Leadership in the Church: An Assessment of a Pastor Training Program

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Abstract

Christianity, the church, and pastors are undergoing a number of changes in the 21st century, and therefore a number of challenges. Although Christianity is growing in the global south, membership and attendance in churches in the United States are declining. What church growth there is seems to be in both smaller and larger churches, posing a different set of challenges for pastors in those respective venues. Many pastors are leaving their churches, primarily because of the perceived expectations and even demands being placed on them by their congregations. A number of new leadership initiatives are currently being offered to pastors to help them deal with this changing and challenging environment. This paper is an assessment of the first cohort in a new executive training initiative called LEADERLABS, the 10 Essential Skills Executive Leadership Program, which is built on a foundation of both biblical and social science research. A quantitative analysis of pretests and posttests suggests that the training had a substantial, and at times statistically significant, impact on the participants, with potential for this new knowledge about leadership to be integrated into staff and congregational operations.

Key Words: leadership, pastors, 10ES ELP LEADERLABS

Introduction

Sociologists Whiteford and Ganen (2015) have argued that the subject of leadership has received little attention in sociological journals in recent years. From 1994 to 2014, they found the term "leadership" in only 31 out of 2,848 articles in six key journals published by the American Sociological Association. This is not to say that leadership has never had the attention of sociologists or social scientists. Max Weber's (1922/1978) classic study of the types of

leadership and authority is well known, as are, to some lesser degree, the works of Michels (1968), Bendix (1963), and Useem (1986), who followed in his tradition. Also, many popular authors on leadership in the last few decades have been trained in sociology or the social sciences, or have used sociological research in their writings (Gardner 1989; Blanchard et al. 2004; and Hatch et al. 2013). One very important article on sociology and leadership has appeared in what many consider a classic text in the field (Guillen 2010). And to the point of this paper, there has even been at least one sociological article on the subject of leadership in the church (Regehr 1979). It is not clear why there is such a dearth of attention to the subject in recent years, but Whiteford and Ganen (2015) have pointed out that, for sociologists, leaders matter less than the structures surrounding them. But as Hersey (1985) argues, different structures and situations require different types of leadership. This is certainly true in the Christian church today, which is undergoing a number of changes and therefore a number of challenges.

Challenges to Pastors and the Church

Although Christianity is growing in many parts of the world, especially outside the west, the Pew Research Center reports that between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the United States population fell from 78.4% to 70.6% ("America's Changing Religious Landscape" 2015). Recent research also suggests that less than 20% of Americans regularly attend church. A study by Hadaway and Marler in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* shows that only about 52 million people worship each week in the United States, which is about 17% of the total population. Church attendance has apparently been declining for several years, with the biggest drops in the Catholic and mainline churches. Meanwhile, Evangelical churches have dropped comparatively little (Hadaway and Marler 2005).

The religiously unaffiliated, however, often referred to as the "nones" (either atheist, agnostic, or simply not affiliated with any specific religious faith tradition), have increased from 16.1% in 2007 to 22.8% of the population in 2014. Christian churches are also becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and religious intermarriage also appears to be increasing. The Pew Research Center reports that of Americans who have married since 2010, 39% are in religiously mixed marriages. This compares with only 19% among those that married before 1960. The biggest increase is in marriages where one of the spouses is unaffiliated (from only 5% before 1960 to around 20% in 2015 ("America's Changing Religious Landscape" 2015).

While many churches are growing in size, it is the smallest churches (attendance less than 50) and the largest churches (attendance more than 2000) that seem to be growing the most. Mid-sized churches (100 to 299) are generally not growing or are in slight decline. Michael Bell (2009) points out that most church attenders in the United States attend big churches. Half of them attend churches larger than 400 and many of these are experiencing

church many times that size. In fact, out of every 100 churches, the one largest church (at least 4000 attenders) would have as many attenders as the lowest 70 churches combined! Bell argues that this has significant implications for denominational structures and for pastors.

Another apparently growing trend is an increasing number of unpaid clergy in the profession. Most mainline churches still pay their pastors (only about 2% are unpaid), but about 30% have a part-time, paid pastor. Lisa Cannon Green (2016) argues that more and more denominations expect their pastors to earn their livelihood in secular jobs. According to Kurt Fredrickson at Fuller Theological Seminary, there seems to be a growing trend toward bi-vocational ministry in both mainline and evangelical churches, especially in the smaller churches. This is not unrelated to declining church attendance, as well as the fact that financial giving by church members seems to be declining (quoted in Burgess 2013).

