
A MISSIONAL CHURCH PROCESSES: POST-INTERVENTION RESEARCH

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Abstract

The “Missional Change Process” was designed by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk to assist churches that sought adaptive change in their organizational beliefs and practices. Rooted in the missional church frameworks that began gaining attention in the 1990s, the MCP was introduced into the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary by Roxburgh, and a cohort curricular model was developed with Mark Lau Branson as the co-teacher. This article explains some elements of that curriculum, and uses pre- and post-intervention surveys in which three churches provide descriptions of their congregations. This paper indicates that significant cultural change occurred in congregational practices during the course’s various initiatives.

Church leaders and researchers often call attention to trends since the 1960s in North American denominations and congregations. There is a level of agreement that mid-century assumptions about organizations and leadership for churches have seen a significant shift in recent decades. One framework regarding congregational culture and leadership is described as *missional church*. The voices within said framework call the Western church to pay attention to the rapid cultural shifts in later-modernity, the implications of the post-Christendom era for the church, and the presence of the gospel in the imminent actions of the Trinity.

Beginning in 2004, a cohort of fifteen pastors began Doctor of Ministry studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in a program designed by Alan Roxburgh. This program

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engaged the pastors for five years of theological praxis that was directly connected to their work as congregational leaders. Roxburgh and I co-taught the annual seminars, shared responsibilities regarding assessing assignments (with Roxburgh providing feedback on major papers), and co-led the project proposal workshop. Roxburgh guided the student work as proposals were approved and final projects moved toward completion. Each year the participants worked for four to six months on reading, research, and some on-the-ground activities, and then they wrote a brief reflection paper just prior to gathering for a two-week seminar. Subsequently, during the next six months, they completed phases on research and activities and wrote a major paper.¹

The D.Min. curriculum used resources that Roxburgh was developing alongside colleague Fred Romanuk for use with his consulting group called the Missional Leadership Institute. This consulting group morphed over the intervening years of the research and became The Missional Network by the time of the latest congregational intervention surveys.² For convenience, I will use TMN when referring to the consulting group and its resources.³

Theoretical/Theological Resources

The conceptual resources that funded the D.Min. curriculum included books and articles by Lesslie Newbigin,⁴ Darrell Guder,⁵ Alan Roxburgh,⁶ Craig Van

¹ New D.Min. cohorts have continued to form, beginning about two years apart; see fuller.edu/academics/school-of-theology/dmin/mlc.aspx.

² www.themissionalnetwork.com

³ I began working with TMN in 2007 and am now a senior associate and consultant. I have not been involved in designing the surveys and their computerized reports. As is obvious from this article, I was involved as a co-teacher of the D.Min. cohort that included the pastors of the churches discussed in this article.

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B.

Gelder,⁷ and others. The four-year design followed this sequence of topics; key reading is noted in Figure 1:

| | Topics and Activities | Authors |
|--------|--|--|
| Year 1 | Social and cultural influences on current approaches to organizational life and leadership; a 360 survey and follow-up conversations regarding the leader’s activities; initial orientation to the missional church conversation | Zygmunt Bauman Daryl Conner Ronald Heifetz Steven Johnson Robert Kaplan Ervin Laszlo Richard Pascale and Mark Milleman Alan Roxburgh Edgar Schein Stephen Toulmin |
| Year 2 | Ecclesiology in North American cultures; survey and conversations regarding a congregation’s traits relevant to missional ecclesiology | Avery Dulles Michael Budde Roger Finke and Rodney Stark Darrell Guder Barry Harvey Stanley Hauerwas Veli-Matti Karkkainen Gerhard Lohfink Stephen Long James McClendon Alan Roxburgh Craig Van Gelder |

Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989); see Alan Roxburgh’s comments on Newbigin and these books in *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 34–46.

⁵ Darrell Guder, et al., *The Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).

⁶ Numerous books by Roxburgh are noted in footnotes throughout the article.

⁷ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000).

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Year 3 | Missiology and the church's local context; engaging neighbors and neighborhoods | Saul Alinsky Paulo Freire Thomas Groome John Kretzmann and John McKnight Eric Law Bryant Myers René Padilla and Tetsunao Yamamori Alan Roxburgh Philip Salzman Robert Schreiter Clemmons Sedmak Richard Sennett Charles Taylor Craig Van Gelder |
| Year 4 | Workshop on final proposals | |

Figure 1: Curriculum

The process of congregational transformation was fostered at the intersection of these fields of praxis—theology, organizational dynamics, cultural contexts, and leadership. The assumptions, spelled out in missional church books and in various works on contemporary culture, focused on the discontinuous changes currently being experienced in Western culture and the resulting challenges to congregations and pastor-leaders.

As students engaged the readings in the context of church ministry, they were asked to emphasize theoretical constructs in the required books as well as from other authors. My course notes indicate several key components. Stephen Toulmin analyzes cultural shifts through the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romanticism;⁸ notably, he posits that widespread anxieties across a society lead to efforts that include increased assurances, tighter controls, and universalized

⁸ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

constructs. Steve Johnson writes about self-organization, adaptive learning, and emergence theory.⁹ Robert Schreiter's approach to doing local theology attends to the layers of cultural influences and a church's work on discerning God in the local.¹⁰ Michel de Certeau demonstrates that seemingly quotidian activities can change social environments.¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman connects the dots between distant structures of globalization and daily matters of the individual, work, social arrangements, concepts of freedom, consumerism, and the nation-state.¹² Richard Sennett explores the relationship between human beings and the cities they inhabit.¹³ Emmanuel Levinas weaves concepts of the human "other" with transcendence.¹⁴

From these and other authors, key theological topics were raised within a framework of theological praxis, which can be summarized briefly. The concept of *missio Dei* leads to an understanding that God is "missional" in God's being and actions; God is always initiating in the world toward telos and traits of reconciliation, truth, justice, beauty, and love. This missional *modus operandi* also governs any understanding of and engagement with the Holy Spirit. Christology speaks to God's non-coercive, sacrificial initiative to sit at the table of the other, to contest powers of domination, to bring healing and forgiveness, and to announce, embody, and generate the reign of God. Missional ecclesiology indicates that churches, by definition, are to discern and engage God's

⁹ Steven Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2001).

¹⁰ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).

¹¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984).

¹² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2000) and *In Search of Politics* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹³ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Norton Books, 1990).

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

initiatives in their contexts. Christian anthropology insists that the “other” is a human, a subject rather than an object, and we (as Christians and as churches) are to act accordingly toward and with church members and neighbors. Matters of the Trinity include diversity (otherness), in unity, *perichoresis* (interacting and mutually indwelling), and sending, which all bear on humanness (in the image of God) and the church (as shaped by the *koinonia* of the Trinity).

This attention to socio-cultural contexts and theological praxis led us to focus on frameworks for church leadership that are cognizant of options for social organizations in late modernity. In an early summary of the expected shifts, Roxburgh presented this comparison:¹⁵

| | Functional Christendom | Emerging Missional Church |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Environment | Stable Predictable Developmental | Unstable Discontinuous Emergent |
| Organizational culture | Hierarchies Bureaucracies Managers/experts Top-down flow Alignment around plan Linear | Networks Teams Dialogue/conscious learning Bottom-up flow Cultivate variety Non-linear dynamics |
| Leadership functions | Performative Operational Manage people Optimize performance Control structure | Adaptive Maintain tension between adaptive and operational Manage rules Create experiments Cultivate environment of adaptability |

Figure 2: Comparing Functional Christendom and Emerging Missional Church

¹⁵ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *Pastor Readiness Workbook* (Vancouver, B.C.: Missional Leadership Institute, 2004), 9.

