EXAMINING ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION: EMPOWERING
VOLUNTEERS IN A WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY

by

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ABSTRACT

RACHEL BROOKE WIDENER. Examining organizational participation: Empowering volunteers in a workplace democracy. (Under direction of DR. LORIL GOSSETT)

Numerous organizations struggle with transitioning mission statements, adjusting organizational culture and even survival. Without member commitment and effective communication, an organization will not survive. The purpose of this research is to address these organizational challenges with a theoretical focus on organizational culture and empowerment. Utilizing a preliminary survey and qualitative interview methodology, member discourses are examined in order to understand the challenges associated with creating and sustaining a participatory organizational culture. In addition to providing a case study on empowerment and participation, this research reveals the explicit need for organizational training as well as the politics of empowerment.

KEY TERMS: empowerment, participation, churches, culture change

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Research Questions:
1. *How does the organization encourage member participation?*
   - Values freedom without pressure: guilt does not work
   - Members are largely intrinsically motivated
   - Most members would agree to participate in any way if asked to do so – there is no lack of commitment, but members do not respond to written requests or general announcements
     a. *What communication strategies are used to persuade people to get involved (message design, channels, etc)?*
        - Written: newsletter, website, bulletin
        - Verbal: announcement and face-to-face direct request
        - All channels remained unchanged either before or after the transition and messages mostly are used to communicate information
        - Since the transition, messages have been designed to include a direct appeal to generic spiritual gifts
     b. *What structures are in place to empower members and foster organizational democracy?*
        - Team structure encourages because people can participate anywhere, at any time, for any project. It also allows members to share responsibility by splitting and sharing positions BUT the team structure is too ambiguous and lacks role definition and term limits
        - The Spiritual Gifts Retreat allowed those who participated to either discover or reaffirm their gifts BUT also empowered members to say no – messages need to be designed so that members redirect their participation toward their gifts

2. *How does the organization discourage member participation?*
   a. *What are some communication issues that might limit member participation (message design, channels, etc)?*
      - Communication messages are welcoming, but not inviting. Instead of a general call or welcome to participate, messages should include specifics of what needs to be done and how long it will take in order to reduce ambiguity
        o This is already proven effective since most leaders report that they ask more individuals to serve than have people volunteer and most members seem willing to serve if asked
   b. *What structures are in place that might prevent members from getting involved?*
      - Members have difficulty understanding how to work within the team structure, especially how the team structure is different the old committee structure
      - Members also do not understand how to put an idea into action
      - This reveals that members need training on how the system works including leadership and role-specific training
      - Politics: In order to try something new, members need "thick skin" to "take the abuse" (*Jeff*) – instead, the organization needs a constructive outlet for disagreement and general feedback

3. *What does it mean to participate in this organization?*
   - There is no widespread agreement on what participation actually means

> ***a. What does "participation" mean to organizational leaders and how do they convey this message to members?***
>   - Participation means being "active" - some believe that by making the choice to attend a smaller church, you are agreeing to be an active participant – but what is active?
>   - Participation is not about turn-taking
>
> ***b. How do members make sense of the participation messages they receive?***
>   - Individuals, members or not, have the privilege of benefiting from the organization without contributing, with the implication that everyone must be called to serve in some way
>
> ***c. What does it mean to be a "good member" of the organization***
>   - A 'good member' is someone who contributes what they are able; there is no conscious score-keeping
>   - This meaning of a 'good member' makes it difficult to hold anyone accountable; members cannot enforce or meet expectations when there are none. This also means that members cannot get upset with each other for not fulfilling certain responsibilities unless clear standards are set

What is participation?
- Process of decision making and outcomes of decision making
- A set of interactions that are part of the execution of work

Although leaders strive to achieve 'new participation' in an organization without formal hierarchy, the lack of clearly defined expectations or roles leads to destructive ambiguity.

What is empowerment?
- Not simply delegating tasks to members; it requires skill, ability, opportunity, freedom, and authority

Empowerment cannot occur without training, support and structure. It requires giving someone something to do as well as providing them with the necessary skills and freedom to do it.

What is organizational democracy?
- Equality among members and opportunities with almost flat hierarchy; individuals possess equal authority and power in decision-making
- Effective participation requires more than mere attendance, individuals must exercise power on a routine basis.

Organizations can still maintain democracy, while providing structure and coordination for members.

Conclusions:
People need assistance to get involved – members need support, coordination, and skills to complete a task or serve in a position.

Individuals at WSCC respond best to face-to-face, direct, and personalized contact. It is also useful to recognize particular gifts of each member and allow members to apply those gifts in creative and innovative ways.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The following research will apply concepts of organizational culture in order to examine a small value-based organization seeking to empower volunteer members and increase participation. Beginning with a brief review of previous literature, chapter two will describe the basics of organizing, including systems and culture approaches. This research involves a specific type of organization, value-based and democratic, completely dependent on volunteers as members. Although there is limited research concerning empowerment in similar non-profit, voluntary organizations, previous research does provide theory concerning participation and empowerment.

Coastal Community Church

Coastal Community Church (a pseudonym), located in the Southeastern U.S., is one of approximately 4000 congregations of a small American denomination. It is a mainline Protestant Church with a moderate-to-liberal theological position. It is similar to Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, or United Church of Christ denominations. It has a total membership of about four hundred, with an average Sunday service attendance of approximately one hundred to one hundred and fifty people.

2006 – The Visioning Team

In 2006, about twenty-five congregants at Coastal Community Church became involved in "informal conversations about church transformation" and the future vision of the organization (*Vision 2007*, 2007, n.p.). At this time in the life of the organization,

several factors contributed to the motivation for change and transformation. Members report being inspired by a mission trip to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina as well as a Bible Study occurring shortly after the trip. Although not directly attributed as being a driving force in the change, these conversations also took place after a change of organizational leadership. A minister of ten years retired and the search for a new minister required the organization to specifically identify its goals and values.

In the search for a new minister, the congregation sought guidance from the regional church, an advisory group more than a governing body, joining the congregations across the state. The regional church also serves as an intermediary and connects churches with ministers when requested. The process of ministerial search began by commissioning a Pastoral Search Committee and surveying the congregation in order to determine the goals and priorities of members as well as provide ministerial candidates with a profile of the congregation. During the search for a new minister, the regional church assists with finding interim ministers, if so requested by the congregation and the congregation is responsible for continued operations of the organization. For a variety of reasons, some beyond the control of the organization such as availability of prospective candidates, this search took three years before finding a permanent minister.

Again, in 2006 members of the congregation began examining their goals and values. These informal conversations led the congregation to commission an official Visioning Team during an annual Congregational meeting on November 19, 2006. The main goal of the Visioning Team, working "in partnership with the congregation," is to develop a vision for the church to be enacted within the following five years (*Vision*

2007, 2007, n.p.). The Visioning Team began with three questions: where are we now, what is our future vision, and how do we get there?

In order to begin to address the first question: *where are we now?* the team reviewed the congregation's mission statement and compiled a list of strengths and areas for improvement. The comprehensive lists of strengths and improvements were developed from data collected concerning both the community and the congregation as related to Coastal Community's fundamental purpose: evangelism and mission. The second phase of this endeavor: *what is our future vision?* involved exercises among congregational leaders in January 2007 to identify core values of the organization. The exercises revealed eight core values. These include Faith, Compassion, Love, Family/Children, and (Financial) Mission, determined to be already effectively accomplished, and Nurturing, Accessibility, and ('Hands On') Mission still needing to be developed and strengthened. The Visioning Team then worked with the congregation to finalize a list of top five ministry opportunities. The core values and top five ministry opportunities led to the development of a Statement of Calling clarifying the purpose of the organization and providing "guidance for all proposed plans and projects" (*Vision 2007*, 2007). The Statement of Calling states:

> The Church is a faithful and caring church family committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ in our Church, Community and World. CHURCH – Equip our church family through spiritual growth and leadership development;
> COMMUNITY – Share the love of Christ through service;
> WORLD – Witness through support of … missions"

According to the Visioning Team, the Statement of Calling "maintains the integrity of [the] current Mission Statement and expands evangelism" (*Vision 2007*, 2007).

The final question identified by the Visioning Team: *how do we get there?* involved developing action plans and methods for implementing the organization's overall ministry plan. The first stage would include reviewing and planning. After surveying the congregation, the Visioning Team prioritized goals identified by the congregation to be of importance. These included, in order of priority, (1) worship services, (2) programming, (3) evangelism, and (4) facilities. The congregational survey, completed by fifty-three members, consisted of thirty-seven questions, affirmed previously collected neighborhood data, congregational data, and congregational strengths and weaknesses. Responses to three different questions indicated that the church did not have a worship service that appeals to all ages, lacked racial diversity and did not appear to appropriately reach those not attending any church.

2007 – Changing the Vision

After the reviewing and planning process was completed, the Visioning Team developed four distinct action plans they felt would address the issues and concerns identified during their research process. The four action plans included: (1) Congregational Spiritual Gifts Workshop, Leadership Retreat, and Ministry Fair, (2) develop dynamic programs to enhance ministry with all ages in the church, (3) place more emphasis on caring for those in our community through local mission programs, and (4) become a more accessible church through evaluating our current facilities and developing a plan to upgrade them to meet our Ministry Opportunities. Although these four action plans were presented by the Visioning Team, the congregation is encouraged to explore their spiritual gifts and talents and pursue more plans of action.

This process began with congregational workshops in which members participated in activities that identified spiritual gifts and talents in order to determine where they can best aid the organization in enacting the Statement of Calling. The Visioning Team determined that only through active participation of a majority of members could the organization accomplish the goals. At this point in the process of transition, the strategic plan of the Visioning Team became suspended. A majority of members had not committed to the transition and previous organizational issues involving "20 % of the members doing 80 % of the work" prevailed (*Vision 2007*, 2007). The Visioning Team and the organization now face the challenge of changing this paradigm of member commitment. It is the conviction of the Visioning Team that the transition will allow the organization to "*do* more ministry in [the] church, community, and [the] world" (*Vision 2007*, 2007).

As part of this transition, the organization also restructured its system of operation. Operating as a congregationally-run organization, Coastal Community Church embraces democratic principles and is guided by a communally developed constitution and bylaws and operates with little or no hierarchy. In order to organize operations, members participated through committees with specified tasks and responsibilities as dictated by the constitution and bylaws. The congregation nominated and voted on representatives to serve in leadership-type roles on committees such as the Official Board and the Administrative Cabinet. Positions on these committees were typically held according to a set term-limit; however, committees were typically responsible for the same processes and events year after year.

For over fifty years the organization operated in a structure in which the Official Board was a decision-making body comprised of a Board Chair, the Chair-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Historian, leaders of both the Men's Group and the Women's Group, Chairs of all of the committees, the Elders, the Diaconate, the Pastoral Nurse and the Minister. Conversely, the Administrative Cabinet served to develop programming and complete calendaring and is made up of the Minister, Board Chair, Chair-Elect, Treasurer, leaders of the Men's and Women's groups, Committee Chairs, Chair of the Elders, Chair of the Diaconate and the Parish Nurse. Under this system of operation there were eight main committees including, Property, Worship, Financial Stewardship, Education, Stewardship, World Outreach, Diaconate, and Elders.

