LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP INTERACTIONS

OF AN INTERNATIONAL PROTESTANT CONVENTION

DURING COVID-19

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Thomas Stephan Narofsky

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the in-depth perceptions and insightful reflections of 12 International Protestant Convention leadership team members to explore and investigate their lived experiences and leadership decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Complexity Leadership Theory. The 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic changed the world when the emergent fast-paced virus disrupted and overwhelmed societal life, creating pre- and post-COVID bifurcation points that will shape world dynamics and social interactions for years (Warren, 2022; Christianson & Barton, 2021; Harari, 2020; Pierce, 2020). For this research, complexity leadership interactions, social network dynamics, and information flow were studied to discover emergent leadership themes and how information flowed through the convention and church networks to make these church leaders successful at operating their churches through turmoil and turbulence (Garretsen et al., 2022; Veldsman, 2020; Borgatti et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The research discovered that despite the sudden shock of the global crisis and societal lockdown that impacted the International Protestant Convention leadership team members' leadership approach and decision-making in responding to the crisis, the leaders remained resolved to lead with God's guidance, direction, comfort, and refuge.

Keywords: Complex Adaptive Systems, Complexity Leadership Theory, Complexity Leadership interactions, COVID-19, crisis, and Christian Leadership.

Dedication

I want to dedicate the dissertation to my wife, Dorene, who has supported me in each educational endeavor and believed I could complete the Doctor of Philosophy program. God knew what He was doing when He put you in my life. I love you yesterday, today, and always.

To my Mom and Dad, thank you for showing me unconditional love, the value of hard work and persistence, and the understanding and ability to press on, no matter the challenge. These are qualities that Terry, ElizaBeth, and I have used throughout life. To my amazing sons, Timothy, Joshua, and Jacob; daughters-in-law, Rebekah and Karis; and grandchildren, Titus, Eliza, Kyrie, Judah, and Jericho, thank you for your love and support throughout this journey and for supporting me. Finally, a big thank you to my family's faithful prayers and encouragement that uplifted me throughout this journey.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" –Philippians 4:13.

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List of Abbreviations

Administrative Leadership Interactions (ALI)

Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Complex Adaptive System (CAS)

Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19)

Communication Perspective (CP)

Community-Building Interactions (CBI)

Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT)

Executive Leadership Team (ELT)

General Systems Theory (GST)

Generative Leadership Interactions (GLI)

Information Gathering (IG)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Information Using (IU)

John Hopkins University (JHU)

Leadership Perspective (LP)

Local Church Leaders (LCLs)

Personal Perspective (PP)

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)

Spiritual Perspective (SP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic changed the world when the emergent fast-paced virus disrupted and overwhelmed societal life, creating a global health crisis that continues to impact and shape social interactions (Warren, 2022; Christianson & Barton, 2021; Harari, 2020; Pierce, 2020). The uncertainty of COVID-19's health consequences spread global fear and panic, spreading as fast as the virus. No secular or religious individual was spared from this discomfort or anxiety.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online (2023), a crisis can be defined as "the turning point for better or worse in an acute disease or fever" and "a situation that has reached a critical phase." Gladwell (2002) describes this as a tipping point and is "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point" and a "dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once" (pp. 9-11). According to Warren (2022), the impact and magnitude of the global health crisis closed 4000 churches and was a tipping point for many church leaders. However, Pillay (2020) provides a reminder that although the "church buildings may be closed, the churches (people of God) are still alive and active" (p. 268).

Dailey (2020) points out that crisis and chaos are part of the reality of life for Christians, and a Christian leader should prepare for when a crisis will happen and not if it will happen (p. 6). When a crisis strikes, leadership matters, and congregations expect their church leaders to take the lead and lead safely through and beyond the crisis (Veldsman, 2020; Wardman, 2020; Boin et al., 2016). During the crisis, church leaders faced many global restrictions, governmental lockdowns, and adaptive leadership trials that challenged their leadership skills and experiences. Church leaders learned to develop enduring ministry methods to keep the church operating,

relied on God's providence and strength, and kept the body of believers connected and communicating (Francis, 2021; Jackson & Williams, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021).

The emergent virus caused a tipping point for church leaders to reflect on the importance of the Church's true purpose to spread the Gospel outside the church walls, the need for adaptive leaders to lead during uncertainty and ambiguity, and the enduring value of trusting God during a crisis (Christianson & Barton, 2021; Beukes, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). The virus further stressed the importance of the church community to stay connected as a relational community of believers by trusting in the foundational promises of Jesus Christ, doing life together despite not meeting in person, and continuing to be the light in a dark world (Cormode, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Pettit, 2008).

Bolsinger (2018) states, "Today's leaders are facing complex challenges that have no clear-cut solutions…that are more systemic in nature and require broad, widespread learning" (p. 19). Widjaja et al. (2021) and Pillay (2020) theorize that churches need to look at the crisis as a vehicle for dynamic change and missional opportunities to get the church back into the world and not try to bring the world into the church. Reframing the crisis as a catalyst is necessary for church leadership to comprehend a situation from multiple perspectives, develop learning organizations, and embrace new leadership methods and strategies (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The complex challenges will necessitate a new set of leadership and relationship interactions.

Momeny and Etzel (2021), Baumgartner (2017), and Estep et al. (2008) theorize that Christian leaders need biblically and theologically rooted leadership theories that are informed by social science to lead in a world that is in constant flux (Bolsinger, 2020; Cormode, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Wright, 2020; Fowler, 2011). Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) provides a clear lens for Christian leaders to understand and adapt to a complex and ambiguous world (Uhl-

Bien et al., 2007; Baumgartner, 2017; Elkington, 2015; Fowler, 2011). Additionally, Christian crisis leadership integrating complex leadership interactions and social network dynamics is essential for a church during a crisis (Firestone, 2020).

Leading a church through a complex and dynamic crisis requires a leader who understands how to balance church operations, maintain community-building activities, and generate problem-solving ideas and action plans during the chaos (Elkington et al., 2015; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Chester & Timmis, 2008). Baumgartner (2017) asserts that the rapidly changing world has left the church unprepared, and pastors leaving seminary are not well-equipped for this complex environment. Elkington et al. (2015) also identify a gap in seminary training for preparing pastors to handle today's complex adaptive system of the church.

This qualitative research design explores the nature of complex leadership interactions and social network dynamics of the International Protestant Convention Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and local church leaders (LCLs) to understand the leadership successes and failures of leading the convention and their churches through and beyond the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the study seeks to understand how information flowed before and during the pandemic and to see what complexity leadership interactions emerged when leading through an unplanned and complex emergent crisis.

This chapter covers the (a) background to the problem, (b) statement of the problem, (c) purpose statement, (d) research questions, (e) assumptions and delimitations, (f) definition of terms, and (g) significance of the study. A summary of the design concludes the chapter.

Background to the Problem

The world is increasingly interconnected and interactive, and a singular event, like the COVID-19 crisis, can have a significant impact with far-reaching ripple effects (Tourish, 2020;

Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). Adelekan (2020) describes that a crisis involves change, risk, and time-sensitive responses by reviewing several definitions of crisis. Moreover, the organizational crisis involves internal or external change that increases the risk of normalcy. Bolsinger (2020) asserts that the virus's effects were transformational, affected human beings socially and relationally, and will impact church dynamics beyond the crisis.

Starting in January 2020, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes coronavirus disease 19 or COVID-19, disrupted and transformed how people lived, worked, and worshiped together (Stetzer, 2022a; Stetzer, 2022b; Harney, 2022; Felman, 2021; Cho, 2021; Corpuz & Sarmiento, 2021). Beginning as a regional health crisis in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, the virus rapidly spread across the planet as human carriers transported the virus through the international transportation nodes of airports, cruise ships, and train systems to every country on the earth (WHO, 2023; Felman, 2021; Kandola, 2020; Sturmberg & Martin, 2020; Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). COVID-19 spread through person-to-person contact when an infected person coughed or sneezed, and respiratory droplets spread (WHO, 2023; CDC, 2023; Felman, 2021; Kandola, 2020; Murugan et al., 2020).

COVID-19 was a global crisis that moved the world from relative stability to disequilibrium and required adaptive change to deal with the crisis. Tourish (2020) indicates that the nonlinear impact of the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented health, economic, social, and political consequences and complex challenges for country leaders and health experts as they struggled with the pandemic (Wernli et al., 2021; Klasche, 2020; WHO, 2023; World Bank, 2020). As the health crisis evolved, it created dramatic and dynamic changes in societies, organizations, churches, and families (Cho, 2021; Murugan et al., 2020; Worley & Jules, 2020; WHO, 2023).

Theological Background

This section provides a theological and biblical basis for the study. It includes an overview of the Christian worldview, Biblical leader qualities, and Christian leadership and complexity.

Christian Worldview

According to Firestone (2020), a person's worldview influences how they view a crisis. The impetus for a Christian worldview is to live and lead in the world with a Christ-like and scriptural focus. Pearcey (2004) posits that everything a Christian does must start with a biblical perspective, or they can unknowingly embrace nonbiblical viewpoints and beliefs (p. 44). Smith (2015) theorizes that a Christian leader should have a biblical worldview based on Scripture and revealed truth. Cosgrove (2006) provides an appropriate definition for worldview as "a set of assumptions or beliefs about reality and human nature that affect how we think and how we live" (p. 63). A Christian or biblical worldview is a map for a Christian leader to find their way in a world of uncharted territory and provides the lens through which Christians live according to God's Word (Bolsinger, 2015).

Biblical Leader Qualities

A Christian leader's relationship with God shapes their life, character, and leadership. A Christian leader is a Christian from the core to crust, places their trust and hope in Christ, and serves through the Holy Spirit's power (Malphurs, 2003). According to Malphurs (2003), a leader who is a faithful Christ-follower learns to lead by first being a follower of Christ. In the same way, a leader submits to the authority of Christ, and a follower submits to the influence of the leaders appointed over them. Sanders (2007) indicates that Christian leaders should grow and

use their God-given talents and live to glorify God and the church's welfare to fulfill the Great Commission.

Christian Leadership. Christian leadership begins with a biblical perspective of leader-follower focused on leading by loving and obeying God's direction and serving others to lead them correctly. Starting in Genesis, with the creation of the heavens, Earth, and finally, humankind, God creates a covenant and leadership relationship (ESV, 2001, Genesis 12:1-3; 17:4-6; Hebrews 8:7-13). Scripture describes leadership as a relational and communal pursuit and a relationship between God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Creation (John 13:14-15).

Bredfeldt (2006) posits that a Christian leader is a biblical leader and teacher who leads by teaching their people through the Word of God. Bredfeldt (2006) states, "The most powerful means of leading the people of God is by teaching them the Word of God" (pg. 18). Bredfeldt (2006) further defines a Christian leader as one who, through a biblical foundation, molds, and crafts a leadership style to adapt to people's needs and lead themselves through biblical guidance.

The Scripture is rich with leadership lessons, even though it is not technically a leadership manual. It demonstrates how scriptural leaders, through times of peace, disaster, war, struggles, and uncertainty, led with the certainty that God was with them. (ESV, 2001, Psalm 78:72, Psalm 119, Proverbs 2:6; Luke 22:26, 1 Timothy 3:1-3, 1 Peter 5:2-3). Christian leadership is anchored on the Scriptures and enables a leader to lead without fear, for God is with them (ESV, 2001, Psalm 31:24, Hebrews 6:19, Philippians 4:10-13).

Christian Leadership and Complexity. Biblical leadership is relational. It begins with the complex relationship of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, one triune God infinitely existing in three persons. Furthermore, it continues with the triune God's complex covenant relationship intertwined with His creation and humanity (ESV, 2001, John 13:14-15). Hall, Hall, and Daman

(2010) indicate that Christians should understand how complex, interdependent, and interconnected systems provide an opportunity to see how God works in the world. The relational triune God designed life to be interactive, connected, sustaining, and bountiful in the Garden of Eden as bountiful systems and subsystems (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 19). According to Black and Smith (2003) and Avery and Gaede (2007), complexity science and complex adaptive systems theory align with Scripture in the proclamation of Creation (ESV, 2001, Genesis 1:1-31; John 1:1-18). God's creation is a complex adaptive system of interactive and interconnective systems (Avery & Gaede, 2007). God created a system that is deconstructable from the cosmos, heavenly hosts, humankind, plants, animals, and insects. While this is an oversimplification in one sense, it demonstrates the relational and interconnected nature of the greater creation (ESV, 2001, Hebrews 1:1-2). When God created the heavens, the earth, and life, He created an interconnected web of networks and a system of relationships (ESV, 2001; Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20). According to Berkouwer (1984), at creation, when God breathed life into humankind, He breathed into man his spiritual life, capability for eternal life, intelligence, character, and *Imago Dei* qualities. Creation and the formation of humankind started a relational covenant that intended life to be relational, shared, interrelated, and nurturing (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; ESV, 2001, Genesis 12:1-3; 17:4-6; 1 John 4:7-21; Romans 12:10; Hebrew 13:1). It is through this relationship that humankind learns the true essence of biblical leadership. Biblically and theologically, a Christian leader should have a leadership foundation built upon the Scripture and reinforced by a Christian worldview with its foundation rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ (Bredfeldt, 2006; Malphurs, 2003; ESV, 2001, Genesis 1:26-28).

Stanton (2019) uses complexity science to demonstrate how Christian leaders can embrace the uncertainty and unpredictability that are part of church life and all life. He shows

that complex sciences, part of God's creation design, are theologically conservative and can provide new insight for Christian leaders. Stanton (2019) states that Christian leadership is complex, and Christian leaders must recognize the complex challenges of a continuously changing and unpredictable world (p. 147). To effectively lead in an uncertain, ambiguous, and dynamic world, church leadership must be agile and adaptive to turmoil and turbulence (Bolsinger, 2020; Cormode, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Wright, 2020). Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) state that complexity is all around us and happens when "networked interactions allow events to link up and create unexpected outcomes, or emergence" (p. 10).

Christian Leadership and Leading during a Crisis. Leadership is essential in a crisis; every organization, community, or society will regularly experience some form of crisis. A Christian should see a crisis as a part of life's journey in a fallen world. The Bible is an excellent example of how a Christian should lead during a crisis (Firestone, 2020). Rainer (2020) noted that it is essential that church leaders comprehend and learn to adapt to the post-COVID church to create sustainable and survivable church strategies. Through the pandemic, pastors and staff delivered hands-free and masked worship ministry and contactless communion while learning how to provide virtual services on a digital platform to keep the church community connected (Jackson & Williams, 2021). Amid the chaos and complexity of a crisis, Christian leaders have the peace of knowing the simple truth that God is with them to persevere in navigating difficult times or crises (Stanton, 2019, p. 147).

Theoretical Background

This section provides a theoretical context for the study. It includes an overview of the foundational literature on operationalizing complexity leadership theory and an understanding of

complexity leadership and social networks. The theory selected to guide this research was the complexity leadership study by Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015).

Operationalizing Complexity Leadership Theory

For the study's intent, complexity leadership theory will be "operationalized" to analyze how church leadership faced and dealt with the chaos and unpredictability of a changing and dynamic environment during the complex emergent 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis (Garretsen et al., 2022; Cho, 2021; Pourdehnad et al., 2020; Bolsinger, 2020; Cormode, 2020; Pillay, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Wright, 2020; Klasche, 2020; Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020).

Complexity leadership studies classify organizations as Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) consisting of heterogeneous agents (humans) that interrelate and influence each other in fine-grain interactions through a neural-like social network that generates coarse-grain properties of innovation, goal achievement, and a learning environment (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). The constant social interaction of the agents who exchange information and energy across the CAS is necessary for survival (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016). A CAS succeeds through a constant flow of information and human interactions in an organization (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) and CAS research conducted by Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) provide a methodology for operationalizing complexity leadership through five organizing functions of leadership interactions (behaviors and practices). The five organizing functions are generative, administrative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using.

Complexity Leadership Theory. Leadership was usually discussed in the context of an individual leader leading people and managing the organization successfully. There are countless definitions, theories, and perceptions of leadership, ranging from a single person, the leader, to a

leader-follower relationship to shared or collective organizational leadership. CLT is a current

leadership framework for researching emerging leadership requirements in a knowledge-based

environment (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Backström, 2014). The

framework defines leadership as a complex dynamic process that draws from complexity science

to develop a leadership paradigm that focuses on creativity, innovation, and adaptive capacity

(Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Lichtenstein et al., 2007).

Leadership interactions are social exchanges between individuals where the collaboration

supports a standing practice or norm and the local rules of interaction among individuals (Hazy

& Uhl-Bien, 2015). CLT emerged from the chaos and complexity science theories to understand

the application of leadership in the complexity and uncertainty of organizations in the knowledge

era and not in the traditional hierarchy leadership applications in the industrial age (Uhl-Bien et

al., 2007). CLT, the seminal work by Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), describes

leadership as a process through which leadership emerges through formal and informal social

network interactions, leadership interactions, and complex organizational dynamics rooted in

complexity theory.

> Leadership should be seen not only as position and authority but also as an emergent,
> interactive dynamic—a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and
> change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce
> new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p 299).

Hazy et al. (2007) hypothesize that leadership is embedded in the daily fine-grain

interactions that occur in an organization and "serve as a system-level purpose even as it furthers

the purposes of those individuals who participate in its functions" (p.13). Goldstein et al. (2010)

further the concept of complexity leadership as a mutual influence process that emerges from

social interactions across an organization's multiple (*micro, meso, and macro*) levels. CLT

examines interactions that occur in the relationships between leader and follower, social network

interactions, and group and peer interaction resonance that influence and are essential for studying organizational survival in a dynamic and uncertain world (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Regine & Lewin, 2000). Complexity theories and the principles of complex adaptive systems are valuable processes for Christian and secular leaders to understand the dynamic structures of a complex and unpredictable world where chaos and crisis are ever-present (Stanton, 2019; Waldrop, 1992).

Complexity Leadership and Leading during a Crisis. Adelekan (2020) describes that organizational crisis involves change, risk, and time-sensitive responses by reviewing several definitions of crisis. In addition, Adelekan (2020) indicates that a crisis has varying levels of risk, time sensitivity, and lack of normalcy; each crisis is different and must be handled differently. According to Garretsen et al. (2022), Shufutinsky et al. (2020), and Sturmberg and Martin (2020), the COVID-19 global pandemic is the epitome of Lorenz's "Butterfly Effect," which indicates that a minute change in an initial discrete system state could create a significant systemic change in a future discrete system state (Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). The world is a complex adaptive system that is profoundly interconnected and interrelated, and a small event (COVID-19) in one sector of society can significantly impact society as a whole. Complexity, nonlinearity, disruption, and discontinuous change are leadership variables that today's leaders should be capable of dealing with during a crisis.

Momeny and Etzel (2021) posit that understanding leadership is more than looking into a leader's actions; it also must focus on the environment and the context in which the leader operates. According to Osmer (2010), context is a composition of social and organic system interactions as a situation evolves. A social and organic system is an interacting and interconnected network of parts that creates the emergence of the whole system (Osmer, 2010).

Leading successfully through a complex emergent crisis requires complexity leadership interactions that match the complexity and non-linearity of the event (Wernli et al., 2021; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Horney et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Ashby, 1956). Delia Davila Quintana et al. (2014) theorize that leadership is a complex process of fine-grain interactions between the leader, a follower, a team, the corporate mission, and the social, economic, and organizational context. Leadership is essential in these interactions, and leadership is a social construct that emerges from the fine-grain interactions among people in the organization (Delia Davila Quintana et al., 2014).

Complexity Leadership and Social Networks

Complexity leadership operates in and through the social dynamics of social networks of interconnected relationships, communication exchange, and meaningful dialogue (Goldstein et al., 2010; Hazy et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Complexity leadership is fundamental to understanding collective leadership and recognizing people, groups, and institutions as CAS that can transform and reorganize to thrive and endure (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Schneider & Somers, 2006). Drath (2001) indicates that reality in a CAS is constructed by the social network interactions of the agents in a collective social system to create worldviews, models, and theories (p.136). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) posit that complexity leadership occurs in a CAS through people's relational ties and interaction resonance in social networks. The complexity leader influences and enables the CAS's relational and social network interactions through complexity leadership functions and interactions (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Christakis and Fowler (2009) identify a social network as a group of individuals that resonate and intentionally connect because they are like-minded in thought and behavior to create a unique network that, as a whole, is greater than its separate parts (p. 9). A social network

is an organized set of friends, family, co-workers, congregations, or organizations connected through relational ties (Scott, 2017; Golbeck, 2015; Christakis & Fowler, 2009). People relate to each other through interconnected social networks and interactions to facilitate communication exchanges and information flows (Hansen et al., 2011; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). A peer leadership network, according to Hoppe and Reinelt (2010), is a "system of social ties among leaders who are connected through shared interests and commitments, shared work, or shared experiences" (p. 601). In a peer leadership network, leaders trust, openly share information, seek support and counsel, develop and learn, and act in collectivity partnerships (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). The International Protestant Convention leadership team, the research's subject, is a bounded network of leaders who form a peer leadership network (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

The International Protestant Convention is a dynamic group of interconnected multilingual and multi-diverse social networks interacting at a macro level. This dynamic group comprises the ELT, the LCLs, the staff, and each church's social network. At the meso level, each church is a separate network and a distinct node comprised of the church staff and members linked together through a common purpose, shared values, Christian perspective, and identity. At the micro level, each church member interacts and connects inside and outside the church with members of their small groups, work offices, family members, and the community.

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

The researcher was part of the International Protestant Convention focused upon within this research and attended two protestant churches while in Germany. The researcher lived in Germany from 1997 to 2004 and served as a Trustee, Finance Chairman, Deacon, and Deacon Chairman. The researcher selected the International Protestant Convention as a valid research setting, having served in the convention and understanding its mission to further the Kingdom of

God. The significance of this study is that many conventions and churches, just like the International Protestant Convention, are facing constant changes and shifting church demographics and need to find leadership ways to adapt to stay relevant and meet the Great Commission's responsibilities (ESV, 2001; Matthew 28:16-20).

Statement of the Problem

There is a small but growing research field on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the requisite leadership abilities needed to lead in, through, and beyond the pandemic. However, there is a gap in the existing literature of complexity leadership studies about the requisite Christian complexity leadership interactions needed by church leaders to lead through the chaos and challenges of a global crisis like COVID-19. The unparalleled global spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), or COVID-19, created a global health crisis and a pandemic-induced church diaspora (CDC, 2023; JHU, 2023). Starting in March 2020, with the WHO's global pandemic announcement, and ending in May 2023 with the presidential announcement, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for the churches to adapt to a continuously changing complex environment to fulfill Christ's commandment through the Body of Christ (Widjaja et al., 2021; Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020; Bolsinger, 2015).

Complexity leadership looks at the connections and interactions of each person in the organization to produce organizational leadership meta-capability, not just a single person or leader (Lichtenstein et al., 2007). CLT and related complexity leadership-based research will frame this study and serve as the foundation for the key constructs and theoretical framework for leadership interactions, definitions, crisis, and what leadership interactions were most helpful in leading and staying connected during the pandemic. The restrictive sanctions that challenged the global body of Christ from meeting in person and worshipping corporately continue to challenge

church leaders to serve the church community better through the lessons learned (Cho, 2021; Christianson & Barton, 2021; Mpofu, 2021; Beukes, 2020; Pillay, 2020). Gaining insights into the church leaders' lived experiences, leadership interactions, and social network dynamics used to pilot their churches through the turbulence and turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic may provide insight into how a church can persist and prosper in a complex and ever-changing world.

