Organizational Sensemaking, Trust, and Church Planting

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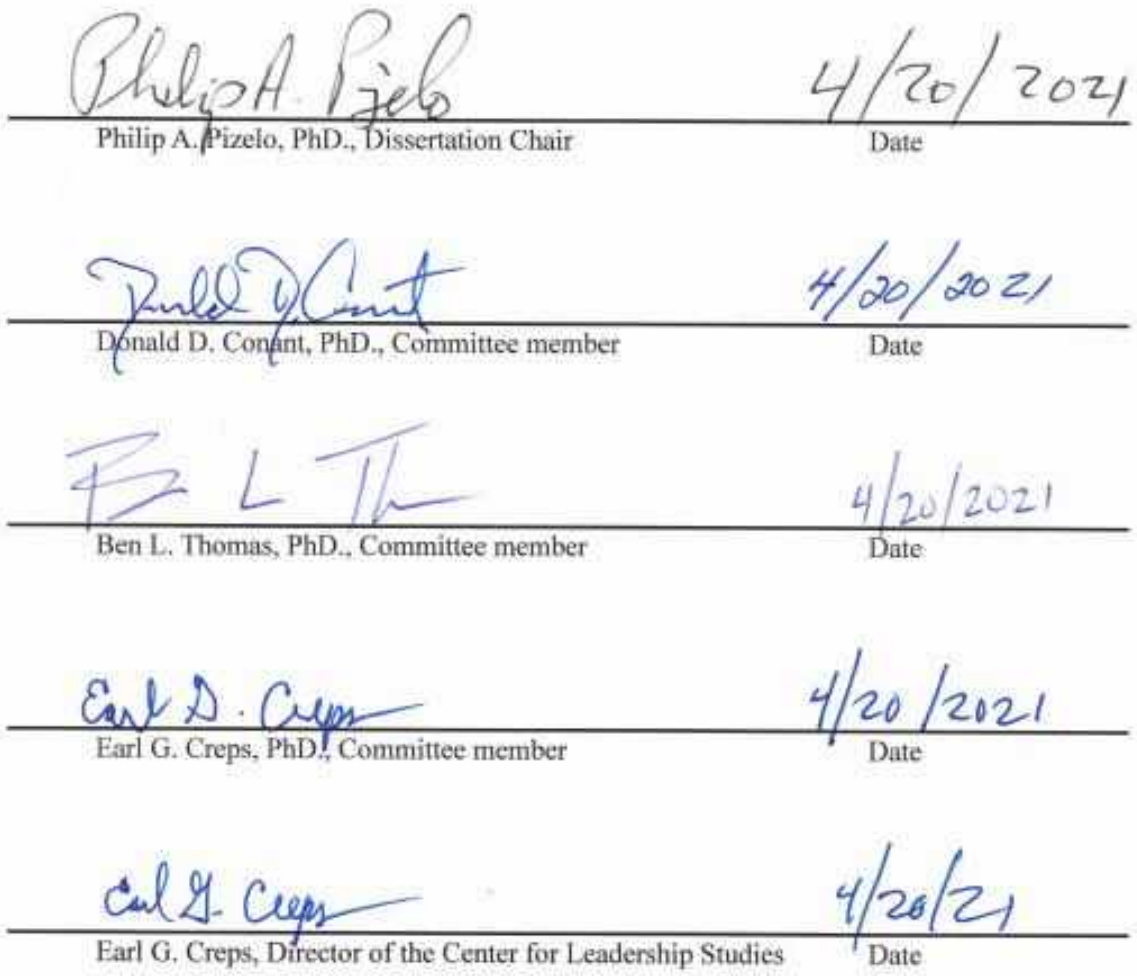

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Abstract

This mixed methods research study examined the lived experience of evangelical church leaders making sense of a disruptive phenomenon, the vision from the district superintendent to address chronic organizational decline by encouraging each church to plant new churches. All but one of the district churches appeared to agree to embrace this vision and take concrete steps to shift from an inward perspective on survival, restoring health, and revitalization to an activist focus on outreach to unchurched population groups in the respective neighborhoods. My assumption was this overwhelming support was based on trust in the superintendent (De Furia, 1996) and that the dominant leadership styles exhibited by the senior pastors (Korn Ferry, 2019) would reflect this trust and organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2005).

The interpersonal trust survey results suggested a concern with the trust environment but the analysis, integrating the qualitative data, could not resolve the numerous inconsistencies between the results from the two methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Findings suggested Weick's (1995) organizational sensemaking provided a framework for examining the phenomenological event but was not a predictive variable for trust nor leadership style choices. Concerning leadership styles, most leaders employed or preferred coaching, contrary to literature (Goleman, 2002). Unexpectedly, the superintendent engaged in sense-giving, shaping the sensemaking of the church leaders through robust support and guidance (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and resulting in increased evangelicalism (Bebbington, 2019) and successful change, meeting the vision metrics. This study contributed to research on sensemaking in a distributed organization, by leaders in a shared leadership structure, and within a religious institution.

Keywords: Organizational sensemaking, sense-giving, interpersonal trust, evangelical churches, church planting, shared leadership design, distributed organizational structure.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

> Sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creating as well as discovery. (Weick, 1995, p. 8)

Sensemaking is a common daily activity, conducted rapidly and unconsciously (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Weick, 1995). Within an organizational setting and in response to a profound disruption, sensemaking provides the impetus for making a decision that results in movement, preferably out of the predicament that caused the interruption and not into greater chaos (Weick, 2001). A practical example involved one district within a US Protestant denomination that faced chronic declining membership and influence. As a solution, its district superintendent recommended each church open a new church. This vision was not new in that Christianity had routinely sought to expand its presence since its beginnings as the Jesus movement (Bray, 2016) but was an uncommon solution in this century; a US Protestant church was more likely to pray about the situation and support the evangelistic efforts of others (Murray, 2001). However, the leadership response was unprecedented; district officials indicated the majority (97%) agreed with the vision and to take specific actions to plant a church within the first year.

This mixed methods study examined the responses of those leaders to the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), focusing on the sensemaking processes that resulted in a decision about the district guidance (Weick, 1995). Extant literature suggested opportunities existed for organizational sensemaking studies on distributed, religious organizations and on organizations governed by a shared leadership model (Maitlis &

Christianson, 2014). This dissertation contributed to the existing knowledge base by addressing some of these gaps. This chapter outlines the conceptual framework for this study, the purpose and methodology of the study, and the significance of examining organizational sensemaking.

Conceptual Framework

Sensemaking is a routine yet important aspect in communications processes (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). It is "a central activity in organizations, and one that lies in the very core of organizing" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 58). Coined in the 1920s, sensemaking gained significance for the work environment when Weick incorporated the construct into organizational theory in 1988. The resulting construct was different from interpreting or framing although it incorporated these activities and included cognitive dissonance, social dynamics, and leadership (Weick 1995). Issues that were unexpected, significant, novel, and that interrupted core activities facilitated the study of organizational sensemaking. Such overwhelming disruptions required the sense maker to focus attention upon the issues, thus providing the basis for research. The Weickian construct consisted of seven elements employed in a complex and interactive manner: reference cues, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, an enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity.

Weick (2001) applied sensemaking to historical calamities and innovation in high performing and high reliability organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Some researchers applied organizational sensemaking to a wide variety of referents, such as senior managers and founders (Anderson, 2017; Lefebvre et al., 2020; Parrish, 2020), supervisors and workers (Ashforth et al., 2020; Manolchev, 2020), entrepreneurs (Balen et al., 2019; Johnson & Bock, 2017; Osorio-Vega, 2019), and corporations (Mees-Buss & Welch, 2019; Van Lent & Smith, 2019). Researchers applied the sensemaking construct across diverse industries, including energy

(Lofquist et al., 2017), education (Bartunek et al., 2019; Marco-Bujosa et al., 2017; Sims et al., 2018), health care (Knibbe et al., 2017; Lunkka et al., 2019), tourism (Dane & Rockman, 2020; Liston-Heyes & Daley, 2017), the media (Chura & Westlund, 2019; Zaidi & Ahmad, 2020), government (Paparone, 2017; Ruel, 2018), and religion (Garner & Peterson, 2020; Hinderaker, 2017; Lequay, 2004).

Other studies explored using sensemaking to improve followers' psychological well-being (Loon et al., 2019), sense of fairness (Sparr, 2018), self-sufficiency (Bäcklander, 2019), employee and management attribution styles (Choi et al., 2019; Kessler et al., 2019), and other organizational contexts (Van der Merwe et al., 2019). From studies of leaders and organizational sensemaking, researchers identified sense-giving, the process by which a leader influenced the sensemaking processes of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Considering the sense-giving construct, researchers identified the vital role middle managers performed in enacting the vision or plan of upper management by providing plausible and viable solutions (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Often using story, metaphor, or visual representations, leaders helped others make sense of perceived contradictions, ambiguities, and confusing concepts with concrete mental images permitting positive action (Eriksson & Fundin, 2018; Muthusamy, 2019). These and other studies identified opportunities for furthering the understanding of the interaction of leadership and organizational sensemaking, calling for studies on distributed and religious organizations, on shared leadership structures (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Kudesia, 2017; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), and how middle managers made sense of disruptive phenomena (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Kudesia, 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and used sensemaking to effect successful change (Homan, 2017; Tushman, 2017). This study sought to contribute to this body of knowledge.

Purpose and Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experience of leaders, in a shared leadership structure within a particular Protestant denominational district, making sense of a phenomenon, the specific vision to address a persistent challenge affecting missional effectiveness by planting new churches. Because so many churches appeared to accept the vision readily, I expected the leaders would exhibit trust in the superintendent (Baer et al., 2018; De Furia, 1996) and that this trust would be a predictive variable in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995). I anticipated the leadership styles of the clergy likewise would reflect trust in the superintendent and sensemaking as they enacted the vision or declined to do so (Baer et al., 2018; Mayer et al., 1995).

The primary research question of this study was: What was the lived experience of church leaders of the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision? The supporting research question, to be addressed with quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), was: What are the relationships between organizational sensemaking of the leaders, trust in the superintendent, leadership styles, and the church planting response?

The design of this study was mixed methods, based primarily on transcendental phenomenology with quantitative instruments to provide insights on trust and leadership styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). As sensemaking is an organizational communications activity based on recall, cognition, and affect, qualitative methodology is employed commonly (Balogun et al., 2003; Filstad, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). The research plan relied on interviews of the leadership within a purposeful sampling of district churches and structural corroboration using informal discussions and cultural artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018; Schein, 2017). Through an inductive and iterative analytical process, descriptions formed the basis of codes and themes, contributing to identification of the essence of the

phenomenological experience. Quantitative instruments provided contextual information to support and to complement the qualitative techniques (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). The integration of these methods is the strength of this design. Integrative mechanisms included transformation of qualitative data to numerical values to determine statistical relationships and the joint display which facilitated side-by-side comparisons of contradictory data from each method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Within this study, the ethical treatment of participants and safeguarding of confidential data were paramount (Bazeley, 2013). The findings provided insights into organizational sensemaking, implications for theoretical and practical applications, and ideas for further research.

Importance of Sensemaking

Researchers applied organizational sensemaking to study its effect on individuals, groups, and organizations in a variety of contexts (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Brandt and Popejoy (2020) stated the importance of sensemaking was not in finding a solution but in exploring the options, evaluating the cues, and integrating diverse perspectives from social interactions to enact the environment, and remaining in ambiguity rather than fleeing from it until a plausible rationale could be articulated. Remaining in the sensemaking process facilitated resilience and organizational agility (de Almeida & Lesca, 2019; Russo et al., 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Assisting progress, middle managers provided sense-giving, leading their teams to enact change with less stress or lost productivity and encouraging the acceptance of a new organizational reality they provided (Filstad, 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Prior et al., 2018; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is the precursor to decision-making and provides the impetus for action (Weick, 1995). It is foundational in organizational communications and for strategic change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

Conclusion

This study was designed to further the literature on organizational sensemaking by examining the experience of church leaders in a distributed and shared leadership structure with respect to the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision to plant churches as a response to persistent organizational decline. Using a mixed methods research format, this study integrated qualitative techniques (interviews, discussions, and archival research), quantitative instruments (on leadership styles and trust in the superintendent), and techniques (correlations, comparisons, regression modeling, and integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses) to determine the essence of the leaders' experience and to define the statistical relationship between sensemaking, trust, and leadership styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Organizational sensemaking is an important aspect of organizational theory, incorporating reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interactions, an enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Organizational sensemaking breaks the inertia of ambiguity, confusion, or other results of significant disruptions to the organizational mission, functions, or health. Leaders, and in particular, middle managers fulfill an important function in enacting strategic change by providing direction, vision, and a plausible story to move their unit, team, or organization forward (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). However, opportunities existed to advance the literature on organizational sensemaking by studying the construct in religious organizations, by middle managers, in distributed organizations, and involving a shared leadership structure (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This study endeavored to contribute to the indicated needs, providing findings, implications, applications, limitations, and further research recommendations.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

> "Sensemaking is best described as a developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities, rather than as a body of knowledge." (Weick, 1995, Preface, p. xi)

This mixed methods research study was designed to examine the experiences of evangelical leaders trying to make sense of a phenomenon, the superintendent's vision to plant new churches, within an environment of organizational decline that had persisted for decades. The leaders, serving in an organizational structure that shared the responsibilities between the paid clergy and volunteers, reportedly accepted the vision readily. They agreed to generate concrete plans within the first year to plant churches, develop new initiatives to meet the vision parameters, or financially support the district in its efforts to empower and equip the churches. As I was surprised by the quick acceptance, I assumed the leaders must have had extraordinary trust in the superintendent (Baer et al., 2018; De Furia, 1996) and I expected to find evidence of this trust in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995) that could be measured by the results for multiplying and in the leadership styles they employed (Goleman et al., 2013).

In this literature review, I addressed the theory, practical application, and extant research results informing the design, conduct, and analyses for this study (Gilbert et al., 2018). This chapter focuses on the key aspects of this effort, sensemaking and the context for the churches in decline, leadership and the influence of trust, and the mixed methods research approach that I implemented.

The first important construct is sensemaking. A common activity (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014), sensemaking applied to organizational theory incorporated cognition,

emotion, and the organizational environment to explain the iterative processes used to develop sufficient sense of a prolonged interruption in the work or mission of an organization to make decisions (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Frequently studied, organizational sensemaking provided a framework through which researchers examined processes and behaviors in diverse industries, work environments, and purposes to influence innovation, training, collaboration, and resiliency (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Middle managers performed a significant role in change by interpreting the sensemaking of upper management for their followers, often employing sense-giving which guided workers in accepting an offered explanation and solution for the disruption (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, studies of sensemaking in a religious organization or context were limited (Anderson, 2019; Garner & Peterson, 2020; Miller,1998).

The second section of this literature review focused on the environment defining the evangelical churches in chronic organizational decline. Although the term evangelical was ambiguous and carried political as well as theological implications (Noll et al., 2019), for this study, it referred to the common perspective of Christians who emphasized a responsibility to actively share the Gospel with unbelievers (Bebbington, 2019). The evangelical churches in this research effort belonged to a specific Protestant denomination which provided the religious authority, resources for performing their mission, and defined the organizational structure and denominational culture (Chaves, 1993). Internal factors, such as age of the church and size (Johnson, 2001; Malphurs, 2011), and external factors of the changing US culture, demographics, and population movements (Barna Group, 2020; Bolger, 2012; Roozen, 2011), contributed to the situation faced by these churches. Options for rectifying organizational decline existed, provided the members were willing to assume the risks (Rainer, 2020; Ross, 2013).

The next section reviewed literature on leaders and the trust placed in them. These constructs provided additional data points for interpreting the sensemaking processes of the church leaders. Leadership lacks a definition universally accepted by scholars and practitioners although most agreed a leader exerted authority to meet specific expectations, as in leading change and innovation (Kellerman, 2018; Kotter, 2012; Lencioni, 2012). Effective leaders developed strong relationships with their followers, empowering them to be creative, autonomous, and forward-thinking, thereby helping them flourish (Anderson, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Neculàesei, 2019; Nullens, 2013). Leaders accomplished these goals by implementing leadership and motivational styles. In this study, I assumed a manager may perform the responsibilities of a leader but defined a leader situationally (Kellerman, 2018).

The definition of trust is generally accepted as a willingness to be vulnerable in a relationship that has consequences (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007). To decide to trust someone depended on multiple factors, such as the situation, the involved individuals and their relationship to each other or within the organization, the perceived trustworthiness of the other, and the proclivity to trust another person (De Furia, 1996; Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Lau & Liden, 2008; Rousseau et al., 1998). Studies examined this construct within various contexts, resulting in diverse and sometimes conflicting findings (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer, et al., 1995; Zand, 1997). The perceived trustworthiness of the leader influenced job performance, affective commitment, and the organizational culture, including risk-taking behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2007; De Furia, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Trust in a Christian church incorporated an additional dimension to account for trusting in God, the earthly institution representing a supernatural relationship, and remaining true to the faith (Baker, 2017; Vanzini, 2020).

The final section of this literature review discussed the study concept, a mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research techniques to accomplish specific purposes leveraged the strengths of each technique but introduced additional concerns for validity and reliability. Descriptions of the quantitative instruments and an overview of mixed methods analytical processes concluded the literature review.

This study endeavored to add to the body of knowledge by examining sensemaking within the shared governance model of a district within a US evangelical denomination with respect to a phenomenon seeking to address a chronic issue of organizational decline (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Rather than focusing on the theological aspect of churches trying to make decisions affecting their organizational future (Anderson, 2008; Carson, 2018), this study examined sensemaking from an organizational communications perspective within a distributed network of churches belonging to a denominational district (Miller, 2015). The primary sections are organizational sensemaking, evangelical churches, leadership, and the intersection of these topics with trust. This chapter concluded with a review of literature on mixed methods research.

Organizational Sensemaking

Organizational sensemaking has been studied widely (Iasbech & Lavarda, 2018; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking is a complex process embedded within organizational communications activities (Miller, 2015; Weick, 1995). It is more than simply framing, interpreting, or building cognitive maps that provide insights to remove or address ambiguity, confusion, uncertainty, and other disruptions (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking uses a foundation of identity, reconstructs reality in terms of the past, and enacts an environment from which cues are recognized and extracted continuously. Sensemaking takes into account

cultural expectations and is driven not by the accuracy of perceptions but by plausibility. Once sense is made of an issue or problem, the sense maker can initiate action to address the disruption, to avoid it, or to intentionally delay (Weick, 1995).

Although sensemaking has been considered a process conducted daily (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014), Weick (1995) indicated organizational sensemaking is most discernable with respect to issues that are unexpected, significant, and disruptive of an organization's activities. Such issues required focused attention to restore order or develop alternatives to address the interruption since routine or historical solutions were ineffectual. Researchers conducted studies to better define Weickian sensemaking (deRond et al., 2019; Khan, 2018), to explore specific elements within the construct (Jenkin et al., 2019; Ma & Peverelli, 2019), or to expand its applicability (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Loon et al., 2019). Other researchers applied Weickian sensemaking to examine or explain beliefs (Hansen & Magnussen, 2018; Ruel, 2018), events (Furey & Rixon, 2019; Magnussen et al., 2018), and situations (Kim & Lee, 2019; Pienta et al., 2018). Research addressed sensemaking by individuals in organizations (Balogun et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), by organizations within their own structures (Harris et al., 2020; Krogh, 2018), or with respect to external stakeholders (Lupton & Maslen, 2018; Park et al., 2018). Most studies addressed sensemaking within for-profit (Chua & Westlund, 2019; Pratt, 2000) and public organizations (Svensson & Hällgren, 2018; Weick, 1993). Many noted the role leadership fulfilled in the organizational sensemaking process to effect change (Bartunek et al., 2019; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) or to guide others in developing their own understanding and responses (Bhappu & Schultze, 2019; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Extant literature contained research on organizational sensemaking (Lowe & Rod, 2018; Vlaar et al., 2008) and on organizational

challenges within Christian churches and denominations (Anderson, 2019; Garces-Foley, 2007; Miller, 1998), but few studies addressed the intersection of sensemaking in religious institutions (Garner & Peterson, 2020; Lian, 2009).

Many studies used the terms “sensemaking” and “making sense” to indicate developing an understanding or explaining perceptions or actions of individuals (Leijonhufvud, 2016; Roberts, 1999) or organizations (Wittberg, 1997) but did not use Weickian sensemaking. For consistency, this study is bounded by organizational sensemaking as defined by Weick (1995).

Weickian Sensemaking

Weick (2001) studied cognition in his dissertation, completed in 1961. From this study, Weick discerned a complexity that exceeded cognitive dissonance. Initially, Weick (1995) focused on critical sensemaking, that which was conducted in preparation for or within crises, particularly those that resulted in calamities. The Mann Gulch disaster in 1949, for example, concerned a dozen smoke jumper forest firefighters who, overwhelmed by the rapid advance of a fire, were unable to make sense of their situation and the instruction of their leaders, and perished (Weick, 1993). Weick, analyzing the collapse of sensemaking within the team, examined structural, symbolic, and contextual cues.

Subsequent research by Weick (1995) delineated the process of sensemaking in organizations. When an organizational member realized it was not “possible to take things for granted...that it has become impossible to continue automatic information processing, the question becomes, why is this so? And, what is next?” (p.14). This awareness to seek meaning from the disruption engaged sensemaking, which has seven elements: reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, an enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity. These elements were not linear nor prescriptive but interactive, iterative, and

interdependent, invoking communications involving the culture, symbols, and structure of the organization. This process provided an impetus for action. Weick did not prioritize the seven principles in his construct. This review begins with reference points.

Reference Points

Within the organizational environment exist cues that provide context, such as indications of how projects are progressing, hints of social acceptance or doubt, and warning of changes that threaten or that provide opportunity (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Routinely, a member within the organization makes sense of informational cues in a rapid, almost effortless manner, and often without consciously realizing her participation in the process. Within prolonged disturbances, however, the member focuses on the information, first consciously noticing the disruption and then seeking cues to define, interpret, and understand the impact for a quick solution. If unsuccessful, Weick indicated "people take increasingly strong steps to manage it. They begin with omission, and then move to greater tolerance of error, queuing, filtering, abstracting, using multiple channels, escape, and end with chunking" (p. 87).

As the problem persists, cognitive abilities decrease and extracted cues are embellished or misinterpreted as the member increasingly fixes on the center of the issues, missing peripheral cues which provide context and which support better choices (Weick, 1995). The member experiences heightened emotions that further degrade recall and effective filtering of cues coming from the environment (Aslam et al., 2018; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; VanDerSteen, 2017; Weick, 1995). Meaning results from the connection between efforts framing and extracting cues. This inability to develop meaning or to make sense of the disruption because of the dwindling depth of focus can be exacerbated by the individual's identity construction: who they are within the organization and what expectations they perceived are placed upon them.

Identity Construction

The identity of the individual is based on roles, experience, ontological worldviews, cultural expectations, emotional intelligence, and other factors (Aslam et al., 2018; Goleman et al., 2013; Kudesia, 2017; Muthusamy, 2019; Waeger & Weber, 2019; Weick, 1995). These identities influence the ability of the individual to develop perspective, filter cues, and interpret the environment to devise plausible meaning. Further, the identity of others, with whom the sense maker interacts, affects the sensemaking process; "who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). Within a stressful disruption, the individual displays their identity plasticity, the various roles they fill and the aspects of their identities that they choose to reveal to different groups in varying situations (Weick, 1995). The control is narrowed as cognition and affect change to focus more on self and escape. Conversely, an individual successfully navigating the sensemaking process may display intersubjective meanings, merging of self with other in a social connection in which the term we is used more commonly than the term I.

De Luca Picione et al. (2018) suggested the way a person frames their thoughts in conversations informs these connections to self, their affect, and their drive toward agency. In short, their modal articulation may provide a means to reflect on their sensemaking process. Although De Luca Picione et al. discussed the benefits of evaluating the linguistic modality longitudinally to reflect movement through the sensemaking process, they noted the choices of words reflecting duty, need, capacity, contingency, and intention provided an indication of the individual's subjective perspectives on self and the context in which the person finds himself. The identity of self, expressed through words and actions, is interrelated with the words and

actions of others to shape and decipher cues in the environment. Yet, the individual seeks not accuracy and consistency but plausibility and credibility to provide the impetus for movement (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Plausibility

Accuracy requires some stability for the integration of information of varying depths, origins, and complexities (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Within the sensemaking environment that is ambiguous, prolonged, and fast moving, the individual narrows the scope of cues accepted, emotions impact cognition, and accuracy is fleeting. Perspective is subjective and, particularly as the need for speed introduces significant risk in the business world, sensemaking succeeds by relying more on plausibility than accuracy. When a good decision is made, individuals justify it by implanting order retroactively and extracting patterns that suggested a linear progression supporting the capabilities of the decision maker (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Röth & Spieth, 2019; Weick, 1995). However, the justification does not accurately reflect the cues, identity, or process used to make that decision. The decision was the choice that seemed most coherent and plausible at the time. Weick indicated bold, innovative ideas typically align with the skills or experiences of the sense maker, energizing a social reaction for collaboration and enactment. As Weick et al. (2005) stated, “Sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (p. 415). Plausibility has a social aspect that incorporates credibility and identity.

Social Interaction

Weick (1995) stated “sensemaking is about accounts that are socially acceptable and credible” (p. 61); the story is plausible. This suggests Weick acknowledged the importance of

culture (Schein, 2017), group dynamics (Forsyth, 2014), and emotions (Goleman et al., 2013) within sensemaking. Culture consists of complex implicit and explicit learned norms based on shared experiences of a group and is unique within each organization, often also within subunits of each organization (Schein, 2017). As sensemaking progresses, the interpretations and framing of the issue must be communicated to those who will help make sense of the disruption and those who would engage to address the problem (Cooney et al., 2018; Einola & Alvesson, 2019; Weick, 1995). de Almeida and Lesca (2019) described this interaction as collective sensemaking, in which organizational members discuss and interpret ambiguous cues. These different insights and perspectives illuminate the meaning of weak signals and provide the organization warning, discernability, and agility (de Almeida & Lesca, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2019; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Such interpretations must be congruent with the organizational culture to effectively bridge the gap between where the organization is and where it needs to be to overcome the disruption (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Coffman & Sorensen, 2013; Lanzer, 2018; Weick et al., 2005). The perception of these others, if positive, further allows the leader to continue to lead, remain viable within the group, and provide stability and clarity in the ensuing decision-making processes (Forsyth, 2014; Miller, 2015; Weick, 1995).

Within the culture, group dynamics affected sensemaking (Forsyth, 2014; Weick, 1995). Members of an organization facing a persistent, debilitating concern may collaborate with each other to find common perspectives and to make sense of the concern. Schmachtenberger (2019) acknowledged the human tendency to relinquish control to others in order to return more quickly to a state of equilibrium in which ambiguity and uncertainty are at manageable levels. Negative influences on finding viable options could be a bandwagon effect, satisficing, or group think, processes by which members of the group or organization appear to agree to proposed solutions

(but do not agree) and fail to voice their concerns or the perceived cultural incongruencies (Forsyth, 2014; Harvey, 1988). The leader also encounters misinformation and distortion, which may be intentional or unintentional (Schmachtenberger, 2019; Weick, 1995). Yet, discussing perspectives and possible ideas with a variety of stakeholders increased the possibility of ownership of and enthusiasm for the resulting plan to address the disruption (Filstad, 2014; Muthusamy, 2019; Tushman, 2017; VanDerSteen, 2017; Weick, 1995). The diversity of perspectives sought and influences accepted constrain or promote favorable circumstances as the work environment is not static but enactive of human agency (Kirkpatrick, 2001; Weick, 1995).

Enactive Environment

The sense maker authors the environment (Weick, 1995). By involving others vertically and horizontally in the hierarchical organizational structure and by taking tentative steps to glean more information, the individual creates opportunities or limitations. The sense maker sorts and filters what he sees and hears. Those with whom he interacts shapes possibilities of the environment in a repetitive fashion, producing "part of the environment they face" (p. 30). Sensemaking is iterative, reciprocal, and roughly sequential; as cues are sorted, identities considered, social interactions encouraged, and actions taken or not. The environment changes, and construction of meaning is reconstructed in an ongoing process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Musca Neukirch et al., 2018; Weick, 1995).

The sense maker considers many factors that could inhibit or promote specific ideas, discusses these with others to determine the interest and plausibility, and empowers movement in the team or organization to act (Weick, 1995). One important element in the enactive environment is faith. The sense maker must have a concept of the future that is positive and attainable. A second element is prophecy. Weick stated, "people act in such a way that their

assumptions of reality become warranted" (p. 36). Expectations, based in faith or a lack thereof, can drive toward fulfillment of what is forecast rather than integrating with others to yield a potentially more viable solution. These expectations, and faith in them, result from past experiences and stories, recalled through reflection.

Retrospection

Reflecting on what solutions were used in the past, whether from personal experience or from the stories of others, is retrospection, an element of the sensemaking process (Gallagher, 2019; Weick, 1995). Yet, within the disruptive situation, an individual cannot recall an event that is useful. What often is recalled are "past moments of socialization" (Weick, 1995; p. 111), activities that became legitimized by the successful outcome in addressing seemingly similar issues and which secured the acceptance of others. Weick stated, however, recall is mood congruent; "past events are reconstructed in the present as explanations, not because they look the same but because they feel the same" (p. 49).

In an organizational sensemaking event, the individual is overwhelmed with streams of information for which divergent and conflicting alternatives may thrive, if some sense of order could be determined within the turmoil (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005). Instead of needing more information, the individual requires "values, priorities, and clarity about preferences to help them be clear about which projects matter" (Weick, 1995, pp. 27-28). Thus, the importance of retrospection. Retrospection permits hindsight bias, allowing the identification of key historical activities or behaviors that were not recognized as significant at the time but which can provide a framework within which to guide the sensemaker (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Röth & Spieth, 2019; Weick, 1995).

Seeking a solution for an issue that is unfamiliar, significant, and surprising requires experimentation (Heifetz et al., 2009; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Weick, 1995). However, this activity can increase tension as the plan is modified to meet organizational and environmental realities, potentially giving the appearance of indecision or error. Generalists and those who routinely improvise have more experiences and resources to garner to address disruption (Spreier et al., 2006; Weick, 1995). This suggests longevity in a leadership role or within the organization would facilitate progress, lower stress, and support competence in finding a solution while time continues to pass.

Temporal Continuity

In sensemaking, it is "more important to keep going than pause, because the flow of experience in which action is embedded does not" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 419). As the individual becomes aware that the disruption is sustained, affecting significant projects or the health of the organization, she must devote conscious attention to the problem until a course of action is accepted. As she continues to focus on the issue, stress heightens and cognitive abilities deteriorate in a downward spiraling cycle, as more cues are ignored and less sensemaking achieved (Weick, 1995). Possessing emotional intelligence to understand and appropriately apply such affect in a useful or positive manner supports sensemaking. Emotional intelligence consists of personal and social competencies: awareness of the influence of one's own emotions on self and others; positive self-control; empathetic awareness of the social environment; and cultivating and maintaining networks of relationships to help others channel their emotions effectively (Goleman et al., 2013).

Meanwhile, other projects, challenges, or problems that existed before the individual recognized the interruption as profound continue to consume attention and resources, and

decisions as to their continued priorities are required (Weick, 1995). The bureaucracy of the organization influences this prioritization, as well as the involvement of stakeholders and communications patterns. An organization with a rational system, hierarchical and structured, tends to seek to enact options that are vetted and measured, suggesting a disinclination for innovation and difficulty in assessing diverse streams of information, thus thwarting effective sensemaking (Sanderson, 2006; Weick, 1995). Open systems focus on process over structure, facilitating sensemaking and supporting efforts to disrupt the downward spiral (Weick, 1995). Within the organizational culture, the struggling continues until the individual feels he acquired a sense of clarity or order and enacts a plausible plan.

Organizational sensemaking is a complex organizational communications process that incorporates reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, an enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity to remove or bypass ambiguity, equivocality, or other significant disruptions that matter to the success or continuation of the organization (Weick, 1995). Critiques of this sensemaking construct sought to address perceived challenges, expand its scope or depth, or apply the construct in innovative ways across diverse environments, industries, and disciplines (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Critique of Weickian Sensemaking

Many researchers studying Weickian sensemaking suggested improvements (Islam, 2019; Saleem et al., 2018; Zhang & Soergel, 2020). Some researchers concluded the construct did not incorporate a sufficient emphasis on cognition (Attfield et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019), emotion (Jiang et al., 2018), or on environmental factors like geography (Introna, 2019) and culture (Karikari & Brown, 2018; Sinha & Bathini, 2019). Namvar et al. (2018) sought “to consolidate the essence of diverse sensemaking perspectives into a simplified blueprint” that could be

leveraged to advance integration of new information systems within organizations (p. 1). Fatien Diochon and Nizet (2019) did not reduce the complexity but highlighted specific elements, comparing ethical sensemaking to a fabric made with threads of cognition, rationality, and objectivism intertwined with affect and reflexivity. Other studies expanded the construct (Crawford et al., 2019; Kataria et al., 2018; Musca Neukirk et al., 2018). Sandberg (2019) suggested diversifying perspectives would yield radical innovation through sensemaking. Introna (2019) encouraged decentering sensemaking to emphasize physical elements surrounding the sense maker. Weick (1995) referenced such aspects as contextual considerations but did not elaborate.

Weick (2001) seemed to prefer practical applications of sensemaking, noting that "calling a situation a mere problem that necessitates a small win moderates arousal, improves diagnosis, preserves gains, and encourages innovation. Calling a situation a serious problem that necessitates a larger win may be when the problem starts" (p. 440). Acknowledging the theory behind the principles is important but the utility of sensemaking is its application to real world problems, by framing the situation, by recognizing the attitudes and perceptions of those in the situation seeking to find a footing by which to take steps forward, or by seeking to influence sensemaking in the near and strategic terms (Brandt & Popejoy, 2020; Weick et al., 2005). Wieck (2001) indicated it is the application that can change society or the world, one step at a time, one person at a time, one organization at time.

Applications

Studies of practical organizational sensemaking incorporated historical activities and ways to influence future sensemaking. Analysis of past sensemaking activities included a study on a dam collapse (Paulo Cosenza, et al., 2018), oil spills (Furey & Rixon, 2019; Kessler et al.,

2019), and from research projects like the Lupton and Maslen (2018) study of the experiences of Australian women applying new virtual health technologies offered by public health systems. Critical sensemaking studies examined the behaviors of stakeholders within a disaster, such as the mass migration of refugees into Europe in 2015 (Kornberger et al., 2019) or a run on an established bank in 2007 (Liff & Wahlström, 2018). Others studied high reliability organizations, including the integration of public rescue resources for the seafaring industry (Roberts, 2018) and municipal policing (Gallagher, 2019).

Considering prospective sensemaking, Samdanis and Lee (2019) studied its use for strategic decision-making in volatile art markets. Zuckerman (2019) examined efforts by institutions (education, health, community organizations, business, and non-profit foundations) serving children to predict necessary modifications to programs supporting their flourishing. Other research documented efforts to affect future responses to disruption, crises, and ambiguities by offering ways to train employees, as to enact more ethical decision-making processes (de Graaff et al., 2019), to normalize the value of pursuing social missions over economic gains (Osorio-Vega, 2019), or to recognize fault lines in team processes (Antino et al., 2019). Some researchers examined employee and management attribution styles (Choi et al., 2019; Kessler et al., 2019). From such studies, new but related constructs emerged (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Corollaries

Constructs related to Weickian sensemaking developed from numerous studies, of which sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Prior et al., 2018) and sense-breaking (Pratt, 2000; Vlaar et al., 2008) were the two most prominent (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sense-giving was an effort to influence the sensemaking processes of others by offering a specific perspective

and prescriptive solutions (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 2001). Sense-giving can result from leaders working openly with stakeholders (Prior et al., 2018; VanDerSteen, 2017). More commonly, leaders restricted access to or shaped available information to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty and encourage the acceptance of a new organizational reality (Filstad, 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Tushman (2017) emphasized the importance of the manager redefining employee identities to assuage threats to established protocols and processes. The acceptance of sense-giving was called sense-taking (Huemer, 2012; Lian, 2009; Rom & Eyal, 2018).

While sense-giving provided plausible meaning from which action can result, sense-breaking was the process of undermining the sense made previously and creating the opportunity for sense-giving (Pratt, 2000). Vlaar et al. (2008) developed a model that connected sensemaking with sense-breaking and sense-demanding; the individual with the broken sense of reality actively sought information to help comprehend the event. Such corollaries reflected politics and power relationships, withholding of information or transparency (Graaf, 2019; Harries et al., 2020; Maclean et al., 2018).

Studies on sense-giving explored macro and micro level processes, from the perspectives of the sense givers and the recipients. Some strategic sensemaking studies incorporated sense-giving within a business (Tisch & Galbreath, 2018), within an industry (Maclean et al., 2018), or in ventures or collaborative relationships between partner organizations (Park et al., 2018). Other research analyzed sense-giving to individuals at various hierarchical levels within the organization (Regan & Henchion, 2019), within teams or work groups (Einola & Alvesson, 2019), by managers (Abdullah & Ismail, 2019), or to influence the perceptions by the public or shareholders of the company (Van Lent & Smith, 2019). Weick et al. (2005) acknowledged

sensemaking, as originally defined, seemed sedentary and dependent upon retrospection when, instead, it was prospective, vibrant, and "infused with issues of sense-giving and persuasion" (p. 409). Other studies have emphasized the important role of middle management sense-giving (Bäcklander, 2019; Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018).

The Role of Middle Managers

Applications of these corollary constructs were numerous and typically involved leadership (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Lüscher and Lewis (2008) described the pivotal role middle managers fulfilled in sense-giving to assuage debilitating anxiety and resistance of workers during an organizational restructuring. Balogun and Rouleau (2017) reported middle managers impacted more than their assigned teams. As senior managers provided the vision for a new future, the middle managers brought these views to their teams to frame and balance the vision, persuading others laterally and vertically in the organizational hierarchical structure. Filstad (2014) concluded rigid sense-giving by upper management squelched the effectiveness of middle management to engage in sensemaking, thus stifling contributions, diminishing their legitimacy, and increasing resistance. Strategic sensemaking incorporated sense-giving for developing plans or using a series of goal-directed activities to ensure longevity and survival of the organization (Garreau et al., 2015; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

Resistance to efforts to construct meaning, particularly sense-giving not addressing the prevailing uncertainty, can stymie the sensemaking process (Filstad, 2014; Miller, 2015). Weick (1995) reframed employee resistance as "confronting the activity of the environment" (p. 33). Encouraging argumentation—debate, dialogue, and questions—increased the variety, diversity, and visibility of voices. Arnett (2019) indicated asking questions created space, slowed the pace,

and invited intersubjectivity. Often facilitated by middle managers, organizational sensemaking occurred everywhere frequently (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Weick, 1995).

Weickian Sensemaking Opportunities

The applicability of sensemaking to every form of and process within organizational theory seemed limitless (Weick, 1995). As noted, researchers examined Weickian sensemaking, studying its elements theoretically to develop models that simplified (Namvar et al., 2018), expanded (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Prior et al., 2018), or refocused the construct (Introna, 2019; Sandberg, 2019). Others applied Weickian sensemaking to a variety of institutions (Dahm et al., 2019; Lunkka et al., 2019) and organizations (Mackey et al., 2019; Oliver et al., 2019), from startup enterprises (Cunningham & Anderson, 2018; Saleem et al., 2018) to established institutions (Penney et al., 2018; Regan & Henchion, 2019) in health care (Lupton & Maslen, 2018; Penney et al., 2018), education (Jerome et al., 2019; Rom & Eyal, 2018), fine arts (Samdanis & Lee, 2019), and religion (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Gubi, 2019), amongst others.

Researchers examined groups or teams within organizational structures (Antino et al., 2019; Burke et al., 2018) and individuals (Choi et al., 2019; Sparr, 2018), analyzing the influence and significance with respect to organizational behaviors (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Kimmett & Muñoz, 2018), communications (Filstad, 2014; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), professional development (Sinha, 2018; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015), and structure (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Waeger & Weber, 2019).

These studies identified opportunities for research. They encouraged studies of sensemaking in distributed organizations, on shared leadership structures (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Kudesia, 2017; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and how middle managers made sense of disruptive phenomena (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Kudesia, 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008;

Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and used sensemaking to effect successful change (Homan, 2017; Tushman, 2017). Of the few studies on organizational sensemaking within religious institutions, most examined sensemaking in Christian churches (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Garner, 2017; Lian, 2009). The literature on sensemaking and religious organizations is addressed in more detail at the end of the next section of this chapter.

Summary of Weickian Sensemaking Literature

Sensemaking is a common human activity, performed daily (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014). Weick (1995) synthesized sensemaking with organizational systems, describing the resulting construct with seven principles: reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity. These principles interacted in a complex, iterative, and integrative manner that continued until a course of action was constructed that fit the noticed cues of the environment, met the expectations of self and others, and provided clarity and impetus for a way forward (Weick, 1995). Weick indicated organizational sensemaking is most discernable with respect to issues that are unanticipated and significant, requiring focused attention over time to restore order or find viable alternatives that address the disruption. Sensemaking was ubiquitous; it could occur within organizations of all sizes and complexity. Middle managers performed an important role in the sensemaking processes (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). These leaders adapted the sensemaking of their hierarchical leaders, providing guidance in the form of sense-giving to their peers and followers, assuaging concerns and focusing attention on solutions supporting organizational objectives (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Garreau et al., 2015). Extant research addressed theoretical and practical studies of the effect or framing of organizational sensemaking to understand communications processes, behavioral interactions, or interdependencies between teams, units,

organizations, and institutions. Few studies examined organizational sensemaking in religious institutions. I found none that explored shared leadership within a distributed structure making sense of change and that considered the influence of the trust environment on the process.

