conceptualize problems in the same way regardless of the changing circumstances surrounding the church. For instance, some pastors persist in offering Thanksgiving or Christmas meals to the community when they have seen diminishing attendance to those events. As Landan put it “we weren’t having the results from the community.”

Results also supported previous research by Primeaux (1997) on groupthink. Groupthink happens when people of the same background (ethnic group, same SES, same education level) with the same background (e.g. same denomination) and within the same structure (e.g. denominational structure) abdicate their responsibility to think independently and creatively, and fail to ask relevant questions. In congregations this occurs when members surrender decision-making authority to a person who is perceived as having all the expertise and information, because “it is their job” (e.g. pastors) or

because “they like to do it” (e.g. lay leaders). Many pastors in this study recognized that groupthink was taking place in their churches even while they had different understanding about the same concept. For instance, Timothy shared that groupthink “happens all the time.... I know groupthink is a dynamic that you need to watch out for because it’s present all the time in everything we do by the way.”

One unanticipated finding was that pastors managed to overcome cognitive fixation by adjusting their way of thinking to new circumstances that challenged conventional wisdom. These circumstances varied from a drastic increase in church members to the merging of three different churches into one. In every case, pastors shared how circumstances had made them more aware of their own way of thinking and the need to change. Even though denominational church structures and traditions were reported to affect pastors’ choices, other additional contextual factors played a major role in shaping pastoral thinking and decision-making. For instance, George, an analytical thinker and engineer by training, had to cope with seasonal and large increases of members in his congregation. These changes increased the amount of decisions he had to make quickly, leading him to modify his usual decision-making processes. He mentioned that he “had to learn to trust my intuition more in leadership... And so the Lord just kept adding responsibility on my plate to where... I couldn’t default to my analytical tendencies. I had to think about it for a minute, pray about it and then make a decision, and move on and trust the Lord has the results.”

Finally, another unexpected finding was that pastors with more years of experienced showed a smaller degree of cognitive fixation. These results are opposite to

research on the fixation effects of expertise. This research suggests how in some contexts such as chess (Chase & Simon, 1973), accountancy (Marchant et. al, 1991) experts are unable to solve new problems that challenge their expertise. These new findings may have been due to the pastors' experience in various churches, which created flexibility to solve a variety of problems, or to the highly structured system that their denomination used to delegate decision-making to lay leaders, creating the space for the pastor to influence how instead of what decisions were made.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study and the emergent themes raised some challenges to the conceptualization of pastoral thinking. For instance, should the Church be considered a permanent or changing institution? Should pastors focus their attention on worship services and activities in the church building or support the congregation to carry the concept of church with them as they live outside of its walls? The concept of functional fixedness may apply to pastors' implicit definitions of the Church in that they may see it as a stable, unchanging organization, rather than one that is flexible, given the needs of society. Other factor that may influence pastoral decision-making is how pastors view the purpose of the church. If it is viewed as a place that should receive as many people as possible, then pastors will focus on building larger structures as it grows. However, if pastors see the church as a place to train people who send to do works of service in the community, then the emphasis would be to train, equip and empower those members for that work.

Pastors in this study sometimes found a way to overcome cognitive fixation. . The need for pastors to become aware of their own thinking processes in leading churches has already been documented (The Barna Group, 2006; Kinnaman, 2011). As cognitive fixation is difficult to detect it may be useful for pastors to engage in the development of metacognitive abilities, such as problem formulation and ideation, that help overcome cognitive fixation. Such training has already been recommended for use in the medical field (Croskerry, 2002). A possible solution may be to make training in creativity and flexible leadership strategies part of ministry training.