This situation is compounded by an increasing debt taken on by seminary students. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, of the seminary students who graduated in 2011 with a Master of Divinity degree (the typical degree for a full-time pastor), more than 25 percent amassed more than $40,000 in educational debt, and five percent accumulated more than $80,000 in debt. If they are fortunate enough to get a full-time job as a pastor, the average median wage is only $43,800 ("Occupational Employment and Wages" 2016).

Given the data presented above, it would not be unexpected that clergy are leaving the ministry in greater numbers than ever before (Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea 2012). Popular estimates range from 1,500 per month to 5,000 per month (Blake 2010). But there seems to be little scientific evidence that supports these large estimates. In 2015, Lifeway Research surveyed 1,500 pastors of evangelical churches and found an estimated 13 percent of senior pastors in 2005 had left the pastorate ten years later for reasons other than death or retirement. The three reasons most cited were "I took the church as far as I could" (54%), "My family needed a change" (34%), and "Conflict in the church" (23%). Mentioned somewhat less frequently were "The church did not embrace my approach to ministry" (19%), "Church had unrealistic expectations" (18%), and "Not a good fit for the church (18%) (Stetzer 2015).

But all pastors, those who have left and those who have stayed, report that the role of pastor can be exceedingly stressful. As Green (2015) reports:

- 84 percent say they are on call 24 hours a day.
- 80 percent expect conflict in their church.
- 54 percent find the role of pastor frequently overwhelming.
- 53 percent are often concerned about their family's financial security.
- 48 percent often feel the demands of ministry are more than they can handle.
- 21 percent say that their church has unrealistic expectations of them.

Lifeway Research also pinpoints shortcomings in their churches that make a pastor's role more challenging (Green 2015):

- 71 percent of churches have no plan for a pastor to receive a periodic sabbatical.

- 66 percent lack a support group for the pastor's family.
- 66 percent have no lay counseling ministry.
- 33 percent don't have a list of counselors for referrals.
- 30 percent have no document clearly stating what the church expects of its pastor.
- 16 percent lack a process for church discipline.

While both those who left and those who stayed agreed that their jobs as pastors were demanding, former pastors who left were much more likely to report that they felt isolated, that the church had unrealistic expectations, and that their congregation did not provide genuine encouragement to their family. Congregations and communities can have high expectations of pastors and place burdens on them to perform their roles perfectly (Pooler 2011). These expectations add social pressure that legitimizes the idealized pastoral role and identity, an identity that is often internalized and becomes a way of thinking about one's self. Perhaps even more alarming is that *Christianity Today* reports research showing that more than one out of four pastors say they have been forced out of a church due to personal attacks and criticism from small congregational factions, which in turn puts them at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and health problems ("Spotlight: Pastors Fight and Flight" 2012).

The Need for Leadership

These changes, especially where there is a growing congregation, present both challenges to and opportunities for a pastor, especially a young pastor whose primary goal is to build a large church. Although some pastors might thrive in a church's dynamic growth stage, Collin Hansen (2016) points out that the struggle to manage growth is one of the reasons so many pastors are leaving their church. He argues that the church needs pastoral and executive leadership. The pastor cannot do his or her job according to Scripture if he or she is tied up in administration. According to Hansen:

> A growing congregation is the kind of problem every pastor wants. Not many pastors overall see much if any numeric increase in membership during their tenures . . . But growth brings its own challenges. And many pastors who thrive in a church's dynamic growth stage struggle to manage increasingly complex structures and leadership burdens when their congregations demand them. (2016)

It is in this changing environment that Fred Garmon, the president and founder of LEADERLABS, a relatively new program designed to bring better leadership to the church, hopes to make a difference. Garmon holds a bachelor's degree in Biblical Studies, and a master of divinity degree with an emphasis in Ministerial Ethics. He also has a PhD in Organizational Leadership, where his doctoral dissertation examined leadership and conflict in the ministerial context. LEADERLABS is an executive leadership training program focused primarily on pastors

and administrators in the church. The 10ES ELP (10 Essential Skills Executive Leadership Program) is a leadership institute designed to expose leaders and managers to leadership concepts, an inspirational learning environment, and a secure learning community.