In this dissertation, the seven elements of Weickian sensemaking provided the framework within which to examine the common experience of church leaders making sense of a disruptive phenomenon to address chronic organizational decline within a US Protestant denomination. The next section reviewed literature on evangelical churches.

Evangelical Churches in Decline

The context in which organizational members engaged in sensemaking affected the outcome (VanDerSteen, 2017; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This section examined literature applicable to the context of the evangelical churches in decline. Beginning with a definition of evangelicalism, I subsequently discussed the importance and influence of denominationalism on identity, structure, leadership, values, ritual, culture, and relationships between the churches and the denomination (Chaves, 1993). Other influential internal factors were organizational age and life cycle, congregational size, and internal conflict (Roozen, 2016). External factors from society, geography, and changing demographic realities in the local areas exerted pressures (Johnson, 2007). Combining these factors with the personalities of the church members and the dynamics between the clergy, lay leaders, and congregations yielded a complex environment (Chaves, 1993). Considering the factors affecting a church do not negate its purpose: to restore fallen creation by being a sign of God's love and desire for reconciliation (Anderson, 2008) and thereby partnering with God in this mission, the *missio Dei* (Schirrmacher, 2018). This section concludes with a review of literature addressing organizational sensemaking in religious organizations.

Evangelical Churches

The members of evangelical churches emphasize adherence to four common Christian principles: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism (Bebbington, 2019). They profess the importance of a personal conversion of believers from a life driven by sinful desires to one that seeks a wholesome, trusting relationship with Jesus, of the active profession of faith to share the Gospel with unbelievers, of the primacy of the Bible, and of the significance of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus to provide eternal salvation.

What distinguishes evangelical churches from other Christian churches is this drive to evangelize, to share the Gospel widely in support of the instruction of Jesus, referred to as the great commission, to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Bebbington, 2019; Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). Evangelical Christians are a diverse mosaic of believers (Sweeney, 2019), denominations, and movements (Fisher, 2019) that include Roman Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Mormonism, Lutheranism, Mennonitism, and Christians of African American and Hispanic American ethnicities (Noll et al., 2019). Marsden (2019) likened the diversity of evangelicalism to a biological class with numerous species. For the purpose of this study, evangelicalism is based on the theological perspective, not the polarizing definitions within the US political arena and media (Noll et al., 2019). The evangelical churches in this study belonged to a specific US Protestant denomination, allowing this literature review to be scoped appropriately.

Denominational Aspects

Churches associated with a denomination inherit a defined culture, purpose, and organizational structure. Chaves (1993) recommended defining a denomination not by function

or member motivations but by its religious authority. Such authority controls access to religious goods, such as providing meaning and purpose, freedom from oppression like poverty or sin, or a promise of a caring community, wealth, health, or an enduring future, a way toward eternal salvation. This sociological definition permitted distinction of denominations from secular organizations that published materials or provided education, health care, and other similar services or products and from other not for profit organizations with an apostolic mission. This definition is widely accepted by researchers seeking to study power dynamics, operations, and management in denominations (Djupe, 2014; Ecklund, 2006; Frendreis & Tatalovich, 2011; Ward, Sr., 2018).

Denominations exert control over member churches by legitimizing authority and regulating resources (Chaves, 1993). Denominations define doctrine and set qualification standards to certify their leaders but may accept licensure from other denominations holding similar belief systems (Carter, et al., 2018; Djupe & Gilbert, 2003; Smidt, 2016). Denominations may assign clergy to specific pulpits (Cantrell et al., 1983). The role of the clergy is critical to the success of the denominational religious authority structure as the clergy enforce discipline and thereby develop each church's identity as a Baptist, Episcopal, or other (Chaves, 1993). This distinguishes the people of one denomination from those of another and supports the regional, national, or international denominational infrastructure (Cantrell et al., 1983).

The congregation is foundational as individuals join church congregations that affiliate with denominations (Chaves, 1993). Relationships are paramount and emphasized over the competing values of rules, adhocracy, and outreach (Boggs & Fields, 2010; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). In fact, the people are the heart of a vibrant and healthy organization (Beebe, 2011). They are consumers of the denominational publishing materials, financial supporters of projects of the

local church and of the denomination, and the laborers supporting Sunday schools and worship services (Chaves, 1993). All denominations sponsor groups that interact with the outside world to provide services or products to their congregations, such as foreign and home missions; "educational materials, publishing tracts, reports, and books; administering pension funds; giving or loaning money to congregations for building projects; and organizing denominational efforts in higher education" (p. 151). The denomination defines the leadership structure within churches.

Leadership Structure

The individual churches within a denomination typically reflect the dual structures of religious authority and resources (Chaves, 1993; Malphurs, 2013) managed by the three primary organizational elements: clergy, the congregation, and lay leaders (Djupe & Gilbert, 2003).

Clergy typically are considered the primary leaders of the local church, with authority conferred by the denomination, a theological calling from God, and recognition by the local church organization (Bray, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Keller & Alsdorf, 2013; Malphurs, 2013; Sturges et al., 2019). Clergy often have formal theological or religious education, demonstrate expertise and having been bestowed with gifts from the Holy Spirit, and infer a more intimate relationship with God (McNamee, 2011). Clergy fulfill many roles in the church and often are called by the names of pastor, priest, preacher, minister, and reverend (Ledbetter et al., 2016). Other names tend to be situational but may include shepherd, evangelist, chaplain, or missionary. Larger churches have more than one paid clergy, with the hierarchically higher clergy identified as the senior or lead pastor and other pastors by their positions (such as youth pastor, worship leader) or as associate or staff pastors (Becker, 1999; Olds, 2017). The leaders set the emotional character, model the desired virtues, and connect relationally with the others (Beebe, 2011). This establishes a steadfast, reliable, and predictable environment in which flourishing can be

promoted. The people provide the energy in the culture relying on the shared norms to constrain deviants, encourage collaboration, and seize opportunities (Schein, 2017).

A congregation consists of individuals who are not all religious professionals but who meet voluntarily and regularly for social reasons—to belong and to find transcendent meaning—in standardized religious activities like singing, chanting, or worshipping (Chaves, 2004; Christerson & Emerson, 2003; Stroope & Baker, 2014). These gatherings typically occur once a week, in the same location and at the same time, for a short duration. Members of a congregation, called parishioners or congregants, demonstrate their faith by providing financial support; being laborers in the worship services and accompanying programs, like childcare, music, Sunday school, and other weekly church programs; or involvement in outreach or missionary endeavors (Friday, 2017; Rainer, 2020).

A challenge to leadership is that the memories of church members are often longer than the tenure of the pastors, particularly in churches with extensive histories (Malphurs, 2011). Members will transfer the transgressions of previous ministers onto the newly installed minister, who may have no knowledge or understanding of this development (Creech, 2015; Friedman, 1985; Malphurs, 2011). Galindo and Mills (2016) warned efforts by the preacher to self-differentiate may result in conflict, sabotage, and resistance from the congregation. Further, "when a congregation loses confidence in the church's pastoral leadership, they vote with their feet and their checkbooks" (Smith, 2017, p. 69), withholding financial support before ceasing volunteering or permanently leaving the church, frequently without notification (Rainer, 2020).

Lay leaders are elected or selected as representatives from the congregation to participate in decision-making processes with clergy in a democratic fashion (Elliott, 2008; Sandvig, 1995). Congregational representatives may be in a formal position, as members in a governing or

administrative board, or informally exert influence by wielding power obtained by social standing within the congregation (Beach & Rutledge, 2019; Sandvig, 1995). Lay leaders, whether possessing formal or informal authority, identified themselves as followers of God more prominently than others in the congregation but typically chose their vocational identities as being more significant (McNamee, 2011). Lay leaders may be program leaders, lay preachers, committee chairs, or members, and can be called deacons, elders, delegates, evangelists, or disciples.

Denominations, through their religious authority and agency structures, provide a form of branding that influences the organizational structure, doctrine, and culture of member churches (Carter et al., 2018; Chaves, 1993; Djupe & Gilbert, 2003). The culture and structure outline the functions and responsibilities of clergy, lay leaders, and congregational members. Yet each church is unique, even within its specific denomination, and its health influenced by many other factors (Beebe, 2011; Ecklund, 2006; Forward, 1997).

Health Factors

A successful organization is the one that is healthy, focuses on its mission, values its employees, makes an impact on its community, and fosters commitments through its connections, convictions, compatibility, and character (Beebe, 2011; Coffman & Sorensen, 2013; Drucker, 1985; Lencioni, 2012; Schein, 2017). An evangelical church can fit within this description, using denominational resources to stay focused on its mission of stewarding Creation toward reconciliation and wholeness (*missio Dei*), impacting community through its outreach programs and internal shepherding for spiritual growth, and fostering commitments through discipling its members to demonstrate the virtues needed to flourish and facilitate the flourishing of others (Anderson, 2008; Beebe, 2011; Keller & Alsdorf, 2012).

Internal Influences

As in any organization, internal factors influence the health and fulfillment of the organizational mission and vision (Lanzer, 2018; Schein, 2017). In a business, the factors may be characterized topically, such as management, marketing, finance and accounting, production or operations, research and development, and management information systems (David & David, 2017). Health of churches, however, has been not routinely measured by such factors (Ross, 2013). Instead, it is assessed commonly by the religiosity of the church, that is, how closely the church adheres to the *missio Dei*, and by "nickels and noses," or the number of seats filled on Sundays and the resulting financial support (p. 75). Discussions of research results from surveys conducted by Barna Group (2016) and the national congregational studies (Chaves, 2014), among others, connect the health of churches to numerous factors including congregational sizes, organizational age, and conflict. In this section, I address available literature on these three.

Congregational Size. The size of a Protestant congregation reflects distinct characteristics: smaller churches operate more like extended families (Brubaker, 2009; Friedman, 1985; Galindo & Mills, 2016) while the largest churches resemble corporate businesses in processes used to administratively guide the large number of participants and programs (Stroope & Baker, 2014; Thumma & Bird, 2015). Chaves and Eagle (2019) reported "more people [in the pews] mean more resources, more staff, and more programming" (p. 5). Table 1 summarizes characterization of churches by size.

In 2015, 93% of all US churches served 400 or less parishioners, indicating they were programs-sized or smaller (Chaves & Eagle, 2019). Thus, most clergy positions are in smaller churches; the median sized congregation was 70 people. Most churches with 200 or fewer parishioners (family- and pastoral-sized) have one pastor assigned, some are part-time, but most

are paid. However, the majority of Americans who went to church attended corporate-sized churches or megachurches. More current statistics have been impacted by the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and the full effect has yet to be determined (Bird & Thumma, 2020).

Table 1

Protestant Church Sizes and Characteristics

Size category	Attendance size	Characterization
Family	Up to 50	A close-knit community, clan-like, tied to local neighborhoods but having minimal impact due to limited resources; typically homogeneous (Becker, 1999; Brubaker, 2009; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Galindo & Mills, 2016; Thumma, 2015).
Pastoral	51-150	A focus on communing with God with established rituals, building disciples through education and activity, while trying to maintain intimacy; seek to imprint values on local communities or distant lands through financial support (Becker, 1999).
Program	151-350	Shifting from an intimate environment to one focused on programs as the church grows, requiring new formal infrastructures to manage larger staff, resources, church programs, and volunteer programs (Thumma, 2015).
Corporate	350 - 2,000	More resources with attention on outreach to the local communities and leadership liaison with leaders of other large churches and non-profit and public organizations (Becker, 1999; Roozen, 2011). Appear impersonal due to the size of the facilities, number of staff, and greater responsibilities impacting personalization (Thumma & Bird, 2015).
Megachurch	2,001 and more	Often with multiple sites within a geographic region and typically offering more than five services each weekend (Edgell & Robey, 2015; Thumma & Bird, 2015). More diverse ethnically and likely to plant churches; leaders typically have great influence in the denomination and local region (Bird & Thumma, 2020).

Note: A megachurch is the largest form of corporate-sized churches but is often listed as a distinct size category (Bird & Thumma, 2020).

Church Ages. Like size, the chronological age or life cycle of a church provides insights on its culture and vision (Malphurs, 2011; Ross, 2013). When a new church is started, or planted, the vision is on outreach as the goal is to grow the size of the congregation. As the church

increases in attendance size, attention to the religious authority and agency structures becomes progressively urgent (Chaves, 1993; Malphurs, 2011). Continuous, incremental changes are implemented (Bolger, 2012), such as bolstering the administrative structure, programs for daycare and discipleship, and a workforce to serve in the programs (Malphurs, 2011; Roozen, 2011). If the church struggles to address these challenges, its attention turns inward, and growth slows (Malphurs, 2011). As solutions evade the church or the church seeks to evade the issues, the growth will stop and then plateau. The church must begin specific and intentional strategies to reinvigorate the growth to prevent an early demise, which would result in closing (Malphurs, 2011; Ross, 2013). As church attendance declines, the church has less resources—organizational, financial, and workers (paid and unpaid)—to incorporate into programs (Roozen, 2011; Ross, 2013). Malphurs (2011) reported 80-85% of US Protestant churches by 2010 were plateaued or declining in weekend attendance rates. Ingram (2015) recommended churches intentionally revitalize their programs every ten years to remain healthy. Without such a plan, churches, particularly those that are small and over 50 years old, become sedentary, lack confidence in their continued utility in the *missio Dei*, and decline until they close. Decline can increase the frequency and intensity of conflict (Roozen, 2016).

Conflict. Conflict is inevitable, and necessary for groups to grow more stable, develop richer relationships, and become more productive (Dudley, n.d.; Forsyth, 2014). Forsyth declared that if there is not enough conflict, then the group stagnates; if conflict escalates to result in high levels of tension, then the group experiences destabilization and disengagement by members. A church is no different—too little conflict and the church does not grow; too much conflict and the church may break apart, splitting or closing (Roozen, 2016; Starke & Dyck, 1996).

Internal pressures causing conflict in churches include inappropriate actions by staff, financial misappropriation or shortfalls, and power struggles within the clergy or with lay leaders (Cornelius, Jr., 2012; Dewar, 2016; Greer et al., 2014; Packard & Hope, 2015). Other sources of conflict are disagreements with the clergy enforcing their religious authority, incongruencies between church doctrine and member behaviors, including focusing not enough or too much on outreach, and social or cultural issues such as styles of music (Hinderaker & Garner, 2016; Sutton & Chaves, 2004). These issues are value-laden and challenge beliefs, anxieties, and perceptions within the congregation, resulting in members exiting the conflicted churches (Roozen, 2016; Starke & Dyck, 1996). Theological conservatism of the clergy and congregations explained 56.3% of the decline in churches in 2015 while an additional 18.5% could be attributed to the presence of conflict and the respective ages of the church, the senior pastor, and the congregation (Haskell et al., 2016). External trends also can foment conflict in churches and contribute to their decline (Bosch, 2011; Roozen, 2016).

External Influences

For decades, church attendance in the United States has been declining and society has become more secular (Barna Group, 2016; Bolger, 2012). Younger generations have not valued the authority and non-pluralist perspective of churches (Mercandante, 2014; Puffer, 2018), are not bringing their children to church (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017), and other generations are ceasing to attend, likely due to inconvenience or incompatibility with lifestyles (Barna Group, 2015; Nell & Mellows, 2017).

US Societal Changes. The changes in US society and culture over the past 70 years are developing an environment in which the institutional characteristics and virtues of Christianity are contested (Bolger, 2012; Stonestreet, 2018) and perceived as of questionable relevance or in

need of reinvigoration (Barna Group, 2020; Nell, 2015; Nell & Mellows, 2017; Walls, 2014). Between 1991 and 2004, the number of Americans not attending church nearly doubled, from 39 million to 75 million (Barna Group, 2016). By 2015, this increased to approximately 105 million Americans, or 44% of the adult US population. Mercandante (2014) explained individuals who no longer attended church claimed to be spiritual but not religious, joining millions of Americans who sought freedom from commitment, independence from organized groups, rejected dogmatism, and had a critical and open attitude. Bolger (2012) concluded "people want God but they don't want church" (p. xxvi).

US Demographics. Geographic realities—socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, and gender demographics—influence the perceptions of the congregations and outsiders which affect decision-making (Johnson, 2007; Roozen, 2011). Between 2000 and 2010, new suburban areas experienced twice the growth rate in population as older suburbs and large cities and four times the growth rate of rural, town, and small city settlements (Roozen, 2011). White evangelical denominations followed the suburban growth and experienced increased attendance in the churches while new churches in the big cities and old suburban areas attracted other racial and ethnic populations but did not reflect as significant an increase in attendance.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported nearly one in four (22.4%) clergy in 2018 were women but earned 20% less, by median assessment, than men. The posts held by women tended to be in smaller, rural churches, often half the size of congregations led by men (Djupe, 2014). Although most denominations officially accept women as leaders in churches, organizational cultural norms of local churches affect practice (Chaves, 1997; Ecklund, 2006).

Geographic regions in the United States had denominational characteristics (Roozen, 2011). To wit, Black Protestant and White evangelical denominations were common in the south

while the northeastern United States was “disproportionately [mainline] Protestant, Roman Catholic and non-Christian, with a slightly above average skew of…racial/ethnic and new immigrant groups” (p. 11). More homogenous ethnically than others, mainline Protestant denominations maintained traditional services that did not encourage racial nor ethnic diversity (Wright et al., 2015).

External influences on the health of churches included changing perspectives on the relevance of Protestant religious institutions (Bolger, 2012), population shifts from city centers to suburban areas (Roozen, 2011), continuing inequalities in posting or congregational acceptance of women to pulpits in larger churches (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019) and homogeneity (Wright, 2015), and persisting characterizations of US geographic regions (Roozen, 2011). Yet, organizational decline in churches was a common concern for which recovery is difficult but possible (Ross, 2013).

Options for Restoring Organizational Health

A church in decline goes into survival mode and may restructure its organization, change leaders, shutter outlying facilities, curtail the number of programs, and undertake other measures to reduce the financial footprint of the organization (Murray, 2001; Ross, 2013). The life stage reality may spur churches to reevaluate their purpose, mission, and policies. Common options are introducing new programs to reach unchurched population groups in the neighboring areas, revitalization, planting a new church (Boyd, 2015; Ross, 2013), or merging with a megachurch (Bird & Thumma, 2020).

New Initiatives

A church beginning to decline may seek to implement new initiatives to bring health and vitality to the organization, its mission, and programs (Boyd, 2015; Malphurs, 2011). Some

initiatives used the established church facilities while others used external venues. Initiatives included offering different forms of worship, enhanced and revitalized outreach efforts, hiring new staff, firing ministers, allowing access by unaffiliated community service organizations to the church facilities during the week (Roozen, 2016), providing a vibrant church service with new music genres, or courting multiculturalism (Garces-Foley, 2007). Some churches experimented with blending Christian and non-Christian forms of worship that resonated with people who desired a form of ritual, prayer, and chanting without the trappings and commitments of organized religion (Edgell & Robey, 2015). Blended services resembled pagan rituals, infusing Taizé, Celtic, and Anglican songs into artistic liturgy like dance and mystic readings but no sermons, and were conducted in church facilities or in parks (Bolger, 2012). Critics indicated such blending de-Christianizes the experience (Burge & Djupe, 2017; Pretorius, 2014).

External initiatives included missional home churches and emerging church projects. Missional home churches or microchurches worked in collaboration with local established churches but were held in the homes of church members (Nell & Mellows, 2017). This was not a re-structuring of church but a re-imagining of an interactive, participatory, and engaging experience in which Christ has a central role, just not prominently. An authentic missional church met five factors: being focused on the Trinity, was incarnational, disciple making, relational, and transformational. This form of outreach expected clergy to not take a central role but to empower lay leaders from within the community, similar to the emerging church movement (Bolger, 2012).

The emerging church movement was one orientation that deconstructed the formality of church by holding gatherings in bars, libraries, and public venues, and eliminating sermons and ritual (Marti & Ganiel, 2014). Fostering social legitimacy by emphasizing community,

intentional conversation, and individuality, such initiatives encouraged spiritual diversity and an eclectic mix of different forms of worship. A common example was the dinner church, in which a meal was offered to encourage participation in the gatherings conducted with an established periodicity in the same off-site venue (Fresh Expressions, 2021; Marti & Ganiel, 2014). Churches sponsoring such activities were not necessarily seeking growth of their particular church through evangelism nor ecumenicism but to be out in the community, respecting divergent perspectives, and hoping to "create open opportunities to see, hear, and respond to God" (Ganiel & Marti, 2015, p. 111).

Planting or Multiplication

Another option was starting another church, often referred to as planting a church (Boyd, 2015, Malphurs, 2011). Unlike prayer and preaching, this form of evangelism was not a common practice for US churches in the 20th century, even though the establishment of new churches had been a tenant of Christianity from its origins (Murray, 2001). In evangelical Protestant circles, churches could plant a new church as could the denominational hierarchy. Some were begun in distant locales with minimal, if any support, as in missionary work (Ruhl & Meier, 2016). Most had a dependent relationship with the original church or denomination, a relationship sometimes referred to as mother-daughter (Kingsway, 2020). Such church plants typically occurred within a relatively close geographic location to facilitate the sharing of resources until the planted church was self-sustaining. MacMillian (2017) reported planting efforts resulted in significant expenditures of resources typically without an adequate return on the investment, resulting in shuttering. A modern innovation on church planting was church multiplication, in which the planted church was expected to plant another church shortly after becoming self-sufficient (Ruhl & Meier, 2016).

Turnaround Churches

Instead of focusing upon intentional activities designed to grow, a church in survival mode may center its attention on internal processes, capabilities, and resources, in an effort to restore its health (Rainer, 2020; Ross, 2013). Such churches acknowledged the decline was irreversible without significant changes. The turnaround process takes years to accomplish and requires dedication and collaboration between the lay leaders, parishioners, and clergy. Churches unable to turnaround may seek to merge with other churches, such as megachurches (Bird & Thumma, 2020), or shutter (Ross, 2013).

Summary of Evangelical Churches in Decline

Organizations are relational at their deepest level and are healthy when their purpose, actions, and mission focus upon providing opportunities for flourishing, in a holistic, virtuous, and congruent manner (Lencioni, 2012; Stiltner, 2014). For Christian churches, a denominational affiliation provides benefits of shared resources that exceed the capabilities of an individual church. Examples are books and other printed material for use in Sunday school, hospitals emphasizing denominational values, and facilitation of projects that build facilities or support evangelists locally or in distant locales (Chaves, 1993). However, the affiliation also requires conformity, as in organizational structure, administration, and culture. These normalize the perceived identities of the members, which influence their interactions. Additionally, the size and age of each church provided insights into its characteristics and guide behaviors, such as managing conflict (Roozen, 2016). Changes in US culture and societal interests over the past 70 years have eroded the perceived influence, authority, and significance of US Christian churches (Bognár, 2017; Walls, 2001). These external pressures add to the influences on the church, which must consider its desired position and role within the local demographics and geographic

features (Johnson, 2007; Ruhl & Meier, 2016). Churches in decline employ various options, such as changing leadership and programs (Murray, 2001), introducing new or blended services (Bolger, 2012), hosting external projects to reach unchurched individuals, as through micro- or home churches (Nell & Mellows, 2017), dinner churches and other emerging church initiatives (Fresh Expression, 2021), planting new churches (Malphurs, 2011), or revitalizing churches in a turnaround program (Ross, 2013). The distinction between planting and revitalization has been compared to birthing and resurrecting the dead (Malphurs, 2011; Ross, 2013).

Sensemaking within the Institution of Religion

There is limited existing literature on organizational sensemaking within religious organizations (Garner, 2017). Of those, most studies examined sensemaking in Christian organizations; very few studies explored sensemaking in other US religious congregations or memberships. The existing studies explored the sensemaking experiences of individuals (Lian, 2009) and of organizations (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013). Numerous studies analyzed sensemaking within a religious venue or aspect but did not incorporate the Weickian construct of seven principles (Abujaber, 2018; Littlefield et al., 2006; Roberts, 1999). As an example, Leijonhufvud (2016) studied the sensemaking of architects seeking to preserve historic churches that were deteriorating in conditions attributed to climate change.

Organizational sensemaking in churches is limited to a few studies on individuals making sense of structures, like leadership (Lian, 2009; Patrick, 2012) and denominationalism (Hinderaker, 2017). Kaylor (2008) explored the sensemaking of Baptist pastors of churches excommunicated from the denomination as they sought to explain the expulsion and lead their parishioners in developing a new identity. Lequay (2004) studied an African American Baptist church that faced chronic declining membership and needed to implement change. The ethnic

background of individual members influenced their sensemaking processes, resulting in detectable differences based on perceived cultural realities. Hall (1997) examined sensemaking of members of two US organizations, an African Methodist Episcopal megachurch and a global insurance corporation, comparing observed leadership behaviors to the expectations outlined in formal organizational documents. Hall developed a modification to Weick's (1995) construct by noting the past (retrospection), the present (ongoing), and the future (prescription) interrelated simultaneously. Forward (1997) analyzed the sensemaking of ten evangelical pastors as they filled positions in churches located in the same mid-western US city. Some were new to ministry while the rest of the pastors had served in other churches. Most reflected on having inadequate training for addressing conflicting expectations between their assumptions and those of the congregations as well as developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Organizational sensemaking within religious organizations studied revival of religious orders (Wittberg, 1997), discernment in glossolalia (Lynn, 2013) and calling (Sturges et al., 2019), the role of narrative (Beach, 2018), and positioning the institution of church for political gains (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013). Bognár (2017) argued the church can restore a person's identity and social position through sensemaking. Tourangeau (2017) examined the Roman Catholic church sex abuse crisis, seeking commonalities in the socialization and familial histories of the offending priests. Haffner (2006) explored the organizational design, documentation, and representation of the core convictions of the Seventh-day Adventists denomination in a healthcare facility, noting the influences of cognition, emotion, and behavior on sensemaking. Littlefield et al. (2006) researched the messages from the Vatican in response to a widespread disaster in south Asia in 2004, analyzing the extent and impact of the sense-giving efforts. Hayes (2019) assessed the value of using drama, in the form of reminiscence theater, to initiate interest

in and development of meaningful interactions between young adults and adults over the age of 65 years old. Klaasen (2018) studied the resolutions of the dioceses of the Anglican church in South Africa trying to encourage young adult participation in worship and church activities.

These studies and others encouraged further research. Balogun and Rouleau (2017) suggested opportunities existed for more studies on sensemaking within distributed leadership, shared leadership structures, and by middle managers. Kudesia (2017), Filstad (2014), Lüscher and Lewis (2008), and Maitlis and Christianson (2014) included similar recommendations. Tushman (2017) and Homan (2017) commented on the need for more studies on successful organizational change. Lian (2009) indicated studies on "how leaders make and give sense during a time of organizational change" would address a dearth of literature in religious research. A few studies reflected the value of additional research on sensemaking within religious organizations (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Kudesia, 2017; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Lequay (2004) specified a need for attention directed to the intersection of the influences of sacred texts and organizational communications with respect to sensemaking. Boyd (2015) encouraged research in organizational change in churches, particularly focused on church planting.

The purpose of this mixed methods phenomenological study is to contribute to the literature by examining the life experience of leaders, in a shared leadership structure in churches dispersed geographically in a specific US Christian evangelical denominational district, to make sense of the phenomenon of the superintendent's guidance in 2017 to plant new churches.

Summary of Christian Religious Organizations Literature

The environment in which organizational sensemaking occurs in churches is complex (Bognár, 2017; Weick, 1995). Significant influences included the denomination, which imparted

the organizational culture, structure, and focus; the shared governance model in churches that depended on perceived and enacted identities and expectations (Chaves, 1993); and the churches themselves that varied in size and age (Roozen, 2016). Conflict was necessary and challenging to the balance and health of churches (Starke & Dyck, 1996). External influences included the societal shifts away from authority and institutional religion (Bolger, 2012), from living in inner cities, and the impact of geography that included changing dynamics of socioeconomic, demographic, and municipal developed areas and norms in the unique cultures (Schein, 2017).

Studies on organizational sensemaking within religious structures have examined leadership (Lequay, 2004), organizational structures (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Wittberg, 1997), or behaviors (Boyd, 2015; Kaylor, 2008). Opportunities exist for studying middle management in shared governance arrangements that effect successful strategic change (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Maitlis & Christenson, 2014). This study seeks to address some of these opportunities by examining the life experiences of the shared leadership structure of Protestant denominational church leaders making sense of a phenomenon in 2017, the district superintendent's guidance to start new churches.

Trust and Leadership

To make sense of the overwhelmingly positive responses of the leaders within the district to accept eagerly the superintendent's vision, I expected trust in the superintendent to be a critical and influential variable (Baer et al., 2018; De Furia, 1996). I anticipated this trust to influence sensemaking (Weick, 1995), resulting in tangible planting results, and to have an effect on the leadership styles employed by the leaders (Spreier et al., 2006). This section addresses literature on trust, leadership, and their intersection.

Trust

Trust is a difficult construct to define. Scholars agreed trust incorporated a willingness to be vulnerable in a relationship with another whose behaviors cannot be controlled but were believed would result in a positive outcome (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007; Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995; Rotter, 1967). Trust was more than having confidence in a teammate, perceiving leaders to be reliable or predictable, cooperating on important projects, or taking risks (Mayer et al., 1995). But characterizing trust was elusive. It may be a relatively stable personality characteristic (Rotter, 1980), a dynamic phenomenon (Rousseau et al., 1998), or a cognitive judgment (Dietz & Hartog, 2006). Baer et al. (2018) stated trust is not a personality trait and Colquitt et al. (2007), in their meta-analytical study, listed many research results that provided additional and contradictory defining characteristics. However, scholars agreed trust was important in social exchange relationships (Blau, 2007; Colquitt et al., 2007) and leadership dynamics within an organization (Baer et al., 2018; Zand, 1997).

Whether a person chooses to take a risk to display trust behaviors depended on many factors. Foundational to this was the perceived trustworthiness of the other and the trust propensity of self (Baer et al., 2018; De Furia, 1996). Trustworthiness consisted of three characteristics: competence, integrity, and benevolence (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 1995). These characteristics encouraged affective commitment in organizations (Colquitt et al., 2007). Trust propensity was the willingness to trust others, a behavioral trait that developed over time from childhood to become a stable disposition (Mayer et al., 1995). Researchers indicated the propensity to trust was most important before the individual determined the perceived trustworthiness of the other. However, some studies stated trust propensity varied widely in intensity and frequency, even daily (Baer et al., 2018). Colquitt et al.

reported trust propensity, in various studies, had been equated to dispositional trust, generalized trust, and interpersonal trust.

Context was another factor that influenced the decision of the person to risk trust behaviors (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). The context may include relational balance of power, potential consequences, and available alternatives. For example, deterrent-based trust relied on utilitarian sanctions, such as laws and contracts, to insure a positive outcome (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995). On the other end of the spectrum was identity-based trust which depended upon an intimate relationship built over time and through shared experiences that developed full confidence in the other. Lencioni (2012) described this level of trust as vulnerability-based trust, "when members get to a point where they are completely comfortable being transparent, honest, and [emotionally and professionally] naked with one another" (p. 27). Korsgaard et al. (2015) focused on the context of the relationship between the dyadic individuals, indicating trust can be mutual and cooperative, reciprocal and perfunctory, or asymmetric with greater risk for the individual who was more trusting than the other (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Nerstad et al., 2018).

Other influential factors considered power or position within the hierarchical structure. Some scholars provided results indicating trust was different between the one trusting and peers, and with a supervisor, middle manager, or executives (Dietz & Hartog, 2006). Dirks and Ferrin (2002) reported studies reflected a stronger correlation for the dyadic partners in proximity, but Colquitt et al. (2007) did not concur, not finding a significant relationship. Similarly, scholars held divergent positions on the influence on trust of the longevity of the relationship. Baer et al. (2018) and Zand (1997) advocated the frequency and type of interactions increased the ability of the individual to develop a relationship that could move the trust basis on the spectrum from

deterrence and cost benefit analysis to trust derived from an established history of reliability and goodwill (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Rousseau et al., 1998). Results reported by Dirks and Ferrin (2002) in their meta-analytical study showed a weak relationship between longevity and the propensity to trust. These disagreements, on the influences on trust of position, power, and longevity, and even more fundamentally, on the characterization of trust, affected the operationalization of trust in studies. Most studies relied upon subjective, singular viewpoints of hierarchically subordinated followers evaluating their feelings of the trustworthiness of their supervisors (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995). These challenges impacted the literature with respect to trust and leadership.

Leadership

Leadership is a challenging construct to define. Until recently, the term manager sufficed as an interchangeable term meaning both leader and manager, someone in a position of authority (Kellerman, 2018; Kotter, 2012). Kotter (2012) succinctly described the difference: The former leads change by developing a vision for the future and empowering followers to embrace and enact that vision; the latter manages the bureaucracy and its resources to meet the organizational mission, vision, and objectives. Kellerman (2018) provided many different definitions of leadership, as a behavior, activity, manifestation of power or authority, a relationship, or an attribute. Further, Kellerman declared leadership was not a profession like law or medicine nor a vocation like doctor or lawyer. Leadership education, training, and development were multi-billion-dollar industries and yet, in the beginning of the 21st century, most leaders were not prepared nor capable of fulfilling the expectations and requirements placed upon them. The literature remained contradictory on whether a leader does not manage, a manager does not lead,

or if an individual can or should wear both hats, “what their respective responsibilities are when they go back to work to do their day jobs” (Lencioni, 2012, p. 132).

Leaders do more than develop strategies and address conflict; they influence the organizational culture to promote employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Melé, 2012; Smith, 2017). Viewing followers as more than self-centered subordinates who require constant attention and direction, effective leaders partner with followers to empower their unique capabilities and personalities, find ways for them to apply their creativity and talents, and value their contributions and voices (Anderson, 2008; Neculàesei, 2019; Nullens, 2013). This perspective fosters trust and reciprocity, which facilitates fairness and inclusiveness in the workplace (Black & La Venture, 2018; Fard et al., 2020).

Chosen leadership styles demonstrate aspects of this partnership. In tracing the progression of leadership style theories, Benson (2019) documented changes in perspectives. Leadership originally focused on the inherent capabilities the great man, then the dyadic relationship between leader and follower, to group leadership, and to the current perspective of leading in an organization. A common contemporary theory is the McClelland theory of needs, which indicates leaders use power, achievement, or relationships (affiliation) to motivate others and for self-motivation. Goleman (2011), for example, expanded on McClelland’s theory to incorporate emotional intelligence, and clarified six leadership styles that exemplified the leader’s perspective on followers, supported leading change, and impacted organizational culture (Goleman et al., 2013; Spreier et al., 2006)

The six styles were participative, visionary, coaching, affiliative, pacesetting, and directive (Spreier et al., 2006). The first four were resonant styles that uplifted the followers, resulting in improved performance and a positive effect on the organizational culture. The latter

two were dissonant styles, not useful for improving relationships but effective in situations requiring swift and precise actions, as in a crisis. These styles are summarized in Table 2. Effective leaders comfortably applied four or more styles; the least commonly used style was coaching (Goleman, 2002). The use of a specific style also impacted the trust environment.

Table 2

Leadership Styles Repertoire

Style	Description	Impact on culture
	Resonant leadership style	
Participative	Also known as a democratic style, this relational approach actively incorporated diversity, innovation, and the voices of others in the organization to build consensus. High stress approach.	Promoted trust in the leader and in each other.
Visionary	Most effective when leading change, this power style empowered the followers to attain shared personal (work related) and professional goals. Low stress approach.	Motivated toward an achievable and positive future.
Coaching	This power approach aligned the interests and skills of the follower to the needs and goals of the team or organization by focusing on the individual, not the job. Low stress approach.	Creates intense affective connections
Affiliative	To promote harmony and settle raw emotions on the team or in the organization, this relational style focused on the personal and emotional side, bringing the team together with lavish praise and encouragement. Low stress approach.	Built emotional capital to restore unity.
	Dissonant leadership style	
Pacesetting	Focused on goal achievement and forward progress, this style was driven by metrics and the need to meet expectations on time and with high levels of quality. High stress approach.	Fixated on meeting needs affecting the health of the organization.
Directive	Previously described as coercive and commanding, this power style reduced ambiguity and confusion by issuing clear, timely, and unwavering orientation and direction, as in a crisis. High stress approach.	Provided strong direction to assuage fears and indecision.

Note: Table developed from the chart on page 55 (Goleman et al., 2013) and Spreier et al. (2006). A leader using resonant styles is authentically self-aware of her identity, priorities, emotions, values, and goals as well as those of her followers; these represent high and low stress approaches. A leader using dissonant styles focuses on accomplishing the mission over positivity and relationships with a potentially detrimental effect on the trust environment; high stress.

Trust in Leadership

The trust risked with a leader reflected the individual's trust propensity and perceptions of the leader's character, or trustworthiness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In return, the trusted leader noted higher job performance in his teams and followers, who acted as better citizens, displaying loyalty and kindness. Work attitudes improved. The followers reflected a deepening commitment to the leader, accepting shared information more readily (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lau & Liden, 2008; Nerstad et al., 2018; Zand, 1997). The leader encouraged mutual influence and reduced controls that affect autonomy and performance (De Furia, 1996; Nerstad et al., 2018; Zand 1997). The organizational culture realized a more trusting environment (Baer et al., 2018; Lau & Liden, 2008; Nerstad et al., 2018). Also of interest, Dirks and Ferrin suggested hierarchically subordinated employees attributed character traits to their supervisors who implement new policies or changes. The traits could become entrenched and result in the leader fulfilling the prophesized behaviors. Lencioni (2012) stated this attribution error occurred when the leader was relatively unknown.

Some studies indicated followers displayed increased risk-taking behaviors, not only in trust relationships but in other aspects of the business environment, such as trial and error and innovation (Day & Shea, 2020). Goleman et al. (2013) explained "people with whom we have a sense of trust give us a safe place to experiment, to try out unfamiliar parts of our leadership repertoire in a no-risk setting" (p. 162). Conducting a meta-analytical study across disciplines, Mayer et al. (1995) identified a consistent and moderately strong statistical relationship between trust and risk taking, performance of assigned tasks, and organizational citizenship behaviors. This expansion of the influence of trust to affect the workplace culture is, perhaps, heightened within a religious environment (Baker, 2017; Narbona et al., 2020; Vanzini, 2020).

Trust in Christian Churches

Trust within a Christian church was similar in that it involved a willingness to risk being vulnerable (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) but differed in that the trust was not focused only on a particular leader or church organization but in the belief that their church fulfills a role in the mission of God in whom they place their trust (Baker, 2017). The parishioners trusted the clergy and the lay leaders to fulfill their responsibilities in leading the local church in accordance with the expectations of the denomination and local culture, such as a specific type or message of the worship service (Baker, 2017; Chaves, 1993). The parishioners expected their leaders to be trustworthy and demonstrate trust-enhancing behaviors, such as sharing the Gospel in an authentic manner, meeting expectations like honesty in financial matters and interactions with others, and being compassionate yet steadfast in adhering to the truth of the Scriptures (Melé, 2012; Schein, 2017; Smith, 2017). Similarly, the clergy and lay leaders trusted the leaders at the next hierarchical level and above to be trustworthy, not only with respect to the administrative aspects of the denomination but also with the theological (Chaves, 1993; Ledbetter et al., 2016; Smith, 2017). These expectations are similar to those of any follower to their leaders, for the leaders to meet the organizational objectives to fulfill the expressed mission and vision (Lencioni, 2012; Schein, 2017).

A difference is the church membership trusts in the institution, Church with a capital C (Nabona et al., 2020). Christians believe the Church is a symbol of Jesus Christ, where imperfect and sin-filled people can be redeemed, forgiven, and reborn into a community (Vanzini, 2020). That community is accepting and interested in helping them flourish by introducing them to Christ and helping them develop a loving relationship with the triune God. The Church offers the world a Savior who provides rest for the weary, hope for the hopeless, fulfillment for the

depleted. This description may seem paradoxical as it blends the sinful and the transcendent. The Church as a symbol of truth and redemption has been embroiled in reproachful scandals by the counter-witness of leaders and parishioners throughout the world and ages. Yet, as Christians,

> seeing shadows and shortcomings, feel our trust in her [the Church] diminish or fade away…we can then turn with a more penetrating gaze—the gaze of faith—to the search for Christ hidden in the Church, who continues to offer Himself to human beings through her, to be encountered. (Vanzini, 2020, p. 388)

Christians believe in the institution to facilitate their meeting and relationship development with Jesus and rely upon God's ordained to enact this interaction by providing the resources, discipleship, and encouragement (Baker, 2017; Vanzini, 2020). They trust in other Christians to support their growth spiritually. "Leaders must learn to live *out* as well as to live *by* faith, to *keep* as well as to *have* faith, and to be faith*ful* as well as to be *full* of faith" (Ledbetter et al., 2016, p. 96; italics in original). Faithfulness enables deeper trust, that in turn grows their faith and opens opportunities to flourish (Baker, 2017). "As leaders in the church, trust is a sacred asset that must be carefully handled with deep respect and priceless value" for it not only reflects the character of the leader but the trust in Christ manifested in their witness within the congregation and to the outside world (p. 3). Trust within a church culture includes a third dimension characterized by trust in the leadership, trust in the organization, or trust in God.