As results also showed the relationship between personal cognitive fixation and group cognitive fixation at leadership or congregational level, pastors would benefit from understanding systems thinking. Pastors are part of a system that interacts with other groups such as lay leaders and congregations. Mental models assist in clarifying our internal pictures of the world and how they shape our actions and decisions (Senge, 2006). Such practices could also enhance team building, as they are based on deep listening, empowerment and a shared vision. However, successful training in those areas depend on the pastors' flexible mindsets. Pastors' might embrace a growth mindset when they believe in the possibility of personal improvement and change as key (Dweck, 2006).

Finally, pastors might benefit from sharing with one another on their changes in thinking and decision-making. Pastors can also further their progress by finding ways to re-invent the church experience to provide fresh solutions to societal changing needs (McLaren, 1998). Some of these new approaches can be found in the innovation

literature on understanding customers' needs (Ulwick, 2005), deeply empathizing with your customers (Brown, 2008), and designing innovation in the marketplace (Kim & Maubourgne, 2005).

Implications for Future Research

The results of this study suggest several implications for future research. As this study illustrated interactive decision making amongst pastors, lay leaders, and their congregations it would be useful to study how congregations experience group cognitive fixation and the strategies pastors use to break those behavioral patterns. In addition, prolonged research engagement with the pastor and the congregation would be beneficial to understand how decisions are shaped within committee work and the conversations around those processes.

A further study including more female pastors and pastors from other ethnic groups could help understand how gender and ethnicity contribute to occurrence of cognitive fixation. For instance, there may be cases of covert prejudicial behavior influencing decision-making. A similar study should be conducted with a larger sample of women.

Another study could be carried out in churches with a low degree of governmental structure, thus giving the pastor more authority over decision-making in the church. In these settings, pastors may be more likely to be influenced by cognitive fixation. In these churches pastors have decision-making power over all aspects regarding the life of the church. Independent churches may provide an appropriate

sample for such a study as they are not bound by denominational central organizations or written policies.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the purposive sampling of the cases it covered, a particular group of churches in Texas. Some of the participants were selected due to the snowball technique, which may have influenced participants who agree to participate. The pastors who agreed to participate may have been more confident, flexible and open to outside evaluation making them less prone to cognitive fixation than others. A limitation of the study was the low number of female and of African American participants. The study focused on pastors of smaller churches who may have confronted different challenges than do their counterparts in small or larger churches. This study was also limited as data were gained through solely interviews with pastors and observations from administrative meetings.

Conclusion

Examining cognitive fixation in pastoral thinking and decision-making, along with its underlying factors is complex: the psychological structures of cognition and the spiritual focus of pastors' work overlap. This complexity also can be seen at the definitional level of cognitive fixation as well as in the study of the possible factors that may contribute to it. Cognitive fixation that happens at the leader or congregational level has an effect on pastoral decision making. Other key factors that played a role in pastoral decision making, were the church traditions and bylaws that determine the decision-making power of each group.

Individually, pastors in this study may have benefitted from metacognitive training as pastors' awareness of their circumstances helped them change their thinking strategies and generate original solutions. Finally, pastors may benefit from adopting a perspective on leadership development and congregational life based on relationship building rather than performing distant ministry. As Strauch (1995) mentioned a "first among equals" mindset may help the spiritual growth of "clerical" leaders, who in turn can then continue the work of the congregation through works of service.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Email sent to pastors

“Dear Pastor Smith,

As part of my doctoral studies in Educational Psychology at Texas A&M University I am doing research on pastoral decision-making. I have been serving in a local church in this city in Texas since my arrival 5 years ago (House of God – Casa de Dios). My objective doing this research is to better understand how decisions are made in the church.

Please let me know whether you would be available for a 60 minute interview.

The focus of the interview would be to talk about your past church-related experiences. Please let me know when you will be available in the next two weeks.”

