TRANSITIONING FROM CHARISMATIC FOUNDER TO THE NEXT GENERATION

WILLIAM M. KONDRATH

Abstract: Perhaps the most significant transition in a religious community is the transition from charismatic founder to the next generation. This article tells the stories of three charismatic religious leaders and the organizational shifts that took place as these leaders retired. Among other requirements for this transition, it discusses the changing role of information and communication, the greater need to process feelings systemically, and the renegotiation of values, expectations, roles, and responsibilities. It offers an analogy to illustrate how the transition affects the relationships among the members, and not just with the founder/leader. Finally, it discusses the differing rates of transition within the community and charts what distinguishes the founder generation from the next generation along a number of dimensions.

Introduction

My thesis is fairly simple: The transition from charismatic founder to the next generation usually requires not merely a shift in who is the leader, but an organizational shift. That is, to survive, to establish itself as a continuing organization, and, one hopes, to thrive, a church, a denomination, or a ministerial center requires focusing on the way the *community* does its work, internally and externally. When we focus on the community, we see that the generational shift demands more than plugging in a new leader. Furthermore, I would argue that this shift and its consequences are not

William M. Kondrath is the William Lawrence Professor of Pastoral Theology and director of theological field education at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

always foreseen or welcomed by either the charismatic founder or the followers of the charismatic founder. In addition, I will contend that it will often be useful to employ the assistance of an external consultant to assist the community with its transition. And, whether or not such assistance is used, I will articulate some common patterns that arise during the transition period and suggest ways of understanding and facilitating the changes that will help to ensure the vision and goals of the founder are carried into the next generation even as the structure and style of the organization or community is transformed. The founder's vision and goals are part of the reason people partnered with the founder or joined the budding community or organization. Thus they need to extend into the next generation in some form.

The support for my arguments comes primarily from my own consulting experience over some thirty years, and particularly from recent experiences with three communities that have made, or are in the midst of making, the shift from charismatic founder to the next generation.[1] These communities include a metropolitan outdoor church which sees itself as a ministry to and with homeless persons and which has grown into a national

---

[1] My interest in this paper is the shift that occurs from founder to the next generation. There is a significant body of literature defining and characterizing *charismatic* leaders. For the purposes of this paper, I am considering a broad definition that the charismatic founder is one who is viewed by her or his followers as deserving near absolute trust as one called or set apart for leadership, and one to whom loyalty is expressed as much emotionally as rationally. (See Max Weber, "Charismatic Authority," in *The Theory of Social Economic Organization,* Chap. III, Sect. IV, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press and London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1922/1947), 358-363. There is also significant literature on the development of organizations beginning with such classics as *The Organizational Life Cycle*, ed. John R. Kimberly, Robert H. Miles and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980) and Ichak Adizes, *Corporate Lifecycles: How and Why Corporations Grow and Die and What To Do about It* (Paramus, NJ: Prentise Hall, 1988). In the latter, see particularly the author's discussion of the "Founder's Trap" (39) and the change in leadership from entrepreneurship to professional management (48-51). Given the brevity of this paper, I will be focusing on lessons drawn primarily from the three leaders and organizations referenced in this paper.

and international network of "street churches"; an ecumenical meditation center that trains volunteers to instruct people in a specific form of centering prayer along with a philosophy of life; and a world-wide, rapidly growing Christian denomination founded primarily to welcome and support gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons. The first two communities have been in existence for fifteen and twenty-three years respectively. The third organization is about forty-two years old. I will briefly describe each of these communities and their founders before talking about the changes that ensued in their structures as the founders handed over the mantle of leadership.

Ecclesia Ministries

Ecclesia Ministries had its origins, in 1994, on the Boston Common when Debbie Little-Wyman set out with a knapsack containing sandwiches and socks to meet and talk with homeless individuals in a large public park. About seven years earlier, while she was the communications director of Harvard Law School, and before she married Thomas Hunt Lyman, Debbie Little had an epiphany.[2]

> There was one day I was driving up Mass Avenue in Cambridge. I was stopped at a stoplight, and I think I was dictating into a tape recorder and making notes on my lap … and I just happened to look over on the steps of an apartment building beside the car. And there was this woman there who I'm sure I described at the time as a bag lady with her bags around her. I had this instant desire—it just happened so quickly—just a whole-hearted desire to have a life in which I could go and sit down next to that lady and stay with her until she got whatever she felt she needed.[3]

[2] In November 2002, Deborah Whiting Little married Thomas Hunt Wyman.
[3] Quoted by Christy McKerney, "Meeting Jesus on the Street" http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/findingfaith/2007/12/taking_the_church_to_the_street.html. Posted December 17, 2007.

For some six years, Little-Wyman struggled with the idea of seminary and ordination internally as well as with those who held the keys to ordination. But the call to hear what the gospel meant to homeless people held steady, and she was eventually ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. On Easter 1996, Little-Wyman celebrated Eucharist on the Boston Common, never thinking she would do it again. But throughout the week, people who had not been at the service told her they would see her the next Sunday. The assumption on the part of people she did not know that she would be there for them led her to the realization that there was a church already on the streets. In the years that followed, Little-Wyman drew in volunteers who prepared a meal that was served on the same rolling altar just used for the Eucharist. She made regular visits to the jails and hospitals where members of the congregation found themselves. She began visits to Barbara McGinnis House, a freestanding seventy-five bed recuperative care facility for homeless people operated by Boston Health Care for the Homeless. Later, a five-hour weekly art program and a three-hour movie program were developed inside area churches, even as the main worship service continued outside year-round on Sunday afternoons. Early on, Little-Wyman invited half a dozen people to serve as a board of advisors to her. She raised funds for her own salary and program expenses from generous individuals, local churches, and large and small grants. Seminarians from several local divinity schools did field education during the academic year and students from as far away as Atlanta and Great Britain came to intern during the summer.