Among the primary resources for these elements of the course were Ronald Heifetz's research on adaptive leadership,¹⁶ Peter Senge's promotion of learning organizations,¹⁷ Daryl Conner's work on how quickly changing contexts require nimble organizations,¹⁸ and Edgar Schein's frameworks concerning organizational culture and leading change.¹⁹ The change process and sequence used in the cohort, developed by Roxburgh and Romanuk,²⁰ was informed by Kurt Lewin's model of organizational change—unfreeze, change, refreeze²¹—and Everett Rogers's work on diffusion theory.²² The MCP varies from the most frequent uses of Lewin and Rogers because, rather than emphasizing a new structure, product, or service, it seeks a local approach to missional life that makes a habit of continual change from the edges of the organization. So the refreezing is of a praxis of engaging, discerning, experimenting.

The overall process is embedded in a practical theology process of action-reflection. The assumption is that D.Min. students bring their own experiences, situations, stories, and challenges into the learning community. Practical theology works with the stuff of our current situation—the actions and practices in which we are already participating. Then within a learning community, we engage reflection by using various mirrors that clarify the influences that got us to this point

¹⁶ Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

¹⁸ Daryl Conner, *Leading at the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1998).

¹⁹ Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).

²⁰ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); also relevant to the D.Min. class regarding leadership frameworks is material later included in Alan Roxburgh, *Missional Mapmaking* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

²¹ Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

²² Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995).

and the resources that can indicate next steps.²³ As noted above, the mirrors we use include the diverse fields of cultural studies, organizational development, leadership studies, church history, theology, biblical studies, missiology, and spirituality. The work of practical theology is that of shaping a congregation toward practices that are generative in the local circumstances for discerning and participating with God.

Many churches have tried to find self-understanding and new options in the image of a classic bell curve. This plotted line seemed to explain what many churches experienced, moving from early and rapid growth, to a somewhat level plateau, to uneven decline, then to stagnation or a long and perhaps fraught legacy.²⁴ Some church strategists, drawing on the work of Jim Collins and Jerry Porras,²⁵ call for disrupting the cycle with a “BHAG” (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) or other focusing interventions that worked within the norms of managed strategies and clear hierarchies. I have already noted that this missional approach did not have confidence in those frameworks. Roxburgh and Romanuk had developed a different picture of a church’s organizational life while noting the options that leaders had for their work (Figure 3).

²³ See Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007); and Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

²⁴ Numerous authors have used various labels for the curve; all have built on the work of David Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1984).

²⁵ James Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

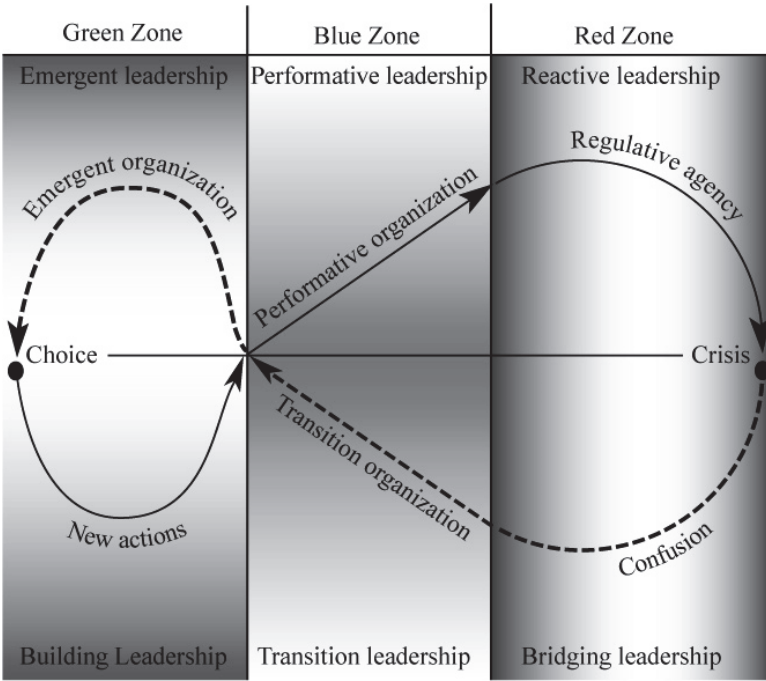


Figure 3: Three-Zone Model of Missional Leadership
 (class handout by Alan Roxburgh)²⁶

The sequence begins in the lower Green Zone, then as a group forms and sustains its life; it creates habits and structures in the upper Blue Zone (performative). At some point, the church moves into a Red Zone that it signaled by diverse stresses. Basically, the habits, structures, expectations, and leadership priorities are inadequate for the changes that are occurring in the interface of the church and its environment. The church becomes aware of generations relocating, a neighborhood changing, the membership and finances declining, and/or various expressions of internal strife. As the church enters the upper Red Zone, the social imaginary of participants causes them to expend energy on returning to the Blue Zone. This reactive impulse is rooted in mistaken confidence that reifying old structures, priorities, events, and activities will bring the comforts of

²⁶ This figure is available in Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 41.

the performative era. With an emphasis on regulative functions (clarifying structures, increasing training, enforcing procedures, maintaining control), the leaders resist the kinds of changes that would make God's role in the disruption discernable, and miss the new opportunities for grace and life in their midst. At some point, the losses, conflicts, and pain of the Red Zone come to a crisis, during which the efforts to return to the old days are replaced by confusion. (The degrees of trauma in all of this vary widely; some churches are more adept at naming the Red Zone and embracing the ambiguity of a new era, while others do not survive the crisis.)

Church leaders who have the needed capacities will be with the church in its deepening awareness, confusion, and waiting. This is a liminal time²⁷ in which the past is gone and the future has not arrived. Leaders who prescribe new answers, new structures, new staff, or other fixes will keep the church from developing the needed competencies for listening to God, each other, and neighbors in expectation that they (the people, together) can experiment and find a way forward. The D.Min. cohort and the TMN Missional Change Process are primarily designed for churches that are entering or living in the Red Zone. This process is designed to move churches into the initial phases of the lower Blue Zone (transitional) in which some new practices transform the internal and external life of the church toward a deeper engagement with *missio Dei*.

The Missional Shift

The two large shifts (in being and agency) that we focused on throughout the entire D.Min. sequence could be summarized as (1) the transformation of a church, regarding how it relates to its local context—from reactive or developmental toward deeper mutual and transformative engagement, and (2) a transition from

²⁷ Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

traditional modes of pastor-leader to priorities that front the work of shaping generative environments in which the everyday people in the pews gain capacities for discernment and engagement with God's missional initiatives (explained further below). The pastor-leader and the congregation form a system; they have habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that are deeply embedded in societal forces and how ecclesial traditions have become shaped in those forces. In other words, a congregation has a formal ecclesiology (whether Reformed or Pentecostal or other) and a functional ecclesiology (their life-on-the-ground), and the particular way-of-being that is expressed in numerous habits about roles, words, affects, structures, perceptions, aims, and relationships.

For a congregation, this diagram oversimplifies yet still reveals primary perspectives and elements of church life. A church does not land in one category; rather, the typologies here provide a means toward conversations concerning diverse characteristics and activities in the church. The TMN workbook explains:

The *Missional Church Readiness Instrument* is designed around the idea that a congregation functions across four different types or characteristics. This does not mean that a congregation should be defined as one of these four characteristics but that a congregation will display each of these characteristics across various elements of its life at any particular time. Therefore, this is not about defining your congregation with a label but a way of talking about how you may see your congregation functioning across these four characteristics.²⁸

²⁸ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Workbook* (Vancouver, B.C.: Missional Leadership Institute, 2004), 10.

