

## The Maturity of Multiplication: Transitioning Churches From Single to Multisite—A Four-Frame Analysis

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Christian churches in the United States face headwinds against effective multiplication, including religious industry dynamics, leadership and organizational development challenges, and cultural trends. The religious industries market is mature, saturated, and faces declining attendance and increasing numbers of people shifting to no religious affiliation (Pew Research Center, 2021; Wood, 2022). These trends offer context to the challenges faced by local churches that are navigating the organizational development issues created by the need to refocus on multiplication (Bolman & Deal, 2017; D'Angelo & Stigile, 2016).

Regardless of these headwinds, churches are implementing multiplication strategies. Multisite church planting has become a prevalent strategy for church multiplication in the United States, with 11% of all congregants now attending multisite churches (Chaves, 2021). In a multisite church planting model, the new campus and church that planted it remain part of the same organization, including shared leadership and organizational structures (House & Allison, 2017). Transitioning from a single-site to a multisite church structure can create severe leadership and organizational development challenges for churches that are determined to break out of plateau (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Bullard, 2001; D'Angelo & Stigile, 2016), transform their organization (Gibbons, 2019), and move into the maturity of multiplication (Barna Group, 2016; Bullard, 2001; Mathes, 2019).

### The Problem

Common Ground Church of the Nazarene (CG, or Common Ground) is in its 14<sup>th</sup> year of existence and desires to plant multiple campuses through the multisite church planting model. CG has not yet successfully transitioned from a single site to multisite. The problem is further complicated by Common Ground's social enterprise model. CG understands social enterprise as supporting its discipleship ministries through net revenue produced from fee-based ministries aimed at impacting the communities in which the church ministers. Over half of Common Ground's revenue comes from social enterprise activities like childcare, sports ministries, after school programming, community partnerships, and grant income. Therefore, the Virtuous Business Model's concept of social impact (Brooker & Boyce, 2017) is a key consideration when evaluating potential solutions to the problem.

From an organizational development perspective, the problem of transitioning to multisite is related to barriers in all four of Bolman and Deal's (2017) frames<sup>1</sup>. While other seminal ecclesiastic<sup>2</sup> studies (Newbigin, 1995; Van Gelder & Zscheile, 2018; Wiley, 1943) consider the issues of organizational design within a

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<sup>1</sup> Bolman and Deal (2017) promote a four-frame paradigm of organizational development: structure, human resources, political, and symbolic. Structural refers to issues like policies, procedures, and hierarchy. Human resources refer to areas like employee engagement, career paths, and skills development. Political refers to the competition for scarce resources. Symbolic refers to the stories, ceremonies, and language that form culture.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiology is the study of the nature, structure, and polity of the church.

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theological viewpoint, the contribution of this project was to use Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame organizational development approach as it relates to Nazarene polity.

### **Driving Research Question**

The problem statement was established as an overarching question to focus on a resolution:

Based on Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame analysis, what strategic intervention strategies can Common Ground Church of the Nazarene implement to successfully launch multisite church plants—beginning with a location in New Haven, Indiana, in 2024—while honoring its denominational bylaws and commitment to community transformation through social enterprise?

From this question, eight guiding research questions were developed to conduct the literature review.

### **Methodology**

Secondary research, through a comprehensive review of academic and trade-level literature of multiple multisite industries, provided significant insights into the eight guiding research questions. Primary research was conducted using Bolman's (2021) Leadership Orientation Survey as the basis for an exploratory study into multisite church lead and campus pastors' perceptions of their leadership orientations (i.e., structural, human resources, political, and symbolic). Statistical analysis of 47 surveys was conducted. Findings from the primary and secondary research were analyzed using the Virtuous Business Model's social capital (Brooker & Boyce, 2017), McKinsey's 7-S model of organizational alignment (Hayes, 2014), and an assessment of change resistance.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The secondary research found 17 best practices for multisite organizations in each of Bolman and Deal's (2017) frames: human resources (4), political (4), symbolic (4), and structural (5). It also identified four best practices in academic research techniques around the four frames. A gap in the literature was identified around understanding the differences between multisite lead and campus pastors. Therefore, primary research was focused on clarifying this question.

The primary research found that both lead and campus pastors perceive themselves as using all four leadership orientations. Lead and campus pastors perceive their use of the structural frame at similar levels. Lead pastors showed a statistically significant higher perception in their use of the political frame. Findings in the human resources orientation reflected non-statistically significant differences in the comparison of lead pastor and campus pastor perceptions. However, given the magnitude of effect achieved in the comparison, a sample size of 204 participants would have detected a statistically significant difference in the analysis favoring campus pastors. The symbolic orientation reflects a similar pattern of finding in the comparison of the perceptions of lead and campus pastors. While there was no statistically significant difference at the current sample size, a sample size of 470 study participants, given the magnitude of effect achieved in the comparison would have enabled the detection of a statistically significant difference favoring lead pastors. Additional research with a larger sample is needed to confirm the potential differences in the human resources and symbolic frames.

Primary and secondary research identified and clarified 10 potential solutions to address CG's desire for a successful transition from a single to multisite church. A customized methodology was developed to analyze these solutions for their likelihood to succeed. First, a five-point Likert scale was used to score each solution based on organizational alignment using McKinsey's 7-S model (as cited in Hayes, 2014) and the Virtuous Business Model's social capital (Brooker & Boyce, 2017). Then each solution was scored using a 5-point

Likert scale based on measurements of change resistance. The two scores were then multiplied by each other to create a likelihood to succeed score. All solutions were ranked and prioritized for implementation by their likelihood to succeed scores.

### **Recommended Solution**

Based on the analysis, nine of the 10 solutions scored highly likely to succeed and were approved by Common Ground for implementation.

1. Create a community listening campaign as a starting point for scaling into New Haven.
2. Determine the leadership skill sets for lead and campus pastors in line with the Leadership Orientation Survey (Bolman, 2021), and create a plan for leadership development within the organization.
3. Establish an endowment fund to give large gift and legacy donors a way to support the ongoing work of multisite church planting.
4. Evaluate and update all symbolic communication to unify the church around multisite strategies.
5. Create the polity for running the current governing board in line with multisite strategies.
6. Rework the staffing structure to incorporate key activities like evangelism and discipleship, leadership development, and communications.
7. Implement a central services office.
8. Implement a centralized Learning Management System.
9. Evaluate and update policies and procedures around the two-speed operational philosophy.

To implement the recommended solutions, a detailed hybrid change management plan was developed. It incorporated Kotter's (2012) eight-steps, Gibbons' (2019) social behavior model, Lewin's (1947) three-stage model, and the Virtuous Business Model (Brooker & Boyce, 2017). The change management plan included a comprehensive communication plan, reinforcement strategies, scenario planning, and a step-by-step action plan. Six change teams made up of key influencers from existing CG leadership teams were established and provided with major milestones, lists of tools and training to develop, and a detailed Gantt chart with proposed due dates and milestone dependencies.

### **Conclusion**

This study represents a novel approach to church multiplication, applying organizational development principles to an industry in which scholars often answer such questions theologically. New ways of solving church multiplication problems are created using best practices from multiple industries that use multisite organizational models. The change management model offered also provides a template that can be applied to a variety of transitions these organizations may face. These methods can be studied, applied, and built upon by the client organization and others who are interested in transitioning churches from single to multisite.

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