Summary of Trust Literature

Trust is believing in another person to be trustworthy—honorable, upright, and benevolent—and willing to take a risk to act upon that belief. Perceived trustworthiness facilitated efficiency from leaders (Lencioni, 2012; Zand, 1972, 1997) and a healthier culture in which followers displayed greater job satisfaction, better citizenship behaviors, higher job

performance, and increased risk-taking actions (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lau & Liden, 2008; Zand, 1997). Trust has an ethical component; leaders did not want to be perceived unfairly as not being trustworthy (Hawley, 2019) yet some followers attributed personal characteristics to leaders based on enacted policies (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lencioni, 2012). Further, unmet expectations damaged the trust environment (De Furia, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In a church, being perceived as trustworthy reflected directly also on the leader's calling and truthful adherence to their faith and service to Christ (Baker, 2017; Nullens, 2013; Sturges et al., 2019; Vanzini, 2020). Trustworthiness was less about what a leader did than how the leader was perceived to act (Carder & Warner, 2016; Davidson & Hughes, 2019).

Trust proclivity and contextual factors, such as a historical relationship, consequences, alternatives, relative positions or power, and culture affected the willingness to trust others (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Scholars, though, disagreed on the statistical significance of the effects of such contextual factors on trust. Indeed, scholars disagreed as to the properties of trust. Within the context of this study, trust in the religious leader may be a mediating factor in understanding the experience of hierarchically subordinated leaders making sense of a phenomenon directing them to multiply their resources and facilities during a persistent period of organizational decline. A mixed methods approach provides the flexibility needed to incorporate quantitative instruments with interviews and other qualitative techniques to improve the quality of the interpretations of the findings.

Mixed Methods Research Literature Review

Mixed methods research techniques endeavor to examine processes and outcomes by combining the strengths of qualitative research approaches with those of quantitative research and countering the weaknesses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). More

than simply using qualitative and quantitative techniques in a study, a researcher intentionally integrates the approaches to best meet the design of the study, which may be concurrent, exploratory, explanatory, exacting, or transformative (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). A concurrent approach involves the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data. An exploratory design can employ qualitative results to refine the quantitative instruments, the samples, or generate hypotheses to be tested with quantitative results. An explanatory design may use qualitative data to provide illustrations of the quantitative results or context, or enhance the utility of the results. An exacting design bolsters the rigor of the study by boosting the validity and reliability of one technique with the other, as in correcting biases in one method, triangulation, or increasing the fidelity of the instrument. The transformative design seeks to examine a social justice environment, diversifying perspectives, or the context of treatments or interventions.

The order, whether qualitative techniques preceded or succeeded the quantitative techniques, was significant to the design of the study (Creswell, 2014; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). Timing is another important consideration and can be concurrent, sequential, or embedded. Concurrent timing of the two techniques benefits an exacting design but restricts exploration of the topic unless the study repeats the design over time, as in a longitudinal study. A sequential timing facilitates exploration designed studies. Embedded timing is useful in the exacting design study, using quantitative techniques to standardize qualitative scales or qualitative methods to supplement the quantitative findings.

The design and timing of a mixed method study reveal the worldview of the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Behavioral and social researchers with a constructivist paradigm, seeking subjective views and shared meanings, prefer the

narrative data of qualitative research techniques while those with a post positivist or positivist paradigm favor quantitative techniques for their statistical analyses. Mixed methods scholars tend to be pragmatists who focus on outcome over process. This is not meant to imply that any one worldview is superior to the others, but the perspective tends to influence the design and timing.

Qualitative Techniques

Qualitative methods explore meanings and context, using observations, explanations, descriptions, and interpretations to analyze experiences, beliefs, and thoughts of subjects (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2014). The primary method to study sensemaking is qualitative (Balogun et al., 2003; Filstad, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Balogun et al. encouraged combining multiple qualitative techniques, particularly ethnographic methods of being embedded over a long period of time to observe, interview, and interact with individuals involved in sensemaking. Filstad employed a case study method with semi-structured interviews, informal interactions with individuals and in meetings, and observations. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) endorsed action research, which required the researcher to be embedded in the organization to collect data in real time. Other techniques can include archival research for archeological reports, biographies, photographs and videos, travel records, demographic statistics, private letters and journals, news accounts, and oral histories (Gilbert, 2018a).

Quantitative Techniques

Quantitative methods measured empirical, objective data to define the relationships between specific, identified variables for trends and opinions for a sample which represents the greater population (Creswell, 2014; Field, 2017). Few instruments quantitatively measure sensemaking. One example is SENSEMAKER, a mixed methods tool that assessed

organizational sensemaking through micronarratives and testing to clarify participant-led interpretations and facilitate cultural change (Van der Merwe et al., 2019). Another, PROGNOSTICS, named “implicit factors characterizing the specific organizational culture, outlines the fields of collective experience and identifies cognitive obstacles” to change while empowering the potential of workers (Michiotis & Cronin, 2018, p. 11). Each of these instruments required large sample sizes of hundreds of participants. More common were quantitative instruments that measured leadership aspects or styles. Trust measuring instruments were not common; one that is applicable to this study is the interpersonal trust survey (De Furia, 1996).

The quantitative leadership survey used in this study was the leadership styles workbook (LSW), a revision of the managerial style questionnaire (MSQ) that emerged from the 1976 McClelland and Burnham study (Bernardin & Pynes, 1980). This study identified managerial styles that supported or diminished motivations for achievement, relationships, and power in six styles: participatory, visionary, coaching, pacesetting, affiliative, and directive. The instrument consisted of 36 forced-choice items completed in about 20 minutes. Creative Organizational Design acquired the MSQ instrument and made minor modifications, primarily for marketing purposes: the name changed to LSW, the term manager was replaced by the term leader, and three style labels (democratic, authoritative, and coercive) were renamed participative, visionary, and directive, respectively (Korn Ferry, 2019). The workbook identified the preferred style of the participant, the style the participant perceived was required to meet organizational needs, and included guided reflexive exercises intended to improve the participant’s awareness and employment of the six approaches. The workbook did not include statistical analysis of internal or external validity nor an explanation for the selection of these styles (Bernardin & Pynes,

1980). McClelland and Burnham (1995) reported they used an undefined convenience sample of company managers from large US corporations attending professional workshops designed to enhance managerial effectiveness. Bernardin and Pynes concluded the instrument could be a useful diagnostic tool.

The interpersonal trust survey (ITS) was based on the 1996 unpublished De Furia dissertation that assessed an individual's likelihood to employ trust-enhancing behaviors (De Furia, 1996). These behaviors were sharing relevant information, reducing controls, allowing for mutual influence, clarifying mutual expectations, and meeting expectations. The instrument measured the participant's self-assessment of their trust proclivity and of their belief that others, undefined, would use those same behaviors (De Furia, 1996; Sibicky, 1996). An observer variant allowed participants to rate their observations of their leader performing the trust-enhancing behaviors and compared the leader's behaviors to a desired level. Combining the results of the observer variant would provide data on the trust environment fostered by the leader, with indications of the satisfaction of each participant. De Furia reported all five behaviors were necessary to reflect trust in the leader. Incorporating results from both variants allowed the researcher to conduct a 360-degree assessment on the leader.

De Furia developed this instrument as an educational device to support professional development in building and maintaining perceptions of trustworthiness in the work environment (Sibicky, 1996). De Furia (1996) studied a relatively small sample ($N = 360$) of employees in Virginia and Maryland who held varying positions (in human resources, accounting, analysis, paralegal, professional training, school administration, family therapy, and others), hierarchical levels (like program and facilities managers, public school principal, clerk typist, phlebotomist, first level and middle managers), and industries (law, medicine, recreation, county government,

information technology, life insurance, and public education). De Furia reported the internal reliability ($\alpha = .05$) using Pearson's coefficient $r = .981$. Recent employment of the two variants studied a relationship between interpersonal trust and religiosity mitigated by an ontology of death (Testoni et al., 2018) and a relationship with personality characteristics of leaders (Quinlan, 2008).

An objective of quantitative analysis is to define the statistical relationships between variables as well as the strength and the direction of their effects (Field, 2017). One method assesses the relationship between two variables, such as correlations, inferring an effect of one variable on another but not causation (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Another is a linear regression model, from which the results indicate associations between test input and output, defining the impact of an independent variable on the dependent variable. As most phenomena cannot be explained through a direct effect between two variables, models facilitating the determination of more intricate relationships, such as inter- and intra-dependencies, are useful.

A more complex method incorporates mediation and moderation models, which analyze the effect of multiple variables upon the phenomenon being studied (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Mediation variables explain the variation between the predictor and outcome variables. Moderation variables influence the relationship of the predictor variable on the outcome variable, intensifying or diminishing the outcome; the moderator predicts the size, strength, or direction of the effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variable. Moderator and mediator variables can be incorporated into effective moderation mediation models, allowing the researcher to focus "on the conditional nature of an indirect effect, that is how an indirect effect is moderated" (Hayes, 2018, p. 387). The integration of the analytical results from the qualitative and quantitative techniques form the foundation for mixed methods analysis.

Mixed Methods Techniques

Mixed methods analysis reflects the integration of the results of qualitative and quantitative techniques focused on a specific research objective, with one technique having primacy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). The researcher begins with analysis of each technique in accordance with the standard practices for that technique. Typically, the researcher will calculate descriptive statistics, develop correlation matrices, check goodness of fit to models, and perform comparisons between and within groups for quantitative data to determine inferential test results, effect sizes, and confidence intervals (Field, 2017). Depending on the methods used, the researcher may conduct iterative and repetitive reviews of qualitative data such as interviews and archival data, develop themes and codes to interpret the data, and include assistance from qualified others to confirm analytical techniques (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018).

The value of the mixed methods approach is the integration of the two methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Common integration techniques include identifying results that converge, diverge, confirm, or contradict; linking data, like qualitative codes to quantitative variables; transforming data, such as qualitative into quantitative values; and determining how the results of one technique can inform the results of the other. A joint display of the results of an integration method in a table or graph merges the data sets in an effective manner and permits comparison or clarification of the analysis. Some challenges with the mixed method research technique include the skills of the researcher to effectively conduct qualitative and quantitative techniques, time needed to conduct the different techniques, and validity concerns. Not only does the researcher need to address threats to validity and reliability of the qualitative and quantitative techniques, but the integration process potentially introduces additional concerns. These may involve the

sample sizes, merging of the data bases, not resolving inconsistencies or anomalies, or not clearly articulating the logic of the design of the study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2006) recommended an awareness of inference quality, which addressed the internal validity of quantitative data and the trustworthiness of the qualitative results, and inference transferability, focused on the external validity with application to the operationalization of the qualitative technique.

Summary of Mixed Methods Research Literature

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in an intentional design, mixed methods research techniques can increase the rigor, robustness, and interpretability of study results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The design may be exploratory, explanatory, exacting, or transformative with qualitative and quantitative techniques conducted concurrently, sequentially, or embedded. The design typically reflects the worldview of the researcher, of which pragmaticism is the most common. Organizational sensemaking is a complex communications process that lends well for qualitative studies (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Examining moderating or mitigating influences on the sensemaking data can provide greater insights into the experiences of leaders within a distributed religious organization making sense of a disruptive phenomenon, being directed to plant new churches while struggling to survive and restore health.

Conclusion

A complex yet common communications process, organizational sensemaking incorporated cognitive, social, and affective aspects for developing a perspective of reality for which plausibility was more important than accuracy (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Filstad, 2014; Weick, 1995). Through the seven principles of reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity,

Weickian sensemaking described the process that can result in an impetus for decision-making and agency. Applicable to individuals and organizations facing a profoundly disruptive event, sensemaking was easiest to study in crisis situations (Furey & Rixon, 2019; Paulo Cosenza et al., 2018; Weick, 2001) or within high performance organizations (Magnussen et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2019).

Researchers suggested improvements, like those focusing on cognition (Attfield et al., 2018), affect (Jiang et al., 2018), contextual factors in the environment (Introna, 2019; Karikari & Brown, 2018), and simplification of the construct (Namvar et al., 2018) or its expansion (Musca Neukirk et al., 2018). From research on organizational sensemaking in a wide variety of industries, situations, and disciplines, constructs such as sense-giving and sense-breaking described practical applications (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Studies recognized an important role that middle managers performed facilitating change by addressing debilitating aspects, providing mind maps, stories, and revised identities to calm concerns and focus efforts on organizational objectives (Filstad, 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). The existing research provided few studies on sensemaking with respect to successful organizational change, in distributed organizations, by middle managers, and in non-profit organizations like churches.

The few studies on religious institutions and organizational sensemaking examined organizational structures (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013), activities (Boyd, 2015) and leadership in Christian churches (Lequay, 2004). Protestant churches, different from for-profit organizations and other non-profit agencies with an apostolic mission (Chaves, 1993; Ledbetter et al., 2016) exist in an environment influenced by internal and external factors. The religious authority and resources of denominations provide organizational structure, mission, and culture for the member

churches, including the shared leadership model involving the clergy, lay leaders, and members and emphasis on activism. Supported by church members, this activism involved professing faith by evangelizing within local neighborhoods or in distant lands (Chaves, 1993). The age of the church and its size were additional influences on its focus, culture, and capabilities to meet the needs of the members and to share the Gospel (Johnson, 2007; Roozen, 2016). Conflict, a necessary element for deepening relationships, also provided challenges to the organizational health (Starke & Dyck, 1996). External factors, such as the changing demographics and US society shifting from a perceived relevance of organized religion, impact conflict, growth, and health of the churches (Bolger, 2012).

The net result is the continuing decline of US Protestant churches, in attendance, support, and significance to the increasingly secular society (Barna Group, 2016; Chaves, 2014; Roozen, 2016). In response, churches sought to streamline their budgets, change leaders (Murray, 2001), employ blended services (Marti & Ganiel, 2014), plant new churches (Malphurs, 2011), revitalize their focus and programs (Ross, 2013), or merge with megachurches to survive (Bird & Thumma, 2020). The trust in their leaders was an important aspect in turning around their future (Rainer, 2020; Ross, 2013).

To trust someone, an individual believes the other is trustworthy and is willing to risk that they are not (De Furia, 1996; Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995). Scholars disagreed on the characteristics of trust (Rotter, 1967; Rousseau et al., 1998) and the influences on trust of an existing familiarity between dyadic partners, the positional relationship and its distance, and the organizational culture, in terms of affect, commitment, job performance, and other metrics (Baer et al., 2018; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Rotter, 1980). Instead of finding dyadic partners, trust in a religious institution may reflect a triadic relationship, one of whom is

transcendental (Baker, 2017; Vanzini, 2020). Scholars agreed trust was a necessary component for leadership dynamics in organizations (Baer et al., 2018; Zand, 1997).

To study this complex situation of church leaders in a shared leadership model and distributed organization making sense of the district superintendent's vision to plant new churches while the member churches continued to experience organizational decline, a mixed methods approach seemed most feasible. A mixed methods research study endeavors to incorporate the strengths of qualitative and quantitative techniques and to leverage each against the other to mitigate weaknesses and improve the interpretability of the research results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017). The two techniques can be combined in many different ways to meet the needs of the study and match the worldview of the researcher. The next chapter describes in detail the mixed methods research plan.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

> The substance of sensemaking starts with three elements: a frame, a cue, and a connection. (Weick, 1995, p. 110)

The research plan is designed to extract the essence of the lived experience of leaders, in a shared leadership structure within denominational district churches, who, in 2017, made sense of a phenomenon that instructed them to plant new churches in the midst of chronic organizational decline.

Before beginning this study, I understood the leaders representing the majority (97%) of these churches readily accepted the superintendent's vision and agreed to develop plans to plant churches or commence initiatives that would support future church plants. The preponderance of agreement suggested a strong belief in the superintendent (Baer et al., 2018) may have been a moderating influence (Hayes, 2018). Trust is foundational to leadership, perhaps more so in churches due to the emphasis of trust in God and in a shared faith (Baker, 2017). Assessing trust in the superintendent could be examined in interviews with structured questions and iterative interviewing methods, with quantitative instruments, or through an integration of both techniques (Gilbert et al., 2018). Not confident I could persuade busy leaders to consent to lengthy or multiple interviews, I chose an instrument that assessed the trust environment based on the behaviors of the superintendent as observed by the church leaders (De Furia, 1996). I included a second instrument assessing their leadership motivation styles (Spreier et al., 2006). This instrument may provide insights into the sensemaking processes of the leaders and their trust in the superintendent. The choice of motivational style could reveal their progress through the

sensemaking process by reflecting divergence from their default approach, the preferred style (Weick, 1995). To incorporate the instruments and interviews as foundational research techniques, I designed a convergent exploratory mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design should facilitate a more complete understanding of factors influencing the sensemaking processes of the leaders.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the common experience of the district church leaders making sense of the phenomenon, resulting in a specific action either supporting or rejecting the vision. The primary qualitative research question was

> What was the shared experience of church leaders making sense of the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision?

The primary quantitative research question was

> What were the relationships between organizational sensemaking of the leaders, trust in the supervisor, leadership styles, and the individual church planting responses?

Supporting questions were

- What was the relationship between levels of perceived trust in the superintendent and sensemaking as manifested in the level of fulfillment of plans for planting a new church?
- What was the relationship between levels of perceived trust in the superintendent and required leadership styles, displayed in the level of fulfillment of plans for planting a new church?
- What was the relationship between organizational sensemaking and the choice of leadership style to lead the church forward under the vision?

Research Methods

Reviewed by the Northwest University Institutional Review Board and my dissertation committee, this mixed methods research plan employed a convergent design in which collection via qualitative and quantitative techniques occurred concurrently and informed the analysis of the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018). The intent of a mixed methods study is to leverage the advantages of each technique and offset disadvantages. A convergent and exploratory mixed methods design begins with the development of employment strategies for each technique and independent analysis. Merging these "compare, contrast, and/or synthesize the results" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 70), which include transforming data from one method into a useable form for the other method. The analysis of the combined data should have provided a more robust understanding to address the purpose of the study.

Population and Sampling

The district of the small Protestant evangelical denomination consisted of less than 40 churches in diverse but contiguous geographical regions—urban inner cities, old suburbs, and rural settlements and within varying majority ethnic and socioeconomic descriptors—as well as various organizational life cycles based on the ages of the churches, sizes of membership and average weekly attendance, tenures of lead pastors, revenues, and other contextual factors (Bolger, 2012; Chaves, 1993; Johnson, 2007; Roozen, 2016). The selection of this district or this denomination was not significant with respect to organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995). However, it was the setting in which the phenomenon occurred and to which I obtained extensive access. In return for granting access to the churches and members, the district superintendent requested the identity of the denomination, district, churches, and members not be revealed in the process of conducting this study nor in the reporting of its findings.

Although there was opportunity to interact with all the district churches, I focused on a limited sample of seven churches, representing approximately 20% of the number of churches within the district (Gilbert et al., 2018). I expected to reach saturation in qualitative techniques within this percentage since 97% of the churches embraced the vision immediately (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Seidman, 2013). Gilbert et al. (2018) indicated the sample size for quantitative analysis should have been 91% of all the district churches to achieve the desired statistical significance ($\alpha = .05$). However, due to concerns that the state government, to counter any significant increases in COVID-19 infections, might impose quarantines and other restrictions on my mobility, I chose to be intentional in obtaining a representative sample with a maximum heterogeneity. The churches selected into the sample reflected the diversity of the district with respect to geography, history, church sizes, and the genders and ethnicities of the lead pastors. The researcher did not have access to demographic information on the congregations. In the sample were six churches that participated in the vision and one that did not. Table 3 describes the distribution of district churches within the geographic region and by congregational sizes.

Table 3

Percentage of District Churches and Sample Represented within Four Regions and Four Sizes

Geographic region			Congregational size		
Region number	District %	Sample %	Size category	District %	Sample %
Region 1	21.2	16.7	Size 1	21.2	16.7
Region 2	27.3	33.3	Size 2	42.4	33.3
Region 3	24.2	33.3	Size 3	24.2	33.3
Region 4	27.3	16.7	Size 4	12.2	16.7

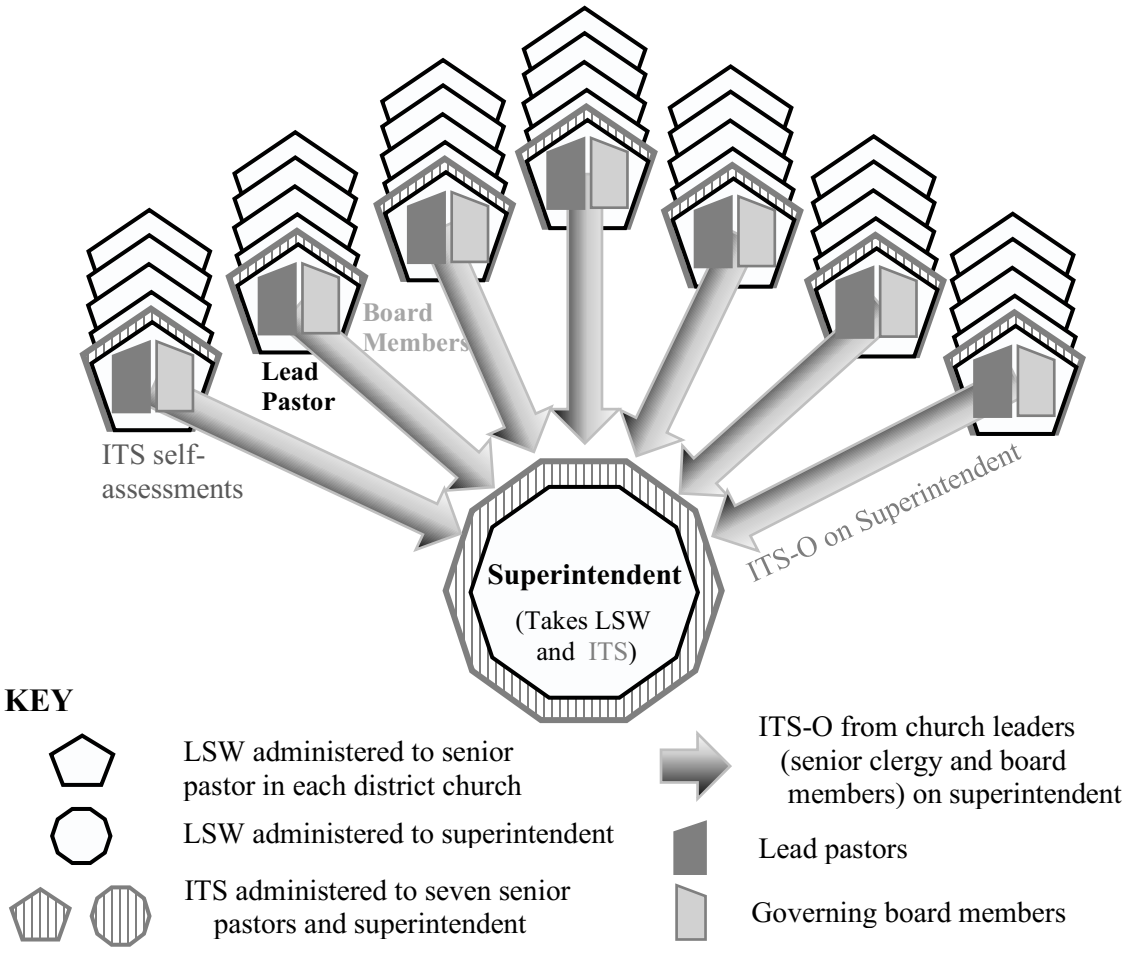
Note: The region numbers refer to quadrants on a map with approximately equal numbers of churches located in each region. Size 1 reflected congregations with up to 50 attendees; Size 2 for 51-150 attendees; Size 3 for 151-350 attendees; and Size 4 represented the largest churches in the district, with 351-2,000 attendees (Johnson, 2001).

The district overall geographic population demographics were 78% White; 10% Black; 4% Latinx; 2% Asian (Advameg, 2019; DataUSA, 2018; US Census Bureau, 2018). Less than 10% of the district churches were led by a woman or a person of color.

This study focused on seven representative churches. Lead pastors and members of the governing boards who served in these positions when the superintendent enacted the vision would receive personal invitations to participate in interviews and to complete surveys. The lead pastors would be asked to facilitate access to church records, including contact data for the board members. From the remaining churches, I would ask for cultural artifacts documenting aspects of the sensemaking processes by members of the church leadership structure and the lead pastors to participate in the demographic and leadership surveys. Figure 1 illustrates the sampling structure.

Figure 1

Illustration of Sampling Plan



Note: LSW is the leadership styles workbook; ITS is the interpersonal trust survey; ITS-O is the observer variant of the ITS that focused on the trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent.

Ethical Concerns

The ethical treatment of the participants was paramount. Ethical issues included ensuring dignity for and safety of each participant and maintaining the promises of the letters of informed consent—to maintain the confidentiality of each interview, response, and other raw data (Bazeley, 2013). Samples of the informed consent forms, tailored for the lead pastors and the governing board members, are provided in Figures A1 and A2 in Appendix A.

The qualitative design, from the questions and locations of interviews to maintaining confidentiality of verbal and non-verbal communications, were intended to be respectful. After completion of the analyses, the transcripts, encrypted audio and video recordings, signed informed consent forms, and other sensitive materials were stored in a locked filing cabinet within an office in the Northwest University Center for Leadership Studies until destroyed. Administrative or research support was provided by individuals who completed training in protecting the rights of human research subjects; their certificates were filed with the research materials in the office at Northwest University. In addition, I extended my concerns for ethical treatment to these assistants, as reflected in the letters of confidentiality they signed (Naufel & Beike, 2013). An example is in Figure A3. The university institutional review board evaluated the procedures in this study to safeguard the rights and welfare of participants and assistants before I began the field work.

Qualitative Methodology

Organizational sensemaking involves cognitive processes, reflection, emotions, social interactions, and biases that shape the environment and enable decision-making (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Thus, the primary method to study sensemaking is qualitative (Balogun et al., 2003; Filstad, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). This portion of

the research plan was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study supplemented by research on cultural artifacts (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018; Schein, 2017).

The principle qualitative research question was: what is the shared experience of church leaders making sense of the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision? The design of the qualitative techniques examined the data from two perspectives: the shared phenomenological experience of the leaders within each of the sampled churches and the collective experience of the leadership of all sampled churches.

Techniques

Since the phenomenon occurred in the past, interviews, observations, and archival research would be effective methods to collect qualitative data on sensemaking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018; Weick, 1995). Formal interviews were triangulated by contextual research in archival records, from observations, with analysis of external environmental factors, and from incidental informal interviews with knowledgeable individuals who could clarify religious, denominational, or interactional questions emerging from the collection efforts (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018; Johnson, 2007).

Interviews

The central qualitative technique in this study was the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2007; Seidman, 2013; Weick, 1995). Two groups of church members would be scheduled for interviews. One group consisted of the lead pastors of the seven selected churches. These interviews would be individual, audio recorded, and consist of open questions, listed in Figure A4, asked after I confirmed I had a signed informed consent form from each participant. The interviews should take less than one hour to complete. The setting for each interview would be convenient for the interviewee and in a location that was appropriate and safe. I intended to

conduct the interviews in person. However, if the threat of infection from the COVID-19 pandemic remained a concern, I would seek alternative methods for conducting the interviews. The preferable alternative would be a virtual meeting to observe facial expressions and other non-verbal signs (Seidman, 2013).

The second group scheduled for interviews were the members of the governing boards within each of the seven churches. The respective lead pastor performed a gatekeeper role, providing contact information for the members serving on the governing board when the superintendent announced the new vision at the annual district meeting in 2017. Invited individually, the members of each governing board would participate in a group interview (focus group) with other members from that specific church (Koeshall, 2018a; Templeton, 1994). These interviews would be scheduled at a time convenient for most of the members in each board, should last about an hour, and would be conducted in person unless the COVID-19 pandemic situation required alternative plans. All participants must have completed the informed consent form before joining the group for the interview.

All interview questions, derived from the literature review and supportive of the primary qualitative research question, would be pilot tested and reviewed by my committee members before being deployed (Johnson, 2018b, 2018c). At the beginning of the interview, I will review the informed consent form risks and benefits. I will encourage participation by all members, asking each member to speak candidly and implementing a protocol to ensure each voice can be heard by having participants speak one at a time (Templeton, 1994).

I will capture these interviews digitally if permission was granted by the participating members (Templeton, 1994). I arranged for an individual, not affiliated with the district or denomination, to assist me in videotaping the interviews. This person completed training and

signed a confidentiality letter. The interview recordings and our notes on initial coding, similarities and differences between participant perspectives, body language, and a seating diagram will be maintained in an encrypted file and the interview transcribed prior to the initiation of interviews at a subsequent church location (Koeshall, 2018b).

Archival Research

Denominations influence the organizational culture, structure, and focus of member churches (Chaves, 1993; Schein, 2017). Denominations impact perceived and enacted identities and expectations in shared governance models. Further, the size, history, and vision of member churches affect their cultures (Ross, 2013; Roozen, 2016). Applicable data points would be captured in district archives. The district superintendent granted access to archival information, such as administrative data on each of the churches, cultural artifacts, and church activities reported by the churches to the district office (Creswell & Poth, 2018; [Denomination], 2018). The administrative data included historical reports on average weekly attendance and membership, financial records, history of each church, pastor longevity, and limited demographic data on senior pastors. The district offices did not maintain rosters of the governing council members or church staffs. Cultural artifacts included district and denominational policies and procedures concerning religious authority and agency structures, communications methods and modes, and descriptions of denominational symbology (Chaves, 1993; [Denomination], 2015a; Schein, 2017). In addition, I intended to conduct multiple visits to each of the district churches to collect observations and data on church activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2018a). While at the locations, I would inquire on obtaining minutes from the administrative councils and committees held in 2017 to compare with other archival and anecdotal data reporting church planting interest and efforts.

Environmental Context

The environment in which organizational sensemaking occurs is complex (Bognár, 2017; Schein, 2017; Weick, 1995). Structural descriptions of the context in which the superintendent introduced the phenomenon would include the nationwide trend of declining religious influence in society (Bolger, 2012) and its impact in the local geographic region of the district or church (Johnson, 2007), the experience and education levels of the leaders (Boyd, 2015), organizational and power structures (Chaves, 1993), observed cultural influences (Johnson, 2007), communications patterns and messaging (Miller, 2015), and the perceived readiness of each church to plant new churches (Malphurs, 2011).

The geographic location of the churches and their potential church plants affect perspectives for expansion efforts as well as the cultures in the specific churches, attracting attendance from within the contiguous environment (Kingsway, 2020; MacMillan, 2017; Malphurs, 2011; Murray, 2010). In the area surrounding each of the sampled churches and their plants, I gathered data on the population, such as socioeconomic, ethnic, age, education, employment, immigration, and settlement characteristics. This data provided context to help analyze the interview results from the church leaders (Schein, 2017). I will capture observations during visits in a journal that distinguishes facts from my recorded perspectives, opinions, and feelings (Johnson, 2007, 2018a). I also will draft memos interpreting emerging trends, patterns, and potentially viable coding; thoughts about possible relationships between variables; surprises; and topics that may need further consideration or dedicated attention to understand more fully Easter & Johnson, 2018b). I expected to identify additional individuals who have access to and knowledge of the phenomena and would seek to initiate informal discussions (Chaves, 2014;

Lamont & Swidler, 2014). Extracts and meanings will be incorporated, as appropriate, as triangulation or new streams of data when analyzed.

Analysis Plan

The plan for analysis of the collected qualitative data included techniques to ensure validity and reliability (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2013). All interviews would be digitally recorded unless not permitted by the participant. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim, using a virtual transcription service, and the transcripts checked for accuracy against the recordings. I will encourage the interviewee, after reviewing the contribution, to provide feedback to improve the clarity or interpretation of specific passages (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2013). Transcriptions from group interviews will be parsed into contributions by specific individuals and shared only with the particular contributor for feedback.

Using an inductive process, I will code the transcripts, line by line, to inform the reviews of each subsequent interview (Bazeley, 2013; Easter & Johnson, 2018a). I will consolidate elements into a code structure that captures the emotions, insights, and observations of the interviewees and extracts significant phrases that apply directly to the research question. This will be the basis of the codebook which provides the framework in which to analyze phrases, explain the coding system, and facilitate interpretations. These phrases would illustrate findings in the dissertation. Clustering the phrases into codes and themes will describe the leaders' experiences within each church. Similarly, I will identify phrases related to leadership styles and trust for use later in the integration with quantitative analysis. I will review the contextual information, checking for bias. To increase confidence in the coding process, I will read the interviews a minimum of six times each, checking for overlooked constructs and confirming low inference (Embraced Wisdom Resource Group, 2015; Yale University, 2015).

After capturing the essence of the individual (pastor and collective boards) church experiences, I will review the interviews again to code the data for themes between all senior leaders, all governing boards, and the combination of both groups (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent of this analysis is to identify similarities and differences between the shared experiences of the leader positions compared to the individual churches. Analytical software would facilitate sorting, linking, and visualizing clusters but I have not selected a specific program (Bazeley, 2013). If the process becomes difficult or overwhelming in its complexity, I will identify a program to implement. However, I have confidence in my analytical abilities based on more than 20 years of experience in intelligence analysis for the US government.

Incidental interviews, doctrinal policies and other denominational documents, cultural artifacts from the individual churches, routine communications from the superintendent for the consumption by the churches and their leaders, observations, memoranda, journal items, and other qualitative data collection will be used to triangulate the information from the interviews (Gilbert et al., 2018; Johnson, 2007, 2018b). These resources will help me develop an understanding of the shared experiences of the church leaders in their sensemaking processes. These data also will support integrated analysis with the quantitative data. However, before I can be confident of my findings, I must consider and address issues that may affect the quality of the data collection and accuracy of the analyses; I must address validity and reliability (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999).

Validity and Reliability Plans

Biases and other errors can degrade the quality of the research effort (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). I addressed many potential errors of qualitative

techniques through the design of this portion: using the described iterative analytical process for coding the interviews, illustrating constructs and findings with descriptions relayed by the interviewees or captured in archival documents, member checking of the transcripts, and intentional triangulation by incorporating multiple resources to avoid reliance on a single methodology. However, there also are inherent flaws in interviewing, the possibility of making unjustified assumptions, and of researcher bias and involvement which must be addressed.

Lamont and Swidler (2014) described numerous strengths of interviewing, including the depth of understanding and meaning-making that is available through this technique, but also warned of potential biases. Specifically, subjects attributed order or focus to events as they unfolded that did not exist at the time, ascribed justification during the process that were not observable until after the event ended, or fabricated details to address questions on events occurring outside their experiences or observations. Weick (1995) and Kerlinger and Lee (1999) also noted similar concerns applicable to this study that relied on the participants recalling their experiences from three years earlier as accurately as possible. One way to address this bias was to reach saturation of the data or meaning (Saunders et al., 2017; Seidman, 2013). I anticipated reaching saturation within the intended core sample, due to the unusual response rate. If the 14 interviews (seven of lead pastors and seven group interviews) did not reach saturation, I will reassess the situation to determine if resources permitted additional interviews and seek participation by church leaders identified before the field work commenced. Ideally, all leadership elements in each of the district churches would be interviewed (Gilbert et al., 2018).

Another useful technique is to prompt the recollection (Seidman, 2013). I will provide each lead pastor a copy of the summary of the year's activities submitted by the church

leadership to the district office immediately prior to the 2017 annual district meeting and remind the interviewees that I am looking for their recollections at that point in time.

Another concern is religious congruency fallacy (Chaves, 2010). Chaves warned researchers about assuming religious coherence, the presumption of consistency between faith and behaviors, when studying religious persons or organizations. Instead, "we should expect those who tell such stories to justify them" (p. 11). Chaves explained automatic, natural reactions influenced by a faith system in daily encounters are practically impossible unless an individual practices, on a routine basis, religious schemas to inform actions. The solutions selected to counter this bias were to ask for clarification or justification during the interviews, member checking of the transcripts, and bracketing (Bazeley, 2013; Chaves, 2010).

Bracketing is the technique to disclose the researcher's experiences with the subject matter, allowing the reader to decide if the researcher analyzed the data responsibly (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2007). I have not served as a pastor or leader in an evangelical church, although my faith background is evangelical. I have no affiliation with the denomination studied in this research effort. I received my master of divinity degree from George Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas, and completed two quarters of clinical pastoral education, serving as a chaplain in a medical center in San Antonio, Texas. I have not been called to the pulpit. My vocation has been as a leader in US government organizations for more than 30 years, but the authority has been formal and legitimate, granted by virtue of my assigned position within the organizations (Northouse, 2013). This differred significantly from the source of authority in a church (Kinnison, 2014; Ledbetter et al., 2016). To counter bias or unjustified conclusions, I will check assumptions and perceptions against cultural artifacts, formal interview responses, and interactions with knowledgeable individuals (Bazeley, 2013; Johnson, 2007; Schein, 2017).

Having a pragmatist interpretive worldview, I will compare the composite descriptions of the shared experiences with data from diverse resources for triangulation and clarity (Balogun et al., 2003; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Filstad, 2014; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). From the culled textural and structural descriptions, I will develop a composite understanding of the essence of the experience of leaders within each sampled church and collectively between the churches. Additional insights on trust and leadership styles will be gleaned through the quantitative portion of this study.

Quantitative Methodology

Although secondary to the qualitative techniques, the quantitative methods would be applied concurrently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative instruments provided supporting data on how trust and leadership styles related to and informed the sensemaking experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). The demographic survey collected data that could be used as covariates in regression analyses (Field, 2018; Hayes, 2018).

The primary quantitative research question was: what are the relationships between the independent variables of organizational sensemaking of the leaders, trust in the superintendent, and leadership styles and the dependent variable, the church planting response? Corollary or secondary questions were

- What was the relationship between levels of perceived trust in the superintendent and sensemaking as manifested in the level of fulfillment of plans for planting a new church?
- What was the relationship between levels of perceived trust in the superintendent and required leadership style, displayed in the level of fulfillment of plans for planting a new church?

- What was the relationship between organizational sensemaking and the choice of leadership style to lead the church forward under the vision?

Instruments

To address the primary quantitative research question, I selected two instruments, one that measured the perceptions of a leader employing trust-enhancing behaviors (De Furia, 1996) and a second instrument that assessed the dominant and perceived needed leadership styles in the district churches (Korn Ferry, 2019).

Interpersonal Trust Surveys

The interpersonal trust survey (ITS) provided two data sets (De Furia, 1996). One assessed an individual's likelihood or propensity to employ five trust-enhancing behaviors: sharing relevant information, reducing controls, allowing for mutual influence, clarifying mutual expectations, and meeting expectations. The second data set provided results on expectations for others to use these same behaviors but the instrument did not define who these others were. Sibicky (1996) questioned the validity of the instrument in measuring the complex social and psychometric properties of trust, noting the small sample ($N = 360$) of participants comprising the normative database and lack of supporting research. A study by Testoni et al. (2018) indicated "a strong spiritual dimension corresponded to a greater willingness to develop trustful relationships" (p. 11). The observer variant (ITS-O) allowed those working with a supervisor to assess the leader's behaviors in relation to their own expectations, in two data sets. Each variant had 60 items with a nine-point Likert scale and would take 30 minutes to complete. The scoring sheet facilitated interpreting the responses with respect to the five trust-enhancing behaviors. I purchased copies of the ITS from Wiley Publishers however the ITS-O was out of print. I obtained permission from the publisher to make up to 499 copies for use in this research study.

De Furia (1996) indicated the ITS-O data sets could facilitate analysis in three ways. One way was understanding the perceptions of others of the observed behaviors self-assessed by the participant, also known as a 360º assessment. A second established the trust norm for a team. A third method was to determine how well the participant's needs were being met by their supervisor. This study incorporated the first and third purposes and added another: comparing the perceived trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent to desirable behaviors identified by hierarachically subordinated leaders.

Leadership Styles Workbook

The Leadership Styles Workbook (LSW) measured six motivational leadership approaches: participatory, visionary, coaching, pacesetting, affiliative, and directive (Korn Ferry, 2019). It consisted of 36 forced choice items and could be completed in about 20 minutes. I adjusted the Likert scales to include descriptors for each of the numerical values, as depicted in Table 4. Including a descriptor for each choice provided ordered categories for the numerical scale and clarified what each number choice represented (Harris, 2014).

Table 4

Likert Scale Descriptors Added to the Leadership Styles Workbook

Variable	Choice					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Numerical value description	Definitely disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Definitely agree

Note: The original scales in the LSW exercises described choice numbers 1 and 6. I added descriptors for the remaining numbers for improved clarity and accuracy (Harris, 2014).