Purpose Statement

This transcendental phenomenological research aimed to explore, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Veldsman, 2020; Borgatti et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Friedrich et al. 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research examined the lived experiences of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams (ELT/LCL) in leading a convention of multilingual and multi-diverse churches during COVID-19 through the lens of complexity leadership theory.

The International Protestant Convention comprises multicultural people of diverse origins who worship, fellowship, and share the life-giving salvation of Jesus Christ. A multicultural church is dynamic and complex, filled with various people with divergent interests and values and differing personalities, experiences, and worldviews. Lingenfelter (2008) indicates that leaders must understand how their cultural beliefs, values, and biases shape their leadership thinking and actions. According to Lingenfelter (2008), diverse leadership interactions and relationship skills are needed to connect to the multicultural church and diversity of ethnic and

social groups. CLT provides the framework for the interactive dynamic's viewpoint and considers how social network dynamics could influence the resultant viewpoint.

Research Questions

Complexity leadership was the guiding theoretical framework for this study, and the research questions influenced and guided the selection of the phenomenological research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). The research questions address Hazy and Uhl-Bien's (2015) five leadership interactions of administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using. The first three complexity leadership functions, generative, administrative, and community-building, are how people interact or relate in an organization for complex organizing (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The information-related functions of information-gathering and information-using relate to what complex organizing interactions are about (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Generative leadership encompasses the complexity mechanism of emergence and enables adaptation, innovation, and creativity. Administrative leadership involves the complexity mechanism of entrainment and institutes efficiency, roles, and responsibilities in an organization (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community-building covers the complexity mechanism of belonging and promotes an organization's shared identity, engagement, and trust (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Information-gathering involves integrating and synthesizing complex mechanisms and assessing individuals' ability to sense and comprehend relevant organizational information (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Finally, information-using enables the ratcheting complexity mechanism and uses the knowledge gathered through the integration and synthesis mechanism to move the organization forward (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering,

and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ2. What complexity leadership interactions, administrative, generative, community building, and information-gathering and information-using, did the selected participants rely on the most to lead an organization (church) through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

The principal research question driving this study's design is how the convention leadership teams describe the complex leadership interactions and how information flowed to provide stewardship for the Convention/Church, shepherd the flock, and fulfill the Great Commission during the chaos and crisis of 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

A transcendental phenomenological study examines lived experiences and in-depth perceptions to understand the essence of the meaning of those who experienced the phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2014). The transcendental phenomenological method will be coupled with a social constructivist research framework to observe the participants' lived experiences and in-depth perceptions.

Research Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that each participant was truthful, answering the interview questions, and did not embellish the truth. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), during the research data collection process, a researcher's presence may influence a participant's response to an interview question and create an altered version of their lived experiences instead of the actual lived experiences. The researcher and participants have an interactive connection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A second assumption was that the participants remember their

experiences accurately and in rich detail and explain the essence of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

A third research assumption was that the transcendental phenomenological approach is appropriate for analyzing this phenomenon. The social constructivist model recognizes that knowledge is co-constructed through the researcher's and the participant's social interactions in the research process (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology methodology seeks to understand lived experiences and in-depth perceptions through exploratory qualitative research. Moustakas (1994) postulates phenomenology as an appropriate instrument for exploring and relating shared experiences to phenomena. Furthermore, the transcendental model acknowledges researchers' role in understanding a phenomenon. The researcher and the participant are co-constructing the research. In this experience construction, a related assumption is that the researcher is honest and non-biased in interpreting the collected data. This study aimed to collect detailed and in-depth descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomena. To fully capture the lived experiences, quality versus quantity from a few leaders is preferred over many leaders. The challenge is determining the correct number of participants.

Research Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The first limitation of this study was the sample size and generalizability. The transcendental phenomenological methodology may not generalize to a larger population (Trochim, 2006). The study focused on two cross-sections of leadership. First, the Executive Leadership Team and second, the local church leaders from the multilingual and multi-diverse churches in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America; although it may add value to leadership research and church operations in a complex crisis, the collected data may not sufficiently reflect

all church leaders' opinions or lived experiences in the COVID-19 crisis. A second limitation

was that a researcher must be concerned with researcher bias during the interview process and

data examination. Researcher bias based on interpretation and personal experience may result in

a loss of perspective on the actual phenomenon and a failure to see patterns or themes emerge

from the research (Crotty, 1998). Participant self-bias was another potential limitation of

phenomenological studies. During the interview process, a participant may expand beyond the

experience due to the researcher's presence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A fourth limitation was

selecting ZOOM® interviews as a data collection instrument. The interview process and question

structure must be structured to analyze interview responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A final

limitation may include inaccuracies as the participants attempt to recall events accurately.

Delimitations of the Research Design

This study is delimited to the International Protestant Convention leadership teams

(ELT/LCLs). This research is further delimited to examine the operationalizing complexity

leadership framework, specifically the framework's administrative, generative, community-

building, information-gathering, and information-using interactions.

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Definition of Terms

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The following terms are used to investigate this phenomenon:

1. *Bracketing:* A qualitative method to mitigate a researcher's experience or bias by "bracketing" or deliberately setting aside one's beliefs about the phenomenon before and throughout the research. Setting all other components of research aside (Moustakas, 1994).

2. *Complex Adaptive Systems*: A dynamic and interactive multidimensional social network of heterogeneous agents, individuals, or groups of individuals who are linked to shared common interests or collective identities that are capable of innovation, learning, and adaptability (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

3. *Complex Leadership Interactions:* Dynamic behaviors or leadership interactions that influence, but do not control, the equilibrium between chaos and order in a complex adaptive system (company) to achieve the requisite complexity balance required for

organizational fitness (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

4. *Complexity Leadership Theory:* The seminal work by Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) describes leadership as a process through which leadership emerges through formal and informal social network interactions, leadership interactions, and complex organizational dynamics and is rooted in complexity theory.

5. *Epoché:* A method where researchers recognize their interpretations or assumptions about the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

6. *Emergence:* The unexpected bottom-up development of novelty, new structures, creativity, and unpredictable, emergent patterns that occur from information and social interactions of interconnected people (Levin, 2005; Holland, 1998; Waldrop, 1992).

7. *Transcendental Phenomenology:* Transcendental phenomenology is a segment of phenomenological research. Phenomenology is the reflection of things as they appear to an individual. Transcendental phenomenological research of the studied phenomena is processed with a systematic reduction process to eliminate any preconceptions or hypotheses of the researcher to produce the pure transcendental ego (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

8. *VUCA:* Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous or VUCA is a military acronym first developed at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to describe the global tectonic shifts and changes regarding threats and opportunities for global security, economics, market, and workforce conditions across the globe. (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Johansen, 2007).

Significance of the Study

This study's importance may contribute to complexity leadership theory by understanding the importance of the lived experiences and in-depth perceptions of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams to discover whether complexity leadership interactions emerged or were applied and how, through social network dynamics, information flowed before and during 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic to lead the Church in, through, and beyond the crisis. Understanding how church leaders led their church during the COVID-19 crisis is essential to providing other congregational leaders insight to learn when the next crisis occurs (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Stanton, 2019; Gibbons, 2009).

The International Protestant Convention was founded in 1957, and the first churches ministered to the spiritual needs of U.S. military personnel and their families stationed in Europe. The convention transformed from a military-centric population as the military declined after the Berlin Wall fell and changed political and economic circumstances. Today, one-third of the churches are primarily military personnel still stationed overseas. In contrast, the other churches are international members comprising multiple churches and partners in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America.

This study may add to the current literature on operationalizing CLT and organizations as CAS and emerging church leadership literature on recognizing the need for adaptive leaders and the church as a CAS. Furthermore, it may inform Christian universities to establish classes that provide an understanding of complex leadership and social network dynamics for emerging church leaders. This research investigated and explored, through the International Protestant Convention leadership and the church leaders' lived experiences, to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions used to sustain their churches through the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic. The discovery of emergent or frequently used complexity leadership interactions may serve as a model for future complexity leadership research by highlighting the interactions the leaders used to survive and thrive in turmoil and turbulence. Furthermore, each participant's in-depth perceptions and insightful reflections, provided through leader-researcher interviews and surveys, may provide insight into how information flowed through the networks to make these church leaders successful at operating their churches.

Summary of the Design

The qualitative method, rooted in social and behavioral sciences, explores the human experience through detailed textual and structural descriptions and discovering the essence of

lived experiences and insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Textual

descriptions are observed by examining a research participant's experience and understanding,

while structural descriptions are observed through how a participant experienced the

phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A phenomenological approach was selected for this

research, allowing the researcher to concentrate on individuals' lived experiences to discover the

phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological research method seeks to find

emergent patterns and themes based on the participants' lived experiences and the phenomenon

(Smith et al., 2011). For this reason, an exploratory qualitative transcendental phenomenological

study was conducted to explore and comprehend the lived experiences and complexity leadership

interactions of the convention leadership teams (ELT/LCL). Furthermore, each leadership

participant's in-depth perceptions and insightful reflections, provided through leader-researcher

interviews and the questionnaire, offer a comprehensive view of how information flowed

through the convention and church networks.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW
Overview

This literature review summarizes the concepts and theories used to discuss the research topic. Incorporated in this literature review is an analysis of the selected literature's relevance to support the research's overall framework and design. Several theories, concepts, and articles will examine and explore the research questions stated in Chapter One. This study has a theological, theoretical, and related literature foundation focused on biblical leadership, complex leadership theory, complex adaptive systems, complexity leadership interactions, and social network dynamics. The literature review will also analyze the literature on COVID-19 and leading in the pandemic.

Theological Framework for the Study

Leadership is fundamental to everything in life-from personal leadership to leading others and leading in an organization--leadership is everywhere (Narofsky, 2015; Maxwell, 2008; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). It does not matter if a leader is on a battlefield, playing field, boardroom, or walking in Galilee with twelve disciples; leadership matters and makes a difference (Dearduff, 2015; Dearduff, 2013; Narofsky, 2015; Narofsky, 2013). The theological framework posits a holistic, multidimensional approach to biblical leadership theory incorporating a thematic biblical framework and a Christian worldview foundation, integrating them with the complexities of leading in the world.

Christian Worldview

The impetus for a Christian leadership worldview is to live and lead in the world with a Christ-like model and incorporating a scriptural focus. Smith (2015) theorizes that a Christian leader should have a biblical worldview based on Scripture and revealed truth. Cosgrove (2006) provides an appropriate definition for worldview as a "set of assumptions or beliefs about reality

and human nature that affect how we think and how we live" (p. 63). Smith (2009) describes how habits, rituals, and practices can form a liturgy that shapes and molds a Christian's desires, choices, and actions. A Christian leader's relationship with God shapes their life, character, and leadership. The biblical worldview is the general and special revelation of God, Jesus Christ the Savior, the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of *Imago Dei*. The biblical worldview provides a lens through which a believer thinks, sees, and lives a Christian life and a Christian leader a biblical foundation for leadership.

Biblical Leadership

According to Howell (2003), Christian leadership's foundation is anchored on the Scriptures and the teachings contained in the Bible, which enables a leader to lead without fear, for God is with them (ESV, 2001, Psalm 31:24, Hebrews 6:19, Philippians 4:10-13). The Scripture is rich with leadership lessons, even though it is not technically a leadership manual, demonstrating how biblical leaders, through times of peace, disaster, war, struggles, and uncertainty, led with the certainty that God was with them (ESV, 2001, Psalm 78:72, Psalm 119, Proverbs 2:6; Luke 22:26, 1 Timothy 3:1-3, 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Sanders (2007) posits that God prepares leaders for a "specific place and task in mind" (p. 60). Christian leaders can learn from the leadership lessons of the Bible to understand the necessary principles of Christian leadership (Sanders, 2007). Biblical leadership is found in the Old and New Testaments. Biblical leadership can be found in the New Testament through the leadership of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. Jesus was a servant leader who transformed his followers through inspiration and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Agosto, 2005). Jesus developed and enabled his disciples to act during his three-year ministry (ESV, 2001, John 13:14-15). Kouzes and Posner (2017) indicate that enabling others to act involves establishing

trust and nurturing employee relationships. In Mark 1:16-20, Christ recruits Simon, Andrew, James, and John as disciples by saying, "Follow Me"; they trust and follow Him (ESV, 2001).

Scripturally Focused

Bredfeldt (2006) posits that a Christian leader is a biblical leader and teacher who leads by teaching their people through the Word of God. His book's thesis is in the following quote: "The most powerful means of leading the people of God is by teaching them the Word of God" (Bredfeldt, 2006, pg. 18). The Word is essential to life and God's purposes, and He demonstrates Himself through His Word (ESV, 2001, Genesis 1:3). All life was created when God spoke life into existence, and all life is held together through His Word (ESV, 2001, John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:16-17). The Hebrew word *dabar*, which can mean word or to speak, communicates an act of speaking and having spoken (Avery & Gaede, 2007, p. 22). Isaiah verifies the power of God's spoken Word in Isaiah 55:11: "So shall my word that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that I purpose" (ESV, 2001). God reveals His relationship with Man in the Word (Bailey, 2020). In the New Testament, information and communication from God came alive in Christ, who is the Word or *logos* (Avery & Gaede, 2007). Avery and Gaede (2007) posit that Christians will find strength through a solid relationship with the Triune God and the Scriptures, God's written word on living according to God's design. The Word of God creates a learning environment that enables His people to live in the Word and the Word to live in them (Woodward, 2012). God created life to communicate and be relational (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006).

Relationally Focused

According to Momeny and Etzel (2021), Christian leaders should be scripturally and theologically rooted in the practice of leadership and conversant with social science theories to

lead effectively in a constantly changing and unpredictable world. A Christian leader is grounded in the Gospel and the Scriptures as the guide for leadership. The Scriptures describe leadership as a relational and communal pursuit and a relationship between God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Creation (ESV, 2001, John 13:14-15). Beginning in Genesis, with the creation of the Heavens, Earth, and finally Man, God starts a covenant and leadership relationship (ESV, 2001, Genesis 12:1-3; 17:4-6; Hebrews 8:7-13).

Relational leadership means empowering the church community to use their gifts and talents to serve God and His plans (ESV, 2001, Ephesians 4:12-13). Hartwig and Bird (2015) indicate that collective church leadership is a biblical design in collaborative leadership inherent in the church community. According to Kilner (2018), a Christian leader should look at all people they lead as created in *Imago Dei* and that the image is created in Jesus Christ, who is perfect humanity and both the Son of God (ESV, 2001, Matthew 16:16) and the Son of Man (ESV, 2001, Mark 2:10). *Imago Dei* also grounds the Christian leader in the context that the people they lead are made in the image of God, and a leader leads people to reflect Christ's love and God's glory within their own lives (Momeny & Etzel, 2021).

Momeny and Etzel (2021) posit that Christian leadership has a different foundation from secular leadership principles and a different objective in belief. Leadership is more than a leader's actions; it is also the environment and the context in which the leader operates (Momeny & Etzel, 2021). Churches are a relational community of believers in a continuous process of social interaction bound together by Christ's love and love for one another (Stanton, 2019; Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The church community is a covenant relationship exhibited by the Triune God and called to live and love one another in communion with the Creator (ESV, 2001, Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 17:1-8; Exodus 3:1-18; Judges 6:11-27; Psalm 72:1-19; Mark 3:14; Acts 9:1-6).

Biblical Leaders Qualities

Noah was a biblical leader who dealt with the crisis of the flood and destruction of all life by God. When God told Noah that He planned to destroy all life on earth because of their corruption, despite being ridiculed by others, Noah trusted and obeyed and led his family to survive (ESV, 2001, Genesis 7). Abraham faced a crisis of his faith when God commanded him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham's trust in God allowed him to follow His command, knowing that God provides. Through his faith, he became the father of nations. Jacob was described as a father and leader of nations (ESV, 2001, Genesis 49:1-27).

Joseph was an outstanding manager in the Bible. Joseph's interpretation of Pharoah's dream allows him to save the Egyptian people and his family (ESV, 2011, Genesis 41:25-36). Joseph advises Pharoah on resource management, appoints overseers over the land, and takes one-fifth of the land's produce (ESV, 2011, Genesis 41:34-36). Joseph developed actions, plans, and achievable goals when gathering all the resources for seven years (ESV, 2011, Genesis 41:47-49). Joseph clarified, planned, and monitored operations to ensure efficient use of resources (grain) when the seven years of famine arrived (ESV, 2011, Genesis 41:53-57). In the end, Joseph's managerial skills saved Egypt and the Israel Nations.

Moses is a critical leader in the Bible. Moses was an under-shepherd of God and possessed many leadership qualities. Moses shepherded and oversaw the Israelite's provision, protection, and guidance throughout the 40-year desert dwelling (Laniak, 2006; Howell, 2003). Moses trusted and was faithful to God, leading the Israelites out of Egypt and back to faith and reliance on God. Moses had faith in God and glorified God in his leadership (ESV, 2001, Exodus 15:1-18; Hebrews 11:23-24); he articulated God's vision for the Israelites (ESV, 2001, Hebrews 11:26); he listened and responded to the needs and concerns of the people, and he inspired and

influenced a nation (Exodus). Joshua was a servant leader gifted in diplomacy when he divided the lands between the twelve tribes (Sanders, 2007; ESV, 2001, Joshua 1:1-6).

Nehemiah was a complex adaptive leader who could lead amid crisis and peace. Guttel, Konlechner, and Trede's (2015) research indicated that business success and survival are contingent on a leader's ability to be ambidextrous and balance exploration (leadership) and exploitation (management). Nehemiah was a man of prayer, had a scriptural focus and reliance on God throughout each crisis, and sought to Glorify God (ESV, 2011, Nehemiah 1:4-11). Before his journey, Nehemiah understood the uncertainty and risk of the journey and embraced challenges, even accepting death when asking the king for permission (ESV, 2011; Nehemiah 2). When Nehemiah arrived, he began rebuilding the wall by surveying the walls to fully understand the project and develop actions and plans (ESV, 2011; Nehemiah 2:15-16). After surveying the wall, Nehemiah used his community-building skills to inspire the people around a shared purpose and vision to build the wall (ESV, 2011, Nehemiah 2:17-20). Then, using administrative leadership, he delegated the building of the wall by establishing a chain of responsibility, roles and responsibilities (ESV, 2011; Nehemiah 3-4). Nehemiah used generative leadership by innovatively assigning rebuilding sections of the wall to those who lived next to that section. Finally, Nehemiah used information-gathering and information-using to listen and respond to the needs of the people and to find out information about his enemies' attempts to stop him from rebuilding the wall (Nehemiah 5). Nehemiah faced challenges and crises during his leadership from his enemies, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab, who tried to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the wall (ESV, 2001, Nehemiah 4-6). However, Nehemiah prayed to God for deliverance in the face of the crisis.

According to Youssef (2013), no leader significantly influences the world more than Jesus Christ and is the ultimate effective leadership model. Bredfeldt (2006) defines a great leader as one who, through a biblical foundation, molds and crafts a leadership style to adapt to people's needs and lead themselves through biblical guidance. Laniak (2006) explains that the shepherd motif is the fundamental model of leadership and an image of a pastoral ministry basis. Furthermore, he describes the shepherd-leader, shepherd-king, and shepherd-ruler through a biblical and theological analysis of the word shepherd and shepherding (Laniak, 2006). Resane (2014) ascribes specific functions of a shepherd: care and feeding, leading and protecting, restoration, and attending to sheep by grooming, shearing, and delivering lambs. Gunter (2018) indicates that the shepherd metaphor is appropriate and valuable as a motif for depicting the nature, role, and proper leadership roles among God's people.

Throughout His time, Jesus was persistently training, developing, and instructing His disciples and followers through parables, actions, and words about what it meant to follow Him (Dillon, 2005; Horn, 1998; Stein, 1994; ESV, 2001, Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 10:5-42; Matthew 13:1-58; Mark 1:17-18; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 6:20-49; John 2:13-25). Jesus enabled His disciples and followers to develop and become leaders to carry His message and ministry after He left. Christ encouraged the heart and was transformational (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Bass, 2005; Burns, 1978). The Apostle Paul was also an emotionally intelligent servant leader who followed Christ's call to lead and fulfill the Great Commission (Ascough & Cotton, 2005; ESV, 2001, Matthew 28:16-20). Paul nurtured communities of faith and communicated his message of Christ in person and in letters to enable the Gospel to spread across the early known World (Endacott et al., 2017; Hartwig & Bird, 2015; MacMillan, 2001; ESV, 2001; Romans, Philippians, Corinthians, Thessalonians, Colossians). A principal focus of Paul's theology was to extend

Christ's good news through community interactions and to lead people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul was also a complex adaptive leader who used all aspects of operationalizing complexity leadership. At the beginning of his leadership, Paul zealously persecuted the church. His zealousness was his strength, but after his tipping point conversion on the road to Damascus, his meekness was his strength (ESV, 2011, Galatians 6:1, 2; Corinthians 3:12; Colossians 3:12). The Epistles are replete with examples of Paul using community-building, administrative, generative and information and information-using interactions to encourage and inspire people (ESV, 2011, Acts 13:13-44), establish the rules and procedures for the church and its leaders (ESV, 2011, 1 Timothy 3:2-7), and to gather information from each of the churches and then respond. Paul was a courageous leader who was unafraid to stand up for his belief and faith in Christ when he stood up to the Jerusalem Council against circumcising for the Gentiles (ESV, 2011, Acts 15:1- 35; Sanders, 2007). He counted it all as joy to serve Christ. Paul also displayed humility in dealing with each of the churches he started.

Dailey (2020) states that Apostle Paul, in Galatians 2:1-10, saw that the early Christians faced a crisis, and he used every part of his God-given gifts and an absolute belief in Christ to uplift and encourage the church in the crisis. Paul learned how to prevail through crisis after crisis by relying on God in every circumstance (Philippians 3:12-14; Philippians 4:6-7). Paul trusted God to be his refuge and strength, from being imprisoned to shipwrecked to his death (Philippians 4:10-13).

Christian Leadership Amidst Crisis and Complexity

Veldsman (2020) indicates a crisis is an unforeseen and threatening event that significantly disrupts an organization, community, or society. Furthermore, the crisis can

"threaten to disrupt a system, structure, a way of doing/living, accepted values, and people" (Veldsman, 2020, p. 45). A leader must understand how to navigate the crisis and respond to the crisis in a nonlinear and adaptive manner due to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. A leader must learn to lead "beyond" the crisis and "anchor" the organization and its people to a future reference point and a vision of a future beyond the crisis. A leader must lead "through" the crisis to endure and recover. Adelekan (2020) asserts that the "crisis phenomenon is relatively new compared to the leadership phenomenon" (p. 36). Adelekan (2020) describes that organizational crisis involves change, risk, and time-sensitive responses by reviewing several definitions of crisis.

According to Firestone (2020), a person's worldview influences how they view a crisis. A Christian should see a crisis as a part of life's journey in a fallen world. The Bible is an excellent example of how a Christian should lead during a crisis (Firestone, 2020). Matthew 7:24-27 provides the scriptural answer for leading during a crisis by keeping focused on the Word:

> Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (ESV, 2001).

Beukes (2020) describes how the church can be relevant in this crisis using a missional and theological perspective. COVID-19 challenges and offers opportunities to reconsider and think about the church's mission outside the church's traditional brick-and-mortar walls. Stanton (2019) uses complexity science to demonstrate how Christian leaders can embrace the uncertainty and unpredictability that are part of church life and all life. He shows that complex sciences, part of God's creation design, are theologically conservative and can provide new

insight for Christian leaders. Stanton (2019) presents Stacey's (2007) organizational theory of complex responsive processes of relating and shows that the approach is aligned with Christian leadership, covenantal ecclesiology, and the theology of divine sovereignty in classical theism (p. 147). Stanton (2019) describes a theology of shalom as an anchor of hope and an enabling practice for leaders to persevere in navigating difficult times or crises (p. 147).