In order to empower members and increase participation, the transition involved a change from the previous 'committee' structure to a 'team' structure. Instead of operating through committees, the church is now organized into four care teams, the Community Care Team, the Church Care Team, the World Care Team and the Administrative Care Team. Each care team is guided by three facilitators, who now comprise the Official Board and volunteers are welcome to participate on any team at any time, whether for one event or for an indeterminate amount of time. The previous committees are sorted into one of the Care Teams. This new team structure will also result in a slow dissolution of the Administrative Cabinet and the Official Board. A challenge, even to some who actively participate and helped enact this change, is articulating to others how this new team structure is fundamentally different from the previous committee structure.
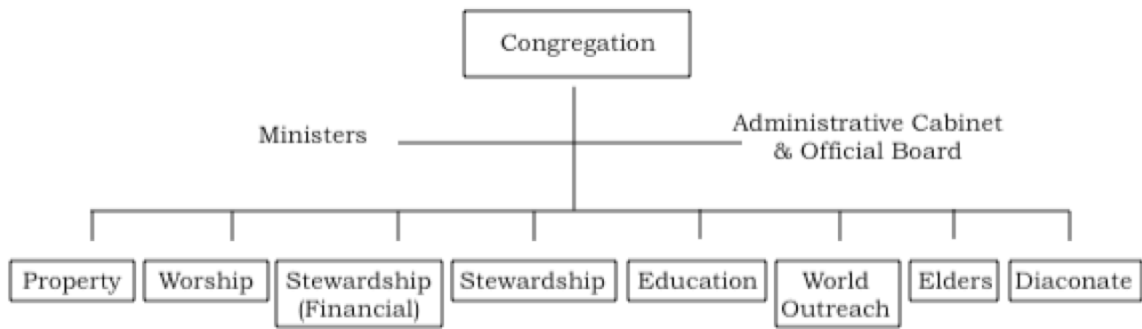
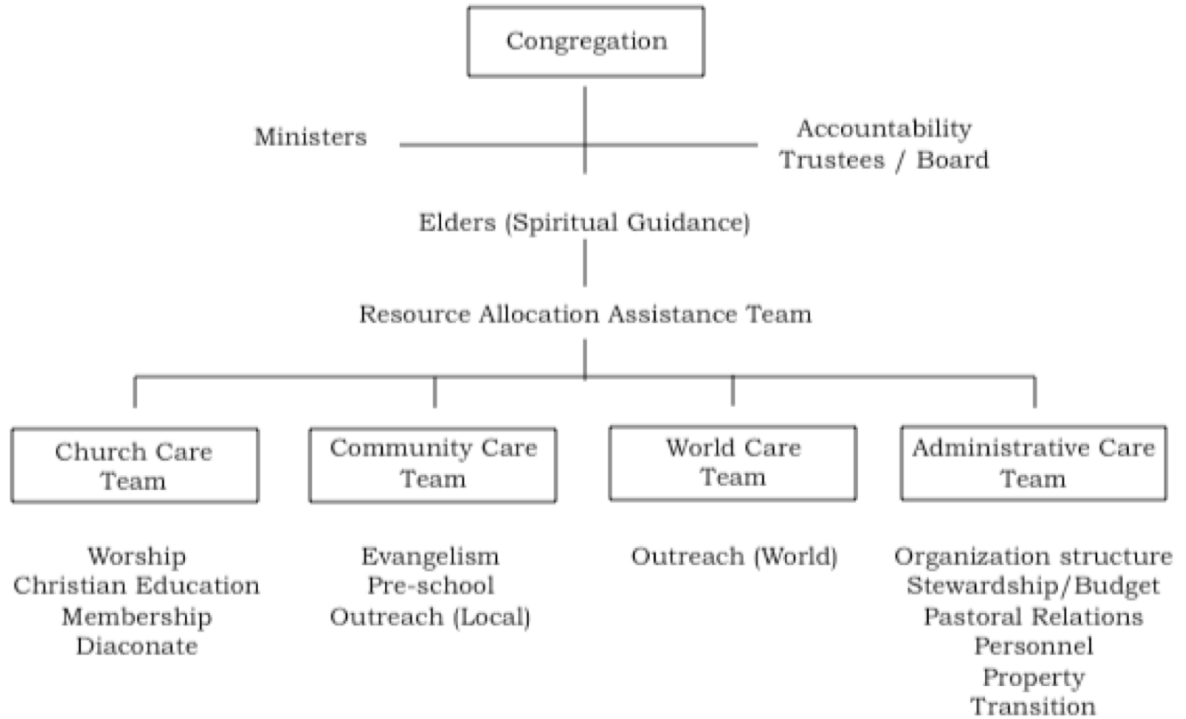FIGURE 1: Old organizational structure

FIGURE 2: New organizational structure

2009 – A Vision Not Fully Realized

Since the *Vision 2007*, produced by the Visioning Team was approved by the congregation in October 2007, Coastal Community Church has continued to struggle with their transition. Perhaps further complicating the situation, in January 2010, the minister

who has been central to this process resigned for personal reasons, giving the congregation six week's notice to find a replacement. His last day was February 21, 2010. The Visioning Team and the organization now face the challenges of changing the paradigm of member commitment and continuing the transformation. Furthermore, some members of the organization's leadership team believe the transition has stalled. Numerous organizations struggle with transitioning mission statements, adjusting organizational culture and even survival. Without member commitment and effective communication, an organization will not survive.

This particular site is valuable to examining empowerment and participation, not only because it is a value-based, democratic organization, but also because the members of the organization have previously attempted to transform their organization and failed to fully empower members. Chapter three details the specific significance of this site, concluding with the questions guiding this research. Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, results were coded and organized according to emergent themes, as described in chapter four. In chapter five, results are discussed in relation to the previously stated research questions and concluding with negative case analyses and member checks. To conclude, chapter six describes both theoretical and practical implications as well as directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to enact successful organizational transition, organizational survival, or growth, a comprehensive definition and understanding of what an organization is must be established. Selznick (1978) characterizes formal organization systematically, as two or more people working together on an endeavor. This systems approach associates organizations with economies and relationships related to available resources as well as effectiveness and competence. Individuals in organizations, from the systems perspective, are only considered in terms of their role or function in a system. This restricts the ability of individuals to participate in the organization as 'wholes'. Participating as 'wholes,' individuals develop informal patterns, relationships, and structures within the formal organization. This leads to the view of the organization as a cooperative system, organic with character emerging from decisions and action.

Organizational Culture

Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo (1990) define organization as intertwined collective actions. This definition asserts that organizations exist only through communication; in order to fully understand how this occurs, scholars examine organizational culture. Actions and behaviors between members of an organization and the organization and surrounding environment comprise organizational culture. According to Tyler (1871), as quoted in Sriramesh, Grunig & Dozier (1996), culture also encompasses "knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and

habits acquired…as a member of society" (p. 232). Applied to an organization, culture

must extend beyond logical or economic capabilities to include a system of values

distinguishing differing groups of individuals from another group. Geertz (1973)

determined that culture is constructed and demonstrated by members of an organization.

Apart from the pragmatic functions, organizations are socialized and bonded by shared

meanings. These shared meanings comprise organizational culture.

Researchers (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982) describe

organizational culture as prevailing values unifying members of the organization. Geertz

(1973) recognizes culture as the framework of significance in which individuals

understand experiences and guide actions, thus forming social structures. From an

interpretivist perspective, Putnam (1983) characterized the complexity of organizational

culture as due to the subjective human interactions resulting in socially constructed

meaning. Although culture varies according to the organization or even the group of

members within an organization, Ruud (2000) affirms that a culture system within an

organization implies consistency, goals, and patterns of action functioning to connect

organizational members together. This bond, termed 'normative glue' by Tichy (1982) is

accomplished through communication. As individuals form bonds and socially construct

meaning, the social interactions and sense-making develop and maintain organizational

life (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). Widespread organizational agreement of values

provides members the "internal synergy needed to work creatively and cooperatively"

(Cheney, 1999, p. 117). Common throughout these representations of organizational

culture are the concepts of shared values and constructed meaning between individuals in

an organization.

Sriramesh, Grunig, & Dozier (1996) signify the importance of understanding organizational culture as a key to effective organizational management. However, organizations with strong cultures may still face difficulty, resolved through the management or changing of organizational culture. Certain organizational conditions promote the development of strong organizational cultures and unique community meanings, including steady member involvement and history. However, this also results in cliques or clans within the organization developing either due to the lack of other options and communicative separation of individuals from the whole group. In order to examine organizational culture, culture must be viewed not as a product of an organization, but as an ever-changing process, the evolution of organizational meaning (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). It is through cultural practices that all facets of an organization, including structure, membership, control, and numerous other aspects are understood.

Members often understand organizational culture with the use of metaphors. This allows individuals to recognize and experience both structure and purpose. Identifying conflict between organizational metaphors, Gribas (2008) examines metaphor in terms of the impact created by how members designate and label themselves on organizational relations. Members often unknowingly describe the organization as a team, equating the organization with group cooperation without recognizing the inherent issues of leadership, power, and control. A team metaphor may serve to mask another ineffective or oppressive organizational process. Similarly, Smith & Eisenberg (1978) conduct a root-metaphor analysis examining conflicting organizational metaphors creating tension

between management and workers. Metaphor, as with culture, can transform as organizations.

As individuals and environments change, so too must organizations. Robbins (2001) identifies forces initiating organizational change including the inherent changing nature of the workforce, changes in technology, the economy, competition, society, and politics. If planned properly, organizational change can to some extent be successfully managed. Goals of a planned change usually incorporate adapting to a changing environment or modifying member behavior. Organizational change is often considered in terms of magnitude. A 'first-order change' involves no ontological or functional shifts and usually occurs uninterrupted and linear. However, 'second-order change' is a "multidimensional, multilevel, discontinuous, [and] radical" change that reframes members ontologically and the organization operationally (Robbins, 2001, p. 542). First- or second-order change can occur structurally, technologically, in physical setting, or in membership.

Communicative and cultural organizational changes can be either first- or second-order. Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson (2000) identify a strong mission statement, which must be utilized, as imperative to organization. Organizational vision develops shared purpose and strengthens organizational identification, also motivating members with feelings of success to strive toward organizational objectives. Vision statements and strategic plans, in order to be effectively integrated into the organizational culture, must be supported with robust member dedication and integrated into daily organizational activities. Before change can occur, organizations must acknowledge that such transformations may also fundamentally alter the nature of the organization. In order to approach organizational

change appropriately, members must discuss and decide the reasons, timing and process (Cheney, 1999). In order to sustain member commitment, organizations must maintain flexibility and adaptability; however, enacting changes in organizational vision are often met with challenges.