Deployment of the Instruments

The plan was to deliver the LSW to the senior pastors in each district church two weeks prior to the interviews (Korn Ferry, 2019). The workbook contained educational material on

leadership styles as well as several exercises. Two of these exercises were the LSW test instrument; the remainder were opportunities for the pastor to reflect on personal, dominant style characteristics and determine optimal situations in which to use different styles. The pastor would retain the workbook but provide a copy of the results from the two pertinent exercises at the interview. If the interview was conducted in the church facility, I would survey the location, noting observations and impressions (Johnson, 2018b). After the interview, I will ask the senior pastor to complete in the subsequent two weeks the ITS for self-assessment and the ITS-O on the observed trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent (De Furia, 1996). In a like manner, I will distribute the ITS-O instruments to the board members who participated in the group interviews and ask for the return of the answer sheet within two weeks. I will provide stamped and self-addressed envelopes to all interviewees for this purpose.

Analysis Plan

The analysis of the quantitative data would begin with descriptions of the central tendencies, variances, and other calculations providing inferential statistics (Field, 2017). Focusing on one instrument at a time, I will conduct analysis of the results from each data set and between each set, all with significance as $\alpha = .05$. For the data on trust, Hypothesis 1 tested interrater reliability; the null ($H1_0$) and alternative ($H1_A$) hypotheses are provided.

$H1_0$: The trust-enhancing behaviors desired by one rater were similar to the desired behaviors by other raters, as measured by the ITS-O (De Furia, 1996).

$H1_A$: The trust-enhancing behaviors desired by at least one rater differed from the behaviors desired by the other raters.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 tested the relationship of the perceived behaviors of the superintendent in comparison to desired behaviors and in a 360° assessment (De Furia, 1996). Figure 2 graphically depicts the intersection of data sets for the analytical plan involving interpersonal trust.

$H2_0$: In a trusting environment, each of the five observed trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent would equal or exceed the desired behavior levels, measured by ITS-O.

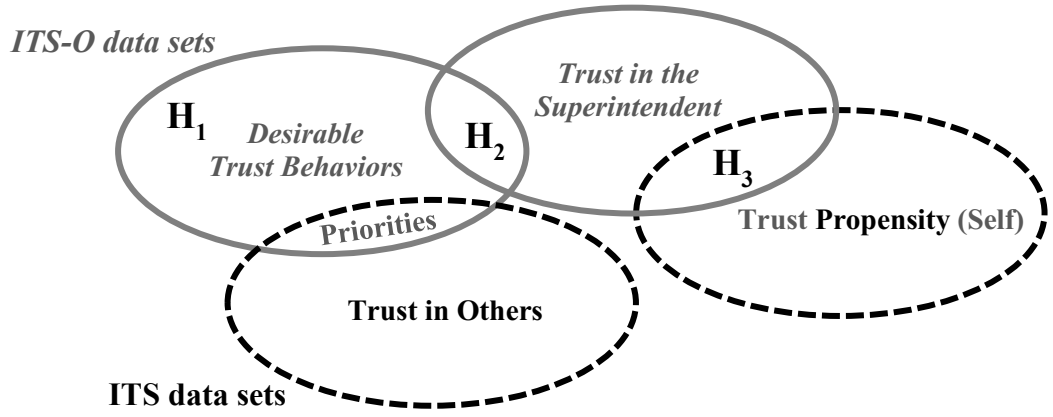
$H2_A$: In a distrusting environment, one or more of the five observed trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent would be less than the desired behavior levels.

$H3_0$: In a trusting environment, assessments by subordinate leaders, as measured by the ITS-O, would equal or exceed the self-assessment of the superintendent, as measured by the ITS.

$H3_A$: In a distrusting environment, the assessment of subordinate leaders would be less than the self-assessment of the superintendent.

Figure 2

Illustration of the Integration of Data Sets from the Interpersonal Trust Surveys



Note: ITS-O was the observer variant of the interpersonal trust survey (ITS; De Furia, 1996). Each version had two data sets. The ITS-O data sets supported Hypothesis 1 (H_1) and Hypothesis 2 (H_2) testing. One data set each from ITS-O and ITS provided the data to test Hypothesis 3 (H_3) and different sets compared the relative rankings of desirable trust-enhancing behaviors as identified by the church leaders and expected trust in others by the superintendent.

I will continue to explore the results from the ITS and ITS-O data sets until all logical analyses were completed, such as comparisons within groups, between groups, and integrations (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017). Expecting more than 30 subjects for each instrument and variation, I anticipated working with parametric data but would apply appropriate techniques if the sample sizes were insufficient or results not parametric. Later, I would apply data collected by qualitative techniques to interpret the results further.

For the LSW, an assumption was the leaders would employ the dominant leadership style, their preferred style (Korn Ferry, 2019), when faced with an unexpected and disruptive challenge necessitating sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Further, the choice of the necessary leadership motivation style could reflect the stress and perceived expectations of the superintendent for progress in the vision implementation (Spreier et al., 2006). Although some analysis could be conducted on the data sets, such as identifying the most common choice for preferred and required leadership styles, analyses more directly addressing the goals of the quantitative portion required data transformation, an earmark of mixed methods methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). First, quantitative validity and realiability concerns were addressed (Field, 2017).

Validity and Reliability Plans

Important to the results of these analyses were countering threats to reliability and validity (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). Reliability refers to the consistency, reproducibility, and dependability of the quantitative results. It can be determined through internal consistency measures, such as exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. I incorporated a check of the fit of the models, for variability calculations and coefficients of determination, and

interrater reliability checks in the analytical plan. I ensured each test, as appropriate, included the standard deviations and statistical significance to compare to my standard, $\alpha = .05$.

Validity confirms what is tested is what was intended (Field, 2017; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). The validity of the statistical conclusion may be threatened by an under-powered study, which was a concern as I anticipated at least 30 responses to the trust surveys but may not obtain that threshold for the LSW. I intended to test within-group variability and interrater reliability. Threats to construct validity were addressed by testing alternative hypotheses and correlation coefficients supported discriminability. The qualitative data will be used to triangulate with the results. As I was not seeking causation, I did not anticipate threats to the internal and external validity, although the applicability of results would not extend beyond the district since the trust environment and potential influence of the superintendent was bounded geographically. Once the qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed, I sought to integrate the methods for a more informed interpretation of the results.

Mixed Methods Research Methodology

The strength of a mixed method research design is the systematic comparison and integration of the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017; Kerlinger& Lee, 1999). To begin the mixed methods process, I would seek to triangulate or clarify the results from each quantitative instrument with qualitative data to facilitate the interpretations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017). Then, to assess the relationship between the four primary variables—sensemaking, trust, leadership, and planting results—I needed to perform data transformation analysis to determine numerical values for sensemaking and planting results. These values, combined with trust in the superintendent from the ITS-O (De Furia, 1996) and leadership styles from the LSW (Korn Ferry, 2019), in a

moderated regression model will provide results of the relationship between the four variables (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). The results will inform the qualitative analysis of the interviews, providing additional insights into the sensemaking contexts and processes of the church leaders and into the trust environment in the district.

I also will transform the categorical data from the LSW (the characterizations of the preferred and required leadership styles) into numerical values (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) based on my assessment of similarities to the Weickian organizational sensemaking principles (Weick, 1995). Adding stories from the interviews and data from the cultural artifacts and other qualitative resources will facilitate my understanding of the relationship between organizational sensemaking, trust in the superintendent, the leadership styles, and planting results. Any remaining inconsistencies or unusual findings can be evaluated further using additional mixed methods techniques, such as a joint data display, accommodating side-by-side assessments of the qualitative and quantitative analyses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018).

Transformation of Collected Data

A distinguishing element of mixed methods research is the transformation of data to be compatible for analysis: qualitative data are quantified and quantitative data are reclassified to integrate with qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018). Data transformations to facilitate analysis concerning sensemaking, church planting, and leadership results were necessary in this study.

Organizational Sensemaking

The first data transformation integration technique quantified data collected in the formal interviews to support the primary quantitative research question seeking the relationship between sensemaking, trust in the superintendent, leadership, and individual church planting results

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantification of organizational sensemaking was complex as the construct consisted of seven different properties that were interrelated (Weick, 1995). I identified 31 aspects that could represent the seven principles (Weick, 1995, 2001; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015; Weick et al., 2005). Discussed in Chapter 2, these aspects were set in a Likert-type scale for which a high numerical value indicated effective employment of sensemaking skills and progress. I averaged the aspect scores to set a domain score for each principle. The average of the domain scores determined a global score for sensemaking for each interview. The goal was to ascertain a score for each leadership element; one score for each lead pastor and one for each governing board. Using the principle of temporal continuity as an example, Table 5 describes recommended aspects that could be used to quantify stories and insights from the formal interviews to assign a numerical value for segmenting ongoing time into experiential durations. Details on all seven principles and the 31 related aspects are available in Tables B1 and B2 in Appendix B.

Table 5

Descriptions for Aspects of Temporal Continuity, a Weickian Sensemaking Principle

Aspect	Aspect description
Interruption	The profundity of the disruption to ongoing projects. A low score (1) reflected a significant interruption of activities; a high score (5) for no disruption.
Bureaucracy	The perceived control exerted by the church administrative processes. A low score indicated closed systems; a high score, open systems.
Emotional intelligence (EQ)	The emotional balance the leader reflected in the midst of sensemaking. A low score suggested poor EQ was demonstrated but a high score, high EQ.
Stressfulness	The perceived levels of anxiety expressed. High stress prompted a low score; low stress, a high score.
Distractions	The interference from other projects. A low score reflected no distractions meaning a complete focus on the disruption; a high score indicated the leader addressing multiple simultaneous distractions.

Note: Each aspect received a score based on data available in interviews (Weick, 1995). No evidence of the aspect resulted in no score and the averages for the principle included only scored aspects. Averaging the scores for the seven principles yielded global scores. The goal was a single global score for each interviewed pastor and governing board.

Because the standard for quantifying qualitative data was dichotomous (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and consistency of collection between each participant through the semi-structured interview format was limited (Seidman, 2013), this quantification likely would be more effective as an interpretive lens than a psychometric instrument (Field, 2017). Results of the individual and group interviews will inform the descriptions of the scale iterations and allow ranking of the results to quantify those pastors or boards that reflected greater (numerical) values for organizational sensemaking that others. Table B3 would incorporate quotes from the interviews and other applicable qualitative techniques to further illustrate this process.

Church Planting Response

In addition to data transformation for organizational sensemaking, I needed numerical values for the planting responses of the individual churches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The superintendent's vision was to plant ten new churches and two dozen apostolic initiatives within a three year period.

A church plant was an effort to launch a new church in the region ([Denomination], 2015a; [District], 2019). A plant may focus upon a specific ethnic group, community, or existential need, such as support groups for addressing addictions or grief ([District], 2019). A church plant, sponsored by a mother church and exhibiting consistency and regularity in its activities, could be led by ordained clergy or lay leaders. Church plants planned to become self-sustaining within two years of being established, acquiring 25 missional partners and an average of 50 people attending weekly ([Denomination], 2015a). A church plant that achieved these milestones changed its status from a church plant and continued to grow its membership and weekly attendance to eventually attain the full status of a church within the denomination.

An apostolic initiative represented intentional activism to contact and develop a relationship with a group of individuals who had no prior association with the church or denomination ([Denomination], 2015a; [District], 2020a). Examples were emerging church projects like dinner churches, missional communities, and microchurches. A dinner church reflected historical Christian roots of hospitality. The church sent a lay leader or pastor and team to a location, typically in an underserved neighborhood on a routine basis, often monthly. The team provided a free meal, short Gospel-based message, and prayer. The goal was to develop new relationships longitudinally with individuals within the neighborhood and allow room for the Holy Spirit to work upon the gathering. A dinner church was not self-sustaining, but required constant infusion of resources from the mother church. Yet it was important as it opened new areas for future church plants ([District], 2019).

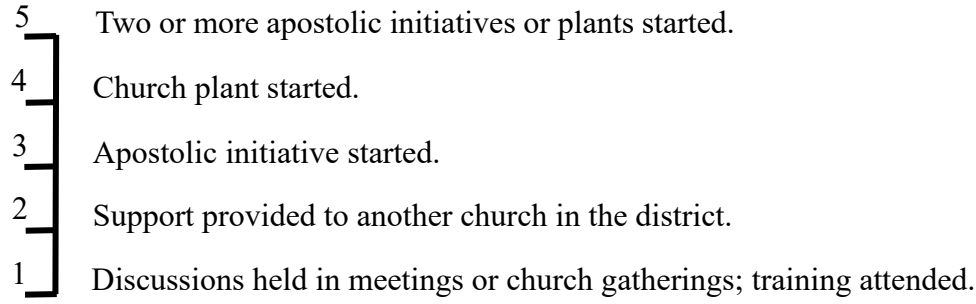
Other apostolic initiatives were missional communities and microchurches ([District], 2020a). Missional communities focused on group relationships and sought to expand by connecting to other groups related by common interests, geography, or other aspects. Led by lay leaders, bi-vocational pastors, or retired pastors, these gatherings were less frequent—monthly or quarterly—and celebrational. Not self-sustaining, they determined interest within new areas and provided opportunities for congregationss to share the evangelical message. Micro-churches were small versions of the mother church held in different venues, like coffee houses and community centers, without the formality of traditional church services. Micro-churches invited connections with individuals and discipleship training: growing spiritually and relationally and providing opportunities for activism.

To calculate the response to the vision, I plan to use documents provided from the district office, from minutes from church governing board meetings, interviews, and any other available

sources. The scale portrayed in Figure 3 illustrates the conversion of the qualitative data into a numerical value for quantitative analysis. Greater numerical values of the scores reflect more significant achievement of the church in meeting the goals of the superintendent's vision.

Figure 3

Illustration of Quantified Church Planting Data



Note: An apostolic initiative was a pre-cursor activity for determining the viability of a future church community ([District], 2019). A church plant had organizational structure, was aligned with denominational doctrine, and a goal for self-sufficiency in 24 months from the date of establishment ([Denomination], 2015a).

Leadership Styles

The assumptions that the choices of leadership styles (preferred and required) could reflect sensemaking progress or stress can be assessed with a comparison of one data set to the other (Korn Ferry, 2019) and data transformation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). My first premise was that leadership styles defined by motivational need (power, relationship, achievement; Spreier et al., 2006), emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2013), and compatibility with sensemaking principles (Weick, 1995) can be ranked on a scale assessing sensemaking efficacy. Table 6 provides a description of each of the leadership styles and principles that appear complementary. Figure 4 provides an illustration of the resulting scale, which would be used to compare the relative positions of the required leadership style and the preferred approach. A higher scoring style indicated the application of more sensemaking

principles and thus stronger sensemaking efficacy while a lower scored style may reflect diminished cognitive capacities and emotional control. Comparison to qualitative data would be necessary to gain an informed interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Table 6

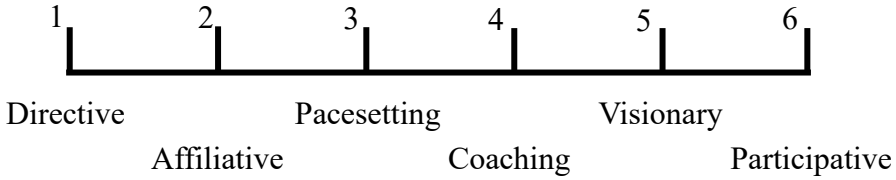
Integration of Weickian Sensemaking and Leadership Styles Repertoire

Leading style	Style description	Compatible sensemaking principles
Participative	This relational approach actively incorporated diversity, innovation, and the voices of others in the organization to build consensus. Also called democratic.	Reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity.
Visionary	Most effective when leading change, this power style empowered the followers to attain shared personal (work related) and professional goals.	Reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, enactive environment, and retrospection.
Coaching	This power approach aligned the skill and interests of the follower to the needs of the team or organization, not focusing on the job but the individual.	Identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, enactive environment, and temporal continuity.
Pacesetting	Focused on goal achievement and forward progress, this achievement style was driven by metrics and the need to meet expectations on time and with high levels of quality.	Reference points, plausibility, enactive environment, and retrospection.
Affiliative	To promote harmony and settle raw emotions on the team or in the organization, this relational style focused on the personal and emotional side, bringing the team together with lavish praise and encouragement.	Identity construction, social interaction, and plausibility.
Directive	Previously described as coercive, this achievement style reduced ambiguity and confusion by issuing clear, timely, and unwavering orientation and objectives, as in a crisis.	Reference points, identity construction, and enactive environment.

Note: Some of the six leading styles represented in the LSW (Spreier et al., 2006) appeared compatible with more Weickian principles and corresponding aspects than other styles (Weick, 1995). Chapter 2 and Appendix B contain additional details on this integration.

Figure 4

Scaling of Leadership Motivation Styles Within the Weickian Sensemaking Construct



My second assumption concerning results from the LSW addressed stress (Spreier et al., 2006). Stressfulness may indicate difficulty making sense of the disruption, resulting in the arousal of emotions and diminished cognitive capacity for extracting viable cues, interacting with others, and finding a plausible story (Weick, 1995). Table 7 portrays the stress and characterizations of the motivational needs of the six leadership styles in the LSW (Korn Ferry, 2019; Spreier et al., 2006), although the LSW was not designed to measure stress levels.

Table 7

Characterizations of Six Leadership Styles in Relation to Motivational Needs and Stress

Motivational need	High stress styles	Low stress styles
Relational	Participative	Affiliative
Power	Visionary	Coaching
Achievement	Directive	Pacesetting

Note: Motivational needs were based on McClelland's theory of need, as characterized by Spreier et al. (2006).

Integration of Collected Data

Having obtained values for sensemaking, trust, leadership styles, and church planting responses, I would be ready to address the primary quantitative research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018): what were the relationships between organizational sensemaking of the leaders, trust in the supervisor, leadership style, and the individual church planting responses?

This question was tested with two hypotheses. One evaluated influences on organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and the other on the required leadership style (Korn Ferry, 2019).

$H4_0$: The perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent (as measured by the ITS-O) had a direct effect on organizational sensemaking (as determined by quantified interview data) and an indirect effect through the influence of the preferred leadership style (as measured by the LSW).

$H4_A$: The perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent did not have a direct effect on organizational sensemaking nor an indirect effect through the influence of the preferred leadership style.

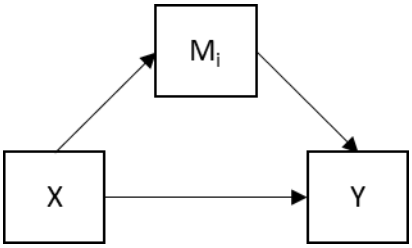
$H5_0$: Perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent (as measured by the ITS-O) had a direct effect on the required leadership style (as measured by the LSW) and an indirect through the effect of sensemaking (as determined by quantified interview data), with covariates of age, tenure, and prior church planting experiences (obtained in the demographic surveys).

$H5_A$: Perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent did not have a direct effect on the required leadership style nor indirect through the effect of sensemaking, with covariates of age, tenure, and prior church planting experiences.

Using the IBM statistical package of the social sciences program (SPSS) version 27 (IBM, 2020) with the Hayes PROCESS tool addendum (Hayes, 2020), I will use a moderated regression model to calculate effect sizes (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Figure 5 displays the simple moderated model. With the results, I will integrate qualitative data to inform the interpretations to develop findings.

Figure 5

Simple Moderated Regression Model



Note: Simple moderation model for determining the direct effect of the input variable (X) on output variable (Y) and the effect moderated by another variable (M_i). Diagram copied from Hayes (2018, p. 585).

Validity and Reliability Plans

As with the qualitative and quantitative techniques, validity and reliability considerations for the mixed methods research methodology must be included in the research plan (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Considerations specific to mixed methods integrative techniques include adequate sample sizes, merging the data bases, addressing anomalies, and the logic of the study design. I endeavored to address each of these concerns. The sample size may be sufficient for the qualitative portion but inadequate for the quantitative. In this study, I acknowledged the concerns this poses as I felt constrained in obtaining appropriate numbers for the quantitative portion. I will endeavor to encourage the greatest participation numbers possible. If the sample sizes proved to be less than at least 30 participants per instrument, which was the minimum recommended (Field, 2017; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018), I will perform the analyses using appropriate techniques and rely upon the statistical significances to provide indications of significant findings. I will also integrate the results with qualitative data to develop reasonable explanations for or clarification of the findings.

In merging the data bases, I developed plans for data transformation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Although typically dichotomous, the quantification of data on sensemaking, leadership styles, and on planting progress will be attempted in a five-point scale. For the sensemaking assessment, I arranged for an experienced analyst to confirm my process and I will perform interrater reliability calculations. Again, the databases will be integrated so that the quantitative results inform the qualitative analysis and the qualitative data support or contradict the quantitative results.

With respect to resolving inconsistencies and anomalies, I will check my codebook with experienced researchers and use joint data integration tables to facilitate analysis to determine reasonable explanations similar to or different from the literature as described in Chapter 2 (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018). The last validity and reliability consideration involved the logic of this study. I provided my reasoning for using a mixed methods research design to examine the sensemaking processes of church leaders in a declining organizational environment who were directed to plant churches to restore health in the district. I explained the incorporation of interpersonal trust and leadership styles surveys and how the results may inform the sensemaking environment, influences, and results, manifested in the church planting results. The next chapter describes the results of my implementation of this research plan.

Conclusion

This mixed methods study of the experiences of middle managers to make sense of and enact (or not) the guidance of their superintendent addressed practical and academic goals. Seven churches selected for the sample group represented the diversity of the dozens of churches within the Protestant evangelical denominational district. The research plan incorporated qualitative

techniques of formal and informal interviews of individual leaders and groups sharing leadership responsibilities, observations in the sampled churches, and document and environment analyses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2007). Qualitative analysis will be iterative and inductive to select phrases and develop themes providing textural and structural descriptions of the essence of the experiences of the leaders in the sampled churches. These results will be compared to the analyses of cultural artifacts, contributions from the remaining churches in the district, and quantitative instrument responses to form the findings (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Gilbert et al., 2018; Schein, 2017). Quantitative instruments will provide insights on trust characteristics (De Furia, 1996) and the leaders' styles (Korn Ferry, 2019).

Paramount to this design was the ethical and respectful treatment of all participants and of the raw data collected, which will be safeguarded. Contact with participants of the study was not initiated until the university institutional review board and my dissertation committee reviewed the research plan. Completion of the university protocols will release this study for publication and its contribution in addressing academic and practical applications will be met.

Chapter 4 - Results

> Sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality. (Weick, 1995, p. 57)

This research effort examined the essence of the lived experience of church leaders within a specific denominational district concerning how they made sense of the phenomenon of their superintendent directing them to plant churches during chronic organizational decline. The phenomenon should have been disruptive as churches in decline tend to focus their attention inward, upon their organizational health and revitalization of their purpose to worship God (Rainer, 2020; Ross, 2013). In contrast, these church leaders reportedly responded quickly and affirmatively, developing plans to plant churches within the first year of the phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is much research on organizational sensemaking and the important role middle managers, like these church leaders, fulfilled in implementing the vision of their hierarchical leaders (Bäcklander, 2019; Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). Few studies researched the sensemaking processes of church leaders (Lequay, 2004; Lian, 2009) or within a distributed organizational structure (Kaylor, 2008; Klaasen, 2018).

To understand why the church leaders responded rapidly in support of a vision that differed greatly from the status quo, I focused on the influence of the perceived trustworthiness of the supervisor. Trust is important in effective leadership (Colquit et al., 2007; Zand, 1997) and I surmised that the church leaders must have had extraordinary trust in their superintendent to enact the vision so readily. This trust would influence their sensemaking, including the leadership styles they implemented to meet organizational needs and to plant new churches. I found no

studies that examined trust, leadership, and sensemaking of leaders in a religious culture.

To explore the organizational sensemaking of these church leaders, I developed this mixed methods study that concurrently collected qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative techniques provided stories describing the leaders' sensemaking processes, leadership behaviors, and the environment in which the phenomenon occurred (Gilbert et al., 2018; Weick, 1995). However, the data did not provide definitive information attributing planting results to each church. The quantitative techniques, gathering empirical data on trust, leadership styles, and demographic details on the participants, allowed scrutiny seeking to identify a relationship between trust and leadership styles (Field, 2018). To incorporate the variable of sensemaking, I used data transformation and integration techniques, converting the interviews with church leaders into numerical organizational sensemaking scores (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Findings on the relationship between trust, leadership styles, and sensemaking informed the analysis of the qualitative data to clarify the essence of the shared sensemaking experience, the primary purpose of this research. This chapter provides the analytical results of this mixed methods study.

Participant Demographics Data

Although the research plan sought to focus on the leaders within seven churches representative of the district, lead pastors in only four churches agreed to participate. The four pastors agreed to formal interviews and supplied responses to a demographics survey, LSW, ITS, and ITS-O instruments. Governing boards associated with two of these churches participated in interviews and with responses to the ITS-O. These four core churches were diverse with respect to metropolitan areas (rural, suburb, large cities), ethnicity led, gender led, and church sizes (family, pastoral, and programs-sized, which collectively averaged 350 members/attendees or

less each week). Persistent efforts to contact the leaders in the pre-selected replacement churches were not typically fruitful. Concerned with this small sample size, I reviewed my notes from initial contact with the lead pastors from the remaining churches and invited available and interested lead pastors and governing boards to participate (Gilbert, 2018b). The decision to change the population from a purposeful sample to a sample of convenience resulted from these difficulties encountered in the collection processes on site. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic was not a factor. Table 8 displays the resulting participation and sample sizes.

Table 8

Participation by Sample Size and Technique

Technique	*N*	Core churches	Expanded sample of churches	Lead pastors	Governing boards	Superintendent
Demographic survey	20	4	4	19	0	1
ITS	6	4	1	5	0	1
ITS-O	7	4	2	4	3[a]	0
LSW	19	4	4	18	0	1
Formal interviews	11	4	4	7	3	1
Informal discussions	12	0	0	12[b]	0	0

Note: ITS = Interpersonal trust survey; ITS-O = ITS, observer variant; LSW = Leadership styles workbook.
[a] One board member was not serving on a governing board before the vision enactment in 2017; two members represented the same church. [b] One participant was not a lead pastor in 2017.

The superintendent participated in an interview and completed the demographics survey, LSW, and ITS. I conducted informal discussions with current and former lead pastors while initiating communications with the district churches to seek participation and many of these pastors completed the LSW. The average age of the lead pastors participating in the study was 57 years. The mean tenures were 10 years appointed in the same church, 17 years in churches within the district, 21 years in the denomination, and 26 years in ministry. Table 9 provides detailed demographics data. I did not acquire demographics data from the lay leaders.

Table 9

Mean Statistics of Demographic Characteristics of Clergy Participants

Characteristic, in years	*N*	%	*M*	*SD*
Age at time of survey	20		57.3	12.0
30-39	4	20.0		
40-49	2	10.0		
50-59	3	15.0		
60-69	8	40.0		
70-79	3	15.0		
Tenure at appointed church	19		9.7	8.7
0-9	10	52.6		
10-19	7	36.8		
20-29	2	10.5		
Tenure in district	19		16.5	10.4
0-9	6	31.6		
10-19	6	31.6		
20-29	5	36.2		
30-39	1	5.3		
40-49	1	5.3		
Tenure in denomination	19		20.8	12.9
0-9	5	26.3		
10-19	4	21.1		
20-29	4	21.1		
30-39	5	26.2		
40-49	1	5.3		
Tenure in ministry	19		25.7	12.9
0-9	3	15.8		
10-19	3	15.8		
20-29	3	15.8		
30-39	8	42.1		
40-49	2	10.5		

In the four core churches, two lead pastors were newly appointed to their churches while the other two had been serving for four or more years; one lead pastor had not served in the district before 2017 ([Denomination], 2018). However, the means of tenure of the lead pastors in the four core churches statistically did not differ significantly from the mean tenure reported from the remaining lead pastor participants. In the expanded core of eight churches, a third pastor was newly appointed in a specific church but had served in the district in leadership positions for more than 10 years. The mean tenure from the expanded sample of eight churches

did not differ significantly from the mean tenure of the remaining churches participating in the study. Tables 10 and 11 display these data. This suggested the four core churches and the expanded eight churches could be representative of the district churches for quantitative analytical purposes.

Table 10

Demographic Characteristics Comparing Means of Four Core Churches to Other Churches

Characteristic, in years	Four core churches		Other participating churches	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age at time of survey	49.0	15.7	60.1	10.5
Tenure at appointed church	8.3	12.6	9.3	8.0
Tenure in district	14.3	11.8	18.4	11.4
Tenure in denomination	20.3	13.4	21.9	13.6
Tenure in ministry	21.5	12.6	27.4	12.4

Note: $N = 19$; core churches $n = 4$. The core churches were from the original design for a purposeful sample of seven churches; the leaders of the three other churches declined to participate.

Table 11

Demographic Characteristics Comparing Means of Expanded Core Churches to Other Churches

Characteristics, in years	Expanded core churches		Other participating churches	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age at time of survey	55.1	15.3	58.3	10.8
Tenure at appointed church	9.2	10.2	10.0	8.1
Tenure in district	19.2	12.5	14.9	9.1
Tenure in denomination	25.0	12.4	18.4	13.1
Tenure in ministry	25.7	13.8	25.3	13.2

Note: $N = 18$; expanded core churches $n = 8$. Expanding the originally selected core churches resulted in including four volunteers; three were lead pastors and the fourth was a governing board member in a fourth church.

The decision doubled the number of churches represented but altered the population from a purposeful sample for maximum variation to one of convenience (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The resulting participation affected the percentages by church size; the largest sized churches, those averaging 151 or more attendees each weekend, were under-represented (no corporate-sized churches with 351-2,000 attendees and a much smaller group of programs-sized churches of 151-350 attendees) and the smallest churches were over-represented as 87.5% of the sample were family- and pastoral-sized churches. The decision to include available pastors and board members may have amplified the volunteer bias and other challenges to external validity (Bazeley, 2013; Dollinger & Leong, 1993; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1976).

Data Collection Processes

Once my committee accepted my dissertation proposal and the institutional review board approved my application, I contacted the district superintendent who disseminated a letter of introduction through the district's routine communications channel (District newsletter, August 18, 2020). A redacted version of the letter is included in Figure A5 in the appendix. This letter provided authorization for me to initiate field work on site. Government-imposed restrictions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated continued social distancing and other personal protective measures. As a result, I conducted most interviews via virtual venues and effected contact with most of the pastors and the board members through a combination of email, text, telephone, and the US postal service. This prevented me from conducting observations within the churches and from effectively collecting non-verbal communication behaviors and interactions between board members (Johnson, 2007, 2018b). However, none of the pastors or board members indicated a health safety concern precluding participation. Another difficulty concerned documentation of the planting responses of each church to the growth vision. Even though the

district staff reported achieving the goal of the vision, I was unable to obtain a confirmed or official list of all the church plants and the new initiatives with attributions to individual churches that supported specific efforts.

Qualitative Data

The purpose of the qualitative data analysis was to examine the experience of the church leaders being asked to plant new churches to address persistent organizational decline. The collection plan in Chapter 3 detailed the qualitative techniques of formal interviews, informal discussions, archival research, and observations supplemented with journaling (Gilbert et al., 2018). I used official district and denominational policy documents to assess the organizational structure and incorporated routine intra-district communiqués to become oriented within the organizational culture (Schein, 2017). I applied an inductive and iterative process to subject-reviewed transcripts of the interviews and other qualitative data to identify codes, trends, and patterns (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Often describing the context or environment in which the church was situated, the participants explained what they understood and how they interpreted the superintendent's vision to lead in ways that made sense to them and their churches. Initial reactions to the vision were enthusiasm, concern, and nonchalance. These reactions led some churches to join into the vision, others to experiment to find viable initiatives, some to seek additional help, and most to address the costs of multiplication to meet the district end goals of the vision: planting ten more churches and starting two dozen initiatives in a three-year period. This analytical effort described the experience of the church leaders making sense of the phenomenon within the Weickian construct (Weick, 1995) but did not provide sufficient detail to characterize the trust environment, the influence of their sensemaking on leadership style choices, nor attribution of planting results.

The Environment of the Phenomenon (Vision)

Within a small evangelical Protestant denomination, the superintendent, whom the church leaders in the district elected, led for a four-year term in a process overseen by the next higher hierarchical level in the denomination ([Denomination], 2016b). The superintendent provided spiritual, fiscal, personnel, and administrative support and guidance to the churches. These responsibilities required communications with the leaders in each church and various district boards and committees, and collaboration with the next higher leaders in the denominational organizational structure ([Denomination], 2015a, 2016a, 2017, 2018, 2019). At each annual district meeting, the superintendent announced formal assignments of clergy to the churches, new initiatives, and other business of the district, often prefaced by discussions. As one pastor reflected, the superintendent's "pattern has been to kind of get a read from the pastors first by sharing that information…then if adjustments need to be made before presenting it to maybe the larger body, that's kind of been [the superintendent's] approach."

By 2014, the superintendent "knew the [district] was on the slide" and worried about the chronic decline in the populations attending the churches and providing support. One pastor noted "one thing that [the superintendent] did was gave us an assessment that we really weren't doing that good in terms of a [district]. That we were, you know, not really growing. We were shrinking." Individually, nearly half (47%) of the churches were declining ([Denomination], 2015b, 2017), some for many years, and many were stagnant. The superintendent admitted, "We just don't plant churches well. We hadn't for decades…we hadn't planted thriving churches." The last church plant that developed into a fully self-supporting church was established twenty years earlier. After much consideration, deliberation, prayer, and research, the superintendent implemented a vision for turnaround, in which churches reimagined their purpose, redefined

their mission and vision for the future, and set goals that became plans involving the whole church using all available resources (Ross, 2013). The purpose of turnaround church efforts is to restore health to the church, but, as one pastor explained, the process takes years.

Internal Factors Affecting Decline

Focusing on the health of a church involved more than addressing a declining population and revenue. Some faced internal issues with finances and concerns caused by members of the church. A newly installed pastor of a small, family-sized church (less than 50 members or attendees) relayed a history of inadequate bookkeeping practices, incomplete records, and thousands of dollars of unsecured debt of which the church leaders were unaware. A larger, pastoral-sized church (51-150 members or attendees) "had not been financially stable in probably 20 or 30 years. When [the pastor] got here, [the church] had credit card debt." The church leaders used a credit card to pay the utilities and district apportionments (dues) were in arrears. The church owed back taxes to the Internal Revenue Service, which placed a lien on the property. Further, neither "the parsonage nor the church building had been maintained…There were literally broken windows and broken furnaces and all sorts of stuff. The only thing that had been updated was the roof because we had a hailstorm" and the insurance company paid for its replacement.

Another pastoral-sized church had a "highly toxic and critical bookkeeper" who criticized the staff, likely leading to the resignation of one staff member. The pastor of a larger, programs-sized church (151 to 350 members or attendees) referred to "two significant antagonists in the church that basically had to leave." One "was a compulsive liar" and the other yelled and "screamed in the lobby …so staff that felt threatened, volunteers that were scared" expressed their concerns to the leaders. Both had been in lay leadership positions and both left the church

organization when confronted by the pastor and lay leaders. The pastor of another pastoral-sized church felt that at times “we [the church leaders] were held hostage by the big givers and their agenda for the church rather than Jesus’ agenda for the church.” A governing board member at that church related, “we had some contentious boards and there wasn't agreement and there was a lot of, you know, in some cases, disrespect.” Not all problems originated in churches, however.

External Factors Affecting Decline

External factors contributed to the chronic conditions. Church leaders noted the changing demographic profiles within their neighborhoods and in the greater society. One leader stated their urban neighborhoods were “probably 25 years ahead of a lot of the rest of America when it comes to the browning of America and then the changing that's coming in many ways.” The majority ethnicity had become the minority as people of other ethnicities moved into the region. The leader reflected “most of them [church members] were still pretty afraid of their [immigrant] neighbors. Very few knew the names of many other neighbors that were [of that ethnicity] and had very little relationships [sic].” The new pastor saw this development as an opportunity, however, and within a few years, the church “saw some significant growth. Yeah. So, the shift in people's understanding, their own mission, and their own responsibility for the mission of God had really begun to take root.” Another leader noted changing demographic characteristics but from the perspective of the resulting shift in society and the need for the church to remain relevant, acknowledging a

> new demographic and a new culture. The model of the current church culture was not where society was shifting to and I'm not talking about in terms of liberalization and so forth. Growth is among minorities, among [a specific racial people group], is happening in cities. Young people today are multicultural. They don't want to be in a White

> homogeneous society. They are socially active. And if that is not where you are headed for this church, you will get more of the same [decline and irrelevance].

Although internal and external factors detrimentally impacted the health of many district churches, some leaders found positive elements within their own churches that could facilitate health and ways to engage their local communities. A new lead pastor appointed to a pastoral-sized church remarked, "finding out that I had a core of leaders here that I could place my trust in, that were willing to see beyond how it's always been done, has…been absolutely huge." Many of the churches expressed interest in helping people within their respective communities. Scilicet, church congregations recognized enormous need in rural areas, subsidized housing developments, and under-resourced inner cities. Although some churches sought to develop lay leaders, not all churches had members in the congregations who would drive mission-focused efforts. As one pastor remarked, "you can get somebody to go and do the work of evangelism cross-culturally in a different area before they'll do it in their own [neighborhood]." Another pastor lamented, "There were no evangelists among the congregation and 'leaders' steadfastly refused to become evangelists." The turnaround initiative yielded modest gains within some churches, but the chronic decline continued.

Factors Leading to the Phenomenon

Assessing the progress and impact of the turnaround initiative in the first elected term, the superintendent noted the numerous internal and external factors detrimental to vitality. Although church leaders sought to leverage their respective resources and capabilities, many could not grow lay leaders to step forward. The superintendent acknowledged,

> I think in my heart, I was beginning to suspect Turnaround by itself isn't going to win the day. Some of these churches aren't going to make it. So, having less churches, which is

> proving to be true, that's not a recipe for growth and health… And then, I started reading some literature realizing a church of 50 can plant a church. It doesn't have to be a lot of money. And Fresh Expressions [a form of emerging church movement (Fresh Expression, 2021)] came out… I thought if we could somehow generate this compelling vision that every church should be healthy and if it's healthy, it can multiply and we'll [the district] help you [the churches] do it.

This was the genesis of the multiplication initiative, in which the district set a goal of increasing the number of churches by ten and having two dozen church starts within three years. The superintendent's comprehensive plan incorporated equipping the churches with training and mentoring, recruiting experienced pastors to lead and promote growth, and providing support.

A staff pastor at a pastoral-sized church reported the district offered matching funds for planting new churches and encouraged churches that could not multiply to support the efforts of those that could. One recruited pastor talked about the turnaround church classes the pastor attended with other leaders in the district before being appointed to a local church. The pastor noted the presenters "did a great job of setting a foundation for moving forward because it really got everybody on the same page as to why we exist and how we do ministry and all of those things." This pastor observed the opportunity to attend quality training was not always offered to smaller churches in the denomination, as the leaders in those churches tended to be more conscientious and steadfast, rather than powerful, influential, and successful at growing a church. Prior to being recruited into this district, a pastor participated in a denominational training event in which the instructors warned,

> if you invest your money in your smaller churches, trying to make them bigger churches, the kind of result you will get is you may get some growth in your smaller churches. If

> you invest your money in the pastors for the 10 larger churches, the type of growth you will see in a church that's already growing is going to go far beyond. And so, their suggestion to the [superintendent of another district] was [to] invest in training in the churches that were showing growth and in the pastors from the larger churches.

Another pastor, who had experience planting churches in a different district, was intrigued with the challenge of implementing the new multiplication vision and eagerly agreed to come into the district, specifically to be a part of the vision. This pastor, first assigned to a church, later moved into a district staff billet, mentoring church leaders and providing individualized training for churches and for groups district wide.

Many church pastors knew of the multiplication vision in advance of the 2017 annual district meeting, having been recruited or having participated in training events organized by the district officials. Other leaders, clergy and church delegates representing individual churches, heard the vision at the annual meeting. Most lay leaders learned of the vision later, in their local church committee meetings or at Sunday worship service. Their initial reactions were mixed, representing a spectrum from inspiration to apprehension, from high energy to low, as the leaders sought to make sense of the vision within the respective contexts of their churches.

Initial Reactions to the Phenomenon

When asked about their initial response to the vision, most church leaders talked about past experiences, collaboration efforts, and the challenge of shifting mindsets from the inward focus of the turnaround process to outreach activities of growth. Some leaders reacted initially with excitement, some with concern, and a few seemed unaffected.

Responses of Enthusiasm

Expressing passion for the launch of this new vision, some church leaders felt emboldened. One recruited pastor eagerly anticipated the upcoming challenge of being appointed to a church in the district, stating,

> Over my career, what I have always gravitated towards is a church that was in decline rather than a church that was happy with where they were at. And generally, what we have done is gone in and helped change the mindset of who they are and who they could be. And when you begin to change the thought process, then they became open to do outreach. And the Lord has blessed us over the years at various churches.