Interview Protocol

A brief introduction and conversation will be held to understand how the pastor began involvement in the ministry and within their denomination that will include the first question. The introductory script to help the pastor understand the purpose and scope of this study would be as follows:

“Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you for this interview. My name is Hector Ramos and I am currently pursuing the final stage of my doctoral degree in Educational Psychology at Texas A&M University. I have always been interested in effective church leadership and the interaction between pastors and leaders to make the church more

effective. My purpose in conducting this study is to understand how pastors think and how pastoral decision-making can impact the church. I appreciate your great help in this research because I know about the many roles pastors play and the great demand that is placed on your time every day.”

No	Interview Question	Intended outcomes	Research Question (RQ)
1	Tell me about your decision to become a pastor? How did you choose this career?	This is a grand tour question to build trust with pastors. This question allows the researcher to understand some of the key points in the beginning years regarding the type of commitment and motivation that drove pastors into fulltime ministry.	
2	Tell me about some of the big challenges you had to solve in your experience as a pastor?	This questions allows the researcher to understand how the pastor views his or her own ability to identify big challenges and solve them. Insight is gathered into this decision-making process.	RQ 1: To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors’ thinking and decision-making processes?
3	Tell me about times you believed a particular decision or solution was very important for the church, but it was very difficult for people to understand. a) Tell me about times when you had to	The researcher is looking for those examples where a type of code (“God’s leading”) hinders the pastor from considering other alternatives. The researcher is looking for examples where traditional ways of thinking	RQ 1: To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors’ thinking and decision-making processes?

No	Interview Question	Intended outcomes	Research Question (RQ)
	<p>introduce a new way, method or strategy. What was the reaction?</p> <p>b) Tell me about, describe times when... you have been pastoring a church and there was conflict because of people did not want to follow traditional ways of doing church...</p> <p>c) Tell me about your experiences when people resisted change? Why do you think that happened?</p>	<p>or traditions have hindered change when those traditions where not of any value to the church or the community it intends to serve.</p>	
4	<p>Tell me about times when the congregation influenced decisions. How did it happen?</p>	<p>The researcher is looking for evidence that in some situations group dynamics and premature judgment may have hindered creative solutions.</p>	<p>RQ 1: To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?</p>
5	<p>Tell me about times when you had been successful in the previous church and wanted to bring those methods to the new church but you found resistance.</p>	<p>The researcher is looking for evidence on how examples of success in another church fixated pastors so they use the same 'formula' in a different context.</p>	<p>RQ 1: To what extent does cognitive fixation occur within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?</p>

No	Interview Question	Intended outcomes	Research Question (RQ)
6	Tell me about times in your experience when traditions were kept even though they seemed irrelevant to the vision and mission of the church?	The researcher is looking for examples where traditional ways of thinking or traditions have hindered change when those traditions were not of any value to the church or the community it intends to serve.	RQ2: What type of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?
7	Tell me about times when tried and tested programs seemed to give less results over the years but it became difficult to change. Why do you think it happened?	The researcher is looking for examples where traditional ways of thinking hinders change when established traditions were not of any value to the community it intends to serve.	RQ2: What type of cognitive fixation factors exist within pastors' thinking and decision-making processes?

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Name of Observer: Hector Ramos

Date and Time:

Length of Observation:

Meeting being observed:

Description of observation: In this meeting the pastor will conduct a conversation with different leaders regarding deciding on different issues. The observation is centered on the language, behavior including reactions of the pastor to different suggestions and comments and to describe the type of decision-making process that is taking place.

Examples of behaviors that will be observed include redirection, restating the question, identifying alternatives, considering options offered by church members, reframing the problem and identifying missing data.

Number of participants: Between 5-10 participants.

Note to Observer: As completely and accurately as possible, describe the decision-making processes observed as the pastor leads the meeting. If appropriate, include direct quotes from the pastor. Try to avoid making judgments.

1) Overall summary of the meeting

2) Description of decision-making strategies e.g.

- Influence of expertise
- Influence of previous experience
- Influence of automaticity

3) Words/Phrases the pastor uses make decisions and gather points of view:

4) Observer's Overall Insights (Note: Observer's Field Notes are written in a separate notebook)