LEADERSHIP IN CHURCH CONFLICT: TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS THROUGH ADAPTIVE WORK

by

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ABSTRACT

Leadership In Church Conflict:
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The purpose of this thesis is to help church leaders learn to respond effectively to conflict that arises during times of change. In order to transform a community of faith, change is needed. Transformation involves changing perceptions, behaviours, opinions, and even personal values. Transformation requires a renewed purpose for and commitment to reaching communities with the gospel. In order for this transformation to take place, however, Christian leaders need to be equipped with an approach to help people effectively work *through* conflict that accompanies change. This transformational process is what Ronald Heifetz calls *adaptive work.* It involves learning to diminish the gap between reality and the perception of reality that currently shapes a congregation's response to their current circumstances. This thesis will present church leaders with a team-based approach for responding to situations of conflict arising from change. My aim is to help inspire transformation using an adaptive work model.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this work is building effective leadership in the church to be able to respond to conflict arising from change. Human nature resists change and holds on to what is familiar. Effective leadership involves being equipped to introduce change in the community of faith even if this change will give rise to conflict. The challenge for church leaders is to harness the energy of conflict in order to carry a faith community through the rough waters of change. This challenge requires courage, perseverance, and great wisdom. Leaders must be prepared to meet this challenge head on. Change is required to bring about positive transformation in a community of faith.

What is involved in the transformation of a community of faith? Transformation involves altering one's perception about how things *ought to be*. In a church context, it involves altering one's perception about what being part of a community of faith is all about. Transformation is about giving something up in order to bring about something new — something better. It involves a change in character — an internal change of heart and attitude. God offers personal transformation when someone puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ. This involves discarding the old ways of doing things and living as the new creations believers become when they put their faith in Christ. As the Apostle Paul commands, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."[1] For a community of faith, the context of this thesis, transformation means renewing a spiritual vitality in people who sit in the pews week after week. It means helping congregants see that patterns, rules, and traditions, are secondary to reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. It means that personal opinions,

[1] Romans 12:2, NIV.

behaviours, and even values about what the church is and how it operates may need to be altered in order to communicate the gospel message of hope to an ever changing culture. Unfortunately, in the process of transformation, conflict will arise.

Dealing with conflict is a natural part of life. The word conflict itself conjures up negative images of quarrels and heated disputes. In the media, journalists seem to prey on stories about antagonism and hostility because these reports appeal to the public's apparent intrigue with controversy. Yet, in spite of this perceived intrigue, reports of unresolved conflict in the global community and even in our neighbourhoods create a sense of unrest in society. Situations of conflict can leave us with a feeling of insecurity because of the lack of control we have over them.

Closer to home, conflict occurs on a much more personal level. Unresolved family disputes can lead to broken marriages and the disintegration of the family unit. In the education system, children can face conflict through peer pressure or when antagonized by the school yard bully. Conflicts arise in the workplace over company goals, falling stock prices, employee salaries, perceived discrimination or coming to consensus during a collective agreement negotiation. Even in the church, hostile disagreements, unresolved disputes, grudges, gossip, or verbal attacks can occur on a regular basis in the lives of its members and adherents.

Christian leaders have had to deal with contention within their congregations since the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. The New Testament provides examples that demonstrate that the early church experienced conflict. As early as Acts 6, we read about a dispute developing over inequitable care for widows in the congregation. Acts 15 relates the cultural conflicts that arose as a result of integrating Gentile Christians into a

predominantly Jewish community of believers. In James 4:1 the apostle asks "What causes quarrels and fights among you?" clearly highlighting that there were situations of conflict in the church. Those who serve in church leadership must recognize that conflict is inevitable. Whenever people with different opinions, different personality styles, different ethnic and national backgrounds, different traditions and family heritages gather together, their diversity will eventually surface and create tension. This is true in business, in politics, in educational institutions, in the medical world, and, unfortunately, even in the church, the body of Christ.

As Christians, we may live under a false expectation that the church will be different than secular organizations. We expect it will be a place with no evidence of division, no opposition to ideas, and no challenges to leadership; a place of peace and harmony because Jesus taught his follower to "be at peace with each other."[2] The Apostle Paul echoes this instruction urging believers to "live in harmony with everyone."[3]

While the description of the church stated above represents a biblical model of what the body of Christ *should* be, anyone who has been part of a local community of faith will realize that we have fallen short of the biblical standard. The church *should* be a place of forgiveness and a place where love rules. Unfortunately, we still contend with sin and brokenness. As a result, even a cursory review of life in the New Testament reminds us that conflict within the church is inevitable. It is an issue that leaders must be prepared to deal with. But even more important, conflict is an issue that leaders must be equipped to effectively respond to in order to edify the body of Christ.

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[2] Mark 9:50.
[3] Romans 12:16.

Along with conflict, change is another word that is often not well received in current culture. People are more comfortable with routine. We become accustomed to a schedule, a way of life, a standard of living, a group of friends, of a style of worship. For many people change is uncomfortable. Individuals tend to resist change because of the uncertainty associated with it. It breaks their routine, disrupts their lives, and forces them to do things outside of the boundaries they have set for themselves. As a result of this resistance, change typically gives rise to conflict.

As uncomfortable as change is, however, it is an important part of growing. Maturing involves change. It involves learning from the past in order to bring about a better future. This is true of all organizations including the body of Christ, his church. Nevertheless, as uncomfortable as change is, it becomes even more challenging when conflict arises in response to it.

If one accepts that change is necessary for growth and maturity in the body of Christ, and conflict is a natural part of change, then it follows that conflict can have a positive role to play in the change process. In fact, conflict can become the necessary fuel for change. In their book, *Leading Congregational Change*, co-authors Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr declare, "Change does not happen without conflict."[4] This is not limited to secular institutions or corporate businesses. Rather, they assert, this has clear biblical support as well. Whenever the people of God were

[4] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change.* 7. Jim Herrington is the executive director of Mission Houston, an interdenominational, multi-cultural pastoral effort to transform the city of Houston, Texas. Mike Bonem is president and co-founder of Kingdom Transformation Partners, a church consulting and training firm in Houston. James Furr is senior consultant with Union Baptist Association and adjunct professor of sociology at Houston Baptist University.

challenged to change their current way of life in order to follow God's call to do something great for his service, conflict emerged.[5]

If we acknowledge, then, that conflict is a reality in the church, the task church leaders must accept shifts away from its elimination and moves towards working through it effectively. But even more strategic than simply working through it, leaders must learn how to utilize conflict to bring about *productive change* that enhances ministry and makes the church, as a whole, more effective in carrying out its mandate to "make disciples of all nations."[6]

According to the theory presented by author Ronald Heifetz[7] in his book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, this endeavor involves recognizing the clear distinction between technical and adaptive problems. As he states, technical problems "point to the different modes of action required to deal with *routine* problems...[adaptive problems] demand innovation and learning."[8]

A true mark of leadership, then, moves beyond simply treating every situation as a technical problem with a simple solution. Leaders needs to recognize that underlying the observable conflict are individual's values, beliefs, and behaviors. Thus, as Heifetz states, leadership should be viewed as "adaptive work ... [which] consists of the learning

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[5] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 7. The authors reference the work of H. T. Blackaby and C. V. King, *Experiencing God. Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1990). As an example of this claim, consider God's interaction with Moses at the burning bush. When God called him to lead the people of Israel to freedom, Moses was confronted with a dramatic change to his routine way of life. As a result, conflict emerged. Moses challenged God's wisdom in choosing him (Exodus 3) and would go on to face conflict with Pharoah, the Hebrew people, and even with God himself.

[6] Matthew 28:19.

[7] Ronald A. Heifetz directs of the Leadership Education Project at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. He is also a principal of the Cambridge Leadership Associates and co-founder of Harvard's Center for Public Leadership.

[8] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 8. Emphasis added. The distinction between technical and adaptive problems will be further developed in Chapter Two.

required to address conflicts in the values people hold or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face."[9]

In order for church leaders to be effective as agents of transformation in their congregations and communities, they must learn to turn situations of conflicts into adaptive work environments. Initiating transformation in the lives of people will inevitably lead to conflict because transformation involves change, and for most people, change can be unpleasant. Yet, transformation will not come about by dealing with problems using simple technical solutions involving a series of flowcharts and formulae that provide step by step solution paths for various conflict situations. Rather, transformative change can only come about through adapting to a new way of doing things. When conflict arising from adaptive work, namely, conflict resulting from the learning involved in the process of change, is handled effectively, transformation occurs. Believers who have diverse ideas and opinions learn how to constructively dialogue with one another, challenging and confronting issues in a positive manner that demonstrates respect and love for the other person. In this way, the body of Christ is edified and built up.

Various models for dealing with situations of conflict have been developed over time. The focus of these approaches is primarily resolution; that is, diagnosing the cause of the dispute and implementing a process to resolve the matter and eliminate the tension. These forms of conflict resolution rely on methodical processes to bring about solutions. In the past, conflict resolution has been addressed from the perspective of an agonistic culture, one of aggression where clashes between warring sides needed to be resolved.

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[9] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 22.

More recently, however, the positive elements of conflict are being recognized by leaders who are seeing the benefits of utilizing conflict to bring about positive change.

I have stated that conflict can be utilized to bring about positive transformation in faith communities. In order for this transformation to take place, however, Christians need to be equipped with an approach to properly channel the energy of conflict arising from changes that are necessary to mature the body of Christ. The New Testament provides strong biblical examples of how effective leadership responded to conflicts arising from change. Thus, the equipping process must begin at the leadership level and it involves more than the effort of the pastor or a group of individuals calling itself a board, it requires *team* leadership. This thesis will present church leaders with a team-based approach for responding to situations of conflict arising from change in a manner that inspires transformation — a transformation that involves revitalizing congregations with a renewed purpose, commitment, and understanding of how they can reach their communities with the good news of salvation through Christ.

Chapter One will provide a general overview of conflict theory. As stated earlier, conflict can provide energy for leaders to inspire transformation in their churches. Yet, not all conflict is productive and not all conflict can be utilized to bring about positive change. Hence, conflict theory, especially in organizations like the church, must be understood by leaders before it can be used toward positive ends. This first chapter will introduce some of the key definitions and terminology related to conflict, describe some of the types and levels of conflict experienced in organizations, and present several causes of conflict that can occur in a church context. In this chapter, I want to help church leaders identify the situations of conflict they are dealing with so they can understand

some of the underlying causes of the conflict and respond appropriately. Some of the literature researched for this thesis has reinforced the agonistic perception of conflict, especially in the church. This will be discussed to highlight the need to educate church leaders to move toward an alternate, non-agonistic approach for dealing with situations of conflict. Understanding organizational conflict theory in general terms begins this educational process.

Chapter Two will focus on the concept of adaptive work presented by Ronald Heifetz. Understanding what adaptive work is provides a framework for leaders to be able to recognize the situations of conflict that this thesis proposes to address. This second chapter will highlight the need for transformation within communities of faith and prepare leaders to understand the resulting conflict that typically arises in these periods of change. This involves appreciating the role that personal values have in situations of conflict. Leaders will also be given guidelines for identifying adaptive work and distinguishing these situations from conflict that can be addressed with technical solutions. Since adaptive work is not an easy process for leaders who are dealing with difficult conflict, Chapter Two will also highlight some of the hindrances that leaders may encounter when faced with adaptive work. At the close of the chapter, a case study will be presented to provide a practical example of a situation in a church setting requiring adaptive work.

Chapter Three will present examples from Scripture that support the concept of adaptive work and will show how church leaders responded to situations of conflict to produce positive change in their community of faith. This thesis presents an approach for *church* leaders to use in responding to conflict. Thus, the concept of adaptive work and

utilizing conflict to promote needed change must be supported biblically. Several examples of change, conflict, and the positive response by biblical leaders will be discussed to provide a biblical frame of reference for adaptive work.

Initiating change and utilizing the resultant conflict in a productive manner to transforms congregations requires a strong leadership team. Building such a team will be the focus of Chapter Four. In this chapter, the work of Patrick Lencioni[10] will be drawn on to equip church leaders in the critical principles required to build an effective leadership team. Leadership through times of adaptive work, however, does not come without snares. Some of the pitfalls church leaders can fall into will be presented to assist men and women in avoiding the hazards to effective leadership.

Based on the first four chapters setting the foundation for effective team-based leadership and supported by examples from Scripture, Chapter Five will offer church leaders a strategic approach for addressing complex conflict situations. Adapted from the theory presented by Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky,[11] this final chapter will outline a five point approach to situations involving change and conflict that will equip Christian leaders to respond to difficult situations in a manner that utilizes the energy of conflict to inspire transformation within their communities of faith. This approach will provide a valuable tool to assist church leaders in facilitating change by leading their congregations *through* conflict that arises out of situations requiring adaptive work.

My interest in writing this thesis stems from my desire to help church leaders deal with conflict and change more effectively. Conflict can be a very destructive force but it

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[10] Patrick Lencioni is founder and president of The Table Group, a San Francisco Bay Area management consulting firm specializing in executive team development and organizational health.

[11] Martin Linsky serves along with Ronald Heifetz on the faculty of John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and is a principal of Cambridge Leadership Associates.

need not be if responded to appropriately. Through this work, I want to equip myself and other church leaders with an approach that builds stronger leadership in our churches and challenges men and women not to fear change and conflict, but to respond to them with focused determination. As one who tends to resist change and avoid conflict, this work is a deliberate effort to enhance my own personal leadership skills. As a former manager working in a unionized manufacturing environment for a multi-national company, I have witnessed the effects of change and how leaders have responded both positively and negatively to the ensuing conflicts. I have had the privilege of being trained to deal with situations of conflict and change management. The corporate world has valuable insights to offer church leaders in dealing with these situations.

As a former church board member, I have also witnessed how change and conflict can disrupt unity in the body of Christ. While I recognize that the church is not a company, and that church leaders can not manage its affairs like they would a business, there are valuable principles that church leadership can glean from the corporate world. In my current role serving God in pastoral ministry, my desire is that this work will present some key principals that will benefit all church leaders. The desired result is to avert division, to build up and edify the body of Christ, and to help the church as a whole remain focused on its role to make reproducing followers of Jesus Christ for the glory of God. This is the process of transformation.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

I have stated in the thesis of this work that I will present an approach for church leaders to use in responding to situations of conflict arising from change. Conflict can provide the energy necessary to inspire transformation in churches, but not all conflict is positive and not all conflict can be utilized to bring about positive change. In this chapter, I argue that church leaders must understand some of the key concepts and principles of organizational conflict before they can utilize conflict toward positive ends. I will present terminology related to conflict along with the types, levels, and causes of conflict experienced in organizations, including the church. The purpose of this chapter is to help leaders recognize various situations of conflict, identify who the key participants are and the role they play in the dispute, and understand some of the underlying causes of conflict. This will aid leaders in responding to these situations appropriately.

To begin with, church leaders should recognize the positive potential of conflict rather than focus on the task of simply suppressing it. Schellenberg reminds his readers that,

> conflict is so fully a part of all forms of society that we should appreciate its importance – for stimulating new thoughts, for promoting social change, for defining our group relationships, for helping us form our own sense of personal identity, and for many other things we take for granted in our everyday lives.[1]

Many books have been written about conflict management and how to address disputes using various resolution models. This literature includes writings on conflict that occurs in church settings as well as disputes in other Christian organizations. While there is some recognition that conflict can bring about positive changes in organizations, much

[1] Schellenberg, *Conflict Resolution*, 9.

of the information presented on conflict management still portrays conflict as being agonistic — one of warring factions requiring mediators and referees to bring about resolution. As M. Afzalur Rahim states in his work, *Managing Conflict in Organizations*, the recommendations from current organizational conflict literature still "fall within the realm of conflict resolution, reduction, or minimization."[2] From Rahim's perspective, this is a deficiency that must be addressed. Robbins supports this argument stating that "we live in a society that has been built upon anticonflict values...we should not be surprised to find that antidisagreement values dominate the literature."[3]

Earlier I stated that it is important for Christian leaders to understand some of the broader principles of conflict so they will be able to recognize situations where conflict may be necessary to promote transformation. Many of the principles reviewed in this chapter reinforce the idea that conflict is negative and should be suppressed. Since conflict is often perceived as being agonistic, especially in the church, it is the goal of this chapter to contest this premise and highlight the need for church leaders to consider an alternate approach — one that doesn't stifle change by suppressing conflict. Rather, leaders must consider an approach that harnesses the energy of conflict to foster growth.

Conflict — Definitions and Descriptions

To begin the process of educating church leaders in the principles of conflict theory, the term itself requires review. What is a proper definition of the term conflict? Pneuman and Bruehl provide an etymology of the word which highlights the agonistic

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[2] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 75.
[3] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 18–19.

framework of the term.[4] The Latin root points to two essential components of its meaning. The first component of the word comes from the root, *figere*, which means *to strike*. From this root we also derive other words related to conflict such as *inflict*, which has the meaning of striking something, as well as *profligate*, which means to *strike forward* or to knock someone on his or her face. The second component of the word, *com*, means *together*. Thus, from the Latin root of this word, one can immediately recognize the underlying basis for conflict is the notion of *striking together*, whether it is two objects or two human opinions. This definition conjures up traditional images of warring factions, antagonism, and violence portraying an aggressive clash of interests. These images continue to promote a negative expression of the term.

Based on this etymology, Speed Leas[5] and Paul Kittlaus describe conflict as analogous to two objects trying to occupy the same space at the same time, and consequently striking together. When applying this to people, whether individuals or groups, these authors refer to Ross Stagner, who describes conflict as "a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other *but not by both*."[6]

Leas and Kittlaus go on to state that Stanger's description of conflict highlights an important principle: For conflict to exist, each side of the issue at hand must recognize that the other parties' goals or views *interfere* with their own — that their "ideas or the values or the actions must be attempting to occupy the same space at the same time."[7]

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[4] Pneuman and Bruehl, *Managing Conflict*, 2.

[5] Speed Leas is a Director of Consultation at the Alban Institute, Washington, D.C. and has completed many works on conflict in church contexts.

[6] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 28–29 citing Stagner, *The Dimensions of Human Conflict*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 136. Emphasis in original.

[7] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 29.

Tillett's definition of conflict parallels Leas. In his work, *Resolving Conflict. A Practical Approach*, he states that "conflict exists when two or more parties perceive that their values or needs are incompatible."[8] Consequently, if one of the parties did not care about the other's point of view or withdrew from the situation, forfeiting his or her own view in the process, there would be no conflict. Thus, conflict involves a clash of ideas, values, opinions, or goals. Based then on both the etymology of the word itself, one can understand why conflict has received such an adverse perception.

Robbins has researched the history of conflict philosophies and definitions as well as their parallels to management theory. Traditional philosophy viewed conflict in a negative way and, consequently, something that required elimination. According to the traditional view, "all conflicts were seen as destructive and it was management's role to rid the organization of them."[9] An example of this philosophy is the study of social conflict performed by Elton Mayo in the late 1930s.[10] His work, which led to the human relations movement, emphasized the need for cooperation in enhancing the effectiveness of organizations. For Mayo, conflict was evil and required minimization or, if possible, elimination from organizations. According to Robbins, this philosophy of management continued to be predominant through the 1940s.[11]

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[8] Tillett, *Resolving Conflict*, 16.

[9] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 12.

[10] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 6. Other theorists holding to this classical view of conflict in organizations include Frederick Taylor, Henry Fayol, and Max Weber.

[11] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 12. Robbins does present an exception to this statement in the work of Mary Parker Follett who recognized the value of constructive conflict already in the 1920's. Rahim supports Robbins recognition of Follett's work and states that it was several decades ahead of the majority of the social science of her day.

In his work, *Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation*, Lyle Schaller defines conflict as a "clash of differing points of view."[12] This definition continues to reinforce the agonistic perception of conflict. Like Robbins, he notes that historically the term related to the more violent nature of irreconcilable interests and objectives. The modern context of conflict, however, can describe the more moderate, non-violent differences of opinion and values between individuals or groups. Schaller points out that since conflict can have such a broad range of understanding, some scholars prefer to use the term *social tension* to describe the more moderate dimension of conflict.[13]

The concept of conflict as *social tension* highlights two of its basic components. First, conflict has a *social* component to it. Conflict occurs within a social context when individuals or groups disagree with one another over competing ideas or values. The field of conflict studies primarily focuses on social conflict, namely the conflict between individuals or groups.[14] As Rahim states, "When two or more social entities come in contact with one another in attaining their objectives, their relationships may become incompatible or inconsistent."[15]

The second component of this concept of conflict is the *tension* that is created as a result of this competition over values, ideas, or goals. Schaller contends that conflict does not exist apart from competition.

> Change generates competition which expands the range of choices available to people. That produces greater competition which creates new changes which...creates additional choices. That becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. A common side effect of that cycle is the generation of disruptive conflict.[16]

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[12] Schaller, *Community Organization*, 73. Schaller is a renowned church consultant and author on the subject of congregational life.
[13] Schaller, *Community Organization*, 73.
[14] Schellenberg, *Conflict Resolution*, 8.
[15] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 1.
[16] Schaller, *Cooperation to Competition*, 48.

As an illustration of this concept, Schaller points to the merger of two denominations. Such a major change can result in the new body competing for the loyalty of each of the original congregations, trying to emphasize the common values, doctrines, and goals shared by both groups. Unfortunately, this competition can produce winners and losers when both parties struggle over control. As Schaller reminds us, "This is not a new pattern of institutional behaviour! This competition over control...has been one of the longest and most divisive battles in the history of the institutional expression of the Christian faith."[17] Thus, competition over values, ideas, and goals leads to tension.

Schaller's position that conflict and competition go hand in hand is supported by the definition of the term itself. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, conflict is "a competitive or opposing action of incompatibles as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons."[18] This competition can range from a friendly contest between sport teams to violent confrontations between picketing union workers and corporate management. For Rahim, relationships break down when there is competition for common resources that are in short supply or when there are differences in an individual's behavioural preferences regarding communal actions to be taken by a group.[19] This relational view of conflict is reflected in Rahim's definition of the term. He defines conflict as an "interactive process manifested in *incompatibility*, *disagreement*, or *dissonance* within or between social entities (i.e individual, group, organization, etc.)."[20] Note that these terms — incompatibility, disagreement, and dissonance — once again reinforce the idea that the term conflict is often viewed in a negative light. Regardless of the level of conflict,

[17] Schaller, *Cooperation to Competition*, 79.
[18] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 10th ed., "conflict."
[19] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 1.
[20] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 18. Emphasis added.

however, the preceding paragraphs imply that competition between individuals or parties leads to tension.

In his work detailing the history of the traditional philosophy of conflict cited earlier, Robbins proceeds to show how the agonistic view of conflict continued through the 1940s. As time passed, however, this philosophy began to change and behavioural scientists began to view conflict with a degree of acceptance, recognizing the potential positive effects that conflict could provide if controlled and directed appropriately. The absence of conflict in several businesses was noted to have led to complacency, apathy, and stagnation in these organizations.[21] At the time, however, behaviourists only sought to rationalize the existence of conflict, recognizing that it seemed to have benefits but not understanding the extent of its positive contribution to organizations. This is evident from the work of Daniel Katz who states, "...it should be added that we are not assuming that all conflict is bad and that the only objective toward which we should work is the resolution of conflict. Group conflict has positive social functions..."[22] Unfortunately, this realization that conflict could have positive outcomes was not fully accepted by organizational management and response to this revelation was received with "grudging tolerance."[23] Thus, management accepted that conflict should not be stifled but failed to understand how to utilize its potential to stimulate positive change.