In another church, members noted the multiplication initiative complemented their efforts to focus on evangelism in their local area and energized the congregation. The pastor and board members of a programs-sized church described their readiness for multiplication, remarking,

> We knew we had to do something different from all the statistics we were getting and [lack of] young people. And what we needed to do, to be more disciple-oriented instead of "bringing them in," you know…We were kind of turning that way before our [annual meeting]. I mean, they [the district] started using the term "multiplication" and things like that beforehand. But as a church, we had made a shift…I think it was [that] we were pretty stagnant. I think as people, we didn't really do any outreach. When we said we supported missions, we supported them with our money, we didn't want to get our hands dirty. For a lot of years, we didn't get our hands dirty. And I think we were all ready for a change. Personally, I thought I was about this close [hand motion] to leaving the church.

Although keenly interested, other church leaders acknowledged limitations in having an impact in their geographic locations without substantial support from other churches in the

district. After years of advocating for the district "deliberately committing resources to the city," a board member in an inner-city church said "I was really excited. They [district staff] were saying all the right things. But at the same time, I had watched people say things about [the city] in the [district] for many years. And so, I was optimistic but also skeptical." Skepticism was a common reaction, but some leaders described deeper concerns.

Responses of Caution and Resistance

Some church leaders reacted with anger, incredulity, concern, and worry their churches could not multiply. Namely, a few churches were struggling with basic survival. One newly appointed pastor who had been in the denomination for decades lamented the church was "a small church. Things like Multiplication, that's like you're asking them to jump off a cliff. We got to Multiply [but] we're just getting by week to week." Another new lead pastor noted,

> We were still so much in a phase of turnaround for our church that it didn't feel very feasible for us to be much of a part of it [the vision] other than to pray for the [vision]…How can we plant something if we're still struggling as a church right now?

A board member within a small church in a large metropolitan area expressed different doubts, acknowledging "the problem when you multiply [in an] under-resourced area: the people who walk in the door… are bringing needs, not resources." The board member explained, "I still think part of them [the district leadership] thinks that we can make an awesome, self-funding, megachurch in a place like [city name], consisting entirely of the poor, the unskilled, and the needy. It just doesn't work that way."

Other church leaders expressed stronger emotions. One board member explained the pastoral-sized church learned of the vision when they heard their pastor had been replaced. The member stated,

> Walking in and finding out that we now have no pastor as of such and such a date was not the way to handle it. And actually, I would say, at that point, the largest percentage of the people were ready to just throw in the towel, but things changed and a few people that were a lot more optimistic brought the people around to where they felt that it's worth a try…After we met the [newly appointed] pastor, more and more people came around.

An informal leader in the same pastoral-sized church stated the district had not only replaced the pastor but restructured the church leadership, dissolving the governing board the following month. The leader noted, "what we really were under was the scrutiny of the [district], that they were going to shut us down if we didn't turn around." After the annual meeting, the superintendent "came and led some discussion about what we need to change in our focus or how we need to change our focus to be more of an outreach type church." The church had been in chronic decline, like many others.

During the 2017 annual district meeting, the superintendent announced the appointment of eight lead pastors, of which three pastors had not worked in the district before. In the following months, the superintendent restructured the lay leadership in at least three churches, disbanding the governing boards. A pastor described the situation, acknowledging the district

> closed a few churches that have not been fruitful...And so they [my church] were concerned that they may be on the chopping block if they didn't do something. And so, they were very open to new things...I did not get any resistance.

The governing board and congregation accepted the multiplication vision as becoming an important focus in their ministry strategy. Some leaders expressed excitement while others conveyed anger and concern initially in response to the new vision. A third reaction was a sense of casualness without urgency.

Responses of Nonchalance

A few church leaders acknowledged the new vision without worrying about how to implement it. For example, the senior pastor of a corporate-sized church (351 to 2,000 members or attendees) engaged in the turnaround program noted significant progress over the past few years. One phase of the program was growing disciples and leaders for initiatives, but they had not yet launched new outreach efforts. To the pastor, the multiplication vision seemed to be a continuation of the turnaround process and no changes were needed. Another pastor, of a programs-sized church, stated, “revitalization has kind of been our work from the beginning. But I didn't really term it in any sort of church planting network language early on.” The board member in a third church remarked, “What I understood it [the vision] to be was that there was going to be a slightly changed emphasis on nontraditional congregations.” Leaders such as these perceived the new vision to be similar to their current focus.

Other pastors thought they could not multiply and encouraged actions within their churches that would prepare them for a future when they could. Some churches established committees or boards that would identify opportunities and options. One church committee used detailed demographic data provided by the district to develop and initiate a survey in the local community to obtain insights on how best to reach unchurched groups. A few churches returned to the basics. One pastor stated, “what was on the front burner at that time was a push from the [district] to create by-laws or review them, and for very good reason. We [the church] could not find any, so we had to start from scratch.” Defining their uniqueness and mission could unite the congregation and help them focus on reaching others not involved in a church. A pastor of a family-sized church that began as an ethnic church plant asserted, “every church may not have wanted to start a church.” This pastor suggested closing such a church and, with members who

wanted to have a healthy and growing church, starting another church, preferably in a different neighborhood with a younger, more diverse ethnic and racial population.

The varied initial responses—excitement, concern, insouciance—of the leaders provided a good indication of the resulting involvement of the churches in the vision. However, some leaders who initially expressed concern or reluctance toward the vision became stalwart advocates and implemented innovative policies to support their efforts. The ensuing responses to the superintendent's vision varied; some supported the vision and others could not effect change, resulting in the closure of one or more churches.

Subsequent Reactions to the Phenomenon

As the leaders worked through their initial responses, attended more training, received guidance and performance feedback that was tied to the multiplication vision, and sought to make sense of the vision within the realities of their churches, they built upon a common foundation. One leader explained,

> one of the basic factors is, in Matthew 28, when Jesus says go into the world. Go and make disciples of all nations. Go. This idea that for many, many years the church has just banked on the fact that people will come. "If you build it, they will come." [laughing] And I think this was a shift that said, "Go. Go and make disciples. Go reach people. Go. Go to them. Go where they are. Understand where they're at." And allow the Lord to work in and through that.

Some leaders embraced the vision. Others found the process difficult, requiring nurturing and experimentation to build momentum. A few requested additional interventions by the superintendent and three churches closed their doors. Most churches faced costs, losing property

and congregational members. In the end, most churches increased their engagement with their local communities.

Joined the Vision

To embrace the vision for multiplication meant changing how the churches had been operating in the past century. As one pastor who led a pastoral-sized church for more than a decade noted, "I had to first understand that there are some people in our culture that will never come to a church building for a variety of reasons." Then, the leader had to explain the vision to the governing board, other committees, and to the congregation. The pastor stated, "you have to go at the pace of your leadership, of what they can actually handle and absorb." Joining the vision necessitated shifting mindsets. To accomplish this, many pastors identified the passions within the church and sought opportunities to involve the members and lay leaders.

One newly appointed pastor quickly realized the identity of the programs-sized church congregation was embedded in the foreign missions program, "in what was happening over there [on the foreign mission field], in their support [of the missionaries] over there. And they had personal connection with many missionaries…it just came out through everything they did." The pastor refocused this passion for outreach into the local community. The pastor's success was reflected in the comments of a board member, who stated,

> we had quite a few missionaries in different countries. But another part of the vision [of this church] is we need to have our own back yard as the mission field now. There are two or three generations now of Americans who have not heard the Word [the Gospel].

This strategy, to shift the perspective of the congregation from foreign missions to local needs, occurred in many churches in the district. Leaders also identified a need to focus on the local communities, but the shift required looking outward rather than within the church. To give an

example, the lead pastor of a programs-sized church expressed concern that the congregation was so focused on the building in which they met on Sundays that it seemed to be “idolization or maybe addiction to our building.” The pastor mentioned they had a large complex that mostly stood empty and was a drain on the finances. The pastor wanted to sell the building and hold Sunday services in a rented store front location.

The lead pastor of a programs-sized church expressed initial doubts but later espoused the multiplication vision as essential to the future of that church. The lead pastor of a similarly sized church identified a catalyst for multiplication was the pastor and spouse because they

> were missionaries at heart. And our heart was what we were casting [as] a vision and people got excited about it. There hadn't been a lot of life in the church for a while. They hadn't had a young pastor in a very long time. Children's ministry was just beginning to jump start again. So, they were kind of like, “Hey, we'll go anywhere where there's life. We're ready for life in this church.”

Further, the pastor explained a key strategy for leading the church into multiplication was to emphasize and endorse leaders the congregation knew, leaders who had grown up in the church and whom the church members recognized as being evangelists. The pastor encouraged the church to support these outreach efforts, knowing successful involvement would inspire additional members to participate. Other lead pastors noted the viability of this strategy. One expressed “doing little things and seeing a response to it helped build the idea of outreach.”

The training, mentoring, and support from the district provided ideas for the leaders. For one family-sized church, the lead pastor encouraged the establishment of a dinner church because of the superintendent’s guidance. The pastor acknowledged, “we had some experience from having a dinner church in [another city]. So, we just implemented what we already had

been comfortable with." For many other churches, deciding how to become engaged in the vision was more problematic. These leaders attempted various plans to determine which were viable.

Experimented for Change

For most of the church congregations, multiplication was a new and untried concept. Although a few clergy leaders had backgrounds in planting or revitalizing churches, those experiences typically were in different geographic locations and within different churches than the ones to which they were appointed. The majority of church leaders faced numerous unknowns through which they sought to lead their churches, with the support and collaboration of their lay leaders. Experimentation was common.

One board explained the process their church used to determine viable options required lengthy discussions and collaboration with the clergy. A member recalled the pastor or a board member "would throw ideas out and then we would just lead discussions, take them in different directions, and agree or disagree as a Board or ask for further information or what have you, before we made a decision."

The leaders of a programs-sized church explored numerous options, perhaps to see what the congregation would accept. The pastor remarked on the importance of communicating clearly and often with the members of the church to effect the transition to multiplication. Building trust was a significant component. The lead pastor of a similarly sized church conveyed,

> early on there were some false starts where we had launched a few things and then we had to do a quick kind of evaluation of them and really say, "You know what? We are going to have to make a shift here. We're not going to keep going down this road just to save our pride or whatever. We need to stop this." And I think every time you have a start

> and stop, you probably lose some of your leadership change that's in your pocket. But I felt that we needed to.

A few of the lead pastors reflected on the importance of tenure when trying new ideas. One pastor who served a pastoral-sized church for more than a decade mused,

> I think this fact that I have been here for as long as I [have], kind of through the ups and downs and just tried to be consistent, and that plays a big part in it [trust]. We tried some really wacky things and tried some really good things. We failed…[but] failure is not the final card you play. It's a learning thing.

Many new initiatives resulted from the experiments and efforts of the church leaders: microchurches, church plants, dinner churches, and other uses of district-owned or rented community centers for outreach programs. Some of these and many other initiatives did not meet the district metrics, but these efforts focused on the local community, making contact with unchurched neighbors, meeting needs, and encouraging new relationships with unchurched groups. Such outreach ministries involved supporting local elementary school children, nursing home residents, and those in rehabilitation from substance abuse. Many churches stocked free food pantries and clothes closets. Some focused on special needs, such as for caregivers, people recently released from prison, mourners, or those required to perform court-mandated community service hours. A few churches could not gain traction and required greater reliance upon the district. The leaders of these churches requested mentoring, more training, backing, and interventions.

Asked for Additional Assistance

The multiplication vision was difficult to implement for some leaders and their church organizations. One staff pastor indicated the plan, as outlined by the superintendent, seemed to

be “scaffolding,” and lacked detail. Another pastor worried about how to explain the vision to the lay leaders and congregational members. The pastor brought the lay leadership team, from the governing board and other committees, to meetings with the superintendent. This allowed the lay leaders to hear the vision directly, relieving pressure on the pastor to explain the vision and its implications. At one church, a board member expressed discouragement, noting the lack of resources within their church to enact programs engaging more with the local community. However, the district staff offered financial support which created momentum for that church.

Other pastors relied on the district in different ways. One of the newly appointed pastors explained, “When you're walking out on a plank and you're telling a church there's going to be a transition and we are going to be changing, you've got to know that the [district] leadership is behind you on something like that.” Another church became divided over the implementation of the new vision with each side seeking counsel from the superintendent. The newly appointed pastor, recruited to facilitate the turnaround process of the pastoral-sized church, embraced the multiplication vision but many lay leaders and parishioners feared this was “too focused outward and not paying enough attention to those in the church.” The superintendent and district staff met with the church leaders and arranged tailored training, discipleship, and other opportunities to explore the vision and realistic options. Unable to reconcile, the church closed.

Faced Unexpected Costs

The shuttering of three churches within the district was not the only cost. Most of the churches declined further in attendance and streamlined expenditures and property holdings to help fund efforts to become healthy or support the growth effort. Several churches lost significant portions of their respective congregations. The pastor of a pastoral-sized church recalled members expressed interest in reversing the decline but wanted to retain its same look

and feel. Comfortable with their small size, established churches typically fear the loss of intimacy as new families join the church, the pastor explained. To resist the vision, many parishioners left their churches. One board member remarked, “maybe we did lose a lot. A good portion of our congregation wasn't really on board with the new vision. But we felt strongly enough about this that we went forward with it anyhow.” Another pastor, experienced in transitions and revitalization of churches, sought to warn the lay leaders, remembering,

> I said early on to our Board. I said, “It is likely that we may lose some people. But remember this, no matter what you do, you will most likely lose people. And our goal is not to lose people. Our goal is to make sure that everybody makes it on the bus, as many as possible. That's our goal. We don't want to lose anybody.”

Losses did not only involve difficulty in persuading members to trust the vision and to shift their perspective to actively participate in outreach endeavors. Other losses resulted directly from embracing and fulfilling the planting vision. A board from a programs-sized church explained congregational members and staff pastors left to participate in or lead dinner churches, church plants, or other efforts. These members no longer attended worship services in the mother church, nor did the seekers in these new endeavors. In rationalizing these losses, a board member indicated “we also are starting to count not just [the local church], the main church, but all the other ministries. If we count all those, we have actually been growing the last few years.”

Other losses involved property. The sales of parsonages attached to two different churches helped balance their respective budgets and fund reorganization and multiplication initiatives. A lead pastor of a pastoral-sized church dreamed of selling the church buildings and renting a business space only for Sunday services. The pastor observed,

> We have a huge, sprawling building in the middle of cornfields and it's not serving. If it were serving ministry purposes, great. But it's not. And standing empty. And they [church members] like to say that the building we own free and clear. But buildings take wear and tear. They break down. And they still cost money.

Whether embracing the superintendent's vision and energizing their congregations, experimenting to find feasible options for health or growth, obtaining tailored support from the district staff, or addressing the costs of planting, the church leaders in the district were impacted. They endeavored to make sense of the vision within the culture and resources of their respective churches. Nearly every church increased its engagement in local neighborhoods and the superintendent claimed successful accomplishment of the vision.

Results of the Phenomenon

District officials met their vision goal, designed to be achieved in three years and to increase the number of churches by ten with dozens of new initiatives to meet the needs of unchurched neighbors and introduce them to Jesus. However, I was unable to obtain a single, comprehensive listing of those churches and initiatives nor clarification of which were started by specific churches or by the district. Many churches could not or did not start their own initiatives; they collaborated with other churches that had viable projects. As a district official indicated at the vision deadline, "all but five churches were [involved in multiplication efforts], but about at least a third of those didn't have anything measurable. They were just beginning to get some people some training. And they were showing signs of participation." This official explained the results, although considered successful, contained surprises. The superintendent expected financial commitments from the churches to provide resources that could be used to multiply but few gave financially to the planting fund. Instead, "what has really taken off, far

beyond what [the superintendent] ever imagined even, was the number of people that would get excited and partner with specific initiatives."

This analytical effort described the experience of the church leaders making sense of the phenomenon directing them to plant churches, but most did not grow new churches nor implement projects that would yield apostolic initiatives. Applying the organizational sensemaking construct to the data, I identified elements consistent with the Weickian principles (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Organizational Sensemaking in Qualitative Data

Having culled through the qualitative data to provide the shared experience of the church leaders, a chronological perspective, and major themes surrounding the efforts to make sense of the new vision within the observed realities of the churches, I analyzed the data for evidence of organizational sensemaking occurring in the initial and subsequent reactions of the leaders and churches (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018; Weick, 1995). Derived from the seven Weickian principles—reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interactions, enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity—I used the 31 aspects I identified for the quantification of organizational sensemaking to analyze the qualitative data. These aspects are defined in Tables B1 and B2 in Appendix B, and exemplified by quotes from the qualitative data in Table B3. Four sensemaking principles emerged as having primary utility.

Common Organizational Sensemaking Principles

The leaders experienced the phenomenon of the superintendent's vision for growth in ways unique to each individual, yet all shared a common church environment, similarities of the culture within the district and denomination, and the expectation to collaborate with the other leaders in the church and district to lead their respective churches (Chaves, 1993; Schein, 2017).

Seeking evidence of organizational sensemaking, I scoured the interviews, informal discussions, and church records of board meeting minutes for illustrations of the seven Weickian sensemaking principles (Weick, 1995). Stories compatible with four principles were discussed most frequently by the greatest number of leaders when describing their sensemaking experience, in prioritized order of most frequent to least: retrospection, reference points, plausibility, and social interactions.

Retrospection. Each of the interviewed church leaders discussed past experiences (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Part of the Weickian organizational sensemaking construct, the principle of retrospection recalls past experiences and feelings to provide a mental framework within which the individual seeks to hang the current disruption or challenge. Although the framework will prove inadequate, it does offer a tool by which to facilitate handling some of the information overload the leader experiences. Defining aspects are tenure, referent plasticity, the number of times the plans were adjusted, prioritization of this project with respect to other ongoing or emergent projects, and time lapse between the annual meeting and planting a church.

The church leaders discussed referent plasticity and tenure most commonly. Referent plasticity relates to the diversity of the leader's background (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). All described the experiences of the pastors leading, revitalizing, or planting churches and referred to tenure, either within the appointed church, in the district, or in ministry. Weick indicated leaders with broad backgrounds, such as generalists, would be impacted less in the disruption because they have more memories upon which compare to the current situation. In addition, the varied experiences of the leaders provided ideas for new ministries reaching local communities, to regain health, or to strategize to transform parishioner mindsets. Most of the

leaders also defined the priority they placed on the superintendent's vision. Table 12 provides some examples of comments that were consistent with aspects of retrospection.

Table 12

Illustrative Quotes on Retrospection, a Sensemaking Principle

Aspect	Example
Tenure	"I've never been a part of a church plant before. My [spouse] and I years ago attended a church plant when we lived in [another state] for [number] years. And beyond that, I'd never been in the leadership side of that. So, this is totally a new concept for me."
Referent plasticity	"I enjoy a challenge. I really do. And what they were portraying needed to be done here is the type of things that I enjoy being involved with. So, it was like, OK, this sounds like a match."
Plan revision	"One of our [church members] lives in [an older adults] complex [description]. We said, "OK, let's not do a dinner church there." [The church member] really wanted us to do something, outreach over there. And so we started it out calling it Dessert Church but then when you got that many diabetics, that's not a good idea either. So now it's become kind of a Bible study, kind of a church in and of itself."
Prioritization	"We're in the midst of going through this process, this training process of what it would be like to shift the emphasis from Sunday morning to more of a house church type approach, becoming a network of house churches."

Reference Points. The second common principle consisted of aspects associated with reference points (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Reference points provide indications of the leader noticing, extracting, and benefiting from cues available in the environment. The leaders frequently addressed the aspects of content details, cultural ripeness for change within their respective churches, and the depth of debates held on ideas considered to address the superintendent's vision. Comments applicable to the two remaining aspects, optimism and political interference, were provided by some leaders but not as frequently as the other three aspects. Table 13 displays an illustrative quote for each common aspect.

I expected trust-enhancing behaviors and the trust environment (De Furia, 1996) to contribute to sensemaking indications in this principle (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). By definition, trust-enhancing behaviors—reducing controls, sharing information, allowing mutual

influence, clarifying mutual expectations, and meeting expectations—could provide cues to help the leaders make sense of the phenomenon (De Furia, 1996). This expectation will be revisited later in this chapter.

Table 13

Illustrative Quotes on Reference Points, a Sensemaking Principle

Aspect	Example
Content details	"Finding out that I had a core of leaders here that I could place my trust in, that were willing to see beyond how it's always been done, has also been absolutely huge."
Cultural ripeness	"It's been a real struggle, sometimes a literal fight at [church business] meeting to figure out we need to use our money not for our building, but for serving people and discipling people and giving and missions."
Ideas considered	"Because at that time, before 2017, we, didn't we? We already had launched [a specific church growth initiative]...Did we have home school in place already? [Yes]...We had dinner churches. We had [another outreach initiative]. We had all those things in place."

Plausibility. In the interviews, many leaders described their efforts to shift the mindsets of the church members, which reflected two aspects of plausibility: the alignment of skills sets to ideas and reactions within the church (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Plausibility brings reasonableness into an ambiguous or otherwise disruptive situation. Defining aspects of this principle were the alignment of ideas and skills, the reactions of the boards and congregations, the boldness of plans for implementation, and the fluency of process descriptions. I assessed the willingness of the organizational members to follow leaders who identified creative or innovative plans reflected strong sensemaking efficiency. Further, being able to describe the process in an engaging and fluent manner similarly suggested successful sensemaking. Table 14 is germane.

Although the superintendent indicated the growth vision was successful, the lack of clear results attributed to each church and implementation of initiatives that met local neighborhood needs but not district metrics suggested mixed results in plausibility within the district.

Table 14

Illustrative Quotes of Plausibility, A Sensemaking Principle

Aspect	Example
Alignment of skills and ideas	"And our current pastor is willing to try new items as we go. I am sure. In one of our conversations recently, [the pastor] was saying that [the pastor] had done things that [the pastor] had never done before."
Board reaction	"We [church leaders] started trying to brainstorm what would bring people in and what we could do to bring people in. We decided that we needed to do more outreach and be more action oriented than a 'country club' mentality."
Church reaction	"I think all of them [members in the congregation] really hungered to make a difference in their community."

Social Interaction. The fourth common principle was social interaction. Weick (1995) indicated organizational sensemaking was not an activity conducted in isolation as ideas and plans must be shared to be defined, discussed, and developed. Representative aspects were perspectives sought, influences considered, and collaboration conducted. Several leaders related their engagement with others, recalling mutual influences and efforts to collaborate. Trust-enhancing behaviors, measured in the ITS and ITS-O (De Furia, 1996), also could provide insights supporting analysis of this sensemaking principle and will be integrated later in this chapter. Table 15 provides examples describing this principle, drawn from the formal interviews.

Table 15

Illustrative Quotes of Social Interaction, A Sensemaking Principle

Aspect	Example
Perspectives sought	"My leadership style is all about me being vulnerable, about what I'm learning and growing, and inviting people to do the same…I'm deliberately breaking down those walls and saying we're all learning and growing and being disciples together."
Influences considered	I considered the dinner church because it was a direct suggestion from the superintendent [who] just said, 'I think the dinner church would work there.'"
Collaboration conducted	"And that's when the [district] started coming on board with funds, because that's when I couldn't see how are we [the church organization] going to afford to move forward without help?"

Less Common Organizational Sensemaking Principles

Participants in this study less frequently discussed material compatible with the remaining organizational sensemaking principles of identity construction, temporal continuity, and enactive environment (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). I interpreted identity construction to be a combination of aspects like identity plasticity, self-image, the social synthesis of plurality, and word choices that reflected affect, agency, and duty (De Luca Picione et al., 2018). Temporal continuity segments time into perceived durations of experiences, punctuated by the profundity of the interruption, the impact of bureaucracy, stress, distractions, and the restraint of emotional intelligence (Weick, 1995). The enactive environment consisted of constraints and opportunities authored by the leadership team, defined by the factors the leaders considered, interest aroused in others, speed of taking ideas to agency, and expectations manifested as prophecy. Data from the interviews, informal discussions, and individual church meeting minutes depicted the aspects for these three principles in Table B3 in the appendix.

Had the interviews lasted longer than an hour or included more structured questions in a sequenced process, I might have collected additional data that could have changed the prominence of some sensemaking principles with respect to the others (Seidman, 2013).

Summary of the Qualitative Data Analysis

The leaders in the district churches expressed diverse perspectives. Some were initially enthusiastic and embraced the vision, immediately seeking ways to continue existing efforts or expanding their reach into neighboring communities. Some churches needed a recalibration, such as shifting the mindset from foreign missions to local missions or renewing strategic objectives and vision statements. Other churches revealed concerns, that they were too small, under resourced, had financial shortcomings, or did not have members interested in leading planting

efforts. Some churches identified no need to change directions, only intensify or to implement plans. As the leaders worked through the vision and its implications, many innovated and experimented to find viable opportunities. Most lead pastors nurtured the shift from internal focus to external agency, finding momentum through small successes achieved by individuals observing the effect on others within the respective congregation. Some leaders required additional assistance from the district staff in the form of counsel, training, and financial support. A few churches closed, but the majority succeeded in increasing their efforts to grow their influence by meeting physical and spiritual needs in their nearby communities.

As the church leaders described their experiences, they reflected the Weickian sensemaking construct (Weick, 1995). Their interviews most commonly illustrated aspects of four principles, retrospection, reference points, plausibility, and social integration. I anticipated many stories from the interviews and in the minutes from church committee meetings would discuss trust and the trust environment as being influential in the sensemaking process but these only were inferences (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018). The formal interviews did not provide sufficient detail to allow characterization of their leadership styles either. Thus, the quantitative techniques assumed greater importance to provide insights into the trust environment and the influence of sensemaking on the enacted leadership styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative Data Analyses

Initially, the primary purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to determine a relationship between interpersonal trust in the superintendent, organizational sensemaking, leadership styles, and the planting responses of the churches (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). I did not obtain data to quantify the planting responses nor did I employ an instrument that could measure organizational sensemaking. However, analyzing the influence of trust (De Furia, 1996) on

sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and leadership styles (Korn Ferry, 2019), or of sensemaking on trust and leadership styles, remained an important goal. This goal, though, could not be realized only with quantitative data; it required data transformation to obtain values necessary for using regression modeling to determine moderating and mitigating influences (Hayes, 2018). This section, then, started with the results of the interpersonal trust and leadership styles surveys.

To begin the quantitative analysis, I assessed the trust environment, which De Furia (1996) indicated was a direct reflection of the perceptions of followers observing the supervisor. After confirming the raters held a comparable view of trust-enhancing behaviors, I evaluated the outcomes of the instrument variants that provided ratio data and incorporated supplemental information, using the scoring matrix from the ITS-O test booklet (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2018). The results seemed to differ from trends obtained in the qualitative data. The second instrument, the LSW, provided ordinal data that identified leadership styles that the clergy preferred and that they identified as necessary to lead under the phenomenon (Korn Ferry, 2019). The resulting analyses from the ITS, ITS-O, and LSW provided values and findings that I evaluated with the qualitative and transformed data in the final section of this chapter.

Interpersonal Trust Surveys

The trust surveys consisted of two variants that provided data on five trust-enhancing behaviors: sharing information, reducing controls, allowing mutual influence, clarifying mutual expectations, and meeting expectations (De Furia, 1996). The ITS examined trust propensity and how trustworthy they perceived others to be. The instrument instructions did not define who the participant should consider as others. The ITS-O variant measured the participants' observations of the superintendent displaying the trust-enhancing behaviors and which trust behaviors the raters identified as most desirable. Table 16 displays descriptive data for the surveys.

Table 16

Means of Trust-Enhancing Behaviors of Self (Participants) and Others

Variable	Range	*M*	*SD*
My behavior (trust propensity), *n* = 6			
Sharing information	8.0	41.2	3.7
Reducing controls	7.0	29.8	2.7
Allowing mutual influence	13.0	34.2	4.7
Clarifying expectations	9.0	38.5	3.0
Meeting my expectations	10.0	40.2	4.4
Expected behavior of others, *n* = 6			
Sharing information	9.0	32.7	3.1
Reducing controls	8.0	28.5	3.3
Allowing mutual influence	10.0	33.5	3.3
Clarifying expectations	5.0	39.2	1.7
Meeting my expectations	10.0	34.3	3.7
Observed behavior in the superintendent, *n* = 7			
Sharing information	20.0	26.3	7.0
Reducing controls	10.0	30.7	4.0
Allowing mutual influence	20.0	27.7	6.3
Clarifying expectations	17.0	31.4	5.8
Meeting my expectations	16.0	31.4	5.5
Desirable behavior, *n* = 7			
Sharing information	9.0	35.7	3.2
Reducing controls	8.0	33.0	3.2
Allowing mutual influence	7.0	30.9	2.5
Clarifying expectations	10.0	36.9	3.3
Meeting my expectations	7.0	37.3	2.4

I offered both variants of the trust survey instrument to the lead pastors of the sample churches after their interviews but to the interviewed members of the governing boards, I invited them to participate in the ITS-O variant only. Those who responded to the ITS and ITS-O

instruments ($N = 6$ and $N = 7$, respectively) answered all 60 questions which incorporated a nine-point Likert scale. Examining the results of the four data sets individually and in specific combinations supported three hypotheses. Analysis of the results also provided characterizations of the trust environment within the district (De Furia, 1996).

Two concerns with this analysis involved sampling and volunteer biases. The sample sizes for the trust surveys were not optimal. I had anticipated greater participation from the seven originally selected churches for the ITS-O, expecting to invite more than 60 participants and obtaining 30 or more responses. Response rates to surveys are problematic, averaging less than 20% for telephone surveys, 30% online, and 60% when conducted in person (Gilbert, 2018b; Lindemann, 2019). Using guidelines identified by Trespalacios and Perkins (2016), I endeavored to make the invitations most appealing by using tailored and informative emails that followed individual invitations issued in person, via telephone, or by text. For the LSW, more than half (18 participants) of the district population accepted. For the ITS-O, however, I obtained seven results, which is extremely small for analytical efforts and well below my target number. I also may have amplified volunteer bias by shifting to a sample of convenience, potentially permitting a larger number of individuals with different characteristics into the study and biasing the output (Dollinger & Leong, 1993; Kline, 2019; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1976).

With the available responses, I commenced the analysis of the interpersonal trust data (De Furia, 1996). First, I determined if the participants held similar views of the behaviors (Field, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2016a). I then compared the perspectives on the observed behaviors of the superintendent by the church leaders with what they considered desirable behaviors and with the superintendent's self-assessment.

Hypothesis 1, Interrater Reliability Concerning Trust. To assess whether the pastors held similar expectations concerning trust, I selected the data set on desired behaviors as measured by the ITS-O (De Furia, 1996). These results represented the raters identifying the trust behaviors they valued, and in this hypothesis, I conducted an interrater reliability test, comparing the responses of each participant to the results of the others.

$H1_0$: The trust-enhancing behaviors desired by one rater were similar to the desired behaviors by other raters.

$H1_A$: The trust-enhancing behaviors desired by at least one rater differed from the behaviors desired by the other raters.

Result: Failed to reject the null hypothesis. To conduct this interrater reliability analysis, I used a Kruskal-Wallis K test (Field, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2016b). The trust behavior scores, $N = 7$, $K = 7.58$, $X^2 = 12.59$, $p = .27$, exceeded $\alpha = .05$ and thus did not deviate significantly. These results demonstrated the raters held expectations on trust-enhancing behaviors that were not significantly different from each other; they were homogenous. This finding permitted subsequent analysis of the data. Had one rater's scores differed appreciably from the others, that would indicate the participants held views on the trust behaviors that were not comparable and successive analysis on the results from the ITS and ITS-O instruments would have a bias in meaning.

Hypothesis 2, Behavior Comparison to an Ideal. I expected the superintendent to perform behaviors that reflected relational trust building, routinely demonstrating ability, integrity, and benevolence (Colquitt et al., 2007). After all, I understood (before commencing field work) most (97%) of the church leaders embraced the new vision and began making plans to plant churches or engage in developing related initiatives. This confidence seemed

contradictory to the experience of the churches and district which had not successfully planted churches over the past several decades. However, leaders within a trusting environment would be more willing to risk and embrace innovation, potentially represented by the new vision (Mayer et al., 1995). De Furia (1996) stated all five behaviors contributed to perceptions of trustworthiness.

The ITS-O provided data on how the raters perceived the superintendent performed these behaviors and on desired trust-enhancing behaviors, used in the previous hypothesis (DeFuria, 1996). The superintendent's observed actions then, representing each of the five behaviors and measured through this instrument, should surpass what the raters identified as ideal (Field, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2016a).

$H2_0$: In a trusting environment, each of the five observed trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent would equal or exceed the desired behavior levels.

$H2_A$: In a distrusting environment, any of the five observed trust-enhancing behaviors of the superintendent would be less than the desired behavior levels.

Result: Rejected the null hypotheses for four of five behaviors. To compare the observed and desired behaviors, I used a Mann-Whitney *U* test ($N = 7$), first looking at the behaviors globally and then as individual domains (Field, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2016a). The results, displayed in Table 17, indicated significance values less than $\alpha = .05$ for the global values ($r = -.97$; $p = .01$) and for four behaviors: sharing information, reducing controls, clarifying expectations, and meeting expectations. The calculations for the remaining behavior, allowing mutual influence ($r = -.338$, $p = .19$), resulted in my failing to reject the null hypothesis, reflecting the leaders' belief that the superintendent's behaviors met or exceeded the level for what was desired. These results indicated the raters perceived the superintendent did not appear to be demonstrating trust-enhancing behaviors overall.

Table 17

Comparison of the Observed Behaviors of the Superintendent to Desired Behaviors, N = 7

Variable	*M*	*U*	*r*
Global trust, superintendent	4.57	45.0	
Global trust, desired	10.43	4.0	−.966**
Shared influence, superintendent	4.79	43.5	
Shared influence, desired	10.21	5.5	−.894**
Reducing controls, superintendent	5.57	38.0	
Reducing controls, desired	9.43	11.0	−.628*
Mutual influences, superintendent	6.43	32.0	
Mutual influences, desired	8.57	17.0	−.338
Clarifying expectations, superintendent	5.07	41.5	
Clarifying expectations, desired	9.93	7.5	−.797*
Meeting expectations, superintendent	5.00	42.0	
Meeting expectations, desired	10.00	7.0	−.821**

Note: For all calculations, $SD = 7.8$. * Correlation significant to $p = .05$ level. ** Correlation significant to $p \leq .01$ level.

To interpret the significance of the mutual influence behavior (De Furia, 1996), I used the ranking calculations in MS Excel to determine how the participants prioritized the desired behaviors. The most desirable behavior was clarifying mutual expectations and the least desirable was allowing mutual influence, as depicted in Table 18. Also in this table, I provided a rank of the behaviors that the superintendent believed others performed, as measured by the ITS. This data set, although not equivalent to the desired behaviors data set of the ITS-O, might provide insights into the value the superintendent placed on the behaviors as a leader's expectations reflect their values (Ledbetter et al., 2016).

The response from the superintendent indicated the two highest expected trust-enhancing behaviors were the same as the church leaders' most desirable behaviors, clarifying and meeting expectations (De Furia, 1996). The superintendent's scores for allowing mutual influence ranked second, tied with meeting expectations, contrary to the church leaders' ranking. Thus, the

behavior for which the church leaders indicated as a strength for the superintendent was also the least desirable behavior, yet one the superintendent apparently valued.

Table 18

Prioritization of Desired and Expected Trust-Enhancing Behaviors

Variable	Raters' desired behavior, $N = 7$		Superintendent's expectation, $n = 1$	
	Rank points	Rank	Score	Rank
Clarifying mutual expectations	29	1	42	1
Meeting others' expectations	28	2	39	2
Sharing information	23	3	33	4
Reducing controls	18	4	33	4
Allowing mutual influence	11	5	39	2

Note: The highest or most desired rank was the lowest number (1), based on the highest rank points (raters) or score from the ITS (superintendent). The rank points represented a calculation based on the ranking of each rater's scores within a behavior, the frequency of occurrence of the rankings for each behavior, and a weighted score so the highest point value indicated the highest rank (1).

The importance of one behavior with respect to another, according to De Furia (1996), is not fixed nor universal; the relative importance may depend on the context, the individual, the industry, cultural expectations or realities, and other factors. Additionally, failure to observe a specific behavior may result in participants ranking that more desirable than the other behaviors. A corollary, then, may be that the least desired behavior is the one commonly observed.

To resume a focus on the trust environment, I accessed the scoring system integrated into the ITS-O instrument answer form (De Furia, 1996). The form allowed the rater to self-score the responses to determine if the rater's expectations were met, by subtracting the score for each desired behavior from the score representing the respective observed behavior of the superintendent. A negative score revealed the desired behavior score was higher than the score given the superintendent and reflected the rater's expectations were not met for that behavior. De Furia indicated the size of the difference described the degree of disappointment or satisfaction.

Similarly, the answer form provided instructions for each participant to calculate the tone of the trust environment. The ITS-O contained 60 questions, of which half measured desired trust-enhancing behaviors, with six questions addressing each behavior. Using the difference between the scores for the desirable behaviors and the observed behaviors of the superintendent, the rater determined an average score for each test question by domain. De Furia (1996) stated this calculation provided an assessment of the trust environment. Positive values greater than 0.5 reflected an environment where trust was built; values between 0.5 and −0.5 resulted in a neutral trust environment; and values that were less than −0.5 indicated a discouraging environment.

Based on these parameters, no participant indicated the superintendent met their expectations for fostering a trusting environment. The scores from one of the seven participants (14.6%) showed a neutral trust environment from each behavior. Two participants (28.6%) indicated their expectations were not satisfied with any of the behaviors. The remaining four (57.2%) participants reflected mixed responses of neutral or negative scores only. Thus, more than half of the composite scores (20 of 35, or 57.1%) signified perceptions of the superintendent's conduct as weakening the trust environment. De Furia (1996) stated interpersonal trust depends on the belief that expectations for trust behaviors will be satisfied. When they are not, the trust relationship is diminished, potentially impacting the ability of the leader to lead well (Rousseau et al., 1998).

This scoring system appeared to identify a limitation of the instrument (De Furia, 1996). The perceived tone of the trust environment was based on a single point view, that of what the rater's observed in relation to what they desired to observe. Leadership, however, is a relationship between the leader and the others (Kellerman, 2018) and interpersonal trust incorporated a process of mutuality and integration (De Furia, 1996; Mayer et al., 1995). The

instrument could not reveal the cultural norms, context of the interactions between the leader and the participants, nor other factors affecting the power structure and relationships. Further, this highlighted a concern introduced in Chapter 2 that trust surveys typically are based on subjective data (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). However, these results provided an indication of a potential concern to consider when examining the shared experience of the church leaders making sense of the phenomenon. Integration of qualitative data was essential to interpret the meaning that could be derived from these results and follows in the mixed methods analysis section of this chapter. The next hypothesis compared the observed behaviors to the superintendent's own assessment. This distinction afforded insights into the superintendent's perceptions of self-performance from the vantage point of the church leaders on those behaviors.

Hypothesis 3, a 360-Degree Assessment on the Superintendent. A 360-degree evaluation compares the self-perception of the leader, the superintendent, with input from leaders at different hierarchical levels in the organization (De Furia, 1996). As I anticipated a trusting environment within the district, my assumption was the church leaders would rate the superintendent at least as highly as the superintendent self-rated, reflecting the raters trusted and supported their leader who also supported them.

$H3_0$: In a trusting environment, the assessment by subordinate leaders would equal or exceed the self-assessment of the superintendent.

$H3_A$: In a distrusting environment, the assessment of subordinate leaders would be less than the self-assessment of the superintendent.

Result: Rejected the null hypotheses for four of five behaviors. The calculations from the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test ($N = 7$, $\alpha = .05$) indicated the leaders perceived four of the superintendent's trust-enhancing behaviors as ranking lower than the superintendent's own

assessment of those behaviors: sharing information ($T = 0$, $T_{crit} = 4$), allowing mutual influence ($T = 0$, $T_{crit} = 4$), clarifying mutual expectations ($T = 0$, $T_{crit} = 4$), and meeting expectations ($T = 0$, $T_{crit} = 4$). For the fifth behavior, reducing controls ($T = 10.0$, $T_{crit} = 4$), I failed to reject the null hypothesis based on the results; the participants rated the superintendent's behavior higher than the superintendent's self-assessment (Field, 2017; O'Loughlin, 2017). These results were consistent with the negative results of the previous hypothesis.

The exceptions were in two behaviors, allowing mutual influence and reducing controls (De Furia, 1996). The superintendent exceeded the ideals with respect to allowing mutual influence, but that behavior was not performed as well as the church leaders expected. Allowing mutual influence is a behavior about collaboration in decision-making, sharing ideas and power, persuasion, and control. The church leaders, through their scores, reflected that although the superintendent was deliberate in seeking their voices and incorporating their insights, the level to which the superintendent collaborated with them was less than what they wanted from the superintendent.

The second behavior was reducing controls; the church leaders believed the superintendent performed this trust-enhancing behavior well, better than the superintendent self-assessed (De Furia, 1996). Reducing controls involves procedures, protocols, performance measures, and promotions. When a leader reduces the control over an employee or hierarchically subordinated leader, she permits greater autonomy over daily tasks or strategic projects, as through delegation, and empowers the subordinates by equipping and encouraging them (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The church leaders indicated the superintendent reduced controls better than expected even though this performance was less than ideal. All of the church leaders who submitted trust survey responses were interviewed and some provided minutes from the meetings

of their respective governing boards. These data helped interpret the results and are discussed in the mixed methods analysis section of this chapter. This concludes the analysis of data from the two variants of the trust surveys only. Analysis of the leadership survey, the second quantitative instrument, follows.