In 2003, Ecclesia Ministries incorporated as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with a more formal board of directors. About the same time, Little-Wyman informed the board that she wanted to devote more time to supporting similar street churches that were beginning around the country, in Great Britain, and Brazil. Many of the founders of these communities had visited common cathedral,[4] as the Boston church had been named by its members, or they had read about the church and its founder in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* or heard about it on National Public Radio. Little-Wyman became designated as Founder and Missioner, and she and the chair of the board interviewed and hired Joan Murray as minister of common cathedral. Murray was ordained in the United Church of Christ, having been called to serve this community that increasingly saw itself as ecumenical or multi-denominational. In 2007, Kathy McAdams, an Episcopal priest from California, joined the staff and soon became the executive director of Ecclesia Ministries upon the retirement of Murray. Ecclesia Ministries is now in its sixteenth year as an organization.

Contemplative Outreach of Colorado

Contemplative Outreach of Colorado was founded by Sr. Bernadette Teasdale, SCL, in 1987. COC is a "spiritual network of individuals and small faith communities committed to living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in everyday life through the practice of Centering Prayer."[5] It is affiliated with an international organization, Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., whose office is in Butler, New Jersey. Both organizations take their inspiration from the teaching and writing of Father Thomas Keating. In this paper, COC is being viewed as an independent organization with its own charismatic founder. While affiliated with an international network by reason of a common teacher—Father Keating—and a core set of teachings and spiritual practice, COC has developed into a self-sustaining organization which rents an entire

---

[4] The name, common cathedral, has always been spelled without capitalization as a symbol of its radical inclusiveness and to distinguish it from churches whose practices and rules many people on the street experience as distancing.

[5] This self description is found on pamphlets, training materials, and the website: http://www.contemplativeoutreach-co.org/index-2.html.

complex of buildings and hosts a large annual conference for five hundred people and fosters about fifty separate prayer groups in multiple locations.[6]

Teasdale refers to nearly every step of her vocational development as something that God initiated or as "providential." As a young religious of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, she spent many years as a teacher, then counselor and development officer for her religious community's college. She describes a turning point in 1976 when her spiritual director, Edward Hays, who had introduced her to centering prayer, told her she was called to found a community at some point. She did not know what that meant at the time and wouldn't for some years. In 1980 she entered an MA program at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and did her field education at the Paulist Leadership and Renewal Project, which trained lay people for ministry and conducted nine-day congregational missions. It was there that she observed how centering prayer could be introduced to groups of laity in Catholic congregations. She also learned to train Catholic laity to organize themselves and take seriously the responsibility for their own spiritual growth. When she returned to Colorado, she worked with another sister of her community to expand low-income housing, and then Bishop Evans invited to her start the RENEW adult education process for the Diocese of Colorado. This program meant visiting nearly all the congregations in the diocese and starting small learning groups within them. In 1987, the new Archbishop, J. Francis Stafford, introduced Teasdale to Father Thomas Keating and asked her to join him in bringing centering prayer to the parishes of the diocese.

---

[6] While Thomas Keating could also be seen as a charismatic leader of the Contemplative Outreach movement, his involvement in COC has primarily been through teaching at the annual conference and leading retreats at Snowmass, Colorado. COC as a community would not exist were it not for the evolving dream of Teasdale and her incredible relational and organizational abilities.

Teasdale was given a small office at Spirit of Christ Church in Denver. She took facilitator training in centering prayer and began to use Keating's spiritual journey tapes with parish groups. This work became the foundation of the community she was to begin, living out the vision she had heard from her spiritual director and which she had come to believe. Over the next twenty-three years, what evolved was not merely a training program for individual congregations, but an ecumenical community of some seventy volunteers, who are referred to as *staff* and for whom COC is in effect their primary community of faith. They have moved three times since the early days at Spirit of Christ, where they had an office and use of some classroom space. After occupying a house and then a former convent, they now rent a former Episcopal parish complete with sanctuary, church hall with industrial kitchen, classrooms, offices, gardens, and a picnic area. While Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. is international, based in thirty-three countries, no other local community has an operation that can even begin to compare to COC.

Teasdale describes her own leadership style as based largely in prayer and hospitality. COC gatherings always begin with at least twenty minutes of silent prayer (centering), and meals play a large role in training programs and retreats. Until fairly recently, Teasdale herself did much of the shopping and cooking. Like Little-Wyman, Teasdale has been an excellent fundraiser, mostly attracting large gifts from individuals. Her cadre of nearly seventy volunteers lead prayer groups, teach Keating's philosophy,[7] help to organize retreats and the annual conference, provide transportation, visit prisons, give talks in local churches, and manage bulk mailings and a website. When Teasdale celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday, she gave notice that she would be retiring

---

[7] See Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (Paramus, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999) and *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

within a few years and she initiated a two-year transition process, led by three consultants with whom she had worked at the Paulist Leadership and Renewal Project.

The advisory board for COC had been a loosely organized group of six to eight people from COC in Denver and from the Benedictine Monastery and retreat center in Snowmass; they have been meeting once a year. On the advice of the transition consultants, the entire community of volunteers was invited to two weekend trainings which focused on retelling their history, learning communication and negotiating skills, focusing on their emotions during the transition, discussing leadership styles and options. In addition, a transition council has been formed, consisting of about twelve local leaders, who have been interviewing Teasdale both to acquire her knowledge of operations and to experience what drives her commitment. Their new leadership structure and personnel have yet to be determined, but they are clearly well on the way to a systemic, organizational change.