Churches are a continuous process of human interactions that create a community of believers who work together to spread the Good News of the saving work of Jesus Christ (Stanton, 2019). Churches are complex and internally structured for efficiency and adaptive to respond to changes in the environment (Wood & Sosis, 2019; ESV, 2001, 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:4; Ephesian 4:4-7; 1 Peter 2:9). As a living system, the church can self-organize through feedback loops enabling spiritual growth, resilience, and adaptation (Hall et al., 2010, Avery & Gaede, 2007; Wheatley, 2005). Church leaders should understand the adaptive leadership capacity of the church that is enabled by socially networked interactions, system dynamics, and complexity theory (Stanton, 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2009; Black & Smith, 2003).

Howell (2003) and Manz (1999) contend that highly effective Christian leaders must focus on a compassionate approach to leadership based on the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus. The Bible illustrates how Christians should have led during the COVID-19 pandemic (Firestone, 2020). The Bible shows how biblical leaders led through times of chaos, crisis, pandemics, uncertainty, sickness, and death from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible displays Old and New Testament leaders who dealt with problems, challenges, and struggles. Joseph dealt with several crises in his lifetime, from his brothers selling him into slavery to being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and being thrown into jail, to serving 11 years in jail before Pharoah

made him the second highest in the land. During his trials and challenges, Joseph remained faithful to God and was rewarded by God for his faithfulness.

Moses is another excellent example of a leader who experienced internal and external leadership crises. Moses struggled internally as a leader who doubted himself and his abilities. He dealt with Exodus's external leadership challenges from Egypt, living in the desert for 40 years, relying on God for his strength and vision, and seeking God's prayer for his leadership wisdom. Moses faced several crises during his time as a leader. The biggest crisis was convincing Pharoah and the Israelites that God sent him to free Israel. He depended on God in his weakness to provide his strength. Moses knew he needed God primarily for his leadership (ESV, 2001, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). Moses' long-suffering was evident in times of conflict and crisis, from complaints about water and food to disobedience and rebellion. Throughout these trials and challenges, Moses' example of trusting in and being faithful to God is the Christian perspective needed to lead through the crisis (Firestone, 2020).

King David was a leader (ESV, 2001, 1 Kings 1:28-30) who was a man after God's heart. King David was a biblical leader who led through a crisis of being hunted by Saul and trusted God for his deliverance. He cried out to God and was heard by God (ESV, 2001 1 Samuel). Despite his failings, King David never turned away from God in peace and crisis. David had a heart for God's counsel, refuge, strength, and restoration (ESV, 2001, 1 Samuel 19).

Queen Esther faced the crisis of exposing her Jewish heritage after Haman convinced the king to decree to slay all the Jewish people. She faced a crisis of faith because she knew entering King Ahasuerus's inner court without being requested by the king was death (ESV, 2001; Esther 4:11). Queen Esther spoke up despite the fact she may be put to death and saved the Jewish people from destruction, and the Jewish Nation remembers her leadership with the celebration of

Purim (ESV, 2001, Esther 7:1-6, 9:20-32). Daniel dealt with the crisis of being thrown into the lion's den for not worshipping the statue of the king and surviving by trusting God for his safety (ESV, 2001, Daniel 6). Despite being rejected, accused, put on trial as a false prophet, and imprisoned, Jeremiah relied upon and trusted in God for his deliverance (ESV 2001, Jeremiah 26-38). This faith and belief that God is ever-present in good and bad times is the key to calm and crisis leadership success.

Summary of the Theological Framework

The theological framework intentionally designs a biblical leadership structure on the fundamental theological topics of biblical, scriptural, and worldview that shape a Christian leader's foundation. The framework also intentionally integrates the leadership challenges and emerging uncertainty and complexity facing a Christian leader today. A Christian leader can look at the immutable and unchanging Triune God and understand that God is in control in a volatile and fallen world. A Christian leader can engage the complexity of the crisis, conflict, turmoil, and constant change by remembering the simplicity of the Scriptures and a thorough understanding to be still and know that God is their refuge and strength (ESV, 2001, Psalm 46).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical section provides a leadership theory overview and then helps define complexity science, complexity leadership, and social network dynamics and their application to leading a church during COVID-19. A Christian leader grounded in the Scripture, Christian theology, and social science components is better equipped to lead in a complex and socially different world.

Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), the seminal work by Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), describes leadership as a process that emerges through formal and informal

social network interactions, leadership interactions, and complex organizational dynamics rooted

in complexity theory. CLT examines leadership interactions that occur in the relationships

between leader and follower, social network interactions, and group and peer interactions that

influence and are essential in studying church survival in a dynamic and uncertain world (Arena

& Uhl-Bien, 2016; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Leadership Overview

Leadership, and the study of what is or makes a leader, is a research phenomenon

spanning the beginning of civilization and the written word. Burns (1978) asserts that

"Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 2).

Although there is empirical data, there is no definitive or integrated list of leadership traits,

competencies, or situational variables (Northouse, 2015). Leadership was once considered an

individual leader leading people and managing the organization successfully. There are countless

definitions, theories, and perceptions of leadership, ranging from a single person, the leader, to a

leader-follower relationship to shared or collective organizational leadership. Leadership

continues to evolve from an Industrial-age focus on the worker and a cog in the machine to a

knowledge-age focus on the employee as a co-creator of value, innovation, and the competitive

edge (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2012) and Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) view leadership as a co-

created act of leading and following through the dynamic relational process of leaders and

followers in social and relational interactions. According to Fairhurst and Grant (2010),

leadership is more than a reductionist view of characteristics, behaviors, and actions; it is a

holistic view of leadership that recognizes followership. Burns (1978) states that leadership is the

process of building a "relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers

into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). Furthermore, Fairhurst and Grant (2010) indicate that followers validate and authorize leaders to lead. This legitimization of authority empowers leaders to achieve their goals and vision.

Marion (2008) and Hazy (2011) hypothesize that one leader cannot effectively manage companies in the increasing hypercomplexity of the world and chaotic interaction of human agency dynamics. The difference between organizational death and survival is the leadership's ability to understand, assess, and adapt to the dynamic forces of internal and external pressures that affect an organization's ecosystem. The human agency dynamic integrates various variables, including differing values, choices, perspectives, and relations (Hazy & Backström, 2014). Leadership interactions are social exchanges between individuals where the collaboration supports a standing practice or norm and the local rules of interaction among individuals (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Current leadership theories seek to understand a leader's actions and behaviors instead of a complete organizational leadership understanding of how leadership emerges from social interactions (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Northouse (2019) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.3). The trait theory views leadership as inherent or innate qualities such as height, intelligence, and natural abilities (Northouse, 2019). The trait leadership theory proposes that only those born with the characteristics can be great leaders or great men. According to Northouse (2019), the foundation of transactional leadership theory is a transactional process of leaders providing employees with something they want, safety, security, or money, in exchange for their work. Transactional leadership uses rules, instructions, and regulatory processes to accomplish goals and objectives promptly (Northouse,

2019). Northouse (2019) states that "transformational leadership can describe a wide range of leadership, from particular attempts to influence followers on a one-to-one level to comprehensive attempts to influence whole organizations and even cultures" (p. 164). Burns (1978) indicates that leadership is the method of developing a "relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). CLT, the theory at the center of this research, is a contemporary construct for investigating leadership interactions in a knowledge-based environment (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018).

Complexity Science

Complexity science views this interconnected and intertwined life of systems and organisms in the metaphor of organizations as organic wholes and living organisms (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Morgan, 2006; Wheatley, 2006). Capra (1996, 2005) views complexity science as a bifurcation point or phase transition from Descartes's mechanistic and reductionist worldview to a holistic ecological view. Through a holistic ecological view, the complexity of life is viewed as the sum is more significant than its parts. Complexity science is a compilation of hard and soft science, including physics, biology, psychology, and social sciences, to understand complex systems' dynamic structures and interconnected relationships in the complex adaptive system (Waldrop, 1992). Complexity science provides a living systems view of an organization and its capability to sustain relationships and adapt in a complex and turbulent environment (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Stanton, 2019). Complexity science, complexity leadership theory, and understanding CAS principles are essential for leaders to comprehend the dynamic structures of a VUCA world where chaos and disorder transpire (Stanton, 2019; Reeves et al., 2016; Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Black & Smith, 2003; Johansen, 2007).

Complex Adaptive Systems

CAS is an open, dynamic system that allows emergence, energy, and information exchange through linear and nonlinear interactions and has boundary limits (Johnson et al., 2013; Holland, 1998; Simon, 1978). A boundary of the whole system defines the limits and creates a shared meaning or identity (Locker, 2011; Krieger, 2009). A system boundary can be a worldview, shared values, and a basic understanding of what is honest, trustworthy, sound, and beautiful (Locker, 2011; Krieger, 2009). A CAS is the most basic analysis unit and the foundation for research within complexity science (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Regine & Lewin, 2000). Preiser et al. (2018) indicate that the world comprises intertwined social-ecological CAS that are open, living systems, and socially structured. Organizations are open systems and complex social systems. Regine and Lewin (2000) define complex adaptive systems:

> Complex adaptive systems are composed of a diversity of agents that interact with each other, mutually affect each other, and, in so doing, generate novel behavior for the system as a whole. However, the pattern of behavior we see in these systems is not constant because when a system's environment changes, so does the behavior of its agents and, as a result, the system's behavior as a whole (p. 6).

Complexity leadership studies classify organizations as CAS consisting of heterogeneous agents that interrelate and influence each other in fine-grain interactions through a neural-like social network that generates shared social interactions for innovation, goal achievement, and a learning environment (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). The constant social interaction of the agents across the CAS is necessary for survival and dynamic change (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016). A CAS is an open, dynamic system that allows emergence through nonlinear interactions, social communication interchange, and energy exchange (Johnson et al., 2013; Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Holland, 1998; Simon, 2005). CAS succeeds through a constant flow of information and human interactions in an organization (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The

complexity leader influences and enables the CAS's relational and social interactions through complexity leadership functions, fine-grain interactions, and coarse-grain properties (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Information sharing and knowledge exchange through relational networking are essential to business survival (O'Donnell, 2014; Kerr, 2011). Information is an essential part of sustaining life for open systems, for without information, entropy emerges, and death occurs (Wheatley, 2006). According to Wheatley (2006), information provides an organism and an organization with autopoiesis, self-organization, and feedback loops for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems monitoring. The informal systems are the social systems that permeate the organization and provide the social interactions and interconnectivity of the human systems (Simon, 2001). A system is cybernetic since feedback is essential to its structural survival. Systems require collaborative and cooperative interactions to produce the requisite relational dynamics to produce feedback in the system (Simon, 2005). In organizations, system learning, adaptation, and evolution are essential elements of survival (Kerr, 2011; Simon, 1991).

Organizations today face multifaceted, multidimensional, and complex challenges that require leadership and organizational capabilities to meet these challenges (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Palus & Horth, 2004). Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) posit that leaders must understand what it takes to lead in a complex world by understanding CAS in complexity science. According to Hazy, Goldstein, and Lichtenstein (2007), individual agents inside a CAS shape the system functions by shaping the agents' connectivity through leadership interactions that comprise each system. Stacey (2007) recognizes these agents as interdependent, intelligent human beings rather than mechanical automatons or cybernetic objects. Lichtenstein et al. (2007) indicate that a CAS consists of individuals that resonate through collective interests, knowledge, goals, and

worldviews. Furthermore, they can perceive and articulate the population-wide patterns in their local interaction and even desire different population-wide patterns (Lichtenstein, p. 238). This new structure defines leadership as a complex dynamic process that draws from complexity science to develop a leadership paradigm that focuses on the resiliency, effectiveness, and adaptability of an organization (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

The Church as a Complex Adaptive System. Complexity leadership studies classify organizations (*church*) as CAS, consisting of diverse agents that interrelate and influence each other in day-to-day social interactions and are bounded by a shared identity in Christ and the Christian worldview. According to Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006), as a body of believers, the Church is a CAS that engages in life together to become more Christlike (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The church is a CAS, a web of life, with nested complex adaptive systems and interactive social networks containing socio-spiritual relationships and organizational systems comprised of ministries, structures, rituals, and Christ's followers (Smith, 2009; Osmer, 2008; Avery & Geade, 2007; Black & Smith, 2003).

CAS are embedded or nested in another CAS (Crowell & Boyton, 2020). This nested CAS description starts from the micro to the macro, describing how a complex adaptive systems approach seeks to recognize the relationships and discrete interactions of the whole system, not just the parts of the system (Plsek & Wilson, 2001). The CAS relationship can be identified in the church and each parishioner. A parishioner is a CAS embedded inside a life group, which is a CAS nested inside the church ministries, which is a CAS embedded inside the church, which is a CAS nested inside the local community (Crowell & Boyton, 2020; Zimmerman et al., 1998).

According to Van Gelder (2000), the church is a spiritual community and a sociological entity that is holy and human. As a living organism and an organization, the church is a CAS as a body of believers in the Scriptures (Avery & Geade, 2007; Black & Smith, 2003). The interconnected relationships and dynamic networking interactions create feedback loops that linearly and non-linearly shape each person. Woodward (2012) specifies that a church is a living organism and an organization; both entities must be cohesive and unified (p. 41). According to Elkington et al. (2015), "As a living breathing organism, the Early Church" emerged from within homes and communities and adapted to their environment, which was constantly challenging, changing, and uncertain (p. 8).

According to Elkington et al. (2015) and Elkington and Booysen (2015), the description of the church as a complex adaptive system aligns with Scripture when the church is referred to as the body of Christ made of many parts but one living body on a mission for God (ESV, 2001, Romans 12:4). The church can be viewed as a living and growing organism and an organization that adapts to the changing dynamics of its surrounding ecosystem while enabling the church to be innovative, creative, and change-oriented to interact and connect with the surrounding ecosystem (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Bolsinger, 2015; ESV, 2001, 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesian 4:4-7; 1 Peter 2:9). According to Smith (2009), thin (fine-grain interactions) and thick (coarse-grain properties) practices or habits influence how Christians live their lives. These thick practices reinforce fellowship with God, becoming more Christ-like, and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thick habits are meaningful practices (Lord's Supper, Worship, Baptism, Apostolic Creed), while thin habits can be routine practices or life-influencing properties. However, thin practices (fine-grain interactions) can become thick (coarse-grain properties) over time if they influence habits, choices, and worship of God.

This dynamic, complex process of interaction resonance cultivates a socio-spiritual connection that allows the body of Christ to influence each other, encourage one another, and love one another, which allows a Christian to grow more Christlike through a social contagion process of becoming mature fruit to continue the works of Jesus Christ (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Pettit (2008) stated that Christians are the body of believers connected in the community through Jesus Christ's body and are greater together than individually (p. 25). The Church is a living organism, and the connective tissue to Christ points to the fact that the community of believers is highly interdependent and interconnected to grow and produce spiritual formation (Pettit, 2008).

Plowman et al. (2007) posit that the church is a CAS with autopoiesis, self-organization, and feedback loops for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems monitoring capabilities (Wheatley, 2006). According to Plowman et al. (2007), the Mission Church was slowly heading toward entropy when a homeless ministry emerged from the interactions in the community and congregation. The community's changing demographics and declining church membership produced a climate of resistance, tension, and concern for church leadership and the congregation (Plowman et al., 2007). Through the determination of a self-organizing team, a homeless ministry emerged that transformed the church, increased the heterogeneity of the community, and church membership growth (Plowman et al., 2007).

Complexity Leadership Theory

A review of CLT is required to answer whether complexity leadership interactions emerged or were applied during the COVID-19 pandemic. CLT emerged from chaos and complexity science theories to understand the application of leadership in the complexity and uncertainty of organizations in the knowledge era and not in the traditional hierarchy leadership applications in the industrial age (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) express that CLT

is a methodology through which leadership occurs in relational interactions and social networks. CLT is a complex science-based leadership theory that provides a comprehensive way of studying leadership by presenting a theoretical framework for researching emerging leadership requirements in a knowledge-based environment (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Backström, 2014). The complexity leadership framework includes three defining leadership foundations: adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership as organizing systems for fine-grain interactions and coarse-grain properties. These three leadership foundations correlate to the organization's bureaucratic and administrative functions and the emergent, informal, dynamic forces of complex adaptive systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). According to CLT, leadership is emergent collaborative leadership interactions through robust and connected organizational relationships (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The leadership theory does not eliminate the actions or importance of the individual leader but focuses more on the organizing effects of collective and distributed leadership interaction patterns (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Bolden, 2011). Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) and Ospina and Uhl-Bien (2011) indicate that emergent leadership is a co-created act in a socio-relational action between leaders and followers interacting in a network. Drath (2001) points out that leadership and accepting the leader is a relational process collaboratively co-constructed in a complex social structure.

CLT concepts are used to comprehend how to apply leadership in organizations dealing with the complexity and uncertainty of the fast-paced and ever-changing world that a mechanistic organization coupled with hierarchal-based leadership theories did not fully address (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Morgan, 2006). Crowell and Boynton (2020) signify that a leader who uses a complexity leadership approach is

at the heart of the action and performs what Katz and Kahn (1966) posit is the "influential

increment" and not command and control leadership. Morgan (2006) indicates that metaphors

imply a methodology of thinking and an approach to seeing the world to understand the world.

Wheatley (2006) posits that when we no longer view organizations as machines that need

exacting precision to operate and individuals as cogs that need calibration and adjustment, we

can move from the reductionist worldview to a wholistic worldview of living systems (Morgan,

2006). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) focus their research on how exogenous and endogenous factors

influence CAS leadership interactions. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) describe how leadership emerges

through networked interactions, organizational dynamics, and complexity theory. Leadership,

adaptability, and innovation are essential to survivability and sustainability (Hazy & Prottas,

2018; Elkington & Booysen, 2015).

Complexity leadership is essential to understanding leadership in a complex and uncertain

world by recognizing that organizations are CAS that adapt and change to the environment to

survive (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Schneider & Somers, 2006). The complexity framework

defines leadership as a complex dynamic process that draws from complexity science to develop

a leadership paradigm that focuses on the resiliency, effectiveness, and adaptability of an

organization (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001;

Lichtenstein 2016; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). It is a leadership theory grounded in enabling

leadership through rich interconnectivity in a complex social system (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017;

Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Administrative Leadership. Administrative leadership is a traditional top-down

command and control function or leadership role that, through exploitation and entrainment,

aligns organizational behavior and essential resources to produce outcomes linked to the

organization's mission, vision, and goals (Lichtenstein, 2016; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Administrative leadership function is the operational business systems practices and interactions

to clarify roles and responsibilities, establish processes to use discretionary controls to manage,

allocate, and monitor resources, and increase organizational effectiveness (Arena & Uhl-Bien,

2016). According to research conducted by Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), administrative leadership

interactions focus on the managerial control and configuration of the organization and involve

the establishment of the organizational strategy, vision, and goal setting; alignment of corporate

structures, task schedules, project preparation and planning, and resource and human capital

allocation.

   Adaptive Leadership. Adaptive leadership is bottom-up, formal, and informal and can

emerge anywhere within the organization (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Adaptive leadership is defined

as action-based and solution-oriented leadership interactions. Adaptive leadership interactions

encourage individuals to solve company problems and generate business opportunities through

the entrepreneurial process of new concepts, information, innovation, ideas, and adaptive change

(Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) specify adaptive leadership as emergent

behaviors produced through the fine-grain agent interactions of agents within a complex adaptive

system that enable the conditions for exploration, organizational change, nonlinear information

flow, complexity leadership dynamics, and organizational and individual learning.

   Enabling Leadership. Enabling leadership enables adaptive and administrative

leadership to co-exist by creating the conditions for catalyzation. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) posit that

enabling leadership behaviors catalyzes the conditions for exploration and exploitation by

managing the adaptive tension of the administrative and adaptive leadership entanglement by

enabling adaptive dynamics within the organization. The enabling leadership interactions assist

in the facilitation and creation of exploration through interactive social networks that allow for the free exchange of information, ideas, and creativity and create individual and organizational opportunities for learning, coordination, collaboration, and co-evolution of ideas, innovations, and products (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). At the same time, enabling leadership behaviors involves leadership interactions, or organizational ambidexterity, to balance exploration and exploitation conditions by applying internal tension or constraints to converge ideas and concepts into innovative outcomes for the organization.

Fine-Grain Interactions and Coarse Grain Properties

According to Gell-Mann (2002), the influence patterns and organizing effects occur in a CAS through fine-grain interactions and coarse-grain properties. According to Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015), the complexity mechanism of *entrainment* course-grain properties influences fine-grain interactions. Through the complexity mechanism of *emergence,* fine-grain interactions can change coarse-grain property functions (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Levin, 2005). Giddens (1984) describes this as a "duality of structure" where entrainment (*exploitation/convergence*) and emergence (*exploration/divergence*) occur continuously in organizations.

Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) posit that fine-grain interactions are the social and leadership interactions that occur throughout the day when information and ideas are exchanged through dialogue. Fine-grain interactions are face-to-face or virtual meetings, coffee break conversations, organizing and planning events, and daily relationship communications. Intentional leadership interactions can influence fine-grain interactions to produce variety and resilience in coarse-grain properties (Hazy, 2011). Fine-grain interactions are part of the daily organizational life of people connecting and dialoguing. They are part of social interactions in informal social networking

through cross-functional teaming conversations, lunchroom talks, and daily hallway conversations (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Coarse-grain properties are the organizational structures, processes, standards, and daily meetings that people rely on to guide them through their day and provide stability and order (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Coarse-grain properties are the standard daily organizing policies and processes that create the convergence of resources. Coarse-grain properties are the daily business processes, organizational routines, and outcomes that provide stability and order (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Coarse grain property examples are the regular 0900 meetings, the information security process of signing into a business computer, and the company policies for operations.

Human Interactive Dynamics and Adaptation

Through fine-grain interaction and coarse-grain properties, leaders influence and emerge, and human interactive dynamics occur. Lichtenstein et al. (2007) posit that leadership develops in human interaction dynamics, creating organizing effects in CAS that can shape future outcomes. The organizational leadership process is an essential meta-capability that emerges from human interaction within a CAS (Hazy et al., 2007). Hazy and Prottas (2016) hypothesize that complexity leadership interactions ensure that a CAS continually preserves its effectiveness for short-term operational requirements and long-term and intermediate resiliency despite uncertainty in a dynamic environment. Complexity leadership looks at a CAS's connective tissue of leadership interactions to produce the requisite organizational leadership capability necessary to survive as agents co-evolve through their interactions.

Hazy et al. (2007) state that heterogeneous agents interact linearly and nonlinearly and create continuous organizational ecosystem functions that form new business process concepts, ideas, and company structures for conducting business. The social interactions within an

organization are complex because people (*agents*) are multifaceted and diverse, and their actions can affect the behavior of others in unpredictable ways. The reciprocal interactions that these agents do can be autonomous and unpredictable. Understanding how nonlinear and unpredictable social interactions and knowledge flow affect business dynamics is a vital leadership element for leaders to know. Especially in an uncertain and dynamic world where organizations adapt and change to the dynamics of the exogenous and endogenous environment to survive (Hazy & Backström, 2014; Reeves & Daimler, 2011; Lichtenstein et al., 2006).

Marion (2008) and Hazy (2011) theorize that organizations are complex and dynamic due to the heterogeneous agency of the human dynamic, which is too chaotic for one leader to manage effectively. The human element incorporates multiple variables or dynamics, such as personal and organizational values, choices, leadership context, spatial relation, and time orientation (Backström & Hazy, 2014). Human agents are unique and diverse people who are conscious, self-conscious, emotional, rational, irrational, and often spontaneous beings capable of choosing.