Leadership Styles Workbook Survey

The LSW contained two exercises that provided categorical leadership styles based on tabulated scores from a six-point Likert scale reflecting degrees of agreement, from definitely disagree (1) to definitely agree (6; Korn Ferry, 2019). The leadership styles were participative, visionary, coaching, pacesetting, affiliative and directive. The first exercise determined the style the participant preferred and the second identified the leadership style the participant perceived was needed to lead their respective churches under the growth vision. Interested pastors who led their churches in 2017 received the LSW. Of these, 18 pastors and the superintendent provided complete results, answering all 36 questions.

I first conducted analysis to check the alignment or amount of variance that could be explained by the model, represented by the significance value exceeding the desired significance value (Field, 2017). Using a *chi*-square test ($N = 19$, $\alpha = .05$), I examined the responses from each participant, identified by sequential alpha-numeric labels in Table 19 (Korn Ferry, 2019). For the majority (94% or 18 participants), the required leadership styles aligned with the preferred styles. All significance values exceeded the desired significance value but one, for participant P4 ($X^2 = 17.5$; $p < .00$).

The LSW categorical outcomes for each participant are displayed in Table 20 (Korn Ferry, 2019). Dual choices in the table indicated a tie for the highest scoring leadership style from the results from five participants.

Table 19

Alignment of Preferred and Required Leadership Styles, by Participant, N = 19

Measure	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
X^2	3.41	1.14	2.14	17.50	1.33	1.72	8.57	2.99	6.53	1.56
p	.64	.95	.83	.00*	.93	.89	.13	.70	.26	.91

	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17	P18	P19
X^2	1.08	1.83	0.57	7.19	3.30	10.73	7.93	1.79	1.15
p	.96	.87	.99	.21	.65	.06†	.16	.88	.95

Note: Desired significance, $\alpha = .05$. * Significance of $p < .01$; † significance of $p = .10$.

Table 20

Identification of Categorical Leadership Styles for Each Participant, N = 19

Leadership style	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Preferred	Visionary	Pacesetting	Coaching	Coaching	Coaching
Required	Coaching	Affiliative	Participative	Visionary/ affiliative	Coaching

	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Preferred	Pacesetting	Affiliative	Visionary/ coaching	Coaching	Participative
Required	Pacesetting/ coaching	Pacesetting	Coaching	Directive	Directive

	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Preferred	Participative	Coaching	Coaching	Visionary	Coaching
Required	Coaching	Coaching	Coaching	Coaching	Pacesetting/ coaching

	P16	P17	P18	P19
Preferred	Visionary/ coaching	Visionary	Coaching	Participative
Required	Participative	Coaching	Coaching	Coaching

Note: Five participants indicated the same high score for two different styles, indicating both styles were either the preferred or the perceived required approaches (Korn Ferry, 2019). These are identified by two styles in the same row listed under the participant identification code.

Four pastors (21.0%) indicated their preferred style was also the leadership approach they determined as most appropriate for leading their respective churches when the vision was enacted. This style, for all four participants, was coaching. The remaining 15 participants employed leadership styles that were not their preferred styles. Overall, 16 of 19 participants listed coaching as a preferred or required style.

Correlation of Leadership Styles and Tenure

A factor that could influence the required leadership styles was tenure. As discussed in Chapter 2, trust is not a static phenomenon but one that changes over time as the individuals increase familiarity and develop relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 1995), perhaps even on a daily basis (Baer et al., 2018). Within family systems theory tailored to the church environment, tenure is a critical factor for being successful, particularly in family- and pastoral-sized churches (Creech, 2015; Friedman, 1985), which were the characterizations of the majority (87.5%) of churches in the sample. Tenure facilitated developing familiarity with the organizational culture, history, and personalities, which was essential for effective leadership.

Table 21 is a correlation chart for required leadership styles and tenure variables: longevity as the lead pastor in the same local church, as a leader in the district, as clergy in the denomination, and within the participant's ministerial leadership history (Field, 2017). As the superintendent did not serve in a pulpit, the respective response was removed from the sample size. The leadership styles data were not measured on an interval scale but from combining Likert scale values, necessitating the use of Spearman's *rho* (r_s) for the correlation calculations. Most of the required leadership styles—participative, visionary, coaching, and directive —had no significant correlations ($\alpha = .05$) with the tenure variables.

Table 21

Intercorrelation of Required Leadership Styles and Tenure Variables, n = 18

	Tenure			
Variable	In church pulpit	In district positions	In denomination	In ministry
Directive style	.19	.19	.04	–.11
Visionary style	–.15	–.20	–.10	.05
Affiliative style	–.54*	–.40	–.28	–.10
Participative style	.40	.31	.32	.37
Pacesetting style	–.62**	–.60**	–.53*	–.67**
Coaching style	–.23	–.15	–.12	.12

Note: Leadership styles are perceived required styles. Chart values are Spearman's *rho* values. Desired significance level, $\alpha = .05$. * Correlation at significance level of $p = .05$; ** correlation significance level of $p = .01$.

There was a significant statistical relationship ($n = 18$, $r_s = -.54$, $p = .022$) between the affiliative style and tenure of the pastors in the local church but not with tenure of the pastors in district, denomination, or general ministry positions of leadership (Field, 2017; Korn Ferry, 2019). The affiliative style is people-centric, focused directly upon relationships and maintaining harmony (Spreier et al., 2006). Thus, this leadership approach likely would be most effective with smaller groups or numbers of individuals, as in the family- and pastoral-sized churches (Creech, 2015; Friedman, 1985; Johnson, 2001). I determined no significant correlation between the affiliative leadership style and congregational size ($\alpha = .05$, $n = 18$, $r_s = .18$, $p = .48$).

The correlation of the pacesetting leadership style to tenure ($n = 18$), as reported in Table 21, was negative and significant to tenure in the local church ($r_s = -.62$, $p = .006$), tenure in the district ($r_s = -.60$, $p = .008$), in the denomination ($r_s = -.53$, $p = .02$), and in ministry ($r_s = -.67$, $p = .002$; Field, 2017). This leadership style focused on task orientation, with high standards for meeting objectives and demanding timeliness and quality (Korn Ferry, 2019; Mishra, 2013; Spreier et al., 2006). Such an approach seemed counterintuitive to the purpose of ministry,

evangelism and worshipping God, in which timely accomplishment of such tasks cannot be scheduled (Ross, 2013). However, within larger churches, such as those of the corporate or megachurch congregation sizes with more than 350 parishioners and a complex administrative structure, pacesetting could be useful for program oversight functions and autonomy of groups responsible for those programs (Johnson, 2001; Thumma & Bird, 2015). The quantitative analysis did not support this observation; I determined no significant correlation between the pace setting leadership style and congregational size ($\alpha = .05$, $n = 18$, $r_s = .41$, $p = .09$).

Summary of the Quantitative Data Analysis

The purpose of the quantitative data analysis portion of this study was to inform the analysis of the qualitative data by providing results from two instruments to incorporate into determining the relationship between organizational sensemaking of the church leaders, trust in the superintendent, and leadership style (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017). To begin this effort, I examined the results from each instrument (Field, 2017).

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 used data sets from the ITS and ITS-O to assess the trust environment (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017). I confirmed the church leaders held similar views on five trust-enhancing behaviors: sharing relevant information, reducing controls, allowing for mutual influence, clarifying mutual expectations, and meeting expectations. The second and third hypotheses provided results that defined the trust environment, which depended on the church leaders observing the superintendent performing all five behaviors. Hypothesis 2 examined the perceived activities of the superintendent with respect to desired behaviors. The church leaders ranked the superintendent's activities higher than the ideal only for the behavior allowing for mutual influence. Hypothesis 3 explored the supervisor's self-assessment and the followers' observations of those behaviors. The church leaders believed the superintendent did not perform

four behaviors as well as the superintendent's own perspective but rated the observed efforts of the superintendent to reduce controls higher than the superintendent self-rated. Further analyses indicated the seven church leaders felt dissatisfied with the trust environment, perceiving the superintendent's behaviors did not facilitate nor enhance a trusting climate. De Furia noted numerous factors could affect the scores, such as context, the individuals involved, and the organizational culture, and were factors to consider when interpreting the results.

The next instrument, LSW, identified coaching as the most common leadership style preferred and employed by the lead pastors (Korn Ferry, 2019). I confirmed an alignment of the results for preferred and required leadership styles with the model and noted 15 of the 19 participants employed leadership styles that differed from their preferred styles to lead their churches under the vision. Demographics data, such as sizes of the churches and the tenure of the pastors in their assigned churches, tenure in the district, in the denomination, and in ministry, provided additional insights. I noted correlations of two leadership styles, affiliative and pacesetting, with tenure but not with church sizes (Field, 2017). The next section integrated the qualitative analyses and data with the quantitative analyses to triangulate and clarify findings as well as to attempt to define a relationship between organizational sensemaking, trust in the superintendent, and leadership styles. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Mixed Methods Analysis

The final portion of this chapter synthesized the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses to address the purpose of the study, to extract the essence of the lived experience of the shared leadership structure in the distributed churches to make sense of the phenomenon directing them to plant new churches to counter the chronic organizational decline (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018). The purpose of the qualitative data analysis

was to extract the shared experience of church leaders trying to make sense of the new vision (Bazeley, 2013; Johnson, 2007). I determined the experiences were unique to each church leader but could be described within a framework of the Weickian sensemaking construct, specifically by the four principles of retrospection, reference points, plausibility, and social interaction (Schein, 2017; Weick, 1995). The purpose of the quantitative data analysis initially was to provide results that could be incorporated with transformed qualitative data to determine a relationship between organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), trust in the superintendent (De Furia, 1996), and leadership styles (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018; Korn Ferry, 2019). After analyzing the qualitative data, I determined the quantitative techniques assumed greater importance to provide insights into the trust environment and manifestation of sensemaking through the enacted leadership styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This final section, employing mixed methods techniques of integration and joint displays, highlighted the consistencies and inconsistencies concerning the observations of the superintendent's trust-enhancing behaviors from the qualitative and quantitative data sets (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Next, I examined the choices of leadership styles, integrating the Weickian construct and qualitative data for additional evidence of organizational sensemaking by the church leaders (Weick, 1995). These efforts did not provide sufficient information to assess the relationship between sensemaking, trust, and leadership styles. Conducting data transformation to quantify the sensemaking data from the interviews, I inserted values representing each of these three variables into a regression model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Hayes, 2018). Integrating these results with other findings, I interpreted the superintendent's behaviors as likely influencing the sensemaking of the church leaders through the effect of sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The Trust Environment

Church leaders responding to the ITS-O perceived the superintendent did not demonstrate the trust-enhancing behaviors to desired and expected levels, with two exceptions: allowing mutual influence and reducing controls (De Furia, 1996). Yet, the qualitative data provided vignettes and statements suggesting the superintendent performed these behaviors, in positive and negative ways. Table 22 provides quotes representing these two trust-enhancing behaviors.

Table 22

Illustrative Quotes on Allowing Mutual Influence and Reducing Controls

Behavior	Quote
Allowing mutual influence	Positive: "I think, [the superintendent]'s pattern has been to kind of get a read from the pastors first by sharing that information with the pastoral leaders first and then if adjustments need to be made before presenting it to maybe the larger body, that's kind of been his approach." (Participant BB) Negative: "They (original governing board members] blame the [district] for what happened as far as the boards being disbanded [after the vision was announced]. [The superintendent] was blamed for taking their beloved pastor and then coming in, following it up, with disbanding the Board." (Participant E)
Reducing controls	Positive: "The [church] was given the choice whether to close it, restructure it, or to go ahead. The [church] did choose to go ahead and make what changes needed to be [made] to make a turn around." (Participant M-M1) Negative: "[The pastor] shared [the] frustrations with [concerning the superintendent] in [the] Dashboard Report about not being able to follow a lot of the suggestions from the [planting seminars] for the pastors." (PROTEAS board meeting minutes, January 22, 2018)

The interviews, communications records between the district and the churches, and church reports highlighting the discussions in meetings of the governing boards and other local committees inferred contradictions also with respect to the remaining three trust-enhancing behaviors (De Furia, 1996). Table 23 exhibits quotes from interviews describing positive and negative examples of the superintendent sharing useful information, clarifying expectations by

setting standards for mutual performance, and meeting expectations of predictability, reliability, and consistency.

Table 23

Illustrative Quotes on Sharing Information and Clarifying and Meeting Expectations

Behavior	Quote
Sharing information	Positive: "[The superintendent] allowed us to bring parishioners [to meetings] so we were able to get them right there, a source so that they could hear it [the vision] themselves, and they could talk about it as a team, but I didn't have to interpret what [the superintendent] said that way." (Participant II)
	Negative: "[The superintendent] cast the big vision for what we're gonna [sic] do [but] it's [district staff member] and I that are the day to day, in the local churches, working with leaders, helping churches make sense of the [growth] plan and the vision, all of that. I think that's a dynamic." (Participant D)
Clarifying mutual expectations	Positive: "I was told in my interview, the role you're going to play is to go in and turn the church around. And that may mean, the interview question was, if you have to walk somebody to the door because they just will not transition and they're going to stand in the way of the church moving forward, are you willing to do that?" (Participant E)
	Negative: "I am also, in addition to a Board member, I am our Lay Delegate. The Lay Delegate for the church...And you were probably given my name because it's no secret that I have long been an outspoken critic of our [district] and the way it historically has done an exceedingly poor job of resourcing the under-resourced areas in [the state], specifically the city of [city name]." (Participant QQ-M1)
Meeting expectations	Positive: "But trusting your leadership to have your back is huge. When you're walking out on a plank and you're telling a church there's going to be a transition and we are going to be changing. You've got to know that the leadership is behind you on something like that." (Participant E)
	Negative: "Because at that time, before 2017…We already had launched [a specific church growth initiative]...Did we have home school in place already? [Yes]...We had dinner churches. We had [outreach initiative 1]. We had all those things in place." (Participant H-M1) "So we were part of kind of a pilot for the [district]. And then once we got it going, and it seemed like it was sustainable, then the [district] now is taking it over." (Participant H-M5). [Discussion between board members in an interview.]

De Furia (1996) stated the leader had to be perceived to perform well in all five behaviors to enhance trust and build a trusting environment. Consistent with the results calculated from the matrix on the instrument form, the church leaders perceived a neutral to negative tone to the trust environment, and that their expectations were not met. The qualitative data, primarily from

interviews, implied contradictions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Analysis of the qualitative data provided indications of the superintendent performing all five behaviors, of which the church leaders perceived included detrimental and beneficial influences on the climate, in nearly equal proportions.

From the interviews, I identified more quotes reflecting negative perspectives of allowing mutual influence behaviors associated with the superintendent than positive (De Furia, 1996). I then expanded my analysis and added the perceived mutual influence behaviors of pastors, lay leaders, and parishioners. The number of positive and negative examples were nearly equal; I counted one more example of the church leaders noticing positive mutual influence behaviors occurring within the district than negative. One plausible explanation concerned attribution theory, in which followers connected disappointment caused by a policy or situation to the character of the leader endorsing, enacting, or facilitating the policy or situation (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

The contradiction between the quantitative and qualitative data analyses concerning the trust environment remained. The next mixed methods analytical technique I applied was the joint display which facilitates scrutiny through a visual arrangement of the qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). I first framed the analysis of the qualitative data within the quantitative results from Hypothesis 2, the perceptions of the seven church leaders comparing the superintendent performing trust-enhancing behaviors to an ideal (De Furia, 1996). I constructed Table 24 to stage quotes of contradictions and similarities with respect to the findings of the hypothesis and prioritized the anomalous result, allowing for mutual influence, by listing it first in the joint display.

Table 24

Joint Display of Hypothesis 2, Based on the Quantitative Results

Variable	Congruent quote	Discrepant quote
Church leaders' observation scores > desirable levels for this behavior		
Allowing for mutual influence	"[The Superintendent]'s pattern has been to kind of get a read from the pastors first by sharing that information from the pastoral leaders first and then if adjustments need to be made before presenting it to maybe the larger body, that's kind of been his approach." (Participant BB)	"[The superintendent] was blamed for taking their beloved pastor and then coming in, following it up, with disbanding the [governing] Board [to enact the vision in that church]." (Participant E)
Desirable levels > church leaders' observation scores		
Reducing controls	"In that gap [often and extended] between pastors, the church folks ran the church. They did any counseling, any visitation. And that was usually that group that was a bit untrustworthy [of clergy]. Either they didn't trust the individuals that came or they didn't have any trust that they [the pastors] were going to stay very long." (Participant JJ)	"We're not engaging the Governing Boards, the churches [congregations] with them. We're depending upon our pastors to do that. And some pastors are going to do better with that than others." (Superintendent)
Sharing information	"[The superintendent] cast the big vision for what we're gonna do. It's [staff pastor] and I that are the day to day, in the local churches, working with leaders, helping churches make sense of the plan and the vision, all of that." (Participant D)	"[I wanted to] try to create a sense of team. Look, we can do that [inspire the church leaders, but] we can only really do this [vision] together. You know, we're not trying to be top down. We're trying to say here's the vision for us." (Superintendent)
Meeting expectations	"I took some criticism for not wrapping my words in velvet sometimes. So I've tried to be more sensitive to speaking the truth, but not in a way that loses the hearing, so to speak." (Superintendent)	"Maybe we had a few financial obstacles, but [the district] came through with some money and that helped us get it started. There weren't really any obstacles that I can remember. (Participant H-M5)
Clarifying mutual expectations	"It's no secret that I have long been an outspoken critic of our [district] and the way it historically has done an exceedingly poor job of resourcing the under-resourced areas in [this region]. (Participant QQ-M1)	"We know which zones [geographic regions in the district] are generating new leaders and which ones aren't right now. I had a conversation with [the leaders in some regions] about that yesterday." (Superintendent)

In this joint data display table, I incorporated quotes from my interview with the superintendent, to provide additional insights from the qualitative data. The superintendent self-rated with a high score for allowing mutual influence, as measured by the ITS, a score greater than the other church leaders assessed, measured via the ITS-O (De Furia, 1996). The superintendent recalled routine meetings with district committees, church pastors, and the superintendent's advisory council. The council, consisting of clergy and lay leaders elected to this position during the annual district meeting, acted as a sounding board that provided feedback, encouragement, and diverse perspectives to help guide district policies and initiatives ([Denomination], 2015a). However, the superintendent acknowledged not meeting often with district church governing boards and congregations during the deployment of the vision. As mutual influence is an aspect of the sensemaking principle of social interaction, I expected to find a positive and statistically significant relationship between the trust behavior and organizational sensemaking (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017; Weick, 1995). I determined no such relationship.

The second joint display table addressed Hypothesis 3, which provided a 360º assessment by comparing the church leaders' perceptions of the superintendent's performance of the trust-enhancing behaviors to a self-assessment by the superintendent. In Table 25, I supplied quotes that reflected agreement with the results from this hypothesis and quotes that appeared to be contradictory (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). When possible, I included excerpts from my interview with the superintendent to provide illustrations of performance of the behaviors the superintendent self-assessed. There were many quotes from which to choose for the congruent and discrepant examples, from the interviews of the superintendent and church leaders, informal interviews, and archival data.

Table 25

Joint Display of Hypothesis 3, Based on the Quantitative Results

Variable	Congruent quote	Discrepant quote
The church leaders' observations score > the superintendent's self-assessment score		
Reducing controls	"It was actually easier for them [the congregation] to catch the vision to do a church plant in [a local suburb] than it was to do something like that right here in their own neighborhood. So by providing lots of different options, different people kind of aligned with different things." (Participant D)	"Because the Superintendent allowed us to bring parishioners [to meetings] so we were able to get them right there, a source so that they could hear it themselves, and they could talk about it as a team, but I didn't have to interpret what the Superintendent said that way." (Participant II)
The self-assessment score > the church leaders' observations		
Allowing mutual influence	"It was a matter of getting some really good people in the room and just hammering it [the vision] out over many conversations across the months." (Superintendent)	"The narrative that had been kind of shared was that they [the church] were getting a young pastor who wouldn't care about the [persons over the age of 65 years]. And mind you, almost the entire congregation were [over that age]." (Participant D)
Sharing information	"We still have a lot of work to do. I don't think I was ever believing that we would just [snapped fingers] turn around...I do have an executive retreat coming up next month, but I have that on the agenda. We're going to talk about that." (Superintendent)	"I feel like we just had a lot of pastoral talent or resource come in to help lead these various ministries." (Participant H-M1)
Meeting expectations	"Trust is the key to all of it, at the end of the day. It's the only currency I have." (Superintendent)	"There was kind of like a revolving door for pastors. I kind of put my thumb on [the district] because that's who appoints. (Participant JJ)
Clarifying mutual expectations	"I had to make some real hard decisions about closing a couple churches and removing a couple of pastors that... weren't being effective. They weren't being teachable. Their churches had seen tremendous decline under them. And they were fighting me on what I needed them to be doing. And so when I had those conversations, it was so painful and I didn't want to do it." (Superintendent)	[Concerning addressing needs in the inner cities:] "I've been beating my head against that brick wall with [the district] for so many years and watching [the lead pastor] do the same thing. " (Participant QQ-M1)

These joint displays suggested the contradictions between the quantitative and qualitative analyses were intractable (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The church leaders who responded to the ITS-O instruments voiced a concern about the trust environment but also reflected trust in the superintendent. A concurrent mixed methods study, like this one, could not resolve this issue; a sequential mixed methods study or a longitudinal ethnographic study in which the researcher directly and frequently observed the superintendent's behaviors potentially may have been more useful (Gilbert et al., 2018).

Leadership Styles

The church leaders who participated in the LSW exercises identified their preferred leadership styles and the approaches they perceived were necessary to lead their churches under the new growth vision (Korn Ferry, 2019). To analyze the results further, I first gathered qualitative data to identify examples reflecting the leadership styles. Then, incorporating principles from the organizational sensemaking construct, I transformed the ordinal LSW data to scaled values (Weick, 1995). I expected the leadership styles selected after the vision was enacted would reflect the sensemaking of the leaders, which could be assessed using the data transformation scale. Integrating qualitative data provided interpretations that supported and contradicted this expectation and suggested an opportunity for future research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Illustrations of the Six Leadership Styles

Within the qualitative data were comments reflecting characteristics of the participative, visionary, coaching, pace setting, affiliative, and directive leadership styles (Spreier et al., 2006). Examples are provided in Table 26. I did not collect sufficient qualitative data to assess effectively which leadership approach each interviewed participant applied before or after the

phenomenon, and the LSW did not capture the approaches the church leaders used most often prior to the introduction of the phenomenon (Korn Ferry, 2019).

Table 26

Quotes Reflecting Required Leadership Styles

Leadership style	Description of style	Illustrative quote
Directive	Mandating compliance	"Things like Multiplication, that's like you're asking them to jump off a cliff. You know, we got to multiply."
Affiliative	Fostering a sense of harmony	"I didn't go in there [as the new pastor of the church] to change a lot of things. I went in there to, first of all, just learn who the people were and to love them and then finally to lead them."
Pacesetting	Focusing on task completion	"Come with us. Please come with us [into this new vision]. And if you don't want to, then find a different church."
Coaching	Investing in others	"And I think that we're finally, you know, when people afterwards say, 'Wow, that made a lot of sense' and, 'Boy, that was good,' that begins to tell you that OK, people are beginning to really grasp this concept [multiplication], which is good."
Visionary	Guiding with a long-term strategy	"The model of the current church culture was not where society was shifting to…you would have to bring in, to basically have this be organically done by grassroots folks from the areas you're looking at doing [planting]."
Participative	Facilitating collaboration and ownership	"And although leadership always rises to the top I believe, we all brought leadership into this group and crafted [a church planting] vision together [in a different district]. And we all worked out of our giftedness, our strengths rather than our weaknesses. And it really, really went well."

Illustrations of Potential Sensemaking

I expected the leaders would employ initially a familiar leadership style, namely their preferred style, when faced with a challenge necessitating sensemaking (Korn Ferry, 2019; Weick, 1995). After the leaders made sense of the phenomenon and determined a plausible response, I expected them to apply leadership approaches that reflected effective sensemaking activities. To evaluate this expectation, I used the data transformation scale for the leadership styles in relation to the Weickian construct, as discussed in Chapter 3. The styles were ranked

highest to lowest (participative, visionary, coaching, pacesetting, affiliative, directive), with respect to compatibility to sensemaking principles.

Four LSW participants did not vary in their choice of leadership styles. They indicated their preferred and required approaches were coaching. This could suggest that the participants were entrenched in the sensemaking processes and had not yet determined viable responses to the phenomenon (Weick, 1995). However, coaching was a resonant form of leadership that encouraged open lines of communication, experimentation, and growth (Goleman, 2000) and which was a low power approach (Spreier et al., 2006). This possibly indicated an intentional decision to implement a style that could meet the organizational needs.

Exploring the qualitative data provided some clarity. Two of these four participants assumed the senior leadership positions in their respective churches in 2017; the other participants had served in the lead billet for more than five years ([Denomination], 2017). The new pastors, who reported they each held ministerial positions in different churches for more than two decades, shared their perspectives in interviews. One of these pastors appeared to be comfortable in the disruption caused by the phenomenon and expressed that shifting the congregation's mindset from internal health to an external focus occurred through "small victories," accomplishing "little things and seeing a response to it [sic] helped build the idea of outreach…it has been, in a way, that the light bulbs have gone on and they're sharing the light with others."

My assessment of the comments from the other interviewed pastor suggested continued perturbation and doubts as to the validity of the superintendent's vision for the specific church. The pastor expressed a fervent passion to engage with the community, opening the church facility for distributing food and clothing and providing a hot meal weekly to residents of a local

subsidized housing development in order to build meaningful personal relationships. The pastor led a weekly Bible study in a housing complex for adults over the age of 65 years and provided opportunities for neighbors to perform mandated community service hours on the church property. However, none of these ministries met the parameters of a church plant nor new initiative as outlined in the superintendent's vision. The pastor stated, "If I disagree with the [superintendent] in [the] vision, it's I do not believe the church is going to die. I believe the church is going to prosper. Maybe it may look differently." In seeking to understand the vision (Weick, 1995), or perhaps relinquish control to others (Schmachtenberger, 2019), the pastor brought the lay leadership team to meetings with the superintendent "so they could hear it [the vision] themselves and they could talk about it as a team, but I didn't have to interpret what the [superintendent] said that way." These two pastors reflected different interpretations of using the preferred style as the required style: one employed an effective approach for the situation while the other seemed to resort to what was familiar while struggling to frame and extract cues for sensemaking.

A majority of the participants (10 of 19, or 52.6%) preferred the coaching style and most (12 or 63.2%) perceived it as required to meet the organizational needs after the superintendent enacted the vision (Korn Ferry, 2019). Although the results for four pastors did not register a difference between the preferred and required leadership styles, most of the participants (15 or 79.0%) indicated they used an approach that differed from their preferred style, often selecting a style that incorporated skills reflecting weaker sensemaking (Weick, 1995). With respect to these 15 participants, four employed a more effective leadership style than their preferred styles but the rest enacted a less effective sensemaking leadership approach. Table 27 displays the noted shifts in leadership styles with respect to the Weickian construct.

Table 27

Choices for Required Leadership Styles Within a Weickian Ordering, N = 19

Variable	Change in sensemaking	Change in style
Increase in sensemaking efficiency	4	
Visionary/coaching to participative		1
Coaching to participative		1
Affiliative to pacesetting		1
Pacesetting to pacesetting/coaching		1
No change	4	
Coaching to coaching		4
Decrease in sensemaking efficiency	11	
Participative to coaching		2
Visionary/coaching to coaching		1
Visionary to coaching		3
Coaching to pacesetting/coaching		1
Coaching to directive		2
Coaching to visionary/affiliative		1
Pacesetting to affiliative		1

Note: The increase or decrease in sensemaking efficiency was determined by movement along the scale depicted in Figure 4 (in Chapter 3).

The selection of a leadership style that was not the preferred style may imply aspects of sensemaking. To illustrate, if a participant sought escape from the distress of the sensemaking process, the leader could choose a leadership style that did not permit efficient sensemaking (Schmachtenberger, 2019; Weick, 1995). Alternatively, the leader may pick a less effective sensemaking leadership approach to address issues within the organization. As an example, the pastor of a small church chose to implement a directive leadership style, which held the lowest rank (1) on my sensemaking scale, rather than the pastor's preferred coaching style, which ranked higher (4) on this scale. When first assigned to the church, this pastor faced a core of long-serving lay leaders who did not trust clergy nor the district leadership. The pastor proposed an outreach activity, but the lay leaders told the pastor to "forget it for this year." The pastor replied, "'No, we don't have to forget it. We can still plan this...and we'll do it'" in the ensuing

months. The pastor assumed responsibility for the planning and execution, overseeing the details and ensuring a successful event. The pastor left the position before the deadline for the vision completion ([Denomination], 2019).

Each of these vignettes involved experienced pastors who had just begun their lead pastor responsibilities in their respective churches. However, the results of a correlation between leadership styles and tenure indicated no statistically significant relationship for the most effective sensemaking styles—participative, visionary, and coaching—nor the least effective approach, directive. This study contained no other data that could be analyzed to explore this issue further. The next topic to explore with mixed methods techniques was sensemaking.

Organizational Sensemaking

Weick (1995) identified seven principles for organizational sensemaking: reference points, identity construction, plausibility, social interaction, an enactive environment, retrospection, and temporal continuity. As I did not incorporate an instrument by which to assess the sensemaking capabilities or activities of participants, I transformed data collected in interviews to develop a numerical sensemaking score. I assigned a score to each interviewed pastor and an averaged score for each governing board (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). First described in Chapter 3, my resulting scaled scoring protocol is described in Appendix B. The upper limit of each scale reflected adherence to the respective aspect of the represented sensemaking principle and the most possible points. The lower limit of each scale represented difficulty with the sensemaking processes and received one point. Figure 6 provides an overview of the data transformation protocol and is followed by an example. Combining the derived sensemaking scores with results from the ITS-O and LSW in a regression model supported Hypotheses 4 and 5.

Figure 6

Concise Description of Organizational Sensemaking Scales

Reference points: Noticing, extracting, and embellishing cues.

- Context details: gross trends (1) to subtleties (5)
- Cultural ripeness: reluctant (1) to ready (5)
- Political interference: low (1) to high (5)
- Optimism: low (1) to high (5)
- Ideas considered: one (1) to many (5)

Identity construction: Shifting between definitions of self.

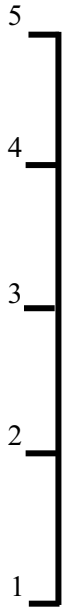
- Identity plasticity: few (1) to multiple (5)
- Self-image: doubtful (1) to confident (5)
- Plurality: me (1) to we (5)
- Linguistic modality: must (1) to want (5)

Plausibility: Bringing reasonable into ambiguity.

- Alignment of skills and ideas: divergent (1) to congruent (5)
- Plans to implementation: measured (1) to bold (5)
- Process fluency: difficult (1) to easy (5)
- Board reaction: resistant (1) to supportive (5)
- Church reaction: resistant (1) to supportive (5)

Social interaction: Socializing that was actual, implied, or perceived.

- Perspectives sought: narrow (1) to diverse (5)
- Influences: self (1) to many (5)
- Collaboration: infrequent (1) to frequent (5)



Enactive environment: Authoring constraints and opportunities but not only action generation.

- Factors considered: one or two (1) to more than ten (5)
- Interest: resistant (1) to innovative (5)
- Speed: not started (1) to greater than a month (5)
- Prophecies: self-fulfilled (1) to differentiated (5)

Retrospection: Handling information overload.

- Tenure: less than one year (1) to more than 20 years (5)
- Referent plasticity: specialist (1) to generalist (5)
- Time lapse: days (1) to months (5)
- Prioritization: main focus (1) to strategic (5)
- Plan revisions: none (1) to multiple (5)

Temporal continuity: Segmenting ongoing time into experiential durations.

- Interruption: significant (1) to none (5)
- Bureaucracy: heavy (1) to light (5)
- Emotional intelligence: low (1) to high (5)
- Stressfulness: high (1) to low (5)
- Distractions: none (1) to many (5)

Note: Effective sensemaking is the highest number (5); ineffective the lowest (1).

After completing the interviews and confirming accurate transcripts with the participants, I highlighted quotes and topics that met the descriptions for the various aspects of the principles (Weick, 1995). An example is one pastor who discussed elements of identity, social interaction, and retrospection when addressing a question about expertise in planting churches:

> I would say not much [experience]. Maybe, maybe not at all, other than just I've read books about it and, you know, now just the friends that I've had going through it themselves. And then, I mean, revitalization has kind of been our [the leaders'] work from the beginning.

This pastor made additional comments applicable to these principles in the interview. Discussing the identity of the church, the pastor asked, "What does it look like for us to be a church next year and the year after that and after that?" The pastor talked about selling the church buildings, not just the parsonage, to improve flexibility and to focus the identity of the church on reaching unchurched populations in the surrounding neighborhoods. A goal was to become a church of microchurches, which typically were held in homes and conducted in an informal style led by church members, not the pastors (Marti & Ganiel, 2014).

Conversely, many parishioners in this church identified with the sanctuary, believed in the historical model of expecting seekers and believers to come to the church buildings to hear the Gospel, and wanted the focus of the clergy and lay leaders to help members grow spiritually. The pastor indicated a "struggle to communicate that [transition] well to the church." These comments suggested issues with plausibility: matching ideas to skill sets, making plans and implementing them, inhibiting a fluid process forward, and resistance from the governing board and parishioners. Table 28 exhibits a concise description of the aspects in identity construction, social interaction, plausibility, and retrospection that guided my quantification process.

Table 28

Descriptions of Aspects Representing Four Organizational Sensemaking Principles

Aspect	Aspect description
	Identity construction
Identity plasticity	The number of identities, or redefinitions of identities, recounted.
Self-image	The self-expression of confidence in identity.
Plurality	The intersubjective meaning in which the identity of self connects and synthesizes with others.
Linguistics	The articulation of modality to reveal subjective experience (De Luca Picione et al., 2018).
	Social interaction
Perspectives sought	The interest to seek the contributions of others, particularly diversity of voices (Heifetz et al., 2009).
Influences	The willingness to incorporate the insights of others.
Collaboration	The importance of working together, over time.
	Plausibility
Alignment of skills to ideas	The compatibility of proffered ideas with past experiences.
Plans for implementation	The innovativeness of prospective projects.
Process fluency	The ease with which the story is presented.
Board reaction	The expressions of reasonableness, pragmatics, and instrumentality by members of the governing board.
Church reaction	The expressions of reasonableness, pragmatics, and instrumentality by parishioners.
	Retrospection
Tenure or longevity in local church	The duration of time through which a pastor or lay leader has to build relationships within the church.
Referent plasticity	The diversity of the participant's background.
Time lapse	The discrete segment in time between the 2017 annual meeting of the district and enactment of the planting or multiplication vision.
Prioritization of the vision	The focus on multiple projects simultaneously.
Plan revisions	The number of times the leaders returned to the initial plan to revise the scope, resources, or other facets.

Note: Descriptions were derived from Weick (1995) and supplemented with indicated citations.

After collating the data in one interview, I determined a score for each aspect in the principles and averaged the aspect scores to record a domain value for each principle (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Weick, 1995). I then averaged the scores for the seven principles to

develop a single value representing a sensemaking global score for that participant. Table 29 contains the domain scores for each principle and the global score for each participant, represented by an alphanumeric label. I could not assess a score for every aspect or principle, which was a design limitation; I chose to restrict the interviews to one hour each and to ask lightly structured questions that allowed flexibility for the participant to express their sensemaking experience in ways that they felt were meaningful (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Johnson, 2018c). This resulted in incomplete data for the data transformation process. Table B3 in the appendix furnishes excerpts from interviews and other sources that I deemed compatible with and illustrative of each principle used in the data quantification effort.

Table 29

Quantification Scores for Organizational Sensemaking of Leaders, N = 10

Sensemaking Principle	P6	P8	P9	P11	P15	P18	P19	P20	P21	P22
Reference points	3.8	3.8	1.8	3.0	4.7	3.3	3.0	3.5	3.4	4.2
Identity	4.5	3.8	2.5	4.0	4.3	2.3	3.3	3.0	4.0	3.0
Plausibility	2.8	3.6	1.8	4.0	4.4	3.0	1.5	2.3	3.7	4.6
Social interaction	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	4.7	1.7	3.7	4.0	3.7	3.0
Enactive environment	2.8	3.7	1.8	4.2	4.4	2.8	3.3	-	3.0	4.3
Retrospection	2.1	2.6	1.2	2.8	3.3	1.7	2.0	1.0	5.0	3.5
Temporal continuity	3.2	3.5	2.2	4.5	4.0	1.5	3.2	3.0	4.8	3.8
Global sensemaking score	3.0	3.4	1.9	3.7	4.2	2.3	2.8	2.8	3.9	3.8

Note: Participant P20 relayed insufficient information in the interview to allow a score for the principle of enactive environment (Weick, 1995).
Global $M = 3.1$; global $SD = 0.82$.

To validate the sensemaking scales, I sought interrater reliability data but was unable to obtain multiple scores from another analyst with whom to compare my ratings (Field, 2017). I incorporated this limitation into Chapter 5. Nonetheless, I chose to use these sensemaking scores from the ten interviews to meet the primary quantitative purpose of this study: to assess the relationships between organizational sensemaking, trust, and leadership styles.

Trust, Leadership, and Sensemaking

Having examined individually each of the primary variables, as reported in the test instruments and transformation of the qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), I analyzed the results to determine the relationship between the variables (Field, 2017). I originally intended to determine if the three variables influenced the responses of the churches to plant new churches, the goal of the growth vision. However, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I did not obtain confirmation of the specific church responses. The church leaders who participated in the interviews and discussions described some of their outreach efforts, but most did not plant new churches. Some churches provided financial or material support to the few churches that did open initiatives or church plants while others remained focused on turning around their churches, improving their church health, or becoming more connected relationally in their respective geographic areas.

To make sense of the vision and prepare to explain it and its ramifications to the church organization, the lead pastor would have considered past experiences; the pastor's own identity; reference points within the environment; interactions with members of the governing board, staff, and parishioners within the local church; and the denominational culture (Chaves, 2004; Schein, 2017; Weick, 1995). These factors, I surmised, would have included trust in the superintendent and the preferred leadership styles (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017; Korn Ferry, 2019). Hypothesis 4 explored the relationship of these two variables, as measured in data sets from the LSW and ITS-O, on the derived sensemaking score, at a significance level of $\alpha = .05$.

$H4_0$: The perceived trust in the superintendent had a direct effect on organizational sensemaking and an indirect effect through the influence of the preferred leadership style.

$H4_A$: The perceived trust in the superintendent did not have a direct effect on organizational sensemaking nor an indirect effect through the influence of the preferred leadership style.

Result: Failed to reject the null hypothesis. To assess the effects of the observed trustworthiness of the superintendent ($N = 7$), organizational sensemaking ($N = 10$), and preferred leadership style ($n = 18$), I used a conditional process model that returned an error due to the small, combined sample size ($n = 4$; Hayes, 2018, 2020). Analysis using Spearman's *rho* indicated no significant correlation between trust in the superintendent and organizational sensemaking ($n = 7$, $\alpha = .05$, $r_s = .43$, $p = .33$), and no correlation of these two variables with the six preferred leadership styles (Field, 2017).

As I expected to identify a strong correlation between trust in the leader (De Furia, 1996) and organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), I intended to examine the variables in a different conditional process model, utilizing sensemaking scores as the mediating variable and the required leadership styles as the dependent variable (Hayes, 2018). Using data measured by the ITS-O on the perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent ($N = 7$), the LSW for required leadership styles ($n = 18$), and the quantified sensemaking scales ($N = 10$), Hypothesis 5 would have incorporated covariates of age, tenure, and prior church planting experiences, captured in the demographic survey, to assess any relationship between the variables (Hayes, 2018).

$H5_0$: Perceived trust in the superintendent had a direct effect on the required leadership style and indirect through the effect of organizational sensemaking, with covariates of age, tenure, and prior church planting experiences.

$H5_A$: Perceived trust in the superintendent did not have a direct effect on the required leadership style nor indirect through the effect of sensemaking, with covariates of age, tenure, and prior church planting experiences.

Result: Failed to reject the null hypothesis. Using a simple mediation model like the one for the previous hypothesis resulted in similar results: I received an error due to the small sample size (n = 4; Hayes, 2018, 2020). I examined the Spearman's *rho* correlation coefficients between these variables, at $\alpha = .05$ (Field, 2017). I did not determine a statistically significant result. The issue concerning the inability to use simple moderation models for Hypotheses 4 and 5 are addressed further in Chapter 5. Incorporating the data on tenures, I also did not determine a statistically significant correlation between trust in the superintendent, organizational sensemaking, nor any of the four tenure variables.