One interesting feature of this community is the highly developed personal level skill in meditation, combined with underdeveloped interpersonal skills and a lack of systemic analysis. The consultants have drawn upon the depth of personal prayer which the staff exhibit and their comfort with silence and listening to God as they have the staff develop interpersonal listening skills, greater affective awareness and competency, and a knowledge of institutional analysis and various leadership styles and options.[8]

Metropolitan Community Churches

The website for the Metropolitan Community Churches describes its origins and founder, in nearly

---

[8] For a discussion of levels of intervention and change, see William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 47-49, where I have discussed oppression and change at four levels: personal level (thoughts, feelings, beliefs); interpersonal level (behaviors); institutional level (policies, practices, laws); and cultural level (what is viewed by society as good, true, and beautiful).

textbook Weberian terms, as an example of a charismatic leader:

> In 1968, a year before New York's Stonewall Riots, a series of most unlikely events in Southern California resulted in the birth of the world's first church group with a primary, positive ministry to gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender persons. Those events, a failed relationship, an attempted suicide, a reconnection with God, an unexpected prophecy, and the birth of a dream led to MCC's first worship service: a gathering of 12 people in Rev. Troy Perry's living room in Huntington Park, California, on October 6, 1968.[9]

Perry was the eldest of five brothers. His father was a north Florida bootlegger who died fleeing from the police when Perry was eleven years old. After dropping out of high school, Perry was licensed as a Baptist preacher at age fifteen. He married a preacher's daughter and had two sons. He moved to Illinois where he attended Midwest Bible College and the Moody Bible Institute. He became a preacher at a small Church of God, but was forced to leave the church after administrators found out he had had sexual relationships with other men. He and his wife moved to Southern California where he became pastor of a Church of God of Prophecy. Perry's marriage fell apart when his wife discovered his copy of *The Homosexual in America* by Donald Cory.[10] His bishop told him to renounce himself in the pulpit and to resign. He was drafted into the army in 1965 and served for two years in Germany. After he returned to Los Angeles, he worked for Sears department store and fell in love with a man. The end of that relationship led to a suicide attempt and subsequent new

---

[9] This excerpt is from Troy Perry, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay: The Autobiography of the Reverend Troy D. Perry* (Arlington Heights, IL: Christian Liberty Press, 1987) and can also be found on the MCC website at: http://www.mccchurch.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=About_Us&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=662#Intro

[10] Donald Webster Cory (pseud.), *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenberg, 1951).

call to ministry—specifically to founding a church which welcomed all people, especially GLBT persons. The first service in Perry's home was attended by twelve people. Within ten weeks, the group had to move to a larger space.

Today, the church has grown to forty-four thousand members and has adherents in almost three hundred congregations in twenty-five countries, as well as an aggregate budget in excess of twenty-six million dollars.[11] As the denomination grew, it developed a board of elders who oversaw different regions. In the years leading up to Perry's retirement as moderator of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the church began a strategic plan that would lead to the election in 2005 of the Rev. Nancy Wilson as only the second moderator of the denomination. Significant restructuring was voted on at the General Conference in Acapulco, Mexico, in June 2010.

Moving toward the Next Generation

I have briefly described these three charismatic leaders and their organizations in order to begin outlining the changes that take place when the founder is no longer the leader of the organization. The thesis of this paper is that the work of transition is not simply to replace the charismatic leader with a new leader who may or may not be charismatic. The work is to change the structure of the organization or movement and the style of leadership. In the cases of Ecclesia Ministries and Metropolitan Community Church, these changes have already taken place. In the case of Contemplative Outreach of Colorado, the change is well underway.

Charismatic Founders Cannot Be Replaced

Some communities make the mistake of thinking they can replace their charismatic founder with little other change taking place. Intellectually, they may state that, of

---

[11] See *Forty Years of Faith, Hope, and Love* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2008), 16, complied by the Rev. Dr. Cindi H. Love.

course, our founder "could never be replaced," while at the same time unconsciously striving to find someone with the same energy, dynamism, and personal magnetism as the founder. Other communities, tired of the quirks and idiosyncrasies of the founder, attempt to "correct" the founder's faults by seeking a different style of leader. In either case, the focus is on the level of the individual, rather than on the organizational level. This rarely, if ever, works.

Instead, what is required during the transition to the second generation is an organizational shift. Indeed, some of this shift may begin during the time of the founder's leadership, as evidenced especially in the example of COC, which became a 501(c)(3) organization early on, and which a year ago established a transition council that has become skilled in guiding an organizational change process with the help of outside consultants. The very introduction of this transition council is serving as a model of a new style of leadership that may replace the sole-leader model of the founder. MCC also began to develop organizationally during the nearly forty-year leadership of Troy Perry. As they grew into a national and international church, they developed regions and a system of elders and even put in place an executive director. In the case of Ecclesia Ministries, the informal board of advisors became a more formal board when the ministry became a 501(c)(3) organization in 2003. Often the addition of a more formal board occurs without much angst or anxiety because the power generally remains with the founder. Because of legal implications (e.g., the board is legally responsible for the fiscal oversight), the organization is systemically changing and forming an underlying structure that will help support future leadership change. Transitional pain, if it is experienced, comes when the board begins to grow into its own authority. The pain is felt more by the founder, who may experience or fear a loss of power, than by the board, who may welcome their growing responsibilities, or by the members, who may not notice the budding organizational changes.

The Creation of a Board and Its Role

The formation of a formal board or the development of a group of advisors into a formal board often happens when the organization applies for not-for-profit tax status. This step may indicate that the organization is becoming less individually founder-focused and more organizationally complex. However, the board may function only as, or primarily as, a vehicle to obtain grants and to fulfill tax reporting requirements. The indication that the community or movement is shifting to a new organizational style is when the board takes on the responsibility for setting a new vision, significantly changing the leadership structure, or hiring the successor to the founder. At this time, the board needs to come to grips with the fact that the founder cannot simply be replaced. Often the survival of the organization means that the very structure and style of the organization must change. For the organization to continue and to thrive, many of the functions that were carried out by the founder need to be assumed by the board or delegated to various people, rather than assuming a new executive director or leader will take over all the responsibilities and functions of the founder. During the founding stage, followers or members were oriented toward the charismatic founder. Now the focus turns toward the board, committees, a constitution and bylaws, and standard practices and procedures.