Value-Based Organizations

Various organizational structures adhere to the same fundamental concepts of organizational culture. Religious organizations, such as churches, are unique, especially for research purposes due to their structure, environments and other organizational features (Hall, 2007). Participative or value-based organizations, such as churches, differ from traditional organizational structures in that traditional organizational structure often involves a systematic approach of hierarchical authority and control. While some religious organizations emulate more traditional, hierarchical approaches to organizing, there are a number of smaller community churches (particularly in the US) that embrace flatter organizational structures and rely upon the active involvement of their membership to operate and maintain the system. These participatory religious organizations may be structured according to the skills and willingness of various members to volunteer their services to the organization. These churches may also rely upon other methods to encourage the voluntary participation of members (Hodson, 2001). Examining organizational leadership of churches, Hall (2007) further determined that research of such participative organizational structures is lacking in scholarly literature. Furthermore, churches as participative organizations exhibit characteristics of traditional secular organizations and similar organizational pressures apply. The success of a participatory organization depends less on economics and more on communicative and social

advancement. Participative or value-based organizations are largely reliant on volunteers, or those who are unpaid but contribute time and effort to the organization (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002). As such, examining the methods used by churches to promote member participation may provide other voluntary organizations (e.g., public service groups, non-profits) with valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities such organizations face when attempting to empower their members.

It is important to organizational maturity and success that participative organizations cultivate an organizational history and knowledge. This is accomplished communicatively through strong managerial relationship development and engagement leadership positions (Sriramesh, Grunig, & Dozier, 1996). Although participative organizations differ in some aspects to traditional organizations, numerous organizations are capable of transitional change and success. These participatory organizations are often described as alternative forms of organizing and valuing complex relationships in the organization (Buzzanell, P., Ellingson, L., Silvio, C., Pasch, V., Dale, B., Mauro, G., …Martin, C. 1997). Buzzanell et. al. (1997) further distinguishes alternative organizations as valuing relationships over traditional profit and defined by an unconventional structuring of relationships and tasks. These alternative organizations can be categorized in several ways, including ideologically or value-based, in which democratic principles inform organizing and decision-making (Buzzanell et. al., 1997). As organizations materialize through communication, certain organization-specific behaviors and interactions among participants begin emerging.

Various organizational structures adhere to fundamental concepts of organizational culture but present different challenges. Participatory or value-based

organizations, such as churches, co-ops, and kibbutzes, differ from traditional

organizational structures in that traditional organizational structure involves top-down,

one-way authority and management top-down authority and unilateral management

control (Hodson, 2001). Conversely, participatory organizations may be structured

according to various member abilities and depend wholly on the amount of member

participation. Essential to leadership and organizational participation are the values and

attitudes that members bring to the organization (Clegg, 1983). Examining cooperatives,

Cheney (1999) determined that mere survival of participative value-based organizations

relies on actually identifying success so that members work toward a common goal.

Although participatory organizations differ in some aspects to traditional

organizations, Clegg (1983) relates power and participation in most alternative

organizations as concepts that must involve the fundamentals of democracy. Participatory

organizations often perceive democracy as an ideal form of organizing. Rosner (1983)

identifies democracy as an organizational arrangement involving certain objectives and

role differentiation. Essentially, organizational democracy is an extreme example of a

participative organization. It involves increased member participation and requires

organizational power to be dispersed throughout the system (Clegg, 1983).

Organizational democracy is further classified as either participatory democracy or self-

managed democracy. The difference between the two is in the perceptions of members,

individuals in participatory democracy decisions on a social level and as complete

persons, rather than individuals who fill a certain role (Rosner, 1983). Furthermore, the

individual actively takes part in decision making within the organization. When members

participate as 'total human beings,' the interests of the individual and the interests of the

group converge. In organizational democracies, the concerns of the individual and the concerns of the organization are of equal importance and consideration.

Clegg (1983) contrasts participatory democracy with the least possible democratic methods of assuming that individuals must be members in an organization without bringing many personal factors with them. In participatory democracies, membership equality is essential. Individuals possess equal authority and power in decision-making. In fact, Rosner (1983) argues that effective participation requires more than mere attendance, individuals must exercise power on a routine basis, stating members who participate more often can participate better than members who do not. Although Mason (1982) claims that participatory democracy results in superior decision-making that avoids the dangers of group-think, instead it is more a process of decision making – it is not just representing various member interests. It is the active-participation element that makes membership an essential component of achieving organizational democracy. Stohl & Cheney (2001) examine democratic organizations and determine many challenges associated with enacting participatory and democratic processes in the workplace. When democratic organizations experience change, especially for the purpose of recruiting increased member commitment, they must permit new members freedom to impact the development.

Participation

McLagan & Neal (1995) identify ten fundamental values that define participative organizations including shared power, rights, and responsibilities; access; internalized control; and learning. Although a participative organization may embrace the values prescribed by scholars, unless the values are determined and developed by the members,

the organizational values will fail. Part of co-creating the organizational values involves

members being able to understand and explain organizational values (McLagan & Neal,

1995). This allows for sustainment of the organizational history as well as momentum for

future evolution and change of the organization. Finally, the values of an organization

cannot be expressed in terms of vague idioms; values must be communicated as explicit

actions or behaviors with the associated responsibilities and benefits. This reduces

participative ambiguity and empowers organizational members. At its core, participation

is a choice that cannot be forced or demanded in order to be successful. The organization

can promote responsible choices to participate by ensuring members are conscious of the

impact of their decisions on the organization and its environment (McLagan & Neal,

1995).

McLagan & Neal (1995) mainly examine organizations that are participative but

not necessarily volunteer-based; however, the concepts apply similarly to both paid and

volunteer organizations because to some extent in both instances members can choose

their level of participation. There are five levels of organizational involvement in which

participation occurs at different intensities (see FIGURE 3). This is concept is essential to

examining volunteer participation because individuals may have different understandings

of what participation is as well as different participative capabilities. An organization

cannot demand participation from its members nor perhaps should each member

participate at the highest level of involvement at all times.

Level I	Prescribed action	People follow procedures and do as they are told
Level II	Activity Participation	Participate by influencing how the work that is part of their immediate job is done
Level III	Role Participation	Participate by determining what they or their teams will accomplish. Participation on this level requires broad knowledge about customers and the organization's operations
Level IV	Context Participation	Participate by moving outside the boundaries of their own or their team's job to influence the processes and structures around and beyond them
Level V	Vision Participation	Participate by shaping or influencing the most fundamental assumptions that guide their organization. Activities on this level help to determine the values, goals, strategies, and other frameworks that determine what the organization is and will be

FIGURE 3: Five levels of participation (McLagan & Neal, 1995, pp. 189-191)

Additionally, participation may have different meanings depending on the individual. Cheney (1999) identified five different connotations of member participation: ideological, economic, psychological, organizational, and sociological. Therefore, in order to encourage further participation, organizations may need to address different interpretations of participation, whether members participate for recognition, ownership, job enrichment, delegation, integration or some other understanding of participation. Organizations can often influence participation by empowering members.

Empowerment

Organizations often seek to empower their members in order to increase member commitment and participation by involving members in organizational decision-making. Although Burke (1985) viewed empowerment as merely appointing a member with power, other researchers conceptualize empowerment as members' perceptions of their

capability and power. Applying self-efficacy theory in order to examine empowerment, researchers relate task motivation to a member's confidence in their task capabilities. When viewed from this perspective, empowerment correlates to interpersonal and dyadic interactions. Similarly, Conger & Kankungo (1988) associate empowerment with motivation. More than just an understanding of interpersonal or dyadic interactions, as with participation, empowerment is a process.

The process of empowerment relates to organizational structure, leadership, and policies that enable members to influence organizational actions and messages. Researchers (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Ford & Fotter, 1995) assert that empowerment is not something a manager or organization simply delegates to members; it requires member skill, ability, opportunity, freedom and authority. Furthermore, Ford & Fotter (1995) differentiate between job content, tasks and procedures, and job context, how the job fits into the overall mission, goals, and objectives of the organization. Chiles & Zorn (1995) determine that several factors shape how members perceive empowerment within the organization, including "leadership, policies, methods of communication, standard operating procedures, orientations to problems, shared practices, and shared values" among many (p. 5). Taking the perspective of organizational culture allows examination of such variables.

One method of empowering members is to provide work teams that are either self-directed or autonomous. These teams must be provided with the ability to make decisions. Martin (1983) equates this type of empowerment with both an expense reduction and increased organizational effectiveness. However, these teams cannot increase effectiveness without training, this includes "intensive training in technical roles,

decision-making strategies, self-management, and self-leadership" (Sagi & Koslowsky, 1999, pp. 92-93). Exercises in team building also contribute to the development and success of work groups. Furthermore, positive verbal persuasion within an organization increased feelings of empowerment among members, especially when members felt inspired rather than fearful or guilty.

This concept is reiterated by Bandura (1986) in that individuals complete tasks and contribute greater effort when reminded of their capabilities, rather than focusing on uncertainty and insufficiency in difficult situations. In doing so, organizations identify circumstances that create powerlessness and work to minimize these situations both through formal organizational procedures and informal communications. In order to fully understand and examine empowerment, Chiles & Zorn (1995) propose a five-factor model of influences. This includes the four self-efficacy factors: enactive attainment, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and emotional arousal, as well as macro-level dimensions of organizational culture. In addition to examining changes in organization culture, this research presents interesting challenges as an organizational democracy seeking to increase member participation through empowerment. Both empowerment and participation literature emphasize the need to give individuals something to do, while also providing the freedom to do it. In addition to the formal structures and practices intended to empower members and increase participation, organizational culture reveals additional values, norms, and patterns of behaviors and symbols organizations empower members, enhancing perceptions of individual usefulness and effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The Coastal Community Church (*a pseudonym*), located in Southeast U.S., will serve as the field site where data will be observed, collected, and evaluated. Members of the congregation, including members of the *Visioning Team* and other Church officials (minister, etc), were the primary sources of information for this case study. The major significance of this organization as a research site lies in the fact that some members have identified what they perceive as a problem: a lack of full member participation in the church. Additionally, organizational leaders have taken a number of different actions to initiate organizational change and empower members to get more involved with church activities. However, some members of the organization's leadership team believe the transition has stalled.

As a result, this site is a particularly interesting location to study to understand the challenges associated with creating and sustaining a participatory organizational culture. In this particular organization, members are able to choose the extent of their participation because they are voluntary affiliates of the system. These members do not depend on the church for a paycheck, nor are they required by law to attend and participate in church activities. As a result, there is a great deal that organizational scholars can learn by examining how these voluntary organizational members negotiate their membership responsibilities with each other and determine the degree of participation necessary to sustain the successful operation of this organization.

A survey will be used to determine how members situate themselves in the organization and perceptions of the overall state of the organization. This also determined if members perceive that there is in fact a problem within the organization and to what extent there is energy for participation beyond what is already occurring. The survey further contributed to the interview data, allowing for comparison between participation habits reported on the survey and participation habits described in the interviews. This blending of both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a more dynamic understanding of the organization and contributed to the overall literature on organizational culture and volunteer participation as well as alternative organizations and organizational democracy.

Research Questions

RQ1) How does the organization *encourage* member participation?

    a)   What communication strategies are used to persuade people to get involved (message design, channels, etc)?

    b)   What structures are in place to empower members and foster organizational democracy?

RQ2) How does the organization *discourage* member participation?

    a)   What are some communication issues that might limit member participation (message design, channels, etc)?

    b)   What structures are in place that might prevent members from getting involved?

RQ3) **What does it mean to *participate* in this organization?**

a)   What does "participation" mean to organizational leaders and how do they convey this message to members?

b)   How do members make sense of the participation messages they receive?

c)   What does it mean to be a "good member" of the organization?