Recognizing the positive effects of conflict in enhancing performance and preventing apathy, especially in the corporate world, raised an apparent dualism for management. Unbridled conflict had negative effects and could lead to potential dysfunction in organizations. Properly managed conflict, on the other hand, could

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[21] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 15.
[22] Katz, "Approaches," 113–114.
[23] Pneuman and Bruehl, *Managing Conflict*, 2.

stimulate innovation and change. The key for organizations, however, was learning how to balance conflict so as to optimize organizational creativity while maintaining efficiency and coordination of activities.[24] Robbins describes this philosophy of conflict, which began to advance in the1970s, as *interactionist.* This philosophy helped organizations understand that conflict was necessary and needed to be encouraged but also required managing.[25]

Robbins' interactionist philosophy of conflict sets the level for the approach presented in this thesis. I have been arguing for a general understanding of conflict in order to show how the traditional view conjures up images of hostility and antagonism. More recent history, however, points to a view of conflict that recognizes its potential benefits. The positive side of conflict and how it can bring about transformation will be the focus of the following chapters of this thesis. Before proceeding with that discussion, however, it is important that church leaders understand the various types of conflict, roles participants play, levels of complexity, and causes of conflict. The goal is for leaders to be able to distinguish situations in which conflict can be used to fuel positive change. This is the focus of the next section.

Distinguishing Conflict Types, Participant Roles and Levels in Conflict

Conflict can arise as a result of many different circumstances. As I stated in my introduction, not all situations of conflict produce an environment that can be used by church leaders to bring about positive change. Thus, I argue that it is important that leaders understand how to distinguish various types of conflict, what level conflict has

[24] Pneuman and Bruehl, *Managing Conflict*, 3.
[25] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 13.

escalated to, and what some of its underlying causes are. This understanding will equip leaders with the knowledge of identifying situations of conflict that can foster transformation.

One way conflict can be categorized is by grouping it according to relational factors. Authors differ with respect to the terminology used to describe these various types of conflict, but Leas and Kittlaus simplify them into three categories: *intrapersonal, interpersonal*, and *substantive* conflict.[26] In order to better understand how to identify the source of conflict, leaders need to be able to discern its relational components.

Intrapersonal conflict is a struggle that a person has within himself or herself.[27] While the definition discussed in the previous section stated that conflict involves two parties, intrapersonal conflict still meets this criterion. Internal struggles involve battles between the intellect and the emotions, between the mind and the heart; these two *parties* (the mind and heart; the intellect and emotion) are at odds with one another creating inner conflict in a person's psyche. Bossart references the work of Blaine F. Hartwood of the Niagara Institute of Behavioural Science who asserts that *problems* are not usually at the heart of conflict. He states that "the real problem is the *state* of the individuals and the resulting relationship between persons."[28] In situations of conflict, internal issues must be considered as well as external relationships. He goes on to say that "the inner conflict of the individual is at the base [of the problem]."[29] Tillett expands on this concept of inner conflict recognizing that intrapersonal conflict can result from competing demands, needs

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[26] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 30-35.
[27] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 30.
[28] Bossart, *Creative Conflict*, 9. Emphasis added. No specific reference work by Hartford is cited by Bossart.
[29] Bossart, *Creative Conflict*, 9.

and loyalties within an individual. These competing demands and needs can lead to guilt, which he considers an "important form of inner conflict."[30] Thus, inner conflict can stem from opposing internal feelings a person has that battle against each other.

To provide an example of intrapersonal conflict, consider a church pastor who may experience an inner struggle between the desire to be accepted and loved by all members of the congregation and the desire to preach the truth, even if it may offend some. The Director of Music may experience a struggle between a personal desire to introduce contemporary music into the worship service and a feeling of loyalty towards some of the seniors who are known to prefer traditional hymns. In these situations, both the pastor and the Director of Music have internal feelings at odds that create *intrapersonal* conflict.

Rahim claims that every individual faces situations of intrapersonal conflict on a daily basis.[31] Each time we are faced with a decision that has any degree of uncertainty, we experience internal conflict. Some situations of internal conflict are less dramatic that others, but they are a part of everyday life.

A second type of conflict is *interpersonal conflict.* Interpersonal conflict is related to differences between two or more individuals but is not necessarily related to a specific issue. Leas and Kittlaus describe this conflict as occurring between individuals "primarily over their incompatibility as persons. This conflict is not generated by what a person does or what he thinks about an issue, but by how he feels about the other person."[32] Bossart defines interpersonal conflict as "the projection of our intrapersonal

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[30] Tillett, *Resolving Conflict*, 5.
[31] Rahim, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 97.
[32] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 31.

ambivalence of values onto others with the resultant dissatisfaction and frustration."[33] What he is asserting is that interpersonal conflict arises when we try to impose our own personal values onto others and are rejected. The resulting frustration gives rise to interpersonal conflict. The role that personal values play in conflict will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Intergroup conflict, which is a form of interpersonal conflict, can arise when the dispute occurs between groups rather than specific individuals. For the purposes of this work, however, intergroup conflict will be categorized within interpersonal conflict since the conflict is often carried out by individuals within each group and adequately addressing the conflict depends on discussions with the individual representatives of the parties involved.

An example of interpersonal conflict is a clash of personality styles in a work environment. An extroverted manager might regularly nag an introverted employee to be more assertive in his dealing with clients. Interpersonal conflict certainly occurs in church settings as well. A people-oriented pastor may constantly be at odds with the task-oriented Chairman of the Board. The differing personal styles of leadership can result in tension that spills out into church business meetings creating frustration for all members of the leadership.

A third type of conflict is *substantive conflict.* Substantive conflict can occur between two individuals, between two or more groups, or a combination of individuals and groups. What differentiates substantive conflict from the previous two types just discussed is that substantive conflict has to do with specific facts, goals, issues or values.

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[33] Bossart, *Creative Conflict*, 10.

While personalities and feelings are still factors in these circumstances, the root of the conflict relates to external factors.

Examples of these situations include a dispute between the pastor and church treasurer about how expenses should be reported, or it could be about a disagreement between the Director of Music and the worship leaders as to the number of choruses that should be sung on Sunday morning. Substantive conflict can also occur between groups of people where each group holds to a certain view or position in contrast to the other group. A tragic example of this is when a church divides over the dismissal of the pastor. Clashes occur between one group of congregants that remain loyal to the pastor and another group that support the decision to ask the pastor to leave.

Substantive conflict can be further divided into several subcategories. Conflict can arise over facts, methodologies, goals, purposes or values. Leas and Kittlaus cite Tannenbaum and Schmidt's work in providing a further subdivision of substantive conflict.[34]

First, substantive conflict can occur over *facts* of a situation. For example, a conflict may arise between the church's board members over the financial health of the church. The deacons say that the church is doing well while the treasurer states that the church is falling behind relative to previous years. The conflict can be easily resolved by looking up the actual data in the financial reports from the past few years and comparing them to the current financial position of the church.

A second kind of substantive conflict relates to disagreements over *methodology* or the *means* of finding a solution to a problem. In the previous example, the board

[34] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 32. The authors cite the article by Warren Schmidt and Robert Tannenbaum, "The Management of Differences," in Irving Weschler and Frank Massarik, *Leadership and Organization* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1961), 101-118.

members may finally agree on the actual financial state of the church based on the conclusions of their investigation, but an ensuing conflict might develop over how to deal with the failing financial state of the church. One board member believes that the pastor should be preaching more frequently on tithing and the stewardship responsibilities of church members. Another member disagrees, holding that such action will drive new congregants and potential new members away from the church. She believes that monthly financial statements to the membership will be adequate.

A third kind of substantive conflict deals with *goals or purposes.* Many churches have had heated conflict over the development of their mission statement. Questions such as *What direction should our church be moving in?* or *What is the purpose of our church in relation to the local community and the rest of the world?* are important to ask. Getting a group of people to agree on such philosophical questions and summarize them into a concise statement, however, can lead to much debate. Conflicts over goals and purposes can have deep seated effects on congregations and need to be addressed with sensitivity.

This deep seated effect on individuals involved in goal or purpose conflict leads to the final form of substantive conflict which relates to *values*. While goal or purpose substantive conflict deals with outcomes, value conflict relates to the underlying core or foundation on which the goals and purposes are built. The goal debate raises the question *What is ...?* The value debate deals with the *Why...?* questions. To use Leas and Kittlaus' distinction, "The answer to the goals question determines the direction that an organization will take, but the answer to the values question determines which goals will be chosen."[35]

[35] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 33.

Since conflict can also arise due to confusion over whether an issue is over goals or over their underlying values, the distinction between these two is important. To illustrate this, Leas and Kittlaus describe a situation where a church disagreed over its involvement in a political issue.[36] Some in the church defined the conflict as an issue over values while others argued it was a matter of the church's goals. Through mediation, the church members recognized that there was actually a significant level of agreement on their underlying values regarding the role of the church in the community. They agreed that individual diversity in opinions was acceptable, that everyone had the right to express their opinions, and that the church had a role to play in upholding justice in society. Once the commonality between the individual values was acknowledged, the debate was tempered and more open dialogue ensued. The focus was redirected to the actual question behind the issue: *Should the goal of our church be involvement in this particular political issue?*

When leaders of a church propose significant changes in a congregation's way of life, the resulting conflict generally falls into the category of substantive conflict involving goals and values. While personality differences come into play, church leaders need to be able to discern the underlying personal values that may be perceived as being under attack through the change. I contend that this type of substantive conflict is at the root of the issues that church leaders will face in the process of initiating transformational change in their congregations.

The preceding paragraphs have outlined the various types of conflict that church leaders may encounter. Before proceeding with a detailed description of the levels of

[36] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 34.

complexity that can develop in situations of conflict, it is necessary for leaders to understand the key roles that various parties can take during conflict. This is important because leaders need to discern between direct and indirect participants.

In his work, *Managing Church Conflict*, Hugh Halverstadt defines various terms that help "clarify …the distinctive ways in which parties' primary interests and positions relate them to a conflictive situation."[37] I believe that understanding how to differentiate the various roles that participants in situations of conflict can take aids church leaders in determining which individuals in the dispute need to be approached first in order to begin the process of addressing conflict in a positive manner.

Principals — A principal in a conflict situation "is a party whose interests — purposes, needs, desires, responsibilities, and/or commitments — are in collision with those of at least one other party. Principals are related to a conflict because they have stakes in *the conflicting process*."[38] The principals are at the heart of the conflict and it is their differences that fuel the conflict. These principals are the individuals church leaders need to identify first.

Within this group of principals, Halverstadt introduces three sub-groupings.[39] The first of the subgroups, called *structural* principals, are those who have institutional responsibilities. The second, called *cultural* principals, are those who have status within the organization. Within the context of a church setting, paid church staff members typically take the role of structural principals. Professional staff can have a high cultural status because they are seen as authority figures. When these two roles overlap, one can

[37] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 46.
[38] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 46. Emphasis in original.
[39] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 46.

see why church conflict often arises between church staff members or between church staff and lay leaders.

A third sub-group is *political* principals. This group represents "special mentalities, attitudes, beliefs, or ideologies resident in faith communities and denominational systems."[40] Loyalties among church members have a significant influence in conflict situations and in many cases, individuals may hold to a position contrary to their own convictions in order to uphold allegiances with other members of the church.

Bystanders — A bystander in an organizational conflict is a party "whose interests …are related to the *impact* of a conflict's resolution"[41] on the community or the organization itself. Bystanders are primarily focussed on the *process* by which principals resolve the conflict, not so much on the actual solution. As the definition states, their concern stems from the fact that they will be impacted by the way the conflict is handled by the leadership of the church. They would not want the dispute to cause irreparable damage to their organizational environment. While the term sounds passive, bystanders can exercise much influence on the conflict process if they so choose. This can be in the form of imposing constraints and boundaries on the principals' behaviour. "A community of responsible bystanders can also reinforce constructive behaviours by the principals, thereby contributing to a win/win resolution of the issue."[42]

Halverstadt warns that bystanders who have high stakes in the outcome of the conflict can often exacerbate the situation rather than aid in its resolution. This can occur when they take sides in the conflict hoping that this action will prevent the situation from

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[40] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 47.
[41] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 47. Emphasis added.
[42] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 47.

disintegrating. Unfortunately, such action only polarizes the principals even further. A more effective way for bystanders to be involved in the conflict is to focus their intervention "in the process of the conflict rather than position themselves over the matters at issue."[43] What Halverstadt is saying is that bystanders can be more effective in helping leaders respond appropriately to conflict by supporting them in the solution process rather than taking sides. This will be elaborated on in Chapter Five.

Third Parties — A third party to an organizational conflict is an outside party "whose interests...relate only to the *dynamics* of a conflict."[44] Bystanders described above are *not* third parties. While bystanders and third parties are both involved in the dynamics of the conflict, Halverstadt distinguishes third parties as those who are interested in *only* the dynamics of the conflict and nothing else. They remain unaffected by the resolution or the effects of the process itself. In a church setting, these third parties may be represented by regional officials from the denominational head office who may be called in as advisors in a conflict situation.

In order to help illustrate the distinction between these various roles, Halverstadt uses a fishing boat analogy.[45] The principals are those in the boat who have engaged themselves in a fight. Bystanders are others in the boat that are deeply concerned about the outcome of the fight and make every effort to ensure the boat doesn't sink. They have a direct interest in the *process* by which the conflict is carried out because they will suffer the effects if the outcome ends in disaster. Bystanders might impose a boundary condition on the principals declaring, for example, that the principals may not stand up in the boat during their confrontation. One can see how taking sides in the conflict proves

[43] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 47.
[44] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 49. Emphasis added.
[45] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 47–49.

counter productive as it actually increases the risk that the boat will capsize. Third parties, on the other hand, are individuals who are standing on the shore of the water. They can observe what is happening and can even call out advice from the sidelines but they are not directly involved in the conflict and they are not directly impacted if the boat floats or sinks.

Arbiters — A final role to consider is that of an arbiter. An arbiter is one "whose interests …relate only to the conflicting *differences* between principals."[46] When efforts to resolve a conflict in a constructive manner have failed, an arbiter may be required by all parties involved to bring about a resolution. This should always be seen as a last resort. Unfortunately, individuals in conflicts cannot be forced to act fairly. Aggressive, manipulative principals combined with passive bystanders who refuse to be engaged in bringing about an amiable solution lead to destructive conflict situations. When arbiters are called in to pick up the pieces, their solutions to the conflict primarily apply to the community of bystanders rather than the principals. The bystanders are then freed to begin to rebuild their community, often at the expense of losing one of the principals in the process.

I have argued that it is important for Christian leaders to understand some of the broader principles of conflict so they will be able to recognize situations where conflict can be used to promote transformation. With the types of conflict and participant roles now clearly defined, church leaders will be better equipped to assess situations of conflict and distinguish between the primary and secondary participants. Understanding the personal dynamics within these situations is important. Discerning roles in conflict will

[46] Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 50. Emphasis added.

aid leaders in directing appropriate responses to the appropriate parties based on their level of involvement in the issue at hand.

To further educate leaders in understanding conflict, I present an overview of the degree of escalation that can develop during situations of conflict. These degrees of escalation relate to the complexity that can exist in these conflict situations. Leas has developed five levels of conflict,[47] with each level increasing in the complexity of the circumstances as well as in the difficulty of achieving clear solutions. He notes that each level has two identifying characteristics: first, the conflicting parties' objectives, and secondly, the way these parties use language.[48] A review of these levels of conflict follows:

Level 1: Problems to Solve — This first and simplest level of conflict deals with some of the substantive issues described previously. In these situations, actual differences do exist between individuals or groups giving rise to conflicting goals, needs, plans or values. Individuals may have feelings of anger or hostility towards one another but this generally does not last for any length of time and is quickly brought into control.

In Level 1, the objective of those involved in the conflict is resolution of the problem. They utilize rational methods to assess the underlying issues and seek to be focused on the actual problem at hand and not the personalities or intrapersonal issues the principals may exhibit. The solution to the problem is sought using known problem-solving techniques and those involved in the conflict will work together, sharing information and optimistically cooperating towards achieving a solution.

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[47] Leas, *Moving*, 19–22. Leas uses the terminology "levels of complexity" in describing these degrees of conflict escalation.

[48] Leas, *Moving*, 19.

The language used at this level of conflict is clear, specific, and focused on the current situation and the facts of the matter being resolved. Innuendo and blaming are not involved and the disputants invite others, those identified above as bystanders, to be involved by providing information that will help to bring the problem to resolution.

Level 2: Disagreement — In Level 2 conflict, the parties involved are more concerned with self-preservation than with solving the problem. Self-preservation involves more than just the prevention of injury to oneself. It involves safeguarding one's image. Solving the problem becomes secondary to ensuring that, in the end, the primary individuals involved in the conflict do not lose face and come out looking admirable. An element of shrewdness is introduced and the principals draw others into the conflict looking for advice so they can strategize their next moves.

The language used to describe the situation at Level 2 involves generalizations rather than specifics. Facts are not openly stated to help identify the specific people involved or the specific issue at hand. Rather, general comments are made like *Some people have said...* or *There seems to be a communication problem here.* While there are specific details underlying these general statements, those having a concern in the conflict try to avoid direct involvement by using these types of generalizations. This level of conflict is characterized by caution rather than hostility. Parties will lean towards compromise to bring about a resolution to their differences even if it is not appropriate or even possible.

Level 3: Contest — At Level 3, conflict occurs when the dynamics of the situation revert to a win-lose scenario. In the end, one of the principles comes out of the conflict as the winner, while the other ends up the loser. The objective of those directly

involved in Level 3 conflict moves from self-preservation to winning. Those involved in the dispute are not interested in the elimination of their opponents but actually enjoy an adversary who will present them with a challenge. These types of situations are usually complex and involve multiple issues that intertwine making the resolution of the conflict more difficult. As bystanders begin to side with the various disputants, issues get clouded by personality differences and factions are formed. The common goal of these parties, however, remains the constant search for victories that reinforce their group's power and control over others. At this point, the contest has been set for a win/lose conclusion.

The language of Level 3 conflict involves distortion of the details and facts of the situation. This distortion, whether perceived or described, creates a serious problem in the conflict resolution process. Leas lists several of the key distortions that occur during this level of conflict:[49]

Magnification is the tendency to consider oneself to be more gracious than one actually is and the other party as more malevolent that she or he is.

Dichotomization is the tendency to divide the people and details of the conflict into neat pairs, but opposite parts. This type of distortion creates the *us versus them* or *right versus wrong* situations with no grey areas in between. These two extreme alternatives are the only options considered in the resolution process.

Over-generalization is a form of distortion that exaggerates the specific behaviour of parties involved in the conflict. While Level 2 conflict introduces generalities in the description of the situation, Level 3 takes these generalities to extremes. Phrases like *he always says...* or *she never does...* appear in the presentation of the details of the conflict.

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[49] Leas, *Moving*, 20.

Assumption making occurs in Level 3 conflict when the principals begin to convince themselves that they can read the minds of their opponents and understand their most subtle motives. This is a delusion that further distorts the facts. The principles not only *describe* the consequences of their opponent's behaviour, but also imply that they possess a special insight into the *rationale* for this behaviour.

In addition to language and objectives criteria, there are other indicators that a leader is dealing with Level 3 conflict. The winning objective of the disputants makes it likely that neither party will be open to making any peace offerings toward resolving the dispute. Both sides wait for the other party to show signs of weakness. Personal attacks between opponents are prevalent adding to the complexity of the conflict. Those directly involved in the conflict also move from using rational arguments to appealing to the emotions.

Level 4: Fight or Flight — At this high level of conflict, the objective of the disputants moves from winning the contest to hurting or getting rid of their opponents. Hope that the opposing party will ever change is lost completely. Thus, the only option remaining is to remove opponents from the environment. Examples of this level of conflict include attempts to fire the pastor or to get an opposing group to leave the church. Unfortunately, in these situations, the interests of the overall organization are lost in favour of the good of the group. The primary goal is to be right and to punish the opponents rather than attempt to move towards resolution.

At this level of conflict, strong leaders emerge to direct the factions that have now solidified. Cohesion becomes the primary focus of these factional groups at the expense of the organizations overall wellbeing. The language of this level of conflict moves

toward ideologies where the group elevates the principles that are being violated rather than keeping the focus on the issues at hand. One's rights, freedom, or individuality are at stake. This level of conflict is named *Fight or Flight* because no middle ground exists between parties. They are either running to escape the conflict or digging in to attack, and the attackers don't differentiate between their opponents as people and the ideas that are being proposed or defended. Factions also disassociate from each other carrying an unforgiving and self-righteous attitude. This adds to the segregation of the groups and makes each side immune to the pain the other is experiencing.

Level 5: Intractable Situations — Intractable situations are essentially conflict situations that can no longer be managed and have gone beyond the control of those who initiated the dispute. While the objective of Level 4 conflict was to punish and ultimately remove one's opponent from the organization, this next level takes the severity of the antagonism one step further. Here the disputants seek to destroy their opponents who are perceived as not only hurting the organization itself, but society as a whole. In the previous example concerning the firing of the pastor, Level 5 conflict would see the members of the church attempt to prevent this pastor from ever finding another church to minister in and actually obstruct the pastor's search for a new position.

Those entangled in Level 5 conflict believe they are defending some universal cause which compels them to continue the battle at all costs. They are fighting for the sake of society as a whole, for truth itself, or for God. Consequently, they believe that continuing to wage the conflict is the only solution.

In the previous section I have detailed the types of conflict, the participant roles, and the degrees of complexity that church leaders may find themselves dealing with when conflict erupts in their local congregations. I have argued that this information is necessary to educate leaders in conflict theory. When a church leader suddenly becomes drawn into a conflict, he or she must be able to quickly assess the situation — *What are the issues? Who is directly involved? Who are the principals and who are the bystanders? Is this conflict at Level 1 or has it already escalated to Level 3 or 4?* These are some of the questions that leaders must answer before they can begin to respond effectively to the conflict in a manner that fosters transformation. This chapter has presented some of the basics of conflict theory to equip these leaders in this assessment process. Being able to identify the key players when conflict arises or to realize whether a conflict is rooted in personality issues or real facts and what level the conflict has evolved to, will aid leaders in utilizing the approach presented in this thesis more effectively.

In addition, however, what I have presented to this point has served to support the opening assertion of this chapter, namely that much of the literature on conflict presents it in a negative, agonistic light. This last section in particular detailing the various levels of conflict highlights this point clearly. Terms such as disagreement, self-preservation, opponents, adversaries, contests, fights, battles used by Leas to describe these conflict levels reinforce this negative perspective.

The purpose of this thesis, however, is to equip Christian leaders to be able to utilize conflict in a constructive manner. I have argued that not all conflict can be used to inspire transformation. Certainly, some types of conflict must be suppressed. Destructive

behaviour as described by Leas in his work on levels of conflict must be dealt with appropriately and the literature provides guidance on how to begin this process.[50] My goal is to present a different approach in dealing with conflict. But before leaving this overview of conflict, a brief review of some of the causes of conflict, especially in a church context, will be presented to complete my aim in preparing church leaders respond appropriately to these situations.

Common Causes of Conflict

One of the first steps leaders must take in appropriately dealing with situations of conflict is assessing what caused the dispute to arise. This can often be difficult since conflict can erupt after some of the originating issues have already evolved. The key for leadership, however, is to investigate the situation as soon as possible and begin with an inquiry process with the principals involved to determine what is at the heart of the dispute. In the context of communities of faith, Roy W. Pneuman has identified some of the common sources of congregational clashes.[51]

Unclear Organizational Structure — Pneuman uses the term "structural ambiguity"[52] to describe this cause of conflict. Conflict emerges when guidelines regarding the roles and responsibilities of the clergy, staff, laity, or committees are unclear. This can occur when role definitions and procedures are not written down or, if they are, they are not adhered to by the organization. No one in the organization knows who is responsible to do what. When a procedural question arises, there is no

[50] Leas, *Moving*. Leas provides some intervention strategies for dealing with conflict at the various levels described above in Chapters 7-9.
[51] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 45-53.
[52] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 46.

documentation to provide guidance. Individuals may get conflicting information from various sources, thus leading to frustration. Alternatively, individuals develop their own procedures. This can potentially lead to friction if these new procedures conflict with another parties' unwritten methodologies.

The Pastor's Role and Responsibilities are in Conflict — In this situation, conflict arises as a result of differing views on what the pastor should be focusing his or her time on. The church board may request that the pastor primarily focus on preaching and development of local outreach opportunities in the community. The seniors in the church, however, believe the pastor should be spending more time with visitation. These differing views lead to conflict.