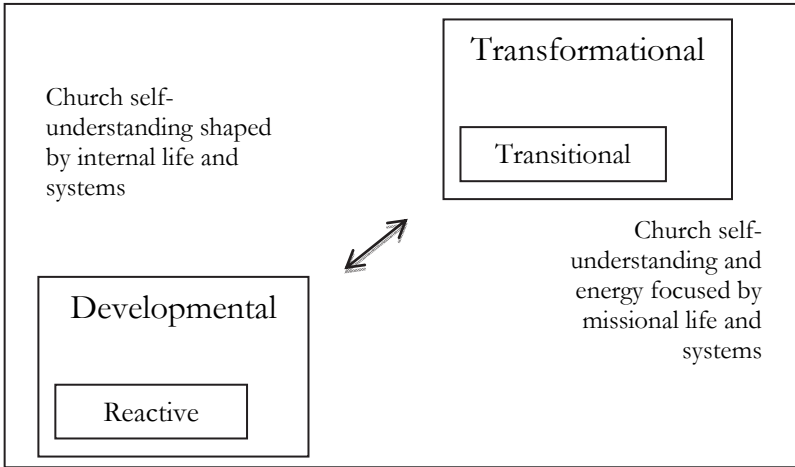


Figure 4: Church Typologies (From Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Workbook*, 9.)

The four types describe the energy, activities, and priorities of a church's layered life and reveal how they interact with their context. These layers include relationships, organizational initiatives, money, planning and decision-making, mentoring, and networking. Many churches begin with significant relationships in a neighborhood (or several neighborhoods), where members live and facilities are built. Sometimes an initial plan for a church is engaged without explicit connections with a geographic location, and sometimes as a result of years of changes in the nearby residences, churches become disconnected from the local. In both cases, the congregation lacks significant relationships with its neighbors. A *Reactive* church has experienced years in which these relationships with the local context exhibit a degree of disconnect and perhaps even discomfort. While there may be programmatic or rental arrangements with the neighborhood, the church's practices and priorities are focused on the institutional and internal relational life of the church's members. A *Developmental* church would describe itself as wanting to receive new participants, and because they have confidence that they already know what they are doing, they are putting resources and even

creativity into improving their ministries to make their church more attractive and welcoming. However, changes do not come from knowing neighbors but from building on the preferences of members and the resources of their current networks. (They may try to meet the *needs* of neighbors, based on their own understandings, but this is substantially in a framework in which the church has power, such as resources and decision-making, and the neighbors are objects of their provisions.) The shift into *Transitional* is significant; it requires a learning posture that goes beyond improving current ministries and moving toward new imagination and experiments regarding the local context. Relationships with neighbors become mutual (they are subjects rather than objects). Also, the role of positional leaders becomes focused on shaping an environment in which “life at the margins” of the organization is sanctioned and nourished, which must happen concurrently with the management of the “holding environment,” which creates the safety and tension needed for significant learning. For example, adequate attention must be paid to normal operations along with engagement with the grief work that is needed as some participants experience the grief of change and loss.²⁹ The *Transformational* stage is one in which ongoing discernment and experiments, failures and successes, the voices of everyday members and neighbors, and a deepening sense of participation in God’s mission are all becoming more common and expected. These become new habits, permeating the whole organization. This is not a steady state but a dynamic and fluid life, requiring leadership and structures and learning that discourage turning inward. It is this four-stage description that forms the basis of the surveys used by TMN and employed by our D.Min. curriculum. For the purposes of the article,

²⁹ On leading adaptive, cultural shifts in organizations, see Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2002) and on their framework of “holding environments,” see 102–107, with reference to Donald Winnicott, *The Maturational Process* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).

movements from left to right on the spectrum in Figure 4 will be described as positive.

The Survey

Unlike most surveys that are used for organizational measurements, the TMN surveys are designed for social construction. This difference is significant for how they are used in churches during the D.Min. and for how this article diverges from the intent of the survey design. Church leadership materials are full of ways to measure congregational activities, beliefs, resources, and contexts. Among various survey approaches to assessment are those available through the Hartford Institute for Religion Research,³⁰ the work of Natural Church Development,³¹ the publications of various mega-churches, and numerous denominational offices. These sources provide churches with data on various aspects of a congregation's activities, makeup, resources, and options. For example, a survey can ask questions about participation in small groups, the use of certain media or musical instruments during worship, the percentage of the budget that goes into traditional mission activities, and what local programs a church has for their community. Such data gathering is rooted in modernity's frameworks concerning positivist knowledge, management confidence in commodifying human information, a level of certainty concerning strategic goals, and the function of data in a social organization. A case can be made that a congregation needs a clearer awareness about certain realities and trends and that some information can be gathered and interpreted toward such awareness. However, TMN fronts the work of surveys not for positivist knowledge but for changing conversations.

This D.Min. program (and the TMN resources) addressed key elements in church life that indicate readiness for change within the theological praxis

³⁰ http://hrr.hartsem.edu/leadership/church_inventory.html.

³¹ <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/index.html>.

frameworks of missional ecclesiology. Some questions are more about readiness for change; some questions are more about tendencies toward missional ecclesiology. The cumulative report merges these responses into a sort of photograph of the church. The awareness of members is stimulated as they reflect on certain questions while they take the survey and as they are subsequently engaged in dialogue about the results.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>System Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure • Planning • Leadership • Staff | <p>Focus Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Organization • Programs • Financial |
| <p>Congregation Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy • Involvement • Practices • Ministry | <p>Community Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration • Growth • Connection • Impact |

Figure 5: Survey Categories and Factors (From Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Workbook*, 16.)

The *Workbook's* explanations of the categories and factors cover more than ten pages, but the overall goal of this article does not require that much detailed commentary. The four primary clusters clarify the themes:³²

- “Church Systems” include organizational factors that describe “the formal and informal systems shaping how decisions are made, planning occurs, leaders function and communication is used.”
- “Church Focus” concerns “where energy is being or not being expended in the system.”
- “Congregation Factors” brings together the “personality” of the church, the “structures of life, tradition, ritual, and the experiences of the people

³² Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Workbook*, 19, 24, 28, 32.

who comprise the congregation.” These factors have been formed over years and are visible in numerous habits.

- “Community Factors” examine the “current dynamics between the congregation and the contexts of its members.”

A few additional definitions will be offered in the course of interpreting the data. The sixty-four statements in the survey (four per factor), are constructed on the continuum of the typologies noted above (Reactive—Developmental—Transitional—Transformational).³³

Participants are asked to respond to each statement using a Likert scale (disagree strongly, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree strongly), and each set of four statements is followed by a space for comments. Answers are not forced, and respondents can agree (or not agree) to any sentence. In other words, a participant could agree with a reactive statement and with a transformative statement with regard to a single trait. In the report, any response of agree or agree strongly is counted toward the cumulative affirmation of that sentence (all other responses are ignored).

Each pastor (D.Min. student) invited church participants to respond to the online survey. (For those who were not able or comfortable with online surveys, a paper copy was made available and the pastor arranged for another church member to insert the data.) Participants were to self-identify according to several categories (which could be adapted by the pastor), such as governing board, other leaders, staff, members for more than three years, and newer members. For this article, these categories have been combined; in the real-life rollout of the process, the differences among

³³ The wording of a few of the sixty-four statements went through editorial changes, to increase clarity, between the first and second use at these churches. Most changes were minor (like adding the word *email* to a list of communication options). Fewer than five statements were significantly rewritten, and the characteristics of the continuum were always maintained.

categories are important for a leader's work of shaping conversations.