In pursuing these three research questions, there are several challenges to be considered. It can be difficult to get people to talk openly about their participation, or lack thereof, within an organization – particularly one that they have chosen to attend voluntarily. An additional challenge to consider is the fact that I have been a member of this organization. Some people may not feel comfortable sharing information with me because they worry that I might identify them or information with my family or others in the organization. To address these issues, I provided the members of this organization with a number of different ways to participate in this project, some of which allowed them to remain anonymous when providing answers to my questions. I also informed everyone in the church that I am collecting data for my MA thesis and am bound by confidentiality rules associated with the university. I believe these steps provided my participants with the ability to openly share their feelings and opinions with me during the research process.

Although my membership in the organization may have presented a few challenges, it was also a strength. My connection to this organization provided me with a basic understanding of its history, the rules and structures that have guided its operation over the years, and familiarity with most of the members. Positioning myself

appropriately as a researcher while I am collecting data, and actively accounting for my positionality ensured a careful and rigorous analysis of my findings.

Methodology

I will draw upon two different methods to conduct this study: a) surveys; b) interviews.

Survey

Research began with the distribution of a preliminary survey through the organizational newsletter. The survey included a letter to the congregation explaining the research and fulfilling consent requirements. The newsletter also included a request for interview volunteers. To ensure the anonymity of the surveys, the interview request was separate from the survey and letter. The survey, letter, and interview request was sent in the newsletter, received by all congregational members at their home. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete. In addition to providing members with a paper version of the survey, the newsletter also provided information to allow participants to complete the survey online at surveymonkey.com.

Surveys were returned either through the mail to the primary investigator, online, or dropped in a sealed box located at the church. For those households consisting of more than one church member, extra copies of the survey and interview request were available by request, online and made available in the church near the drop box for completed surveys. After the preliminary survey, letter, and interview request was disseminated in the newsletter, an announcement was made in church by the minister, briefly explaining the study, the location of the drop box and directing questions to the primary researcher.

Interviews

After the preliminary survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were recruited from the congregation with a formal interview request as well as being informally approached by the primary investigator. Additionally, announcements making members aware of this project and requesting interview participants appeared for three months in the organizational newsletter and for two weeks in the church service bulletin. Interviews allow researchers to experience rich, "mutual understanding" and permits "negotiation of meanings" apart from the "researcher's pre-understanding" (Alvesson, 1996, n.p.). These semi-structured interviews allow participants to go into detail about their personal experiences. The design of the research guide was flexible and allowed participants to add additional information as they see fit. The goal of the interview process was to promote an open and friendly dialogue that facilitated active participation on the part of the interviewee and a friendly conversational exchange. Interviews were scheduled according to participant's availability and audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Once transcribed, interviews were coded according to emergent themes and patterns. For the purposes of confidentiality, interview participants were given pseudonyms. Brief descriptions of interview participants, without identifiers, is included in Appendix D.

Analytical Rigor

To ensure rigor in the coding process, negative case analysis and member check were conducted. After I arrived at my findings, I went back through the data to ensure that I did not overlook any information that might run counter to my conclusions. Additionally, I shared my findings with two key informants in the church organization in order to get their feedback on my analysis. Their reactions to my findings were

incorporated in my final report. Previous survey data regarding member participation and

organizational culture collected by the organization in 2006-2007 will also be utilized to

provide insight on the results of a congregational retreat conducted in order to promote

and facilitate change, and assisting in interview probes. Finally, the variety of data used

for the study (surveys and interviews) should allow me to triangulate my findings,

providing additional analytical rigor for this project.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Survey Results

There are approximately 150 members of the Coastal Community Church. Surveys were distributed to the membership in a number of different ways to ensure that all parishioners were able to receive the information. There were 200 paper copies of the survey distributed in the monthly church newsletter over a two-month period. Additionally 50 paper copies of the survey were made available to members in the lobby of the church itself. A drop box was also available in the church for members to submit their surveys anonymously. Finally an online version of the survey was made available to all members, with the website address listed in the newsletter. The survey consisted of three open-ended questions regarding the degree to which members participated in the daily operation of the church and if they attended the Spiritual Gifts Retreat. Additionally, several fixed response questions were asked to get a sense of how members felt about the way work was distributed within the organization.

A total of 17 useable surveys were returned. Five surveys were completed online at surveymonkey.com, one survey was returned by mail and 11 were deposited in the drop box located at the church. The response rate for the survey portion of this study was approximately 7%. This indicates that members were not necessarily inclined to provide feedback about their experiences in the church or attitudes about the culture change through this particular method. As a result, it is difficult to draw any strong conclusions

from the survey results in and of themselves. However, the open-ended responses did

provide some additional insight into the attitudes members held toward participation

within the organization.

Key issues that emerged from the open-ended questions on this survey were that

most respondents participated in four different committees or activities per year.

Additionally the survey results indicated that 16 of the 17 respondents had attended the

2006 Spiritual Gifts retreat. Each attendee reported attending this event to better

understand their gifts, gain inspiration and/or their position in the organization dictated

that they participate. One respondent reported not attending because of a time conflict

with other obligations. These responses indicate that those members who returned the

surveys tended to be individuals who were fairly active participants in the organization.

While the low number of respondents makes it difficult to conduct a complete

statistical analysis of the results, the surveys did reveal a fair amount of disagreement

between respondents regarding the statement: *Responsibility and work is evenly*

distributed among congregational members. Using a five-point likert scale (with 1=

strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), nine respondents strongly disagreed with this

statement, six reported disagreeing, one respondent agreed and one strongly agreed that

work was evenly distributed among congregational members (M = 4.24, SD = 1.15). This

indicates that most survey respondents did not feel that work was evenly distributed

among the general membership of the organization.

A second fixed response question on the survey asked members if they: *I would*

accept any type of position in order to help Coastal Community Church. All 17

respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (M = 2.24, SD = 0.97).

One respondent added to this question by writing that they would do so "as long as it was a reflection of my spiritual gifts." While the small number of respondents certainly calls into question the degree to which we can draw conclusions exclusively from this method of analysis, the results do indicate that there may be a fair amount of disagreement about the degree to which work is evenly distributed and the degree to which members who are willing to participate in the organization felt they were being effectively utilized. Given that the small number of survey respondents tended to be fairly active participants (e.g., involved in approximately four different activities or committees a year) it is interesting that there was so much disagreement among these members about the degree to which work was evenly distributed.

Interview Results

The second primary method used to explore the nature of participation in this organization was in-depth interviews with members of the congregation. Twelve members volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Volunteers included a mix of organizational leaders, as well as those who participate at high or low levels. Those classified as organizational leaders, approximately five, either served in a Chair or Facilitator position in the past two years. Due to scheduling and requests by volunteers, 7 interviews were in-person and 5 over the telephone. Seven females and 5 males volunteered, with ages ranging from the late twenties to early eighties and an average age of fifty-three. The length of each interview ranged from 17 to 65 minutes, with an average of 37 minutes. This resulted in over 180 transcribed pages, individual interviews ranging from 8 to 24 pages each. Interviews were coded according to emergent themes.

Coding themes included member participation, empowerment, membership, change or transition, Spiritual Gifts Retreat, and organizational structure. Although 609 instances were coded, some instances were coded according to more than one emergent theme. Thorough analysis of responses and themes when combined with survey results collected at the beginning of this study reveals rich explanations and descriptions of Coastal Community Church.

Membership

Descriptions of organizational culture are coded as membership. Membership (20%) is subcategorized into length, metaphors, values, in-groups, and strengths or weaknesses. In terms of the length of membership, interviewees became members of the organization approximately 4 to over 50 years ago, including one who had been a founding member of the congregation. The newest member joined the church 4 years ago, four members had joined between ten and twelve years ago, one had been a member for 26 years and five joined more than forty years ago.

Membership responses were also coded according to the organizational metaphors utilized by members. Ten out of twelve interviewees described Coastal Community Church as a *family*. In terms of this organization, the 'family' description is both a metaphor and a reality. As one member (*Cailyn*) describes,

> most people, meaning 90% of the people are probably somehow related by marriage or whatever, blood or marriage, to somebody, somebody else in the church.

Even those who are not necessarily related to other members of their church beyond their immediate family describe the congregation as their "extended family"

(*Staci*). Other adjectives describing the organization include friendly (*Cailyn, Richie*), loving (*Sarah, Rebecca*), nurturing (*Ben, Danielle*), welcoming (*Cailyn, Ben*), and devoted (*Holly, Dustin, Richie*).

Despite the fact that members are so interrelated, those who have been members for a shorter amount of time than the majority were aware of their differences. Throughout descriptions of the congregation, various in-groups and out-groups or cliques became apparent. One member (*Cailyn*) describes this as,

> Even though I've been there as long as I have, its still, I'm still like a, the outsider, cause I'm not part of that group that started the church or grew up together or um, but I mean they're still welcoming, it's not a, a negative thing, but you, you are aware of it.

These in-groups are part of the challenge facing the congregation as they seek to transform their organization. Members generally arrange themselves according to age, gender, and relation. Although these groups assist in identification with the organization, sometimes "griping" and trouble "pits groups against groups" (*Rebecca*). Working to unite these members, regardless of their differences and groupings, are the shared values of the organization. The mission of Coastal Community Church is to help others, help "our neighbors" (*Jeff*) and help each other – to be "church beyond our walls" (*Staci*) Consistent with the overall denomination, members describe values of equality, freedom of spiritual beliefs, without pressure "to do anything" (*Danielle*), and as described by a leader of the organization (*Dustin*), resilience throughout internal and external change. These values unify members of this organization and are central to the culture of the organization. But perhaps some of the reason that this change is difficult is the subtle

differences between the subcultures or in-groups and out-groups. Even though one

interviewee (*Christine*) described these values as,

> I hate to say no rules, but… there are no limits and no boundaries… but that
>
> doesn't quite describe it either, um, hm… there's an openness and acceptance of
>
> who you are and what you are, just for what you are.

However, another member alluded to the value of tradition over innovation. When

asked about the values of Coastal Community Church, one member (*Rebecca*) simply

replied, "tradition" and laughed, adding that "it can be inflexible…at times," especially

when it comes to change. Furthermore, a central mission to Coastal Community Church

is service to the community. Despite the fact that members relate this as a *community*

church, most members do not in fact live in the same community where the church is

located and members of the community do not attend the church.

Although the organization clearly values freedom from pressure, some relate this

non-assertiveness as a weakness, "they're very non-assertive as a general rule"

(*Christine*). Members "just assume that everybody knows that they're welcome… and

then you tend to forget to actually draw people in" (*Cailyn*). As with any organization,

Coastal Community Church has both strengths and weaknesses. Typically, interviewees

related strengths as an organizational, or group feature and weaknesses as those of the

members, but not blaming specific individuals. For example, "the communication I think

is pretty good in this congregation, the problem is that people either don't listen or don't

read" (*Christine*). However, relating to communication within the church, another

member stated, members "don't communicate very well with each other, either

personally or [organizationally]" (*Jeff*). Overall members identify commitment and

genuine willingness to help as a strength, but widespread member participation as a weakness or "growing edge," (*Dustin, Ben*) as the organization chooses to refer to weaknesses.