The Congregation Outgrows the Organizational Structure — As congregations grow, the structure within the church can become a source of conflict. For example, close relationships among the entire congregation may need to give way to smaller group settings. This type of change may be difficult for some in the church family. Long-standing members may still expect the pastor to be involved in a more personal ministry, as in the past, but this expectation is no longer feasible due to limitations on the pastor's time. These changes create tension.

Clergy and Parish Leadership Styles Don't Match — Leadership style can also create conflict, especially when a new pastor has a different style than his or her predecessor. Pneuman separates leadership style into two basic categories — the pastor is either task oriented or relationship oriented. If the congregation has been accustomed to their pastor spending significant time visiting families and developing good relationships with individuals, this expectation is carried on to the next pastor leading the church. A

task oriented successor will run into difficulty with this congregation. Much will be accomplished and many new programs implemented but without the focus on people, this new pastor will face tension due to the conflicting expectations within the congregation.

A New Pastor Rushes into Changes — Sometimes a new pastor arrives at a church and fails to take sufficient time to get to know the congregation before introducing changes. The congregation criticizes the pastor for disregarding its heritage or being insensitive to the concern of long-time members who feel displaced by the changes. A new, young pastor arrives at a church and immediately replaces the traditional hymns with contemporary choruses. This creates significant conflict among many in the congregation whose prefer the previous style of worship.

Communication Lines are Blocked — Communication issues typically arise in *response* to conflict as one group avoids dialogue with its opponents. This, however, often escalates the tension as key information needed to resolve the issue is withheld. Communication is critical in conflict management and when it breaks down or is purposely hindered, the conflict can escalate to a higher level making management more difficult.

Disaffected Members Hold Back Participation and Pledges — Churches that struggle with conflict also find themselves struggling over control of resources. As the tension rises, individuals or groups begin to limit their involvement in the congregation, both in their financial giving as well as in their time commitment. Attendance begins to suffer as people feel ignored and respond by disengaging from the church.

People Disagree about Values and Beliefs — As stated earlier, differences in values and beliefs are a major source of conflict in churches. "Congregations disagree

about what the church is and what it ought to be about."[53] This diversity of values will be looked at more closely in the next chapter.

Church People Manage Conflict Poorly — Poorly managed conflict leads to hightened conflict. As Pneuman points out, people in the church seem to have the impression that conflict is evil and that it should not happen in the church.[54] This leads to the creation of false norms that lead people to ignore conflict rather than manage it.[55] This only exaserbates the situation and often intensifies the tension.

It is this final point that Pneuman makes, namely that the poor management of conflict reinforces the negative image associated with it. The mismanagement of situations of conflict only serves to promote the notion that conflict itself is bad, and it has created a false perception that the goal of leadership should be to suppress it. Pneuman, however, reminds his readers that conflict has a benefit to organizations, including the church. "Conflict creates the energy that makes change possible."[56] When conflict is managed poorly it does become destructive. Denying the conflict process only removes the opportunity to harness its energy to bring about positive change in our congregations.

I have argued that church leaders must come to the realization that they need to be educated in the process of dealing appropriately with conflict so that they will be prepared to address it when it surfaces. This chapter has served that purpose. But education must come about *before* conflict escalates to a point where it is out of control. Leaders need to

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[53] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 45.
[54] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 51.
[55] An example of a false norm would be a statement like: "*Challenging the view of someone in leadership demonstrates lack of respect.*"
[56] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 51.

take the time to educate themselves with these conflict principles *during periods of calm* so that they can be prepared for the troubled times when issues arise that lead to conflict.

To summarize this chapter, conflict is a reality in the church. Church leaders must learn to face the challenge and shift away from its elimination and move towards utilizing it to bring about transformational change within the church, a process that Ronald Heifetz calls *adaptive work.* It is this change that will enhance ministry and make the church, as a whole, more effective in ministering to the communities it is called to reach for Christ. Adaptive work, however, requires bold, effective leadership. Building a strong leadership team is essential to move a church through the challenges that arise when change occurs, even in the midst of conflict. But before introducing how leaders can use conflict to bring about positive change, the concept of *adaptive work* needs to be developed in greater detail so that a clearer understanding of its application can be discussed. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSFORMATIONAL CONFLICT — INTRODUCING ADAPTIVE WORK

In a recent meeting with several evangelical denominational leaders, Bud Penner, president of the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada, summarized observations these leaders made concerning the condition of many evangelical churches in Canada. The following are excerpts from these observations: [1]

- Evangelicals are attending church less faithfully on a Sunday to Sunday basis. On average less than 50% of church members and adherents are present on a given Sunday.
- There is less volunteerism and yet higher expectations for services from local churches.
- Giving is less focused on the local church and focused more on the value the giver hopes to receive from his/her gift directly.
- There is an emphasis on making worship more appealing to post-modern people, but there is not an agreement as to what that should look like. There are lots of opinions, usually strongly expressed.

The observations made by these denominational leaders highlight some of the challenges church leaders are facing in our Canadian culture. The communities churches have been called to minister to with the gospel message of Jesus Christ are changing. Our society is governed by post-modern thinking. Technological advancements dominate the lives of our younger generation. The cultural mosaic of our communities across Canada is also changing. These changes are affecting churches and their ministries. Yet, I believe that many churches have failed to respond to these changes effectively. Part of this failure to respond stems from an apparent fear that the church will become too worldly and fall away from core biblical teaching. Some churches have attempted to

[1] Penner, "Presidents Report." This letter was addressed to Pastors and/or Board Chairs from the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada dated May 17, 2007, Burlington, Ontario. The letter listed nine observations. The remaining five were not pertinent to this thesis. Letter used with permission.

change but leaders have met such resistance from their congregations they have given up the effort.

Why do churches need transformational change? Herrinton, Bonem and Furr put this question into perspective:

> Is something wrong if a church takes care of its members and maintains stable attendance while preserving its traditions? Traditions and rituals have great value, and effective care ministries are always needed. But Christ established his church to proclaim and demonstrate salvation to the world.[2]

This statement highlights the fact that many congregations may be too inward focused, forgetting the biblical mandate calling believers to "Go and make disciples of all nations."[3] I contend that churches need to evaluate their effectiveness at being salt and light in their local communities. For those who discover that their salt has lost its flavour or their light has been hidden under a basket, change needs to take place. This requires transformation in these congregations, but it must begin at the leadership level. Church leaders must accept that transformation begins with a recognition that continuing to maintain the status quo fails to fulfill the mandate to reach a lost world with the message of hope. Change is needed.

Change is an important part of life. As we mature we are constantly in a state of change. Maturing is all about changing from the old to the new. For the Christian, the apostle Paul declares, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"[4] The spiritual life of the believer is about change; it is about

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[2] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, ix.
[3] Matthew 28:19.
[4] 2 Corinthians 5:17.

transformation. Again, the apostle Paul commands believers: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."[5]

While change is important, it does not come without pain. Change is uncomfortable for people. People resist change because of the unknown that lies ahead for them. As a result of this resistance, change gives rise to conflict. This statement has biblical support as well. When God called individuals to step out in faith and do something great for his service, the Scripture records that conflicts emerged; but in the process these individuals were transformed. Consider an example from the Old Testament. When God called Moses to become the leader who would deliver the Israelites from Egypt, Moses became extremely uncomfortable with the changes that needed to take place in his life. Conflict erupted between him and God as he argued with God about his own shortcomings. Conflict continued throughout his leadership journey, first with Pharaoh and subsequently on many occasions with the people of Israel. Through the changes and ensuing conflicts in his life, however, Moses was transformed. He become one of the greatest leaders and servants of God recorded in Scripture. As Pneuman states, "conflict creates the energy that makes change [transformation] possible."[6] Moses is a testimony to Pneuman's claim.

In my thesis, I argue that conflict arising from change can inspire transformation. While this notion seems paradoxical, Leas and Kittlaus state that "the positive functions of conflict make it essential to healthy organizational life."[7] A healthy church will have conflict. In Chapter One I presented an overview of conflict to educate leaders in some of

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[5] Romans 12:2.

[6] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 51. I contend that Pneuman's concept of change energized by conflict is the kind of transformational change needed in the lives of many congregations.

[7] Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights*, 35.

the aspects of conflict theory. In the process, I also highlighted that conflict has traditionally been perceived in a negative light. In this chapter I argue that there are specific situations involving conflict that, when responded to appropriately, foster transformation. These are the situations Heifetz and Linsky call *adaptive work.* This chapter will help church leaders identify these situations in which conflict *can* be utilized in a positive manner to promote growth in their communities of faith. I will unpack the concept of adaptive work and how it can be applied to situations of conflict arising from change, specifically in church settings. I believe that one of the contributing factors linking change and conflict in the church is threatened personal values. The role personal values play in situations of adaptive work will be discussed first.

Values and Conflict – The Fuel for Adaptive Work

In the following section, I argue that the relationship between conflict and change can be attributed to a perception that personal values are being threatened. The benefit of these situations, however, is that they can promote open discussion and dialogue that can begin a process called *adaptive work.* First, I will establish how change and conflict relate.

Change usually requires adaptation. Some change requires little adaptation. A traffic light gets added to an intersection in the neighbourhood. We discipline ourselves to stop when we encounter a red light that was not there before. Over time, as more traffic lights mark the busy street, we learn to adapt to this new situation. We begin to give ourselves more time to get to our destination because the new lights slow down our progress that previously went unhindered.

Other forms of change require more significant adaptation. They involve changes that affect the core of our being — our value systems and traditions. These types of changes were described in Chapter One as *substantive* conflicts rooted in individual or group goals and values. Changes of this type raise our resistance because they take us out of our comfort zone. As resistance rises, conflict can erupt which heightens the discomfort. Adaptation meets more resistance as the status quo is challenged.

On the surface, understanding what instigates conflict in a church setting may appear to be a simple task. When one of the senior members of the church complains to the Director of Music that the worship band was far too loud on Sunday, the initial response to this confrontation may be to simply turn the volume down. At the heart of the conflict, however, lies more that mere decibels. The senior member feels that the recent introduction of contemporary worship music threatens her personal value system – one value being that traditional hymns represent proper worship.

In Chapter One, I cited Pneuman who stated that differences in values and beliefs are a major source of conflict in churches. "Congregations disagree about what the church is and what it ought to be about."[8] In many cases, the underlying factor that gives rise to conflict in churches is a set of values that are being challenged and, more importantly, overlooked when change is introduced. At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that the failure of churches to respond to the changing face of society may be noted as one of the reasons church attendance in Canada is in a state of decline.[9] Responding to change raises fear in many congregations. I contend that this fear has a direct correlation

[8] Pneuman, "Nine Common Sources," 45.

[9] Reginald Bibby, sociologist at University of Lethbridge has tracked religious trends in Canada. In a National Post article (Joseph Brean, "Church of Tough Love," December 23, 2006.) Bibby is cited as stating that while spirituality is on the rise in Canada, church attendance is down. This reinforces the observation made by the evangelical leaders cited at the opening of this chapter.

to the core values of the membership of these congregations. These core values are part of an individual's identity. When they are threatened, individuals may feel isolated or even that they are under personal attack. As a result, resistance surfaces leading to conflict leaders must now face.

Charles Taylor raises an interesting connection between core values and a person's identity. This connection is based on every person's inherent need for recognition — what Taylor terms "the politics of recognition."[10] In his essay, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* he focuses on the political and sociological implications of this concept of recognition. As an example, he details the desire by the francophone culture in Quebec to preserve their unique identity as a multicultural application of this principle. This principle is more than a simple attempt by a minority group to survive — it is about recognizing the inherent *value* of the group. As Taylor states, "we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their *worth*." He goes on to say, "Multinational societies can break up, in large part because of a lack of (perceived) recognition of the equal worth of one group by another."[11]

Taylor's insight into this notion that a group or individual's identity is linked to a desire for recognition has valid implications in context of the local church. Consider the previous example where the Director of Music introduced a change to the worship format. The older member in the church protested this change, perceiving that because her personal values were being threatened, her very identity was also being challenged. Her desire to resist change stemmed from a need that the church *recognize* her unique age

[10] Taylor, "Politics," 25. Taylor is Professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill University in Montreal.

[11] Taylor, "Politics," 64. Emphasis in original.

group as having intrinsic *value* and *worth* within that local congregation. Again, from Taylor,

> what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity.[12]

Thus, when the leadership of the church does not respect the values of individuals and groups, or fails to recognize the unique identities of different contingents within the congregation, the authenticity of the group's identity is at stake. As a result, conflicts will naturally arise.

Tillett defines this type of conflict as *value conflict.*[13] Like Taylor's notion of value identity, he asserts that values play a significant role in the individual's definition of self. Consequently, when an individual's values are threatened, conflict will arise. Value conflict can arise when an individual is somehow forced to act contrary to her own values or when he is expected to support values that are contrary to his own personal values. Tillett proceeds to describe another type of conflict relevant to this discussion that he terms *world-view conflict.* This type of conflict has its origins in different perceptions of how the world or a component of it, like family, relationships, or the environment, for example, should be defined or how they should function.[14] For example, Tillett describes intercultural and cross-cultural conflict as stemming from diverse world-views. The news story about a Muslim teenager being removed from a soccer field because she was wearing a hajib highlights conflict arising from a clash of world-views. From a Christian perspective, however, I believe these two concepts are related. One's worldview and

[12] Taylor, "Politics," 38.
[13] Tillett, *Resolving Conflict*, 10.
[14] Tillett, *Resolving Conflict*, 10.

value system are so closely connected that conflict arising from one would certainly disrupt the other. My worldview that God's Word is true and the only guide for life provides me with the source for my value system — the Bible.

This notion of threatened identity may not be at the heart of all conflicts. However, I argue that many of the divisive issues in churches that are attempting to initiate transformational change may be traced to a failure to acknowledge and respect people with differing values. While it is understood that church leadership can not create a setting that ideally meets every congregant's personal preferences, recognizing the worth of a person or groups' identity and dialoguing with them to understand their value system will help to diffuse these contentious situations. The Apostle Paul encourages the church in this matter:

> But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be *no division in the body*, but that its parts should have *equal concern for each other*.[15]

I have argued that many churches are in need of transformational change. This change, however, will undoubtedly give rise to resistance, and this resistance is a form of substantive conflict. I have shown that the connection between change and conflict is the perception of threatened values. The energy produced by this conflict, however, when harnessed properly, can be utilized to move congregations *through* the process of transformation. This process is called *adaptive work.* I argue that church leaders need to be able to identify these situations where conflict can promote transformational change. Again, Ronald Heifetz provides positive guidelines that will assist church leaders to understand how to begin this process of transformation through identifying and then

[15] 1 Corinthians 12:24–25. Emphasis added.

promoting an environment of adaptive work. We now turn to defining adaptive work and recognizing it in a church setting.

Adaptive Work – An Environment for Transformation

Once one has accepted the benefit of conflict and its positive implications for an organization like the church, the goal of leaders can focus on utilizing the energy of conflict to bring about change, growth, and maturity in that organization. Mennonite author, John Paul Lederach, reiterates the value of conflict: "Conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change."[16] Recognizing that conflict can bring about constructive change, Lederach has redefined the goal of conflict management from resolving the issue at hand to bringing about what he has termed *conflict transformation.* "*Transformation* provides a clear and important vision because it brings into focus the horizon towards which we journey — the building of healthy relationships and communities, locally and globally."[17] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr describe this type of interaction using the term *life-giving conflict* in which those involved achieved a deeper understanding and commitment that grew out of the significant disagreement at the heart of their dispute.[18] William Willimon supports this notion stating, "Where there is absolutely no dissatisfaction, no vision of anything better, and no pain, there is little chance of action. A church with a healthy amount of tension and conflict is a church alive."[19]

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[16] Lederach, *Little Book*, 5.
[17] Lederach, *Little Book*, 5. Emphasis in original.
[18] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.
[19] Willimon, "Crisis and Conflict", 188.

This concept of conflict transformation or life-giving conflict supports the premise presented by Heifetz and Linsky that responding to conflict must begin with the recognition of its potential to bring about positive organizational change, what they term *adaptive work.* Robbins echoes this recognition and presents an approach to positive conflict he refers to as an "interactionist philosophy" noted earlier in Chapter One. This philosophical perspective,

- recognizes the absolute necessity of conflict
- explicitly encourages opposition
- defines conflict management to include stimulation as well as resolution methods, and
- considers the management of conflict as a major responsibility of all administrators.[20]

As stated earlier in this chapter, human nature tends to resists change. We are more inclined to be comfortable with the familiar. Unfortunately, the world around us is constantly changing. Global climate change, growing child poverty, the threat of terrorism, and the redefinition of traditional marriage — these headlines remind us that the world is in a constant state of flux.

As we observe the world, we see the principle of adaptation all around us. Nature adapts to change. Insects develop resistance to pesticides. Fruit trees develop resistance to climate changes. From a social perspective, people learn to adapt to changes in government laws. Children learn to adapt to changes in educational curriculum standards. The process of learning itself is a form of adaptation. In response to a new situation, one learns about it and then changes behaviour in order to conform to the new boundaries related to that situation. Consider the traffic light example at the opening of this chapter. While change may not be readily accepted, people eventually do learn to adapt. It is

[20] Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict*, 13–14.

during the initial period of change, however, the period of time where we recognize that something new has come upon us — something that challenges our traditional view of life — that leads to tension.

Conflict arises when circumstances do not match one's perception of the way things should be. Heifetz points out that there is a gap between reality — the circumstances we encounter — and one's values, which produce the perception of how things ought to be. It is in the process of bridging this gap that the concept of adaptive work is introduced:

> Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflict in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behaviour. The exposure and orchestration of conflict — internal contradictions — within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways.[21]

Several aspects of this definition require further discussion in order to understand the fundamental components of adaptive work. First, adaptive work is a process that requires learning for all parties involved, including the leadership. This learning does not take place through formal, classroom training. It cannot be scripted because these situations are complex. In situations of adaptive work, learning takes place *during* the adaptive process as leaders assess their environment, take action, re-evaluate the outcomes and strategize the next steps. This is where the real learning takes place: in the center of the adaptive work itself. Second, the goal of adaptive work is to highlight the potential gap that exists between reality and the predispositions individuals have that are tied to their value system. Third, adaptive work implies that a change is required. This change may be in a person's values, her beliefs, or her behaviour, or perhaps in a

[21] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 22.

combination of these factors. The goal of the needed change is to close the gap between reality and the individual's predispositions. Finally, the ensuing conflict that results when this gap is exposed must be utilized by leaders to mobilize their congregations to learn new ways of doing things. Before continuing to unpack adaptive work, the concept of reality testing needs further discussion.

One of the advantages of viewing leadership in terms of adaptive work is that it points to the importance of reality testing.[22] As stated above, adaptive work was defined as an effort to reduce the gap between the values people hold and the reality they face. Thus, a critical task of leaders is to be constantly testing reality. This involves "weighing one interpretation of a problem and its sources of evidence against others."[23] Without this important task, the vision of leadership may be realized but to a futile end.

This concept is best illustrated with an example.[24] The leadership of the Union Baptist Association was establishing a mission and vision for the future of its churches in the Houston Texas area. Statistical data from 1950-1989 tracking membership, attendance, and giving trends for all the churches in the association was analysed. The trend reflected positive growth in all categories.

The immediate response from the leadership was enthusiasm. Based on this growth data, an exciting mission and vision for the Association *could* have been created with a strategy for new church plants and expansion of existing mission efforts. Fortunately, the leadership *tested reality* by comparing the growth trend of the churches to that of the city's population. The result was startling. The gap between the growth of

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[22] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 24.

[23] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 24.

[24] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 2–3. This example has been adapted from a story presented in their book.

the churches and the growth of the city grew wider every year. The churches were actually losing ground repeatedly over the forty year period of study.

This example highlights the difference between visionary leadership and effective leadership. Effective leadership creates a vision that is founded on the results of testing reality. All leaders need to be constantly testing reality before embarking on great visions of grandeur. When leaders create a vision without first testing reality, their churches can waste time, energy, financial and human resources embarking on ministry programs or building expansions, for example, that fail to meet the needs of both their own congregation and their surrounding community. As Heifetz warns, "to produce adaptive work, a vision must track the contours of reality; it has to have accuracy, and not simply imagination or appeal."[25] Does this mean that leadership is not a visionary activity? Not at all; Heifetz explains that creating vision is an important role of leadership but the emphasis falls "on the act of giving clarity and articulation to a community's guiding values."[26] Thus, leadership works together with the community, challenging its values and testing them with reality to produce adaptive success.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr support Heifetz. Using their own terminology, they describe this comparison of reality to vision as *creative tension*: "Creative tension occurs when a compelling vision of the future and a clear picture of current reality are held in continuous juxtaposition."[27] Jesus challenged his disciples to test reality. In Matthew 9, he points out that the fields were ready for harvest but testing reality showed that the workers were scarce. This reality testing required action and Jesus called the disciples to

[25] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 24.
[26] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 23.
[27] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 100.

pray to God for more workers.[28] As Jesus demonstrated, the role of leadership is to test reality in order to generate this creative tension and follow up with action. This is accomplished by clarifying the gap between reality and the vision. Once this tension is generated, it must be sustained.[29] The challenge for leaders is recognizing the distinction between creative tension and destructive tension. If the tension is excessive, people will withdraw or put up strong resistance. If the tension is too weak, there will be little motivation for change. Tension generated over minor, insignificant issues will only result in leaders losing credibility.

Creative tension, then, is necessary in order to lead an organization through adaptive work. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr provide three aspects that must be interactively exercised in an organization to generate and sustain creative tension:[30]

Defining A Vision That Can Be Shared By The Community Of Faith

Shared vision is the key to moving a group of people through the trials of adaptive work. Whenever change is introduced, tension is created as individuals perceive that their current values are being challenged. Leaders must encourage their congregations to re-evaluate their personal values. This begins by clarifying one's own personal mission and vision. "As individual visions become clear, mobilizing groups of people to pursue a shared vision becomes more practical and powerful."[31] Once a shared vision of what the future looks like has been established, commitment grows, even if personal values are challenged. This occurs because individuals feel that they are part of the process of

[28] Matthew 9:37–38.

[29] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 101.

[30] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 101–111. 1) Discerning and describing a vision that comes to be broadly shared, 2) communicating a clear picture of current reality, and 3) engaging in the processes that generate and sustain creative tension.

[31] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 102.

creating a new tomorrow for themselves and their community of faith. "Leaders [who initiate change] should be clear about the relationship between personal vision and shared vision... Only when a deep commitment to a shared vision emerges can true transformation occur."[32]

Clearly Communicating The Results Of Reality Testing

I stated earlier that the concept of reality testing is critical to leading organizations through adaptive work. Leaders must be constantly comparing the vision they have shared with their congregation to observable reality to determine if the vision is on track. One of the challenges leaders face in generating and sustaining creative tension through adaptive situations is having the boldness to communicate reality to their congregations. "Creative tension is expressed when change leaders hold an uncompromising willingness to discern, acknowledge, declare, and act on the truth."[33] Assessing reality is often a challenge of its own. The corporate world has used many tools to understand reality. Marketing departments depend on trend analyses, demographic studies, customer surveys and feedback to list a few. I believe that churches, on the other hand, tend to do little measuring of current reality and are often uncertain of how to interpret the data once it is obtained. Adaptive work requires leaders to educate themselves in the use of these tools if they are to effectively communicate reality to their congregations.

Collecting and interpreting data is critical in discerning reality. Once this has been completed, the next important phase is *communicating* a clear picture of reality. This can be difficult for leaders due to fear that they will be blamed for the current conditions, a situation that creating an environment of adaptive work attempts to prevent.

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[32] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 102–103.
[33] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 104.

Heifetz asserts that leadership based only on influencing those it has authority over will result in communities who will assign fault for failure solely on the leader's shoulders.[34] Church leaders must be boldly willing to share their view of reality to their congregations, especially when reality paints a clear picture that "our church is not getting the job done."[35] This vulnerability helps to build trust between leaders and their congregations. Vulnerability is a critical aspect of leadership. This will be elaborated on in Chapter Four.