The explanations for respondents and instructions to pastors are explicit: the survey is not intended as an assessment. The survey is not creating hard data or accurate measurements. It is designed as a tool to serve conversations. The instructions state,

It is not designed as a measuring instrument to evaluate your congregation beside others. Neither is it designed as an instrument that is meant to pass the expectations of a social scientist designing a survey for research. Think of this survey as a resource to initiate dialogue with one another about who you are right now in terms of your missional life as a congregation.³⁴

This framework creates a significant limitation on what is possible for this article to claim. The purpose of the surveys (and of this article) is not to quantify missional ecclesiology and praxis in congregations. The goal of the article is limited: can it be demonstrated that these churches self-reported positive movements concerning missional readiness traits during the intervention of the Missional Change Process? So a general movement from the left to the right in Figure 4 would indicate that positive self-reporting paralleled the intervention.

The Missional Change Process

As previously noted, the surveys were part of a process of organizational change that prioritized social construction. The intent was to provide prompts in the system for conversations while increasing the capacities in that system for adaptive change and missional innovation. The overall sequence that pastors and churches followed is provided in Figure 6.³⁵

³⁴ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Survey* (Vancouver, B.C.: Missional Leadership Institute, 2004).

³⁵ Until recently, TMN literature called this process the "Missional Change Model," but that created some confusion since a model is often a set

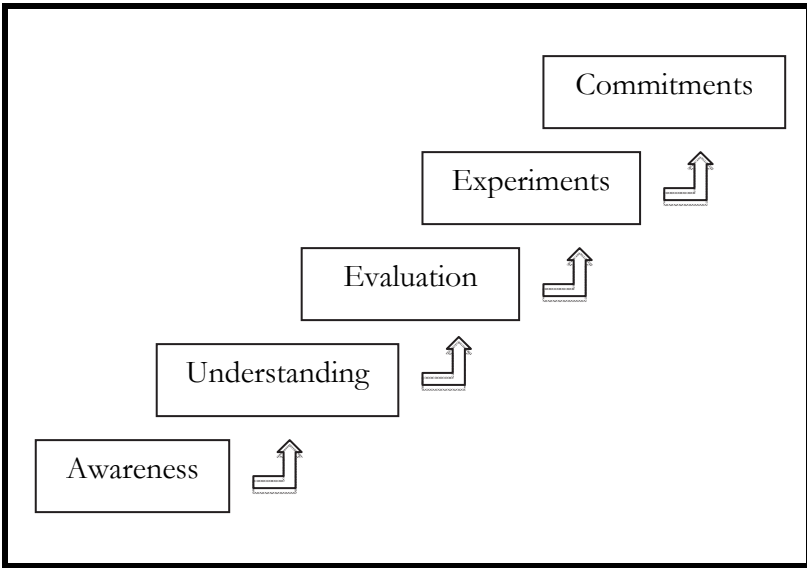


Figure 6: Missional Change Process (Based on Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Church Readiness Workbook*, 13)³⁶

In the class (and workbook), the role of a Guiding Team and the steps of the process are given more detail. The early listening and awareness activities included the survey along with Appreciative Inquiry interviews.³⁷ Each church’s board followed a process that provided frameworks for adaptive change while a few elements of the report were introduced into small groups. A sequence of conversations in small groups continued to follow the steps of Figure 7.

product rather than a process. More recently, it is called the Missional Change Process.

³⁶ This is also available in Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 8.

³⁷ See Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2004).

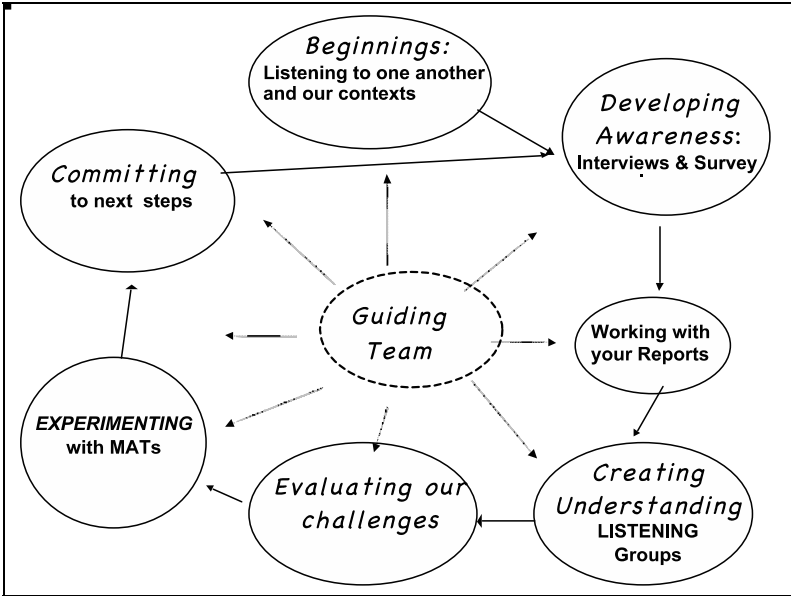


Figure 7: Mapping the Process (From Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Church Readiness Workbook*, 4)

Conversations moved from awareness to understanding to evaluation, with an assignment to differentiate technical challenges from adaptive changes.³⁸ This distinction requires that the pastor and church leaders become able to identify which challenges can be clarified, with clear goals that can be met within the competencies of the church, and which challenges lay beyond those characteristics. In conversations with the church board, two to three groups named adaptive challenges and proceeded to shape experiments that were to address these challenges. The success or failure of such experiments was not key; rather, the whole system was learning new conversations and practices, increasing capacities for missional innovation.³⁹

³⁸ These distinctions, and the relevant matters of leadership, are explained in Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1994), 73–88; and Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2002), 13–30.

³⁹ An abbreviated description of the process is found in Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 115–190.

Three Churches

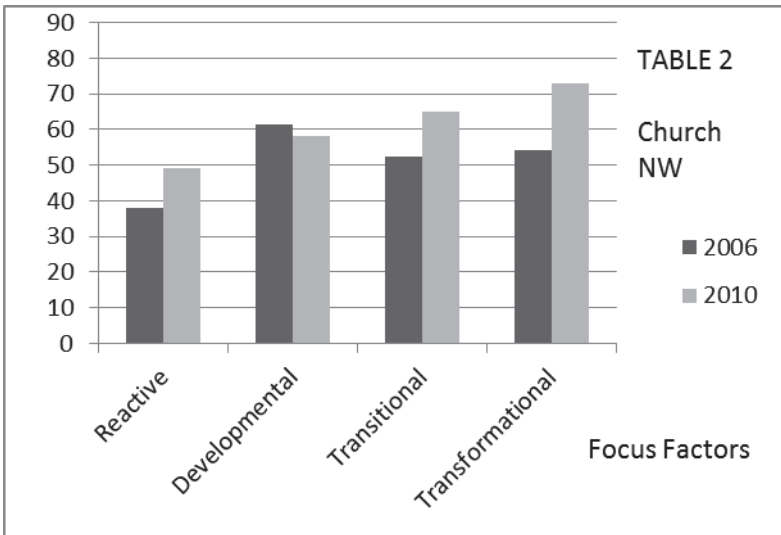
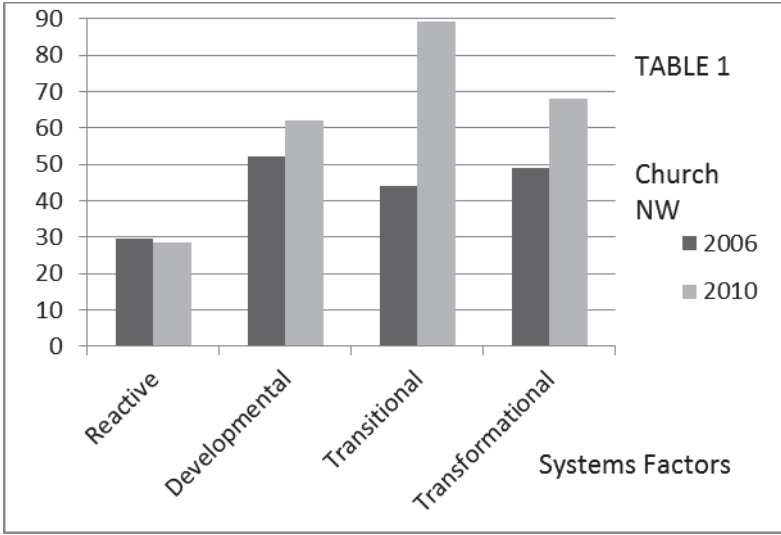
This article will report on three churches in which (1) the church completed the TMN processes, (2) the pastor completed the D.Min. program, and (3) the church re-administered the congregational 360 after those steps.⁴⁰ The selected churches can be given basic descriptions:

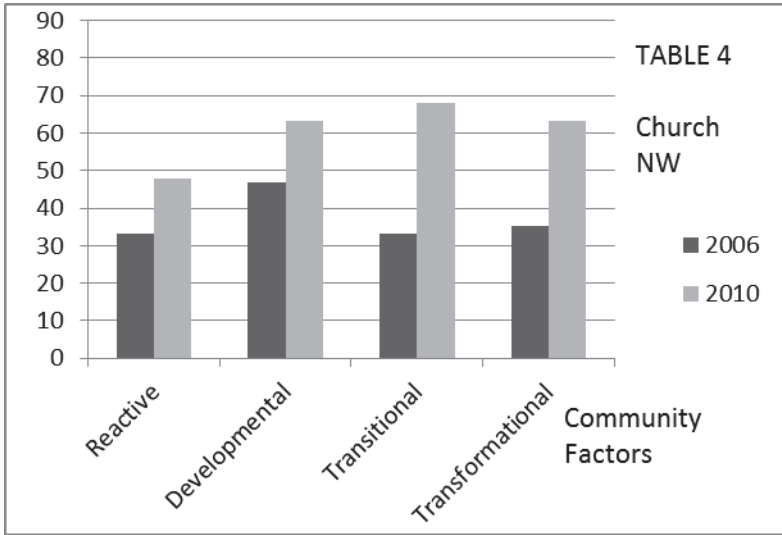
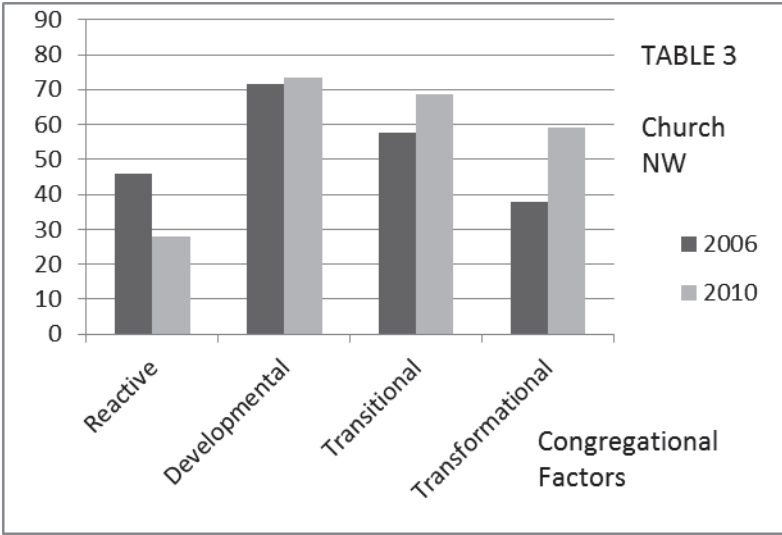
- Church NW is west of the Rockies and north of San Francisco, in a suburban context. After growing to seventeen hundred members in the 1970s, the Sunday worship attendance was about five hundred when this project began.
- Church SW is west of Albuquerque and south of San Francisco, in an urban context. It was about ninety years old, with sixty to seventy worshippers in attendance, and had experienced urban challenges, including the lure of suburbs.
- Church NE is east of Chicago and north of Baltimore, in a rural context that is experiencing the approach of suburbs. It is more than two hundred years old and has about 250 people in worship on Sundays.

Church NW

The congregational surveys for Church NW were administered in 2006 (thirty-eight participants) and 2010 (thirty-seven participants). As noted above, a positive change is noted in organizational movements from left to right in the results between the first and second administration of the survey. Following the clustered factors in Tables 1 through 4, I will comment on several observations:

⁴⁰ All data featured in the remaining sections of this article are from reports issued to each church by The Missional Network. Karen Parchman assembled the data for this article.

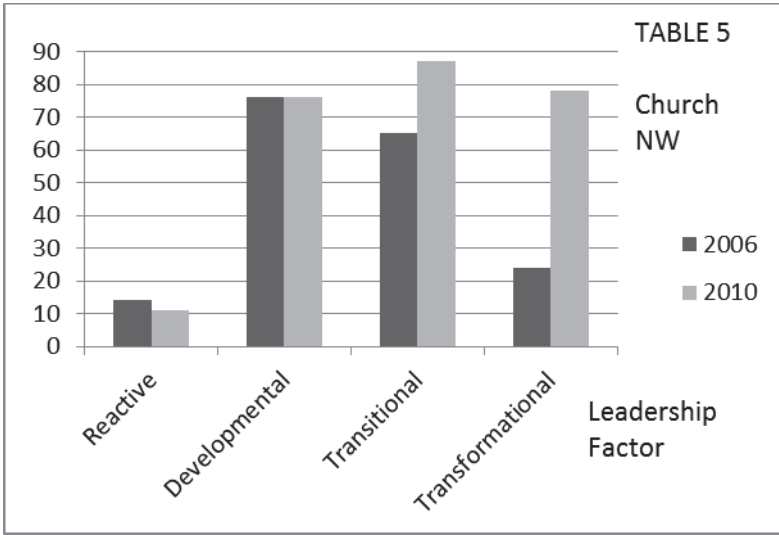




In each of the four areas, the transitional and transformational responses increased for the post-intervention survey. In one area (Focus Factors), there was also an increase in reactive responses, which would call for further analysis of details. (As noted above, participants can affirm statements that indicate any of the four types; they are not forced to choose only one.) The

percentage gains for transitional and transformational statements were significant, and most impressive for Community Factors (from thirty-three percent to sixty-eight percent for transitional and from thirty-five percent to sixty-three percent for transformational).

Among the Systems Factors, the responses about leadership contribute to the shift (Table 5).