In reviewing the results of my endeavors to interpret the findings from the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research analyses in comparison to the literature review, I assessed that the research results described a nearly perfect, text-book example of sense-giving by the superintendent to influence the church leadership (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Sense-giving

Efforts to shape the sensemaking processes of another person by offering a specific perspective or a prescriptive solution is sense-giving (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 2, sense-giving often was performed by leaders higher in the organizational hierarchy for middle managers, who then influenced their teams and other followers. Some of these leaders reflected transparency (Prior et al., 2018) but most controlled the cues provided the followers to guide them to a specific conclusion or viewpoint for change within the organization (Filstad, 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). This construct of

sense-giving seems applicable to my understanding of the shared sensemaking experience of the church leaders in the phenomenon of this study.

The superintendent discussed the many preparations made to empower the church leaders to embrace the new vision for multiplication. The superintendent knew the district had to facilitate change, stating, “I had to expend financial resources to hire people who could bring resources and deliver them and create structures or systems or pathways to disseminate the resources.” But, before getting started, the district staff considered financial assets, staffing needs and retirements, and expertise; “we figured every line, you know, and you build in all your assumptions. It was a big project, and no plan survives first contact.” Seeking trained church planters, the district staff recruited from seminary and other districts and formed partnerships with church planting institutions across the country.

The superintendent also considered the available clergy in the district and replaced eight lead pastors, formally announcing the new assignments at the annual conference in which the vision was presented. Some were recruited from outside the district or reassigned within the district and afforded extensive training before assuming the positions. Shortly thereafter, the superintendent required the disbanding of some governing boards in churches that had poor performance records. One newly installed pastor noted the lay leaders “were very settled and comfortable” until the board was dissolved. A board member in another church in which the board was restructured acknowledged the church had to change the “country club mentality” because the church was “pretty stagnant.” Explaining their situation, the board member apologized, “we supported them [missions] with our money, [but] we didn't want to get our hands dirty” by conducting outreach ministries in local neighborhoods.

To the superintendent, such complacency and inactivity was not appropriate. The district staff realized communications were critical to launching and sustaining the growth effort. In addition to a monthly newsletter,

> we're [the district staff] constantly releasing video, training, and opportunities so that our readers, many of them in our pews and on Governing Boards, are saying this isn't the [district] we were some years ago. So, I think that we've elevated an awareness that there's been an important shift that's taking place.

The superintendent allocated financial resources for a full-time consultant, recruited mentors and trainers, earmarked grants, and made other necessary provisions. Church leaders discussed the training and one remarked,

> Prior to my coming [into the district] also they had classes in church planting and…it was a cohort that I was asked to come up and meet with, that all ministers in this [district] had gone through, which was just a whole revamping of how you think about church. And what the purpose is and how you do outreach and all of these different things.

As a result, credentialed leaders in the district experienced "a seven-year immersion in our language [of turnaround and multiplication] and the culture they're trying to build." These extensive preparations and activities appeared to be compatible with the definition of sense-giving (Filstad, 2014).

Of interest, the church leaders observed superior behaviors of the superintendent in reducing controls and allowing for mutual influence (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017). Had the superintendent crafted a specific perspective by which to influence the sensemaking of the church leaders and force a particular outcome, I would have anticipated these two behaviors to have been ranked much lower. Instead, the church leaders felt empowered to experiment and

tailor potential programs to the skills and resources within their respective churches. Many leaders referenced small victories that slowly but surely facilitated a shift within their congregations from an inward focus to one seeking new ways to interact with their communities and evangelize. A district official stated more than three-quarters of the churches engaged the vision, but many had not produced any tangible results by the third year.

Furthermore, flexibility of the enactment of the vision was evident in the surprise of how the churches became involved in the multiplication effort. The district official clarified that the superintendent expected a significant financial investment by the churches. Instead, individual parishioners sought active roles in the efforts of other churches when their churches could not plant a church or begin a new initiative. In some regions, the church leaders developed lay leaders to spearhead the new multiplication efforts. Although the costs of participating in the vision were significant—loss of members who would not embrace the vision, loss of talent who took the lead or supported the infrastructures of the newly established outreach efforts, loss of facilities to balance budgets and fund these efforts—every church leader who supported the vision expressed passion for the new direction for their churches. The superintendent's sense-giving empowered and supported the leaders in their difficult tasks of making sense of the change impacting their churches (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017).

Conclusion

This mixed methods study examined the essence of the lived experiences of the shared leadership structure in a small number of district churches who made sense of a phenomenon that instructed them to plant new churches in the midst of persistent organizational decline. Although each participant related unique and individual experiences, they shared commonalities (Schein, 2017). In addition to a similar denominational structure, culture, and organizational

responsibilities (Chaves, 1993), the leaders received indoctrination, training, and resources that empowered many of them for change (Filstad, 2014). Some leaders initially reacted with enthusiasm, others with caution or concerns, and a few determined the new vision was related or similar to their current focus and required little, if any, adjustments. After processing the phenomenon further, most church organizations developed means by which to connect and deepen relationships with their communities. Many of these initiatives did not meet the standards set by the district leadership yet the district indicated it achieved its goals for increasing the numbers of churches through planting and fresh initiatives that should lead to the establishment of new churches. Unanticipated by the district leadership, many church congregations connected to churches that could plant or start new initiatives, providing financial support or resources that facilitated the desired growth in the district.

Trust in the superintendent was a significant aspect of this study (De Furia, 1996). Employing quantitative and qualitative techniques, I sought to define a relationship between organizational sensemaking, trust behaviors, leadership styles, and the planting responses of the churches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; De Furia, 1996; Korn Ferry, 2019). I did not determine any statistically significant relationships between these variables (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). I did not obtain data on individual church responses to the vision and, the sample sizes for the quantitative instruments were small, using remnants of a representative sample and available volunteers, which may have affected the findings with increased effect of the biases of sampling, volunteers, and attribution (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Dollinger & Leong, 1993). I obtained significant results involving leadership styles with tenure (Field, 2017; Korn Ferry, 2019). I also identified a concern about the trust environment in the district for which the quantitative and qualitative data analysis appeared contradictory and which I could not resolve with mixed

methods techniques of integration and joint display tables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; De Furia, 1996).

In the next chapter, I discussed the findings within a lens for practical and scholarly applications. This study contributed to our understanding of organizational sensemaking by middle managers, interpersonal trust, and leadership styles within a distributed religious organization, characterized by its shared leadership structure. However, there is much still to research about trust in leaders, sensemaking, and sense-giving in religious organizations. Outlining the limitations of this study and summarizing the results, I offered suggestion for future research opportunities at the conclusion of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Sensemaking never stops. (Weick, 1995, p. 107)

This final chapter provided a discussion based on the analytical results of this mixed methods research study into the sensemaking experience of leaders working within shared leadership structures of distributed evangelical churches in a geographic district of a Protestant denomination (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study incorporated the perceptions of the leaders' trust in the district superintendent (De Furia, 1996) and leadership styles (Korn Ferry, 2019) to provide insight into the reflections of sensemaking principles (Weick, 1995).

Discussion

This discussion starts with a summary of findings from a study of the sensemaking of the church leaders following the enactment of the superintendent's vision for each church to plant another church as a means of addressing the chronic organizational decline in the district. The findings addressed sense-giving by the superintendent (Filstad, 2014), the lack of participation by the largest churches in the district (Becker, 1999; Chaves, 1993; Johnson, 2001), and the visibility of Weickian sensemaking principles in the narratives (Weick 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Additional findings addressed the common choice of the coaching leadership style (Korn Ferry, 2019; Spreier et al., 2006), the trust environment (De Furia, 1996), and the independence of the primary variables (Field, 2017). Implications of these findings suggested practical applications of the Weickian sensemaking construct as a framing device rather than an influential variable (Weick et al., 2005), utility of the coaching approach for guiding denominational resource materials for evangelicals (Bebbington, 2019; Chaves, 1993), and redesigning studies of

churches to account for sampling limitations (Field, 2017). Theoretical applications included suggestions for applying trust in triadic relationships within evangelical churches (Baker, 2017; Vanzini, 2020) and against the use of non-dichotomous variables in data transformation efforts supporting mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The chapter concluded with a discussion of limitations and recommendations for further research into organizational sensemaking, particularly with respect to trust and leadership.

Summary of Findings

Findings derived from this mixed methods study on sensemaking by church leaders addressed numerous conclusions, some of which were consistent with the extant literature, such as the findings on sense-giving (Filstad, 2014) and the participation of the larger churches (Chaves, 1993). Findings regarding the trust environment (De Furia, 1996) were not consistent with the literature. Aspects of the remaining findings, on leadership styles choices (Goleman et al., 2013) and organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), were similar to the literature accounts but included some variation or contradictions. These congruencies and incongruencies did not define a relationship between sensemaking, trust, and leadership styles but provided insights into implications and limitations of this study and ideas for further research opportunities.

The Sense-giving of the Superintendent

Efforts to influence the sensemaking results of others by providing plausible and socially acceptable perspectives, including prescriptive solutions, are considered sense-giving behaviors (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The interviews of ten church leaders, informal discussions with other lead pastors, records from governing board meeting minutes, and communications records provided details reflecting the sense-giving activities to the lead pastors by the superintendent. These pastors, in a position roughly equivalent to middle managers,

assuaged ambiguity, fears, and the profound disruption of the superintendent's vision to influence their lay leaders and congregations (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). The vision was compatible with the historical perspective of evangelicalism, of outreach through which the Gospel is shared by the members of the churches, not just missionaries in foreign lands, and reinforced by the great commission issued by Jesus (Fisher, 2019). The superintendent provided comprehensive support through extensive training, encouragement, mentoring, performance metrics, reinforcement in communiques, financial grants, pulpit assignments, and many other means. The sense-giving efforts, described by the church leaders and records, were consistent with literature that described sense-giving as common and effective in business organizations (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). To my knowledge, sense-giving in religious organizations by upper management through middle management to member churches had not been documented.

The Large Church Participation

In the district, the majority (64%) of the churches averaged 150 attendees or less on weekends, which was typical for US Christian churches, before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bird & Thumma, 2020; Roozen, 2016; Thumma, 2015), but constituted 86% of the churches cooperating in this study; the largest churches declined participation. Two possible explanations involved the nature of corporate-sized churches and being part of a denomination. Corporate-sized churches comprised 12% of the district churches, with none being classified as megachurches, and average 350 to 2,000 attendees each weekend (Johnson, 2001). The leaders focus on their example and impact in the local community, outside the church, within the denomination, and with leaders of other churches, sometimes regardless of denominational

affiliation (Becker, 1999). As in any large business, accessibility to the CEO is limited due to the significant time commitment of the top position.

Another possible reason for the larger churches not volunteering to join the study involves the culture of a denomination (Chaves, 1993). A denomination provides legitimate authority to the church and its leaders and regulates resources. Small churches lack revenue, volunteers, and financial stability and seek loans for construction projects and other significant material needs from the denomination. Larger churches have these resources and do not have to depend upon the provisions of the denomination. Perhaps this power dynamic influenced the perceived need to participate in the study.

The Sensemaking of Church Leaders

Within the common denominational and declining church cultures, the church leaders discussed their sensemaking experience in terms compatible with the Weickian sensemaking construct, most commonly in retrospection, reference points, plausibility, and social interaction (Weick, 1995). The experiences of the lead pastors, in leading missions, driving turnaround church efforts, or planting new churches, and their willingness to experiment or wholeheartedly embrace the change required by the superintendent's vision for the district lent confidence, enthusiasm, examples, and encouragement to the governing board members and to the congregations. These aspects reflected consistency with the retrospection principle. With respect to reference points, the clergy and lay leaders remarked on the receptivity of the church members for change. Some congregations had little interest and would not step forward to lead initiatives. Other groups sought opportunities to serve their neighbors through projects meeting the vision metrics, like dinner churches, and other ministry projects that simply met the needs of their communities, such as clothes or food pantries and Bible studies outside the church facilities.

Nearly all the leaders remarked on the sincerity of the superintendent to pursue the vision, demonstrated by the financial support, training, and other opportunities offered; the closing of underperforming churches; and restructuring of governing boards. Although the superintendent remained dedicated to the vision, the leaders noted the superintendent was not heavy handed; the leaders perceived the superintendent was open to their influence and permitted flexibility in tailoring their responses within the realities of their churches, as reflected in the ITS-O analysis.

The leaders also reacted to the plausibility of the vision (Weick, 1995). Some pastors lamented that poor organizational health required them to continue with their turnaround church efforts, developing mission statements and organizational objectives, addressing budgeting deficiencies, and focusing inward. Others connected the vision to the great commission and, perhaps, their evangelistic roots (Bebbington, 2019), changing the mindsets of parishioners from supporting missions abroad to actively supporting local efforts, partnering with district churches that launched new initiatives, and providing financial support to the district. The fourth common Weickian sensemaking principle, social interaction, reflected the denominational culture of a leadership structure shared between the clergy and the lay leaders (Chaves, 1993): lengthy and involved conversations between the lead pastor and governing board members, extensive communications plans to persuade and inspire the church members, and claiming small victories leading to increased activism in the pews.

Of the remaining three principles of temporal continuity, identity construction, and enactive environment, the narratives included pertinent information but with less frequency in the stories and between the leaders (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Explanations for these less prominent principles may include limitations of the study design or interview capabilities of the researcher (Johnson, 2018c; Seidman, 2013; Templeton, 1994).

The Coaching Style

Goleman (2002) discussed the six leadership styles that incorporated emotional intelligence and characterized the motivations behind the styles: participative, visionary, coaching, pacesetting, affiliative, and directive. Of these, the coaching style was used least by high performing leaders, perhaps, Goleman surmised, because this style was time consuming to implement effectively. However, in this study, more than half of the lead pastors preferred the coaching style and a similar proportion, although different individuals, selected the coaching style once the superintendent introduced the vision to the district (Korn Ferry, 2019). Combining these results, 16 of 19 of these experienced ministerial leaders were familiar with and respected the coaching style, seemingly in contradiction to the literature (Goleman, 2002). A plausible explanation concerns evangelicalism and the superintendent's vision for planting.

As Murray (2001) noted, planting churches was a traditional activist behavior with roots to New Testament times. Like then, district churches endeavored to develop individuals to fulfill the leadership responsibilities in the newly planted locations (Friday, 2017; Malphurs, 2013). Of the six leadership styles, only coaching focused directly on the intersection of talent and organizational need (Goleman et al., 2013; Spreier et al., 2006). The coaching style emphasized the alignment of the individual's interests and skills to meet organizational goals, which, in this situation, were evangelical. Further research could determine if this explanation is accurate.

The Trust Environment

The quantitative results from some leaders, as measured by the ITS-O instrument, indicated a concern with the trust environment (De Furia, 1996). Their scores reflected unmet expectations, which negatively impact organizational culture (De Furia, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Analysis of the interviews, meeting minutes, and other qualitative sources provided

conflicting information, some of which supported perceptions that the superintendent's behaviors did not foster a trusting environment while other analysis contradicted these (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The use of joint displays, shown in Tables 24 and 25 in Chapter 4, did not resolve the inconsistencies. Yet the district met the vision goals to plant churches and launch initiatives.

A possible explanation is that trust in the superintendent did not hamper the ability of the church leaders to responsibly lead their churches and satisfy organizational objectives (Baer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Many of the churches lost large portions of their congregations, those who disagreed with the shift from focusing on themselves to actively expanding their circles of influence into unchurched groups in their neighborhoods, from financially supporting missionaries in distant lands to local initiatives like dinner churches, and selling church facilities to decrease administrative costs and allow more flexible support of externally-focused ministries (Smith, 2017; Starke & Dyke, 1996).

From an organizational standpoint, the churches met district expectations to increase their interactions with local populations not attending district churches and activating greater commitment and participation from the parishioners (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Many churches experimented to find viable options and relied upon each other, perhaps even trusted each other more, to develop the small victories. This could be likened to improved job performance and organizational citizenship, discussed in Chapter 2 (Baer et al., 2018; Mayer et al., 1995). It is difficult to equate the church environment to a business environment, as the parishioners are both consumers (of the worship services, for example) or customers (of Bible study resource materials) and (unpaid) employees as they conduct the outreach ministries under the supervision of lay leaders or pastors (Boggs & Fields, 2010; Chaves, 1993; Malphurs, 2013). The dramatic losses experienced in the churches could be considered lost customers who no

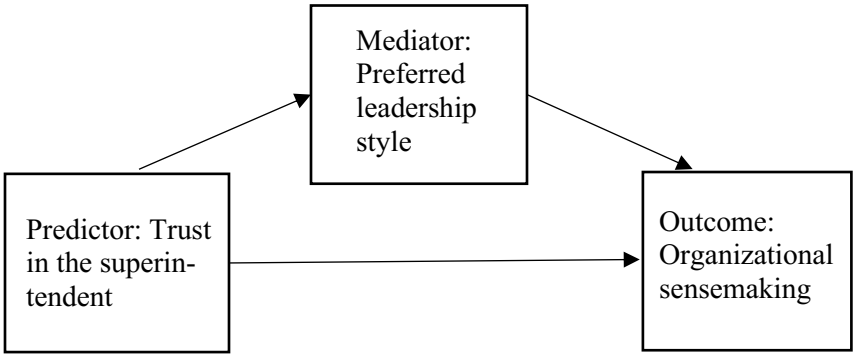
longer desired the changed product or could be represented as turnover in unpaid employees (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Neither characterization is appealing or fully appropriate. This, however, reflects opportunities for future research in trust and parishioner characterizations.

The Primary Variables

In addition to trust in the superintendent potentially not being an influential factor for leading in the churches, it may not have been an important factor for making sense of the vision either (De Furia, 1996; Weick, 1995). Within this study, a relationship between trust in the superintendent, organizational sensemaking, and leadership styles was not determined. (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Hypothesis 4 sought to examine the direct effect of perceived trustworthiness of the superintendent on organizational sensemaking and an indirect effect through the influence of the preferred leadership style, depicted in Figure 7 (Hayes, 2018). Receiving an error message for an insufficiently sized sample in SPSS (IBM, 2020) while using the Hayes PROCESS tool (Hayes, 2020), I removed the mediating variable but neither a simple linear regression nor correlation reflected a significant relationship (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018).

Figure 7

Conceptual Diagram of Trust in the Superintendent, Sensemaking, and Leadership Styles

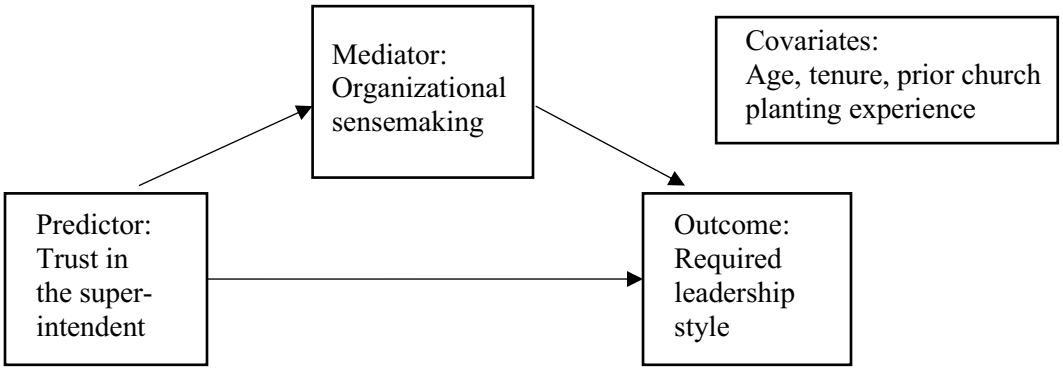


Note. Hayes Model 4 is modified to identify the variables used in this hypothesis (Hayes, 2018).

Rearranging the variables into the model in Figure 8, I used Hypothesis 5 to test the direct effect of the perceived trust in the superintendent on the required leadership style and indirect through the effect of sensemaking, with the indicated covariates (IBM, 2020; Hayes, 2020). The results were similar; no significant statistical findings due to an error for insufficient sample size ($n = 4$).

Figure 8

Conceptual Diagram of Trust in the Superintendent, Leadership Style, and Sensemaking



Note. Hayes Model 4 is modified to reflect the reorganization of variables (Hayes, 2018).

As expressed in the previous section on the trust environment, trust in the superintendent may not have been a predictor variable (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). I expected trust in the upper-level management would influence the behaviors, actions, and sensemaking of the middle managers preparing to interact with followers (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Perhaps my assumptions were inaccurate because they intermingled the referent positions, upper-level management, middle management, and followers (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Alternatively, the shared leadership structure may have had a more profound influence on the relationships of trust, sensemaking, and leadership. From my experiences as a leader in government, I am predisposed to believe one leader has primacy, even within a shared leadership structure, although that leadership may rotate or vary situationally within the structure. Within a

church environment, the pastor typically is considered the spiritual leader even though she may share the administrative responsibilities with a governing council and committees (Bray, 2016; Chaves, 1993; Johnson, 2007; Keller & Alsdorf, 2013; Malphurs, 2013). This studied denomination is intentional in declaring and supporting an equal partnership between the lead pastor and the respective governing board to lead the church, a characteristic that was not captured well within the study results and clearly is a limitation. The structure is an untested variable that may contribute effect in the sought relationship with sensemaking, trust, and leadership styles (Hayes, 2018). A third possibility may be the variable of trust in God, in the Church, or theological calling (Baker, 2017; Nullens, 2013; Sturges et al., 2019; Vanzini, 2020). Without further research, a viable explanation involving this additional referent for trust is not available.

Implications, Limitations, and Further Research

These findings suggested implications for practice and theory, identified limitations, and offered opportunities for further research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Implications

The sense-giving activities by the superintendent, the lack of participation by large churches in the district, the sensemaking principles reflected in the interviews, the selection of the coaching leadership style by most of the lead pastors, the trust environment, and the relationships between the primary variables had implications for academic and practical studies.

Studying Relationships between Sensemaking, Trust, and Leadership Styles

The implications of the finding of not determining a relationship between sensemaking, trust in upper management, and leadership styles are practical and theoretical (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Hayes, 2018). From a practical perspective, I assumed organization sensemaking

would be an important factor that not only disrupts the inertia to facilitate decision-making (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), but informs others of the thought and interaction processes of the individual. From this insight, training programs and professional development plans could be tailored to leverage the capabilities of the individual more fully and improve agility in organizations, similar to the findings of studies from Antino et al. (2019), de Graff et al. (2019), and Osorio-Vega (2019). These studies sought to train and normalize desirable behaviors in employees and address team issues, as mentioned in Chapter 2. However, if organizational sensemaking does not have an effect on leadership styles nor on trusting behaviors, perhaps sensemaking is a descriptive construct for framing analyses or interventions but not a skill or capability to be learned and enacted.

Studying Coaching

The practical implication of the predominance of the coaching leadership style for the clergy in these evangelical churches is not to negate the validity of servant nor transformational leadership styles, commonly aspired to by church leaders, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Ledbetter et al., 2016). Servants as leaders focus on facilitating the growth and flourishing of others by serving them, putting the highest priority needs of the follower before profit and organizational goals (Greenleaf, 1998). Transformational leaders seek to elevate followers, encouraging moral stances that support flourishing (Stone, et al., 2004). A leader simultaneously can be a servant and transformational, in a synergistic stance that supports inclusivity in the organizational culture. Likewise, coaching as a mindset, a motivation, a style can support the overarching leadership philosophy (Goleman et al., 2012; Spreier et al., 2006) and, like servant and transformational leaders, focus on the follower. Coaching, in evangelical churches, may be a predominant mindset that complements other leadership stances. A practical implication is the

insight this provides to denominations to influence the resources the denominational structure provides to church leaders (Chaves, 1993; Ward, Sr., 2018). Perhaps denominational bookstores, Sunday school resources, and discipleship training materials already focus on a coaching perspective. District supervisors may have intuited this mindset in the church leaders and tailored conversations, performance goals, and guidance to support and encourage coaching. This study did not obtain sufficient clarity to determine whether the coaching leadership style is familiar to and resourced by this evangelical denomination, but it does pose an interesting construct for future research.

Studying Trust

One troubling finding of this study involved the trust environment, which some church leaders perceived as neutral or negative and which appeared to not have a statistical relationship to organizational sensemaking nor leadership styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; De Furia, 1996; Hayes, 2018; Korn Ferry, 2019; Weick, 1995). Possible explanations mentioned earlier in this chapter concerned referents in the organizational hierarchical structures (Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). These have theoretical and practical implications.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, scholars disagreed on the effect of different job positions in the organizational structure upon trust and trusting behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 1995; Rotter, 1980; Rousseau et al., 1998). The "job" positions in a church differ substantially from those in a business and in a non-profit organization, as demonstrated by my problematic characterization of the parishioners within a business model, referenced in this chapter and discussed by Boggs and Fields (2010). Thus, efforts to define the relationship between the various referents in a church setting and the effect of trust between them may expand the theoretical literature on trust. The referent combinations include the three primary elements of a

church (clergy, lay leaders, and parishioners), those in a denomination (district supervisor and church leaders), in a shared leadership structure (clergy and lay leaders of a governing council), and in a collaborative environment (district clergy and the leaders of other churches, non-profit organizations, and public officials external to but partnered with the local churches). Additionally, Vanzini (2020) and others referred to a third referent of trust within religious organizations, trust in a transcendent being. In other words, the trust relationship is not dyadic but triadic as the third referent is perceived as always being present. This perceived reality may not have an equivalent within most corporate business cultures, although spirituality in the workplace has been researched (Fard et al., 2020; Neculàesei, 2019; Rhodes, 2006; Schutte, 2016). Certainly, this has theoretical implications but also practical ones.

From a theoretical perspective, similarities to analogous aspects of a corporation would be informative and encourage qualitative and/or quantitative research to define and characterize them (Boggs & Fields, 2010). Finding comparable trust elements would facilitate their examination as churches are difficult to study, if only by the perspective of time commitment since churches typically meet on weekends (Chaves, 2004; Christerson & Emerson, 2003; Stroope & Baker, 2014). Additionally, awareness of the triadic partners may require inclusion when designing studies in church cultures (Nullens, 2013; Vanzini, 2020). As this study determined, seeking to evaluate the trust environment without considering the theologically based trust element may have inhibited efforts to define the trust climate and relationships between different variables, including referents, to trust.

Studying Churches

In designing this study, I acknowledged the limitation of population size (Gilbert, 2018b). A district of less than four dozen churches may include less than six dozen pastors

([Denomination], 2018). The typical church size is less than 100 members or attendees on an average weekend (Roozen, 2016), which suggested one pastor assigned to the smaller churches and two or more pastors assigned to the largest churches. In this district, nearly two-thirds of the churches were small, of family or pastoral sizes ([Denomination], 2018). The governing boards, likewise, would reflect small numbers, typically three members for the smallest churches and perhaps a dozen for the largest churches ([Denomination], 2015a). As the purpose of the study was to examine the sensemaking processes of the leaders, a phenomenon common to each church had to occur, with sufficient distinctiveness to be identifiable within these churches, and to disrupt processes (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Such phenomena are uncommon, at least before the COVID-19 pandemic (Bird & Thumma, 2020). Studying sensemaking in churches has implications of a theoretical and practical nature.

From a theoretical perspective, mixed methods and, more directly, quantitative techniques are challenging as the sample sizes needed exceed the likelihood of obtaining responses (Gilbert, 2018b; Lindemann, 2019). Specifically, Gilbert et al. (2018) recommended a sample size of nearly nine in ten pastors (91%) to meet the desired precision of the sampling error ($\alpha = .05$). Knowing that the number of invitations does not have a direct relationship to the number of participants (Lindemann, 2019), the viability of quantitative analysis is problematic. This insight is not designed to discourage empirical studies in churches. Instead, I want to encourage scholars and students with exceptional mathematical (statistical) skills to help ameliorate this persistent issue confronting studies of churches. Secondly, this issue requires innovative study designs to address the desired study purpose with awareness of significant difficulties in achieving sufficient population sizes.

Quantification of Qualitative Data

Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) discussed data transformation and integration procedures. Most commonly, researchers quantified qualitative data into dichotomous numerical values or counts (frequency of appearance, elapsed time, number of participants or behaviors, etc.). Some studies demonstrated the transformation of quantitative data into qualitative units or themes. In this study, I transformed data using both methods and discerned theoretical and practical implications.

I converted the results of the LSW, the preferred and required leadership styles (Korn Ferry, 2019), into numerical values (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) based on the assessed sensemaking skills (Weick, 1995) attributable to the style. For example, I indicated the participative leadership style (Spreier et al., 2006) would employ the most organizational sensemaking principles (Weick, 1995) most effectively. As a result, I rated the participative approach as a 6, but the directive style as a 1, signaling its poor sensemaking efficiencies. The problems that emerged were primarily two-fold. First, results for five of the participants indicated more than one style (see Table 20 in Chapter 4). My scaling process required an average of the scores, but this was troublesome. An average of the participative (6) and directive (1) scores, for example, would result in a 3.5, a score suggesting a style between coaching (4) and pacesetting (3), which is nonsensical. The second problem emerged when I sought to use these scores in regression modeling with sensemaking and trust (De Furia, 1996; Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018; Weick, 1995). The leadership scores were biased as they already incorporated sensemaking principles (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018).

Difficulties also presented in the quantification of the interview results. The data transformation process from qualitative data to quantitative values, described in detail in

Appendix B, involved evaluating 31 aspects representing seven Weickian principles. Although laborious, the process was feasible. The practical difficulty was in training another analyst to apply the taxing process to the interviews, for the purpose of providing a means of countering threats to reliability, statistically comparing rater results, and to internal validity. A theoretical implication was that the scores replicating a Likert scale type value did not represent ratio data for the quantitative statistical analysis, the most effective type of variable for regression modeling (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) only described transformation of narrative data into dichotomous and ratio values, apparently for valid theoretical and practical reasons.

Limitations

The preceding discussion of findings and implications surfaced numerous limitations primarily with design, affecting the quantitative and qualitative data analyses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018. The most significant limitation involved the sample size for quantitative purposes (Gilbert, 2018b). I identified a phenomenon which could facilitate the study of sensemaking in a distributed organizational structure involving a minimum of 150 leaders, a quantity I assumed from counting the lead pastors of all the churches and estimating the numbers of members serving in the respective governing boards ([Denomination], 2015a, 2015b). I selected a subset of this group and identified alternatives that would allow the representative sample for maximum variety to be sustained (Bazeley, 2013; Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). However, the larger churches chose not to participate, and more than half of the participating lead pastors did not agree to allow access to their governing boards. I changed the sampling to include pastors and board members who expressed interest in the study. Even so, the resulting sample size was insufficient to meet the primary objective of the quantitative analysis: to determine a statistically significant

relationship between organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995), trust in the superintendent (De Furia, 1996), leadership styles (Korn Ferry, 2019), and planting results (Field, 2017; Gilbert, 2018b; Hayes, 2018). These developments did not diminish the threat to validity concerning the statistical conclusions as my study was underpowered: the regression models could not be performed, nor effects determined due to an inadequate sample size (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999).

The change in sampling procedures may have exacerbated volunteer bias by including a larger proportion of participants with a vested interest in discussing their experiences in sensemaking and the superintendent, who were more motivated, or who were seeking a form of approval or validation from an outsider (Salkind, 2010). Rosenthal and Rosnow (1975) indicated volunteers to studies possessed personality traits that scored stronger in affability and vulnerability. In particular, volunteers tended to not represent the greater population for these reasons. The impact of this bias is not clear as I was unable to calculate effect (Field, 2017). However, the sampling procedures did affect the internal and external validity (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999).

In hindsight, the sampling process did not ensure sufficient representation from both elements of the shared leadership design in each of the churches (Bazeley, 2013; Gilbert, 2018b). Following my bias of one leader in an organization having the primary responsibility, which in a church typically is the senior pastor (Chaves, 1993; Ledbetter et al., 2016; Smith, 2017), I designed the study to have the lead pastors be the central points of entry into their churches (Seidman, 2013). I solicited them to be gatekeepers, affording access to the respective governing board members and to archived documents from boards and committees affected by the superintendent's vision. A contributing factor was that the district staff could not provide board meeting minutes nor rosters of designated members on the governing boards in the district

churches. I could have revised the sampling method to include the delegates from each sampled church. Delegates represented their respective churches at the annual district conference. Some exerted significant informal power and authority throughout the year while others seemed contented to fulfill their duties for the singular event. Like board members, the identities of the delegates would be accessed through the churches. To limit the administrative and contextual complexities, I chose to not include these representatives. Choosing to use gatekeepers and to bound the sample failed to adequately mitigate a threat to the internal validity of the sample selection and the external validity, reducing the applicability of the findings across the district or into other districts across the denomination (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999).

Other limitations included the interpersonal trust surveys (De Furia, 1996) were not triangulated with objective data measured by additional instruments (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), the quantification of qualitative data was not tested for inter-rater reliability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Field, 2017), the design of the interviews were lightly structured and brief (lasting one hour or less) which truncated the amount of data collected (Johnson, 2007; Lamont & Swidler, 2014), and the study design did not incorporate the theological aspect of church (Gilbert et al., 2018) which may have been significant in analyzing the trust environment (De Furia, 1996). These limitations also impacted the quality of the study by not addressing threats to internal and external validity and to interrater reliability (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999).

Further Research

The findings from this study contributed to the influential construct of organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995) but also suggested opportunities for research to further available literature on the Weickian construct. The most significant may be the relationship between trust (trusting behaviors, trustworthiness, and trust proclivity), leadership, and organizational

sensemaking. Although scholars disagreed on the significance and effect of leadership and trust, many agreed a leader who is perceived as trustworthy positively influenced citizenship behaviors, job performance, work satisfaction, affective commitment, and other tangible metrics (Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). The intersection of sensemaking with these variables is underrepresented in literature. Within missiology, or the study of the mission of the church, the relationship of leaders and trust may hinge on a triadic relationship, not a dyadic one, and the intersection of sensemaking may be profound. This seems to be an intriguing construct worthy of exploring fully.

Research on the coaching leadership style, particularly in relation to evangelistic organizations, may have many practical applications for denominations and non-denominational training materials supporting outreach initiatives such as church planting efforts, microchurches, the emerging church movement, and others (Bebbington, 2019; Chaves, 1993; Marti & Ganiel, 2014; Spreier et al., 2006; Ward, Sr., 2018). The coaching approach may be effective also for church members in turnaround churches, particularly at the five to seven year mark in which active participation is most crucial (Ross, 2013). If organizational sensemaking is more than a framing device for studying past behaviors but is a predictive variable, using the sensemaking principles couched in coaching terms may improve the transferability of the learning from resources to lay leaders (Spreier et al., 2006; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Conclusion

This mixed methods research study sought to contribute to the extant literature on Weickian organizational sensemaking within a distributed organization, a shared leadership structure, and by the church leaders, a position roughly equivalent to middle managers between the district leadership and the parishioners. The findings provided the experience of the church

leaders making sense of a specific phenomenon, the vision of the superintendent to address chronic organizational decline by planting new churches. The narratives and church records supported framing within the Weickian construct. Incorporating variables on trust in the superintendent (De Furia, 1996) and the leadership styles of the clergy (Spreier et al., 2006) did not provide insights into sensemaking (Weick, 1995) as a predictive factor but contributed to the context of the environment in which the organizational sensemaking occurred. Unintended findings included an example of sense-giving by upper management, the superintendent, who with comprehensive preparations provided unparalleled support for the vision which shaped the sensemaking of the church leaders (Filstad, 2014; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Another was the impact of the organizational change for planting churches which reinforced the evangelical commitment by the remaining church members (Fisher, 2019). The apparent importance of the coaching leadership style (Korn Ferry, 2019; Spreier et al., 2006) and the potentially significant influence of trust (De Furia, 1996) in a triadic relationship (Baker, 2017; Vanzini, 2020) were, similarly, unexpected. These unplanned consequences provide viable suggestions for further research.

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Appendix A

Figure A1

Informed Consent Form for Lead Pastors

Northwest University
Sensemaking in a Religious Distributed Organization
September-October 2020

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Voluntary Status: You invited to participate in a study conducted by me (the researcher). You may choose to participate but may withdraw at any time. If you decide to not continue, any data already gathered will be used in this project unless you specify otherwise. To make an informed decision, the following information is provided about the purpose of the project, possible risks and benefits of participating, and what is asked of you. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form that outlines your rights as a research subject before engaging in any study activities. If you have any questions about your rights, please let me know.

Purpose: This study is a project to analyze the shared experience of leaders making sense of a specific vision to address a persistent challenge affecting missional effectiveness. This project is for a dissertation designed to meet doctoral candidacy requirements at Northwest University. Results from this study will be presented in a finished dissertation that will be uploaded into dissertation databases. Portions of the results also may be used for articles for academic or trade journals and may be shared at a professional conference.

Commitment and Compensation: To be a voluntary participant in this study, you will be asked to discuss your experience as a leader in your church making sense of [the bishop's] vision in 2017 to plant new churches. Your participation in this study should take less than two hours by

- Providing some personal demographic information,
- Submitting results from one or two interpersonal trust surveys, exercises 1 and 2 of the leadership styles workbook, and/or
- Participating in an interview.

You will not receive financial compensation for your participation, but I will provide a presentation next year to you and/or your church on the overall results of the study, if desired. Your participation is important for the study to be accurate and thorough.

Possible Risks and Benefits: Participation in this study is not expected to cause risk, harm, or discomfort. Other leaders in your church may know I have asked you to participate but not your answer. If you feel uncomfortable by this, the questions, methods, or any other factor, please tell me and we can conclude the interview or testing process immediately. If any questions or content of this interview bring up personal questions, confusion, anxiety, or depression, please contact the Crisis Call Center at 1 (800) 273-8255 or http://crisiscallcenter.org/. You may want to seek further help by contacting the Crisis Text Line at www.crisistextline.org, or by texting "HOME" to 741741. The benefit of participating in this study is to give you an opportunity to express your experience of making sense of [the bishop's] vision for the [district] and to contribute to this study on addressing difficult and persistent challenges to ministry.

(Continued)

Confidentiality: I will keep your personal information confidential; it will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity, and that of others revealed in this study, will be hidden by masking or using pseudonyms. Data will be stored in password protected files and shared only with my dissertation committee and an assistant who may help me ensure the reliability of my analytical technique. This assistant will complete certified training on how to maintain confidentiality before accessing data; the data will have no details about your identity nor of your church. Digital recordings will supplement accuracy of my analysis; I will not release any clips. Raw data will be destroyed by the end of 2021. You agree to not discuss your participation nor the participation of others in this study.

Conflict of Interest: I (the researcher) have complied with Northwest University's potential conflict of interest in research policy and completed certified training on protecting participants. If there are questions about this study, the rights afforded to participants, or if you wish to express a concern, please contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Tony Pizelo, at (425) 889-5203, Email: tony.pizelo@northwestu.edu, or the Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Dr. Cherri Seese, at (425) 285-2413, Email: cherri.seese@northwestu.edu.

Consent: You (the undersigned) understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. You understand the procedures described above and understand fully the rights of a potential subject in a research study involving people as subjects. Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing below, you agree to participate in this study, to abide by the confidentiality aspects, and have received a copy of this consent form.

____I agree to be digitally (audio and/or visual) recorded.
____ I do **NOT** agree to be digitally (audio and/or visual) recorded.

_____. _____. _____
Printed Name of Participant *Signature of Participant* *Today's Date*

I (the undersigned) have explained the research to the subject and answered all expressed questions. The subject indicated understanding of the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

_____. _____. _____.
Signature, C C Magruder, Researcher *Date* *Time*

C C Magruder, Ph.D. student
[address, cell phone number, email address]

Note: This redacted informed consent form was designed for the lead pastors in the seven selected churches serving at the time of the phenomenon. A similar consent form for the other pastors excluded references to completing the trust surveys in the commitment and compensation section. I required a completed consent form before accepting contributions to the study.

Figure A2

Informed Consent Form, Governing Board Members

Northwest University
Sensemaking in a Religious Distributed Organization
C C Magruder, Doctoral Student
September-October 2020

INFORMED CONSENT FORM – Group interviews

Voluntary Status: You are invited to participate in a study conducted by me (the researcher). You must not feel obligated; participation is voluntary. To make an informed decision, the following information is provided about the purpose of the project, possible risks and benefits of participating, and what is asked of you. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form that outlines your rights as a research subject before engaging in any study activities. If you have any questions about your rights, please let me know.

Purpose: This study is a project to analyze the shared experience of leaders making sense of a specific vision to address a persistent challenge affecting missional effectiveness. This project is for a dissertation designed to meet doctoral candidacy requirements at Northwest University. Results from this study will be presented in a finished dissertation that will be uploaded into dissertation databases. Portions of the results also may be used for articles for academic or trade journals and may be shared at a professional conference.

Commitment and Compensation: To be a voluntary participant in this study, you will be asked to discuss your experience as a leader in the governing council of your church making sense of [the bishop's] vision in 2017 to plant new churches. Your participation in this study should take less than three hours. You will be asked to

- Provide some personal demographic information,
- Submit written answers to a short series of questions about your experiences, and
- Participate in a group interview with other members of the governing board.

You will not receive financial compensation for your participation, but I can provide a presentation early next year to your church on the overall results of the study, if desired.

Possible Risks and Benefits: Participation in this study is not expected to cause risk, harm, or discomfort. However, you need to understand that other participating members of your church board will know you participated and what you contributed in the interview. There is a risk of disclosing more than what you intend to disclose or to be psychologically harmed (embarrassed, angered, etc.) by a breach of confidentiality, even if not done intentionally, by a member of the group interview. Your senior pastor also will know you were asked to participate but should not know if you did nor what you specifically said. I will not reveal this information, but I cannot promise others in the interview will maintain confidentiality. On the other hand, group interviews can feel supportive and deepen connections between participants as thoughts and emotions are shared. You can stop your participation at any time but please be aware that withdrawing during the interview may feel awkward for you. I will support your decision to leave, should you decide to do so. I will use your contributions to the group discussion, even if you withdraw from the study.