The authors or this article were contacted by Garmon to conduct an assessment of the first cohort of pastors and church administrators to complete the 10ES ELP training. Program evaluation (also known as outcome assessment) is a methodology increasingly used by sociologists to determine whether a social intervention is producing the intended results (Babbie 2013). Because we were contacted several months before the program began, we were able to develop a more comprehensive strategy, including a pretest and posttest component. While the training reflected many Biblical references, it also included scholarly theory and research from well-known social scientists in the field of organizational behavior, leadership and management, and others that have been influenced by social science research (for example, Gardner 1989; Blanchard et al. 2004; Hatch et al. 2013; and Bennis 2009).

In addition to eight all-day training sessions (scheduled once a month, excluding summers, from February to November, 2016), participants completed several standard assessment instruments (usually one prior to each training session) to measure their own strengths and weaknesses in leadership. These included The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI form M), Myself as a Trust Builder Self Survey, The CPI 260 Coaching Report for Leaders, the Northouse Servant Leadership questionnaire, the LBAII – Leader Behavior Analysis, the LPI Leadership Practices Inventory / Self and Others, Leading Change at Every Level, the TKI – Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, and Hogan's MVPI – Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory. Results of these instruments became part of the training process itself.

The 10ES ELP covered the following ten general subject areas:

1 – Integrity of the Heart (Character and Credibility)
2 – Self-Awareness (Looking in the Mirror)
3 – Servant Leadership (Descending into Greatness)
4 – Situational Leadership (Learning to Juggle Styles)
5 – Exemplary Practices (Behaving Rightly)
6 – Leading Change (Navigating Uncertainty)
7 – Leading Conflict (Conflict Positive Environments)
8 – Water You Swim In (Culture)
9 – The Road Ahead (Personal Development Plan)
10 – Developing a Bench (Team Development Plan)

The Assessment Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of this program, a two-pronged approach was used. A quantitative assessment was based on a pretest and posttest survey instrument that was

administered to the participants on the beginning of the first day and at the end of the last day. The survey consisted of 64 questions that, when combined in various ways, measured 11 different desired outcomes of the participant's assessment of their leadership characteristics. These 11 outcomes (or goals) are:

Outcome 1: Participants in ELP will improve their understanding and practice of servant leadership.

Outcome 2: Participants in the ELP will improve their spiritual understanding of leadership.

Outcome 3: Participants will increase their values on a scale of leadership trust, honesty, integrity and ethics.

Outcome 4: Participants will increase their self-awareness concerning their own leadership gifts, personality style, and personal values.

Outcome 5: Participants will grow in their emotional intelligence.

Outcome 6: Participants will be able to understand four leadership styles, how these styles "fit" the four developmental levels of their followers, and how this knowledge plays out in different contexts.

Outcome 7: Participants will increase their understanding of organizational culture.

Outcome 8: Participants will increase their ability to navigate uncertainty in their organizations and the changes occurring outside their organization.

Outcome 9: Participants will increase their ability to see their leadership not just as an individual quality, but also as an aspect of team development.

Outcome 10: Participants will increase their ability to give and receive feedback to those in their church or organization.

Outcome 11: Participants will demonstrate the ability to anticipate conflicts in their churches or organizations before they appear, and when they do occur, to turn them into a positive force for constructive change.

Statements to measure each of these goals were taken in part from more extensive assessment tests that were administered during the course of the program, as well as from questions that have been used in previous studies of organizational leadership. There were also four questions included in the pretest that measured their hopes for the program, which were also then slightly revised in the posttest to measure whether those expectations had been reached. In addition, there were several demographic questions about variables that might affect the outcome of their participation in the program: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, level of education, current employment status, type of work, size of organization, income, and race/ethnicity. Finally, several questions were added to the posttest to determine their attendance record and their ratings of various components of the program. A copy of the pretest and posttest surveys and a list of statements that were used in the survey to collectively measure each of the intended outcomes can be acquired from the authors by

email. A more qualitative assessment was done through a participant observation approach. The author attended all of the eight day-long programs, observing and then interviewing participants during breaks and lunch to ascertain their response to the program in "real time."

Description of Pretest Survey Respondents

The pretest survey was designed during the six months leading up to the initial meeting in February, 2106. The pretest was administered during the first hour of the first full session on February 3. There were 49 respondents – 42 males and 7 females. Almost all of the respondents were white, married, and about one half had children in their home. They ranged in age from 23 to 75, in education from less than high school to the doctoral level, and in family income from between $20,000 to over $150,000. Most were employed full-time as ministers.