The membership category describes how interviewees situate themselves within the organization and how they describe what it means to be a member of their organization and relates how the members align their personal vales with organizational values. It also reveals both advantages and contradictions in the use of a 'family' metaphor to describe the organization. This also reveals the complexity of organizational culture, in that it is socially constructed through human interaction. Culture serves to unite members. The fact that members relate strengths to the organization and weaknesses to the members themselves may convey how members determine who is and who is not a good member, despite the lack of 'taking names,' or 'keeping score.'

Member Participation

Member participation consists of 30% of data and subcategories include volunteerism, motivation, participation habits, and opportunities. When interviewees discuss volunteerism, it is in one of three ways, either individual's volunteer to serve, with frustration because nobody volunteers, or individuals are asked by someone to serve, which is in fact not volunteering at all. Half of the responses regarding volunteerism detailed either being asked to serve or asking someone else to serve, whereas just over one third actually discuss volunteering without direct request to serve. With such an organizational emphasis on volunteerism and widespread participation, motivation becomes an issue.

Responses were coded according to whether members describe intrinsic motivation or being motivated by the organization. Of the 48 responses coded as motivation, over half revealed intrinsic or motivation from within the individual. For example, "I don't think the church itself does anything to encourage me, I think that's just a belief system that I have" (*Jeff*). The responses not coded as intrinsic, revealed organizational motivation to participate in something because of a certain position already held in the organization and the related sense of duty rather than a direct command.

The largest portion of responses coded in member participation consisted of narratives of actual participation. This included experiences of direct participation, either serving in a position or assisting with or attending an event and observations of other members participating. When asked what it means to be a member of Coastal Community Church, one interviewee (*Josh*) related being a member to being an active member, active meaning "supporting the church more than just money, it's financial and giving of your time in some way." Additionally, many members only participate within their specified group, for example, "few people will cross all the barriers of gender and age and work, you know, intersperse their work amongst all people, most people will just stay in their comfortable groups…" (*Cailyn*). There are also difficulties in older members participating, either because of health or timing. Among the accounts of observing participation, interviewees described changes in participation habits and available opportunities for participation.

When discussing a change in participation habits, either participating more or less, interviewees attribute change to the transition and/or Spiritual Gifts Retreat. Several

interviewees report not changing so much the amount they participate but rather change by redirecting their participation according to their gifts. Some members who generally participate at a high level report considering taking on fewer responsibilities and participating less, however, as *Christine* reports, despite swearing "up and down" about having "enough of church work…the next thing I know I am volunteering, by choice." Most interviewees (*Jeff, Staci, Ben, Josh*) reiterate an "80-20 rule," when 80% of the work is completed by only 20% of the members, mentioned in the Coastal Community Church's reasoning for transition. Additionally, responses describe instances of "new participation," (*Staci, Danielle, Holly*) where members not previously involved in church activities beyond Sunday services have participated in events or served in positions.

The final category of member participation included descriptions of participation opportunities. Discussion of opportunities in most cases involves reasons for member participation, for example participation "means the opportunity to develop relationships, deepen my relationship with Christ, and have opportunities to reach out to others who are in need" (*Cailyn*). Another describes an increased amount of opportunities since the transition to a team structure. Despite the fact that there are all of these opportunities to participate, "I don't know that the whole congregation as a whole knows what's going on" or "they just [are] not even realizing something small that they can do that the big impact that would have" (*Sarah*). Members typically find out about opportunities to participate by word-of-mouth, through the bulletin, during the Sunday service announcements, in the newsletter, or on the website. Additionally, members have the opportunity to attend Board meetings in order to find out what is happening. Despite the many opportunities for participation and communication about these opportunities,

interviewees are generally discouraged about an apparent breakdown between communicating the opportunities and widespread member participation.

Themes in this category illustrate that participation is not usually volunteered, but as the result of accepting direct, face-to-face ask. Members are not resistant to participate but do not usually volunteer, especially when responding to a general call or generic announcement. This illustrates the channels used by the organization and how the members interpret those messages.

Empowerment

Empowerment (23%) is subcategorized into ideas, freedom or opportunity, leadership, and encouraging or discouraging participation. Responses coded as ideas related to putting proposals into action. Throughout the interviews, there was not widespread agreement about how a member of Coastal Community Church would put an idea into action. Some report (*Jeff, Staci, Sarah*) taking certain positions due to having "some very good ideas on what I wanted to see" happen (*Staci*). Whereas several others in leadership positions describe seeking new ideas from members either at events or regularly scheduled meetings. Others express having plenty of ideas and the drive to pursue them but the problem is not having enough "time to do them all" (*Staci*). There also appears to be no defined channel for implementing organizational ideas, some members would ask the minister, the "chairman or the facilitator of whatever committee" (*Sarah*) it fell under, or

> go to the board and ask for approval if it was something major…if it was
> something little I would probably talk to a couple of different people and see how
> they felt about it (*Rebecca*).

As one interviewee (*Cailyn*) remarks, with the recent transition, members may not be "to the point or to the comfort level to say, 'I've got this idea [about something to try], I wanna do this, I'm going to do this kinda thing'." When one idea was put into action, it took place over several months "to get people used to that idea," however, a group of members had an idea, and

> they just chose to do it and they did not have to go before the board and say this is what we want to do and have it blessed [and] I think it's a great idea (*Christine*).

Generally ideas are viewed positively, as being able to

> liven up everything, you know if everybody does the same thing all the time year after year after year, then it's all boring and there's no, there's no room for growth, there's no stimulation (*Christine*).

Furthermore, *Jeff* declares, "there's no bad idea out there," pointing to the general organizational openness to new ideas from members. In addition to implementing new ideas, interviewees describe freedom or opportunity to participate or the lack thereof.

The responses coded as freedom or opportunity involved giving members jobs to do and the freedom to be creative while doing the job. Numerous interviewees find the congregational belief in freedom of action and belief without pressure also gives them freedom to participate where they choose. As one member explains, "Everybody has an equal opportunity to do effective, important mission work, reaching out to others…we can all do ministry" (*Cailyn*). With this lack of pressure to participate, members are individually responsible for examining their own gifts and spiritual calling, "then you would go to one of the many venues that were available" to participate (*Ben*). Another member (*Danielle*) describes this as,

you can use your gifts um in anyway that you want whether you want to do it or whether you don't want to do it, that's you choice, there's no pressure to do anything and I don't think anybody at [Coastal Community Church] pressures you to do anything whatsoever.

Members of the congregation are given the freedom to participate where they feel their strengths are,

this way we feel like that people can use their strong points to do um just the one thing you know if they just do that one thing and they do it well then that's all we really ask of them and if they want to go do something else on another team, they're free to do that… (*Danielle*)

In conjunction with the freedom, members have found success in asking others to participate where they have interests.

I think it's real important that you look at the people and look at the things they've been interested in…if that's where their interest is, they they're probably gonna say yes to you and that's what we've been trying to do and it's been successful for us (*Holly*).

An interviewee reiterates this from the perspective of a participant rather than a leader, stating, "I like the whole concept of being, I can be on virtually any of the care teams at any given time to do a given task" (*Cailyn*). Although there was discussion of what encourages members to participate, there were almost equally as many comments about what discourages participation.

It is in responses coded as discouraging participation that the previous statement about valuing tradition became more apparent. The intention of the new structure and

transition was so that "members of the church can pick out one or two things if they feel led to do a particular mission or ministry, and then they can go and do that…" (*Jeff*). However, on several instances when individuals volunteered to do something, others have gone to the volunteers and said, "ok, this is how you have to do it, rather than just saying, you know, you can [do it]" how you want (*Jeff*). This is potentially problematic because individuals feel they are being micro-managed and not given the freedom to do a task how they want to do it.

Interviewees repeatedly describe the current state of the church as uncomfortable, uncertain and not without politics and disagreement. For example,

Because [the transition is] so open-ended, it's not a comfortable place to be when you're used to having everything very black and white, if you'll allow that expression, very traditional, like every year you always do this at this time and it's done this way… and this is not a spell it out for you, this is what do you feel God calling you to do? (*Cailyn*)

In this explanation, *Cailyn* describes the structure provided by organizational rituals that have been replaced by freedom to choose when and what to do. When some members within the congregation are met with change, the response is as one member remarks, abusive. Although it does not deter this particular interviewee, others are not so apt at the church politics,

There's certain things that you know people want certain things done certain ways and there's, there's certain people who, you know, feel like because they've been there so long, or they contribute so much money, they should have more of a say than others, but that's typical in just about any church you go to… you know

people saying well why are you doing this, and you shouldn't be doing that, and

you know some people get upset when they, whenever you change anything…

(*Jeff*)

Furthermore, when expressing displeasure with some change or action, members have

been known to "walk[] out…as soon as they saw [what we did], they left, and I didn't, I

didn't know that, I thought they might stay just because…" (*Rebecca*).

Another aspect that participants may find discouraging is the lack of role-

definition. Perhaps since members are given so much freedom to choose *where* they

would like to participate, the organization places few limits especially on the amount of

time someone serves in a position. One member (*Sarah*) describes this when members

"run from doing any work with the church because they feel like they're stuck in the job

forever." As leaders work to address these challenges to participation, some comment on

the rewards and punishments within the organization, or the lack thereof. For example,

"there's also a lack of rewards and punishments, you can't fire somebody that's,

somebody that's a volunteer, well fire me, put me out of my misery (laughs)" (*Ben*). It

seems that rewards would encourage participation.

In terms of rewards, members seem to agree that, "most people who are doing

things don't want to be praised for it" (*Christine*). The primary reason interviewees report

as encouraging participation is the other people they will be working with. As one

member (*Staci*) describes, "I'm really excited about the two [partners] that I'm gonna

have, um, I think, um, they're innovative, they're willing to say 'why not, let's give it a

shot'." A leader in the organization (*Sarah*) described an instance when members were

able to participate better when several individuals shared a teaching position. This arrangement allowed the participants to

> feel like you can go out of town or you could do something, you wouldn't be letting somebody down because you'd have a back-up, so I think if we could encourage people to do more of that, and show them that they do, they could help out but still have some freedom.

The final code in the empowerment theme is leadership, or any act of instance of leading, guidance, or direction. In spite of the leadership retreat conducted as part of the transition and the freedom members have in participating, there is confusion about leadership in the congregation. A lack of training for leaders is apparent in several interview responses. "Right now, there is no training for facilitators, it's just you know…here's your bucket of stuff, have a nice day, we'll see you next year when it's time to vote on new facilitators" (*Jeff*). Another member explains,

> we don't train people how to be leaders, you know, and about managing a meeting or setting agendas or determining goals and objectives… we just expect our leaders to somehow, know how to listen, you know, how to communicate uh so we just expect our leaders to somehow, through osmosis (laughs)… (*Ben*)

In addition to the lack of leadership training, there is confusion in whether to participate or put an idea into action, members must then agree to be the leader. As one member (*Josh*) explains, "I think that's the intent of the new organization, is that if you have a passion for it, you lead it and take care of it…" But several members describe being extremely uncomfortable in leadership positions (*Cailyn, Danielle*). However, each of the members that report being uncomfortable in leadership positions also described

feeling liberated by the Spiritual Gifts Retreat. Generally interviewees agree that they want to be empowered, some just don't know how, especially within the new structure. However, there are also certain structures in place and messages from the organization that discourage member participation.