Vision and the Mantle of Leadership

In the second chapter of 2 Kings, before Elijah is taken up to heaven by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire, Elisha asks for a double portion of the spirit. When Elijah departs, Elisha picks up his mantle and proceeds to replace him as prophet to the people. It would seem that Elisha is aware that to follow this charismatic prophet something extra will be needed—a double portion of the spirit. I would argue that when we are speaking of the transition from the founder of a community to the next generation, even more is required. The very way the community is organized has to change. The responsibility for seeing and maintaining the vision is not simply transferred to another individual. The vision-keeping needs to become the responsibility of a designated group within the community whose job it is to see to it that the new leader remains faithful to the vision that created the community.

There is an interesting parallel here in the world of psychology. In mid-career, Sigmund Freud designed rings which he gave to his closest disciples as symbols that they were the inheritors of his vision and keepers of his theory. It didn't really work. Those designated next-generation leaders disagreed and competed with one another and ultimately began diverse schools of thought. A number of generations later the charismatic founders of relational-cultural psychology, Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, and Judith Lewis Herman, built a theory and community of practitioners born out of the human rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Each of these women could be seen as a charismatic leader in her own right. Interestingly, as they became more and more aware of one another's work, they started to collaborate on conferences and also began to form bonds with women of color and some men to create a broader network which carries the vision of their work forward. Consistent with their theory, the development of the relational-cultural psychology community is evidence that the charismatic first-generation leader cannot on her own create community. It is up to the legatees, the followers, to find, create, and live the community for themselves.[12]

Likewise in the religious organizations we are considering, the attachment of followers to the founder-leader does not simply transfer to the next designated leader. And the stronger and more clearly defined the personality of the founder, the more difficult is the transition for the followers to the next leader and the

[12] For a discussion of the origins of relational cultural theory see Christina Robb, *This Changes Everything: The Relational Revolution in Psychology* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006) and Judith Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy: Theories of Psychotherapy* (American Psychological Association, 2009).

new structure. What needs to take place is a shift from trust in the leader to confidence in the community, its goals, and its structure.[13]

In the case of Ecclesia Ministries, the board was "born" when they decided to designate Little-Wyman as missioner and hire Joan Murray as minister of common cathedral. Until making this decision, the board was largely a group of supporters and advisors for the founder. They became an even stronger board and assumed the role of keeping the original vision alive when they chose to make Kathy McAdams the executive director and build additional staff around her with her input, rather than advertise the executive director's position nationally. In making this decision, the board met for the first time without any staff present and did so twice—thus assuming responsibility for the overall direction and leadership of the community at a crucial time of transition.

In anticipation of her retirement, Teasdale hired three consultants to assist with transitions facing Contemplative Outreach of Colorado. After two trainings for the whole volunteer staff, a Transition Council was formed and charged with interviewing Teasdale regarding all her responsibilities and duties and coming up with proposals for future leadership. This in itself represented a profound change in how the community was organized and run. The Transition Council is charged with reporting to the volunteer staff and to the formal 501(c)(3) board. It is likely that the Transition Council will handle the search process for the next leader or leaders. They are also assuming more responsibility for formulation of the budget, previously the job of the founder.

The MCC went through many phases during the final years of Perry's leadership. They established a system of

[13] For a discussion of the centrality of trust in leadership, see Robert C. Solomon "Ethical Leadership, Emotions, and Trust: Beyond 'Charisma'" in *Ethics, The Heart of Leadership*, 2nd ed., ed. Joanne B. Ciulla (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 83-102.

regional elders and hired an executive director. Sometime after the General Conference of 2005 elected the Rev. Nancy Wilson to succeed Perry as moderator, financial demands required downsizing the number of elders, and subsequently their regional roles changed. They also phased out the role of executive director. At their General Conference in June 2010, the assembly voted to have the remaining elders become senior staff accountable directly to the moderator, resulting in what they hoped would be a more flexible and responsive centralized leadership group. They also passed a resolution that would affect any future bylaw changes requiring the support of at least three separate countries. This latter provision was an acknowledgement of the growing international character of the denomination and a desire to spread the power and authority internationally.

In summary, all these changes meant that the second-generation leader would not function in the same manner relative to members and other significant leaders as did the founder. In effect, the community was assuming more widespread responsibility for the direction and leadership of the organization.

The Changing Role of Information and Communication

As with any shift in an organization, the better and more complete the information which members receive, the easier the transition will be for the members. Leaders, including founders, often underestimate the information needs of community members. Charismatic leaders in particular, because they may believe that their vision and the rationale for their work is God-given or divinely inspired, may fail to realize the necessity of helping others to understand the reasons for what they are doing. Because they are highly trusted, they may be able to function with a minimum of explanation for what they are doing, and the communication may be mostly uni-directional: from the leader to the followers. When leadership is being transferred to the next generation, the need for information about what is happening and why it is happening increases exponentially. This is especially true because the system itself is changing from focus on the leader to more of an organizational focus. In addition, the information needs to flow in many directions: from the leader to the followers; from the followers to the leader; between the followers; from the organization to those outside; from the environment into the organization. As an example of the last direction, the organization needs to know how its changing structure and leadership style are being received and whether there are any threats to its new configuration.