Results of the Pretest

As a whole, the first group of LeaderLabs participants ranked themselves fairly high (7-8) on spiritual leadership and leadership trust, as well as on their hopes and dreams for the LeaderLabs program. They ranked themselves somewhat high (6-7) on servant leadership, leadership gifts, emotional intelligence, organizational culture, team leadership, and providing feedback. Their lowest ratings (5-6) were on understanding their own leadership style, dealing with organizational change, and dealing with conflict. Table 1 provides a summary of these data.

TABLE 1: MEAN AVERAGES FOR 11 LEADERSHIP VARIABLES

VARIABLE	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
SERVANTLEADER	47	3.40	8.00	6.6383	.91901
SPIRITUALLEADER	47	5.50	8.00	7.5213	.58938
LEADERTRUST	46	5.40	8.00	7.2783	.69981
LEADERGIFTS	47	3.83	7.83	6.2057	.87657
EMOTIONALINTEL	47	4.25	7.63	6.1729	.83224
LEADERSTYLE	47	3.60	8.00	5.8766	1.07909
ORGANCULTURE	47	3.60	8.00	6.8128	.85303
ORGANCHANGE	47	3.83	7.17	5.5603	.72267
TEAMLEADER	47	4.75	7.88	6.5266	.71139
FEEDBACK	47	2.40	8.00	6.0596	1.14202
CONFLICT	47	3.86	7.43	5.8541	.77819

The data were broken down by some of the demographic variables that were thought might have an influence on their perception of leadership in general and their assessment of their own abilities as a leader. No statistically significant differences (< .05) on any of the 11 variables were found regarding gender (comparing male with female), education (comparing college education or above with less than a college education), size of the organization or church (comparing less than 20 people with more than 20 people in their organization or church), and family income (comparing less than $60,000 with more than $60,000).

However, when the data were broken by age (over 40 vs. under 40), statistically significant differences (<.05) were found on 7 of the 11 variables (servant leadership, spiritual leadership, leadership gifts, understanding your leadership style, dealing with organizational change, team leadership, and giving and receiving feedback). The 40 and over group was higher on all 11 variables, but the difference was statistically significant on only 7. Table 2 (on the next page) provides a detailed picture of these data.

TABLE 2: MEAN OF 11 VARIABLES GROUPED BY AGE

VARIABLE	AGE	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
SERVANTLEADER	>= 40.00	33	6.9091	.70016	.12188
	< 40.00	12	6.0167	1.16762	.33706
SPIRITUALLEADER	>= 40.00	33	7.6364	.42889	.07466
	< 40.00	12	7.2083	.85169	.24586
LEADERTRUST	>= 40.00	32	7.3813	.68412	.12094
	< 40.00	12	7.0500	.74407	.21479
LEADERGIFTS	>= 40.00	33	6.4646	.71048	.12368
	< 40.00	12	5.4722	.96618	.27891
EMOTIONALINTEL	>= 40.00	33	6.3220	.77247	.13447
	< 40.00	12	5.8125	.86848	.25071
LEADERSTYLE	>= 40.00	33	6.1333	.90646	.15779
	< 40.00	12	5.2000	1.29895	.37497
ORGANCULTURE	>= 40.00	33	6.9030	.75684	.13175
	< 40.00	12	6.7000	1.09045	.31479
ORGANCHANGE	>= 40.00	33	5.6818	.64329	.11198
	< 40.00	12	5.1528	.68703	.19833
TEAMLEADER	>= 40.00	33	6.6894	.67685	.11782
	< 40.00	12	6.1354	.71402	.20612
FEEDBACK	>= 40.00	33	6.2606	1.01795	.17720
	< 40.00	12	5.5000	1.38957	.40113
CONFLICT	>= 40.00	33	5.9567	.72447	.12611
	< 40.00	12	5.6310	.90650	.26168

Results of the Posttest and Comparison with the Pretest

Thirty-nine of the forty-nine participants who completed the pretest completed the posttest on the last day of the program. A few people dropped out of the program and others were unable to be there for the last day. Table 3 shows the average mean scores for the 11 outcome variables that were measured. When the data were broken down by gender, the number of children at home, and the size of the church or organization, there were no significant differences on any of the variables and no clear pattern of more improvement over the other. However, when the data were broken down by income, participants with a higher

income reported higher scores on all variables than those with lower income, though none of these were statistically significant. Older participants also scored higher on 10 of the 11 variables in the posttest, as they had done in the pretest. The one exception was organizational change. Three of these variables were statistically significant – leadertrust, leadergifts, and leaderstyle. Finally, level of education also showed a difference. On 8 of the 11 variables, participants who had a college degree or greater scored higher than those without a college degree, although none of these were statistically significant.