Generating And Sustaining Creative Tension

Generating creative tension naturally occurs when congregations see a clear gap between where they know they need to be and where they are at the present moment. The role of leadership is to establish a clear shared vision of the future in conjunction with a clear picture of current reality. This will begin the process of creating the necessary tension required to energize the adaptive change process. Because human nature tends to reduce this tension, leaders must continually sustain creative tension in order to keep adaptive work moving forward.

The pressure to reduce creative tension can be overcome by regularly communicating that conflict is necessary for positive change to occur. Creative tension naturally generates discomfort. Discussing it openly helps a congregation deal with it without diffusing its positive effects. In addition, leaders can support one another in facing the challenges associated with conflict. "Sharing the pressure of leadership ...is a key strategy for sustaining creative tension."[36] My own personal experience affirms that

[34] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 14.
[35] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 106.
[36] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 109.

working through conflict as a group helps reduce the pressure that would be carried if the burden was left solely on the shoulders of one individual. The value of team based leadership is the topic of Chapter Four.

I have argued that the diversity in people's personal values can provide a setting in which tension develops. Individuals with competing values interact as they continually weigh their own values against reality. Thus, "adaptive work involves not only the assessment of reality but also a clarification of values."[37] In any social setting, competition between a set of mixed values will inevitably involve conflict.

In order for churches to move their congregations through contentious situations, the leadership must help clarify the values that create the disparity driving the conflict. There are often no easy answers in these situations. One of the greatest failures of leadership occurs when routine solutions are habitually applied to adaptive situations. As Heifetz states, this is "perhaps the essence of maladaptive behaviour: the use of a response appropriate to one situation in another where it does not apply."[38] Peter Senge supports this premise. "We all find comfort applying familiar solutions to problems, sticking to what we know best. Sometimes the keys are indeed under the street lamp; but very often they are off in the darkness."[39] Heifetz proceeds to remind his readers that "the adaptive challenge is a particular problem where the gap cannot be closed by the application of current technical know-how or routine behavior."[40] This introduces the

[37] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 31.
[38] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 73.
[39] Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 61.
[40] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 35.

distinction between technical solutions and adaptive work which needs to be addressed next.

In defining adaptive work, one must consider the distinction between problems that are clear and have known solutions and those that are unclear and require learning. In Chapter One, I described various types of conflict based on *relational factors* such as clashes arising from personality styles between individuals. Heifetz, however, introduces his own classification of conflict and divides it into two types.[41] The first type of conflict involves a clear problem definition and a routine solution that has been proven to be effective based on previous implementation success. In this type of conflict, the responsibility of evaluating the situation, suggesting the solution, and initiating its implementation falls on the leader.

For example, a member of a church congregation approached the Director of Christian Education upset because her two teenage daughters were not permitted to work together to lead a Sunday School class. In this situation, the problem was clear: The parent was unaware of the church's Child Safety Policy that required all children's ministry programs to be lead by at least one adult. The solution was also clear: The Director of Christian Education adjusted the Sunday School volunteer list to allow both of the teens to be able to participate, each one working in a different class with another adult teacher. Significant conflict was averted due to the application of proven experience and existing procedures. When dealing with conflict where problems are clear and solutions have already been developed, people look to the leadership to implement these solutions

[41] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 74-76. Heifetz actually uses three distinctions: Type I, Type II, and Type III. Type II and III however are just sub-divisions of a single category for adaptive problems. Thus, for the purpose of this work, I consider only the two distinct categories, namely technical problems and problems requiring adaptive work.

quickly, using systems and procedures already in place. These are what Heifetz refers to as technical solutions.

In contrast, Heifetz's second type of conflict introduces a greater degree of complexity. The problem itself is difficult to define and learning is required to clarify the issue at hand. The solution is also not readily evident. No previous experience can be drawn on by leaders and no available proven procedures exist to guide parties through the conflict. These are cases of *adaptive work* where defining the problem and working towards a solution becomes a collaborative effort between the leaders and the people involved. Herein also lays the distinction between managing and leading. Managers apply technical solutions to resolve every day problems. Leadership, on the other hand, involves helping a congregation adapt while working towards positive change. It is my aim that this thesis will help transform managers into leaders.

Recognizing situations requiring adaptive work is not always easy. To equip leaders in distinguishing between routine technical challenges and adaptive work Heifetz and Linsky provide four diagnostic clues.[42] First, adaptive work requires people to change more than just their routine behaviours. It requires them to change their hearts and minds — their very attitudes. Second, if the issue appears to require a technical solution, apply this method first. If leaders discover that the problem still persists, it may be that an underlying adaptive challenge exists. By process of elimination, the adaptive problems will surface. The third clue is closely tied to the second. After a situation has been dealt with, the persistence of conflict indicates that people have not fully accepted the changes that accompanied the adaptive process. The final clue that helps leaders distinguish between technical problems and adaptive work is the presence of crisis. A

[42] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 60-61.

situation that suddenly turns into a crisis is a clear indicator that adaptive issues have not been properly addressed. "Crisis represents danger because stakes are high, time appears short, and the uncertainties are great. Yet, they also represent opportunities if they are used to galvanize attention on unresolved issues."[43] It is these opportunities that leaders need to recognize.

Using these diagnostic clues does not guarantee that problems will be accurately identified and addressed appropriately at the first attempt. Adaptive challenges are complex and leadership must be prepared to make adjustments to their efforts to deal with situations throughout the transformation process. The approach presented in Chapter Five will help prepare leaders for this task.

Situations of adaptive work have been defined and examples provided to help Christian leaders distinguish between those requiring technical solutions and those requiring adaptive work. Leadership in these situations is critical. Before proceeding to provide a case study that illustrates a situation where adaptive work is required to bring about transformational change, it is important to identify some of the hindrances that prevent people from adapting during periods of conflict that can only be addressed through change. Understanding these hindrances will help leadership navigate through these challenges to help avoid these situations that prevent adaptive solutions from being implemented.

[43] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 61.

Hindrances to Adaptive Work

I have stated earlier that many people resist change because they become uncomfortable when forced to deviate from the familiar. Progress, however, requires a move from the current state to something different. This change creates what Heifetz calls a state of "disequilibrium."[44] Equilibrium represents stability and with it, reduced stress and anxiety. Thus, it is understandable that when change occurs, people will attempt to restore equilibrium. Yet, equilibrium in itself is not ideal. Growth requires that things change. As Heifetz asserts, "achieving adaptive change probably requires sustained periods of disequilibrium." As a result, "how to manage sustained periods of stress consequently poses a central question for the exercise of leadership."[45] Chapter Five will present ways leaders can help deal with such disequilibrium.

So, why do people fail to adapt? One reason is a misperception of the nature of the imposed threat.[46] If people do not recognize that the situation they are in threatens them in some way, they will not initiate the necessary changes. For example, if a church, whose ministry focus is adults and seniors fails to recognize the growing population of younger families in it surrounding neighborhood, its growth or even its survival could be threatened by its lack of vision to change its ministry mix to meet the needs of the surrounding community.

A second failure to embrace adaptation may be a group's lack of capability to meet the challenges required to change.[47] Returning to the previous example, even if the congregation recognized the changing demographics of the community, their building

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[44] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 35.
[45] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 35.
[46] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 37.
[47] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 37.

may be inadequate to provide the needed space for children and youth ministry. While this incapacity may be overcome by a building program, lack of financial resources may still hinder the required change in the short term.

The third failure Heifetz highlights has a more direct impact on the subject of conflict. He states that "people fail to adapt because of the distress provoked by the problem and the changes it demands."[48] Change can create distress and pain. I believe that this may be why church conflict is so often improperly addressed. The leadership does not want to face conflict because of the inherent pain that comes with it. Heifetz lists a host of ways that people attempt to resist necessary changes required to effectively deal with conflict such as "holding on to past assumptions, blaming authority, scapegoating, externalizing the enemy, denying the problem, jumping to conclusions, or finding a distracting issue." Each of these efforts attempts to "restore stability" rather than "take responsibility for a complex challenge." He calls these patterns "work avoidance mechanisms."[49]

Interestingly, these work avoidance mechanisms are often unconscious.[50] These unconscious responses that fail to properly address conflict and adaptive work is what Farber-Robinson describes as *designed-blindness*, a term that describes "a choice, conscious or otherwise, to be unaware of that which is available to be known to us." She goes on to state that "often our culture colludes in protecting us from seeing what we do not want to know."[51]

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[48] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 37.
[49] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 37.
[50] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 38.
[51] Farber-Robertson, *Learning*, 3.

This latter statement implies that often all parties involved in the conflict can contribute to promoting a designed blindness that leads to work avoidance. The challenge then for effective, transformational leaders is being able to counter the expected work avoidance and promote an environment of mutual learning in spite of resistance to change.[52] The success of adaptive work can be predicted by the following principle: "an initiative that *addresses* the challenge facing the [group] is more likely to result in a robust adaptation than a response that *avoids* addressing the challenge."[53]

Understanding this concept of adaptive work in a church setting requires an example. The following case study presents an adaptive challenge that will help leaders identify the need for transformation in this particular church setting. Later in Chapter Five, an approach for responding to such situations of adaptive work will be presented. References to this case study will be detailed to aid the reader in the application of the key principles presented in this new response approach.

Identifying Adaptive Work — A Case Study

Central Church was a thriving urban church built in the heart of growing Metrocity. When the building was originally erected in 1930, most of the congregation lived in the downtown core with many walking to church on Sunday mornings. Mid-week programs were also well attended and many in the congregation invited their neigbours to join in children's programs and other church events.

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[52] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 38.
[53] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 45. Emphasis in original.

Over time, however, as the city began to experience urban sprawl, members of the church began to move out to the suburbs. Soon, the majority of the congregation lived outside of the city limits, driving to church every Sunday. Mid-week program attendance began to decline as families with busy schedules found the 20 minute drive to church inconvenient.

In addition to the migration of the congregation outside of the urban center, the downtown core of the city continued to age, giving rise to changes in the demographics of the area surrounding the church. As time passed the neighbourhood around the church began to attract immigrant families of various ethnic backgrounds choosing to live in the urban areas of larger cities like Metrocity.

During this time the church leadership began to evaluate the needs of its congregation and the overall vision of the church. Many in the congregation had been asking whether it was time for the church to consider moving its location to the suburbs in order to be more central to its membership. Leaders faced pressure from the congregation's concern that involvement in church programs would continue to decline because of the inconvenience associated with traveling so far to the church and fighting traffic to arrive on time for activities. A few fringe members of the church had already left to join other churches outside of town closer to their homes.

As the leadership team discussed the possibility of a re-location and the challenges of a building program, one member of the board introduced an alternate proposal. Perhaps God was not calling this church to change location.

Rather, she proposed that the Board should consider changing its vision. She went on to present a new vision that saw Central Church remain where it was and develop ministries to reach out to the new community that had been growing around them. The proposal received a mixed response. The leadership was now faced with a dilemma — sell the current building and move the church to a new location or stay and refocus the vision of the church to reach the new ethnic community God had raised up at its doorstep.

Over the course of several Board meetings, heated discussions, and much prayer, the Board came to agree that God was calling them to remain at their downtown location and refocus their ministry to address the needs of their local community. Many challenges lay ahead for the leadership. The first was how to communicate this new vision to the congregation. Many had been looking forward to a new church building closer to their homes. These people might get upset by the decision. Others would fear the changes that this new vision would present. Hearts and minds would need to be changed. Habits, behaviours, traditions, attitudes, even personal values would need to be adjusted if this new vision was to be implemented. Yet, the leadership would also need to keep the congregation from dividing and disintegrating. At that moment, the leaders had no clear solutions to these problems.

This example gives the reader a clear picture of an adaptive situation that leaders could face in a church context. Differing values within the membership of the church had the potential to create significant conflict. Yet if the leadership simply avoided the

problem, maintaining the current status quo to avert conflict, the church may have missed a tremendous opportunity to impact its community with the gospel of hope.

Church leaders will continue to face adaptive situations as they seek to be innovative in their attempts to reach their communities with the gospel:

- As the church grows, the leadership may decide to introduce a second service.
- Renovation projects may be needed to expand church facilities to accommodate new programs geared to the changing demographics in the community.
- As the previous case study suggested, the leadership may refocus its ministry to be more multicultural by reaching out to the ethnic groups in its surrounding neighbourhood. This new ministry focus may involve an acceptance of a diversity in worship styles and alterations in other church traditions.
- A new pastor may be hired to bring a new vision that may change the traditional approach of the congregation and therefore may create tension among its members.

These are some examples of situation requiring adaptive work in which leaders must labor together with their congregations to bring about positive change. The problems may not always be clear and the solutions may be even more uncertain. But addressing the ensuing conflict in a positive light, administering grace in the process, can bring about tremendous growth and maturity in the lives of those involved. This, again, is a process that transforms lives.

Adaptive work creates disequilibrium and the resulting distress will inevitably create situations of conflict. Dealing with complex situations in which change gives rise to conflict creates a significant test for leaders. Adaptive work environments are those in

which solutions are not readily available. As stated in the previous chapter, conflict will escalate when the leadership of an organization manages these situations poorly. Here again, Lederach's terminology is useful. Resolution of conflict is not the ultimate goal. Rather, *conflict transformation* conveys a better description of the leadership goal.[54] This is the task of effective leadership: To initiate adaptive work that creates learning environments in which conflicts will arise but then utilize the tension to move a faith community *through* the challenge in order to inspire transformation.

In this chapter I have argued that transformation through conflict situations, called adaptive work, is the direction leadership must move towards. But using this concept of adaptive work in a church context requires biblical support. Christian leaders need to be trained and equipped to work together, to challenge one another to face the hard facts that surface during reality testing, to encourage one another to mobilize their church congregations to work together in developing responses to adaptive challenges that will bring growth and maturing in the church. In the next chapter I present biblical examples of change, the resulting conflict, and the positive responses of leaders. These examples will provide a biblical framework supporting the concept of adaptive work and the need to build effective team leadership that can address these situations of conflict.

[54] Lederach, *Little Book*, 4.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP THROUGH ADAPTIVE WORK

In the preceding chapters, I argued that the challenge for Christian leaders during times of conflict is being equipped to identify situations where tension can foster transformation. In Chapter Two, adaptive work was defined as a process that challenged value systems and created tension in situations involving change. Simple technical solutions cannot be applied in these cases because the issues that arise are complex and result from changes taking place in peoples' lives. I presented the argument that in these types of adaptive environments, church leaders must work together to direct their congregations through the stormy waters of change. In this chapter, I argue that any effort to equip church leaders with a response to conflict does have biblical support. The purpose, then, of this chapter is to support the previously presented theory of conflict and adaptive work with examples from Scripture. The principles of building effective leadership will be reinforced by evaluating the adaptive environments observed in the text and will show how biblical leaders responded to these situations.

While the term *adaptive work* is not found anywhere in Scripture, I argue that there are many examples of adaptive challenges found throughout the Bible. It is important to review these biblical cases so the principles gleaned from these texts can inform church leadership how to respond appropriately to situations that will call for adaptive work in their own congregations. Since the focus of this thesis relates to *church* leadership, I will direct attention to New Testament examples of adaptive work, specifically concentrating on the leadership pattern set by the apostles and then by Jesus himself.

Beginning with Acts 6, I will discuss how the early church faced adaptive situations as they began to embrace a new way of life in Christ. Tensions mounted as the apostles suddenly had to deal with the administrative issues that arose as the church grew outside of their Jewish cultural boundaries. I will then use Acts 15 to review questions that the early church raised over traditions and doctrine that eventually led to the Jerusalem Council. This situation created many challenges that the apostles and church leaders needed to address in order to keep the body of Christ united. I will then discuss the text from Galatians 2 to highlight a situation of conflict between leaders themselves. Following this study on the early church, I will conclude by looking at the ministry of Jesus himself. I will argue that the way Jesus challenged the value system of the religious leaders and then utilized the ensuing conflicts to teach valuable truths to his disciples demonstrates leadership through adaptive work. I will argue that each of these New Testament examples provide analogous situations of adaptive work that will equip church leaders in the twenty-first century to respond to adaptive change in their own congregations.

Adaptive Work — A Biblical Review

I have stated that the New Testament presents examples of adaptive work in the life of the early church. I first present two accounts that revolve around the cultural diversity that existed in the church at that time. Cultural clashes within multicultural faith communities are an example of an adaptive challenge faced by church leaders. In his work, *The Multicultural Leader, Developing a Catholic Personality*, Dan Sheffield notes that "one concern of the Christian community in North America is the threat to the unity

of local congregations that is posed by the entry of persons of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, even if they are fellow believers."[1]

As stated in the previous chapter, adaptive work can arise as a result of value conflict between groups or individuals. In a church context where multiple ethnic groups come together for worship, conflict can arise when core values rooted in cultural customs and traditions clash with those of another group. Leadership contributes to this challenge when it assumes that the core values and customs of the majority group within the church will be followed. The first biblical account of this kind of adaptive situation is the apparent cultural discrimination detailed in Acts 6. The second account is the dispute that arose over the clash between Jewish tradition and the gospel of grace recorded in Acts 15. These accounts will be discussed next.

Addressing Multicultural Discrimination

The New Testament presents a very realistic picture of the growing pains the early church experienced. From a modern perspective, it would seem that ministry life was simple. When the church was born on the day of Pentecost, there were no buildings to maintain, budgets to pass, or ministry programs to plan. Yet, in spite of its simplicity, this new group of Christians experienced tension as a result of the sudden influx of new believers from different cultures joining their assembly. This diversity in the church led to situations of conflict that required church leaders to intervene. Acts 6 relates the circumstances of one of these situations:

> In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.[2]

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[1] Sheffield, *Multicultural Leader*, 18.
[2] Acts 6:1.

At first glance, the problem presented to the church leadership seemed to be simple requiring a simple technical solution, namely directing those responsible for food allocation to include the Grecian widows in their distribution plan. While this solution may have sufficed in the short term, the root of the problem would not have been addressed.

In establishing the historical context of this passage, it is important to understand that during this period of history, there were tensions that existed between the Grecian Jews and the Aramaic-speaking Jews.[3] The Grecian Jews were not natives of Greece but rather, they would have come from other nations to settle in Palestine. Greek would have been their second language in addition to their own mother tongue. Among this group were Gentile proselytes to Judaism who later became Christians and joined the early church.

There was much ethnic strife that existed between the Palestinian Jews and Jews born outside of Palestine. National Jews were suspicious of those outside of their homeland who embraced their religion. The purity of their faith was questioned by both Pharisee and Essene religious leaders. It seems that both the label *Hellenist* and the attitude associated with this suspicion were carried over when members of both groups converted to Christ. Mistrust and perhaps genuine discrimination by the Hebrew Jews led the Hellenic Jews to complain to the apostles.[4]

In the case of the biblical text in Acts 6, I believe that the neglect of the Grecian Jewish widows could be seen as cultural discrimination. The Scriptures mandated the

[3] Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:367.
[4] Richards, *Bible Reader's Companion*, 714.

caring for widows who had no other means of support if they had no family nearby.[5] The Jewish people took this responsibility seriously in contrast to Gentile cultures. Distributors of charity to the needy actually became an official office in later Palestinian Judaism.[6] The widow population in the region continued to grow. This occurred because it was considered virtuous to be buried in the land of Israel. Many foreign Jews would come to spend their last days there, die and leave their widows alone in a foreign place. Thus, a disproportionate number of foreign Jewish widows lived in Jerusalem. Unfortunately there were insufficient foreign Jewish synagogues in the city for the distributors of charity to supply all the widows adequately. This urban social problem in Jerusalem spilled over into the church. While the favoritism shown to the Hebrew widows by the distributors of charity may not have been done with malicious intent, the unconscious bias needed to be addressed. The Grecian widows and their supporters were forced to raise the issue with the apostles to seek justice.

As stated earlier, this passage illustrates a situation of adaptive work still common in many multicultural North American faith communities. At stake for the Grecian Jews was more than simply receiving their share of the distribution of food and financial support. Cultural discrimination, even if inflicted without malice, creates disunity and eventually threatens the identity of those who fall victim to it. In the previous chapter, I stated that the risk of losing cultural identity can create cultural tensions, even in the church. Sheffield points out that "in a multicultural society, difference must be admitted and recognized so that people do not have to strive to make themselves heard, to the

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[5] The Law of Moses clearly supported protection of widows —c.f. Exodus 22:22–24; Deuteronomy 27:19. Jesus preached about caring for the poor and needy, including the widows and the fatherless. In Luke 7, he had compassion on the widow who had lost her son and proceeded to raise him from the dead. Later, this teaching was reinforced by Paul in his letter to Timothy —c.f. 1 Timothy 5:3–16.

[6] Keener, *IVP Commentary*, Acts 6:2.

detriment of others around them."[7] In the case of the Grecian Jewish widows, they were forced to make themselves heard. The leadership of the church was called to respond to this adaptive challenge to bring about justice and equity within the body of believers.

While the response of the apostles does not provide a fully developed profile of effective leadership in situations of adaptive work, this scenario does provide three important principles that church leadership can learn from. First, the leadership did not simply ignore the issue at hand. In any context, where conflict arises as a result of adaptive change, ignoring the situation demonstrates poor leadership. In the previous chapter, this was referred to as one of the work avoidance mechanisms that hindered adaptive work. In this biblical example, the apostles addressed the issue in a direct manner. By calling a meeting of the entire congregation of believers, the apostles demonstrated a willingness to make the issue public to enhance communication and allow others to be involved in coming to a resolution. As Heifetz states,

> ...we might predict the adaptive success of a policy by the following commonsense principle: an initiative that addresses the challenge facing the society is more likely to result in robust adaptation than a response that avoids addressing the challenge.[8]

A second principle gleaned from this situation is that leaders took responsibility for their role in the problem. Blame for the situation was not passed on to those who were directly overseeing the distribution of food. Once again, this would have been another work avoidance mechanism. Rather, the apostles recognized that they had not properly set up appropriate administrative offices that could deal with these other aspects of ministry, namely the care for the needy. Effective leadership through conflict in situations of

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[7] Sheffield, *Multicultural Leader*, 23.
[8] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 45.

adaptive change involves ownership for the leaders' role in the problem. As Reggie McNeil states,

> ...while examining critics or opponents, the leader must also initiate a thorough self-examination...The key is to get in front of the critics by owning mistakes quickly, thus removing the clubs from the hands of those who might want ...to beat the leader.[9]

Heifetz and Linsky designate this concept "accepting responsibility for your piece of the mess." They go on to state that "taking initiative to address issues does not relieve [leaders] from [their] share of responsibility." Rather, leaders "need to identify those behaviors [they] practice or values [they] embody that could stifle the very change [they] want to advance." [10]

A third principle leaders can learn from this situation involves the decision making style used by those in authority. Leaders must select a decision making process based on the type and severity of the problem as well as the ability of the principals — those stakeholders affected by the problem — to respond to the situation. In Acts 6, the apostles exercised a combination of unilateral as well as participative decision making in dealing with the issue of the Grecian widows. The elders and leaders of the church were called together to discuss the issue jointly and work together to determine a solution. Heifetz and Linsky refer to this as "giving work back;" namely, placing the work back onto the shoulders of the people directly involved with the problem.[11] This concept will be developed further in Chapter 5. While the apostles made the decision to create a new office to oversee the care of the needy, they left the selection of these individuals to the

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[9] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 162, 163. McNeil is the director of the Leadership Development Department of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

[10] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 90.

[11] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 127.

church leadership. Seven men were chosen to fill this new role and ensure just distribution of food to all the needy.

Walvoord and Zuck provide insight regarding the seven men chosen by the church to fulfill this new office. Commenting on this text, they highlight that "all seven men had Greek names, implying they were Hellenists... The early church evidently felt the problem of the unintentional neglect of Grecian Jewish widows would be best solved by the Hellenistic Jews."[12]

Heifetz reminds readers about the importance of participative decision making during adaptive work:

> ...adaptive situations ... tend to demand a more participative mode of operating to shift responsibility to primary stakeholders. Because the problem lies largely in their attitudes, values, habits, or current relationships, the problem solving has to take place in their hearts and minds.[13]

The Hellenist men chosen to fill this new office of deacon would have a better appreciation for equitably meeting the needs of both the Hebrew and Grecian Jewish widows because of their close ties to those who initially raised the issue.