Hazy and Backström (2014) proposed the Complex Systems Model of Organizing framework to understand emergent leadership dynamics. Hazy and Backström (2014), in their theoretical Complex Systems Model of Organizing framework, theorize that heterogeneous agents, including formal and informal leaders, act within CAS and networks to support systems performance (*exploitation*) and adaptation (*exploration*). People are vital to a corporation's competitive advantage and entrepreneurial success (Baluku et al., 2016; Hitt & Ireland, 2002). The constant human interaction dynamics of agents across the CAS are necessary for survival.

Human interaction dynamics occur through the information flow process across the ecosystem by exchanging information, using active learning, and adapting behaviors to the

changing environment (Hazy & Backström, 2014). The actions influencing performance or adaptation happen through fine-grain interactions that enable complex leadership mechanisms or behaviors to generate the requisite organizational outcomes. In this manner, leadership is an organizational meta-capability and process in which people interact and use interpersonal influence to shape the organization to survive and prosper as a collective entity (Hazy & Backström, 2014). By working inside the organizational process, company leaders, managers, and individuals can interact through social networks inside and outside the organization to confront uncertainty and adapt to the environment as a CAS (Hazy & Backström, 2014).

Operationalizing Complexity Leadership

Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) propose a systemic leadership theory for operationalizing complexity leadership through five leadership organizing functions: generative, administrative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using organizing (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The first three complexity leadership functions, generative, administrative, and community-building, are how people interact or relate in an organization for complex organizing (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The information-related functions of information-gathering and information-using relate to what complex organizing interactions are about (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Generative leadership encompasses the complexity mechanism of emergence and enables adaptation, innovation, and creativity. Administrative leadership involves the complexity mechanism of entrainment and institutes efficiency, roles, and responsibilities in an organization (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community-building covers the complexity mechanism of belonging and promotes an organization's shared identity, engagement, and trust (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Information-gathering involves integrating and synthesizing complex mechanisms and assessing individuals' ability to sense and comprehend relevant organizational information (Hazy & Uhl-

Bien, 2015). Finally, information-using enables the ratcheting complexity mechanism and uses

the knowledge gathered through the integration and synthesis mechanism to move the

organization forward (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Complexity Leadership-Based Functions

Generative Leadership. Generative leadership concerns the complex organizing

processes of influencing and facilitating fine-grain interactions among individuals in a CAS and

the emergent coarse-grain properties (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Surie & Hazy, 2006). Generative

leadership influences the fine-grain interactions that occur daily in organizational social

interactions, and it is through the daily social interchanges that a variety of coarse-grain

properties are produced for the organization's benefit (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Generative

leadership catalyzes organizational adaptability, resilience, and exploration to find new solutions

and processes for challenging problems by enabling adaptation, innovation, and creativity. The

complexity mechanism of emergence is a central characteristic of generative leadership (Hazy &

Uhl-Bien, 2015). Emergence is an essential element of complexity science. It is how new

complex forms emerge through bottom-up interactions versus top-down direction (Goldstein,

2010). Through networked fine-grain interactions, tacit information, corporate knowledge, and

shared experiences emerge to create new ideas and information through collective innovation,

creativity, and an active learning environment (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Arena & Uhl-Bien,

2016; Hatchuel, 2001; Simon, 2001; March & Simon, 1958).

Generative leadership influences the daily organizational fine-grain interactions and

changes the interactions to boost the variety of coarse-grain properties (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Generative leadership looks at adaptability, resilience, and exploration to find new solutions and

processes by establishing high goals and organizational constraints for future products, services,

and processes. This is accomplished without micromanaging the operation and by assembling diverse experiences and viewpoints, supporting differences of opinion, and encouraging a learning environment that is open-minded to success and failure (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Generative Leadership in the Church during COVID-19. Generative leadership was an essential part of responding to the unpredictability and uncertainty of the pandemic health crisis (Cho, 2021; Pourdehnad et al., 2020; Klasche, 2020; Worley & Jules, 2020; Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020). Shortly after COVID-19 became a global pandemic, church communities went from communal face-to-face worship to no-contact virtual worship church leaders in less than a week (Stetzer, 2022a). The federal and local government sanctions restricted and discouraged the church from meeting and challenged local churches to expand their creative and innovative capability to minister to the church community outside of the brick-and-mortar church (Cho, 2021; Mpofu, 2021; Beukes, 2020; Cormode, 2020; Pillay, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Wright, 2020).

Church leaders challenged by these restrictions used adaptive behaviors and embraced an active learning environment of innovation and creativity to keep the congregation virtually connected and interacting with each other (Jackson & Williams, 2021). Through the crisis, churches learned innovative skills and developed new operational processes to deliver virtual, recorded, and outdoor sermons, provide home-delivered care packages for parents to continue kids' ministries, and organize weekly life group meetings to stay connected (Francis, 2021; Jackson & Williams, 2021). Jackson and Williams (2021) examined churches' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergent adaptations produced. Several churches learned how to install and operate new online technological capabilities to enable virtual connection for communal worship and help to reduce lockdown isolation for the church community (Jackson &

Williams, 2021). Francis (2021) researched churches in the Northeast United States to understand church leaders' lived experiences and innovative solutions during the virus. One central message emerged through the research survey and informal dialogues: the church must be innovative and flexible to continue reaching people through live streaming as an outreach prospect (Francis, 2021).

  Administrative Leadership. According to Lichtenstein et al. (2007), administrative leadership is the traditional management control function influencing organizational performance and operations. Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) indicate that entrainment and convergence, administrative leadership interactions, and behaviors help establish order and stability through efficiency and coarse-grain properties. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) posit that administrative interactions implement effective entrainment through organizational policies and processes that align corporate structures and systems. Entrainment policies help the organization achieve common goals through deadlines and deliverables and constrain resources (Hazy & Prottas, 2018). Entrainment policies and procedures establish specific deadlines, dependencies, and deliverables; constrain discretionary resources to underpin practical project completion; provide clarity on organizational roles; establish stimulating and achievable goals and objectives for the organization; and allocate resources such as project plans and budgets (Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Fine-grain interactions are constrained to reinforce coarse-grain properties in the CAS through the complex entrainment mechanism to converge actions toward dynamic stability, objectives, and goal achievement (Hazy, 2013). Administrative leadership drives the organization toward structure, administrative control, resource management, and resource allocation (Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Administrative Leadership in the Church during COVID-19. Administrative leadership was part of the church before COVID-19 and was influential during COVID-19. There are multiple books on church administration and guiding church structure, establishing organizational strategy, implementing church ministries, and controlling church programs (Tumblin, 2017; Welch, 2011). Church administration correlates to Hazy and Uhl-Bien's (2015) administrative leadership function by providing dynamic organizational stability through coarse-grain properties of standards, rules, and processes. According to Welch (2011), church administration is designed to identify the church's organizational structure, strategy, purpose, statement of faith, charter, objectives, and overall goals. It also controls and regulates church activities, programs, committees, councils, and ministries through policies and procedures to ensure it operates legitimately and spiritually (Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985).

Furthermore, church administration ensures clarity for roles, authority, accountability, and delegation for efficient and effective operations (Welch, 2011; Tidwell, 1985). Church administration includes financial management of church finances and budgets, human capital management of staff and personnel, facilities management of buildings and grounds, and technology management (Tumblin, 2017; Welch, 2011; Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985). Administrative leadership entrains church committees and boards through established church policies and procedures and clarifies church staff and lay leaders' roles, responsibilities, and authorities for efficient church operations (Welch, 2011; Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985). Church administration also converges church operations through financial stewardship, management accountability, budget controls, and resource and human capital management (Tumblin, 2017; Welch, 2011; Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985).

Warren (2022) and Pierce (2020) indicate that COVID-19 disrupted the world and created pre- and post-COVID viewpoints. Before COVID-19, in-church attendance steadily declined, while those who reported never attending church or only occasionally increased (Kinnaman, 2022; Stetzer, 2022b). Post-COVID-19 affected the church through the loss of social connectedness, reduced church attendance, tithing, and church closures. This has caused a dual concern for the church leaders. The first concern is the effective operation of the church as an institution due to reduced tithing and volunteerism (Kinnaman, 2022). The second concern is the empty pews due to the impact of COVID-19 and the comfort and safety of online hybrid worship services (Stetzer, 2022b). Administrative leadership will play a vital role post-COVID as churches are challenged to determine what programs and activities are needed with the remaining faithful few and those that need to be eliminated to sustain church operations (Harney, 2022; Rainer, 2020; Cormode, 2020). Administrative leadership should look at the need for ongoing programs, ministries, and activities, assess their viability, and decide whether to maintain or eliminate them to ensure the maximum effectiveness of available resources (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016).

Community-Building Leadership. The community-building function is an invaluable complexity leadership function. Community-building leadership interactions and practices cover the complexity mechanism of belonging and promoting a shared identity, engagement, and trust in an organization (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community-building, which incorporates the belonging mechanism, promotes shared organizational citizenship behaviors, cultural identification, social engagement, and social capital (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community-building is a complex organizing function that uses day-to-day information, communication, and

social interactions to reinforce organizational policies, values, and goals to create an inspiring collective identity (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Hazy, 2013).

Community-building leadership is a unifying function that uses fine-grain interactions to emphasize coarse-grain organizational values and identity by articulating an inspiring vision with shared values and goals (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Communication is essential for teamwork, building trust, and creating a vision and shared purpose that people can believe in, commit to, and embrace to make their own (Narofsky, 2015). Momeny and Gourgues (2019) and Kornaki and Caruso (2007) posit that a leader with excellent communication and emotional intelligence skills can inspire, improve team strength, and successfully lead their team. Community-building takes time and requires leaders to establish trust and make people feel appreciated, essential, and key team members (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Narofsky, 2015; Hazy, 2013).

Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) posit that the central organizing theme is to create a feeling of belonging and collective shared identity through community-bonding rituals and activities to enable complex organizing. Strong teams resonate around a shared purpose to produce consistent relationships to achieve team or organizational goals (Narofsky, 2015; Narofsky, 2013; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Community-building embraces the diversity of people and viewpoints to create a community of shared values and collective identity (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community building creates an inclusive and trustworthy culture where employees are willing to invest their lives into the organization, promotes trust by sharing resources, and makes employees feel valued and essential (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Community-Building Leadership in the Church during COVID-19. Church fellowship correlates to Hazy & Uhl-Bien's (2013) community-building leadership function of belonging and shared identity through shared values, purpose, and trust. God's design for the

community is a body of believers who grow and sharpen each other in a deeply connected

relationship as the body of Christ (ESV, 2001, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 2:11-22,

Hebrews 13). Pettit (2008) stated that Christians are the body of believers connected in the

community through Jesus Christ's body, and the connective tissue of Christ points to the fact that

the church is a living organism that connects us to grow in spiritual formation and worship

through a community of believers (Pettit, p. 25, 2008; Bramer, 2007). Spiritual formation occurs

within a church community by mature Christians helping immature believers grow and develop

(Wilhoit, 2008; Bramer, 2007). Community-building leadership interactions were tested during

the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated earlier, fear was a significant element during the COVID-19

pandemic. Ross (2021) illustrates that COVID-19 changed people's lives; it disrupted daily life,

created anxiety, fear, and panic, and established new relational patterns for social interaction.

Individuals were anxious and frightened by the effects of the virus and were looking for hope

amid despair. Hope is found in the Scripture and the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ (Ross, 2021).

A persistent need for connectivity between church leaders and the congregation was a

fundamental discovery that became a leadership strategy in the case study by Jackson and

Williams (2021). The pandemic identified the social dynamics of connecting as the body of

Christ to maintain the church community's social connectivity and the need to adapt leadership

strategies to meet the complexity of the challenge (Jackson & Williams, 2021). The church is a

CAS and a living organism filled with the Holy Spirit. It is a unified body of Christ with many

diverse parts (Elkington et al., 2015; Elkington, 2011).

Social Network Enabled Functions

The following two information-related functions, information-gathering and information-

using, emphasize what the interactions are concerned with and how information flowing through

organizational networks influences and affects organizations. Social networks are the nexus of interconnected relationships, encompassing and facilitating creativity, communication exchange pathways, and meaningful dialogue (Goldstein et al., 2010; Hazy et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The body of Christ is the people called out to preach the Good News to the ends of the earth (Erickson, 2015; Avery & Gaede, 2007).

Information-Gathering Interactions. Information-gathering recognizes new information through fine-grain interactions and makes sense of the information and its relevance to the organization. The function encourages learning, discernment, and pattern recognition to discover new information, identify communication patterns, and encourage the collective sharing of corporate knowledge and information (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2105). Information-gathering from fine-grain interactions allows frank dialogue exchanges to comprehend and understand (sensemaking/sensegiving) the emerging patterns at the coarse-grain level (Högberg, 2021; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Wieck, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005; Wieck et al., 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)

According to Martinez and Aldrich's (2011) research, leaders can reduce uncertainty and ambiguity by establishing diverse networking connections and increasing information exchange to increase organizational opportunities. Relational networking, information sharing, and knowledge exchange increased sustainability in business operations (O'Donnell, 2014). Leadership emerges through communication and meaningful dialogue from the social networking process of networked interactions and organizational dynamics. Information-gathering allows reflective dialogue exchanges to understand and learn from new information about the organization's emerging patterns at the coarse-grain level (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Hazy, 2013). Information-gathering collects new information from exploration and learning

expeditions that challenge assumptions and the status quo through leadership and social interactions. The function encourages a learning environment that enables exploration and experimentation to discover new information, promotes frank and honest dialogue about what is working or not working in the organization, and encourages cross-team dialogue and cross-organization collaboration (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2105).

Information-gathering interactions in the Church during COVID-19. God's mission is accomplished through the church's complex network of social relationships, both endogenously and exogenously. The Gospel of salvation and redemption is spread through the social interactions of the church member's dialogue and express opinions and ideas through formal and informal social networks and information exchanges (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Hansen et al., 2011; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). Jackson and Williams (2021) identified a persistent pattern of the need to stay connected during COVID-19. The pandemic identified the need for the body of Christ to sustain their connectedness and fellowship to reduce the anxiety and panic from the isolation of the pandemic (Jackson & Williams, 2021).

The information exchange should be multimodal and integrated into formal and informal social networks to ensure necessary communication and messages are transmitted (Stevanović & Gmitrović, 2015). During COVID-19, church leaders used several communication processes, ZOOM®, MICROSOFT Teams®, telephone, email, text, and social media to gather information to maintain the church's socio-spiritual connectivity to provide hope and make sense of the uncertainty and ambiguity of the COVID-19 pandemic (Widjaja et al., 2021; Jackson & Williams, 2021; Francis, 2021).

Information-Using Interactions. Information-using functions through fine-grain interactions will transmit direction and implement new coarse-grain properties to better the

organization's ecosystem (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The information-using function combines collected information and shared intelligence (sensemaking/sensegiving) to enhance operations and establish order and stability (Hazy, 2013; Weick et al., 2005). Organizational communication is a dynamic and complex process of creating and transmitting information, messages, and expectations that flow through formal and informal communication networks (Stevanović & Gmitrović, 2015). The key to organizational communication success is a top-down and bottom-up information-gathering and information-using exchange process that engages the entire organization through collaborative fine-grain interactions to create a meaningful dialogue (Drescher & Garbers, 2016; Stevanović & Gmitrović, 2015; Lichtenstein et al. 2006).

Dialogue helps build trust and respect and treats people as humans, not just workers. Trust and respect, not fear, are preconditions for open communication and authentic dialogue. Establishing mutually influencing intrapersonal relationships between leaders and followers creates the necessary trust bond to be effective (Zornoza et al., 2009; Drath, 2001). According to Friedrich et al. (2016), communication is the heart and lifeblood of an organization, and the network is the artery through which all information and knowledge flow. Learning environments allow people to apply their experience and knowledge gathered to change the organization (Woodward, 2012). Information-using leadership interactions and practices enable the ratcheting complexity mechanism and use the knowledge gathered through the integration and synthesis mechanism to move the organization forward (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Information-using takes the gathered information and intelligence to stabilize an organization and drive sustainable operational performance (Hazy, 2013).

Information-using and ratcheting complexity mechanisms drive accountability in resource allocation decisions. It uses delegation of authority in resources and organizational

responsibilities to influence successful outcomes. The function assists in recruiting, selecting, and hiring the right people for each job and clarifies each role and responsibility for successful organizational outcomes. Furthermore, information-using assesses organizational success and failure by understanding, changing, and controlling company personnel and roles through processes and procedures (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Information-Using Interactions in the Church during COVID-19. During the pandemic, the information-using function empathized with the isolated congregation members and provided the church insight, direction, strength, and hope through Scriptures, sermons, and informal messages. Ross (2021) suggests that empathy and awareness of people's feelings, desires, and thoughts are necessary leadership qualities in a crisis. Hebrews 10:23-25 provides insight and comfort for many during COVID-19.

> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Moreover, let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching (ESV, 2001).

Social Network Dynamics

To study how social network dynamics shape the connectivity and information flow of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams' collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, an explanation of social networks and how social networks are essential to understanding the social dynamics and information flow inside an organization.

Social Network

Hanneman and Riddle (2005) identify a social network as a set of actors with relational ties that influence the actors' relationships. The individual's social density depends on the number of relationships the person interacts and connects with within the ecosystem. The robustness of the interconnectedness within a social network depends on the social density of the connections

and interactions (Freeman, 2004). Each agent participates in the organizational leadership interaction process and interacts as a data node in the neural network to receive and transmit information. Social networks are functional interactive relationships created from disparate and diverse connections (Capra, 2005). Social networks are complex and can vary in scope, characteristics, and dynamics. They require collaborative and cooperative interactions to produce the requisite relational dynamics to produce feedback in the system (Scott, 2017; Christakis & Fowler, 2009).

Moreover, the feedback shifts the focus of the relationships towards an expected behavior, idea, or spiritual formation as interactions occur within a social network to produce a social contagion (Aral, 2010). Social contagion is the concept that individuals follow the same ideas, sentiments, and behaviors with those they communicate with and in their social network (Aral, 2010). Social network dynamics, rich connections, agent interactions, and interdependent relationships are essential for CAS (Hazy et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The social network is cybernetic since feedback is essential to its structural survival (Freeman, 2004). Complexity leadership operates in and through the social dynamics of social networks to create an active engagement culture (Goldstein et al., 2010). Christakis and Fowler (2009) identify a social network as a group of individuals who intentionally connect and are like-minded in thought and behavior to create a unique network that, as a whole, is greater than its separate parts (p. 9). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) and Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) posit that leadership emerges from the dynamic interactions within a social network of interconnected agents.

Information Flow

Information is the lifeblood of a living organism and an organization and provides autopoiesis, self-organization, and feedback loops for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems

monitoring (Wheatley, 2006; Gleick, 1996). Information has value and takes on many forms and is an essential part of open systems and sustaining life for open systems, for without information, entropy emerges, and death occurs (Johnson et al., 2013; Wheatley, 2006, 1968; Levin, 2005). Network theory studies structures, functions, dynamics, and the development of interactive processes that enable information flow, feedback loops, and effective dialogue (Borgatti et al., 2018; Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010; Freeman, 2004; Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Network theory concerns network information flow, and Friedrich et al. (2009) view information flow as essential to leadership and network dynamics. The more relationships or ties that occur amongst the nodes or people, the richer the connectedness of the network (Borgatti et al., 2018). People in network relationships have access to information and can control the information distribution and use in the network (Friedrich et al., 2009). CLT postulates that organizations act as CAS with embedded heterogeneous social agents interacting to create a social network that shares and gathers information to generate innovation, collaboration, and trust (Lichtenstein, 2016; Psychogios & Garev, 2012; Reeves & Deimler, 2011).

Carley (1999) describes fine-grain interactions as the act of humans in a social network who share, diffuse, and decide which information is essential to the network. Schrieber and Carley (2008) theorize that organizations discover, adjust, and acquire knowledge through social network interactions and social capital relationships. The collaboration of heterogenous people within a collective context affects information flow and allows organizational change to emerge and establish creativity, learning, and adaptability (Schrieber & Carley, 2008). Information transmission is necessary for leadership and network dynamics.

Hazy and Backström (2014) state that constant human interaction dynamics across the CAS are necessary to grow organizational ecosystems. Goldstein et al. (2010) indicate that an

essential element of a social network is the structure or topology and the node-to-node connection pattern. Network topology influences how information is shared and used within an organizational ecosystem (Goldstein et al., 2010). The social network is a set of nodes, ties, links, and edges that enable a culture of idea creation, innovation, communication, and dialogue through active agent interaction and engagement (Goldstein et al., 2010). Nodes represent the actor or agent in a social network, while relational ties, links, or edges represent the relationship between the actors or agents (Hansen et al., 2011).

Relationships and Information in a Church Social Network

Relationships and information flow shape and govern the structure and function of the Church and its members and shape the viability of its social networks (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). According to Elkington (2011), locally and globally, churches are CAS and living organisms that are open, interrelated, and connected dynamic systems. The living organism approach aligns with the scriptural view of the body of Christ as a living body of interconnected and interdependent believers comprising the many parts and gifts of the Spirit, all necessary for the Church to fellowship, evangelize, and teach to the end of the age (Erickson, 2015; Pearcey, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Wilhoit & Dettoni, 1995; ESV, 2001, Acts 2:1; Matthew 28:18-20).

Through this open and dynamic system, church members continuously receive and process information and then use it to influence, transform, or retransmit it into the system (Campbell & Garner, 2016). This reciprocal interconnected relationship creates the opportunity for spiritual development, growth, and innovation (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Uhl-Bien, 2013). Churches are a process of human interactions, energy exchange, and information sharing that creates a community of believers who work together to spread the Good News of the saving

work of Jesus Christ (Stanton, 2019). The interactive social networks are clusters of individuals across the Church capable of problem-solving, adaptation, learning, and emergent behaviors in social systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Lowe and Lowe (2018) describe social networking relationships as connections and fine-grain interactions of people in organizational, familial, and local communities and the body of Christ.

Pettit (2008) defines this as a "spiritual complexity of interrelation, interconnectedness of ecological rhythms, through social, human, natural and spiritual connections" (pp. 21-22). As people connect, interact, and share information through small church groups (micro-social networks), such as life groups, men's prayer groups, women's ministries, and student ministries, they share spiritual nutrients to develop individual and corporate spiritual formation and grow into mature Christlikeness and stay grafted into the Vine (Pettit, 2008). Ecologically, the intricate process requires a connection to Jesus Christ, the Vine's life source, and the interaction with the life-shaping power or energy of the Holy Spirit and fellow Christians to create growth and development for spiritual maturity (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Black & Smith, 2003).

In John 15:9-10 (ESV, 2001), Jesus tells his followers that he is the Vine and source of life and fruitfulness. When followers abide in Christ, they bear fruit but can do nothing without Christ. Spiritual formation produces the fruit of Christlikeness through the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of formal and informal social networks (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Black & Smith, 2003). Believers are nodes in an existing macro-level network comprising God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Universal Church, the local Church, and other believers to create an authentic community or ecosystem (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Pettit, 2008). The connections and fine-grain interactions refine and develop an individual to become more Christlike (Pettit, 2008, p. 44).

It is not the nodes that are important but the relationship (*fine-grain interactions*) between the nodes that create the patterns and energy for the complex adaptive system of the church (Black & Smith, 2003). People in the fine-grain interaction process interrelate as data nodes in a social network to receive and transmit information throughout an organization. The agent interactions, organizational interdependence, and adaptive tensions are dynamic in a CAS (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). The nutrient-sharing process is the same in a church. The spiritual nutrients and resource sharing occur in the fine-grain interaction of small group ministries, such as life groups, men's prayer groups, and women's ministries, which are nested inside a church to create an ecosystem. The spiritual nutrients are further shared corporately within the Church during worship gatherings, church socials, and church-wide fellowship (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 181).