While much of the emphasis on communication here is cognitive (dealing with ideas, facts, information, content), there is also an affective component to communication. That is, as changes take place people may experience anger when their expectations are not being met, fear about an uncertain or changing set of relationships, or sadness as the impending loss of the founder or loss of the way things have been done. Communication needs to account for these feelings as well as the content of changes. One of the reasons that communication needs to be more multidirectional is that the feelings of members need to be communicated to the changing and diversifying leadership and to other members. More will be said in the next section.

During the first generation, it may be sufficient for most communication to come from the founder to the followers. The followers need to see and hear the vision and goals being put forward by the founder and be able to witness the personality and leadership of the founder in order to put their trust in her or him. As the community transitions away from a community gathered around a minister to a ministering community, the members need to be in greater communication with one another.

During transitions it is important to have opportunities for face-to-face meetings where people can ask questions and engage one another around issues of resistance and opposition. Community meetings also produce *new* information. In some cases, such meetings indicate that the type of transition is not right or the timing is not ripe. Listening to this information coming from the followers can influence the leader's decisions or the pace with which changes are made. In addition, such meetings are not simply *about* change, they are *part of* the change. They are the beginning of a structural shift.

Ecclesia Ministries held open community meetings when Little-Wyman's position was beginning to change and when a new minister of common cathedral was about to be selected to inform members of the upcoming change and to hear the feelings which were very strong because many members of the homeless community were scared they would be abandoned or handed off to someone less caring and understanding. When Teasdale announced she would be retiring in about two years, she also informed the official board and the volunteer staff that she had a grant to bring in consultants and trainers to assist with building capacity for the transition and assist the community with the design of the future leadership structure. The consultants designed a process that helped the community remember its prior changes of location and their history of other transitions and to value these and notice the skills they had acquired over time. They also provided training to deepen affective competence, encouraging the expression of feelings about the transition in order to modulate the rate of change and the support required to process the emotional components of the transition. MCC circulated documents about structural change via the internet, established an elaborate process for feedback and modification of proposed changes, and used several General Conferences to test out new ideas and to implement experimental new structures.

Processing Feelings

In addition to a change in the direction and kind of communication, the processing of feelings is crucial to a healthy transition to the second and subsequent generations. When feelings have not been adequately attended to, all the information in the world will not result in a smooth and wholesome transition process. In fact, pouring out more information without processing feelings may actually aggravate the situation. I think of the process of sharing information without attending to people's emotional reactions as a situation of *impacted feelings*, similar to having an impacted wisdom tooth. Unless the cause of the pain is dealt with, more information about good tooth care will be useless.

Perhaps the most common feeling within a community when the founder announces he or she will be retiring or moving on is sadness. Sadness or grief is about loss. Followers need time to mourn the loss of their founder and leader. The greater their sense of personal relationship and the longer they felt that connection, the more time they may need to grieve. The varying degrees of affinity and different durations of knowing the founder and being in the community account for why some people appear to move through their grief more rapidly or more slowly than others.

Some people are afraid at the time of leadership transition. They perceive a danger to themselves or to the community. Like the people of Israel in the desert, they may want to return to a former time and place where they at least knew they could eat fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic (Numbers 11:5). When people are afraid, whether the stimulus of their fear is real or imagined, they need support and protection. They may also need help determining if their fear is founded in reality. Because the fears may vary in kind and intensity, the time required to find support will vary.

Others may be angry when the founder leaves. Anger is about a violation of boundaries or expectations. People may have believed the founder would always be present. They may feel abandoned. They will need time to recover from what they perceive as a violation or time to recalibrate their expectations. This process of sorting out and processing these feelings can be further complicated if individuals ignore what they are feeling or substitute a feeling that is not congruent to the situation usually because it was unsafe to express the congruent feeling as a child. For instance, a woman may express sadness when she is really angry, because she was not permitted to be angry as a child. The result will be that people try to comfort her when she actually needs to renegotiate boundaries or expectations.[14] Or a man may become outraged and combative as part of a habitual pattern of behavior at a time when his primary feeling is sadness at a loss he is experiencing. He may have been socialized not to express sadness, because "men don't cry" or show weakness.

The greater the number of people who are unaware of their feelings or who are substituting feelings, the longer it will take to move through the transition, because people are not getting what they need at a time of disruption and disequilibrium. The more competent people are to recognize their feelings and the freer they are to respond with emotions congruent to the situation, the easier it will be to move through disequilibrium to a new equilibrium. Sometimes reaching that new equilibrium will mean that they remain in their current community. Sometimes people need to move to another community in order to deal with the disequilibrium. If they do move and the feelings are not adequately processed in the new community, people can still feel a certain internal disequilibrium.

When the feelings that need to be processed are primarily about the founder and community members assist one another in recognizing and attending to those feelings in productive and healthy ways, they are changing the structure or the community, especially if the founder, intentionally or without awareness, either ignored feelings in favor of promoting a divinely ordained mission or dealt primarily with feelings on an individual personal level.

When community members are encouraged to focus on their feelings and express and process those feelings, they are likely to get their emotional needs met. They may even find that while they do not like all that is taking

---

[14] For a discussion of feelings during transitions see Kondrath, *God's Tapestry*, chapter seven. Substitution of feelings is discussed in chapter three.

place, they can live with the change because there are others who feel as they do. They have colleagues. In addition as they express their feelings, the community can respond and perhaps change the pace of transition to assist them.