The three principles of leadership demonstrated in this situation of adaptive work provide a valuable framework for church leadership in responding to conflict. In the following chapters, these principles will be further discussed and incorporated into the final approach presented to equip leaders in responding to the challenges of adaptive work. We now turn our attention to the second biblical example of adaptive change resulting from cultural diversity in the church — the issue of circumcision and the leadership's response at the Jerusalem Council.

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[12] Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:367.
[13] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 121.

Cultural Tension over Traditional Values

The second biblical account relating cultural issues and adaptive work is found in the events leading up to the Jerusalem Council. Cultural diversity in a church context can give rise to conflict due to differences in the cultural application of biblical practices. Acts 15 records a significant issue that arose in the early church regarding the Jewish requirement of circumcision as detailed in the Mosaic Law. The opening verses of the chapter relate the account:

> Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.[14]

Similar to the Acts 6 text previously discussed, conflict once again arose as a result of an issue with cultural basis. F.F. Bruce details the predicament faced by the Jewish Christians.[15] As Gentile evangelization rapidly progressed in Antioch, Cyprus and Asia Minor, the number of Gentile Christians began to outnumber the Jewish believers. Furthermore, the apostles in Jerusalem also condoned the actions of Peter in welcoming Gentiles into the faith community. They had witnessed the strong evidence of God's own approval of this matter when Peter related his encounter with the Gentile, Cornelius. However, the Jewish Christians feared that the sudden influx of many Gentile believers might end up weakening the moral standards upheld by the Jews. Their concern was not unfounded. The moral deterioration within the church had already been evidenced in Corinth as indicated by the apostle Paul's own correspondence.[16]

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[14] Acts 15:1–2.

[15] Bruce, *New International Commentary*, 301.

[16] Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written to address the issue of worldliness and an unwillingness to separate themselves from the culture that tempted them with selfish, immoral and pagan ways.

In response to this dilemma, the members of the Jerusalem church would admit Gentile believers into the body of Christ using similar terms as those imposed on proselytes who converted to Judaism. This involved circumcision and the full obligation to adhere to the Law of Moses. These zealous Jews, whom Acts 15:5 later implies were part of a strict group with Pharisaic roots, proceeded to take their teaching directly to the Gentile Christians in Antioch. Even though the local churches were governed by their own elders rather than by a hierarchy of government based in Jerusalem, these men from Judea would have been received with respect.[17] The elders would have welcomed them as emissaries from the church in Jerusalem and their message would have been assumed to have been commissioned by the elders and leaders there. Unfortunately, these zealous Jews exceeded their commission, taking the matter into their own hands to ensure the new Gentile believers properly conformed to their Jewish laws and customs. This message, however, led to a major upheaval in the Antioch church.

I contend that the adaptive challenge in this biblical account can be related to a more current dilemma in many urban communities of faith, especially in Canada. As immigration continues to rise, ethnic populations are growing, especially in the larger urban centers. This growth has also extended into church communities. As with the previous biblical account, issues tied to cultural and ethnic conflict between groups co-existing in congregations present leaders with problems that cannot be solved by simple technical solutions. Like the Jews imposing their traditional Mosaic requirements on the Gentile believers, Western believers can be guilty of imposing their own traditions of worship style, behaviours, and even dress onto those from other cultures in their churches. As Sheffield reminds his readers, Ephesians 2:11-22 tells of God's desire to break down

[17] Keener, *IVP Commentary*, Ac 15:2.

the hostility between himself and humanity as well as between human beings themselves in an effort to "restore and reclaim his original intention of a human community living in peace, harmony, and inter-dependance."[18] The goal of churches should not be *assimilation*, as the Jewish zealots attempted to do with the Gentiles. Rather, I assert that churches must work towards unity and harmony within a multi-cultural body that respects one another's traditions yet recognizes the common bond of faith that unites one another together in community.[19]

In the case of Acts 15, when an adaptive challenge was recognized, the role of the church leadership was to step into action. While the previous example of Acts 6 saw the leadership involve the whole assembly in the adaptive work process, this text demonstrates a case where leadership took responsibility to shoulder the effort of adaptive work themselves. As Heifetz and Linsky state, there are times when leadership needs to temporarily take work back from those involved in the dispute to reduce the tension.[20] From my own perspective, when issues involve misinterpretation of doctrinal issues, as was the case in Acts 15, church leaders have a responsibility to intervene to maintain doctrinal integrity. Once the doctrinal issue was clarified, the apostles turned the work back over to the individual church leaders to address the matter in their own congregations.

Before leaving the review of this text, one other aspect of how leaders respond to adaptive work needs to be reinforced. In this biblical example, the church leaders in

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[18] Sheffield, *Multicultural Leader*, 29.

[19] See Sheffield, *Multicultural Leader*. The focus of Sheffield's book is training leaders who are involved in multicultural ministries. While too narrow for the scope of this thesis, Sheffield's work provides leaders with an excellent tool for addressing the adaptive challenges of building harmony in multicultural and multiethnic congregations.

[20] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 111.

Antioch who were faced with the conflict responded by returning to where the problem had originated — in Jerusalem. The elders and leaders in Antioch apparently spent much time discussing the matter and, as the passage indicates, such discussion even gave rise to *a sharp dispute*. Conflict erupted during the debate over the problem. This point is important for church leaders to grasp. I argue that conflict in leadership discussions should never be avoided and may even be essential in ensuring that all parties involved have had opportunity to voice their opinions and views openly. Patrick Lencioni supports this arguement. In his work *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,* he states that conflict among leadership is necessary in order to create sufficient buy-in to a proposed resolution.[21] This type of conflict must be properly facilitated but it should never be stifled. The resultant benefit of properly facilitated conflict will be to bring a challenging issue to a positive conclusion. This concept will be further elaborated on in the next chapter. The next section presents a biblical example of internal conflict among church leaders.

Leaders in Conflict – Challenging Inconsistent Behaviour

The previous two biblical texts have demonstrated positive leadership responses to adaptive challenges. Church leaders can learn much from the principles presented and their application to current situations of adaptive work in their congregations. I have stated in my thesis that adaptive work requires strong leadership. The previous section supported this premise and concluded with the assertion that conflict within leadership circles is necessary to foster adaptive work. I now consider the incident when the apostle

[21] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 202–203.

Paul confronted the apostle Peter regarding his inconsistent behavior among the Gentile believers. Galatians 2 provides the details of this narrative:

> When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.[22]

The apostle Peter was likely already in Antioch when the Jewish emissaries arrived. As Paul details in Galatians, Peter had already supported the Gentile converts and ate with them freely, primarily in response to his experience with Cornelius as reported in Acts 10. When the Judean Christians arrived in Antioch with their emphatic insistence on adherence to their Jewish laws and customs, however, Peter withdrew from the Gentile community to eat with circumcised believers only. The effect was disastrous to the unity of the church and compromised the message of the gospel. It even influenced Barnabas so that he followed Peter's example.

In his commentary on this text, Richard Longenecker summarizes the context of the incident. In speaking about Peter's actions he states:

> The picture thus presented ...is that of a misguided tactical maneuver made under pressure—the action of one whose convictions were proper, but who became confused under pressure, could not bring himself to express his true convictions, and so found himself retreating from what he knew to be right. ... He had no theological difficulties with such table fellowship himself. But when confronted by the practical concerns of James and the delegation he sent, Cephas seems to have become confused [taking] a course of action that, in effect, had dire theological consequences: that there could be no real fellowship between Jewish believers and Gentile believers in Jesus unless the latter observed the dietary laws of the former. [23]

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[22] Galatians 2:11–13.

[23] Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary,* 41:75.

The context of this episode in Antioch parallels the situation previously discussed regarding the Jerusalem Council. Certainly, the events point to an adaptive situation of a cultural nature relating to the growing pains associated with the increasing Gentile population in the church. The changes occurring in the early church and the resulting confusion over values, traditions, and true doctrine led to this eventual confrontation within the apostolic leadership ranks.

Paul's response to the situation points to several important insights for church leaders faced with situations of adaptive change giving rise to conflict. First, as previously iterated, conflict within leadership circles is necessary. While the Apostle Paul's response to Peter's actions seemed very harsh at first glance, the seriousness of the matter justified it. At stake was the unity of the church and the foundation of gospel teaching. Earlier in his letter Paul warned the Galatians about the seriousness of altering the gospel message: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"[24] Paul needed to confront Peter's hypocritical behaviour for the sake of preserving the gospel.

The public nature of Paul's sharp rebuke has created significant issues with many interpreters who have attempted to rationalize Paul's behaviour.[25] Did he have to be so quarrelsome, especially in public? This seemed contrary to Jesus' own teaching that disputes should first be dealt with privately.[26] Paul himself counselled believers to restore each other in a spirit of gentleness and humility as he later stated in the same letter to the Galatians.[27] But this apparent contradictory behaviour may have an alternate explanation.

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[24] Galatians 1:9.
[25] Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 41:79.
[26] Matthew 18:15–17.
[27] Galatians 6:1.

When asking why Paul reacted so strongly, the seriousness of the matter must be taken into consideration. I contend that Paul's rebuke of Peter in a public forum may relate to what Heifetz refers to as "mobilizing the stakeholders."[28] In the case of the events at Antioch, Peter's actions had already affected the majority of the church — so much that others were being led astray by his contradictory behaviour, including Barnabas, one of the church leaders. Certainly Peter's actions created much confusion among the Gentile believers. At one point he ate freely with them but then suddenly withdrew and treated them as second rate Christians.

The community of faith in Antioch had become entangled in the problem itself and so Paul needed to address all who were affected by it. While a private confrontation with Peter may have dealt more directly with *his* error in judgement, by addressing the issue in a public forum, Paul was involving *everyone* that had a vested interest in the problem. As Heifetz reminds leaders, "an authority who excludes stakeholders from defining and solving the problem risks developing an incomplete solution or a solution to the wrong problem."[29]

Paul's response to the situation is insightful. Here again, one sees that leadership must take responsibility for challenging issues even if conflict may be involved. Christian leaders who shy away from conflict to secure harmony with peers risk the destruction of other group or individual relationships within the body of Christ. When Paul assesses the situation in the Antioch church, he doesn't hesitate to confront Peter directly about his behaviour.

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[28] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 227.
[29] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 118.

Leaders need to be bold in utilizing conflict, even when it involves confronting one another, in order to continue to progress through adaptive change. This was clearly illustrated by the conflict between Paul and Peter in Antioch. I assert that Jesus, himself, demonstrated mastery of adaptive work when he confronted the religious leaders during his ministry. This is the focus of the next section.

Challenging the Value System of the Religious Leaders

I have presented examples of adaptive work in the early church and how the apostles responded to these situations. I now present the case of Jesus' earthly ministry as an example demonstrating how conflict arising from adaptive work can be used to transform a community. At the time Jesus entered into public ministry, the nation of Israel was under Roman rule. While the Romans had ultimate control over the Palestinian region, the Jews were still given a level of autonomy that permitted them to continue to observe their religious traditions and temple worship. Day to day governance was carried out by the high priest and religious council, or Sanhedran.[30] This autonomy, however, did not negate the Jews' desire to return to being an independent nation. This desire fuelled their hope of a Messiah who would come to liberate God's chosen people from their heathen occupiers. Thus, as Vos states, "during the later intertestamental period, the Jewish community interpreted the setting up of Messiah's kingdom in largely political terms. Even Christ's disciples had a hard time conceiving of Jesus' kingdom as a spiritual one."[31] In John 6:25, Jesus withdrew from the crowds and his disciples because he perceived that they wanted to make him king. In his commentary on this text, Beasley-

[30] Vos, *Bible Manners & Customs*, 404.
[31] Vos, *Bible Manners & Customs*, 387.

Murray supports this premise that the Messianic understanding of the Jewish people was political in nature:

> ...popular messianic movements in Israelite history...reflected the continuity of the hope among the populace, especially the peasantry, of a king who should lead them in a movement of liberation from their oppressors—from the kind of tyrant that Herod was, as well as from the Romans in the time of Jesus.[32]

The autonomy of the Jewish nation permitted the religious leaders to continue to govern the Jewish people in accordance with their cultural customs and traditions. I contend that the very identity of the Jewish community, especially the identity of the elders and religious leaders, was connected to their system of values defined by their cultural and religious traditions. The Pharisees and teachers of the law upheld strict adherence to the written law, the Torah, as well as the oral traditions of the elders. This formed the foundation of their community. Their identity was linked to these values and tied to this system of observance to the law.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, however, major change occurred. John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, proclaimed that "the kingdom of heaven [was] at hand."[33] Jesus' earthly ministry ushered in a new era that required a major paradigm shift in the hearts and minds of the Jewish culture of the time. The changes that Jesus introduced were not political in nature, as many of the Jews had anticipated, especially the religious elite. These changes were ideological in nature. They affected the values that defined the very identity of the Jewish people — their cultural and religious system. These new teachings affected the Jewish people's very way of life and lead to some major unrest among the nation's religious leaders. These conditions meet the criteria of the adaptive challenge.

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[32] Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary,* 36: 88.
[33] Matthew 3:2.

As Jesus' ministry began, the entire system of the religious leaders came under scrutiny. Jesus intentionally began to introduce change into the Jewish community through his teaching, challenging the status quo of their society. As Taylor states,

> ...according to the Gospels, the disputes between the Pharisees centered primarily on the validity and application of purity, tithing, and Sabbath laws. In light of this evidence it would seem that at least part of the Pharisaic opposition to Jesus was occasioned by the obvious disparity between Jesus' claims about himself and his repeated disregard for observances which the Pharisees believed where necessary marks of piety.[34]

Jesus frequently pointed out that the Pharisees needed to change their own value system and recognize that the Kingdom of God was upon them. Until that realization came about, conflict would continue. Jesus repeatedly confronted the Pharisees value system in this way. Not only did the scribes and Pharisees see their own value system challenged, but they also perceived that they would lose their power and status in the eyes of the people and the Roman authorities.

> "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."[35]

The ushering in of Jesus' ministry provides a clear illustration of adaptive change. Using Heifetz's definition of adaptive work, there was an immense gap between the *reality* that Jesus *was* the true Messiah, and the Pharisees' *perception* of who the Messiah *ought to be*. As a result, conflict continually erupted as Jesus' actions confronted the legalistic value system of the Pharisees and religious leaders. Even the twelve disciples and those who were faithful followers of Jesus failed to understand the significance of the changes that Jesus was ushering in. On several occasions, Jesus had to rebuke the

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[34] Taylor, "Pharisee," 914.
[35] John 11:47–48.

disciples for their lack of perception and close mindedness.[36] There needed to be a change in their understanding — in their core value system.

The ideological changes that Jesus initiated through his ministry reinforce Heifetz's concept of what adaptive work is all about. I reiterate that Jesus was a master of adaptive work. Not only was he leading the way by instigating transformation into the Jewish culture, modelling the very behaviour he preached to the crowds, but Jesus also faced the ensuing conflict head on. It was in these situations of conflict that Jesus trained his disciples to be effective leaders, equipping them to be the future leaders of his church after his departure from the earth.

As the thesis of this work states, conflict arising from adaptive work can be utilized to bring about positive transformation within a community of faith. The first step must begin with equipping leadership. Several biblical examples of adaptive work have been presented along with modern applications that church leaders can learn from. Jesus' ministry launched adaptive change in the Jewish community of faith and provided fertile ground for equipping his disciples for their own future ministry. The value system of the religious leaders needed to be confronted and as Jesus proceeded to do so, he used these opportunities to teach his disciples valuable lessons in leadership. The following chapter now turns to the task of providing guidelines for building a strong leadership team. These guidelines will prepare church leaders to face the challenges of adaptive work and conflict in the process of bringing about transformational change in their local church settings.

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[36] A prime example is Matthew 16:23 where Peter is rebuked by Jesus for attempting to interfere with God's plan for his ultimate death. Other examples include occasions when the disciples could not understand the key meaning of Jesus' parables criticizing the Pharisees' hypocrisy.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING A LEADERSHIP TEAM TO FACE ADAPTIVE WORK

Strong leadership is critical in dealing with conflict arising from change, namely situations of adaptive work. Churches need leaders who can utilize conflict to fuel debate and surface issues that may be hindering the process of growth and transformation in their congregations. In the preceding chapters I have presented the case that Christians need to be equipped with a process that properly utilizes this conflict in order to bring about transformation in their communities of faith. I have also asserted that this process must begin at the leadership level. Moving congregations through adaptive work, however, demands more that just one strong leader to step forward to lead the charge. In this chapter, I argue that effectiveness in responding appropriately to adaptive work requires a strong leadership *team* — a group of men and women working together to lead their congregation through the challenges adaptive work presents. The goal of this chapter is to present a model for building a strong leadership team. This chapter will also highlight the need for leaders to recognize that leadership is a continual learning process. I will argue that leaders who stop learning become ineffective. This chapter will also help leaders understand the difference between leadership and authority and how this affects the leader's role in casting vision during times of adaptive work. Some of the pitfalls leaders need to guard against will also be presented.

Mark Gerzon supports the premise that in all areas of leadership, conflict is real. He states,

> How we choose to respond to ...conflict is an act of *leadership*...Diversity and change are becoming universal. Technology is morphing continuously. Decision making is becoming far more complex. Cross-boarder conflicts — cultural,

> economic, religious, ethnic, and ideological — are extremely common. In such a world, leading *through* conflict becomes absolutely vital.[1]

Leaders of churches must be equipped to face this universal world of change Gerzon is referring to. Once equipped to respond to this change, these leaders can assist their congregations in navigating the troubled waters that transformational change brings. This is the process of leading faith communities through situations of adaptive work. Preparation, however, involves learning. Leaders must be ready to take the time to learn how to lead.

True leadership goes beyond management. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr define leadership as "mastering a set of disciplines that leaders must use to guide an organization through turbulent times."[2] I assert that Christian leaders are not called to manage churches. They are called to lead people. The apostle Paul provides the biblical directive: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to *prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up."[3] Moving congregations through adaptive challenges helps each member to be better equipped to serve God in an ever changing world. The reward of this effort is not only having one's personal faith built up but also strengthening the body of Christ as a whole. I believe that this is the process of transformation.

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[1] Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict*, 4. Emphasis in original. Gerzon is president of Mediators Foundation specializing in assisting leaders of groups and organizations in conflict.

[2] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 11. The authors are referencing the overall theme in Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline.*

[3] Ephesians 4:11–12. Emphasis added.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr make the distinction between management and leadership using the terms "transactional" versus "transformational" leadership.[4] Transactional leadership is based on the transactions or exchanges between leaders and their followers. These leaders tend to set rules that guide behaviour and standards against which performance is evaluated. Recall the distinction between adaptive work and technical problems discussed in Chapter Two. Transactional leaders would tend to apply technical solutions to *all* problems. This only serves to maintain the status quo. In contrast, transformational leaders "help [people] embrace a vision of a preferred future."[5] Moving congregations through adaptive work requires leaders to exhibit transformational traits.

As I stated earlier, this chapter is about building an effective leadership team. It is important, however that I address those who lead small communities of faith. I contend that adaptive work is not limited to the size of a congregation. Adaptive challenges do not arise solely in multi-staff mega-churches. Adaptive work is independent of the size of the congregation. Why? Size is irrelevant because every congregation, regardless of size, needs to be challenging itself to stretch its faith, to do even greater things for God's service beyond the status quo of traditional church life. This, however, requires change — a deviation from the status quo. As I asserted in Chapter Two, however, change will give rise to conflict as individuals perceive their personal values regarding what *church* should be are being threatened. Yet, leading a congregation through situations of adaptive work can not be done effectively alone. A lone pastor cannot carry the full

[4] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 96.
[5] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 96.

burden of the adaptive challenge without the support of other staff or lay leaders from the congregation.

A church leader, however, *can* successfully face conflict and mobilize adaptive work when working collaboratively with other leaders. This again highlights the distinction between leadership and management. As Gerzon states, "managerial leaders can solve the increasingly rare kind of conflict that requires nothing more than unilateral decision."[6] When simple unilateral decisions are required, solo leaders can succeed. I assert, however, that this is not true of adaptive work. I argue that leadership through adaptive work requires team leadership. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr support this argument declaring, "*Team* learning is necessary ...because the challenges we face are simply too great for individuals...to achieve them."[7]

Leadership — A Learning Endeavour

As I stated above, learning is a vital aspect of leadership. Senge supports this premise stating that "organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization."[8] Arrogant leaders who deny the need to learn will be impotent in directing their followers through adaptive change. Perhaps the blame for this arrogance should not fall solely with the leaders themselves. A person who denies the idea that leaders need to learn may be misled by the personality-oriented aspect of the term *leader*. There are those in society who assume that "leaders are born and not

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[6] Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict*, 9.
[7] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 130. Emphasis added.
[8] Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 4.

made."[9] I believe this is a false premise. Leaders who enter their role under the notion that they possess sufficient knowledge to be effective are guilty of the *designed blindness* described earlier in Chapter Two. Recall, Farber-Robertson describes designed blindness as a "choice, conscious or otherwise, to be unaware of that which is available to be known to us. It is we who prevent ourselves from knowing."[10] She asserts that this lack of awareness of knowable information is part of a leader's behaviour in that it is *designed*, either consciously or unconsciously. Leaders who design their behaviour to ignore information that is available for them to learn and equip themselves to be prepared to lead through adaptive work will be ineffective. Heifetz connects the adaptive challenge and the learning aspect of leadership:

> Leadership means engaging people to make progress on the adaptive problems they face. Because making progress on adaptive problems requires learning, the task of leadership consists of choreographing and directing learning processes in an organization of community.[11]

In Chapter Two, I stated that adaptive challenges have no simple technical solutions. Recall from Heifetz that technical problems "point to the different modes of action required to deal with *routine* problems...[adaptive work] demand innovation and learning."[12] The previous chapter provided biblical support for the need to provide sound leadership through situations of adaptive work. Directing congregations through these situations requires collaboration, even if only between two or three individuals who desire to see their community of faith grow and mature. This creates the motivation for building a strong leadership team.

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[9] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 20.
[10] Farber-Robertson, *Learning*, 3.
[11] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 187.
[12] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 8. Emphasis added.

Building a leadership team, however, is not an easy task. A group of individuals working together on a board or committee do not necessarily constitute a leadership team. Leadership involves more than simply position or a title. Leadership is not just about power and influence over people. As stated above, leadership involves learning — learning how to motivate, organize, direct, and focus the attention of individuals in fulfilling a goal or purpose. Thus, leadership goes beyond personality characteristics of individuals — there is a behavioural component to it as well. As Heifetz concludes, leadership is "the activity of a citizen from any walk of life mobilizing people to do something."[13] Thus, using Heifetz's description, leadership is an *activity* where individuals influence the community to work together to face their problems collaboratively.

The idea of mobilizing people to accomplish adaptive work raises a critical aspect of leadership, especially in church settings. Do church leaders possess the necessary authority to influence people in the congregation to face adaptive situations? From a biblical perspective the offices of pastor, elder, deacon, or any equivalent position of spiritual leadership in the church are certainly granted authority from God's Word. The apostle Paul instructed his pastoral student Timothy to appoint elders who would be responsible to "take care of God's church."[14] Thus, authority is granted to church leaders to recognize when change may be required to move the ministry forward or venture into a new area of ministry to meet the needs of the surrounding community. In the case study

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[13] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 20. In this statement that leadership is an *activity*, Heifetz is referencing the work of Robert C. Tucker in *Politics and Leadership* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981) whose analytical research focused on the behavioural aspect of leadership rather than the personality side of it.