Summary of Theoretical Framework

This theoretical section analyzed Complexity Leadership to establish the research foundation for the study. Rainer (2020) noted that it is essential that church leaders comprehend and learn to adapt to the post-COVID church to create sustainable and survivable church strategies. Churches are driven by complex interactive mechanisms that require requisite complexity leadership interactions that match the complexity and non-linearity of a dynamic and complex environment to manage organizational effectiveness while leading for adaptability simultaneously (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Horney et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien et al. 2007; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Ashby, 1956). The deterministic chaos of complexity, nonlinearity, disruption, and discontinuous change are complex variables that leaders must be capable of dealing with during a crisis. Furthermore, the crisis can "threaten to disrupt a system, structure, a way of doing/living, accepted values and people" (Veldsman, 2020, p 45).

Related Literature

Bolsinger (2015) describes how leaders today, especially church leaders, must understand leadership's dynamic, uncertain, and uncharted territory. Warren (2021) theorizes that complexity is ever-present in Christian life and is seen in the complexities of God's creation and how God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit interact with humanity (p. 23). Warren (2021) breaks down complex issues, biblical and scientific, into simple explanations about how and why things happen in the world. She uses the COVID-19 pandemic to examine what Biblical and Christian theology indicates about causation, including free will, God's sovereignty, natural processes, divine and demonic forces, and sin.

General Systems Theory

General Systems Theory (GST) is a methodology for understanding and learning how relationships exist between the whole systems and the subsystems. Instead of being unorganized or chaotic, Bertalanffy (1968) viewed the physical and social world as a hierarchical and structured complex. Each subordinate system is connected to each system level to create an integrated whole (Kalantari, 2010; Bertalanffy, 1968). GST is the study of open systems, living systems, and social structures to understand the information processing relationships and the synergy of the system through the means of exchange in the system, between the system and its subsystems, and the interaction and connectivity to the environment (Bertalanffy, 1968, 1952, 1950; Waldrop, 1992). According to Bertalanffy (1968), it does not matter if it is an economic, political, or digestive system; it is defined as interacting or interdependent elements that create a unified whole. Systems are also found in biological systems and human systems (*organizations, families, and society*). Most artificial, biological, or human systems are structurally complex and hierarchal with discernable, nearly decomposable parts (Simon, 2005).

According to Simon (2005), complexity can be found everywhere in the universe and is perceived as a hierarchical structure of complex, constantly interconnected, and interacting systems. At the micro-level of complexity are elementary particles of neutrons, electrons, and protons, the decomposable parts of atoms. At the meso-level of complexity, individuals, families, and tribes are decomposable parts of society (Morabito et al., 2009; Simon, 2001, 2005). Finally, at the macro-level of complexity, planets, stars, and galaxies are decomposable parts of the Universe (Simon, 2001, 2005; 1976).

Simon's (2005) hierarchy of systems theory posits that each system (*society, organization, individual, or molecule*) is an information processing system that is decomposable into subsystems, and each subsequent subsystem is related to the next level of subsystem through a relationship of interconnectivity (Morabito et al., 2009; Simon, 2001, 2005). A system (*society, organization, individual, or molecule*) is nearly decomposable if its disparate attributes cannot be decomposed entirely (Simon 2005). Furthermore, systems become increasingly complex and connected when the aggregate interactions among each component increase endogenously in a system and exogenously with its environment (Wheatley, 2006; Simon, 1978).

Simon's (2005) concept is relevant to the organizational team dynamics and the social interactions among teams that create innovative and creative ideas through exchanging information and data. Simon (1978) defined complex systems as "made up of a large number of parts that interact…the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (p. 468). Human life, societies, organizations, economies, and individuals are complex information systems decomposable into subsystems and their component elements (Augier, 2002). Each component element and subsystem are not more significant than the system as a whole in a synergistic relationship designed for effectiveness and efficiency (Simon, 1962).

God and Complexity

Scripturally, Creation is a set of interacting or interdependent elements that create a unified whole of God's plan for salvation and redemption starting in Genesis through Revelation (Avery & Gaede, 2007; Bertalanffy, 1968). God creates life (ESV, 2001, Genesis 1:1-31), God reconciles life through Christ (ESV, 2001; John 10:11; Colossians 1:1-15), and through Christ, a new Heaven and Earth will be created (ESV, 2001, Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). Knight (2006), God is the creator of all life and all truth, which includes the sciences. Colossians 1:16 points to the fact that everything is God's creation. They have an interconnected relationship with one another and humankind. Colossians 1:16 further describes this relationship God created of interconnected systems that are interactive and connected through networks to worship God, and He holds all life together.

> For by him, all things were created, visible and invisible in heaven and on earth, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things; in him, all things hold together (ESV, 2001).

According to Avery & Gaede (2007), rocks, stars, humans, and reality are interconnected and related through the same DNA because they have been created by the hand of God. Levin (1998) posits that God designed the global biosphere as multiple ecosystems comprised of all living organisms, including human life, insect life, plant life, land, sea, air, and animal life. Nothing exists or can exist without Jesus Christ. All life is made and held together through Him (ESV, 2001, Colossians 1:16-17). The dynamic structures of a complex physical world are hierarchical, and each subordinate system is connected to each level to create an integrated whole (Bertalanffy, 1968, 1952, 1950; ESV, 2001, Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8; Psalm 148).

God created the systems, subsystems, and component elements that Simon (1962) viewed as hierarchal and decomposable. Everything God created--rocks, humans, and galaxies--connect

and interact within the global biosphere (Avery & Gaede, 2007). The multiple ecosystems consist of numerous biological systems, interconnected and interdependent, to instigate, encourage, and reward growth (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 29). Preiser et al. (2018) indicate that the global biosphere comprises intertwined social-ecological complex adaptive systems. Human beings are a part of this complex ecosystem, and rich self-organizing interactions form social connections and interconnected relationships that interact, share, and respond to information that emerges from positive and negative feedback loops (Lewin & Regine, 2003; Regine & Lewin, 2000).

Complex Adaptive Systems and Christian Life

According to Black and Smith (2003), complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory can demonstrate a Christian's growth to maturity. Black and Smith (2003) propose ten CAS principles as a lens for Christians to understand the world using Biblical and Christian ideology for sensemaking and sensegiving (Högberg, 2021). One can integrate the principles to understand God's Word through complexity theories and dynamic systems. CAS is essential in comprehending how complex and interconnected the world is and how this complex design points directly to Christ, "Who is the foundation of all things and holds all things together" (Black & Smith, 2003; ESV, 2001; Colossians 1:16-17). Black and Smith (2003) argue that Christ made all things, including the basic principles of complex systems. Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, the Living Word of Life, is the sustainer and giver of life. Without Christ's salvation and life gift, man will die without hope (Hall et al., 2010). The Scriptures, God's written Word, is information and energy that provides autopoiesis, adaptation, resilience, and feedback loops that give the system, or humankind, self-monitoring, and life (Hall et al., 2010; Warren, 2021).

A CAS is an adaptive structure of an interactive network of people. Elkington (2013) views churches, locally and globally, as complex adaptive systems and living organisms. The church is a socio-spiritual organization and a living organism of interconnected and interrelated human relationships that connect through networks that transmit necessary spiritual nutrients (Bolsinger, 2018; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Erickson, 2015).

According to Black & Smith (2003), people are nodes in God's network, and the relationship with God and fellow Christians identifies us. Believers are nodes in a network that consists of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the universal Church, the local church, and other believers to create an authentic community or ecosystem of diverse believers in a nested CAS (Preiser et al., 2018; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Pettit, 2008). The key to the network is not the nodes but the faith connections (*fine-grain interactions*) that create Christlike love relationships. The energy exchanged in the connection is love and the spiritual nutrients Christians receive from the vine (*Christ*) and each Christian relationship (Black & Smith, 2003; ESV, 2001, Ephesians 2:10). Carley (1999) describes fine-grain interactions as the act of humans in a social network who share, diffuse, and decide which information is essential to the network. Information is a product and the enabling energy that stimulates social interactions between agents in an organization's macro, meso, and micro levels (Bolibar, 2015; Johnson et al., 2013). The Scriptures portray the church as an organic living system of believers and a body made of many parts (ESV, 2001, Acts 2:1; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; 1 Peter 1:1). The Scriptures in Ephesians 4 describe the complex adaptive system and organism properties of the Body of Christ and the Church.

> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift…And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature

manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (ESV, 2001, Ephesians 4:4-6, 11-13).

The whole body of Christ, with its joints and sinew fused and intertwined, is more significant than the individual parts. Despite the diversity of the body parts, it is a unified whole. The church is a complex adaptive system and a living organism filled with the Holy Spirit and is a unified whole consisting of many diverse parts, creating the priesthood of believers to establish the body of Christ (Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Elkington et al., 2015). Each believer is a node and link in the network of Christians in the local church and participates in ministries to build up the body in Christ (Elkington et al., 2015). Through fine-grain interactions, Christians directly and indirectly share Christ's love and can influence another person's perception (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Black & Smith, 2003).

Emergence and Christianity

In complexity and chaos sciences, emergence creates unexpected novelty, new structures, and unpredictable, emergent patterns (Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). The world is a complex adaptive system; it acts unpredictably and dynamically, creating adaptivity and emergence to sustain life. A new way emerged throughout Christ's three-year ministry through His message, teachings, death on the cross, and resurrection (ESV, 2001, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts). His ministry shaped the Apostles and disciples into a complex adaptive system that would carry His message to the world.

The emergence of Jesus Christ on earth was a complex emergent event that changed the world forever (ESV, 2001, Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18). His life was predicted in the Scripture, but how His ministry emerged and developed was unpredictable (ESV, 2001, Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Ezekial 34:23). The Jewish nation was looking for a conquering King, and what they received was a Living Savior. His ministry emerged, creating a new trajectory for Man's

relationship with God. The Gospel or New Covenant challenged the Pharisees and Sadducees' written sanctimonious laws and statutes with the *Logos* and a loving God (ESV, 2001, Matthew 4:4; John 6:63). The Pharisees and Sadducees' linear stability and hierarchical order spiraled into disequilibrium when Christ emerged and began His ministry. Jesus and His message created disequilibrium and challenges for the Sanhedrin, creating tension and conflict that led to His Crucifixion (ESV, 2001, Matthew 26:57-64).

Throughout the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the Pharisees and Sadducees sought ways to trap, discourage, and falsely accuse Christ to reestablish order through rabbinical and Roman law. During Jesus' ministry, the Sanhedrin failed to understand that the world is dynamic, systemic, and nonlinear and is always in constant emergence and entropy (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Gleick, 1996; Ashby, 1958). New life begins as other life ends (ESV, 2001, Isaiah 42:8-9). The Resurrection of Jesus was not a predicted outcome by the Sanhedrin or Romans and acted as a point attractor that drew people to Him through His message of unconditional love, abundant grace, loving mercy, and the gift of salvation. Despite crucifying Christ, which the Sanhedrin believed would end the chaos to their order, they created a nonlinear bifurcation or liminality that enabled a small change to begin that resulted in significant effects and the Christian faith to emerge (Obolensky, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). Jesus' ministry and message created a butterfly effect that is still shaping today (Obolensky, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). The small beginnings in Galilee produced significant systemic changes that initiated cascading global effects as the message of redemption and salvation spread (Obolensky, 2014; Gleick, 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit arrived, the Church emerged and transformed from a Jerusalem-centric ministry to a worldwide ministry through Christ's Resurrection, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues (ESV, 2001). A phase transition expanded Christ's ministry from only the Jewish nation to the Gentile nations. Barabasi (2014) posits that the Apostle Paul established the Christian social network by increasing the network of house churches across the Roman Empire. "Paul was a master of first-century social and religious links, the only network at the beginning of the modern era that could carry and spread a faith" (Reed, 2015; Barabasi, 2014, p. 5). His compassionate concern for his people and all Christ-followers engendered trust, respect, and love among his team members and social network (Ascough & Cotton, 2005). The self-organization of the Apostles, Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Timothy, and the disciples spread the Good News throughout the old world, bringing new believers to Christ. Through Paul's ministry, new believers began to emerge, self-organize, build relationships, and establish new structures and order through interconnecting networks of house churches (Crowell & Boynton, 2020; Wheatley, 2006; Capra, 2002).

According to Reed (2015), these small world churches grew from simple church social structures into complex apostolic networks with significant hubs in Antioch, Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Galatia, Philadelphia, Sardis, Laodicea, Pergamum, Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossae, Smyrna, Troas, and finally, Rome, to spread the life-changing message of Christ and establish a new worldview for each city's believers of the way (ESV, 2001, Acts 13:1-3, 24-28; Acts 16:1-15; Acts 17:1-8; Acts 18:1-4; Acts 9:1-6; Acts 28:17-18).

Finally, Paul created an information flow and processing network through his messenger, relationships, and his Epistles to gather and use the information to shape and govern the structure

and function of the Church, even while in prison (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; ESV, 2001, Galatians, Ephesians, Corinthians, Colossians, Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and Romans).

Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA)

Using a Christian perspective, a Christian leader can look beyond secular strategies and deeper into the VUCA and understand how God and VUCA connect. Van Wynen and Niemandt (2020) explain that Christian leaders must develop a VUCA mindset based on God. Their research incorporates God's character's appreciation, VUCA experiences and language assessment, and leadership responsibilities and prospects. VUCA is a military acronym first developed at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to describe the global tectonic shifts and changes regarding threats and opportunities for global security, economics, market, and workforce conditions (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Johansen, 2007). The acronym describes the conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Volatility is the instability, speed, magnitude, and scale of change that unexpectedly and significantly impacts events creating disorder (Horney et al., 2010). A church leader needs the requisite variety of leadership capabilities to match the complexity and dynamics of the world (Elkington et al., 2015).

COVID-19 Pandemic

Starting in January 2020, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which causes coronavirus disease 19 or COVID-19, disrupted and transformed how people lived, worked, and worshiped together (Felman, 2021; Cho, 2021; Corpuz & Sarmiento, 2021; Kandola, 2020). It started as a regional health crisis in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The virus rapidly spread across the planet as human carriers transported the virus through the international transportation nodes of airports, cruise ships, and train systems to every country on

the earth (Boaheng, 2021; Felman, 2021; Kandola, 2020; CDC, 2023; JHU, 2023; WHO, 2023; Sturmberg & Martin, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is considered a significant "butterfly effect" and a nonlinear societal disruption the world faces (Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). (Warren, 2021; Cormode, 2020; Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020). The virus was a life-altering event that created death, fear of death, financial loss, relationship problems from isolation, and constant anxiety and panic (Ross, 2021). The emergence of the contactless society and reduced human interactions resulted from isolation and fear of contracting the virus (Ross, 2021; Strusani & Houngbonon, 2021).

In January 2023, three years after the COVID-19 pandemic, it still has a lasting and widespread impact on society (Gleick, 1996; Lorenz, 1963). The virus has changed into multiple deadly variants, infecting 650 million people and causing 6.6 million deaths worldwide (CDC, 2023; WHO, 2023; JHU, 2023).

Complicated versus Complex

A system is complicated if its tasks, relationships, components, and processes can be described and replicated (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Cilliers, 1998). Complicated refers to a repeatable and high technical challenge or task. Building a submarine or a rocket is a complicated task that requires technical and specialized skills to accomplish the linear task. A complicated task is a repeatable building process despite being highly complicated. Nason (2017) posits that complexity is the systemic, interrelated, and unpredictable relationships, tasks, and operating environments. A system is complex if its tasks and relationships cannot be simplified because the components are constantly in flux (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Cilliers, 1998). A complex challenge is a multidimensional, interconnected, and interdependent challenge that is nonlinear, dynamic, and unpredictable. COVID-19 is a complex event, a "wicked

problem" that is complex, multidimensional, and interrelated (Allen & West, 2020; Sturmberg & Martin, 2020).

Complex Systems

COVID-19, as described above, meets the five characteristics of Snowden and Boone's (2007) complex systems definition. Snowden and Boone (2007) provide five characteristics that emerge from complex systems' uncertainty and unpredictability. First, complex systems involve many interacting elements. Second, the interactions are nonlinear, and minor changes can produce disproportionately significant consequences. Third, the complex system is dynamic; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and solutions cannot be forced; instead, they arise from the circumstances. This is referred to as emergence. Fourth, the complex system has a history, and the past is intertwined with the present. Moreover, the elements evolve with one another and the environment, and evolution is irreversible. Finally, in retrospect, a complex system may appear ordered and predictable; hindsight does not lead to foresight because the external conditions and systems are ever-changing.

Decision-Making Tools

Two analytical decision-making tools that can help provide clarity and a way forward are the Cynefin framework and Osmer's Heuristic methodology. The Cynefin framework is an academic methodology designed to aid leaders in making decisions in complex conditions. The other is a practical theological analysis method called Osmer's Heuristic methodology. Both methods can provide a solid decision-making foundation for the challenging and unpredictable events of the crisis.

Osmer (2010) describes a practical theological analysis method through four descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks. Osmer's Heuristic methodology uses the

following four questions as a reflective heuristic to guide the discovery process: Descriptive-empirical: "what is going on?", Interpretive: "why is it going on?"; Normative: "what should be going on?"; and Pragmatic: "how might we respond?"

To answer the descriptive-empirical task of "what is going on?" a leader "seeks to gather essential information and data to understand what is occurring and to detect emergent interactions and changes in specific episodes, situations, or contexts" (Osmer, 2010; p. 4). To answer the interpretive task of "Why is it going on?" a leader draws on art and science theories to comprehend and examine these patterns and dynamics (Osmer, 2010, p. 4).

To answer the normative task of "what ought to be going on?" a leader "uses theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from "good practice" (Osmer, 2010, p. 4). To answer the pragmatic task of "how we might respond," a leader seeks to determine strategies and action plans that will affect circumstances in desirable behaviors and enter into thoughtful dialogue with emergent feedback (Osmer, 2010, p. 4).

The Cynefin framework describes five decision-making domains; each signifies a different level of uncertainty and ambiguity in a situation or condition. The domains are disorder, chaotic, complex, complicated, and simple. The Cynefin also uses heuristics to guide the decision-making process. According to Snowden and Boone (2007), the Disorder domain has no clear answer, and a leader must try to break down the situation into problems that can be moved to the other domains to resolve (p. 68).

The Simple domain, also called "The Domain of Best Practice," is the realm of the "known knowns" and requires a leader to Sense, Categorize, and then Respond to the situation (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 71). The Complicated domain, also called "The Domain of

Experts," is the realm of the "known unknowns" and requires a leader to Sense, Analyze, and then Respond to the situation or condition (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 72). The Complex domain, also called the "Domain of Emergence," is the realm of the "unknown unknowns" and requires a leader to Probe, Sense, and then Respond to the challenge of the uncertainty (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 73).

The Chaotic domain, also called "The Domain of Rapid Response," requires a leader to act immediately to restore order and try to move the situation from chaotic to complex and complicated to respond (Snowden & Boone, 2007, p. 73). When used together, these two tools provide leaders with a contextual framework to handle a crisis.

Summary of Related Literature

According to DePree (1989), leadership is a complex, multidimensional, and multifaceted phenomenon, and the first leadership responsibility is to define reality for the people they lead and serve. The team can use their strength and abilities to move forward through the definition of reality. Leadership requires an understanding of inspiration, ingenuity, design, and discipline to lead effectively and passionately in the complexity and ambiguity of the world and crisis. Dailey (2020) asserts that communication is essential for leading a crisis. Communication must be unambiguous so people know what is happening and how to make it through the crisis. Christian leaders should encourage people suffering in crises and seek help to be positive and resilient. Information flow, an iterative process, is essential for an organization to survive daily and during a crisis. The information flow should be multimodal and part of the formal and informal social networks to communicate and dialogue. To reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, in-person, face-to-face, electronic, and social media platforms, mail, email, newsletters, bulletins, text messaging, and telephonic communication can be done. Leading successfully through this dynamic and

challenging time requires complexity leadership interactions and social network dynamics to match the complexity and non-linearity of responding to change in a crisis (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Horney et al., 2010).

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

There is a gap in existing COVID-19 research about the complexity leadership interactions and social network dynamics needed by church leadership to lead through the uncertainty of a global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the necessity for churches and church leaders to adapt to the emergent and continuously changing environment to continue the mutually reciprocal relationship of interconnectedness and interactions of the church community and continue the Great Commission's fulfillment (Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020).

Pastoring during a Pandemic

In their intrinsic case study, Jackson and Williams (2012) investigated the multiple challenges pastoral leaders faced at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and how, through seminar-based collective learning, the pastors learned to adapt and lead in a rapidly changing environment.

The virus destabilized system dynamics and created an unstable state, creating a complex emergent event that generated multiple restrictions, anxiety, confusion, and isolation from the church family. The researchers studied the lived experiences of pastors leading a congregation during a pandemic to identify emerging church practices and explore the use of adaptive leadership processes in a crisis (Jackson & Williams, 2021). The case study was bounded by the eight-week webinar series established by Central Baptist Theological Seminary and Pinnacle Leadership Associates. The average number of participants in each webinar was thirty-eight clergy and church staff from churches in the South and Midwest.

The primary research questions focused on challenges experienced in the early stages of the pandemic, areas of experienced growth by the pastors or congregations, and what leadership strategies were utilized to adapt to the crisis. Amidst the chaos and crisis of COVID-19, church leaders faced the challenges of balancing financial stewardship and stability with internal community connection, external outreach for growth and spreading the Gospel, and innovative ministry connectivity to connect the church community (Jackson & Williams, 2021). Five webinars focused on "church practices of worship, Christian formation, disciple and pastoral care, managing assets, and serving neighbors" (Jackson & Williams, 2021, p. 157).

Two of the challenges identified as growth areas were learning new technologies to transition to an online presence for worship and keeping the connection to the church community active (Jackson & Williams, 2021). These two areas allowed the church to stay internally connected to the church community during the isolation of the lockdowns and allowed it to connect to a larger community through its online presence (Jackson & Williams, 2021). The pastor's and staff's leadership strategies varied from directive decision-making to collaborative leadership to adapt to the pandemic challenges. As the pandemic progressed, the adaptive leadership process emerged from the lockdowns, which provided adaptive space to adapt and innovate new ways to lead the church. Pastors identified several collaborative and adaptive processes as the pandemic progressed that allowed rapid change, innovation for worship, creative ways for congregation connection, and tools for at-home spiritual formation (Jackson & Williams, 2021).

Pandemic Ministry Responses

Francis (2021) researched through a 14-question questionnaire and informal conversations with ten church leaders in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York to understand

how the church leaders dealt with the COVID-19 crisis. The churches involved in the research included representation from American Baptist, Southern Baptist, and nondenominational churches (Francis, 2021). Through a 14-question questionnaire, Francis (2021) examined the church leader's response to the initial pandemic worship restrictions, how the church adapted via technological and non-technological means, reopening problems, leader and congregation lessons learned, and future ministry implications. Churches in the research identified pandemic restrictions ranging from curfews, social distancing guidelines, mask-wearing, local communal worship and in-person attendance, and lockdowns (Francis, 2021). All churches in the research incorporated digital media to connect to the congregation during the pandemic lockdowns. Media methods ranged from CD/DVD to recorded online sermons and live-streaming worship (Francis, 2021). One church created "micro-churches," which consisted of small groups that gathered outside to watch the live-streamed worship (Francis, 2021, p. 492).