The consultants presented a session on "Feelings as Messengers" to the entire volunteer staff of Contemplative Outreach of Colorado. This helped members become aware of the many feelings people had about the transition and assisted individuals in identifying the fact that they were substituting a more familiar feeling which was socially acceptable in their family of origin for a feeling that might have been more congruent with the current stimulus. They began to see that the substituted feeling evoked a response from others which did not meet the need they had. With practice, coaching, and the encouragement of others, participants in the workshop became more adept at recognizing and expressing their feelings *and* consequently they got more of their needs met in the group. In a subsequent workshop, the consultants introduced an exercise in which congregants positioned themselves in relationship to the founder based on their sense of proximity and personal agency. They spoke about what their positioning meant to them (cognitive) and how they felt about their relationship to the founder and to others (affective). The founder was then asked to move out of the configuration, anticipating her retirement. Participants were invited to reposition themselves relative to the "center" and to one another. The same questions about meaning and feelings were asked again. When this day-long workshop was evaluated, this exercise was overwhelmingly deemed the most enlightening and helpful, because it allowed participants to recognize both the options for new and different relationships of power, influence, authority, and support as well as to process the very different feelings that arose for people when the founder was no longer present and the relationships shifted.

Reconsidering Underlying Values and Re-establishing Goals

The transition from charismatic founder to the next generation usually involves bringing underlying values to greater awareness. Many of the group's values remain mostly the same. The second-generation community does not usually see itself as an entirely new creation. When members of the community look at themselves in the mirror after the departure of the founder, they usually recognize themselves. Frequently, though, some values have shifted or gained ascendancy. In the shift to the second generation, the primary change is likely to be the role of the new leader and the relationships of members to one another. In the founding generation, nearly all relationships among members are influenced by individuals' relationships to the founder. In thinking about the transition to the second generation, it might be tempting to use the analogy of replacing the hub of a bicycle wheel. In this analogy, it is as though the founder is the center of a bicycle wheel and the spokes symbolize the relationships of the members. Those relationships are connected through the founder and are influenced by the founder. Granted, there may be some members that travel around the rim (the margins) to other members, but even those relationships are influenced by being defined at a certain distance from the center (founder).

I would like to suggest that in the second generation, changes take place that mean the new leader does not simply replace the founder at the center of the hub. In other words, the shift is not a technical fix, but an adaptive challenge.[15] To exemplify this systemic, institutional change, I suggest an alternative analogy.

[15] Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 73-84, and Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 13-20.

The Fruit Bowl Analogy

Many congregations that struggle with a change of leadership at the senior ministerial level see this change mostly as the exchange of one top administrator with another, i.e., a technical fix. This viewpoint is frequently problematic when an outgoing senior pastor or rabbi has been in place for an extended period of time. The new pastor or rabbi or lay leader inevitably becomes the target of all the negative feelings about the change. For years, I struggled to find an analogy that would convey the systemic dimensions of the change in a manner that people could understand as being far more complicated and nuanced than simply the change of one leader. The suitable comparison finally came as I worked with a congregation that was in the midst of renegotiating a contract with a new rabbi, whose predecessor had served the congregation for forty years.

Imagine a very large fruit bowl, maybe thirty inches in diameter and eighteen inches deep. It is filled with all sorts of fresh fruit: oranges, apples, grapes, kiwis, mangoes, lemons (there are always lemons), peaches, a pineapple, perhaps a couple of delicately placed strawberries, and, of course, a banana. Now let's suppose the banana is the "top banana," the senior pastor, in our case the charismatic founder who is leaving. Because this banana has been so central in the congregation, he or she is in the center of the bowl of fruit.

Now, imagine taking the banana out. What happens? The individual pieces of fruit nearest to the banana shift places. Some of the fruit farthest away doesn't move at all and doesn't even realize the banana is gone.

Now suppose you want to place a new leader in the midst of this congregation. This leader may not be a charismatic banana. She may be an avocado (which only ripens when it is off the tree) or a pear. Obviously, it will not fit in the same space as the previous banana. And even if the new leader were a banana, it would be difficult for it to fit in the same space as the original founder banana because all the nearby fruit shifted when the founder banana left.

Notice also that each of the pieces of the fruit closest to the center, closest to the founder banana, now shifts in relationship to one another, and even extending to the marginal members of the fruit community. The system is no longer the same.

In congregations and communities where the founder was in place for a long time, and even when a subsequent leader has had a long tenure (fifteen or more years), it often happens that people become accustomed not only to their relationship to the leader, but also to their place in the system relative to all the other members. They may also become used to certain patterns of worship, education, social interactions, and community outreach. The patterns and expectations have a way of becoming set. In my consulting work, I have frequently noticed that once a founder or long-term leader is gone, whether the next leader is an interim or a new senior, settled pastor or rabbi, discussions that have not happened in the same way in years begin to take place. All of a sudden people feel free to talk about the style of music at worship, or the amount of silence, or the length of the sermon, or of the entire service. In a temple, they may discuss the quality of the Hebrew language education, or the expectation of how many hours the rabbi is available in the office. Policies regarding same-gender weddings may be revisited around the hiring of the new leader. In congregations not used to thinking systemically, people assume these conversations are about the senior leader—the one who left or the new one coming. The discussions get framed in terms of the similarities and differences in the leaders. In fact, the conversations are about the composition of the congregation, about their shared values and their differences. Often the departure of a senior leader allows the emergence of discussions previously squelched—intentionally or unintentionally—by the leader. At other times, decisions and values had become so familiar it was assumed that all people were on the same page. Sometimes people may have been reluctant to have a discussion of their differences because they believed it would have been disloyal to the founder or senior leader whose views were well known.

A certain comfort with the leader or loyalty to the overall direction of the leader inhibits the recognition or acknowledgment of the divergent values that are present below the surface. Once the leader is gone, people are often surprised at how quickly differences arise. The dynamic I am describing here applies to both founder-second generation transitions and transitions after a long-term senior leader.

If a new leader is chosen too quickly, if the community does not employ the services of an interim minister or a transition committee or team and possibly a consultant, the danger is that all the differences that arise and the emotional disequilibrium which accompanies the discussion of those differences are seen to be the fault of the new leader. This may be exacerbated when the shift in leadership is accompanied by a decrease in financial resources and the downsizing of paid professional staff. All of a sudden the new leader is expected to manage this crisis of expectations with fewer resources, with no relational history with the individuals and families in the community, and with no sense of where the historical mine fields are located.