[14] 1 Timothy 3:5. The verse compares the role of managing one's household to the role of leading in the church. The parallel correlation highlights that the role of leadership in the church involves more that simple management or the *directing of affairs*, but the concept of *caring for* the needs of the congregation.

presented in Chapter Two, the situation of Central Church required such an act of leadership. The leaders in the church had to begin the process of helping the congregation see the need for change. This was the first step in the process of adaptive work that would transform them in such a way that they could impact their community.

In the learning process of leadership, church leaders need to understand the relationship between leading and authority. Heifetz defines authority as "conferred power to perform a service" and goes on to highlight two of its aspects: 1) authority is something that is given to leaders, and conversely can be taken away; 2) authority is given to leaders as part of an exchange.[15] These two aspects of leadership with authority are linked. If the leader fails to meet the expected terms of the exchange, their authority can be removed. In congregational church government, for example, members of the church's board or leadership team are elected by the congregation granting them authority to make decisions and direct the church. This authority, however, comes with an understanding that the leadership will work towards achieving the overall ministry expectations of the congregation. These expectations are based on the personal values each member of the congregation considers important in the life of church ministry.

Heifetz reminds us that people generally look to leaders to provide direction, to protect them from threats, and to keep order.[16] In times of trouble, the congregation turns to its leadership, those in authority, to provide wisdom and answers. Adaptive situations, however, do not have easy answers. When leadership introduces the need for change necessary to move a church forward to meet the changing needs of the surrounding community, distress often occurs in the congregation. Blame for the current problems the

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[15] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 57.
[16] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 69.

church faces is put on the shoulders of the leadership. Issues like a decline in attendance, disgruntled seniors, or youth moving on to more contemporary churches in the neighbourhood some how become the leadership's fault.

When problems arise, blaming those with authority can be dangerous as well as counter-productive, particularly in situations requiring adaptive work. Heifetz states two reasons why this is unwise: 1) it leads to work avoidance especially with issues that are large and complex — issues individuals are usually unwilling to address; 2) it disables some of the most important people and resources needed to collectively address the situation through adaptive work. [17]

Consider the example of the role of leadership in setting the vision for the church. Creating a future vision for a congregation involves adaptive work. This effort will undoubtedly create tension and conflict as individuals feel their current way of life is being threatened. The effort to use conflict to bring about positive change requires a unique understanding of the role of leadership in these organizations. Heifetz challenges the common view that leadership involves "influencing the community to follow the leader's vision."[18] While vision is important and leaders within a church community must dedicate time and energy to initiate the vision process, leaders should not be solely responsible for vision creation. The issue with leadership-based vision is that it is too idealistic. Even if the leadership gets the community to accept their vision and the community begins to move in the direction of this vision, I believe that problems will arise along the way.

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[17] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 73.
[18] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 14.

The work of Herrington, Bonem, and Furr supports this assertion. Ten churches were invited to participate in a pilot project these authors organized. The mandate of this project was to assess the current needs of their congregations, develop a mission and vision statement to guide their strategic planning, and then identify key priorities towards achieving their mission and vision. The process began with great enthusiasm and eventually a clear vision was established. However, once the vision-based priorities began to be implemented, "significant conflict emerged."[19]

Unfortunately, when problems related to vision arise, the community will often turn on its leadership and the fault for the failure will revert back to the leaders who presented the vision. In contrast, Heifetz presents an alternate role for leadership, one that is more realistic. Leadership involves working *with* the community to work through its problems. Thus, leadership is not primarily about prominence, authority, or influence. As previously stated, Heifetz defines leadership as an *activity*.[20] Leaders not only challenge their community to progress through the issues they face, but they also come along side to help them through these issues.

Teamwork is essential among church leaders in preparation for the critical task of taking communities of faith through adaptive work. Yet, this team effort must also extend out into the congregation to involve those who need to affect the changes needed to bring about transformation. I assert that strong team leadership is not about reverting from dictatorial *individual* leadership to dictatorial *team* leadership. Team leadership involves inviting members of the congregation to become involved in the transformation process. In this approach, leaders and their community work in partnership so that when

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[19] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 7.
[20] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 20.

conflict does arise, blame is shared by both the leaders and the community and the problems are worked out jointly. Thus, leaders must be equipped to convert these situations of conflict into positive, constructive environments where problems are worked through communally. This leadership activity is at the heart of what adaptive work is all about.

The previous section has presented the challenge for those in church leadership: While men and women who have been called to serve in positions with authority are expected to resolve issues and conflicts that arise during the process of adaptive work, they must resist fulfilling this expectation placed on them by the congregation. To reiterate Heifetz's assertion: "Adaptive situations...demand a more participative mode of operating to shift responsibility to the primary stakeholders."[21]

I have argued that leadership is an ongoing process of learning that includes understanding the distinction between authority and leading and recognizes the need to engage those who are at the heart of the issues at hand. The next step is to understand how to build an effective leadership team.

The Need for Effective Leadership Teams

Leading a church through the process of adaptive work requires leaders to be continually learning. One aspect of this learning process is the recognition of the benefits of *team* leadership. In the following section I argue for the need for effective leadership teams and then proceed to present an instructive model that will help churches build such a team.

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[21] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 121.

One does not simply become a leader by election or acclamation. As I have stated earlier, leadership is an education. In the same way, building a strong team of individual leaders to provide leadership to a church or organization requires effort. As Herrington, Bonem, and Furr assert, "Teams are hard work. They are inefficient and require us to function interdependently. They can be full of conflict. And for those who are accustomed to hierarchical leadership, teams mean less control."[22]

If this is the case, why work in teams? In fact, the concept of teamwork in organizational leadership has received some criticism. From my own personal experience working in corporate management, I recognize that some of this criticism is valid. Some companies have attempted to utilize the latest self-help books on team building to shoe horn the philosophy into their organization without properly understanding their organization's culture and readiness to move towards team-based leadership. These efforts can become counter productive when the desire to bring about change creates resistance. People perceive that their values regarding what constitutes effective working environments and processes are coming under attack.

This situation is true in churches as well. Introducing team-based leadership can prove to be ineffective if leaders are not prepared to be properly educated in implementing its principles in their unique congregational context. Another issue, unfortunately, relates to the fact that many churches have not even reached the stage of recognizing the benefits of team-based leadership. It is my perception that there are still many *lone ranger* style leaders in many Christian organizations and churches. While the concept of team-based leadership may be perceived as just another fad, one must look beyond the marketing hyperbolae and return to the basic foundational principles of

[22] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 130.

teamwork. Understanding these important principles will help church leaders be more effective in bringing their congregations through the challenges of adaptive work. In fact, as I consider the hardships of introducing team-based leadership just describe above, this task *itself* is a situation of adaptive work that requires strong leadership to work through.

Teamwork is about synergy. It is about harnessing the abilities and skills from multiple individuals into a combined body that, when working together, operates more effectively than any effort from one individual. As Katzenbach and Smith state, a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."[23]

The concept of teamwork is biblical. When conflict arose in the early church over who was the most influential leader,[24] Paul made it clear that leadership in ministry is a team effort. He may have planted the seeds of the gospel, but Apollos watered them and God provided the ultimate increase. In team-based leadership, all members participate. Each has something unique to contribute to the effort.

Paul's instruction later to the Corinthian church reinforces this idea. In 1 Corinthians 12, he declared that the church itself is comprised of many individual parts but that the entire assembly must function together as a single body, a team. Each individual brings unique gifts, skills, abilities, perspectives, and opinions to the group. This diversity has value and must be respected and appreciated and used to strengthen the church. Unfortunately, as Herrington, Bonem, and Furr point out, this very diversity can

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[23] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 128. The authors cite J.R. Katzenbach and D.K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High Performance Organization,* (Boston, MA: The Harvard Business School Press, 1993), 45.

[24] 1 Corinthians 3.

lead to significant power struggles within churches. Consequently, many churches don't embrace the advantages of this diversity. Rather, they have "created cultures in which individualism is valued, power and authority are misused, and mutual submission is viewed as weakness."[25]

I have argued the importance of team leadership. Church leaders are a group of individuals, gifted in diverse ways, but they need to be working together as a team, serving together with a common purpose. Included in this purpose is transforming their communities of faith through the challenges of adaptive work. The following team leadership model serves to educate church leaders in building a strong leadership team.

Team-Based Leadership — An Instructive Model

To reiterate my argument, building a strong leadership team is critical in situations of adaptive work. However, effective team-based leadership does not just happen. I have argued that it requires learning. This is mandatory for leaders to accept. Patrick Lencioni presents a very simple model for building an effective leadership team.[26] While the principles he presents are simple to understand, they are not easy to implement. The model addresses five negative behaviours or dysfunctions as Lencioni refers to them, which leaders must overcome in order to achieve successful teamwork. Unfortunately, many leadership groups are unwilling to commit the time or energy required to transform themselves into an effective team. The following section will focus on the five aspects of

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[25] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 129.

[26] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 195-220. Lencioni presents his leadership model through a fable of a management team who is struggling to meet the challenges of a changing corporate world. He highlights the principles of an effective leadership team by focusing in on the factors that make a team dysfunctional. The pages cited here present a summary of Lencioni's model.

leadership outlined in Lencioni's model and integrate them into a church leadership context that will help leaders move their congregations thought adaptive work.

Instilling Trust

Developing trust is the first and one of the most fundamental components of effective teamwork. One definition of trust is stated as "the assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something."[27] In this definition, trust relates to a confidence in someone's character. Herein lays the relationship between teamwork and trust. Effective teams have confidence in the character of each of its members. This implies that each member of the team can feel free to be open and honest with one another without fear of being criticized or even ostracized from the group. This kind of trust essentially comes down to the willingness of leaders to be vulnerable with one another.

Being vulnerable is difficult for many people. Vulnerability seems to be equated with a lack of strength in character. It is perceived as a weakness. I disagree. Vulnerability involves being willing to share one's fears, one's inadequacies, one's uncertainties, and one's mistakes in life. It is about being comfortable asking for help or declaring one's shortcomings without worry that the request will be used against him or her. Unless leaders are prepared to be willing to be vulnerable with one another, trust will not be developed. As Lencioni states,

> Vulnerability-based trust is predicated on the simple — and practical — idea that people who aren't afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behaviour that wastes everyone's time and energy, and more importantly, makes the accomplishment of results ...unlikely.[28]

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[27] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 10th ed., "trust."
[28] Lencioni, *Field Guide*, 14.

Farber-Robertson shares Lencioni's perspective. In her leadership model, she relates the social virtue of strength to a leader whose behaviour "reflects a high capacity for advocacy coupled with a high capacity for inquiry and vulnerability without feeling threatened."[29] Advocacy involves stating one's own position clearly while inquiry involves being open to understand the positions of others. The openness to share one's position while actively listening and learning another's point of view requires vulnerability.

When trust is absent from a leadership group, significant time and energy is wasted as individuals manipulate their actions in order to elevate their own credibility or prevent their weaknesses from being disclosed. As a result, they volunteer to perform tasks that are outside of their area of giftedness or they refuse to offer assistance outside of their areas of responsibility. When they feel that they are not being supported by the rest of the team, they begin to hold grudges against other team members.

Another effect of lack of trust is leadership members who hold back their opinions and perspectives on matters of discussion for fear that they may be criticized or that their comments will not be taken seriously. Unfortunately, this fear may be properly warranted based on personal experience or based on personal observation of other group members whose comments where criticized on a previous occasion.

Trust is critical in adaptive work because without the ability to be open and honest, exercises like testing reality will not produce a true reflection of the current state of the organization. This is especially true in the context of church leadership. Board members perceive that everything is going well in the congregation but the pastor believes that there is a spirit of complacency that must be addressed. If the pastor feels he

[29] Farber-Robertson, *Learning,* 28.

or she cannot be honest with the leadership team about this perception, the problem will only continue to fester. Without an environment of vulnerability-based trust, I contend that adaptive work can not proceed.

Lencioni asserts that one of the reasons vulnerability-based trust is rare in leadership is due to an innate desire for self-preservation. "The idea of putting themselves as risk for the good of others is not natural and is rarely rewarded in life."[30] For the Christian leader, however, vulnerability should not be such a novel concept. The biblical mandate for all believers is to deny self[31] and consider the interests of others greater than one's own interests.[32] The biblical model of leadership is others-oriented and promotes humility over self-aggrandizement.

One of the ways that leaders can build trust in a team environment is through a formal behaviour profiling exercise. Lencioni proposes using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) profiling tool to accomplish this.[33] The reason this helps leaders build trust is that it provides them with an objective, reliable means of describing each other. From my own personal experience, behaviour profiling also helps individuals realize that their own personality strengths and deficiencies are not abnormal. When a leader analyzes the results of the profile and can see that his or her own behaviours are *typical*, tension is relieved and one's guard is dropped.

Trust is important in building an effective leadership team. To extrapolate this concept, however, trust must also be developed between church leaders and their

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[30] Lencioni, *Field Guide*, 17–18.
[31] Matthew 16:24
[32] Philippians 2:4
[33] Lencioni, *Field Guide*, 26. Speed Leas has created a profiling tool for leaders to use in assessing their own conflict management style. See Speed B. Leas, *Discovering Your Conflict Management Style*, (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1997).

communities of faith. Mobilizing people to step out of their comfort zone to facilitate adaptive work creates tension. People can not learn if they are overwhelmed with change. The goal is to balance creative tension. As Heifetz states, "the strategic task is to maintain a level of tension that mobilizes people to work."[34] What allows leaders to maintain tension in these situations of adaptive work is *trust*. Without this trust, people would not respond to the leadership's effort to sustain creative tension.

Valuing Conflict

Building genuine trust among members of a leadership team is critical. Without this level of trust, leaders will not feel comfortable engaging in passionate, even emotional debate over important issues for fear of being misinterpreted or unjustly punished for their perceived negativism.

As I stated in Chapter Two, the discomfort over heated debate stems from a natural fear of conflict among people, including leaders. Much has already been discussed about the negative perception attributed to situations of conflict. In Chapter One, however, I argued against seeing conflict as an agonistic struggle, in which someone wins and someone loses. Adaptive work requires that leaders be able to discuss delicate issues and problems openly and honestly without fear of reproof. Productive conflict must be distinguished from personal attack, politically motivated challenges, or destructive fighting. Adaptive work requires leaders to be able to voice disagreements, challenge opinions, and raise questions in an effort to help move a congregation through situations of change. As Farber-Robertson states, leaders demonstrate integrity when

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[34] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 106.

they "advocate and act on [their] point of view in such a way as to encourage confrontation and inquiry into it."[35]

Lencioni highlights that many people avoid conflict in an effort to save time and maintain efficiency.[36] I support Lencioni's claim that this is a misconception. Conflict actually saves time because issues are discussed and resolved more quickly when everyone's opinions are put on the table for debate *during* the meeting. Time is wasted when opinions are not only withheld but discussed at a later time, outside the meetings in the parking lot. These outside meetings only fuel disunity and the issue usually ends up back on the discussion table at a future meeting when details need to be reviewed again, wasting valuable time.

Gerzon supports this notion that conflict saves valuable time. In his research on leadership and conflict in organizations, he concludes that "behind a host of diverse inefficiencies in [a] company lurks the same invisible culprit: *unexpressed* conflict." He elaborates on this statement:

> One of the ironies of corporate culture is the desire for efficiency, on the one hand, and chronic wasting of time on the other. More than half of corporate meetings...are considered a poor use of time by their participants. There are many causes for inefficiently run meetings, but one of the most important is that conflicts are either avoided or mishandled. [37]

In other situations, heated discussions are avoided in an effort not to hurt another leader's feelings. Unfortunately, the underlying issues end up being discussed outside of the meeting creating an environment where personal criticisms of individuals or politicking takes place in a very destructive manner.

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[35] Farber-Robertson, *Learning*, 29.
[36] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 203.
[37] Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict*, 34. Emphasis in original.

The practice of freely sharing opinions and points of view parallels Senge's concept of *dialogue* in team learning.

> In dialogue, a group explores complex difficult issues from many points of view. Individuals suspend their assumptions but they communicate their assumptions freely. The result is a free exploration that brings to the surface the full depth of people's experience and thought...[38]

So, in Senge's concept of dialogue, members of the leadership team offer their perspective and assumptions for all team members to examine. The converse of dialogue, according to Senge, is *discussion* where a leader presents her perspective with the goal of persuading the rest of the group to accept her point of view. This emphasis on winning does not promote team leadership emphasising openness and truth.[39] Thus, as Senge concludes, "the free flowing of conflicting ideas is critical for creative thinking, for discovering new solutions no one individual would have come to on his own. Conflict becomes, in effect, part of the ongoing process of dialogue."[40]

Thus, free, honest dialogue, may lead to conflict. As the paragraphs above prove, however, conflict itself becomes a necessary component of team leadership.

Heightening Commitment

To review, building a strong leadership team begins with trust. Trust allows leaders to be vulnerable and express opinions honestly and openly. This trust allows leaders the freedom to challenge one another's point of view, even if it gives rise to conflict. Conflict is necessary in building a leadership team that can effectively move a congregation through adaptive work. When members of a leadership team can express

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[38] Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 224.
[39] Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 223.
[40] Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 232.

their perspectives on issues freely, openly challenging one another without fear of reprise, there will be confidence within the leadership team that everyone's ideas have been considered. This leads team members to be more willing to buy in to decisions, an aspect of team building relating to commitment.

Lencioni points out that there are two components to commitment: clarity and buy-in. "Great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team, even those who voted against the decision."[41]

Buy-in is not *consensus*.[42] Strong teams recognize the danger of consensus. This is contrary to many church leadership codes of conduct. Consensus is sought after with considerable energy. According to Lencioni, however, the key to getting buy-in without 100% agreement is based on the premise that "reasonable human beings do not need to get their way in order to support a decision, but only need to know that their opinions have been heard and considered."[43] When leaders are confident that everyone's ideas have been openly discussed and considered, there will be a genuine willingness to support whatever decision the group ultimately makes.

The second component of commitment is clarity. Clarity is not the same as *certainty*. Here again, Lencioni highlights that "great teams pride themselves on being able to unite behind decisions and commit to clear courses of action even when there is little assurance about whether the decision is correct."[44] Leadership is about decision making. Leadership in adaptive work environments involves making decisions where solutions and even the problem definition itself may not always be certain. Adaptive

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[41] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 207.
[42] Lencioni, *Field Guide*, 51.
[43] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 207.
[44] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 208.

work involves recognizing that not all of the data needed to fully understand the situation will be available. Consequently, decisions may need to be made without all the information.

While making decisions without all the necessary information may be necessary, this principle does not promote irrational decisions based on primitive or even inaccurate information. This principle does not give leaders the license to *shoot first and ask questions later*. There must be logical balance in applying this guideline. Lencioni warns that teams become dysfunctional when they delay important decisions in an effort to wait until more information becomes available. Unfortunatly, this delay carries a heavy penalty as other leadership members become discouraged or the congregation begins to lose confidence in the leadership due to inactivity.

Once again, conflict plays an important role in making decisions. In many cases, all the information needed to make a sound decision is available. It just needs to be extracted from the members of the team. This often requires passionate debate. When everyone in the group has openly shared their perspective and opinion, the group can make a decision with confidence that each member of the leadership team has been consulted and the combined insights from all parties have been taken into consideration.

Lack of commitment by members of the leadership team can significantly hurt a congregation. As mentioned earlier, unresolved disagreements that are not fully divulged in leadership meetings can result in deeper issues that spill over into the congregation. Disgruntled members of the leadership can seek support from outside the team creating factions that breed disunity in the community of faith.

Commitment encourages team members to feel free to challenge each other's behaviour or attitudes. This kind of exchange requires that leaders understand what is expected of them from other team members. Having clearly defined expectations, underscores the need for accountability.

Creating Accountability

Accountability is not a popular term. It means that one is responsible to someone else for his or her actions. This goes against the grain of our modern individualistic society. In the realm of leadership, accountability refers to holding other team members responsible to perform the duties and actions they have committed to and having a willingness to challenge them on behaviours that may hurt the team.[45]

This task may be the one of the most difficult to accomplish, especially in a church setting where most leadership teams are comprised of volunteers committing their time and energy over and above their daily responsibilities. Personal relationships are also closer in church settings than in the business world. Consequently, leaders are even less likely to hold others accountable for fear of jeopardizing close personal relationships. As difficult as it may be, accountability is critical to the effectiveness of a strong leadership team. In fact, holding individuals accountable can be deemed to demonstrate a higher level of respect for that person than allowing the standards of the group to deteriorate eventually leading to harboured resentment and bitterness.

Once again, fear of conflict surfaces as a leader hesitates to challenge the performance of one of his or her peers. Conflict in this context, however, is healthy. Consider the biblical example from the previous chapter. The apostle Paul directly

[45] Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions*, 212.

challenged the apostle Peter for his misguided behaviour. With the unity of the church at risk, Paul did not hesitate to confront another leader, even an apostle, to address the issue directly. Peer leaders who hold one another accountable show respect for one another: when a legitimate challenge is raised against someone's performance, the challenge can be accepted and openly discussed in order to redirect one's actions towards accomplishing the goal of the team. In this sense, peer pressure is a great motivator towards higher performance.

The absence of accountability breeds apathy and the pursuit of self interest. Without members of the leadership team holding each other accountable, actions will not be carried out, goals will not be met, and issues that require attention will continue to remain unresolved, potentially leading to discouragement or bitterness within the leadership group and eventually overflowing into the congregation. Recognizing the importance of accountability also requires a clear perspective on the purpose of leadership in the church.

Establishing Perspective

Strong church leadership is critical to effective ministry. Serving on a church leadership team carries great responsibility. Yet sometimes, those who are appointed or elected to these positions of leadership fail to recognize this responsibility. They accept the call to the position but miss the big picture of what the purpose of the leadership team is all about. They attend meetings feeling important that they serve in leadership but fail to contribute or give their whole self to the effort of leading. As Bill Hybels states, "the first step in building a team is to define the purpose of the team ... and define it with

ruthless specificity."[46] Establishing perspective involves recognizing when it is necessary to initiate adaptive work to begin the process of transformational change. This is the task of the leadership team.

As in business, church leadership is also about achieving results. Many may baulk at this notion arguing that some church leaders focus too much on numbers. I support this reservation. If numerical results are the primary goal of leadership, the church is pursuing the wrong focus. Yet, numbers play an important role in all areas of life. How does someone know that his family is living within its means? He must budget and then track spending against that budget. Similarly, how does an evangelism committee know if its outreach activity made an impact on the community? They need to understand how many unchurched members of the community came to their event.

From my own perspective, goals in ministry are very important. Without goals, how would the leadership know what direction to be moving in? *Will attendance continue to grow over the next few years? If so, will the church have seating capacity to accommodate that growth? Will a second service be required?* Without tracking growth numbers in some manner, these decisions cannot be made in a manner that gives enough time to plan and execute large-scale projects like building a new church to accommodate growth. Establishing perspective involves looking beyond this year's budget and this year's ministry plan. It involves looking five, even ten years ahead and asking the tough questions that will test reality and establish a vision that recognizes the changes that need to be made to bridge the gap between today's reality and tomorrow's transformed community. This is the task of an effective leadership team.

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[46] Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 80.

The leadership team of Central Church described in Chapter Two faced this challenge of establishing a clear perspective for its future. They asked themselves the tough questions. They recognized that the fields around them were ripe for harvest and asked God to send *them* to be the workers to gather in the crops. Their decision, however, would require changes and these changes would certainly give rise to conflict in the congregation. The leadership team would need to be prepared to respond to resistance by fostering its energy to motivate the congregation to confront its own presuppositions and traditional perspectives about what church life should be. This is the adaptive work challenge the leadership team at Central Church faced. In the next chapter, I present an approach that will equip leaders like those at Central Church to move their congregations through the process of adaptive work.

I have argued for the need for team-based leadership and presented a model towards achieving that. Having an effective leadership team that is learning to lead a congregation through the adaptive work process, however, does not come without its dangers. The following section will conclude this chapter on team-based leadership by equipping leaders to recognize the pitfalls they may face during adaptive work.

Leadership Pitfalls During Adaptive Work

Whenever distress arises in a community or church setting, a leadership team can face significant hardships in dealing with issues that cause disequilibrium. When leadership is faced with issues requiring adaptive work, people will resist change by attempting to shut down the leadership responsible for initiating it, essentially trying to prevent the change from occurring.