Spiritual Gifts Retreat

Spiritual Gifts Retreat (7.5%) is subcategorized into change in participation habits, perceived success, and reason for attending or not. All but one of the interviewees report attending the Spiritual Gifts Retreat. The one that did not attend did so because of health issues. Another member describes that this was an issue with many of the older members of the church. Interviewees that attended the retreat reported doing so out of curiosity or reaffirmation of their gifts or to support the church and the transformation process. For example, "I wanted to know really if it would help me discover my personal spiritual gifts and I wanted to be supported of the process, in helping our church go down a new, or a different, not new, different pathway" (*Cailyn*). Other members similarly describe the curiosity, but add a sense of responsibility because of a leadership position the member held.

Despite the perceived success of the retreat, interviewees report little if any change in the amount they participate, although some have redirected their participation into different areas. In two instances (*Cailyn, Danielle*), members found that leadership was not a gift they had and felt more comfortable saying no when asked to lead something. When the minister contacted one of these individuals (*Danielle*) to be board chairman, the minister "said you know your gifts um indicate that you would be a good board chair…and I said look at my gifts again (laughs) I have no leadership gifts

whatsoever…" Members seem resolved to participate "regardless," and as one member (*Rebecca*) describes, the Retreat served to "give me more direction on where I was supposed to be because I'm gonna be, I'm going to participate in some way, it's where am I better suited to participate." Overall, interviewees believed that the Spiritual Gifts assessments accurately assessed their talents.

As well as correctly assessing participants, the Spiritual Gifts Retreat was generally perceived as a success. Even though interviewees report little change in the amount they participate, they deem the Retreat a success because of participation by those who do not ordinarily participate a great deal. For example, "That was really uh really enlightening um to do, to have done that and I think that everybody that did really came away with…new insight into what they, what they could do and what their abilities were" (*Sarah*). In addition to the individual impact of the Retreat, the congregation gained a "huge database of congregants and what their spiritual gifts are" (*Jeff*) so that facilitators can seek out participants with certain gifts or talents. Multiple interviewees also report enjoying the discussions that took place at the retreat among those with similar gifts. After grouping participants at the retreat and building the database of gifts, results of the Retreat were posted on the walls outside the sanctuary. Although participants deem the event successful, it is determined that more members still need to take the assessment and perhaps that results need to remain posted in the church. The Spiritual Gifts Retreat was understood by many members as the beginning of the action portion the transition. In general, members enjoyed the Spiritual Gifts retreat and even those who do not often participate in church events or hold positions attended. However,

for many the Retreat did not necessarily translate into empowerment or participation after the fact.

Change or Transition

Change or transition (16%) is subcategorized into communication strategies and transition. Discussions of the transition process involve belief that it needed to be done, it's been a very slow process, and uncertainty about the success of effectiveness of the transition. However, one interviewee describes confusion with the transition and the reasons for changing.

I ain't sure I understand it, um, like I did with the old system, I don't know if it's working or not, I don't think it's working like it should be or like they plan on it being because I think most people are in my boat, they really don't understand what's going on…I hope it, that it, they changed it and it works out for the reason that they think they changed it, that it will get more people to volunteer… (*Richie*)

Another interviewee describes an attempt to explain the transition to a friend and discovered that,

I couldn't even get it across to her, you know that uh how it was different you know…I'm not sure, I don't know if everybody is still feels that they understand all of it… (*Danielle*)

In addition to the misunderstanding of the transition, several interviewees comment that the pace of the transition is too slow, for example, "I guess I'm impatient, I thought it would move quicker," (*Ben*) and "ssssllllloooowwww, slow, slow, in my mind, I like to discuss it and move, discuss it and move…we're still discussing, let's just move, it'll either work or it won't…" (*Rebecca*) Although interviewees report "great strides" in the

transition, there seems to be little concrete proof of these strides, "I still think it's the same people who always do the work…I think we have a long way to go in reaching that other part of the congregation to get them to help…" (*Sarah*).

Another element of the transition is the possible impact of the minister's resignation. When asked about how this will affect the transition, one member (*Rebecca*) replies,

> I think we're about to hit turmoil again, um, I, I'm afraid of what it will do to the transition process, because this is the year to get things moving, uh, and how can you get things moving when you're in, when you're in search mode…it's gonna be a very difficult year…one of my fears is that it will slow things down and this was the year that I was hoping that we would move forward.

Another interviewee (*Ben*) describes the resignation and future search for a new minister as "a cohesive factor," relating it to previous searches for new ministers, when

> the church you know basically pulled together and everything that had to get done got done…I think we're committed now with the vision, know where we're going and we have enough leadership uh in the church, fifty or sixty people that will push even harder not to let us fail so you know, I, I think it's gonna to some extent help the members coalesce around you know the challenge that you know we've begun a transformation process, we have goals and we're doing a lot of things and we're not gonna go backwards.

This optimism is echoed in the responses of most of the interviewees. However, as some of the interviewees (*Rebecca, Holly*) and the researcher noticed, there is not much discussion of the resignation or impending search among the congregation.

The responses coded as communication strategies involve assessments of the communication channels utilized by the congregation, including the newsletter, website, bulletin, posters within the church, etc. There is general agreement of a breakdown in or ineffective use of communication through these channels. For example, "not everything is written into, written clearly, I should say, or invitingly, in the newsletter, it's more like here's, this is what's going on, it doesn't necessarily say you can come and participate in this fashion" (*Cailyn*). In terms of the website as a communication medium, "we have a website but people definitely don't use that effectively…there's a lot of things that go on in our church that never make it onto the website" (*Cailyn*). One interviewee (*Staci*) remarks on a recent comment about the newsletter, "some people say the newsletter is too long and they don't read it anymore, which just boggles my mind, because to me it can't get long enough…" In addition to getting information from the website and the newsletter, many members get information word-of-mouth.

Interviewees repeatedly remark about getting information by attending either Cabinet or Board meetings. There is concern that those who do not attend either of these meetings cannot get a picture of what is happening, as one interviewee (*Sarah*) explains, "I knew what was going on because I heard it because I was a member of the Board and for the Cabinet, but if I'm just someone sitting in the pews, I only see what they print in the bulletin…" It is apparent that those in the congregation who want information can find it, however, "I would say twenty plus percent who don't have as much information as they think they need or want" (*Ben*). Overall interviewees agree that the communication messages are not reaching everyone in the church, but have few ideas about how to reach the members. It is evident that some people still are not sure why

change was needed, and although they weren't against the change, the confusion resulted in a lack of investment.

Organizational Structure

Finally, organizational structure comprises the remaining 3.5%. Responses in this category involved mention or explanations of either the previous committee structure or the new team structure, as well as mention of either Chairs or Facilitators. Often it seemed as if members used the old terms (chairs, committees) interchangeably with the new terms (facilitators, teams). Even if they did not understand the change, members knew it was different, but could not talk about it as if it was different. There seems to be no linguistic transition, which at the very least leads to confusion when explaining the new structure to others. This also leads to questions of whether there is a structural change in the organization or merely a language change. When reviewing the organizational structure charts (FIGURE 1 & 2, pp. 20-21), it is not clear that there was any *momentous* structural change. In conjunction with the other coded themes, this data reveals how members are encouraged and discouraged as well as exploring the meaning of participation at Coastal Community Church.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study was intended to further understand the organization in regards to three primary research questions: how does the organization *encourage* member participation, how does the organization *discourage* member participation, and what does it mean to *participate* in this organization? The fundamental issues relevant to how this organization encourages member participate are motivation, information, and structure.

RQ#1 - How does the organization encourage member participation?

Throughout interviews with members of Coastal Community Church, it was clear that this organization values freedom without pressure and members are largely motivated from within themselves as individuals. How then does the organization persuade people to get involved? Channels that the organization uses to communicate with its members include both written: newsletter, website, bulletin, and verbal: announcement and face-to-face direct request. In general, these channels have remained unchanged either before or after the transition. These channels are mostly used to communicate information about what is going on at the time or in the near future. Since the transition, messages have been designed to include a direct appeal to generic spiritual gifts, including asking individuals who have spiritual gifts or interests in a certain area or event. Those who attended the Spiritual Gifts Retreat will most likely agree to participate with a direct appeal to their gifts through a participation request is conducted face-to-face.

The organization can still seek to motivate individuals without applying pressure or forcing someone to serve. However, most members do not find the organization in itself a motivating factor. Despite the fact that almost no members of the organization seek praise for their successes, the organization can perhaps encourage individuals through success of previous events or undertakings. In the account of a member who served in the same position for seventeen years, one interviewee (*Christine*) remarked that when that individual was ready to be replaced in that role, no one was to know who did it or for how long. Although the member demanded no praise or acknowledgement of the demonstrated dedication and commitment, it is possible that such recognition could motivate others to follow suit.

It is also clear that members of Coastal Community Church will not find guilt or negative reinforcement encouraging. As one interviewee (*Dustin*) describes the new organizational vision,

> to um move away from a system in which people were you know sort of guilted into doing work in the church or uh you know asked to do things that they really weren't interested in doing to a place of people being able to discern for themselves what they want to do and how they feel led and called to serve and giving them the freedom to do that um and when that happens you find more meaning in what you're doing then if your sort of guilted or told to do something because no one else will do it and yeah you know you have begrudged feelings about it.

It is 'finding meaning' in what you're doing that Coastal Community Church is attempting to communicate to the members. Interviewees relate countless narratives

about how easy it is to participate when you only need to do a small part or when the work is more evenly divided among several people sharing the same position. However, when triangulated with survey results, there is disagreement about how evenly work is actually distributed within the organization. Those who do participate at a high level also report being better able to participate since those who participate the most are better 'in the know' about what is happening and what needs to be done.

Furthermore, most members would agree to participate in any way if asked to do so. In fact, several interviewees remark with surprise and some disbelief in hearing other members state 'well I would've done it if someone only asked me,' despite an existent general call for volunteers. This is also evident in the survey responses to the statement: *I would accept any type of position in order to help Coastal Community Church*. Within this organization, there is clearly no lack of commitment, but perhaps members need more confidence in order to act. By triangulating the interview results with those from the survey, it is apparent that members do not respond to written requests or general announcements. This is clear in the low response rate of surveys that took 15 minutes to complete and the willingness of members to be interviewed for 20 minutes to an hour when asked. Despite this, there are several structures in place that encourage participation and reinforce encouraging communication strategies.

As an organizational democracy, Coastal Community Church maintains equality among members and opportunities. Examining organizational ambiguity, Trethewey (1999) describes the actions of women's shelters and activists as empowering women to prevail over inequalities but accomplish this through often disempowering structures and procedures in order to survive. It is exactly this ambiguity that both empowers and

discourages participation at Coastal Community Church. The ambiguity of the team structure allows members to participate anywhere they choose, at any time, for any project. The literature concerning empowerment and participation recommends team structures in order to increase flexibility and freedom. The change from committees to teams also reduced the number of committees and reduced individual time commitments, resulting in a smaller and flatter team structure.

But this also serves to discourage members both through the lack of role definition or term limits and the fact that many members only participate within their own group, for example women may only participate in the women's group. Members describe this ambiguity as not knowing where they fit in, such as when the women's group actually met with the transition team for clarification. Notwithstanding the ambiguity, the team structure serves to encourage participation in allowing members to share responsibility by splitting and sharing certain positions with others, as a team within a team.