TABLE 3: Average Mean Scores on 11 Outcome Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
SERVANTLEADER	37	5.20	8.00	7.0054	.67575
SPIRITUALLEADER	38	5.50	8.00	7.5789	.64228
LEADERTRUST	38	4.40	8.00	7.3053	.82099
LEADERGIFTS	38	5.50	8.00	6.8289	.64664
EMOTIONALINTEL	38	5.13	7.75	6.5033	.70080
LEADERSTYLE	38	4.80	8.00	6.6632	.82148
ORGANCULTURE	38	4.80	8.00	7.0737	.66968
ORGANCHANGE	38	4.83	16.12	6.2268	1.74751
TEAMLEADER	38	4.25	8.00	6.9211	.67747
FEEDBACK	38	4.00	8.00	6.5421	.97748
CONFLICT	38	4.29	7.57	6.0263	.76164
Valid N	37				

On all 11 variables, there was an increase in the average score from the pretest to the posttest, indicating a positive impact of the Executive Leadership Program on participant's perceptions of themselves as leaders (see Table 4 below). On seven of these variables, the change from the pretest to the posttest was statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that the 10ES ELP had a statistically significant impact upon the participants' (1) understanding and practice of servant leadership, (2) self-awareness concerning their own leadership gifts, personality style, and personal values, (3) growth in their emotional intelligence, (4) understanding of the four leadership styles, how these styles fit the four development levels of their followers, and how this knowledge plays out in different contexts, (5) ability to navigate uncertainty in their organizations and changes occurring outside their organization, (6) their ability to see their leadership not just as an individual quality but also in terms of team development, and (7) ability to give and receive feedback to those in their church or organization. It is perhaps not surprising that participants' (a) spiritual understanding of leadership, (b) understanding of organization culture, and (c) leadership trust, honesty, integrity

and ethics did not show a significant increase, because their scores on the pretest of these variables were already some of the highest. It is of some concern, however, that the change from the pretest to the posttest did not show a significant difference in their ability to anticipate conflicts in their churches or organizations before they appear, and when they do occur, to turn them into a positive force for constructive change. Although it did increase, this variable also showed one of the smallest increases of all of the variables and remained the lowest score of all of the variables on the posttest.

TABLE 4: Average Mean Scores on 11 Outcome Variables

	PRETEST	POSTTEST	DIFFERENCE
SERVANTLEADER	6.6383	7.0054*	.35643
SPIRITUALLEADER	7.5213	7.5789	.04323
LEADERTRUST	7.2783	7.3053	.00110
LEADERGIFTS	6.2057	6.8289*	.57725
EMOTIONALINTEL	6.1729	6.5033*	.37829
LEADERSTYLE	5.8766	6.6632*	.76928
ORGANCULTURE	6.8128	7.0737	.24919
ORGANCHANGE	5.5603	6.2268*	.63494
TEAMLEADER	6.5266	6.9211*	.38534
FEEDBACK	6.0596	6.5421*	.48088
CONFLICT	5.8541	6.0263	.12253
AVERAGE			
Valid N	6.40968247	6.78863637	0.363496

*Indicates Significant Difference at .05 Level

General Assessment of the ELP Program by the Participants

The participants were also asked to rate several parts on the 10ES ELP in terms of their importance. The average scores (on a scale of 1 to 8, with 8 being the highest) are provided below:

The lectures on 10ES ELP	7.3889
The PowerPoints on 10ES ELP	7.0833
The videos on 10ES ELP	7.0833
The workbooks for each session	7.1667
The breaks to talk with other participants	7.0833

The quality of the lunches	6.8056
The assessment instruments	7.8056

The participants were then asked to rate (with the same 1 to 8 scale) the 10 Essential Skills in terms of their significance to them at this point near the end of the program. The results are provided below:

Integrity of the Heart (Character and Credibility)	7.8286
Self-Awareness (Looking in the Mirror)	7.9143
Servant Leadership (Descending into Greatness)	7.8571
Situational Leadership (Learning to Juggle Styles)	7.6364
Exemplary Practices (Behaving Rightly)	7.4848
Leading Change (Navigating Uncertainty)	7.7059
Leading Conflict (Conflict Positive Environments)	7.8065
Water You Swim In (Culture)	7.4857
The Road Ahead (Personal Development Plan)	7.5000
Developing a Bench (Team Development Plan)	7.5357

It is perhaps notable that the evaluation of all 10 of the essential skills was higher for participants 40 and over than it was for participants under 40. But the evaluation of the different parts of the ELP program (lectures, PowerPoints, etc.) was also higher for the 40 and over group, with the exception of the breaks.

The participants were also asked to respond to four statements about whether their expectations of the program had been realized. These results are provided below (with the same 1 to 8 scale):

1. The 10ES ELP has ignited in me a passion to learn. 7.1842
2. The 10ES ELP has provided me with valid and reliable confidential feedback. 7.3421
3. The 10ES ELP has encouraged immediate application of what has been learned. 7.2895
4. The 10ES ELP has inspired me to impart to others what I have learned. 7.3947

The participants were also asked if they would be likely to recommend the program to someone else. The average score on this (using the same 8 point scale) was 7.800.

Insights from the Informal Interviews – the Qualitative Data

A number of informal interviews were conducted before and after each session, during breaks and lunch. Although this is "soft data," some tentative observations can be reached about how participants were experiencing the 10ES ELP in process, rather than at its conclusion. Several themes emerged.

From the survey data, it is clear that participants had high expectations for the 10ES ELP. On the pretest, they were asked to respond to four statements about their expectations (on a scale of 1 to 8). The statements and results were:

- I hope that the 10ES ELP will ignite in me a passion to learn. 7.7347
- The hope the 10ES ELP will provide me with valid and reliable confidential feedback. 7.7755
- I hope the 10ES ELP will encourage immediate application of what is learned. 7.8571
- I hope the ELP will inspire me to impart to others what I have learned. 7.9184

It is clear that participants had high hopes for the program, and many made sacrifices to be in the program. In addition to the cost of tuition, several had to travel many miles, often staying overnight at their own expense. One pastor from Indiana actually sold his new car (and bought a used one) in order to raise the money necessary for the tuition and the cost of transportation and housing each month. Many suggested that it was the connection to Fred Garmon that drew them to the program. Many of the younger pastors, who were in the process of church planting and building, hoped that the program would help them as their congregations and staff grew. But most participants interviewed suggested that they were looking for "practical" ideas about how do deal constructively with issues in their churches. This was very much reflected in many of the types of questions asked during the sessions, which tended to focus on specific problems the participants were experiencing and what the research showed about how a different leadership model might solve those problems, such as situational leadership in which different types of leadership might be required in different situations. This seemed to be true of participants with both small and large congregations. Many pastors stated that what they liked most about the 10ES ELP was that it was "practical," and they could apply it to their own experience as a pastor of a small church with no staff. One soon-to-be-head of a church-related nonprofit spoke about how he was integrating what he had learned from the training with what he had learned from the current director of the non-profit.

During the third session, participants were asked if they were applying any of what they had learned to their work. Even this early on in the training, several indicated that they were meeting with their staffs to discuss (and sometimes train them about) what they had learned, especially with regard to the ideas of self-awareness and situational leadership (which was rated the most favorite lab on the last day). After the session on situational leadership, one participant stated that she met with all of her staff individually to get their perspective on what she had learned. Another stated that he was beginning training for his staff on situational leadership at 7:00am the next day. Even though the official session on culture did not occur until the last meeting, many mentioned in their exit interviews the importance to their staffs and congregations of understanding church culture and denominational culture. As one person said, "The Church of God is a unique culture different from the general population – and it has not changed much in 15 years."

Others did not immediately apply what they had learned during each session, but were waiting for the "broader understanding" of putting all of the sessions together. This brought up the question of the spacing of the sessions, with some suggesting a shorter time span rather

than having to wait a year to put it all together. Some suggested that a more condensed schedule with sessions continuing into the evenings would allow for more informal discussion time and less tendency to forget material from month to month.