Heifetz and Linsky present four distinct pitfalls, what they term as *dangers,* that leaders must be conscious of when introducing adaptive work.[47] The reason they are called dangers is that they are undertaken in subtle ways that can catch leaders off guard and divert their attention from initiating transformation. I believe that it is important that leaders understand these dangers so they can avoid them during times of adaptive work.

The first two pitfalls, *marginalization* and *diversion,*[48] are closely related in that they attempt to distract those responsible for implementing change. In the case of marginalization, the opponents of change elevate leaders as champions of some unrelated cause in order to divert their focus away from the change process. Another form of marginalization occurs when those in leadership inadvertently personalize an issue in such a way that they become consumed with it. As a result, the leadership as whole can end up isolating themselves.

Diversion occurs when the opponents of change raise other, less important issues unrelated to the main issue. For example, consider the situation at Central Church described earlier. During the leadership team's presentation to the congregation highlighting the need to reach out to the local ethnic community, one of the opponents to this vision may raise an issue about the lack of small group leaders the church is already suffering from. The individual argues that the church is not ready to begin a new ministry program. Others in the meeting may rally behind this member. Suddenly the leadership has its focus diverted to a much less important matter. It is in times like these when good leadership must keep the congregation focused on the greater issue at hand, in this case the leadership's vision to reach out to its surrounding community with the gospel of hope.

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[47] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 31.
[48] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 32-40.

A third and more serious pitfall for leaders is *personal attack.*[49] Unfortunately, even in Christian organizations and churches, when people perceive their values are being threatened, they will lash out at the person apparently responsible for initiating the change. For example, the decision by a church's Missions Committee to terminate the support of missionaries who reach the age of retirement may be perceived by an individual in the congregation as directly targeting their personal value of the importance of supporting missions. Consequently, the Missions Chairperson may be personally attacked by this individual in an attempt to reverse the decision and preserve this individual's core value.

Personal attacks will tend to take the focus off of the main issue and distract the leaders from dealing with the underlying heart of the problem. Once again, consider the case of Central Church. One of the supporters of relocation may suddenly attack the pastor, accusing him of disloyalty to the core members of the church which is driving him to persuade the rest of the leadership team to reject the relocation proposal. When implementing adaptive work, leaders need to be wary of personal attacks on their character and criticism of their efforts. As Heifetz and Linsky remind us, "people criticize you when they don't like your message."[50] The leaders' natural response is to defend themselves; to cry victim to misrepresentation and injustice. McNeil warns those in church leadership not to be too personally attached to their ministry efforts.

> Spiritual leaders are very susceptible to problems associated with the inability to practice self-differentiation, thereby becoming so connected to the ministry that

[49] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 40.
[50] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 41.

> any criticism from any part of the organization...is taken as a personal challenge or criticism.[51]

While these feelings of hurt are legitimate, leaders must not let these personal attacks distract them from moving ahead with change. As stated earlier, when value systems are challenged, conflicts arise as individuals seek recognition of their worth. Leaders need to be sensitive to the strain of adaptation on people and, in some cases, bear the brunt of expressed frustration in love. "Exercising leadership often risks having to bear such scars."[52]

A final pitfall Heifetz warns leaders to guard against is *seduction*, the process where one loses one's sense of purpose altogether.[53] An example of this is the strong desire by a leader to gain the power or approval of supporters and peers. Affirmation can become an extremely seductive influence, especially when a person is trying to lead a transformational process. As Heifetz and Linsky state, "When you are trying to create significant change, to move a community, the people in your own faction in that community will have to compromise along the way. Often, the toughest part of [the leader's] job is managing their disappointed expectations."[54]

Seduction can creep into all leadership ranks. In a church setting, for example, changing the format of worship from a traditional to a contemporary style involves adaptive work. The Director of Music could easily be seduced by the pro-contemporary advocates to make an abrupt change to just choruses by complementing her boldness in *bringing the church forward into the modern era* or praising her for *the wonderful spirit*

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[51] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 163. The Apostle Paul reinforces this in 1 Corinthians 4:1-4 where he reminds those in Christian leadership that they are accountable to God for their actions, not to any human system of judgment.

[52] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 44.

[53] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 45.

[54] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 45.

they have felt as a result of the new worship format. In the case of Central Church, supporters of the new outreach proposal may applaud the pastor for his *great vision for the future* or his *sensitive listening to God's call to reach the lost.* Comments like these can seduce a leader to be distracted from introducing change in a way that is sensitive to all the congregants in his or her faith community. As a result, he or she may fail to take the necessary steps to seek to understand the values of those who may not be comfortable with the change.

Marginalization, diversion, attack, and seduction. The warning flags have been raised that counsel leaders to watch for situations that may distract them from exercising transformational leadership through adaptive work. Equipped with this awareness of opposition to change and the associated conflict and pain that comes with it, church leaders need to be prepared to respond to these conflicts and opposition so as to continue to progress adaptive work required for the church to grow and mature.

I have presented the case for strong, team-based leadership and provided a model that will help leaders work towards effective teamwork in leading their congregations through adaptive work. In the next chapter, I will argue that adaptive work requires not only a strong leadership team, but it requires collaborative effort beyond what the leadership team alone is capable of performing, even if they possess vested authority. I will present an approach that will equip the leadership team in the process of initiating and working *with* their congregations through the process of adaptive work.

CHAPTER 5

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ADAPTIVE WORK: A LEADERSHIP APPROACH

In all areas of life, leaders face this challenge: manage the status quo or become agents of transformation. Every day, leaders are faced with a decision whether they will put forth the effort to make a difference in their organizations or settle for maintaining the present state and avoid upsetting the current peace and equilibrium. This challenge is not just restricted to the world of corporate business. Church leaders, all Christian leaders face this same challenge. Yet, becoming leaders who are agents of transformation involves risk because transformation can only come about through change, and the natural response to change is conflict. As Heifetz and Linsky state, "to lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear — their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking."[1]

Initiating transformation in the lives of people will lead to conflict. This conflict, however, should not be suppressed. In order for church leaders to be effective agents of transformation in their congregations and communities, they must learn to move conflict towards adaptive work. McNeil reminds all spiritual leaders that they "will be embroiled in conflict occasionally or frequently precisely because you are leading. Leadership that is not encountering difficulty probably is not trying to accomplish much."[2] When conflict arising from adaptive work is responded to effectively, transformation occurs and the body of Christ is edified and built up.

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[1] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 2.
[2] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 156.

In the previous chapters, I have described the process of equipping church leaders to face this leadership challenge. I have argued that men and women in church leadership need to be educated in conflict theory to be able to recognize situations where conflict can be used to inspire change. These situations require a process called adaptive work, a term I have borrowed from Ronald Heifetz. I have also argued that there is biblical support for adaptive work and today's church leaders can learn much about responding to such situations from the examples presented in Scripture (Chapter Three). I have argued that leadership through adaptive work cannot be done by a single individual or even a group of individuals functioning independently in a leadership body. Effective leadership through adaptive work requires teamwork. The previous chapter detailed important components of building an effective leadership team that can work together to facilitate change and the ensuing conflicts in a positive manner.

I now turn attention to the heart of conflict transformation, namely the approach that a leadership team can use in responding to complex situations of adaptive work. In this chapter I argue that the five-point response to situations of adaptive work presented by Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky in their work, *Leadership on the Line*, can be utilized by church leaders as an approach to deal with change and conflict in order to inspire transformation within their communities of faith. This approach will provide a tool to assist leadership teams in leading their congregations *through* conflict that arises out of situations of adaptive work. While understanding this approach is important, the timing for introducing adaptive work in the life of a church is also critical. I will also argue that the use of the Sigmoid curve as presented by Charles Handy can aid church

leaders in recognizing when change should be initiated to spark transformation in the life of their congregation.

Responsive Leadership Through Adaptive Change

Responding to situations of conflict has received much attention in both secular and Christian literature. The details of Chapter One highlighted the agonistic nature of conflict. This theme also appears in many of the traditional conflict-response models. I believe it is important to educate church leaders in some of these traditional approaches to conflict resolution in order to recognize some of their shortcomings. This review will highlight the need for a new approach in dealing with conflict, particularly when it requires adaptive work. Schellenberg summarizes the traditional approaches used to address situations of conflict into five categories:[3]

Coercion — the parties involved in the conflict are forced to accept a particular conclusion or resolution.

Negotiation and Bargaining —the parties involved in the conflict are engaged in a process of discussion where each party willingly compromises aspects of their position in order to bring about a voluntary agreement.

Adjudication — the power of the state and the legal system are used to provide the parties in dispute with an authoritative conclusion.

Mediation — a third party is appointed to help the conflicting parties reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

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[3] Schellenberg, *Conflict Resolution*, 13.

Arbitration — a third party is appointed to declare a resolution to the dispute as agreed upon by mutual consent by each of the parties in conflict.

Even a cursory assessment of these responses underscores the agonistic nature of most of these traditional approaches. Conflict is presented as a situation of aggression where clashes between opposing sides needed to be resolved. Leaders who use these methods risk isolating parties leading to further tension and divisions within the group. Methods like coercion, adjudication, and arbitration take responsibility out of the hands of the principals in the conflict, namely, those who should be involved in the process of developing solutions to their problems.

To some degree, it could be argued that the proposed approach draws from of the traditional category of negotiation and mediation since it encourages participation from all parties involved in the issue. Both of these methods, however, often involve a third party appointed to help the conflicting groups reach an agreement. In the proposed approach, I argue for a fundamental premise that the *leadership team* must take responsibility to be that mediating party in situations of adaptive work. This is at the heart of what transformational leadership is about.

Church leaders must take an active role in this task of addressing adaptive situations if they desire to see their community of faith grow and mature. Church consultants, denominational arbitrators, visiting pastors — all of these outside third parties can not begin to understand the core issues, personalities, values or social environment that are woven into fabric of the adaptive challenge. I argue, however, that complex problems involving adaptive work require a different approach than these traditional models offer.

Leadership during such challenging times requires wisdom. While simple problems with known technical solutions require straightforward implementation, situations of adaptive work have no clear solution and thus, require a collaborative effort where all parties learn to adjust. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky provide five key principles for leaders to utilize in responding to adaptive change.[4] Effective church leadership involves utilizing each of these responses to ensure adaptive work advances as opposition and conflict are dealt with during the process. I argue that the following approach, adapted from Heifetz and Linsky's five principles, will provide a framework for church leadership teams to navigate the rough waters of adaptive change in their congregations:

- Maintain Perspective.
- Discern Inter-Relationships
- Facilitate Conflict
- Mobilize Lay Action
- Persevere With Integrity

Maintain Perspective

Maintaining proper perspective is a critical aspect of leadership. Leaders can mishandle conflict that arises from adaptive change because they are caught up in the details of the immediate situation. Effective leaders know when they need to step back in order to look at the big picture. The previous chapter provided a similar principle as one of the key components of building an effective leadership team. Big picture thinking is all about maintaining perspective. While listed first in this framework for responding to situations of change, maintaining perspective is required at any stage of adaptive work.

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[4] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 50-160. These principles comprise Section 2 of Heifetz and Linsky's book. Their five principles are titled: 1) Get on the Balcony, 2) Think Politically, 3) Orchestrate the Conflict, 4) Give the Work Back, 5) Hold Steady.

Heifetz and Linsky use a balcony metaphor[5] to describe this first principle of adaptive change. When a situation of conflict arises, the leadership team needs to temporarily remove itself from the situation, to *get up onto the balcony,* to use Heifetz and Linsky's metaphor, in order to gain a broader perspective on the situation. Leaders need to step back from a problem and ask the question: "What is really going on here?"[6]

There are several aspects to maintaining perspective. Problem definition is one. In the early stages of a conflict, stepping back to establish perspective assists leaders in the process of distinguishing whether the problem requires a technical solution or if it truly is a situation demanding adaptive work. Complex issues can be comprised of both technical and adaptive problems. Isolating the technical issues and dealing with them independently with simple, proven solutions can provide a starting point for leaders. The more complex issues requiring adaptive solutions will require harder work. As solutions are applied to technical issues, leaders need to step back and evaluate the resulting impact and determine whether the original assessment of the situation was accurate.

Another aspect of maintaining perspective involves interacting with the individuals and groups involved in the situation. Once the leadership has begun the process of adaptive work, gaining perspective on the situation will include engaging in open dialogue with the participants in the change process. The goal is to understand "where people are at"[7] to use Heifetz and Linsky's phrasing. In other words, leaders need to ask, *Why is the issue affecting this particular group?*; *What values that this group holds are being challenged?*; *What personal preferences dear to them are being*

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[5] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 51.
[6] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 51.
[7] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 63.

overlooked? These questions will aid leaders in understanding the bigger picture of the underlying motivations that could be responsible for creating conflict.

Consider the case of Central Church described in Chapter Two. In preparation for presenting the new vision of reaching their surrounding ethnic community from their current location, the leadership team would need to understand what issues might be raised by the congregation. Maintaining perspective involves being prepared in advance to respond to these issues openly. It also involves stepping back to evaluate the feedback coming from the congregation in response to the vision. The leadership must be able to engage in active listening and reading between the lines for clues pointing to the heart of the concerns being expressed.

While the exercise of maintaining perspective sounds simple, in reality it is difficult to do, especially for leaders who are actively engaged in the problem at hand. Herein lies what Heifetz and Linsky highlight as a critical point for leaders attempting to establish perspective: "When you observe from the balcony you must see *yourself* as well as the other participants. Perhaps this is the hardest task of all — to see yourself objectively."[8] Recognizing that they themselves are active players in the situation requires leaders to perform routine self-evaluations to determine how their actions and behaviours are contributing to the overall situation. The process of engagement in the adaptive process and then stepping back to gain perspective occurs iteratively. Leaders interact with the participants in the conflict, providing input and interventions, but then must retreat to distance themselves from the action in order to evaluate the impact of their involvement.

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[8] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 54. Emphasis added.

This self-evaluation involves what Farber-Robertson calls "double-loop learning" or to use Robert Kegan's terminology, "fourth-order thinking."[9] It involves stepping back and asking, *Why am I doing what I am doing?*; *What role am I playing in this issue?* These can be difficult questions to ask not only because they immediately point to our motives but also because they can challenge the presuppositions we cling to. As Farber-Robertson states, "asking double-loop questions can be disorienting, as it causes us to distinguish between what is actually an unchanging given, and what exists because we have accepted it or allowed it to be so."[10]

Herein lays the challenge to leaders: Fourth-order thinking requires leadership to take responsibility for their part in contributing to the conflicts that arise during adaptive work. Part of maintaining a perspective on situations of conflict and adaptive change involves the leadership accepting responsibility to critique and re-evaluate their own norms, traditions, and personal habits that are often at the heart of conflict and be prepared to challenge their legitimacy.

Transformational leadership through adaptive change and conflict is hard work. As Heifetz and Linsky iterate, "leadership is an improvisational art."[11] How leadership is to respond to challenging situations can not be documented in a procedures manual. Leadership requires improvisation — responding to a problem, observing the impact, re-evaluating the situation, revising the response and then implementing the new plan. It requires the ability to step back to gain a broader perspective on the situation; to understand what is happening and accurately interpret the responses and behaviours of the

[9] Farber-Robertson, *Learning*, 63.
[10] Farber-Robertson, *Learning*, 63.
[11] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 73.

people involved in the conflict. This leads to the second principle in responding to conflict arising from adaptive change, discerning inter-relationships.

Discern Inter-Relationships

One of the critical aspects of leadership involves understanding the complex relationships that exist between the individuals and groups that are involved in conflict. Chapter One detailed three primary types of relationships in conflict: Interpersonal conflict occurs within oneself as a person. This is primarily psychological in nature. Intrapersonal conflict occurs between individuals or groups based on personal incompatibilities. One might consider this as sociological in nature. Substantive conflict occurs between individuals or groups but relates to specific issues. While the focus of this thesis is primarily on substantive issues of conflict, leaders must be able to discern the inter-related nature of these types of conflicts, to see how individuals involved in the conflict are inter-related. Chapter One served to educate church leaders in making this discernment.

The structure of faith communities has often been misunderstood. A traditional view of the church would describe its structure as organizational in nature with distinct compartmentalized relationships between individuals and ministry groups. Lindgren and Shawchuck describe this traditional structure as one where the leadership's function is to transmit the heritage of the congregation down through the generations, preserving the status quo in the process. The organization is seen as static and the leadership serves a patrimonial role in safeguarding the congregation from change.[12] Figure 1 illustrates this hierarchical type of structure. At the top of the hierarchy is the primary leader like the

[12] Lindgren and Shawchuck, *Management*, 21--22.

pastor or chair of the church board for example. At the next level down are ministry leaders or other board members responsible to the primary leaders. The levels continue down the hierarchy finally ending with the individual congregants. The number of levels depends on the complexity of the church's ministry programs.

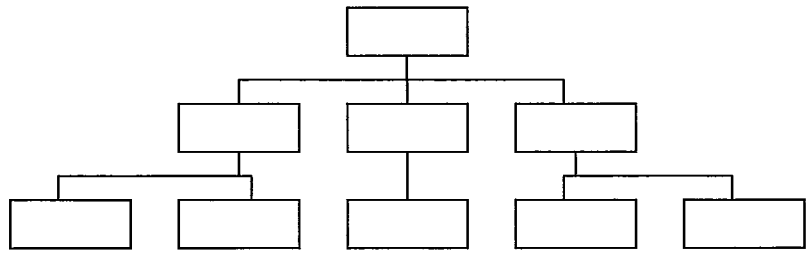

Figure 1: Organizational Structure of the Traditional Church

In reality, however, communities of faith are better represented by a systems view. One might distinguish this from the previous view by recognizing the church as a living organism rather than a static organization. Stevens and Collins assert that churches are best described using systems theory where "the members of the system are interdependent. Within the church there are...persons and subsystems like families that have a similarity of purpose, motivation, belief, and patterns of behaviour." These authors go on to assert that "the fundamental principle is that neither the whole nor the parts can be understood unless the interrelationships of the parts are understood." [13] Figure 2 illustrates this interdependency.

[13] Stevens and Collins, *Equipping Pastor*, xix-xxi.

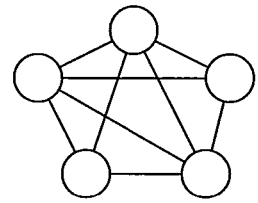

Figure 2: Inter-relationships in the Community of Faith - An Organic Structure

As the above figure illustrates, complex relationships develop between individuals as well as groups within faith communities. Each circle in Figure 2 can represent a ministry group or individuals within a given ministry. As conflict arises, these relationships create unforeseen interactions that leaders must be aware of in order to facilitate adaptive work. Discerning these complex inter-relationships is the second principle leaders must learn in order to effectively transition situations of conflict into positive transformational change. Heifetz and Linsky identify this principle as the ability to "think politically."[14]

Politics often carries a negative connotation. One thinks of broken promises, ambiguous statements, or appeasing interest groups without making real commitments. Yet, outside the realm of public office, thinking politically has to do with establishing a positive network of relationships with people. The Merriam-Webster dictionary lists one of the definitions of politics as "the total complex of relations between people living in society."[15] Effective leadership involves being able to deal directly with the people who are involved in the conflict, understanding their role in the situation, and determining the inter-relationships they hold with those involved in the conflict as well as those outside the immediate dispute. Chapter One identified four such roles, namely principals,

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[14] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 75.
[15] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 10th ed., "politics".

bystanders, third parties, and arbiters. Heifetz and Linsky describe three similar groupings that leaders need to be prepared to interact with in the process of adaptive work: *partners, opponents*, and *bystanders.* In an adaptive work context, principals can be either partners or opponents of the leadership team depending on their support of the proposed changes. Bystanders remain a key group that leaders need to work with. The following discussion clarifies the roles of these three groups and how the leadership team interacts with them during adaptive work.

Partnerships — One of the first aspects of discerning inter-relationships involves establishing partnerships with those who are in support of the change initiatives and these partnerships must begin at the leadership level. While some churches may have a very strong, charismatic pastor capable of leading a congregation through adaptive change, team leadership in the long run, is more effective. Why? This is true because team-based leadership harnesses the abilities and skills of multiple individuals producing synergy, and more importantly, establishing mutual accountability, as the previous chapter outlined. Building a strong leadership team is one of the primary steps in preparing a church for addressing the challenge of adaptive change and the ensuing conflict that arises. Heifetz and Linsky reinforce this important aspect of team leadership: while teaming up with others will reduce a leader's autonomy and even slow progress at times, implementing adaptive work should never be done alone.[16] The absence of unity within the core leadership team, will ultimately lead to the failure of adaptive work.

While team leadership and team learning were the focus of the previous chapter, adaptive work requires partnerships that extend beyond the leadership level. Leaders need to test the waters with new ideas required to execute adaptive work. As Osborne

[16] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 76, 84.

states, "testing the waters provides valuable information. At the least, it lets [leaders] know if [their] dissatisfaction with the status quo is shared by others."[17] This involves bouncing ideas off others or gaining their insight into possible issues that may arise when implementing new ideas. As these new ideas are initiated, the leadership team must once again step back and assess the response of the congregation.

Through this broader evaluation, supporters of the initiative will naturally emerge. These are the individuals that will become the partners in moving adaptive change forward. This is the group that Herrington, Boem, and Furr refer to as the *vision community.* They are "a diverse group of key members who become a committed and trusting community in order to discern and implement God's vision for the congregation."[18] These are the individuals who recognize that change is a positive thing and that conflict may be necessary to fuel the change process. Once the leadership identifies who these individuals are, they can be approached to partner in the process of adaptive work.

Opponents — Once partnerships are established with those who support the change process, another key group that the leadership team must identify is those who might raise opposition to the leadership team's cause.[19] Countering opposition involves knowing who might become upset with the changes involved in adaptive work and learning what concerns they have. As McNeil states, "when criticism or conflict breaks out, [leadership] does well to take stock of the opposition."[20]

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[17] Osborne, "Change Management," 190.
[18] Herrington et al., *Leading Congregational Change*, 41.
[19] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 89.
[20] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 158.

Too often, in an effort to avoid confrontation, leaders tend to ignore their opponents and focus on those who affirm the adaptive work being implemented. In congregations, however, this disrupts the unity of the body of Christ. Those who oppose the leadership's initiative usually do so because they feel threatened somehow — they will experience loss as a result of the changes taking place. This loss may be something tangible, like a particular place in the pew that may be taken by someone else as a result of the growing outreach to the community. On the other hand, the loss could be much more abstract like the loss of a traditional value such as the singing of hymns that are being replaced with contemporary choruses. Change involves loss and for adaptive work to take place, people need to realize that they may need to choose between two values that contribute to their identity.[21]

Once again, the principle of maintaining perspective overlaps with this second principle involving relationships. Leaders must be able to understand where people are, namely what values they hold dear. Those in leadership need to listen to the messages these people are communicating in reaction to the early stages of adaptive work which highlight their opposition. It is important that the leadership dialogue with opponents to understand their issues and then introduce them to the changes taking place in a more personal way, perhaps independently of the entire congregation. It is equally important that leaders communicate to this group the potential loss they may suffer. People may be more willing to make the sacrifice of one of their personal values if they understand the reasons they are doing so.[22]

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[21] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 92–93.
[22] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 94.

Presenting a clear picture of what losses opponents may experiences as a result of proposed changes demonstrates leadership integrity. McNeil supports this principle of engaging opponents by being completely truthful with them.[23] He states that through honest dialogue, especially with critics, discussions will focus on the issues, not the personalities. This gives opponents an opportunity to change their mind while still maintaining a positive relationship with their rivals because personality conflicts have been averted. Effective leaders must operate on the principle of telling the truth in love. This includes admitting to opponents that some of their criticisms may have some validity. Recall from Chapter Three that effective leadership must always be prepared, as Heifetz and Linsky state, "to accept responsibility for [their] piece of the mess."[24]

Bystanders — A third group that the leadership must discern beyond partners and opponents is those who have not yet taken sides with respect to the changes being introduced. Chapter One defined this group as *bystanders,* those who are more interested in the impact the adaptive work will have on them than on the conflicts that arise from the issue. In many congregations, this is the group that comes to church each Sunday but is not actively involved in ministry. These individuals are aware of what is happening through the adaptive process and may even be aware of the conflicts that have surfaced as a result, but they have not been engaged in the process. These are the people that the leadership is most concerned about moving in the direction of change.