The Spiritual Gifts Retreat also served to encourage member participation. The collection of gifts matched with individuals allows leaders to seek out those who would be most interested in a certain event or position, rather than for example asking someone who has already done it or that will certainly say yes. But it also encouraged members who participated and discovered or reaffirmed their gifts. As several interviewees noted, the gifts assessment still needs to be given to those who have not yet done it and perhaps the results of the assessments need to be reposted for all to see, perhaps reviving the initial motivation as well.

Perhaps a largely unforeseen effect of the Spiritual Gifts Retreat was empowering members to redirect their participation and actually say *no* when asked to participate in certain events. Given the values of freedom from pressure, this brings into question whether the Retreat was a success or a failure if members are empowered to say 'no'. This would be a cultural value conflict if the organization does not permit the empowered members to choose not to act, resulting in a counter-culture. However in the case of these particular members, they did not stop participating, but changed the area of their participation. This can be addressed in future events and messages so that individuals are empowered and instead of saying 'no,' they direct their efforts toward their actual gifts.

RQ#2 - How does the organization discourage member participation?

Along with the encouraging aspects of the organization, the findings of this study revealed that there are communication issues and structures in place that can discourage member participation. Although some can be encouraged to participate by knowing what is going on, it can also be difficult for 'new participants' to get involved without knowing what is happening. This is also apparent in the remarks of one interviewee (*Cailyn*) describing the church as welcoming, but not inviting. Instead of having the general call for volunteers and welcoming all to participate wherever they choose, this interviewee proposes that volunteer requests should instead invite members to participate by clearly stating 'this is what we want to do, this is what we need, and this is what you can do to help.' The invitation approach has already proven to be effective, since most leaders report that they ask more individuals to serve than have people volunteer and most members seem willing to serve if asked. Messages should be designed to include specifics of what needs to be done and how long it will take in order to reduce ambiguity.

It may also be helpful to align these requests with certain Spiritual Gifts so that members can match their gifts with certain roles and tasks.

Interestingly, when interviewees describe the strengths of Coastal Community Church, it is usually with group-type description; a strength, is something in general possessed by the organization itself. For example, when asked to describe Coastal Community Church, one interviewee (*Jeff*) responded: "very caring, very family oriented, very giving." However, when interviewees describe weaknesses of Coastal Community Church, it is usually an individual's weakness, but not in terms of blaming a particular individual. For example, "they just hate to commit on paper" (*Staci*). Perhaps the issues the members are seeking to address are those of problems of individuals.

Apart from the empowering and encouraging aspects of the new team structure, the results of this study revealed that some members seem to have difficulty understanding how they can work within it. All members do not seem to understand how the team structure works or how it is different from the way things used to be. Coastal Community Church has tried to empower members by seeking new ideas and embracing change. However, when asked, a few had difficulty explaining how they would put an idea into action, often reiterating old processes of going to the Board, committee, or even minister to ask permission. One interviewee described that if you had an idea, the understanding was that you would then take the lead. But how are those without leadership training or gifts expected to participate in this way? Interviewees also describe events designed for members to share ideas, but according to one interviewee (*Staci*), the majority of members "didn't view it as an opportunity that needed new ideas, so they

didn't offer any." Perhaps it was not that they didn't view it as an opportunity so much as they did not understand.

Furthermore, many report not being able to explain how the new structure is fundamentally different from the old structure, which can also indicate a lack of widespread participation in the development of the new structure. The new team structure does not necessarily equate to doing things differently, additionally, the routine of the old system provided a certain structure for participation. In order to reduce confusion and ambiguity, members need training on how to participate within the team system. While empowerment is beneficial for improved participation, empowerment is not an abdication of responsibility; there needs to be coordination in order to prevent chaos. Without the 'structure' of routine, members need a clear communication contact or coordinator in order to manage, regulate, and track involvement. In their effort to reduce hierarchy and maintain democratic principles of equality, the organization has removed structure that is essential for members in order to know how to participate. With training on how the system works, including leadership and role-specific training, members can gain the understanding needed to participate. It is clear from the success of the Spiritual Gifts Retreat that members are willing to attend similar events and committed to whatever is deemed best for the organization.

In addition to implementing new ideas, interviewees describe "typical politics" that need to be navigated when trying something new and a need for "thick skin" to "take the abuse" (*Jeff*). This would no doubt discourage many from participating. Another interviewee described this discouragement as impacting members' participation after previously being told 'no.' In order to encourage participation Coastal Community

Church, the 'old guard' must also join in embracing change and innovation. As one

interviewee (*Cailyn*) explains, the church has "a lot of growing up to do, and it's, it's not

easy…you know growing up is painful in a lot of ways…church shouldn't be painful."

As one interviewee (*Rebecca*) describes an instance when new things were tried and

something was changed, a small group of members objected by walking out of church

and on other occasions, similar signs of disapproval. There have also been instances

when disagreements have resulted in members labeling others as unchristian. There will

always be disagreement and conflict in any organization, including value-based voluntary

organizations. In order to prevent such participation-discouraging responses,

organizations should have a constructive outlet for expressing disagreement as well as

general feedback regarding changes or events. Such an outlet would provide space in the

organization for differences, while maintaining the unity of shared organizational values

and goals and continuing innovation and growth.

RQ#3 - *What does it mean to participate in this organization?*

The final research question explored what *participation* mean to this organization.

Interviewees often describe an 80-20 syndrome affecting the organization, 80% of the

work is done by 20% of the members. The organization could not be successful until this

was changed and it could not ask the 20% to do more beyond what they already do. In

order to be a member of the organization, you must make a conscious choice and declare

your membership before all those in attendance; however, individuals can attend services

and events, even serve in some positions without officially joining the organizational

membership. In many cases, individuals officially join the membership after spending

time working with members and participating in church events. When asked what it

means to be a member of Coastal Community Church, one interviewee (*Josh*), a leader in the organization, responded it means being 'active.'

Other interviewees assert that by making the choice to attend a smaller church, individuals are agreeing to be active participants. As they explain, in a large congregation, individuals have the ability to stay on the peripheral, "blend into the woodwork and then it's a free ride, you don't have to do anything," and be 'anonymous' (*Christine*). Defining participation as being 'active,' leaves room for many interpretations; active could mean participating at any of the five levels described in chapter three (Figure 3, pp. 11-12). Since not everyone can participate at the highest level of involvement at all times, the organization must recognize that membership must rotate responsibility and involvement among individuals. This is reflected in several of the interviews in which high-participating members describe approaching burn-out because they've been participating at Level V (*vision participation)* for too long. This is the most demanding level of member participation because these individuals are required to examine the fundamental nature of the system and determine the goals, values, and structures that will guide the growth and development of the organization in the future. An issue is created because members have different interpretations of participation and do not engage in discussion in order to merge their interpretation and develop an organizationally co-constructed meaning of participation.

In a small congregation, the survival of the church depends on the combined actions of most of its members. This is not an instance of turn-taking, where the 20% are declaring that they've done the work for so long, now it's someone else's turn. The driving force behind the transition is about what it means to participate in this

organization. As an interviewee (*Dustin*) describes, it's theologically motivated, "it's we are The Body, you know, we all have gifts and we are all called to serve in some capacity, not just 20% of us but all of us." In line with the denominational belief that faith is personal and the organizational belief that members have freedom from direct pressure, participating in Coastal Community Church means discovering your gifts, finding out where you are being called to serve, and doing it without demand from the organization.

Do members have the right to partake in the benefits of being a member without working to sustain the organization and succeed? One interviewee (*Christine*) describes this as a huge attraction for some, to

> just go and absorb and not have to put back anything, it's a wonderful thing, to be, you know, not to be responsible just to you know… to receive without, just to be a sponge and not have to squeeze anything out.

At Coastal Community Church, individuals, members or not, have the privilege of benefiting from the organization without contributing, with the implication that everyone must be called to serve in some way. This is what the organization is all about, working hard and helping others, taking care of each other and taking care of others. How do leaders communicate this to the members? This is done by truly embracing transformation and empowerment and living the Vision, 2007, this unfortunately does not free them from difficulty or challenge. Throughout the data, there is no widespread agreement on what participation means to organizational members and in this organization, members seem to shy away from defining participation for fear of judging or limiting another individual, especially since everyone is a volunteer.

Although individuals are granted the option of doing nothing, there is an implicit

assertion that if everyone is called to serve in some way, individuals must answer that call

and serve. At no time did interviewees comment directly that so-and-so is a bad-member

or even a bad-participant, nor was anyone designated as a good-member because of the

amount of participation. However in the stories of interviewees, change in participation

or success is described through an account of 'new participation.' This implies that,

perhaps subconsciously, members are keeping track of who does and who does not

participate. This is not out of blame or criticism for those who are not pulling their

weight, but instead seems to be out of admiration for those who give of their time and

talents. A 'good member' is one who contributes what they are able, revealing cultural

narratives of organizational heroes.

Since there is no clear rule about what makes a good member or what it means to

participate in this organization, every individual member is able to legitimate his or her

own definition. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult to hold anyone accountable and

enforce or meet expectations when there are none. When everyone is right, no one is

wrong. Members cannot get upset with each other for not fulfilling certain

responsibilities unless clear standards are set. However, it is important for a value-based

participatory organization that organizational truths and member narratives are

understood as equally valuable and legitimate.

Analytical Rigor

Both a negative case analysis and two member checks were conducted in order to

ensure rigor in the coding process. After emergent thematic coding, I returned to the data

to find any statements that contradicted my findings. In terms of the confusion involving

the change from the old committee structure to the new team structure, there were two instances where interviewees did not report confusion. These members were a part of the Visioning Team and helped to develop the team structure. Additionally, the Visioning Team presented the Vision 2007 to the congregation, who then voted on it. Although the congregation had access to the Vision 2007, at church and on the organizational website, no one referenced it in the data and everyone reported being willing to participate. Therefore, this does not negate my finding that members do not completely understand how the team structure is different from the committee structure. There was also an instance when an interviewee mentioned a leadership retreat being held in order to provide leadership training to members. However, the interviewee further described that although it was meant to be leadership training, it was more focused on building group cohesion and planning the Spiritual Gifts Retreat. This interviewee concluded that actual leadership training would be of great benefit at Coastal Community Church.

In addition to the negative case analysis, I presented my findings to two members of the organization in order to get their feedback on my analysis and results. Member checks were conducted with two interviewees, one is a male and a leader in the organization and the other is a female and participated at a low level during the past two years. Both members responded that the analysis presented in this research well described the organization and the different types of members represented in the organization. Upon reading the results, the leader respondent inquired as to how effective the Statement of Calling developed by the Visioning Team was according to the previous literature and this research. He added, "you did a great job capturing and explaining the membership thoughts and this will be a huge eye opener for many people." The other responded

commented that, "I think you have captured and assessed the 'Coastal Community Church' right on target." Both agreed that several different perspectives were represented in the membership at the organization. In addition to the member check and negative case analysis, and a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods serve to ensure the analytical rigor of this research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Organizations are continually changing, always in transition. Tracy (2007) strongly advocates for problem-based research that can result in theoretical innovation as well as opportunity for "practical change" (p. 1). This problem-based research originates in a site where some members identify a problem and have attempted many solutions. The member discourses at Coastal Community Church provide rich, vivid insight into value-based organizational change and empowerment. An important issue, when so many people are torn between different organizations with only so much time to contribute, is how organizations, especially those run by volunteers, encourage participation through empowerment. This is a challenge echoed in the discourses at Coastal Community Church, how do we make it more meaningful for our members?