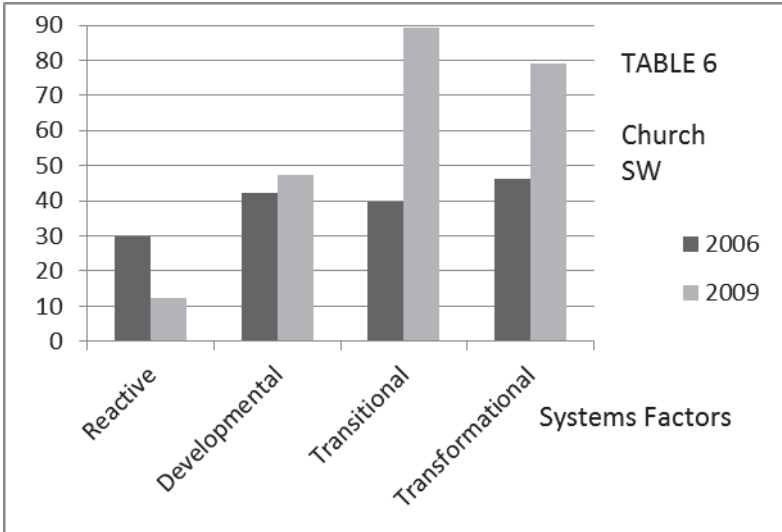


The transitional description, “Our church leaders are trying to involve the congregation in bringing about changes that would make us more relevant to the various communities where we live and work,” and the transformational description, “Our church leaders continually create opportunities for us to innovate and experiment in new ways of ministry, so that we can make a difference in the various communities where we live and work,” both received notable increases. The MCP requires significant shifts regarding a pastor-leader’s frameworks and activities, most notably from categories of strategic management toward shaping action-learning

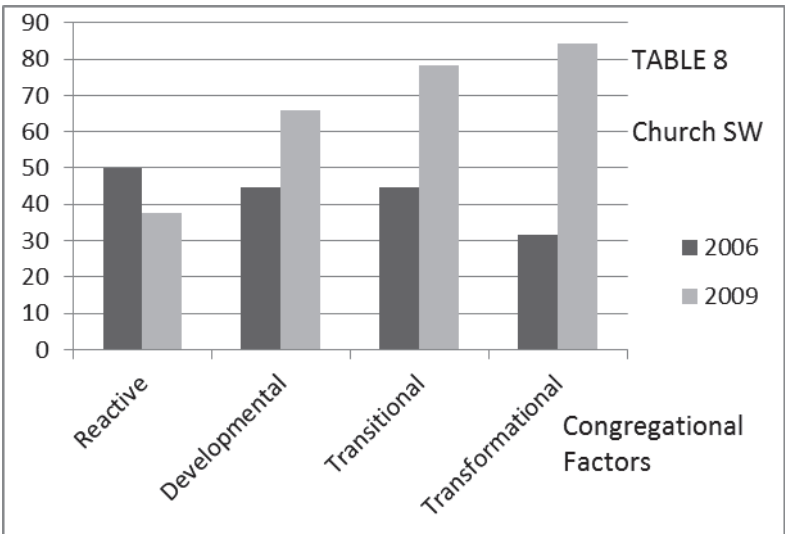
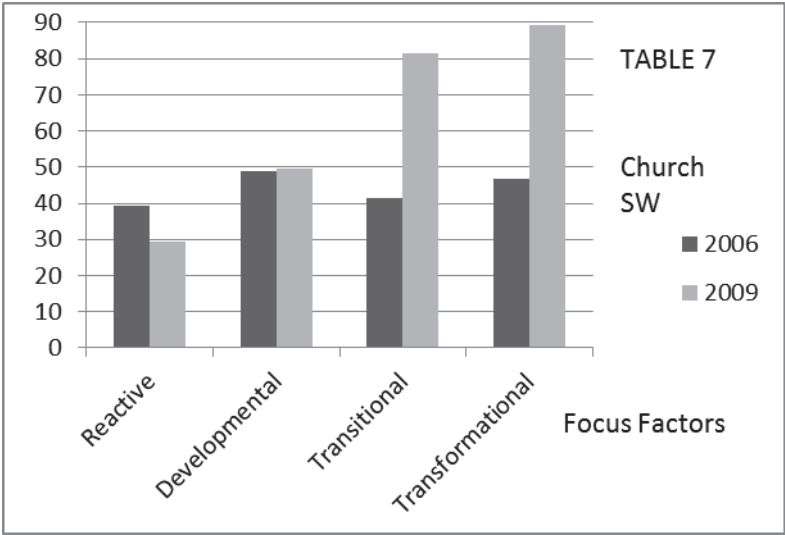
environments.⁴¹ Table 5 indicates that survey participants were aware of changes.

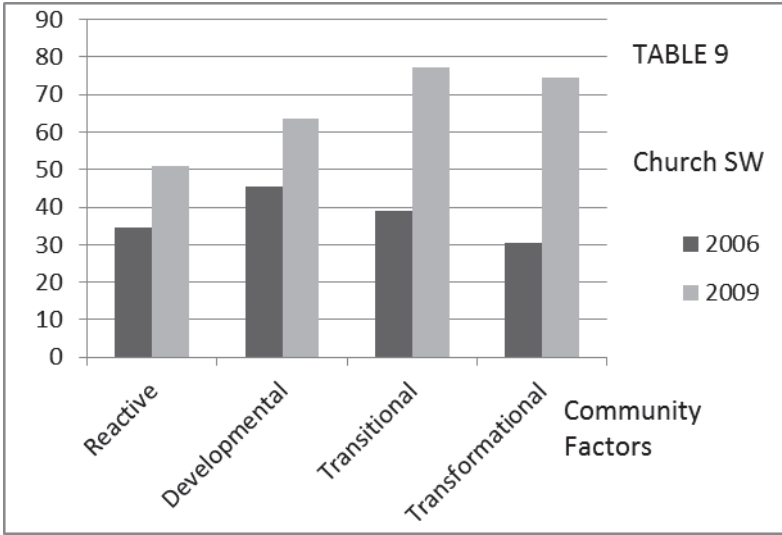
Church SW

The surveys for Church SW, which is in an urban setting, were also completed in 2006 (twenty-four participants) and 2009 (thirty-four participants). Tables 6 through 9 provide a summary of the data.



⁴¹ See especially Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader* and Roxburgh, *Missional Mapmaking*.