Francis (2021) reminds us that the church is not the building but the people despite this uncertainty and disruption. Maintaining community during the pandemic was an essential leadership element of the churches. The lockdowns changed how the churches could meet in person or corporately, but they did not diminish the spiritual needs of the church (Francis, 2021). Virtually meeting as a church provided opportunities to connect as a church community. The churches developed several innovative ways to keep spiritual formation and discipleship, from providing resources to families for home ministry and weekly ZOOM® Bible studies to "Shepherd Groups" to encourage and keep members connected (Francis, 2021, p. 494). Finally, Francis (2021) provides valuable lessons learned from the study. One lesson was that the church needs to be creative and adaptable to reach people. God can reach people through social media, and churches should leverage technology to meet the community's needs and membership

(Francis, 2021). Another lesson learned is that the church is not a building but a people. Using a

biblical lens, the church is the people who are the body of Christ, not the building (Francis,

2021). Even though the church building was on lockdown, the people were not. It provides a

sense of community and spiritual connection to God and His people. The last lesson to note is

keeping the connection to people to continue the church's discipleship programs despite not

meeting in person to keep the church healthy (Francis, 2021). The church is a people of close

interactive social connections and shared biblical values.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter provided an overview of research topics relevant to this proposed study.

After a comprehensive examination of the theological, theoretical, and related literature on

complexity leadership interactions, social dynamics, and COVID-19, it is evident that this

subject has not been researched due to the novelty of the virus. The impact of COVID-19 on

leading a convention or a church has not been examined in relation to complexity leadership

theory. The theological and theoretical standpoint addressed the questions related to complexity

leadership interactions, social network dynamics, COVID-19, connectivity, and information flow

to establish a framework for the study.

Profile of the Current Study

What are the International Protestant Convention executive leadership team and local

church leaders' lived experiences and leadership challenges during the global COVID-19

phenomenon? Pierce (2020) contends that COVID-19 was a bifurcation point that changed the

world and how we interact with one another, and the church community will feel the impact of

that change during and beyond the crisis. The International Protestant Convention executive

leadership team and local church leaders were confronted and challenged by COVID-19 to

manage and operate the core church practices, preach the Gospel, and create innovative ministry methods to unite the body of believers (Jackson & Williams, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021). What the COVID-19 pandemic did expose was the need for the church to create opportunities for adaptive leadership behaviors and an active learning environment to act upon a constantly changing and complex ecosystem to enable the church's social interaction and spiritual relationships to fulfill Christ's commandment for the church (Widjaja et al., 2021; Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020; Bolsinger, 2015).

The literature examined provides a phenomenological complexity leadership research framework for studying the lived experiences and in-depth perceptions of the Convention and church leadership. Complexity theories and the complex adaptive systems' principles are valuable processes for leaders, Christian and secular, to understand the dynamical systems structures of a complex and unpredictable world where chaos and crisis are ever-present (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Firestone, 2020; Stanton, 2019; Johansen, 2007; Vaill, 1996).

The objective of the research was to discover and understand the leadership successes and failures of leading the convention and their churches in, through, and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of complexity leadership theory (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Veldsman, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Furthermore, the study sought to understand how information flowed before and during the pandemic and to see what complexity leadership interactions emerged when leading through an unplanned and complex crisis (Borgatti et al., 2018; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Friedrich et al., 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Chapter Three provides details of the research methodology for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter investigated the experiences of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams who led in, through, and beyond the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. This chapter provides a synopsis of the research design and procedures, research setting, participant sample, data collection, and data analysis process, and a chapter summary. Qualitative transcendental phenomenological research aligns well with this study because it seeks to describe the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. For this study, it was anticipated that the data collected through this research work would help frame a theoretical perspective to describe the lived experiences of the International Protestant Convention leadership team who led the convention and their congregations in, through, and beyond the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Veldsman, 2020).

Research Design Synopsis

This study used a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design that focused on the lived experiences of the participants who experienced the 2020-2023 COVID-19 phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This section provides an overview of the study's problem, purpose statement, research questions, and research design and methodology.

The Problem

Starting in March 2020, with the World Health Organization (WHO) global pandemic announcement, and ending in May 2023 with the Presidential announcement, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for the churches to adapt to a continuously changing complex environment to fulfill Christ's commandment through the body of Christ (Widjaja et al., 2021; Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020; Bolsinger, 2015). During the pandemic, church leaders were

confronted by a myriad of global restrictions and government lockdown challenges and innovatively developed enduring ministry methods to keep the church operating, pressing on in faith to spread the Gospel and keeping the body of believers connected (Francis, 2021; Jackson & Williams, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021). The virus also stressed the need for and importance of the church community to stay connected as a complex social system and a relational community of believers by trusting in Christ, doing life together, and continuing to be the light in a dark world (Cormode, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Pettit, 2008; Chester & Timmis, 2008).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research was to assess, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Borgatti et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018). The phenomenological study examined how complexity leadership and social network interactions of the International Protestant Convention leadership teams were applied to lead through the global pandemic (Cho, 2021; Pourdehnad et al., 2020; Bolsinger, 2020; Cormode, 2020; Pillay, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Wright, 2020; Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020). The theory guiding this study was Hazy & Uhl-Bien's (2015) operationalizing complexity leadership concept.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ2. What complexity leadership interactions, administrative, generative, community building, and information-gathering and information-using, did the selected participants rely on the most to lead an organization (*church*) through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design approach was selected for this study. Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenological design, emphasized the transcendental or descriptive phenomenology approach (Neubauer et al., 2019; Rodriguez & Smith, 2018; Willis et al., 2016). Transcendental phenomenological research is from a social constructionist epistemology and is a segment of phenomenological research. Husserl's (1962) transcendental phenomenology approach identifies a person's lived experiences or personal consciousness and their meaning and context to their daily life (Neubauer et al., 2019; Lopez & Willis, 2004). The exploratory qualitative phenomenology design allows the researcher to concentrate on individuals' lived experiences to discover the phenomena's essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl (1962) believed that to conduct a phenomenological study, a researcher should be tabula rasa or a blank slate and transcend or suspend all assumptions and biases to understand the phenomena and the essence of the entity's experience (Reiners, 2012). Phenomenological research terms include "epoché, lived experience, bracketing, noesis, noema, transcendental consciousness, and lifeworld" (Adams & Van Manen, 2017, p. 791; Willis et al., 2016). Transcendental phenomenology is research constructed through the participants' eyes and learning about the lived experiences phenomena. The researcher removes themselves and their

bias (*epoché*) from understanding the phenomenon with a fresh perspective and new outlook (Neubauer et al., 2019; Rodriguez & Smith, 2018; Bendall, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

The International Protestant Convention leadership teams' study was a phenomenological dive into the essence of church leaders' lived experiences and leadership insights during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic crisis to find the emergent patterns and themes based on the participants' lived experiences and the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2011). For this reason, an exploratory qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to discover the essence of the lived experiences and the use of complexity leadership interactions of the convention leadership teams (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Smith et al., 2011). The knowledge gained may give church leaders and Christian universities new insights into using complex leadership concepts to lead in an ever-changing world.

Setting

This study's geographic setting was the International Protestant Convention leadership teams (ELT/LCL) who reside in the United States, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Central America, and South America. The International Protestant Convention operates in a complex environment between international policy and law, international and local society, cultural differences, diversity, and economic nuances that can affect the rich interconnectivity and interactions of the church and church community. One-third of the International Protestant Convention churches are comprised primarily of military personnel stationed overseas, and the other churches are international members comprising multiple churches and partners in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America, consisting of 144 Nationalities. The leadership team network consists of 60 members, which includes the executive leadership team and the local church leaders.

Participants

The study's purposeful sample involved 12 International Protestant Convention leadership team members (ELT/LCL) who led during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis to discover the team leaders' lived experiences of leading through the pandemic (Smith et al., 2011). A participant cap was set at 15 respondents to make the research process manageable and to avoid data oversaturation. Purposeful sampling ensured that the researcher's findings represented the desired population compared to other research sampling techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A questionnaire was sent to all convention participants and inquired about demographics, eligibility for the research, and the participant's network connectivity to determine how information flowed in the International Protestant Convention leadership network (Scott, 2017; Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010; Hansen et al., 2011; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005).

After the purposeful sample had been determined for the research, an interview was arranged, and each participant was asked questions concerning complexity leadership interactions and their use during COVID-19. A ZOOM® or video conference capability was conducted with the selected leadership participants. The video capability of ZOOM® was not used to protect the identity of the participants. The conference calls involved eighteen open-ended questions to discover each participant's lived experience, emergent relationships, and persistent themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role as the primary data-gathering instrument in this transcendental phenomenological study was essential because the researcher attended two overseas churches in the International Protestant Convention and understood the dynamics of leading in a multicultural church and the country restrictions the convention and each church must follow

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher attended the churches from 1997 to 2004 and served as a Trustee, Finance Chairman, Deacon, and Deacon Chairman. Despite this knowledge of the convention and church operations, the researcher did not know the selected participants before the study. This statement is important because the researcher and participant co-construct the research in a qualitative research study. As the researcher and participant interact, they construct the research and bring forward the lived experiences of the phenomena, so it was incumbent on the researcher to recognize the possibility of bias based on the foreknowledge of the International Protestant Convention.

The researcher took measures to reduce and recognize the influence of bias and used the transcendental phenomenological measures of reflexivity, bracketing, and epoché to write down and set aside these potential biases, beliefs, and experiences before conducting research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a researcher recognizes and is aware of their biases, morals, and experiences through reflexivity. Bracketing is a phenomenological reduction technique to reduce the impact of an investigator's knowledge or prejudice by "bracketing" or consciously putting away one's beliefs prior to and through the phenomena research (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché is a technique where scientists acknowledge their understandings or hypotheses about the phenomenon under study (Bendall, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological reduction process allowed the researcher to focus exclusively on the collected information and examine the participants, discussing their lived experiences (Reiners, 2012). To alleviate partiality and phenomena experience, the researcher recognized and put personal bias and experiences with the examined phenomenon in writing and set the narratives aside throughout the research process (Van Manen, 2016, 1990; Bednall, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Before each interview, a period of self-journaling was used to bracket, write

down, and acknowledge preconceptions and prejudgments to allow for a blank slate approach (Reiners, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1962).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher had an ethical obligation not to mislead participants, to show respect throughout the study, and to keep any promises or statements concerning the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' information or data collected during the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants received an informed consent form detailing their confidentiality and anonymity rights. Liberty University's IRB approved the informed consent form and indicated the potential risks associated with their involvement in the study. Participants of the study were advised of the purpose of the study and were not financially incentivized to participate. The informed consent form guaranteed that the participant was protected from any breach of privacy or confidentiality by eliminating any classifying or identification information to include names through a codifying process to ensure their rights. A participant pseudonym was created for each participant for anonymity and reference throughout the analysis. For the research questionnaire portion, each leader was assigned an alphanumeric pseudonym ranging from A1-A12 to provide anonymity and preserve their identity.

For the interview process, the researcher and the participants discussed the research process and the interview process, as well as the confidentiality and anonymity guarantee before and after the research. A digital recorder and transcribed ZOOM® meeting notes provided another measure of reliability and confirmability. Participants in this interview process were guaranteed privacy and anonymity by not using the video capability of ZOOM® and using the pseudonym created in the questionnaire portion. The data were coded to protect participant privacy, and all audio, mp4 recordings, transcriptions, and pseudonyms were stored in an offline

one-terabyte storage unit and password-protected with access only by the researcher. The

researcher was further ethically bound to follow Liberty University's IRB approval measures and

guidelines to ensure the ethical treatment of participants and the safety and security of collected

data. This study complied with all guidelines and ethical considerations according to the

established guidelines. All participant data and pertinent information are codified with unique

identifiers to mask participant information and ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study utilized the transcendental phenomenological research design with a social

constructivist framework to observe the participants' lived experiences and in-depth perceptions

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological study examines lived

experiences and in-depth perceptions to understand the essence of the meaning of those who

experienced the phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist model recognizes

that knowledge is co-constructed through the researcher's social interactions and the participant

in the research process (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher and participants have an interactive

connection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Collection Methods

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that "a phenomenological study attempts to comprehend

people's views, opinions, and understandings of a specific setting" (p. 51). This exploratory

qualitative phenomenological research was designed to hear and understand the participants'

lived experiences, perspectives, and reflections from having experienced the phenomenon

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). To do this, a multi-phase examination took place

to collect participant data. In a phenomenological qualitative study, the researcher is the primary

data collection instrument and data collection is through interview narratives, diaries, ZOOM®

interview transcripts, websites, emails, and text messages, and collected data can come from organizational documents, audiovisual materials, and researcher observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014; Patton, 2002).

First, a questionnaire was utilized to screen potential participants, and the data were collected and examined to determine eligibility criteria for the research. The demographics and social connectivity data were codified through the alphanumeric A1-A12 and stored on a 1TB storage unit. Second, semi-structured ZOOM® interviews were conducted with open-ended questions with each eligible participant, and each audio recording and participant's reflective review document were reviewed for accuracy. The ZOOM® virtual setting allowed direct observation to monitor participants' behavioral actions and non-verbal communication (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The video recording capability of ZOOM® was not used to protect the identity of the participants. Reflective notes, which are notes taken during semi-structured interviews, allow the researcher to note contextual clues, behavioral impressions, and non-verbal cues to review after the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Smith et al., 2011). The data collected from the audio recordings, documents, and researcher notes were then uploaded into transcribing software to generate a code listing, thematic data sorting, and theme interpretation to generate meaning and check for accuracy. Third, reviewing pertinent public domain documents was conducted after the interview to capture any participant insight.

Instruments and Protocols

The qualitative research design utilized several instruments to discover the lived experiences of the Convention leadership participant. The primary data collection instruments

were participant interviews, a demographic and social connectivity questionnaire, researcher observations, and document analysis.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was used to pre-test the questionnaire and the ZOOM® interview open-ended questions of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Arain et al., 2010). According to Yin (2014) and Kim (2010), a qualitative pilot study can help generate, test, and improve research instruments and protocols. This study conducted a pilot study with a former executive leadership team member and a local church pastor to assess the reliability and validity of the qualitative data collection instruments of questionnaire and interview.

Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview of eighteen open-ended questions was used to facilitate participants' responses and candidly express their perceptions and perspectives of their leadership interactions and experiences of the phenomena. An established set of semi-structured open-ended interview questions reduced researcher bias by adhering to the scripted questions instead of reacting with spontaneous and unrehearsed questions. Eighteen open-ended-questions focused on Personal Perspective (PP), Spiritual Perspective (SP), Leadership Perspective (LP), and Communication Perspective (CP) during the Convention leadership team interviews that guided the interview, helped stimulate responses, and provided clarity and understanding of which leadership interactions are essential to lead through a crisis (Appendices F and G).

Questionnaire

The study employed one questionnaire to collect demographic, social connectivity, and scriptural data. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions and was sent to the International Protestant Convention leadership teams to determine demographics to establish purposeful

sampling, social connectivity to understand information flow, and two questions on Scriptures used during COVID-19 for guidance and comfort (Appendix E).

Observations

The direct observation of each participant allowed the researcher to observe and recognize the leader visually, and the researcher's reflective notes annotated the researcher's perceptions of the participant's answers, facial expressions, and body inflections during the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Procedures

Before beginning this research, the researcher requested Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission to conduct the study to ensure the study design was within the program's ethical requirements and institutional expectations. Furthermore, the IRB reviewed and approved all research forms, including the recruitment letter, informed consent form, questionnaire, and the interview protocol and questions for this study (Appendices B, C, D, E, F, and G). To begin the investigation process, the researcher, with the assistance of the International Protestant Convention front office personnel, sent a recruitment email with the informed consent letter and the questionnaire to the ELT and LCLs to inquire about demographics and social connectivity.

The recruitment letter informed the participants that the questionnaire included demographics and social networking questions to determine the International Protestant Convention's social network connectivity, information flow, demographic makeup, and 2020-2023 COVID-19 leadership experience. The informed consent letter advised that research participation was voluntary, that collected data was to be safeguarded, that participant identities would be anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time from the research. After

collecting data from the questionnaire, a purposeful sample was generated from the eligible participants to discover the lived experiences of the ELT/LCL leaders. The researcher conducted ZOOM® interviews with digital audio recordings as the primary collection instrument for this study. The ZOOM® interviews comprised eighteen guided open-ended questions for each participant.

Researcher reflective notes were produced during the interviews, and observations and perceptions were documented during the interview process. Finally, a participant reflective document was produced, providing further insight into the participant's understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher employed the transcendental phenomenology methodology and the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection process began with epoché, which allowed the researcher to reflect, identify, and write down potential biases and preconceptions about the phenomena and then set them aside before collecting data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bednall, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). To provide research credibility, confirmability, and an audit trail for triangulation, a written journal was used for the epoché process. Before each participant interview, a period of self-journaling occurred to allow for a tabula rasa approach to each interview (Reiners, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1962).

After the data collection, horizontalization and reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis were used to discover the emergent themes and a deep understanding of the true essence of the phenomena. In the horizontalization process, part of the reduction process, the researcher reviewed each participant's statement to understand how it related to the research questions and removed repetitive and non-research statements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). After reducing the participants' statements, the imaginative variation function sought to unify the varying perceptions of the research participants into themes.

Data Analysis

For this research, Moustakas's (1994) data analysis protocols were followed to accomplish a deep dive into the essence of lived experiences and leadership insights of International Protestant Convention leadership and associated church leaders and collect subjective and objective perceptions of the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019; Reiners, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The data analysis process required the researcher to analyze the collected data by reading, rereading, writing, and rewriting to search for emerging patterns and reoccurring themes to construct and understand the true essence of the phenomena (Smith et al., 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The NVivo-14® coding feature was used to show the collected data's emergent themes and recurring patterns.

Analysis Methods

This research study's analysis process consisted of multiple steps to analyze the data of the selected leadership participants. The stages included data familiarization, data entry, data coding, meaning generation, and data credibility examination (Ruona, 2005).

Research Coding

Coding is an essential element of the analysis process to make sense of the vast amounts of collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the literature review process, an initial coding system emerged from the literature and was used to establish the two research codes for the interview process (Appendices H and I). The NVivo-14® coding feature provided a method to winnow the vast amount of data, classify and identify the emerging patterns and themes, and then analyze, looking for connections and associations that show superordinate parallel and subordinate relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the interview, statements and comments were annotated with the codes and later reviewed for clarity and further classification.

Research coding lets the researcher organize and assign collected data to a code for analysis and referencing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Codified data was verified to confirm that it met the research purpose. The NVivo-14® coding feature clustered data into like-groups based on typical theme significance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Colaizzi, 1978).

The clustering technique assisted in explaining the phenomenon and lived experiences. The coding allowed the researcher to discover emerging patterns and thematic data clusters connected to the research questions. The continuous process of data collection, coding, reducing data into meaningful clusters, and analyzing data was essential for the researcher to understand and comprehend the lived experiences and recognize the complexity leadership interactions of the leaders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness

</div>

Trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are necessary components of research to ensure the intended study is free from researcher preconceptions, inaccurate findings from a researcher's inexperience, or unintentional conclusions (Patton, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1986) state that the researcher must address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure the qualitative research's trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research is an indispensable part of the research design, and credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable must be addressed for data collection and data analysis processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Credibility

Transcendental phenomenological research seeks to understand a participant's lived experiences, so it is essential that establishing credibility is intentionally designed into the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research design credibility is accomplished through

several strategies to ensure the authenticity of the data and the conclusions drawn from research data (Patton, 2002). This study used four credibility measures to ensure the authenticity of the collected data: triangulation, participant member checks, researcher audit trail, and detailed, thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1986). Research credibility is achieved in an exploratory, qualitative phenomenological study by triangulating information to check representativeness and accuracy. Triangulating data through public domain documents, recorded interviews, and reflective documents helped increase the credibility of the research findings by crosschecking the data results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The credibility of the qualitative phenomenological study was increased through participant checks to ensure the researcher and the participants concurred with the interview transcription (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability is essential in qualitative research to verify the study's integrity and create a repeatable process for future research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1984). Data dependability was an integral part of this research and confirmed the reliability of the data collection and analysis procedures (Patton, 2002). The researcher ensures data dependability by systematically gathering data using the same process and protocols of interview time allocation, time, data collection, data storage, theme reviewing, interview editing, and managing research data for each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Confirmability

Following a repeatable methodical process and an outside audit of the research findings strengthens credibility and dependability and establishes confirmability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reliability and credibility were enhanced by using an audit trail that

explained the research methodology and processes to allow the primary research to be replicated in the future (Crano et al., 2014). An audit trail for data collection and the research process ensured the data's credibility, reliability, and dependability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The audit trail clarifies how the information is collected, analyzed, and finally interpreted for the dissertation.

Transferability

According to Lincoln & Guba (1986), a researcher must provide rich, thick, descriptive, contextual information about the study process so future researchers can conduct comparative studies and reach similar findings. Transferability is also concerned with the study's uniqueness, and it applies to future research (Yin, 2014). For this study, the researcher endeavored to develop rich, thick descriptive information to provide meaningful context to describe the lived human experiences and behaviors discovered in the research (Moustakas, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Korstjens and Moser (2018) posit that transferability allows future researchers to evaluate the study's findings. All discovered data concerning the human experience and recognized behaviors was transparently described, defined, and annotated to ensure a detailed, thick description of the research is transferable to future researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Chapter Summary

This chapter described how the researcher employed a transcendental qualitative phenomenological methodology to make sense of the lived experiences of the Convention leadership teams. Furthermore, the research strived to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Borgatti et al.,

2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Throughout the research process, the researcher employed

Moustakas's (1994) data analysis protocols and procedures to discover the emergent themes and

ensure the research data's trustworthiness had credibility, reliability, and dependability (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research aimed to assess the lived experiences and leadership decisions of an International Protestant Convention leadership team during COVID-19 through complexity leadership. Chapter One introduced the research concern and provided an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with complexity leadership theory and social network dynamics using a theological and theoretical focus. Chapter Two provided a deep dive into the relevant theological and theoretical literature concerning the concepts and theories used to discuss the research topic.

Chapter Three introduced the transcendental phenomenological research design that framed this study, the study's intended sample population, the research methods, and the data collection and analysis approach for this study. Chapter Four is divided into four sections: Compilation Protocol and Measures, Demographic and Sample Data, Data Analysis and Findings, and Evaluation of the Research Design. Chapter Four will identify the results of the demographics questionnaire, the ZOOM® interviews, and the information flow in the International Protestant Convention and local church networks.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

This study used a purposeful sampling strategy to select a research population from the eligible participants to discover the lived experiences of the ELT/LCL leaders to investigate further and analyze the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Swanson & Holton, 2005). The purposeful sample was derived from the eligible candidates of the International Protestant Convention leadership team members from the United States, Europe, Central America, South America, Africa, and the Middle East who led during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. The

research framework intentionally designed a biblical leadership structure on the fundamental

theological topics of biblical, scriptural, and worldview that shape a Christian leader's

foundation. The framework also intentionally integrated the leadership challenges and emerging

uncertainty and complexity facing a Christian leader today. The following Research Questions

were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership
approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering,
and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches
through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ2. What complexity leadership interactions, administrative, generative, community
building, and information-gathering and information-using, did the selected participants rely on
the most to lead an organization (*church*) through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social
networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

Precedent Literature Review

All research begins with a foundation built on a precedent literature review that

recognizes a knowledge gap, advises theory, and supports further research (Creswell & Creswell,

2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The operationalizing complexity leadership theory research was

built on the precedent literature review of the following areas: practical theology, biblical

leadership, complex leadership theory, complex adaptive systems, complexity leadership

interactions, social network dynamics, and crisis leadership. These literature subjects informed

protocol, instrument development, and phenomenological foundation.