In this context, it becomes crucial to help all members of the community to understand that all the relationships in the system have changed. Some of the folks closest to the center may now be rubbing shoulders where previously the leader stood between them or buffered their relationship. Something is different even for the folks most on the margins—the people for whom the change of leader may not register until they show up for certain annual high holydays or special yearly events. These folks may be able to offer a view that gives a fresh perspective to the choice of the leader. For them, who the leader is may not really matter all that much. They may really only be connected to the community by reason of the relationship to those folks who are closest to them, people located near the outer circles. These marginal folks, often bystanders in the system, may be forces for a more horizontal understanding of what it is to be in community. The difficulty is that their voices often go unheard. The exercise mentioned above with the removal of the leader may help people to become more aware of their relationships with people other than the founder. In the case of the synagogue that replaced a rabbi with a forty-year tenure without the use of an interim, and the MCC's election of Wilson after nearly forty years of Perry's leadership, I noticed that discussions of worship style arose with amazing intensity. I believe that the differences expressed had little or nothing to do with the new leaders. Rather people experienced themselves in new relationships to one another without the long-time leader's clear preference at the center buffering the varied opinions of the members.

Avoiding Structural Fixes for Individual Level Problems

Toward the end of the founder's generation, as the community is beginning to look toward the next generation, it may begin to experiment with a less centralized authority structure. Specifically, the charismatic founder or other key individuals trusted by the founder may notice that the gifts of the founder are not necessarily in administration. It is not uncommon that this situation leads to the appointment of an executive director or administrative vice president or senior administrator. Whatever the title, the job of this person is to manage the organization—to see that things get done and don't fall through the cracks. This person is usually specifically chosen to make up for certain shortcomings of the charismatic founder. Often this arrangement works as long as the executive director or senior administrator acknowledges the visionary leadership and superior authority of the founder. Tensions may occur, but it is likely the founder is pleased to have someone else handling the details of administration.

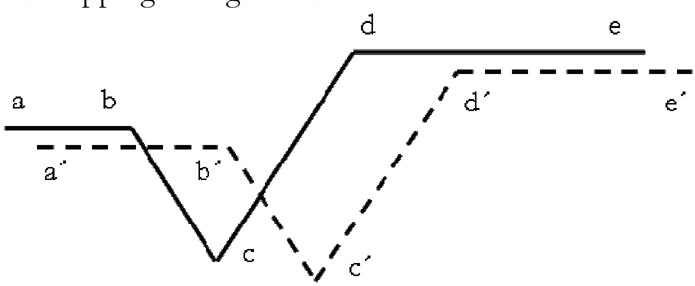
The problem occurs when the founder leaves and is replaced by a new leader. Often this new leader is chosen specifically because she is competent in areas in which the founder was weak. In other words, the new leader may be similar to the executive director or senior administrator. In effect the organization has acted twice to balance the perceived deficits of the founder. In the first case, the organization made a structural fix (adding a position of administrator) to make up for an individual-level deficiency. Then in choosing the next leader, the organization chose to replace one style of leader (innovative, visionary, charismatic) with a different style of leader (administrative, managerial). When this happens the possibility of conflict becomes very great between the second-generation leader, who is new and chosen because she is a good manager, and the executive director or administrator, who knows the system and feels entitled to make managerial decisions or to follow through on an administrative trajectory she was specifically hired to initiate or implement.

At this point, the organization would do well to thoroughly reevaluate its structure. And the administrator, who was the unsung hero in establishing order and keeping things running smoothly as the organization grew and became more complex, now becomes a casualty. This happens with sufficient frequency that it may seem unavoidable. However it is important to realize that such institutional fixes to balance charismatic leaders are at best temporary and need to be undertaken with great caution. The contract with the administrator should be clearly defined in terms of a time frame and the person should be well compensated financially. Such a person is almost certainly an interim administrator, and the better she is at her job the less likely she will be to stay if a second-generation senior leader has administrative skills.

The Slinky Effect: Differing Rates of Transition

Not everyone moves through leadership transitions at the same rate. Various individuals and groups in an organization start the cycle of change at different times depending on their degree of involvement in the decision-making process. The rates at which individuals and groups process their feelings are also different. In a typical congregation, the committee initiating a change may begin moving through the cycle of change first; then the staff or the governing board comes next. They are followed by those people who regularly attend worship and are close to the center of things, followed by the infrequent attendees and more peripheral folks, and finally the folks who come primarily on holidays or who attend only occasional events. The change affects all these people but not at the same rate or to the same degree.

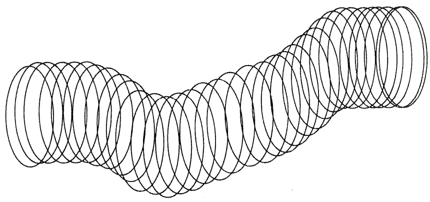
A common way to represent the change is to see it as a movement from equilibrium to disequilibrium to a new equilibrium. This theory would maintain that there is always a period of disruption, and, when we are talking about the move from a charismatic founder to the next generation, this disruption can be quite great. A further complication is that the change curves are different for various individuals and groups within the community. The picture looks like this, only with many more overlapping change curves.[16]



Because the community as a whole experiences this overlapping of disruption and new equilibrium as a dizzying disturbance, a more adequate diagram would be like a spiral or a Slinky toy. This diagram helps to portray the two-steps-forward-one-step-back rhythm of change in a community.

---

16 For a more detailed analysis of the overlapping change curves, see Kondrath, *God's Tapestry,* chapter seven. As the subgroup represented by the dashed line is still experiencing increasing disruption or disequilibrium (b'—c') the subgroup represented by the solid line is experiencing decreasing disruption and on the way toward a new equilibrium (c—d).