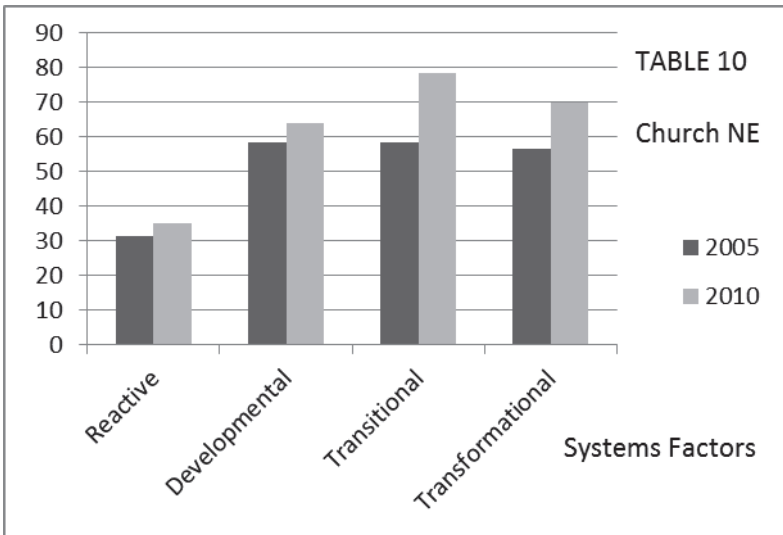


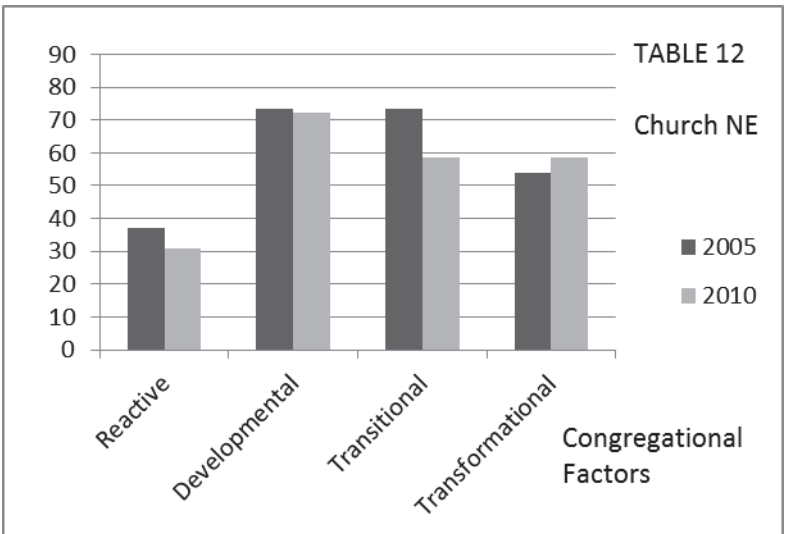
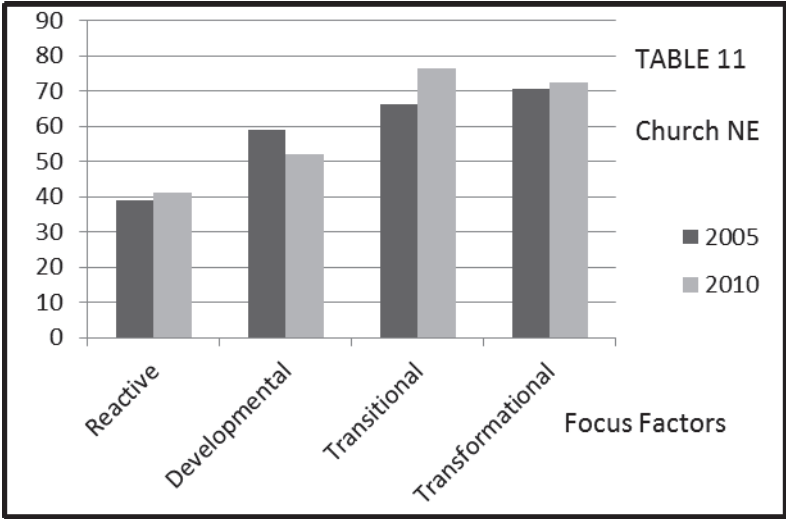
For Church SW, the percentage gains were even greater than for Church NW. All of the clustered transitional factors increased (forty percent to eighty-nine percent, forty-one percent to eighty-two percent, forty-six percent to seventy-eight percent, and thirty-nine percent to seventy-seven percent), as did the clustered transformation factors (forty-six percent to seventy-nine percent, forty-seven percent to eighty-nine percent, thirty-two percent to eighty-four percent, and thirty percent to seventy-five percent). As was true with Church NW, the gain with transformational factors was significant for Church SW’s Community Factors, and Congregational Factors were also notably increasing in transitional and transformational traits. For example, the positive responses increased from sixty-one percent to ninety-seven percent on the sentence, “The prime energy within our church is to continually find innovative ways of engaging the communities where we live and work, in witness and ministry.” Notice that this response demonstrates diffusion. One characteristic of a missional church is posited as a changed social imaginary from attention to selves toward attention (listening, mutuality, discernment) with neighbors. It is insufficient for clergy, or even a few leaders, to have a changing theory or a few

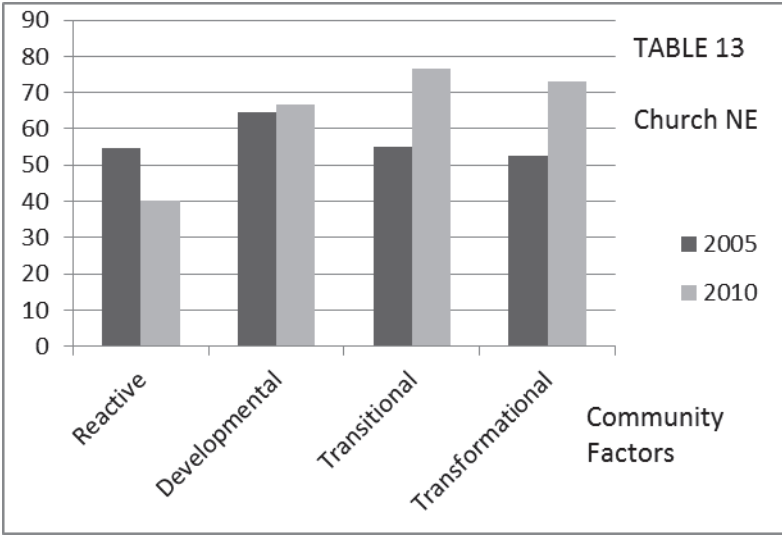
new activities; rather, growing numbers of church participants are being shaped in these missional habits. Less clear again, there is an area of increased reactive responses, this time concerning Community Factors, which requires more analysis.

Church NE

The surveys for Church NE were completed in 2005 (sixty participants) and 2010 (forty-nine participants). Tables 10 through 13 provide the summary comparisons.