Pilot Study

The pilot study began on June 27 and was completed on July 6. The pilot study

interviewed a former executive leadership team member and a local church pastor to check the

questionnaire's validity. The interview process allows the researcher to listen actively, observe,

and hear a leader adequately describe their lived experience. The study was used to pre-test the questionnaire and the ZOOM® interview open-ended questions of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Arain et al., 2010).

According to Yin (2014) and Kim (2010), a qualitative pilot study can help generate, test, and improve phenomenological research instruments and protocols. This study conducted a pilot study to assess the reliability and validity of the qualitative data collection instruments of questionnaire and interview. Overall, both interviewees of the pilot study validated the questions and provided feedback to improve the study. The first improvement feedback was identifying the question clusters in the interview process.

For example, indicate during the interview that the following five questions are focused on the Personal Perspective (PP) of leading during COVID-19. The following eight questions deal with the Leadership Perspective (LP). Moreover, the last questions focus on the Communication Perspective (CP) to include Information Using (IU) and Information Gathering (IG) to help focus the interviewee on the context of the question.

The second improvement feedback was for the social connectivity section of the questionnaire. The recommendation was to include the words internally and externally in the Convention in question one, part c., which would read, "Indicate if you receive and give advice (R/G), receive advice only (R), or give advice only (G) for each connection, internally and externally of the Convention." This would allow the pastors to indicate the Convention and local region or area pastor's advice. According to the pilot study participants, COVID-19 indicated that the disequilibrium from COVID-19 created an environment of change, growth, and shepherding to lead through the crisis.

Resane (2014) ascribes specific functions of a shepherd: care and feeding, leading and protecting, restoration, and attending to sheep by grooming, shearing, and delivering lambs. Through this understanding, leaders can lead their organizations through turmoil and turbulence. Overall, the pilot program validated the research questions and qualitative approach. Each pastor described administrative, generative, community-building, information gathering, information-using leadership interactions, and the importance of social networks to keep communication paths and information flowing to stay connected and informed.

Note: Despite the recommendations provided during the pilot study, the questionnaire's social connectivity (Part c) was excluded from the research as it caused increased confusion as the research progressed. The social network dynamics of social density, connectedness, nodes, ties, links, and edges that enable a culture of idea creation, innovation, communication, and dialogue will be proposed as a further research recommendation (Goldstein et al., 2010).

Data for this study was collected through two fundamental research instruments: the demographics questionnaire and the individual ZOOM® interviews. A questionnaire was sent to all convention participants to inquire about demographics and eligibility for the research. A purposeful sampling of participants was derived from the questionnaire. The research participants were eleven male executive and local church leaders and one female executive leader of the International Protestant Convention who led the convention through the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. The ELT and LCL interviews were guided by the Executive Leadership Team Interview Protocol (Appendix F) and the Local Church Leader Interview Protocol (Appendix G).

Sixty International Protestant Convention participants were sent an email detailing the study and inviting them to participate in the research. Attached to the email were the demographics questionnaire and the informed consent form. Fourteen leaders responded to the

email, and twelve were selected based on the research criteria and limits. Upon receipt of the questionnaire and the informed consent form, a ZOOM® interview date and time was established. ZOOM® interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, depending on the interviewee's responses, and were conducted with eighteen open-ended questions to each eligible participant. Each audio recording and participant's reflective review document were reviewed for accuracy. The ZOOM® virtual setting allowed direct observation to monitor participants' behavioral actions and non-verbal communication (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The ZOOM® interviews were recorded digitally using the embedded recording feature as the primary method and a digital audio recorder as a secondary recording method. The embedded recorded audio transcription was accomplished with an Otter.AI®, and the data coding process utilized NVivo-14®. Upon completion and within seven days of the interview, a transcribed copy was sent to each leader for member checking. Each participant reviewed the transcript for the interview content's accuracy and asked if modifications or additions were required. If the participant concurred with the accuracy, they responded with an email indicating it was accurate and no changes were required. If they wanted modifications or additions, they sent the required changes and reviewed the transcript again with the changes.

Demographic and Sample Data

The data collection strategy was focused on two essential collection instruments. The questionnaire collected demographic and scriptural data and is displayed in Table 1. Sample data and demographics were also collected during the interview. The research sample size was limited to 15 by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the final sample size for the study was 12 leaders. Each leader was assigned an alphanumeric code to ensure anonymity and protect their confidentiality, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Data

Demographics	Data	Scripture during COVID-19
Age range	30-70 years	<u>Old Testament</u> Deuteronomy - Be strong and courageous. Joshua - Do not be frightened. Psalms - God is our refuge and strength. Proverbs - The Lord gives wisdom. Isaiah - Fear not, for I am with you. Jeremiah - Pray to me, and I will hear you. Lamentations - The LORD is my portion.
Range of years of participants being Christian	17-55 years	
Range of years of convention/church participation	2-33 years	
Length of years serving in a leadership role	2-20 years	
		<u>New Testament</u> Matthew – do not be anxious. Luke - do not be anxious about your life. John – My peace, I give you. Romans – God of Hope Philippians – I can do all things in Christ. 2 Corinthians – Comfort for our afflictions

Table 2.

ELT/LCL Data

Participant	Data
Participant A1	• Executive Leadership Team • Pastoral Care and Church Health
Participant A2	• Local Church Leader/ Senior Pastor
Participant A3	• Executive Leadership Team • Church Planting
Participant A4	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor
Participant A5	• Local Church Leader/ Senior Pastor
Participant A6	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor
Participant A7	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor
Participant A8	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor • Executive Leadership Team • Leadership Development
Participant A9	• Executive Leadership Team • Administrative Organizer
Participant A10	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor
Participant A11	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor
Participant A12	• Local Church Leader/Senior Pastor

Data Analysis and Findings

After the demographic and interview data were collected and transcribed, the next step

was to import the data into NVivo-14® to categorize and code the data to identify the emergent

themes and recurring patterns for the researcher to organize and interpret the data. Using

analytical tools, relistening to the digital recordings, and persistent reading and rereading of the

interviews, a comprehensive line-by-line review of the interviews and NVivo-14® codes, the

researcher discovered the emergent themes and recurring patterns of the lived experience of the

12 selected participants to discover the true essence of the phenomenon.

Four themes emerged during the research investigation and the analysis and are presented

in Table 3. The lived experience of each leader, A1-A12, who led in the convention or church,

was also analyzed and presented after the thematic analysis.

Table 3.

Emergent Themes and Recurring Patterns

Themes/Patterns
Communication and Connection
Constant and Disruptive Change
Technological Adaptability and Creative Innovation
Scriptural Focus

During the interview and data analysis process, several themes emerged regarding how

the ELTs and LCLs led the convention and their congregations through and beyond the COVID-

19 pandemic (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Veldsman, 2020).

Theme One: Communication and Connection

Communication and information sharing allow people to connect by building linkages

and solid relationships with a social system. Karp and Helgø (2008) indicate that a leader is

recognized and acknowledged through the gained respect and trust of the followers through

communication and social interaction as a mutual act of recognition where new communication patterns emerge to build trust, credibility, and respect. Stevanović and Gmitrović (2015) indicate that formal and informal communication networks are essential for creating and transmitting information, messages, and expectations. The communication and connection theme was foremost for ELT and LCL leaders as they dealt with COVID-19's discontinuous change and complexity.

Complexity leadership operates in and through the social dynamics of social networks of interconnected relationships, communication exchange, and meaningful dialogue (Goldstein et al., 2010; Hazy et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). CAS succeeds through a constant flow of information and human interactions (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Relationships and the information flow shape and govern the organization's and its members' structure and function and shape the viability of formal and informal social networks (Jensen, 2021; Ahsanul, 2013). The constant dialogue and information flow helped create the communication bonding necessary for social capital, trust, and community-building interactions between convention leaders, local church leaders, and the church community.

The body of Christ is a living community of believers in Jesus Christ who interact and connect through social networks and the synergy of the collective community makes the church more important than the sum of the individual Christian (Black & Smith). The International Protestant Convention comprises multicultural and multilingual churches with over 100 nationalities and diverse ethnic and social groups, and relationships, social interactions, and communication exchanges are the heart of church life. The lockdowns, social restrictions, and isolation of COVID-19 stressed the significance of daily communication bonding to keep the body of Christ unified and connected to do life together as a body of believers. Community-

building leadership interactions and practices cover the complexity mechanism of belonging and promoting a shared identity, engagement, trust, and community bonding in an organization (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Despite the complexity, uncertainty, and social restrictions of COVID-19, Pierce (2020) reminds us that "the church is not a place you go to, but a family to which you belong" (p. 7). Social networking provides the interconnectivity and community-bonding necessary for church members to fulfill the church's mission.

Theme Two: Constant and Disruptive Change

Another emergent theme that came from interviews was the topic of change. Bolsinger (2020) indicates that the virus's effects will be a transformational change that affects human beings socially and relationally and will impact church dynamics beyond the crisis. During the interview, two types of change were discussed: constant and disruptive.

The International Protestant Convention and the local churches were established as English-speaking churches near European military bases. Today, the mission of the Convention is to serve the English-speaking community, but the churches serve a wide range of English-speaking people, including Americans from military bases, embassies, corporations, and expatriates. The churches also serve native speakers of over 100 nationalities in 25 countries.

The first change topic discussed was constant change. Constant change is not new to the International Protestant Convention or the local churches; it is part of the normal operations. Due to the rotational nature of the military, DoD civilians, and corporations, change occurs regularly in the churches. For those churches around military bases or that have U.S. government officials, rotations occur every year, and core families leave as new families arrive. On average, many churches lose and gain about one-quarter to one-third of the church membership annually. They

plan for this change and have processes in place for the transitional change. The second topic of change discussed was disruptive change.

The disruptive change of COVID-19 and the General Secretary's retirement during COVID-19 was new. The retirement of the General Secretary was a planned event and had been in the works before the pandemic. However, the planned change was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global response of border closings and country lockdowns. The first phase of disruptive change that the ELTs and LCLs experienced occurred at the annual European conference in March 2020, where the vote for the new General Secretary was to occur. All voting members who could attend had arrived or were scheduled to arrive at the conference when the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic (WHO, 2023).

Although this caused some apprehension among the ELTs and LCLs about continuing the conference, it was not until the following day, when the U.S. declared a 30-day ban on all European travel, that the reality of the situation became dire. The ELTs and LCLs decided to call the other leaders and guest speakers to inform them not to attend the conference due to global pandemic responses. At the same time, the ELTs and LCLs, who needed to leave the conference and go back to their respective countries and churches before all travel ceased, started arranging transportation home. This was a chaotic time of uncertainty, confusion, and the beginning of disruptive changes.

The second phase of disruptive change was brought about by the COVID-19 virus and the global restrictions and controls placed to deal with the virus transmission. The pandemic changed the relative stability of the International Protestant Convention and the churches to disequilibrium and transformed how people lived, worked, and worshiped (*leiturgia*) together (Stetzer, 2022a; Stetzer, 2022b; Harney, 2022; Felman, 2021; Cho, 2021; Corpuz & Sarmeinto,

2021). This disruption affected the International Protestant Convention and the local churches through multiple governmental restrictions, lockdowns, and social distancing measures that created anxiety, confusion, despair, and isolation from the church family. Although some of the larger churches had the technological means to adapt to an online presence, many churches were forced to make big decisions and changes in church operations. Through this disruption and disequilibrium, the International Protestant Convention and the local churches adapted to the change through autopoietic behaviors, feedback loops for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems monitoring. Depending on the church size and their in-house capabilities, the churches were forced to eventually stop or severely change how they were meeting as a church.

Finally, the last topic of change that was discussed was that COVID-19 and the disruptive change that it created did not catch God by surprise. During the ELT and LCL interviews, the leaders discussed that God was still in control despite the turmoil and trauma. Several leaders pointed to God's sovereignty and that He knew all these things were coming, so He prepared the convention and the churches to have the ability and assurance to adapt to what was coming.

Theme Three: Technological Adaptability and Creative Innovation

The International Protestant Convention was confronted by numerous global restrictions and individual country lockdown constraints that required adaptive leaders who could lead during uncertainty and complexity. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) specify adaptive leadership as emergent behaviors produced through the fine-grain interactions of agents within a CAS that enable the conditions for exploration, organizational change, nonlinear information flow, complexity leadership dynamics, and organizational and individual learning. Technological adaptability and creative innovation emerged as essential approaches to adapting and overcoming limitations and controls for the LCLs for church resiliency and sustainability during

COVID-19. Generative leadership catalyzes organizational adaptability, resilience, and exploration to find new solutions and processes for challenging problems by enabling adaptation, innovation, and creativity.

The complexity mechanism of emergence is a central characteristic of generative leadership (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). LCLs established an adaptive and active learning environment within the congregation to enable emergent innovative solutions and creative ministry methods to keep the body of believers connected and the church operating during the pandemic. As Francis (2021) and Jackson and Williams (2021) discovered in their COVID-19 research, the ELTs and LCLs also developed novel church processes to deliver virtual, recorded, and outdoor sermons and inventive ways to stay connected.

Theme Four: Scriptural Focus

Pearcey (2004) posits that everything a Christian does must start with a biblical perspective, or individuals can unknowingly embrace nonbiblical viewpoints and beliefs if they do not have a Christian worldview (Pearcey, 2004, p. 44). During the data collection process, each leader focused on the Scriptures they were grounded on during the crisis when asked the following questions:

1. What passages of Scripture did you rely on most to reduce your uncertainty and concerns during COVID-19?

2. What passages of Scripture did you use to help others look to God for their strength and refuge during COVID-19?

The leaders' responses varied regarding which books of the Bible and what passages they relied on during the pandemic. However, the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalm, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations were cited. In contrast, the New Testament Books of Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, Philippians, and 2 Corinthians were cited. The leaders cited several recurrent Old and New Testament Scripture passages.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (ESV, 2001, Joshua 1:9).

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, says my soul; therefore, I will hope in him. The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (ESV, 2001, Lamentations 3:21-26).

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah" (ESV, 2001, Psalm 46:1-3).

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (ESV, 2001, Isaiah 41:10).

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (ESV, 2001, Philippians 4:4-7).

"And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" (ESV, 2001, Luke 12:22-26).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this, you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (ESV, 2001, 1 Peter 1:3-7).

The research participants found comfort, solace, and refuge in the Scriptures during, through, and beyond the pandemic. ELTs and LCLs relied on the assurance of God's Word to lead through a crisis with emboldened faith in God's provision for strength and courage. By seeking

God first in prayer, relying on His guidance, and holding steadfast on the Scriptures, they could lead without fear, knowing that God is at hand, and He is their anchor of hope and shalom to navigate the crisis (Stanton, 2019; ESV, 2001, Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 4:4-7).

Participant A1-A12 Lived Experience Interviews

Since the International Protestant Convention operates in seven different time zones, the interviews were conducted using ZOOM®, and each interview time is annotated with the researchers' and participants' time zones. Each participant's interview began with a prayer followed by questions concerning their personal perspective (PP), then questions concerning their spiritual perspective (SP), followed by questions concerning their leadership perspective (LP), and finished up with questions concerning their communication perspective (CP). Furthermore, the interviews are coded using Appendix H, Interview Theme Codes for administrative leadership interactions (ALI), generative leadership interactions (GLI), community-building interactions (CBI), information-gathering (IG), and information-using (IU).

Participant A1 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Friday, August 11, 2023, at 0800 CST/1400 CEST. The interview used the Executive Leadership Team interview guide (see Appendix F).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A1 is part of the executive leadership team and operates from the Macro level of leadership in the International Protestant Convention. During the interview, Participant A1 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A1 was relaxed and stood at a raised desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A1 prayed for God's presence and the interview session. Participant A1 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

PP: On a personal level, COVID-19 changed everything and affected me personally in significant ways. When the U.S. closed travel for Europe, my wife and I were in Europe with ELT and other convention pastors. We were going to vote on the next general secretary at the conference. We got on the telephone to tell everyone inbound to the conference not to come because of the uncertainty of the situation. And so, my wife and I left, and as we traveled back, the airports in Europe were like ghost towns, and then we were in quarantine for ten weeks. So, at the very beginning, COVID-19 affected us in that way.

SP: I have a solid, simple trust in a sovereign God. So, my faith in God did not change during the pandemic. You can imagine things and plenty of fiction is written about seemingly impossible things like the world stopping. But the reality is that COVID-19 stopped the whole world. Because the world stopped, some cities saw the skyline for the first time in their lifetime of people because the smog cleared for one time, you know? However, you will not blame Him for things, but He uses and leverages things and events because He is in control.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A1 provided insight into the convention

operations and innovation during COVID-19 and how the ELT operated to help the convention

pastors thrive (GLI).

LP: I would say the convention was well-positioned to deal with COVID-19 because we are a global organization. We are already used to not being near each other, and it is not like our meetings are always in a physical location. So, we were already using ZOOM®. I think COVID-19 forced our churches to innovate, which was a good thing, and our churches responded very well despite some grumbling. During COVID-19, my role changed to what I would define as an ER doctor kind of role. I tried to find out when a church is suddenly in crisis mode, and I must figure out what will happen next, how quickly, and how much of an emergency it is or is not.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A1 indicated that constant

interactions through daily, weekly, and monthly communication and information flow

opportunities were crucial to keeping convention and local church leaders informed and not

feeling isolated during COVID-19 (CBI/IG/IU).

CP: I would say successful communications ensure our stakeholders are well served. The communication must be pushing communication out and pulling information in. We needed to have ways that we continually hear from our people to understand what was happening in their lives. The COVID-19 world reminded me of the Hebrews 10 idea of not giving up, not abandoning meeting together as believers but encouraging one another to love and do good deeds, which is still valid.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A1 Summary (RQ2)

Throughout the interview with Participant A1, the administrative aspects of complexity leadership were minimally mentioned and were not a dominant concern during COVID-19. The dominant complexity leadership interactions from Participant A1's interview were community building, information-gathering, and information-using (CBI/IG/IU). Participant A1 provided essential leadership as an ELT through these three leadership interactions.

Participant A2 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 16, 2023, at 0600 CST/1300 CEST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A2 is a senior pastor and, during COVID-19, was an associate pastor and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention and the Macro level in the local church. During the interview, Participant A2 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A2 was calm and sitting on a couch when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A2 prayed for God's guiding hand in the interview session. Participant A2 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP**: I did get COVID once, and that was not fun, but it was not until 2021. I had no family members or friends who were significantly ill, but I did have friends who lost family members. Mostly, it slowed me down. Because we were high-paced, we had four services on a Sunday pre-COVID. And then suddenly, we had no services on a Sunday. So, we had good family time and developed a strong relationship with our next-door

neighbors. We had a child during that time. When I look back at COVID, I slowed down for my health. I think we were running at an unhealthy pace.

SP: I think it also strengthened my faith, or at least some of the conflicts and conversations we had to go through strengthened my faith. And at the same time, whether it was COVID or not, I do not know if we had much COVID-caused conflict. My faith grew as I trusted the Lord's promises to turn those conflicts or enemies into good.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3)*.* According to Participant A2, the leadership experience of being a missionary in China helped during COVID-19. Pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19, Participant A2 led men's ministry and a life group and oversaw church facilities and children's ministry and counseling.

LP: Before joining this church, my wife and I were missionaries in China. So leading house churches in China was significantly helpful to being able to say, well, now the church is in the home and is a small group. Parts of training skills and things we went through allow us to apply things during COVID-19.

LP: I do not think I was fully prepared as a leader when COVID-19 first hit. This crisis allowed me to learn from other leaders going through a pandemic. COVID-19 gave me greater respect for the leadership decisions that had to be made for elders and our lead pastor. Because of the weight of what they were trying to deal with, trying to shift and help our congregation but also help individuals help families, it opened my eyes, and as our lead pastor brought me into more decisions, it developed me as a leader.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). During COVID-19, they increased their digital footprint through ZOOM® prayer meetings and Bible studies, YouTube® sermons, live-streaming services, weekly livestream messages, email, and Facebook® to maintain church connections and social interactions (GLI/CBI/IG/IU).

CP: Communication was essential. You could not communicate enough, and because of the constant change, people could never feel like they heard with enough time to pivot or heard before the decision was made or felt like they had said enough in the process. So, communication is huge for managing people and communicating well. We kept mainly connecting through digital communication and had very few in-person touchpoints. Eventually, once we were back, we were just a fragment of what we used to be. Due to the heavy restrictions, we could only start with about 70 people per service without the children's ministry. Even two years after the crisis, we were still restricted to 100 per service due to the size of our auditorium.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A2 Summary (RQ2)

Throughout the interview with Participant A2, the administrative aspect of complexity leadership was mentioned through a concern of tithing during the pandemic and the deacon body's financial stewardship to alleviate the concern (ALI). However, the central aspect of Participant A2 was the complexity leadership interactions of generative, community building, information gathering, and information-using and the concern of keeping the church community connected throughout COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Through the interactions, communication, and information flow, the church created more interaction touch points like sermon podcasts, virtual counseling, and weekly one-on-one interviews to get people's stories out to reduce the isolation and feel connected to the larger church community (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Participant A2 provided essential leadership as an LCL through these four leadership interactions.

Participant A3 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 16, 2023, at 1630 CST. The interview used the Executive Leadership Team interview guide (Appendix F).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A3 is part of the executive leadership team operated from the Macro and Meso leadership levels in the International Protestant Convention. During the interview, Participant A3 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A3 was relaxed and sitting at a desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A3 prayed for God's blessing and anointing in the interview session. Participant A3 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

PP: It is a good question, trying to summarize how I might say there was fear of the unknown, some of that fear of the unknown. There was this initial shot of oh my gosh! What is happening? Is the world going, you know? Die right now or not? And then after that? And, you know, concern about what will happen or what will not happen? Personally, my international travel was halted for a while, but it allowed me to lean more into God during this time.

SP: I think it heightened my awareness of people like me, to a degree, but a lot of other people that are other believers that I know how much they focus on the Sunday gathering as the definition of their faith. If I cannot do Sunday gatherings, worship service, or church, I do not have faith. I would say COVID-19 deepened my relationship with Christ more, and I appreciate all my faith's facets.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A3, COVID-19 moved the convention from relative stability to disequilibrium and required adaptive change to deal with the crisis. Since the convention comprises 80% of U.S. government personnel, it is used to change constantly every year as people rotate back to the States and new people rotate into the area. However, COVID-19 required a more rapid change than every 2 to 3 years. Many convention churches had to move to a digital platform almost overnight because of country restrictions (Europe and Central America being the strictest) (GLI).

LP: Before the pandemic, what was God doing that prepared me to lead? I would say it was through the relationship-building with the pastors and church planters. If I did not have solid relationships and a personal connection with them already. Then, I do not think I would have been able to be helpful to them much at all. But because I had a personal relationship that God had allowed me to build with them, I became a counselor and a coach.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). During the interview, Participant A3 indicated that online prayer meetings with convention leaders and local pastors were essential to embolden their faith, keep them encouraged that God was still in control, and share advice and information about what church leaders were doing to stay connected and encouraged despite government restrictions. (CBI/IG/IU)

CP: I think communication is successful when everyone has access to information. You know, everyone has easy access to information. I would say everything we knew about the conditions of the churches during COVID-19 came directly through communication

with the pastors. The information flow and communications allowed us to get through COVID-19 together by sharing ideas and best practices and praying together.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A3 Summary (RQ2)

In the interview with Participant A3, there was no discussion of administrative leadership interactions. Participant A3's concern focused on the complexity leadership interactions of community building, information-gathering, and information-using and maintaining relationships with convention pastors and church planters (CBI/IG/IU). Participant A3 provided essential leadership as an ELT through these three leadership interactions.