In general, most of the comments made during these interviews were positive and constructive. The overall sense was that many participants eventually began to realize how little they knew about leadership, especially about the importance of developing leaders in the church among their staff and their congregations. One participant who was taking this for seminary credit noted that the training was really helping him make connections with several things he was learning in seminary and as an associate pastor in his church. And others saw the 10ES ELP as a more personally life changing experience. As one of the older participants stated, "I have changed my whole perspective about people since the training; I am now less judgmental of people and I no longer put them into categories." Another stated "It taught me to grow in areas that I need to." And another person, noting that it is never too late to change, said that the experience had helped to push him in a new direction – going back to college at age 40. Finally, one perhaps unintended outcome of the program that came up frequently in the last month was the value of meeting fellow pastors and developing a relationship with them. One person even indicated that this was a key part of the training.

Summary

Both quantitative and qualitative components of the research suggest that the 10ES ELP LEADERLABS program had a positive impact on the participants. On every one of the stated eleven outcome variables, participants collectively scored higher, and 7 of these were statistically significant. Differences in age, income, and education were factors, with older, higher income and higher education participants generally scoring higher on the posttest, although few of these were statistically significant.

The participants who responded to the posttest also ranked the various parts of the 10ES ELP highly, with all but "the quality of the lunches" receiving a score of about 7 out of 8. The highest score (7.8056, which was substantially higher than any of the other parts) was received by the assessment instruments themselves. It is not clear at this point how or whether the participants used the assessment instruments outside of the actual sessions. It is also not known at this point whether the participants will carry out the "follow-up" recommendation to look at their individual assessments as a whole and try to get a picture of who they are. However, the fact that they scored the assessment instruments high is important because the cost of these assessment instruments may make them optional in the future. Of particular significance were the extremely high evaluation scores on the 10 Essential Skills in terms of their significance to them near the end of the program. All scored above 7 (on a scale of 1 to 8) and, with the exception of Exemplary Practices and The Water You Swim In, they all scored

higher than 7.5 out of 8. Self-Awareness took the top score (7.9143), but statistically there was little difference in the rankings – they were all high.

The positive quantitative outcome was very much reflected in the more qualitative interviews conducted before and after sessions, during breaks and lunch. Participants often spoke positively about what they were receiving during the sessions and about the potential to use this new knowledge with their staffs and their congregations. A few had actually begun to train their own staffs in the principles of the training, and some were beginning to apply these principles to their congregations.

A Word of Caution

Although this assessment of the 10ES ELP LEADERLABS program was overall positive, there are several limitations of the assessment that must be acknowledged. The surveys reveal data only about the pastors themselves and their perceptions. Whether these changed perceptions of themselves and their leadership capabilities will bring about changes in their churches, their staff, and their congregations is yet to be determined. One might argue that visible and measurable changes will not be evident for several years. An ideal assessment plan would measure a "state of the church" (with regard to things like presence of conflict, organizational culture, etc.) before the training and determine whether the pastor training program made a significant difference in the church, in its culture, how it deals with conflict, and even to what extent the changes led to an increase in membership.

There are also several methodological limitations of this study. The sample sizes for the pretest and posttest are very small, and therefore preclude placing a great deal of confidence in the statistical difference of the means. Assessments of future cohorts will hopefully provide a larger total sample from which to draw more confident conclusions. In addition, the survey instrument itself served as both the pretest and the posttest, which means that there could have been an instrumental effect on the posttest. Finally, not as much qualitative data was collected as desired. Time constraints and anonymity were limiting factors.

Conclusion

Both churches and pastors seem to be undergoing significant changes in recent years. Declining membership and declining attendance are counterbalanced by church growth in certain denominations, each presenting its own set of challenges. The Barna Research Group ("The Credibility Crisis of Today's Pastors" 2017) even suggests that pastors in general face a crisis of credibility, with Barna's research finding that only about one quarter of all adults in the U.S. hold a positive opinion of pastors in general, and a slightly higher percentage hold a negative opinion. Other research by Richard J. Krejcir (2016), who has been studying pastors

since the 1980s, suggests that things are actually improving. He argues that although the work hours are still long and the pay below a living wage, pastors are much happier with their congregations, and that churches are treating their pastors better today than in the past. However, Krejcir points out that there is still too much overwork because of a lack of training in church leadership. Programs like 10ES ELP LEADERLABS are a promising initiative that bring solid social science theory and data to the attention of pastors and the church. But more assessment research is needed to fully understand its potential. Sociologists that do evaluation or assessment research could make an important contribution to this process.

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