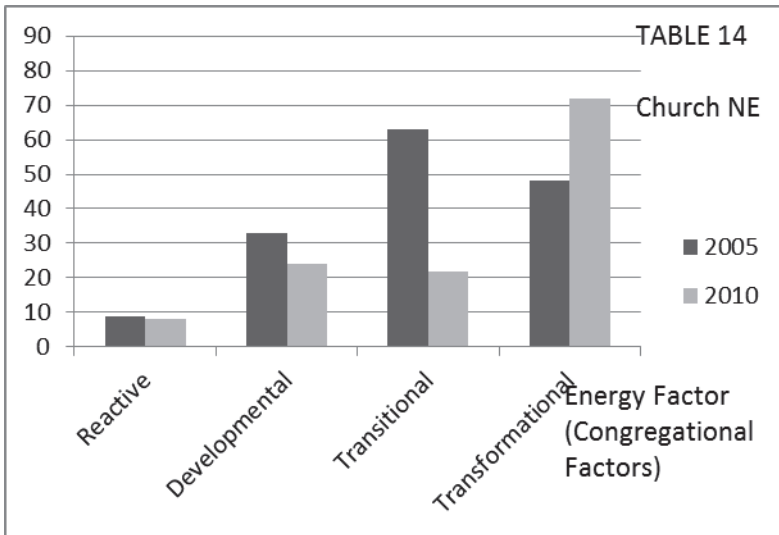




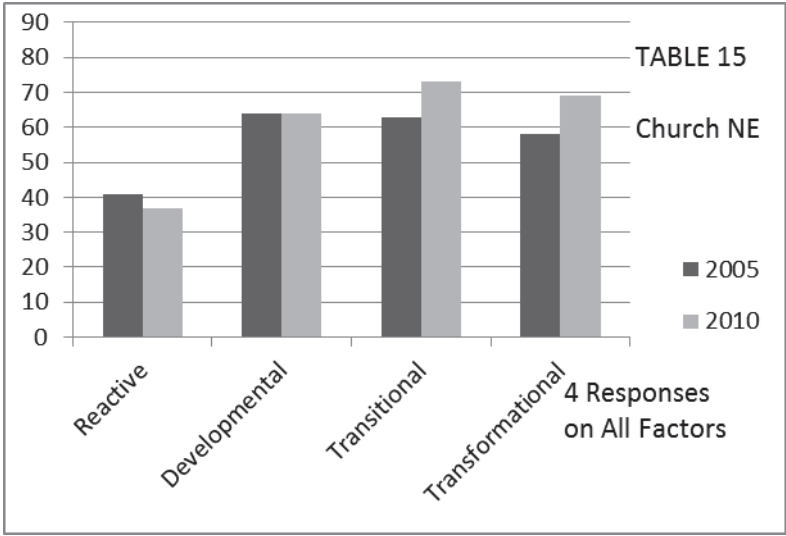
For three clusters of factors, the transitional responses increased: Systems (fifty-eight percent to seventy-eight percent), Focus (sixty-six percent to seventy-seven percent), and Community (fifty-five percent to seventy-seven percent); for the Congregational Factors, transitional responses decreased (seventy-three percent to fifty-nine percent). Transformational responses were either relatively flat (Focus Factors and Congregational Factors) or indicated significant increases (Systems Factors fifty-six percent to seventy percent and Community Factors fifty-two percent to seventy-three percent).

Because these comparisons are not as robust as indicated by the other two churches, three other comparisons provide additional perspectives. First, one factor of the Congregational Factors transitional statements accounts for the drop between 2005 and 2010; “Energy” decreased from sixty-three percent to twenty-two percent (Table 14). The transitional response articulates initial, tentative actions of research and action: “Our prime energy is focused on understanding our city & society. We are involved in some areas but are currently unsure of how to expand further.” While a move toward transitional is usually one goal of missional

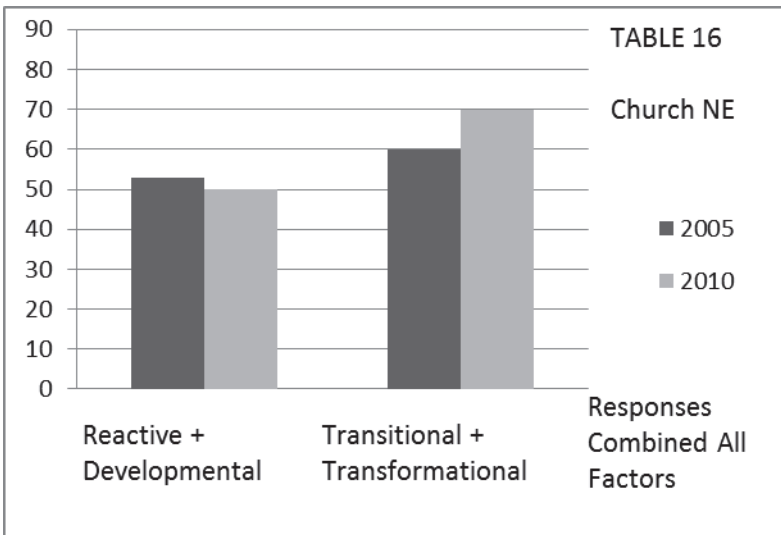
change, in this case the church had notably responded to the transformational choice: “The prime energy in our church is to continually find innovative ways of engaging the communities where we live and work, in witness and ministry.” In other words, the more tentative transitional response was not adequate for how the church described its shift.



Second, two macro summaries indicate trends, as noted in Tables 15 and 16.



The reactive and developmental responses are relatively flat between 2005 and 2010, and increases for the transitional (sixty-three percent to seventy-three percent) and transformational factors (fifty-eight percent to sixty-nine percent) indicate gains. Also on the macro scale, the positive indicators are clear when the total for reactive and developmental are compared with the total for transitional and transformational, as plotted in Table 16.



This large picture, merging 128 data points from two years, clarifies the trend. The reactive plus developmental responses declined by from fifty-three percent to fifty percent (modest, but strengthened by the amount of data behind the totals), and the transitional plus transformational responses increased sixty percent to seventy percent.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the data support a correlation between the interventions and church trends that indicate a positive cultural shift of organizational self-descriptions regarding missional traits. The shifts were observed with regard to internal and external aspects of congregational life, and included leadership as well as everyday church participants.

This research did not investigate cause, only correlation over a given time span. The study had several limitations. (1) I was a co-teacher in the D.Min. series in which the pastors were participating; however, I did not have contact with participants regarding the survey. (2) The number of churches is small, and selection did not include all participants of the D.Min. class, nor was there a control group. (3) The D.Min. included numerous curricular elements for the pastors as well as diverse and continuing initiatives with the congregations, so the study does not clarify which interventions (or set of interventions) are most important for the correlation. These matters indicate the need for additional research.

The interweaving of change elements appears to be important. The MCP engages changes in the pastor's habits of thinking, valuing, and acting, while the habits of the congregants are also engaged toward new habits among themselves and among neighbors. Changing language is important but inadequate because new meanings (theologies, theories) arise as experiments (by pastor and congregants) lead to new knowledge and new commitments. The process is not about new productive programs but about ways of life—seeing, listening, discerning, experimenting—with texts and contexts.

This is a cultural shift in the organization rather than a restructuring of it.

The interventions described here occurred from 2005 through 2010; the primary frameworks were presented in class during 2004 through 2006. Since then, several books by Roxburgh and Van Gelder have continued to clarify processes. (Some were cited in this article because classroom lectures were drawing on the material.) Roxburgh's *Missional Map-making* built on the earlier work in *The Missional Leader*, explicitly noting the problems with romantic idealism and strategic programs (both of which appear frequently in other books on missional church). He highlights the importance of adopting new practices that shift the attention of the congregation. More recently, Roxburgh's *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* deepens his work on social construction (particularly working with the metaphor of a *language house* and Charles Taylor's work on *social imaginary*) and engages the two Lukan books (the Gospel of Luke and Acts) to indicate how language and practices interact. Most recently, his *Structures for Mission-Shaped Formation*⁴² narrates the modern formation of congregations and denominations, the challenges presented by deep cultural shifts, and the changes needed if these structures are to be re-imagined and reshaped for *missio Dei*.

Craig Van Gelder's more recent work has re-engaged key theological matters, especially the role of the Holy Spirit. In *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, he emphasizes that the God who is ahead of the church in specific environments is also the Holy Spirit who can engage a church's awareness and imagination toward transformation. Drawing on the practical theology method of Gerben Heitink,⁴³ Van Gelder provides an interface for discernment and planning. Also, in *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile parse some important matters of theology and

⁴² Forthcoming from InterVarsity Press.

⁴³ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

praxis in the vast collection of books that claim to engage a missional paradigm. In *The Missional Church and Denominations*,⁴⁴ Van Gelder shows the challenge of the systems in which churches have been shaped, and increases awareness around the symbiotic nature of congregations and these larger organizational systems.

Action-research in pursuit of cultural change within congregations, and engaging numerous elements of social construction, selected practices, and ongoing experiments, is a worthy mode of intervention for churches to explore. The Missional Change Process, employed here in a D.Min. program and also widely used in consulting initiatives, frames important elements for leaders. Schools, denominational judicatories, and local clusters of churches can provide venues for learning communities that wish to pursue this work.

⁴⁴ Craig Van Gelder, "The Ecclesiastical Geno-Project: Unpacking the DNA of Denominations and Denominationalism," in Craig Van Gelder, ed. *The Missional Church and Denominations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 12–45.