(Continued)

However, I will not use the written data you provide, if you so direct. With your permission, the interview will be videotaped and I may have an assistant facilitate this. The assistant is not a member of your denomination and has successfully completed a certified training course in how to maintain confidentiality of the proceedings.

Please also note that the group interview is not designed to identify or solve any particular problem but to explore the process used by the governing board to make sense of [the superintendent's] vision in 2017 to have all churches plant a new church. Your insights and experiences will be extremely useful to the study, but do not feel obligated to address every or any specific question. If I perceive you are showing signs of distress during the interview, I will steer the discussion off that topic as soon as I can. Please understand that as I analyze the group interview results, all responses to each question will be merged to provide insights and themes which may not reflect your particular perspective. Also, I may ask to use a specific insight you provided and will check with you before incorporating it into my finished report. I will do my best to mask your identity.

If you feel uncomfortable by this, the questions, methods, or any other factor, please tell me. If any questions or content of this interview bring up personal questions, confusion, anxiety, or depression, contact the Crisis Call Center at 1 (800) 273-8255 or http://crisiscallcenter.org/. You may want to seek further help by contacting the Crisis Text Line at www.crisistextline.org, or by texting "HOME" to 741741. A benefit of participating in this study is to give you an opportunity to express your experience of making sense of the superintendent's vision for [the district] and to contribute to this study on addressing difficult and persistent challenges to ministry.

Confidentiality: I will keep personal information collected for this study strictly confidential; it will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity, and that of others revealed in this study, will be hidden by masking or using pseudonyms in the final report. Data will be stored in password protected files and shared only with my dissertation committee and an assistant who may help me ensure the reliability of my analytical technique. This assistant will complete certified training on how to maintain confidentiality before accessing data, which will have no details about your identity nor of your church. Although digital recordings will supplement the accuracy of my notes, I will release no clips. Raw data will be destroyed by the end of 2021. You agree to not discuss your participation nor that of others in this study.

Conflict of Interest: I (the researcher) complied with Northwest University's potential conflict of interest in research policy and completed certified training on protecting participants. If there are questions about this study, the rights afforded to participants, or if you wish to express a concern, you may contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Tony Pizelo, at (425) 889-5203, Email: tony.pizelo@northwestu.edu, or the Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Dr. Cherri Seese, at (425) 285-2413, Email: cherri.seese@northwestu.edu.

Consent: You (the undersigned) understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, although it may be difficult to do so during the interview. You understand the procedures described above and understand fully the rights of a potential subject in a research study involving people as subjects. Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing below, you agree to participate in this study, to abide by the confidentiality aspects, and have received a copy of this consent form.

(Continued)

___ I agree to be digitally (audio and/or visual) recorded.
___ I do **NOT** agree to be digitally (audio and/or visual) recorded.

_____. _____. _____
Printed Name of Participant *Signature of Participant* *Today's Date*

I (the undersigned) have explained the research to the subject and answered all expressed questions. The subject indicated understanding of the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

_____. _____. _____.
Signature, C C Magruder, Researcher *Date* *Time*

C C Magruder, Ph.D. Student
[mailing address, cell phone number, email address]

Note: The informed consent form (redacted) for the members of governing boards who indicated interest in participating in the study.

Figure A3

Sample (proposed) Letter of Confidentiality (to be completed by any assistant).

Northwest University
Sensemaking in a Religious Distributed Organization
C C Magruder, Doctoral Student

LETTER OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Name of assistant: _____

Respect for the privacy and confidentiality of human participants is paramount.
By signing this letter, you, the research assistant identified above, agree to respect the rights of the participants to privacy, to include their personal identity, church affiliation, and other social and professional connections. Such information may be contained in digital recordings (audio and/or video), interview notes and transcriptions, and other documents. You agree to not discuss any aspect of this study while in public places nor with family, friends, or others in your social circles. You will only discuss this study with the researcher, identified in the title, or with members of the researcher's dissertation committee. If you identify a concern, you will discuss this immediately with the researcher or the chair of the dissertation committee, Dr. Pizelo, at (425) 889-5203, email: tony.pizelo@northwestu.edu, or Chair of the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, Dr. Seese, at (425) 285-2413, email: cherri.seese@northwestu.edu.

☐ I understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality for research participants.
☐ I understand the research data may include data on individuals, organizations, and places other than the participant and will maintain confidentiality of these data as well.
☐ I understand collected information, to include observations and opinions, will not be communicated in public or with anyone other than the researcher or dissertation committee.
☐ I understand that if I identify an ethical concern, I must take immediate action by contacting the researcher, the dissertation committee chair, or the NU IRB Chair.
☐ I agree to provide proof of successfully completing a certified training course on respecting the rights of human participants in a research study. For this study, the course available from https://phrptraining.com is the standard.
☐ I understand I will notify the researcher if any aspect of this study evokes feelings of depression or distress, and I will be released from further obligation to assist. I understand I remain obligated to this letter of confidentiality and have a copy of it.

By signing below, I agree to the statements above and promise to safeguard the rights of the participants for privacy and confidentiality.

Signature: _____ Date: _____, 2020

Figure A4

Interview Protocol

In this study on sensemaking, I am asking you to think back to the [district meeting] in which [the superintendent] rolled out [the] vision shifting from turn around churches to multiplication.

1. How did you hear about the new vision for the conference??
   What did you understand the vision to mean with respect to you and your church?
   What was your initial reaction to the new vision?

2. What factors did you consider as you sought to make sense of the vision within the realities in your church?
   Which changed or reinforced your perspective?
   Of these factors, which were most important to you? Which were not as important?
   How much experience did you have in planting churches?

3. How would you characterize your support of the vision when you first heard it - on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is highly suspicious and 10 is fully supportive?
   What does that number mean to you?
   How about today? What number would you give your support now?

4. How important was trust in the leadership to making sense of the new vision?
   Whose trust was most important to you?

5. How would you describe the participation of your church in the growth initiative?
   What factors supported the progress?
   Which hindered your progress?

6. What else should I know to help me understand your how you and the church made sense of the vision?

7. [For lead pastors only] I will be interviewing the board next. What dynamics should I consider as I prepare? For example, is there someone that the others typically defer to or wait to hear their opinion before answering?

Note: I developed the interview questions to meet the primary research question and to help integrate the qualitative and quantitative data for this mixed methods study. I obtained reviews of the questions by professors (T. Pizelo & D. Conant, personal communication, July 20, 2020; R. Cawthon, personal communication, August 6, 2020) and pilot tested the questions twice, once with a colleague who had expertise in revitalization of churches in a different denomination (M. Guiendon, personal communication, July 29, 2020) and with a colleague who had direct knowledge of the phenomenon but was not affiliated with the district (anonymous, personal communication, August 11, 2020).

Before conducting group interviews, I met with two professors and a consultant, all of whom had expertise in focus group research (J. Delamarter, personal communication, July 21, 2020; R. Cawthon, personal communication, July 28, 2020; R. Sellers, personal communication, August 10, 2020). As a result, I recapped the informed consent form risks and benefits in the interview before asking the first question. I prefaced the group interviews encouraging participation by all members, implementing a protocol to ensure each voice can be heard by having participants speaking one at a time, and asking each member to speak candidly (Templeton, 1994).

Figure A5

Demographic Survey Distributed to Lead Pastors Serving in 2017

Sensemaking in a Religious Distributed Organization
C Magruder, Doctoral Student
[personal cell phone number]

Demographic survey NAME: _____

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. Remember, you can withdraw at any time – just let me know.

Answering the following questions provides statistical references for analysis in this project. The numbers will be combined to provide descriptive data, such as the median age of senior pastors in the [district] or by percentages (e.g., 30% of the senior pastors have served in ministry for less than 10 years) to ensure your responses do not single you out.

1. What is your age? _____

2. How long have you served in this conference in a leadership position? _____

How long have you been a credentialed minister in this denomination? _____

If you have served in another denomination, how long have you been a minister? _____
(total time)

3. Have you served in other positions of leadership outside the church? YES / NO
If so, in what field or industry and what was your position (job title)?

Were you bi-vocational in June 2017? YES / NO
If so, in what field or industry did you work and what was your position (job title) there?

4. What is the highest educational degree you have earned?
If you attended seminary, which one and when did you graduate?

5. What else in your background will help me understand how you think through difficult problems or make sense of new ideas? *(Examples may include specific training, previous job roles or experiences; please use the reverse of this sheet if necessary)*

Note: A demographic survey went to each lead pastor who indicated interest in participating in the study.

Figure A6

Letter of Introduction of Research Project

August 4, 2020

[Salutation]

We have an unprecedented learning opportunity as a conference team which I am excited about and inviting you to participate this fall. Charlee Magruder is a PhD student at Northwest University (Seattle Washington) and she became acquainted with [district staff member] while pursuing her Organizational Leadership degree [redacted] this past fall. Charlee became interested in hearing the story of the unfolding of our 10/36 vision and felt led to base her research on the story of the [district] pursuit of a new direction concerning our emphasis on multiplication. The focus of her research will be on "sense making" which has to do with understanding the complex change process that occurs when church pastors and lay leaders begin to understand and align themselves to a vision for a [district] organization.

I was privileged to meet Charlee this past summer as she traveled to our [region] and began to outline her research project. Since that time, Charlee has immersed herself in scouring through communications, reports, and minutes from [district meetings and periodic newsletter] and an assortment of other conference communications. She is at the point where she is ready to begin the next phase of her research which will involve her traveling to our neck of the woods for a couple of months of face time and additional fact finding from among our team. Her research will directly benefit [the district] as her findings inform our change processes going forward. We will learn more about collaboration, empowerment and how to integrate ideas and human resources because of her work.

To receive the fullest benefit to this research project, she will need our help. Here are two essential characteristics of this next phase of her research:

- A [district]-wide survey. This part of her research will utilize a *survey* with the pastor and lay leaders who were in their positions when the vision was first cast during our annual [meeting] [month] 2017.

- A [sic] intensive interview and survey process of a select 7 societies. Charlee will seek to *interview* the senior pastor and the members of the administrative boards who were serving in place [date] 2017. The time commitment for each participant should be about two hours total, over a couple of weeks. During this meeting with these individuals from these select churches, she will provide details as to what risks and benefits there are in participating and how she will maintain confidentiality of all responses and protect the identities of all participants. Participation is entirely voluntary and no one from the conference office other than Charlee will know who participated in the interview or surveys. The results of all surveys and interviews will be collated and combined so that we will not know who provided what input. There are no consequences for not participating – you should feel no pressure to support this study. Further, you should feel free to be candid in the interviews and in the surveys. Your support and transparent feedback will help us get better as a [ministry] team.

(Continued)

Charlee will be returning to [this geographical region] to be with us from September through October. Once she collects all of the data she needs she will return home and analyze and collate the data. We expect that by late 2021 she will return and provide a briefing of the overall findings with respect to the purpose of the study – to better understand how our leaders made sense of the 10/36 vision so we can prepare future initiatives with her research conclusions in mind. I hope you understand what an incredible opportunity God is giving us to learn from her research and I encourage and hope you will fully participate as you are able.

Those of you who were serving in the abovementioned capacities within our [region] as of [date] 2017 will receive a contact from her soon. So please be on the lookout for her initial contact. Allow me to express my appreciation to those of you who will chose to help her in her research regarding the hospitality and assistance you will extend to her.

//signed by superintendent//

Note: The letter of introduction circulated by the district superintendent; redacted.

Appendix B

Table B1

Data Transformation Process: Overview of Sensemaking Principles and Related Aspects

Principle and Description	Aspect	Aspect Characterization
Principle 1: Reference Points		
Noticing, extracting, and embellishing cues.	Content details	The specificity used to describe the environment.
	Cultural ripeness	The readiness of the church culture to consider and adopt a new direction (Malphurs, 2011; Roozen, 2016).
	Political interference	The political context including relationships, trust, and cooperation.
	Optimism	The mindset and mood, what Weick (1995) describes as having faith.
	Ideas considered	The number of options pondered.
Principle 2: Identity Construction		
Shifting between definitions of self.	Identity plasticity	The number of identities, or redefinitions of identities, recounted.
	Self-image	The self-expression of confidence in identity.
	Plurality	The intersubjective meaning in which the identity of Self connects and synthesizes with Others.
	Linguistics	The articulation of modality to reveal subjective experience (De Luca Picione et al., 2018).
Principle 3: Plausibility		
Bringing reasonableness into ambiguity.	Alignment of skills to ideas	The compatibility of proffered ideas with past experiences.
	Plans for implementation	The innovativeness of prospective projects.
	Process fluency	The ease with which the story is presented.
	Board reaction	The expressions of reasonableness, pragmatics, and instrumentality by the governing board.
	Church reaction	The expressions of reasonableness, pragmatics, and instrumentality by parishioners.
Principle 4: Social Interaction		
Actual, implied, and perceived interactions.	Perspectives sought	The interest in seeking the contributions of others, particularly diversity of voices (Heifetz et al., 2009).
	Influences	The willingness to incorporate the insights of others.
	Collaboration	The importance of working together, over time.

Principle and Description	Aspect	Aspect Characterization
Principle 5: Enactive Environment		
Authoring constraints and opportunities; does not mean only action generation.	Factors considered	The number of aspects contemplated to identify challenges and possibilities that may develop as plans are implemented.
	Interest	The excitement generated.
	Speed	The segment of time taken to enact the new decisions, whether supporting the vision or not.
	Prophecies	The manifestation of assumptions that meet expectations or enact an unexpected result.
Principle 6: Retrospection		
Handling information overload.	Tenure or longevity in local church	The length of time through which a pastor or lay leader has to build relationships within the church.
	Referent plasticity	The diversity of the participant's background.
	Time lapse	The discrete segment in time between the 2017 annual meeting of the district and enactment of the growth vision.
	Prioritization of the vision	The focusing on multiple projects simultaneously.
	Plan revisions	The number of times the leaders returned to the initial plan to revise the scope, resources, or other facets.
Principle 7: Temporal Continuity		
Segmenting ongoing time into experiential durations.	Interruption	The profundity of the disruption to ongoing projects.
	Bureaucracy	The perceived control exerted by bureaucracy within the organization.
	Emotional IQ	The emotional balance the leader reflects during profound disruption.
	Stressfulness	The perceived levels of anxiety expressed.
	Distractions	The interference of other projects.

Note: Descriptions derived from Weick (1995) unless otherwise specified. The principles are numbered to be consistent with descriptions in this document but are not prioritized.

Table B2

Data Transformation Process: Detailed Descriptions of Aspects for Sensemaking Principles

Variable	Aspect description
	Principle 1: Reference points
Context details	How the environment is described, in gross trends, broad terms (1) or in finite details, interdependencies, and subtleties that provide great clarity of the context in which the sensemaking is occurring (5; Weick, 1995, p. 52). Weick described gross trends as recognizing the dense weave of the cloth (p. 50) and subtleties would be expressing the concern about dyes in the cloth being unstable (p. 49). Another way of thinking of this involves accuracy, as described on page 58. In the throes of sensemaking, the leader focuses on circumscribed accuracy rather than global.
Cultural ripeness	How ready is the church to consider and adopt a new direction (Weick, 1995, p. 53)? This has much to do with the culture of the church, which considers such factors as size, age of the church, life stage of the church, and longevity of the pastor and the congregation in the church (Malphurs, 2011; Roozen, 2016). Reluctance (1) may also consider current projects and foci that make it difficult to pick up a new project while others may be ready to another (5).
Political interference	How the relationship of the pastor is to the board (and vice versa), the level of trust and cooperation, and other aspects of the political environment (Weick, 1995, p. 53). High interference (1) prevents sensemaking and sense-giving while low interference (5) suggests a willingness to accept diverse cues. Conversely, political interference may reflect pragmaticism and an acceptance of reality constraining the ability to pick up new projects, suggesting a 5 would be high and a 1 would be low (the opposite of the earlier description). However, if the scaling keeps in mind the point of sensemaking and whether the political interference supports (high score) or inhibits sensemaking (low score), this will be consistent in application for scaling.
Optimism	How mindset and mood is, what Weick describes as having faith (Weick, 1995, p. 54). Sometimes having a map, even one not pertinent to the present effort, will be a catalyst for movement forward and for optimism (5). Remaining in place suggests no animation, no orientation, and stagnation, keeping the group within the sensemaking process (1; p. 55).
Ideas considered	How robust the discussion is about the cues and options available to the leaders. A robust conversation (5) reflects better sensemaking skills as opposed to latching onto the first possible option as a way out of the ambiguity and avoiding the sensemaking process (1; Weick, 1995, p. 55).
	Principle 2: Identity Construction
Self-image	Based on the competence and self-efficacy (5) or lack of a consistent, positive image (1) the participant expresses about his or her identity in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995, pp. 20, 23). Viewing our image in the mirror (pp. 21-22) provides an example of this aspect of identity construction. "Confident people are more likely to put in place environments they expect and can deal with" (p. 184).

Plurality	Based on the social aspect of identity construction (p. 23). Intersubjective meaning, in which the identity of Self connects and synthesizes with Others, effects the merger of affect and cognition through communications and reflects interdependence (Weick, 1995, pp. 71-72, 74). Common use of the term "we" scores higher (5) on this scale than a consistent use of "I" (1).
Linguistic modality	Based on a non-Weickian article that explained how the speaker's articulation of modality affects not only the affect (attitude and response to stimuli) but the sense of agency (action and capabilities) and of duty (the expectations placed upon the leader) within the realities or contingencies of the environment (De Luca Picione et al., 2018). The choice of words reflects a connection, a relationship between cognitive faculty and "necessity, possibility, and effectuality" (p. 85), and provides insights into a person's subjective experience. In this aspect, the freedom of choices moves from must (1) to want (5). This aspect uses the highest word count of the words "must, "need," "may," "can," and "want" to select the appropriate score.
Principle 3: Plausibility	
Alignment of skills and ideas	Assesses the background of the participant with the options considered to make sense of the new vision (Weick, 1995). "Events are shaped toward those capabilities [the leaders] already have" (p. 60). Thus, the ideas that are offered in the midst of sensemaking should tend to complement past experiences, such as skills [and leadership styles]. Divergent (1) to congruent (5).
Plans to implementation	Assesses the boldness of the ideas that are implemented (Weick, 1995). Plans that are bold and adaptive (5) or measured and deliberate (1) reflect the mindset of the leaders in sensemaking (p. 60).
Process fluency	Assesses the story that holds the various elements of the ambiguous situation together (Weick, 1995). Is the story sufficiently plausible for retrospective sensemaking and sufficiently engaging to energize others to socialize and collaborate (p. 61)? Good sensemaking should result in easy fluency (5) rather than a laborious and halting process (1).
Board reaction	Assesses the board reaction (Weick, 1995). Being that sensemaking is about pragmatics, reasonableness, and instrumentality (p. 57), this aspect considers how the leadership responded to the vision to change the focus in the district and, consequently, in the church. In addition to information culled from the interviews can be data from the governing board minutes and other documentation addressing this aspect (in the same church as the interviewee). Reluctant (1) to supportive (5).
Church reaction	Assesses the same aspects (pragmatics, reasonableness, and instrumentality) with respect to the reaction by the congregation by the vision of the leaders (Weick, 1995, p. 57). "Sensemaking is about accounts that are socially acceptable and credible" (p. 61). This may manifest in the congregation supporting the ensuing vision of the leadership by allocating financial or other resources. Reluctant (1) to supportive (5).
Principle 4: Social interaction	
Perspectives sought	Describes the efforts of the participant to seek the contributions of others (Weick, 1995, pp. 39-40). "Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (p. 40). Narrow (1), diverse (5).

Influences	Describes the willingness of the leader to consider and incorporate the insights of others (5) rather than endeavoring to make sense independently (1) or to satisfice (Weick, 1995, pp. 42-43). Self (1) to many (5).
Collaboration	Describes the cooperation and sharing of ideas between individuals (Weick, 1995). This is more than noting a shared understanding. This aspect acknowledges the roles others perform in shaping sensemaking and looks for evidence of infrequent (1) to frequent (5) interactions over time (pp. 42-43).
	Principle 5: Enactive Environment
Factors considered	Counts the quantity of factors related by the leadership in understanding the constraints as well as the opportunities, within their perceived reality (Weick, 1995, pp. 30ff). A few (1-2) or more than ten.
Interest generated	Accounts for the "people" in the "environment" (Weick, 1995, p. 31). Activity generates what develops into the identified constraints and opportunities. Resistance (1) is a mindset that retards activity of others while innovation (5) frees others to be creative and to employ sensemaking skills more fully within the environment (p. 33).
Speed of ideas to tangibles	Counts the time directed toward the new vision (Weick, 1995). One way leaders frame projects and influence their environments is through speed (pp. 27, 31). Not started (1) to more than a month to develop viable plans (5).
Prophecies	Accounts for animation of assumptions (Weick, 1995, pp. 36, 148ff). Grafting and pruning to improve the ability of an apple tree to bear bountiful crops is an example of cognition and agency that enact the environment; the tree and the farmer are interdependent and co-determinant. The farmer assumes the careful attention will produce the desired result (p. 32). However, even the best laid plans may never see fruition (p. 37). The plans may yield a result, influenced by the people in the environment, that does not reflect the initial assumptions (1) but another result that differs significantly (5).
	Principle 6: Retrospection
Tenure	Acknowledges that time exists not only in the moments, those short periods of time in which a memory or an experience may reside, but also in longevity, in the living experience (Weick, 1995, p. 25). This score will include information from the demographic survey on tenure within the specific church and within the denomination. The length of time a pastor or lay leader has through which to build relationships within the church will impact the influence and efficacy of the leader as well (Creech, 2015; Friedman, 1985; Malphurs, 2011). Less than a year (1) to more than 20 years in the same pulpit (5).
Referent plasticity	Acknowledges the diversity of the participant's background (Weick, 1995). A generalist, with broad repertoire of experiences upon which to draw and from which to innovate, would be less impacted by the emotional ramifications of the disruption (pp. 46, 87). This suggests a higher degree of sensemaking (5) in comparison to a specialist (1), who has fewer experiences through which to find congruence with the current situation (p. 49).

Time lapse	Acknowledges the discrete segment in time between the 2017 Annual Conference (held in summer 2017) and enactment of the growth vision (Weick, 1995, p. 25). Emotional response to the disruption, ambiguity, or uncertainty increases as time lapses, decreasing the ability to think clearly and making it harder to find an impetus to act (p. 46). Retrospection ceases when the participant feels a sense of clarity or order and can move forward (p. 29). Years to implement plans (1) or months (5).
Prioritization of the vision	Acknowledges that a leader is engaged in sensemaking when consciously aware of addressing multiple projects (5) rather than focusing only on one (1; Weick, 1995). Typically, a leader is engaged in multiple projects simultaneously (p. 27). How the leader perceives one project within the environment is not with clarity but with equivocality, with each project having different meanings that complement or contradict the experience and which may overwhelm the senses.
Plan revisions	Acknowledges the number of times the leaders return to the initial plan, changing, editing, and revising the scope, resources, or other facets (Weick, 1995). Referring to a story about soldiers lost in the Alps using a map of the Pyrenes Mountains to rejoin their unit, Weick explained the men "kept moving, they kept noticing cues, and they kept updating their sense of where they were" (p. 55). These revisions were critical to the efficacy of the sensemaking process. None (1) to multiple (5).
	Principle 7: Temporal continuity
Interruption	Annotates the profundity of the interruption of ongoing projects (Weick, 1995). The more significant the disruption of the new event (vision) on current projects (1), the more likely intense emotions will degrade sensemaking capabilities, and the opposite, no disruption, improves sensemaking (5; pp. 45, 47, 48).
Bureaucracy	Annotates perspectives on organizations as either rational, natural, or open (Weick, 1995, p. 70). Rational systems (1) are hierarchical, structured, and tend to not embrace innovation and diverse streams of information, thus thwarting effective sensemaking. On the other end of this spectrum are open systems (5) with looser couplings and a focus on process over structure.
Emotional intelligence	Annotates the emotional balance the leader reflects during profound disruption (Weick, 1995, p. 184). Emotion results and intensifies into stress as the interruption continues without an identifiable, viable solution (p. 46). Emotional intelligence is an awareness of and control over emotional behaviors and triggers to permit measured and justifiable responses (Detrick, 2018). In the sensemaking process, leaders think in terms of interpersonal perceptions rather than object perceptions (p. 59), meaning they prioritize relationships–intentions and personalities–over accuracy and objectivity. Emotional controls are important.
Stressfulness	Annotates the level of stress related in the interviews (Weick, 1995). The ambiguity resulting from the fragmentary cues that, at the time, seem to defy order or patterns (p. 44) will cause stress as confusion, misconceptions, and chaos seem to be perpetuated (pp. 44, 45). As the stress continues, it intensifies and can be incapacitating—concentration narrows, cognitive capacities diminish, and more cues are dismissed without consideration. High stress (1) inhibits sensemaking while pushing through the sensemaking process may reflect lower levels (5; p. 101)

Distractions	Annotates the story related in the interview, focusing on the number of revealed distractions (Weick, 1995, p. 129). "Not only does a good decision maker have a good, active memory, that person is especially attentive to choice points that could plausibly be punctuated into an earlier flow of events (p. 185). This suggests the leader would be more aware of distractions (5) and efforts made to minimize their impact on finding the impetus than not (1).

Note: These descriptions formed the foundation of the data transformation to quantify the qualitative data from interviews, discussions, and church documents into numerical values based on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Descriptions were derived from Weick (1995) unless otherwise specified. The principles are numbered to be consistent with descriptions in this document but are not prioritized.

Table B3

Data Transformation Process: Quotes Illustrating Scaled Sensemaking Scores

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	Principle 1: Reference points
Content details	**Subtleties**: "The goal is distance house churches. So, I'm leading the YouTube on Sundays. And then we're having people gather with your people in your home and partake in communion with us and then celebrate with the neighbors who don't have Internet. Bring it to them and then hopefully in the coming, in the future, if we were to, when we reconvene in person and when, if we don't have a building, there are plenty of options."
	Gross trends: "When you talk about multiplying churches, one thing that I did not think is that our strategy was going to accomplish anything because in order to multiply churches, we were going to have to radically shift how we do church to reach a new demographic and a new culture. The model of the current church culture was not where society was shifting to and I'm not talking about in terms of liberalization or so forth. Growth is among minorities, among [ethnic group], is happening in cities. Young people today are multicultural. They don't want to be in a White homogeneous society. They are socially active. And if that is not where you are headed for this church, you will get more of the same. And you would have to bring in, to basically have this be organically done by grassroots folks from the areas you're looking at doing."
Cultural ripeness	**Ready**: "They [the church] were concerned about sustaining the ministry. You know, [the district] has closed a few churches that have not been fruitful...And so they were concerned that they may be on the chopping block if they didn't do something. And so, they were very open to new things...I did not get any resistance."
	Reluctant: 'We looked at those who were the Bishop and the Superintendent at the time. 'They're pulling these people and they're leaving us.' In that gap between pastors, the church folks ran the church. They did any counseling, any visitation. And that was usually that group that was a bit untrustworthy [of clergy]. Either they didn't trust the individuals that came or they didn't have any trust that they [the pastors] were going to stay very long. So there just wasn't a lot of buy-in from that small group. So, I guess, you could call it controlling. They wanted to control."
Political interference	**Low**: "I just think that the church was ready for change. I think [the district] was ready for change. I don't know if we really had many obstacles. I mean, maybe we had a few financial obstacles, but [the district] came through with some money and that helped us get it started. There weren't really any obstacles that I can remember."
	High: "They blame [the district] for what happened as far as the boards being disbanded. [The superintendent] was blamed for taking their beloved pastor and then coming in, following it up, with disbanding the [governing] Board."
Optimism	**High**: "What I felt was I didn't feel skeptical in terms of that it was impossible. It felt like something like, 'Hey, if we can get on board with this, I think this could be great.'"

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	Low: "Because even from the early months when we [the newly appointed pastor] came to [the local church], people said, 'Oh, man, we're surprised they appointed a pastor there. We were under the impression they were going to close the church.' Well, you know, no one told me that [laughing] if that was the plan. So, I said, 'No, we're not closing.' But a lot of people in the congregation had heard that. And I kept trying to reassure them. 'We are not closing the church, at least not on my watch.' 'And we're going to close the church.' But that was still prevalent almost up to the day I retired [more than a decade later]...There was a lot of negativity I guess you could say, because of that."
Ideas considered	**Many**: "Because at that time, before 2017, we, didn't we? We already had launched [a specific church growth initiative]...Did we have home school in place already? [Yes.]...We had dinner churches. We had [another outreach initiative]. We had all those things in place." **One**: "I can remember having a conversation with a person a number of years ago now at the church I'm at that we talked about, 'Well, do you want our church to grow?' 'Yeah.' But they also wanted the church to stay the same and be small. It's like you can't have both of those things. If you want the church to be winning people to Christ and growing and changing, you can't have that and also have the church that we have right now. It will have to change."
	Principle 2: Identity Construction
Identity plasticity	**Multiple**: "So, I think my longevity here has helped with that. I think my consistency. I think even things as simple as my family life, my marriage, my children, which are not perfect, but they are who they are. And people see that. They see what kind of Dad I am. They see that while my ministry is important, they also know that I have other things." **Few**: "I didn't go in there [as the new pastor of the church] to change a lot of things. I went in there to, first of all, just learn who the people were and to love them and then finally to lead them."
Self-image	**Confident**: "We tended to be the younger pastors who were a little bit quicker to adapt." **Doubtful**: "I never did [talk about all our ministries] because it felt like I was patting myself on the back when I did."
Plurality	**We**: "The largest percentage of the people were ready to just throw in the towel, but things changed and a few people that were a lot more optimistic brought the people around to where they felt they that it's worth a try. And then after we met the pastor, more and more people came around." **Me**: "But as far as my reaction to that, [the superintendent's] presentation, this new vision, I was at the point [where] I had mentally made the decision at that conference that if I didn't, you know, I didn't know it was coming. But if I got one more year of talk about [city name], I was basically going to stand up in the conference, tell them exactly what I thought, and walk out and never look back."
Linguistic modality	**Want:** "That kind of details how we [the governing board] want to work and how we want to the church to go forward." **Can:** "You can get somebody to go and do the work of evangelism cross culturally in a different area before they'll do it in their own (area)."

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	May: "And that may mean, the interview question was, if you have to walk somebody to the door because they just will not transition and they're going to stand in the way of the church moving forward, are you willing to do that?"
	Need: "I think the overwhelming reality was that we would really need to make some fundamental shifts in rethinking the traditional sense of what church is and what we actually do."
	Must: "I felt the dinner church itself was never going to be something that would support itself, which meant that there must be other churches feeding dollars into this vision."
	Principle 3: Plausibility
Alignment of skills and ideas	**Congruent:** "I enjoy a challenge. I really do. And what they were portraying needed to be done here [changing mindsets to outreach] is the type of things that I enjoy being involved with. So, it was like, 'OK, this sounds like a match.'"
	Divergent: "And our current pastor is willing to try new items as we go. I am sure. In one of our conversations recently, [the pastor] was saying that [the pastor] had done things that [the pastor] had never done before."
Plans for implementation	**Bold**: "I said, let's start an auxiliary organization and then let's limit our liability and make it a 501(c)(2)/(3). So, I kind of informed the [district], [staff member] that this was our thinking. And [the staff member] said, 'Well, you might be taking on more than just the local church should handle.'"
	Measured: "I fully plan to open up. We'll take our rent money, put it into a separate account. I fully plan to get another space [in which to establish a new church location but not yet]."
Process fluency	**Easy**: "But as far [along the spectrum] as skepticism [is], again, I was really excited. They [the district leaders] were saying all the right things. But at the same time, I had watched people say things about [city name] in the [district] for many years. And so, I was optimistic, but also skeptical."
	Difficult: "Well, actually, this goes back several years. We had a former school building across the street from the church. It's now been torn down. It's just a vacant lot now. But I had taken a group, I just asked for volunteers. I said, 'Let's go see what someone else who's successful, what they're doing. And talk with them.' So, I had a guy that I coached in basketball years ago. He was working down at [a church in different state]. So, I arranged to go down there and spend a day and a half with them. And I just took volunteers...But it didn't work out." [This was the response to the question about factors considered in making sense of the vision].
Board reaction	**Supportive**: "We [church leaders] started trying to brainstorm what would bring people in and what we could do to bring people in. We decided we needed to do more outreach and be more action oriented than a 'country club' mentality."
	Resistant: "You're working with your leaders in your local setting. And you know that that is going to be a potentially slow process, because you'll have early adopters, mid-adopters, and late adopters to that idea. And then you have to go at the pace of your leadership, of what they can actually handle and absorb."
Church reaction	**Supportive**: "The majority of the folks [parishioners] are just very solid Christian followers that if you can portray to them how what they do can make a difference, they'll buy into it."

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	Resistant: "We weren't really into starting a new church because for one we didn't have anybody in the congregation that was interested in starting a ministry."
	Principle 4: Social Interaction
Perspectives sought	**Diverse**: One pastor talked about the numerous people with whom the pastor interacted: missionaries, workers, church members leading new initiatives and others wanting to be trained to lead, the governing board members, a contractor, church leaders in other district churches, district staff, denominational leaders, the superintendent, bishops [the hierarchical level above the district superintendent], church leaders in other states and other denominations, parishioners, neighbors, seekers who would not come to the church, and innovators in the emerging church movement.
	Narrow: "How can we plant something if we're still struggling as a church right now? And how can we get to be a part of that? I think it's just a philosophical wrestling for me and for [the other pastor]. So, we struggle to communicate that well to our church."
Influences	**Many**: "[The superintendent]'s pattern has been to kind of get a read from the pastors first by sharing that information from the pastoral leaders first and then if adjustments need to be made before presenting it to maybe the larger body, that's kind of been [the] approach."
	Satisficing: "I considered the dinner church because it was a direct suggestion from [the superintendent]. [The superintendent] just said, 'I think the dinner church would work there.'"
Collaboration	**Frequent**: "I try to bring as much consensus as possible and help people understand the whys behind. I also expect that from them."
	Infrequent: "A good portion of our congregation wasn't really on board with the new vision. But we felt strongly enough about this that we went forward with it anyhow."
	Principle 5: Enactive Environment
Factors considered	**More than 10**: "I still think part of them [the district leadership] thinks that we can make an awesome, self-funding, megachurch in a place like [city name], consisting entirely of the poor, the unskilled, and the needy. It just doesn't work that way. They don't have the resources."
	One or two: "But whatever you do, and I always preach to the congregation, it's quality over quantity. In a small community that makes a lot of sense. In a small church that makes a lot of sense. What you do, do it well."
Interest	**Innovate**: "I think all of them [in the church] really hungered to make a difference in their community. They were, they are... if you did a leadership analysis of the congregation, you would say that the majority of them are strong, supportive followers."
	Resist: "Every church may not have wanted to start a church...And maybe there was also the issue that a lot of this initiative [was] going to [big city, not locally to this church]."
Speed (ideas to projects)	**Months (quickly)**: "I don't think what was announced at the [annual meeting] changed anything we were doing because people were looking to us and what we [already] were doing."

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	Not started (slowly): "I think that the leaders that I have right now that are in that training cycle are very excited about the potential of this, for reaching people and expanding the ministry of the church and kind of really turning the church from a church that has really plateaued to a church that really is starting to multiply" [three years after the vision was announced].
Prophecies	**Differentiated**: "We tried some really wacky things and tried some really good things. We've failed. I think one of the things that I try to do as a leader is to say, 'Let's try this and let's not be afraid to fail. It's OK. Failure is not the final card that you play. It's a learning thing.' And we need to all be learning, to be teachable."
	Self-fulfilled: "Ministering to the under-resourced is very labor intensive and very resource intensive and not always very fruitful, at least not in a management sense."
	Principle 6: Retrospection
Tenure	**More than 20 years**: "We had started as a church plant, really as an ethnic church plant [two decades ago]. And we rose and we held on and we're beginning now get some significant establishment in terms of consistent funding, in terms of consistent attendance."
	One year or less: [Assuming the position as lead pastor in a new church] "So, you know, starting something fresh, at first, my view was this is a church plant with a core group is how I approached this. And the idea being, OK, I've been blessed with some folks that are giving regular offerings and support. But we've got to treat this as we're something completely new that's trying to reach our community."
Referent plasticity	**Generalist**: Participant Z had been a turnaround pastor and a pioneer pastor (Informal discussion, Participant Z, September 16, 2020).
	Specialist: "I was the area's administrator, like the second chair to the area director. The bulk of what we did was church multiplication."
Time lapse	**Months** (quickly): "I'm thrilled at how the church has embraced it [the growth vision]. On the other hand, this virus stuff [COVID-19 impact] is killing me. We've had to put dinner church on hold. It would be the two-year anniversary right now."
	Years (slowly): [Talking with a few lay leaders], we said, 'You know, what if we just spent a little more time praying together, going through more training together, and start even now praying for the people that we hope to reach, that the Lord would lead us toward those people that could be involved. And then just kind of step back from actually fully launching [a new initiative].'"
Prioritization	**Strategic** (one of many): "We'd like to do a new nonprofit that would basically house mission work that's not traditional church planting. So the background slightly was, we're being charged denominational apportionment shares on any money that we brought in...And so in the church, some of my leaders were giving me a little pushback about how expensive all of this was, because really it was costing the church more)...they [the district leaders were] interested in bringing on another staff person to kind of begin to take my [Lead Pastor] role at [named church]...[there was a] kind of a side ministry ...we began paying [another person], allowing [that person] to raise funds to get paid...we kind of adopted the [city] dinner church, [another] dinner church...[and] we'd been talking about the fact that a naturally healthy church multiplies when there's opportunities."

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
	Priority (only one): "We're in the midst of going through this process, this training process of what it would be like to shift the emphasis from Sunday morning to more of a house church type approach, becoming a network of house churches."
Plan revisions	**Multiple revisions**: "I would say early on there were some false starts where we had launched a few things and then we had to do a quick kind of evaluation of them and really say, 'You know what? We are going to have to make a shift here. We're not going to keep going down this road just to save our pride or whatever. We need to stop this.' And I think every time you have a start and stop you probably lose some of your leadership change that's in your pocket."
	Few if any revisions: "No, we were planning on doing the dinner church anyway, but I was glad [the superintendent] recommended it, too. We did begin a little Bible study at [a center for adults over the age of 65 years] in another community. Which we did that for like seven weeks or something in a row."
	Principle 7: Temporal Continuity
Interruption	**None**: "What I understood it [the growth vision] to be was that there was going to be a slightly changed emphasis on nontraditional congregations, is the way I would describe it."
	Significant (many): "I still think our plan for multiplication is God-sized...And it's still, at the end of the day, there's no earthly plan that would get us there."
Bureaucracy	**Light**: "I was just going to say that we were kind of turning that way before our [annual meeting]. I mean, they [district leaders] started using the term 'multiplication' and things like that beforehand. But as a church, we had made a shift...doing dinner churches. And we've rolled out some other churches. So, we were actually starting a lot of that stuff, probably prior to the [growth] effort."
	Heavy: "I remember my first meeting with some of the church leaders. It was in early June. I was trying just to gather what ministries they had done at least in the previous year. And one of them told me, 'We did a Bible school last year. But it wasn't very good. We didn't have a lot of kids. We didn't have enough workers even for those kids that came. We didn't have enough. We're a small church.' And I says, 'Well, we've got a plan here, my [spouse] and I.'...And they said, 'We'll just have to forget it for this year because it's already June.'…You want to talk about skeptics. I had a roomful of skeptics at that point."
Emotional IQ	**High**: "So, again, that's why my role is not necessarily to try to change [a person's] mind. I think the big thing—and I've had personal conversations with [a person]—is for me to listen a little more intently to [the person] and try to understand more deeply where [the person] is coming from. And yet gently, gently but firmly say, 'Well, I hear you, and I do. And at the same time, I really sense that if our church has a future, if we're going to continue to be the church that God has called us to be, I need to keep moving in this direction. That doesn't mean that I stop listening to you. It just means that I recognize that this could be uncomfortable if we make the shift in the realities.'"
	Low: "Yeah. It was a challenge. Oh yeah. Let's go for this. Huh. [short laugh, possibly some sarcasm] That's my thought."
Stressfulness	**Low**: "So you have a healthy church that takes part of its members and just starts a new church [ergo, a church split]. OK. I mean, they literally just start one."
	High: "Things like Multiplication, that's like you're asking them to jump off a cliff."

Aspect	Quote from narratives - high scoring / low scoring
Distractions	**Many**: "We had two significant antagonists in the church that basically had to leave...And that was rather traumatic for the Board to deal with. However, the Board was completely unified in it. They were 100 percent all on the same page. And so that kind of also was kind of a side matter to the whole issue of Multiplication." **None**: "Well, [the superintendent] expected every church to be in the community and have new ministries in different locations…I just asked that back to [church name]. And we started a dinner church."

Note: The first quote for each aspect reflects a high scoring example; the second quote would receive a low score for effective organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995).