Addressing this concern involves effective communication. Keeping all parties involved in the change process informed is the key to building stronger relationships.

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[23] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 171.
[24] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 90.

This not only includes the leaderships' partners, but also their opponents and bystanders as well.

In the case of Central Church, understanding inter-relationships will be critical in the success of the new vision. The leadership team will need to quickly determine who supports the vision immediately and partner with them to spread the vision to the undecided bystanders. Dealing with opponents will require coming along side them to appreciate their perceived loss, such as feeling isolated from the church because of distance from home. In the process, though, leaders can also help them recognize the common values the new vision shares with all parties, namely reaching the surrounding community with the gospel.

Adaptive work involves building and reinforcing relationships with those who are affected by the change, recognizing and sympathizing with the losses they will suffer, but highlighting the benefits as well. In the end, however, the leadership must be prepared to accept the reality that some people will never accept the challenge to adapt and, consequently may leave the church to find another place to worship. As Heifetz and Linsky point out, "casualties [are] virtually inevitable when organizations and communities go through significant change."[25] This is never desired, especially in a community of faith. Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to resolve their disagreements peacefully, but even *he* experienced loss when the conflict over John Mark drove him and Barnabas to part ways.[26]

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[25] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 99.
[26] Acts 15:36–41.

Facilitate Conflict

Much has already been stated about conflict. Adaptive work inevitably gives rise to conflict since it challenges long held views, opinions, and values. Effective leadership learns to know how to push people beyond their comfort zones while minimizing the destructive potential of conflict and using the energy generated by this distress to move people forward through the change.[27]

Conflict arising from adaptive work often begins within the leadership team since recognizing the need for change and initiation of the discussion to cast a new vision for the church usually begins at the leadership level. As the previous chapter highlighted, leaders must be able to discuss delicate issues and problems openly and honestly without fear of reproof. Honest discussion, unfortunately, can produce conflict as individuals feel they are being criticized. Productive conflict, however, must be distinguished from personal attack, politically motivated challenges, or destructive fighting. Adaptive work requires that a leader must be able to challenge the views, opinions, and even the values of others on the leadership team. The goal is to elevate issues that might be raised later as a congregation moves through the change process. Again, the previous chapter highlighted the importance of leadership developing a healthy trust in one another. Such trust accepts open dialogue that puts all opinions on the table to be properly debated before they potentially explode when communicated to the broader community of faith.

Heifetz and Linsky list several ways in which leaders can be more effective in managing the conflicts that arise from adaptive work. One way includes creating a place, called a *holding environment*, where people can interact outside of their normal meeting surroundings in order to work on the conflict. "[A] holding environment consists of any

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[27] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 102.

relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of another party and facilitate adaptive work."[28] Holding environments help to create positive adaptive work environments because they provide a mechanism to control the stresses that adaptive work generates. People can not learn when they are overwhelmed with change. As was discussed in the Chapter Two, the goal is to balance creative tension: "The strategic task is to maintain a level of tension that mobilizes people to work."[29] What allows leaders to maintain tension in these situations of adaptive work is *trust*. Trust was the first principle in building an effective leadership team outlined in the previous chapter. Now, this same trust must be extended to those involved in the adaptive process. Without this trust, people would not respond to the effort to sustain tension. While not necessarily a physical structure, a holding environment is a place where those involved in the conflict feel comfortable and safe to discuss difficult problems with clear procedural boundaries that ensure all voices are heard.[30]

In a church context, a holding environment might be a retreat center that the leadership team stays at to get away from their busy schedules and focus on the issues at hand. For the larger congregation, a holding environment could be established through organizing several information meetings where the members of the community of faith can join together to openly discuss their perceived issues with the changes that are taking place around them. For example, in the case of Central Church, communicating the new vision could be done at a local school or conference hall. Then, using these offsite locations away from the church to discuss and debate issues, prevents individuals from being distracted by the visual images in the church that only reinforce their resistance to

[28] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 104–105.
[29] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 106.
[30] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 103.

change. As Heifetz and Linsky state, "a holding environment is a place where there is enough cohesion to offset the centrifugal forces that arise when people do adaptive work."[31] What these authors are saying is that tension associated with adaptive work can push people apart. A holding environment attempts to provide a non-hostile setting that keeps people focusing on the common task of working through the issues they face together.

Within the holding environment, leaders must facilitate the conflicts that arise. When one thinks of two parties in conflict with one another, the image of rising temperatures comes to mind. Where there is friction, there is heat. The role of leadership is to control the temperature of the situation in such a way that it "stay[s] within a tolerable range – not so high that people demand it be turned off completely, and not so low that they are lulled into inaction."[32] Once again, this involves maintaining creative tension. Tension is often required to force people to deal with tough issues. Without it, there would be no incentive to change. Yet, if tension is prolonged without some type of relief, the group cohesion may break leading to a complete disintegration of the adaptive effort. Heifetz and Linsky list a number of ways to raise and lower the temperature in the holding environment.[33] Controlling the temperature during adaptive work is not an easy task for leaders. In fact, the ability of leaders to maintain successful creative tension depends on their own tolerance of conflict. As leaders, themselves, gain experience in dealing with conflict in a constructive manner, they will raise the tolerance level of their own community of faith.

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[31] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 102–103.
[32] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 108.
[33] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 111. The authors list multiple ways to both raise the temperature and lower the temperature in a chart titled "How to Control the Heat."

In order to raise the temperature of the situation so that the creative tension is sustained, leaders must highlight the difficult questions that people are thinking but may be unwilling to raise. Consider the key question confronting the congregation of Central Church described in Chapter Two: *Are we as a congregation, willing to welcome the poor, the homeless, and the ethnic minorities into our church even though they look different, smell different, and hold different values than we do?* Questions like this force individuals to truly reflect on their traditional value system and challenge them to think beyond their comfort zone. This will create tension within the holding environment.

Another way to generate creative tension is to stretch people by giving them more responsibility than they are comfortable with. Those individuals who may struggle with the leadership's new focus on outreach to the inner city may be asked to help organize an outreach event in the local community to give them a first hand perspective on the needs of the people there and how the church can be a significant source of hope for them.

Increasing the temperature is important to sustain the progress of adaptive work but prolonged tension can lead to potential disintegration of the entire effort. Leaders must also be able to lower the temperature to prevent non-productive activities. Breaking the larger issues down into manageable tasks that have defined time frames and role assignments can help lower the temperature. Tackling some of the simpler problems first in order to claim small victories will reduce tension. Slowing down the process of change to allow people to warm up to the new ideas can also be utilized. This may involve leaders filtering information flow to the congregation to avoid overwhelming them with too much information at once. In other instances, the leadership many need to actually

take the difficult tasks back from the congregation to temporarily relieve the tension created by the change process.

Facilitating conflict is a significant challenge for leaders to overcome. One of the most productive ways to keep the momentum of adaptive work moving forward is to keep the focus of the congregation on the future.[34] During times of conflict, individuals and groups get discouraged. Yet, if leaders can remind them of what the future will look like once the adaptive work has been completed, the current struggles can be overcome. But it requires work – work that often can only be accomplished by the people themselves. This leads to our next principle, mobilizing the laity to carry out the adaptive work.

Mobilize Lay Action

Adaptive work is challenging because, as already stated, solutions are not readily available. As a result, leaders need to mobilize all those affected by the issue to develop a collaborative solution. To reiterate the earlier warning from Chapter Two, trying to apply a technical solution where adaptive work is required will only lead to temporary relief and the problem will undoubtedly resurface.

The fourth principle in working through the challenges of adaptive situations is for the leadership to take the work off their own shoulders and "put it in the right place, where it can be addressed by relevant parties."[35] In a church context, this involves mobilizing the laity to take action in the adaptive work process.

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[34] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 120. The authors call this "positive vision" which reminds people of a common orienting value that keeps them focused on working through their challenges in the adaptive work process.

[35] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 128.

Men and women in leadership usually fill these authority roles because they are individuals who are known to demonstrate responsibility and take charge in difficult situations. Their nature is to work hard and get the job done, often taking on much of the task themselves. In situations of adaptive work, this can be risky. People come to leaders to solve their problems. Chapter Two warned leaders that taking ownership of problems can lead others to lay blame on them when things go amiss. Over time, the leadership begins to personify the problem. When the tension grows too intense, the natural solution to resolve the issue is to replace the leadership. While this may secure short term relief of the tension created by the adaptive challenge, it never eliminates the problem. The issue will surface again at a future time.

Mobilizing lay action highlights the fact that those individuals directly involved with the issue or conflict are the best people to also perform the adaptive work. Richard Fisher and William Ury identify the importance of this principle in their work *Getting to Yes*. They assert that in order for the stakeholders' to accept the resolution of the problem, they must be involved in the process of developing it. "If they are not involved in the process, they are hardly likely to approve the product."[36] In the case of Central Church, while the leadership made the decision not to relocate, they would need the congregations' effort to implement the new vision. Thus, involving the congregation in developing the means of reaching the surrounding ethnic community would permit them to feel part of the process and help them buy into the changes that would need to take place in their church.

This fourth principle of directly engaging those involved in the adaptive process is closely linked to the second principle described earlier. One of the key challenges leaders

[36] Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 27.

face is identifying who are the primary participants connected to the issue. This involves understanding the deeper inter-relationships within the congregation so that all parties affected by the issue are identified, especially those beyond the obvious participants. Recall the organic nature of relationships within communities of faith described earlier. While one individual may be at the center of the issue being addressed, there are numerous others who are connected to this individual either through family ties, friendships, work relationships, or other loyalties. These bystanders will be important individuals to draw into the process to prevent negative repercussions from surfacing during adaptive work.

Mobilizing lay action does not remove the leadership from the process completely. The leadership team still has a very important role to play in seeing adaptive work progress. Leaders still remain involved by observing the process and intervening when necessary. Heifetz and Linsky suggest short and straightforward interventions that provide clear direction but avert the appearance of taking the issue back onto the leadership's shoulders.[37]

These short interventions can take several forms.[38] Leaders can state observations they make during the adaptive process that help the working group reflect on their behaviours and interactions with one another. Because the leadership is merely observing from the sidelines and is not caught in the emotion of the situation, they have a better vantage point to recognize when tensions are building and what sparked the change in atmosphere. In effect, the leaders stop the group and force them to step back to regain perspective on the issue.

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[37] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 134.
[38] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 135-137.

A second method of intervention would be to raise difficult questions like, *Why is the group not dealing with Joe's concern?* or *Why did it seem like there was heightened tension when Jane suggested that option?* These questions progress beyond the stated observations because they present the group with something they need to react to. It puts the work back into their lap to address rather than ignore.

These types of interventions can even go one step further where the leadership actually presents the group with their interpretation of the stated observation. The leaders may highlight that the issue in dispute is not really the source of the tension but another issue, one that has undermined the group's progress, is really at the heart of the conflict and must be dealt with first before progress can be made. This type of intervention can be used to raise the temperature in the adaptive process if progress seems to be slowing.

The key to each of these interventions is to keep responsibility for performing the difficult work in the hands of those involved in the issue, not the leadership. When leaders fail to remove the issue from their shoulders and give it back to the people, it is likely that the problem will suddenly become theirs to fix, and theirs alone.[39] Leaving the work in the hands of the congregation, facilitated by strategic interventions by the leadership team overseeing the adaptive process, will result in adaptive changes that the larger community of faith can accept because they became part of the transformational process.

Persevere With Integrity

The final principle in managing adaptive work involves perseverance. When the change process begins to intensify, those in leadership must remain calm, recognizing that

[39] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 125.

tensions will rise. The leadership team must move the congregation forward, maintaining their integrity throughout the process. Pressure during this time can be intense and church leaders can begin to doubt their capabilities and the direction they are taking their congregation in. This is the time for leaders to stand their ground and persevere through the challenge of adaptive work.

One of the aspects of perseverance with integrity involves learning to accept criticism and personal attacks while remaining cool and in control. As Heifetz and Linsky state, "learning to take the heat and receive people's anger in a way that does not undermine your initiative is one of the toughest tasks of leadership."[40] The Scriptures provide many examples of this principle. Jesus was criticized and rejected by his family and friends in his own hometown of Capernaum.[41] Yet, he carried out his ministry with focus and purpose. In the Old Testament, Moses was constantly ridiculed by the Israelites while leading them through the desert wilderness.[42] Yet, he maintained his integrity, persevering to continue to lead God's chosen nation to the very borders of the Promised Land. "People you challenge will test your steadiness and judge your worthiness by your response to their anger... Receiving people's anger without becoming personally defensive generates trust."[43] McNeil echoes this notion, reminding leaders to deal openly and honestly with critics. "Being honest with critics means first of all telling the truth. People...need spiritual leaders whose word and integrity are unimpeachable."[44]

The Apostle Paul provides great encouragement for leaders to persevere while maintaining their integrity during situations of conflict:

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[40] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 141.
[41] Luke 4:16–30.
[42] Exodus 16–18 and Deuteronomy 1 are examples of texts supporting this premise.
[43] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 145.
[44] McNeil, *Work of the Heart*, 171.

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you *stand firm* in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel *without being frightened in any way* by those who oppose you.[45]
> One of the important factors in perseverance through adaptive work is timing.

Timing involves knowing when to act on an issue and when to allow the issue to take time to develop. Heifetz and Linsky refer to this timing factor as the process of "letting the issues ripen."[46]

I contend that the matter of timing is critical in the process of mobilizing the energy of conflict to bring about transformation through adaptive work. During the adaptive process *ignoring* situations of disequilibrium can stir even greater conflict as people respond with disapproval towards the *lack of action* taken by the leadership. This can give rise to a more serious problem because it challenges the leadership's credibility. On the other hand, if change is introduced prematurely, before the congregation has enough information to recognize it as something that needs to be addressed, the leadership risks having the adaptive work process stagnate due to lack of interest. Thus, timing is critical and leaders either need to "wait until the issue is ripe, or ripen it [themselves]."[47] The following section reinforces the critical nature of timing in relation to adaptive work.

Introducing Transformational Change – The Right Timing

Leadership perseverance requires both patience and wisdom. When is the right time to present a significant change to a congregation? Is the group prepared to face

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[45] Philippians 1:27–28a. Emphasis added.
[46] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 146.
[47] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 146.

adaptive work? How does the leadership know that the community of faith is ready for something that will involve challenges to their traditional values and require significant effort on their part to achieve, potentially risking loss along the way? Leaders need to assess their congregation, testing reality and determining what gaps are present before launching into adaptive work.

Charles Handy, in his work *The Age of Paradox*, identifies a useful tool called the sigmoid or S-curve that leaders can utilize in understanding the lifecycle of organizations.[48] Figure 3 illustrates this curve and the phases that organizations go through.

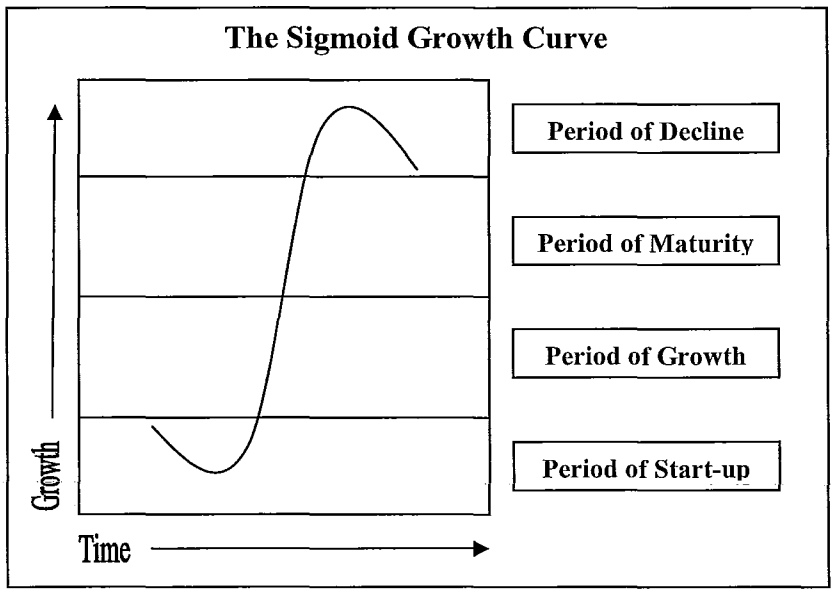

Figure 3: The S-curve or Sigmoid Curve used to represent periods of growth and decline in an organization's lifecycle.[49]

According to Handy, the life cycle of a product or even an organization itself begins with a start-up period. While new ideas are being explored and new programs are being conceived, there are temporary set-backs:

[48] Handy, *Age of Paradox*, 50-51.
[49] Adapted from Steffen, "The Sigmoid Growth Curve," [Figure 1].

- resources may become scarce to support new initiatives
- energy levels are down as people struggle to meet the new demands of added programs
- discouragement sets in as some new ideas fail
- productivity begins to wane.

Once this start-up period is overcome, however, the organization experiences growth and eventually moves on towards maturity. Unfortunately, according to Handy, the future of the organization is never sustainable without regeneration of the process. As Figure 3 illustrates, following the pinnacle of success, there follows an inevitable period of decline. This decline will continue, and the organization will eventually die without conscious intervention.

This inevitable decline presents all leadership with a significant challenge. As Handy suggests, constant growth and development can be achieved when the leadership of the organization recognizes that the time to launch a new initiative is *before* the first growth period climaxes and decline sets in.[50] Figure 4 illustrates this situation. Leaders must initiate the cycle over again to breathe new life into the organization.

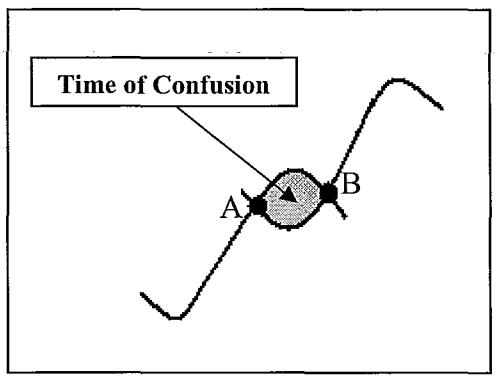

Figure 4: The intersection between two organizational lifecycles is called the Time of Confusion.[51]

[50] Handy, *Age of Paradox*, 51.
[51] Adapted from Handy, *Age of Paradox*, 52.

As stated above, the timing of this change process is critical. Many organizations struggle in this effort because they delay too long before initiating change. Leaders are only motivated to pursue change when signs of decline become evident (point B in Figure 4). This is too late. While rejuvenating life in the organization at this point is not impossible, considerable effort is needed since the organization is going through a state of decline. People are discouraged and some may even have already left the organization. The time for change, however, is when the organization is still at point A, before signs of decline begin to appear.

I argue that this organizational change theory can be used by church leaders when determining the appropriate time to begin the transformational change process. For the leadership team, this creates a paradoxical situation. Leaders must begin the change process while the church is still strong and flourishing — when energy levels and enthusiasm are high. The challenge, however, is the coexistence of the two S-curves. This is indicated by the shaded area in Figure 4, the period that is called the *Time of Confusion*.[52] During this time, people will challenge the decision for change. There will be resistance from those who hold to the old adage: *if it isn't broken, don't try to fix it.* Those who have strong ties to the old curve will feel threatened. There will be chaos as new programs are launched and old ones set aside to free up resources. The leadership team will be questioned for pulling people from the old curve to support the new curve. New people in the church will be called to lead these initiatives so fresh ideas can be introduced but this involves going through a learning curve.

I contend that it is during this *Time of Confusion* that adaptive work must take place. This is the time that leaders need to regularly step back to gain perspective on how

[52] Handy, *Age of Paradox*, 53.

the new initiatives are progressing. They need to recognize what relationships are being affected by the changes as people are being shuffled into new positions. Leaders need to facilitate conflicts that arise, developing partnerships with those ready to jump onto the new curve, engaging opponents and working honestly with them to help them deal with their losses, while also keeping bystanders informed so they can catch the vision and join the adaptive effort. As challenges arise, the leadership team needs to continually mobilize the congregation to keep moving forward, tackling tough issues themselves as they work through the confusion and begin the process of turning the corner on the curve to begin the process towards growth and maturity. In the end, leaders themselves need to persevere through this time of confusion with complete integrity, courageously facing the heat of opposition while keeping the process of adaptive work moving forward.

In this chapter I have presented an approach that church leaders can use when responding to conflict arising from change. This approach is a process called adaptive work and it involves leaders working as a team to challenge the values and traditions of their congregation; helping them adjust to the changes that are needed to bring about a new vision for ministry — a vision not only for themselves, but one that stretches them to look beyond their own walls into the needs of their surrounding community. Initiating change will meet with resistance — a challenge for any leadership team. I contend that the approach presented in this chapter will aid church leaders in overcoming this challenge. It involves leaders stepping back to maintain perspective on the issues that arise, regularly testing reality and making adjustments along the way. It involves understanding the relationships that inter-connect people involved in the process and then

facilitating the conflicts that arise between both individuals and groups. It involves mobilizing people to engage in the process of adaptive work, working through their own problems, overcoming their own fears, challenging their own presuppositions and personal values so that they can feel part of implementing the new vision. Finally it involves leadership integrity and the ability of the leadership team to persevere through the adaptive process.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is about balancing the demands of day-to-day ministry while always looking towards long-term growth in the congregation, both spiritually and numerically through discipling and outreach. Growth involves a change process. However, as this work has illustrated, change often involves conflict, something many in church leadership would rather avoid. Yet, rather than avoid conflict, I have presented an alternate response approach: Harness the energy of conflict to fuel needed change and bring about transformation. This is the process of adaptive work.

Transformational leadership through the process of adaptive work is not an easy task. As Heifetz states,

> Exercising leadership from a position of authority in adaptive situations means going against the grain. Rather than fulfilling the expectation for answers, one provides questions; rather than protecting people from outside threat, one lets people feel the threat in order to stimulate adaptation; instead of orienting people to their current roles, one disorients people so that new role relationships develop; rather than quelling conflict, one generates it; instead of maintaining norms, one challenges them.[1]

I believe this quote highlights why church leadership can fail to bring about transformation in their congregations. The task of leadership described above seems to contradict the biblical directives of peace and harmony in the body of Christ. Yet, I have shown that Scripture demonstrates clear examples of adaptive work that church leaders need to heed.

To grasp these positive aspects of adaptive work requires a paradigm shift. It requires that church leaders learn how to recognize opportunities when conflict can be used in a positive manner. It demands that church leaders learn how to work together as a

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[1] Heifetz, *Leadership*, 126.

team, supporting and encouraging each other, helping one another persevere through the trials of adaptive work; challenging each others opinions and views in order to come to a clear vision of the future for their congregations. Leadership is about learning. Addressing conflict during complex situations of change requires leaders be prepared to learn and adapt to new situations themselves — to set the example for their congregations to follow.

Church conflict can be a very destructive and divisive problem if the leadership is not equipped to respond to it appropriately. The church is the body of Christ, not a man-made institution. Church leaders must strive to edify and build up the body, not allow it to disintegrate. If the approach I have presented can be used by church leaders to prevent such division from occurring, I will have achieved my purpose in writing this work.

It is my desire that the concepts and principles presented in this thesis will equip church leaders to boldly pursue opportunities to introduce needed changes in their churches. Such a pursuit will require an honest assessment of their ministries and a clear recognition of where their congregations need to be challenged. I urge leaders to boldly present a new vision knowing that resistance will ensue. Then, using the approach presented here, leaders can work along side their congregations, navigating the rough waters of change — learning together, growing together, and maturing together. This is the process of transformation through adaptive work.

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