In many ways, Coastal Community Church has always sought to empower its members. Despite the structural or linguistic change from committees to teams, there was little or no actual change in the foundational values or relationships in the organization. Some members have been able to effectively participate after the change, while others seem to be having difficulty. Some of this may be due to a breakdown in communication; however, it may be possible that some members experienced a first-order, linear change, while other members experienced a second-order, ontological change. By reshaping the way members perceive their role in the organization and how the organization operates, individuals must undergo a multidimensional, multilevel change. This reveals the

complexity of organizational change, even in a small, value-based organization lead by principles of democracy and faith.

As Coastal Community Church seeks the degree of participation necessary to sustain the successful operation of the organization, this research demonstrates the challenges organizations face when creating and sustaining a participatory culture. Additionally, discourses reveal how organizational members negotiate membership responsibilities with each other, particularly how the leaders strive to achieve 'new participation' in an organization without formal hierarchy and how a lack of clearly defined expectations or roles leads to destructive ambiguity. Tracy (2002) describes the incorporation of an identified problem with member discourses as the creating "space for organizational action and change" (p. 85). An organization survives on its members and cultivates growth through innovation.

Theoretical Implications

This research applied concepts of organizational culture and democracy in order to examine participation through empowerment. In the attempt to empower members, Coastal Community Church discovered that empowerment could not occur without training, support, and structure. Organizations cannot simply hope for participation, instead it must be enabled. Previous research reiterates that empowerment requires giving someone something to do as well as providing them with the necessary skills and freedom to do it. The findings in this research clearly support the previous literature about empowerment. Although the organization had made the changes understood to empower members and increase participation, especially in terms of providing self-directed work teams. However, these actions seemed to have little impact on

participation. Empowerment literature indicates but perhaps does not emphasize enough that individuals must also be provided with training on how to enact empowerment. This may be especially important in a volunteer organization, since members may have vastly different skill sets and abilities. This research confirms previous empowerment and participation literature, in that participation cannot increase through empowerment without giving members *freedom* to do something within the organization. As Chiles & Zorn (1995) assert, empowerment not only relates to organizational structure and policies, but also leadership. Additionally, this confirms the need for giving members the skills to participate, while highlighting the particular importance of training that is often overshadowed in the literature.

Another concept lacking in empowerment literature is the 'dark side' or challenges to enacting empowerment. This research revealed how organizational sub-cultures can apply pressures against change and empowerment. While empowerment within an organization is framed as a positive change, the current literature does not focus a great deal about the political nature of empowerment. Often, those in power do not want to give up their power, but frame their wish to *share work* as empowerment. As such, empowering members to increase participation will be difficult if not impossible. Although previous literature may briefly mention concepts related to organizational barriers to empowerment, these findings extend this body of literature by emphasizing the political nature of empowerment. Furthermore, this research has demonstrated that democracy cannot exist without a supporting structure.

In their effort to minimize hierarchy and maximize freedom and equality, Coastal Community Church has maintained an almost flat organizational structure. The issue of

structure perhaps was not apparent until the change in which several rituals, repeated year after year, provided members with an informal structure in which to participate. Now, as the ritual is changed, some members do not understand how to be empowered within this new organization. This confirms the organizational culture literature in regard to the importance and strength of organizational rituals and values. Additionally, it provide extends the understanding of rituals as an informal organizational structure. They find it difficult to articulate how the team structure is different from what previously existed as well as how they can effectively participate within it. Organizations can maintain democracy, while providing structure and coordination for members.

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical implications for scholars, this research presents several practical implications for value-based organizations, organizational democracies or even organizations seeking to empower members. Coastal Community Church demonstrates that people need assistance to get involved. Members not only need support and coordination, but also the skills necessary to complete a task or serve in a position. As previous attempts to get members involved proved, individuals at Coastal Community Church respond best to face-to-face, direct, and personalized contact. Organizational culture needs to change in order to implement any of these practical solutions. The communication norms of organizational culture favor mass communication strategies, but this research shows that the culture of this organization, from a membership perspective, favors face-to-face interactions. Thus, the leadership must recognize the communication norms and values that define this organization and modify their communication strategies in order to more effectively recruit volunteers.

It is also empowering to recognize particular gifts of each member and to allow members to apply those gifts in creative and innovative ways in order to further organizational goals. Organizations, including Coastal Community Church and practitioners would benefit from empowerment and participation best practices, including challenges and training. Previous literature on empowerment highlights the benefits of empowerment but does not actually provide a clear set of best practices that would help organizations implement empowerment or participation programs in their organizations.

Future Research

Future research should advance understanding of the careful balance between organizational structure and organizational democracy. How do you create a system that empowers and also creates accountability without limiting freedom and equality? Does volunteer vs. paid employee make a difference in such an organization?

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

The following is a voluntary, confidential survey as part of research conducted by Rachel Widener. This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please answer questions to the best of your ability.

When completed please drop in box located in Gathering Room outside of the sanctuary at West Side Christian Church or mail to: Rachel Widener, 10215 Pineshadow Dr, # 201, Charlotte, NC, 28262. For those who are able, there is also the option to complete the survey electronically at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=28UAzul3c9sZSmCoBbVj8g_3d_3d There is also a link to the survey on http://www.westsideccdoc.org/

How often in the past two years have you served on a church committee or team? Please list the committee(s) and time served.

How often in the past two years have you participated in church events? Please list the events and the capacity in which you participated.

Did you attend the congregational Spiritual Gifts retreat? Please briefly state why or why not.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the corresponding response.

I would accept almost any type of position in order to help West Side.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
1   2   3   4   5

Responsibility and work is evenly distributed among congregational members.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
1   2   3   4   5

I find that my values and West Side's values are very similar.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
1   2   3   4   5

It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave West Side.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
1   2   3   4   5

If able, I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help West Side to be successful.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
1   2   3   4   5

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview questions:

What does it mean to you to be a member of West Side Christian Church?
- If you were telling a friend what it is really like to be a member at West Side, how would you describe the atmosphere?
- What would you say is the overall mission of West Side?
- What does the organization value?

Do you feel that West Side as a whole is operating effectively?
- Why or why not?
- How do you define effectively?

How often in the past two years have you served on a church committee or team?
- Why would you or why did you serve?
- How did you find out about the position?
- Would you serve on the committee or team again? Why or why not?

How often in the past two years have you participated in church events?
- What factors influence whether you participate?

Did you attend the congregational Spiritual Gifts retreat? Why or why not?
- Did you find it helpful? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that it successfully accessed your talents?
- Since the retreat, have your participation habits changed? How?

Do you feel like you have been given ample opportunity to participate where you choose?
- How do people find out about what is going on at West Side?
- If you came up with a new idea, how would you put it into action?

In your opinion, what are the main strengths of West Side?
- What are the main weaknesses?

Developed from Harrison, M.I. (2005). Diagnosing organizations: Methods, models, and processes (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications, Inc.

APPENDIX C: CODEBOOK

Category	Definition	Example	# of Incidents	Percent
MEMBER PARTICIPATION				30 %
Participation	The act of taking part, as in some action or attempt		185 instances (199 coded)	
Volunteer(ed) to participate	To offer (one's self or one's services) for some undertaking of purpose	"I volunteered"	18	
Lack of volunteers	Not stepping forward to offer one's self or services when general call for help is released	"Nobody volunteers"	6	
Ask(ed) to participate	To request or petition someone to take part in something	"I was approached"	24	
Intrinsic Motivation	Motivated to participate by something from within an individual	"I don't think the church itself does anything to encourage me, I think that's just a belief system that I have"	28	
Organizational Motivation	Motivated by the organization to participate in something	"I attended because I felt a sense of responsibility to do it… to participate because um, as an officer of the church I felt like I had to support pretty much everything that the church itself wanted to do"	18	
Attending an event or holding a position	Stories of participants direct participation or observing others participating	"I just, as, as the board chair for 2009, I participated in the transition team"	59	
Change in participation habits	Either participating more or participating less	"I do think that more people are being involved than before um that didn't do a whole lot before…"	23	
Opportunities	A good position, chance, or prospect, as for advancement of success	"…you know meeting with those Sunday school classes to let them know, this is what's going on, here's an opportunity for you to participate"	23	

Category	Definition	Example	# of Incidents	Percent
EMPOWERMENT				23 %
Empowerment	To give power or authority to; to enable or permit		137 instances (158 coded)	
Ideas	Putting ideas into action	"I took the worship committee because I just felt called to do that, I had some good ideas on what I wanted to see in the worship area…"	23	
Freedom/ Opportunity	Giving (or not) members jobs to do and the freedom they need to be creative while doing them	"Everybody has an equal opportunity to do effective, important mission work, reaching out to others"	48	
Leadership	An act or instance of leading, guidance, or direction	"We don't train people how to be leaders you know about managing a meeting…"	13	
Encourage Participation	Promoting participation or instances of noticing new acts participation	"if that's where their interest is, the they're probably gonna say yes"	38	
Discourage Participation	Hindering or preventing participation	"I think it can be very discouraging because of you know again the politics of it all"	36	
MEMBERSHIP				20 %
Membership	The state of being a member; a person that is a part of a society		122 instances (135 coded)	
Length of Membership	# of years since officially joining the church	"I've been a member for twelve years"	12	
Organizational Metaphors	How members describe their culture	"It's part of being a family, it's like being part of a family"	20	
Shared values	Ideals, customs embraced by the organization & members	"I think it values just the overall disciple concept that we are all equal in the sight of God"	35	
Ingroups-Outgroups	Cliques, or sub-groups within the organization either apart of the majority or a small minority	"You tend to get cliques, people that uh grew up there are very comfortable with one another, the ladies that work together all the time are very comfortable, and they don't	28	

		tend to go outside"		
Strengths	Positive aspects or characteristics of the organization	"I think the strengths are, um, they're very generous, um, with their money"	20	
Weaknesses	Negative aspects or characteristics of the organization	"I think the, the main weakness of West Side is probably you don't really have a good congregational participation"	20	
CHANGE/TRANSITION - OTHER				**16 %**
Change/Transition - Other			98 instances	
Communication Strategies	Ways members get information from the organization or to other members	"Not everything is written into, written clearly, I should say, or invitingly in the newsletter…"	22	
Transition	Process of organizational change	"Um… I think we're in transition and I don't think you can ever be effective when you're in transition"	27	
Other			35	
SPIRITUAL GIFTS RETREAT				**7.5 %**
Spiritual Gifts Retreat			46 instances (40 coded)	
Change in participation habits	Participating more or less because of the retreat	"I've started doing a few things on my own that I feel called to do"	9	
Perceived success	Whether the retreat achieved the intended goals – impacting participation habits and/or assessed individuals correction	"I thought it was very successful…"	21	
Reason for attending or not		"Because it was being held and I was on the visioning team and I thought it was important to be there as an education and incoming worship committee chair"	10	
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE				**3.5 %**