In the midst of this organic flow, all the members of the community need to remember that every community is made up of people who respond differently to events in their lives, especially significant changes. The ability of a community to acknowledge their differences, to understand those differences at deeper levels, and to appreciate or celebrate those differences is what makes it possible for them to remain a community. What helps the community in moving through the transition are the three disciplines already mentioned: focused, multidirectional and mutual communication; attention to the careful processing of feelings; and the renegotiation of roles, relationships, boundaries, and expectations.

What follows is a chart of some of the changes that are part of the move from charismatic founder to the next and subsequent generations. This chart is presented as an illustration that what takes place, indeed that what needs to take place for the community to survive and mature, is far more than the selection or election of a new leader. The transition is primarily institutional or systemic. A new way of being an organization must be created. The transition to the leader (or leaders) who replaces the founder is part of an organic process. The procedures for transition are either being made up as the transition is taking place, or if they have been developed during the tenure of the founder, they are as yet untried on a significant scale or without the founder in place. Thus the descriptions below are merely suggestions. In any individual case, the community may find itself straddling the two columns or jumping from one to the other. The chart is meant to give the players in discussions during the transition a language which may be particularly helpful as they renegotiate their relationships and values.

This chart is not prescriptive. It is meant to suggest some options and to encourage the entire community to think systemically and to realize they are not alone in the struggle to make the transition from founder to the next generation. When this chart was presented to about fifty members of Contemplative Outreach of Colorado at a workshop, one participant blurted out loud: "Thank God for this chart. I don't feel nearly as baffled and alone. Other people have gone through this before. So much so, that there is a chart that we can look at and talk about!"

And talk they did. The group felt no constraint to place themselves in boxes, but rather saw many new ways to engage their own reality and to sift through what they were experiencing in relationship to a "neutral" set of descriptions. They felt less need to fight with each other about their own individual descriptions of what they were experiencing. They felt they had a map, which even if it did not exactly correspond to their territory at least gave them a few landmarks from which to negotiate what had been completely foreign terrain.

Transition Chart
from Charismatic Founder to Next Generation(s)

	Charismatic Founder	**Next Generation(s)**
Vision	Founder's vision or commitment	Requires recommitment/ renegotiation
Accountability	To the founder	To the history and articulated vision; later to the structures, constitution, bylaws, historical practices
Governance	Founder's authority and control; centralized in founder	Evolving; (board, second-generation leader, executive director); distributed/delegated throughout organization
Problem Solving	Mostly interpersonal; depends on skills of founder	Need for institutional reservoir of skills and agents
Conflict	Handled interpersonally	Institutional policies created

Feelings	Range set by founder; likely suppression of anger, fear, and sadness	Explosion of feelings at time of transition with little practice at recognition; significant grief, and fear about future; some anger about abandonment
Board	Selected by founder; council of advice	Possibility of election; required by law: e.g., 501(c)(3); choosing founder's successor may "create" the board
Information/ Communication	Little need for rationales; uni-directional	Higher need for quality and quantity of information; multidirectional
Organization Structure	Evolves organically; simple; two-tiered; perceived direct relationship to followers	Evolves systemically; complex; multi-layered; mediated relationships to followers
Policies and Procedures	Few; verbal; informal	Many; written; formal
Roles	Founder/follower	Greater diversity of roles

The Role of an External Consultant

The complexities of the changes that take place during the transition from charismatic founder to next generation argue for the use of an external consultant to assist with the process. While many communities have professional consultants as members, such people have biases about the outcome of the process or are friends with people who care deeply about specific outcomes. They are thus unlikely to be neutral in the role of consultant, or if they do manage significant neutrality, their relationships with strongly interested parties are likely to suffer as a result of their impartial role. The role of the consultant is to assure that everyone is heard and that all the dimensions of the above chart are raised up for the community, even if some are deemed irrelevant. The consultant also applies enough heat to keep the process cooking but not boiling over. The consultant must be impartial to the specific outcomes while maintaining the fairness of the procedures. Finally, the consultant needs to appreciate the emotional dimensions of the transition as well as the values and meanings. For religious or spiritual communities or organizations, the consultant may also assist the community in reflecting theologically upon its transition, referencing significant sacred stories that parallel the current story, e.g., Moses turning leadership over to Joshua, or the farewell discourse of Jesus. The very introduction of a consultant may be a systemic change, signaling leadership by someone other than the founder, thus preparing for the transition to a new leader and style of leadership and a new way of being a community.

Conclusion

The transition from charismatic founder to the next generation is complex. In many cases, it is a pivotal point. Either the organization will continue to exist and flourish or it will quickly lose its bearings and move toward its ultimate demise. This transition requires more than simply replacing one top leader with another leader. It is an organizational change. In almost all cases, when the charismatic founder retires or dies, a *new* organization is born. Because of the prominence of the charismatic leader and her or his enormous influence, members of the community may only focus on the individual level, hoping for another, though perhaps different, leader. They may fail to truly understand or appreciate how they themselves are changing and the opportunities for a redefinition of their roles and responsibilities. It is a rare founder who teaches his or her followers how to understand the organizational dimensions of their community. For this reason, the community must embark upon a steep learning curve at the very moment when it is experiencing one of its most challenging transitions with all the accompanying emotional turmoil. Recognizing the dimensions of the transition allows the work to be discussable and changes the power dynamics within the community, even as the power of the founder is shifting. While this organizational-level dimension of transition is most evident at the end of the founder's tenure, many of the characteristics of the transition and resistance to change are also present when a long-term senior leader retires or dies. Thus the fruit bowl analogy and the chart have proved helpful even for congregations generations after their founding stage. This need occurs because the longer a significant leader holds power the more likely the community forgets the organizational or systemic dimensions and focuses on the individual level of change.