Participant A4 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 17, 2023, at 1630 CST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. During COVID, Participant A4 was a local church leader and senior pastor who operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention and the Macro level in his church. During the interview, Participant A4 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A4 was visiting relatives in the U.S., so the interview was conducted via telephone. Before asking the first question, Participant A4 prayed for Jesus' presence and blessing in the interview session. Participant A4 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** It was not all that scary to me. It did not bother me for whatever reason, and we had people within our church who suffered from COVID-19. It also gave me more work in new arenas and meant significant work at the beginning since we had not been broadcasting our service. At the beginning of COVID, I was preaching on a laptop, which

is weird, and I guess it showed me how much interaction with the congregation means to me that I need that. And emphasized to me that it is because I need to be part of that worship, and it is hard to worship with a computer.

SP: I was never really that concerned. When your faith carries you through many personal things, you understand that God lets things work out and helps you go through them as a matter of faith. And I think some of it is realizing that things are not and will not always go how I want them to. It does not mean that God does not love me; it means God will care for me during this time. And, you know, if I die, and I am with Christ, if not, then I continue doing what he wants me to do.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A4, COVID-19 was a catalyst for intense anger because of the uncertainty of the virus and the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns. The host country was very restrictive during the pandemic and limited gatherings and social interactions. The restrictions were put in place because of the number of people dying in the northern territories. During the lockdowns and mask mandates, several families and church members were angry and left because the church followed the governmental restrictions (ALI/CBI).

LP: You know, I still believe that God has a wonderful plan for our lives. He does. But it does not mean things are going to be easy. And so I think just knowing that and having experienced difficult times was probably the best preparation because I could trust God in the past difficult times. And so, this was one that we will need to go through.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A4, communication and connecting as a church body were essential to thrive during COVID-19 (CBI/IG/IU).

CP: Our people are so spread out that some communication means were already there with cell phones and technical items. We utilized ZOOM® for church meetings and other gatherings. We used our church networks because there are so many different groups within the church; we must network with the groups to hear from the people who know what is happening. Our people sometimes travel an hour and a half to attend our church. They want to connect, or they would not make that trip. ZOOM® was an important connection for people and to be involved in Bible studies. And during COVID-19, those ZOOM® Bible studies were important.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A4 Summary (RQ2)

The central leadership interactions during COVID-19 were administrative leadership, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using (ALI/CBI/IG/IU). Through these four leadership interactions, he provided essential leadership as an LCL. Participant A4 indicated the decision to follow country restrictions because of the church's location and the concern that the virus would spread in the church and people would end up in the hospital and die (ALI). Participant A4 indicated that following the government guidelines was a better witness by showing compassion for others. Participant A4's statement that COVID-19 did not scare him is reminiscent of Paul's declaration in Philippians 1:21-25:

> "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith" (ESV, 2001).

Participant A5 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Thursday, August 18, 2023, at 0600 CST /1300 CEST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A5 is a local church leader and, during COVID-19, was an interim pastor in two of the convention churches and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention. During the interview, Participant A5 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A5 was relaxed and standing

at a desk with the sun on his face when the interview began. Before asking the first question,

Participant A5 prayed for God's blessing and presence in the interview session. Participant A5

provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** I do not know if COVID affected me. That is a hard question; I mean, everything that I had on my calendar got shut down. So, we were not going to be taking any mission trips. Yeah, my wife and I tried to work personally within the system. So, in some ways, it did not slow us down. We just had to be more creative about maintaining friendships and connections within the church and our neighborhood.

> **SP:** My first reaction is that I do not know if it affected my faith. But I do not know that it deepened my faith, but I do not think it hurt my faith either.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A5, as the effects and

restrictions of COVID-19 started to be lifted, the people were ready to get back to meeting in the

church. In the first church, the participant was an interim pastor. The church was a product of

church planting and was only four years old when the pandemic hit. So, because of the length of

the country restrictions and changes in church personnel, it was necessary to conduct

membership classes again. During this transitional period, new membership classes were

established, life groups expanded from three to five groups, and a rewrite of the church

constitution was accomplished (ALI). After this transitional period of refocusing the church and

the members, they were ready to reach out and do ministry again (ALI/CBI).

> **LP:** I have 45 years of ministry and ten years as the Director of Missions. I was the lead pastor in my previous churches, and two of those I started. So, you must learn leadership and navigate through turmoil and challenges. You will have problems at a church when you are the lead pastor. And so, you must know how to navigate all those things. I was also prepared through my education. I went to Southwestern Seminary and learned great biblical and theological understanding, but I learned leadership when I did my Doctor of Ministry at Fuller Theological. They focus much more on leadership and provide sound leadership for practical ministry.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3. During the interview process, Participant A5

indicated that solid communication lines and information flow are necessary to keep the church

connected. Participant A5 relied on the church's social networks of the Life Groups to send and

receive information for sensemaking and sensegiving during COVID-19 as part of the

information flow process (CBI/IG/IU).

> **CP:** When discussing successful church communication, a good system or process must be implemented to get the word out. You must ensure you communicate with everyone in the church. People need to know what you are doing as a church to stay connected and successfully operate. I think the communication lines must be strong. So, for weekly emails, you must make sure people try to read them. And then, I would work with the life group leaders to transmit and receive information. I would call them or meet with them and say, these are essential things your people must know about. And so, I think our primary information and communication process was through the Life Groups.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher

closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his

COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A5 Summary (RQ2)

Central to Participant A5's leadership interactions were administrative leadership,

community-building, information-gathering, and information-using to lead during his time as an

interim pastor (ALI/CBI/IG/IU). These four interactions were his foundation as an LCL during

COVID-19. Participant A5 indicated that administrative leadership was crucial for refocusing the

church for future growth and outreach (ALI). Participant A5 also denoted that the church's social

networks were essential for providing information and receiving required feedback (CBI/IG/IU).

Participant A6 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 23, 2023, at 0600 CST /1300

CEST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A6 is a local church leader and, during COVID-

19, was the lead pastor and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International

Protestant Convention and the Macro in his church. During the interview, Participant A6

described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic,

and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A6 was relaxed and sitting at

a desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A6 prayed for

God's blessing on the study and the results of the interview session. Participant A6 provided

insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** Personally, it was different. But it was also because of where we started in Hong Kong before we moved to Europe. Even though Hong Kong had stringent restrictions, we never went into a lockdown. With that said, we moved to this church and had some reverse culture shock. When we got here, it was a much more individualistic lifestyle than Hong Kong. It is much like the government gives us rules, but we do not follow them. And so that was less comfortable for us. We were not in lockdown when I arrived, but then we went back into lockdown for about five months after I arrived. So, our church was online for a large portion of my early time as the pastor. Another concern for me during the pandemic was how to support myself, my wife, and our daughter. How do I support them and ensure they are comfortable, safe, and thinking through these things? Our daughter had made two international moves in her four years of life.

> **SP:** It also caused me to revisit whether we are putting boxes on God and His Church. While also holding dear these ideas of the gathered church and what that means and what that looks like. But I think it encouraged my faith to see how the Lord worked amid that and how the Lord used some of those to encourage people to create opportunities to be a part of a community in the least ideal situation. So, it reminded me of the tangible need for the local church gathered and that God has uniquely wired people in unique situations ideal for continuing the church.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A6 described how God prepared him for

leading in a multicultural environment. Participant A6 indicated that his undergraduate degree

was in sociology, so he studied socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Then, after

seminary, God led him to serve in international English-speaking churches. In Hong Kong, there

were 33 nationalities and 25 nationalities in the church; he is now the lead pastor.

> **LP:** Well, it challenges you to consider many things you have probably never considered before. What I mean is that it is cultural, political, and background, whatever it may be; even in the international church, like our church of 50 people, it has 25 countries represented. So, you have people from warm cultures, cold cultures, from charismatic church backgrounds to the most conservative, Lutheran, or Catholic backgrounds. So, you have the span of things, and so you must take all of those aspects, not just the church background, but the cultural background and not just the cultural background, but also where they grew up, who they are, what is their family structure, all of those things are important.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). During the interview process, Participant A6

indicated that communication is essential to keep the church connected, but it is challenging in a

multicultural and multilingual church (CBI/IG/IU).

> **CP:** Communication is one of the hardest things in any aspect of life. In marriage, in work, whatever it may be, you throw it in on top of five continents, 25 cultures, and numerous church backgrounds. Effective communication is complex. Very few of our congregants are native speakers. And so, when you think about that, are you defining terms, theological terms, and specialized terms that you may use in the English language that an English language learner does not know? Sometimes, I find myself saying words repeatedly to make sure people know what the words mean, so effective communication is the layers deep with that. And then, following up multiple times, I often say to our leadership team, when you think you have said enough, say it two or three more times to people because culturally, I may say something to someone, and they understand it one way, and I may understand differently. And so, effective communication needs to be persistent.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher

closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his

COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A6 Summary (RQ2)

During the interview, Participant A6 described how stepping into a new church amid

COVID-19 and shepherding a multicultural and multilingual church through the complexity of

COVID-19 was very challenging. Participant A6 indicated that leading in a multicultural church

requires a cultural understanding of the people, diverse leadership interactions, and relationship

skills (Livermore, 2015) (CBI). According to Participant A6, administrative leadership is not his

greatest strength. He is a relational leader whose pastoral strength is connecting and building

relationships (CBI). His statements revealed that during COVID-19, he operated more from

community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership

interactions (CBI/IG/IU). These three complexity leadership interactions were his leadership

construct as an LCL during COVID-19.

Participant A7 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 23, 2023, at 0800 CST /1500 CEST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A7 is a local church leader and, during COVID-19, was the lead pastor and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention and Macro in the local church. During the interview, Participant A7 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A7 was calm and sitting at a desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A7 prayed for Jesus to bless this time and to guide the interview session. Participant A7 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** There were many ups and downs with COVID from a personal standpoint. When COVID hit, everything was forced to pause, and we were locked in. My creative juices in how we get through this started flowing, which was probably good for me mentally at the time, but it was also a forced slowdown. For many reasons, I needed to slow down. It was great spending time with my wife, and we got into cooking and started doing things we'd never really had time to do. My wife got pregnant during COVID-19, was hospitalized, and had to be on a ventilator. It was scary because, at one point, it looked like they would have to induce labor at six months.

> **SP:** I believe the biblical notion of suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope. And the aspects of it that were suffering, like what happened with my wife, and indeed, we are thankful for it, but there were very scary periods for me. My wife's dad also died during that time. And so, we were dealing with the grief of his passing and with joy because our daughter was born during COVID. So, there were many times of crisis when I felt like I had no one to depend on but God. I was much more trusting in God's sovereignty because the world does not depend on me.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A7 described that when COVID-19 hit, he had been the pastor for five years and had been in the church for nine years. He stated that his longevity in the church allowed him to develop a deep trust with the church body, and that

helped him lead through the pandemic. Participant A7 further describes the innovation and creativity needed to thrive in COVID-19.

> **LP:** I was the senior pastor and have been since 2016. I became senior pastor after serving as the youth and young adult pastor. I arrived at the church in 2012. So, that is a long time to be at this church. I was the second longest-tenured pastor in the church's history, so I have been there for a while to earn the people's trust. So, leadership in terms of leading a church, developing listening skills, and asking powerful questions that stimulate good discussion, I think maybe during that time, it made me develop my listening skills to become a good listener.

> **LP:** COVID-19 got my creative thinking going. I enjoy being an outside-the-box thinker, which allows me to do that. How do we do church in this situation? And we had just begun kind of setting up a structure where things could be done by ZOOM® and online and posting things, so I feel like I knew how to do some of those things. As far as the church is concerned, they responded well. God did good things in our church, you know, during COVID. It was not easy, but it was good.

> **Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3).** According to Participant A7, communication is critical in a multicultural and multilingual church with a membership of 30 different nationalities and a sizeable transitory population that can expand to 40 nationalities (Livermore, 2015) (CBI/IG/IU). Participant A7 described that communication must be intentional, clear, and widespread so people know what is happening and to be able to provide comfort for those suffering (IG/IU).

> **CP:** Well, just using the word communication transmits one idea to another. So, successful communication means a message has been communicated and received. So, I would say that effective communication means clarity. Overall, communication during COVID-19 was not perfect, but it was good. Our church is multicultural and multilingual, so dealing with all the different cultural dynamics of how we communicate is essential to understanding. I think there is a different amount of understanding when interacting with people of different cultures and languages. But I think that is one of the beautiful things the Gospel does. We are all sinners, but we are all saved through the Gospel. You all have a common grace that we all point to that helps us to get through crisis. It helps us humble ourselves before each other, regardless of cultural or economic background.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leaders for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A7 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A7 used generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using leadership interactions quite effectively during COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IU/IG). During the pandemic, the creative ideas of Corona care groups, prerecorded sermons on YouTube®, ZOOM® prayer meetings, and later church meetings in the park, and a ZOOM® Christmas event that allowed current and former church members and pastors to connect and talk during COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Participant A7 detailed organizing all the council members into Corona care groups to serve as shepherds during COVID-19. These Corona care groups served as formal and informal social networks to gather information and use that information to make decisions and keep all church members updated (IG/IU). Several emergent worshiping and social interaction ideas arose from the Corona groups (GLI/CBI). Participant A7 also indicated that leading in a multicultural church requires a solid cultural understanding of the people, diverse leadership interactions, and relationship skills (Livermore, 2015). These four complexity leadership interactions guided his LCL leadership.

Participant A8 Interview

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Thursday, August 24, 2023, at 0600 CST /1300 CEST. The interview was conducted using the Executive Leadership Team guide (Appendix F) and the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A8 is a local church leader, and during COVID-19, he was the lead pastor, and on the executive leadership team, so he operated at the Macro and Meso leadership levels in the International Protestant Convention and the Macro level in the local church. During the interview, Participant A8 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A8 was relaxed and sitting at a desk when the interview began.

Before asking the first question, Participant A8 prayed for the Lord to bless and honor the study

and for guidance in the interview session. Participant A8 provided insight into the personal and

spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** So, at first, it was quite stressful, and it also added a lot of work at the beginning. When the U.S. announced stopping travel from Europe, I was with convention leaders preparing for the annual convention. And so, we have people on the way from the U.S. to be our key speaker, who had to turn around. So, I had to evacuate Europe to return to my home church. It created a lot of stress. It was out of the ordinary and out of everyone's comfort zone. But there were some good things as well because I traveled about 50% and could not travel for 18 months, so my wife was happy, and it gave us some time to focus on the family, which was nice.

> **SP:** Regarding COVID-19, I guess it brought my focus back to the people more than programs. I would not say my faith was largely affected, but it was not shaken in any way, living through a global crisis. But you get to experience the reality of your faith and understand that God is in control. We do what we can, but God has a purpose in whatever He allows. I got to experience that firsthand, such as where we got to restructure, and we are in a much better place financially and structurally leadership-wise coming out of the pandemic than before.

> **Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3).** Participant A8 described his leadership role during

and through COVID-19. He is the senior pastor of his church (13 years) and has been in the

church for 17 years.

> **LP:** My role in the church was senior pastor during COVID-19, and I also served on the executive leadership team during that time. I stepped down in October 2022 after serving for seven years in the role of developing leaders. One of the main things we focus on is church unity. I think that God has consistently, you know, grown me in creating unity within the church. And so, I could use some of those same skills and make sure we brought unity and did not allow this to break us. And so, unity is a big thing for me.

> **LP:** We have people from maybe 30 different nations, people with backgrounds as Lutherans and charismatics, and Baptists and Presbyterians, and we also have a Buddhist in the church who is no longer a Buddhist but is not a Christian. And so, the point is, they bring many different things into it, and we want to guide them into the truth. So, you must build a different foundation of cultural understanding and deconstruct things so everyone understands. We want everybody to know we are trying to follow Christ together.

> **Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3).** According to Participant A8, he used collective

leadership and a social networking approach to transmitting and receiving information in the

church (CBI/IG/IU). He used the collective church leadership to keep the church body connected

so people felt they were in the loop and could provide feedback (CBI/IG/IU). He started with a

core team, expanded to a larger team, got everybody on the same page, empowered them, and

released them to work in their areas.

> **CP:** Communication is transparent and clear messaging, so everybody feels in the loop. Unfortunately, it takes more than that because people still say I did not see, and you are like, it was in the bulletin and the weekly email and on this poster right here that you are looking at, but so you know, you need redundancy in your communication. I feel information flowed freely during COVID because people wanted to connect, give feedback, and be open and honest. At first, we did not have streaming services, so, what we did was we went to the ZOOM®, and we had church on that platform. We also used the different modes and different uses for breakout rooms. I think the initial ZOOM® calls helped because people were cut off from each other's home from work and could not go, so it was a place to meet and remind people that the church is still here for us.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher

closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his

COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A8 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A8 used generative, community-building, information-gathering, and

information-using leadership interactions to sustain the church and keep the community

connected during COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Participant A8 also indicated that leading in a

multicultural church requires a solid cultural understanding of the people, diverse leadership

interactions, and good communication and relationship skills. Participant A8 also indicated that

keeping the church unified throughout COVID-19 was critically important to what he did as a

leader. These four complexity leadership interactions guided his leadership as an LCL.

Participant A9 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Thursday, August 24, 2023, at 1230 CST /1930

CEST. The interview was conducted using the Executive Leadership Team guide (Appendix F).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A9 was part of the executive leadership team during COVID-19 and was the lead event organizer and communication coordinator for the International Protestant Convention. During the interview, Participant A9 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A9 was relaxed and sitting on a comfortable chair when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A9 prayed for God's blessing and guidance for the interview session. Participant A9 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** I think the biggest concern I had during COVID-19 was not being able to travel and not knowing when I would be able to travel. Also, working from home affected my work because it affected my favorite part of my job, which was organizing events. So, it felt like something was just sucked out from under me. I was with the rest of Europe's executive leadership team when the U.S. announced its COVID-19 restrictions. We were ready to launch the conference and had to cancel it. And for me, everything I have been working on for months has just been torn into pieces. So, I think I had a lot of mixed emotions at first. Initially, the lockdown was okay because it was like a sabbatical, allowing me to take life slower, but we went into many lockdowns and restrictions.

> **SP:** I think the time to slow down helped my faith and walk with God. I had more time with God, and He is always with you. I also enjoyed sitting down at the piano, just like after church service. I missed worship services, but I would go and sit down and play songs for myself, which were meaningful experiences for me. But the isolation of the pandemic also made me think about biblical prophecies about wars and rumors of wars, disease, and pestilence. Getting back to work was essential for my sanity. I appreciate attending church more because when it is stripped away, you realize it is a privilege.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3)

Participant A9 described the executive leadership during COVID-19. Participant A9 worked directly with the General Secretary as the lead event organizer and coordinator. Participant A9 served as a Convention member for 33 years and an ELT for 20 years.

> **LP**: My leadership role was a mixture of things. I was an administrative assistant, office manager, executive assistant, communications coordinator, and events planner. One of the big things I do is to make sure people feel connected to something bigger than themselves through networking and fellowship. During COVID-19, it was my job to keep the communication lines open so the churches, pastors, and executive leaders felt

connected and had a place for help, encouragement, prayer, or whatever they needed the time. I provided opportunities to meet online and gave them hope that we would meet again one day.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A9, communication was essential to keeping the convention connected and ensuring the General Secretary had information about the churches and pastors (CBI/IG/IU).

> **CP:** Communication is critical since we have 60 churches scattered across the globe. Our communications are conducted electronically except when we meet for annual conventions in Europe or Central America. As communications coordinator, I switched to ZOOM® a few years before COVID-19. When COVID-19 hit and the lockdown occurred, we started using the breakout rooms for online prayer meetings and individual counseling rooms. We also did outreach through daily phone calls.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for her insight into the COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A9 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A9 used community-building, information-gathering, and information-using leadership interactions to sustain the church and keep the community connected during COVID-19 (CBI/IG/IU). During the interview, Participant A9 indicated that because of the experience of COVID-19 governmental lockdowns and church restrictions, the leader left the ELT position to join an organization that works with the persecuted church. These three complexity leadership interactions guided the leadership interactions as an ELT.

Participant A10 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Friday, August 25, 2023, at 0600 CST /1300 CEST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insight. During COVID-19, Participant A10 was a local church leader and lead pastor who operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant

Convention and the Macro level in his church. During the interview, Participant A10 described

the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and

thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A10 was relaxed and sitting in a

comfortable chair when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A10

prayed for God's wisdom and guidance on the study and the results of the interview session.

Participant A10 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** It is ironic that you should ask because my wife and I had COVID again two weeks ago. It was my second case and her third. Back in the original strain, my wife ended up in the hospital with COVID-induced pneumonia for a week. And, you know, it was certainly not pleasant. There was great stress and strain during the pandemic and the circumstances of trying to lead a church through that crisis. Not only was there the fact that we both had COVID-19 but there was the process of trying to figure out how to live and keep up with the various guidelines.

> **SP:** I think COVID-19 strengthened my faith. It strengthened my faith in God's ability to do something even when it was the most difficult of times, and we saw so many miracles happen. I mean, we have gotten used to that to some degree. Our fundamental approach to ministry is to try and keep up with what God is doing, which is true. It is a case in which God opens doors, and we are like, I did not expect that to happen.

> **Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3).** Participant A10 described his role during COVID-19

and the leadership he provided as the senior pastor. Participant A10's ministry experience is a

combination of university and student ministries. He understood new beginnings and dynamic

changes and felt this was essential in his leadership during COVID-19.

> **LP:** But the things that seemed to come to the top of my mind during the pandemic were those from my creative side. The international church is simply a student ministry with an older component. At one point, my wife and I had this conversation early on in our ministry, and she said, I do not know how to deal with people leaving so often. But that is a component of transitional churches and is challenging for many people. And I said to her, look at it, the student ministry, they are graduating. We get first-year students, and we have sophomores and juniors. Then, we have seniors for a while before they transition to the next place God has for them. We have not lost a single person.

> **LP:** Regarding leadership experience, I would say the student ministry background was probably the most significant single element and was a big help in thinking things through and moving forward. I think the training that I had as a student minister. Part of my role was training those who were student ministers and looking at things creatively. I

do not particularly appreciate being locked into a particular pattern of doing things, which was undoubtedly a big help in the pandemic. You know, one of the things that COVID brought us was opportunities for change. You always had that in an international church, but certainly, COVID brought that opportunity in a new way.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A10, he used collective leadership and a social networking approach to transmitting and receiving information in the church (CBI/IG/IU). He used the core church leadership team and the ministries' social networks to unite the church community as a body of Christ, allowing information to flow through the church quickly (CBI/IG/IU).

> **CP:** To me, successful communication is when the church's people understand, and I would even go a step beyond understanding to a sense of ownership. I would say, for the most part, there are parts of the communication process you did not have during COVID-19. We tried to set many things into place to allow communication and just tried to communicate to people through multiple means. It was challenging, no doubt about it, but we tried to do everything we could. The basic information must be communicated.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A10 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A10 used generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using leadership interactions to sustain the church and keep the community connected during COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Participant A10 indicated that it took 18 months of meeting online before they could meet as a complete church. According to Participant A10, the pandemic created many different and unexpected challenges. However, the blessing of watching God at work during COVID-19 strengthened his faith. Participant A10 commented that God is not bound by anything, including a pandemic. These four complexity leadership interactions guided his leadership as an LCL.

Participant A11 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 30, 2023, at 1630 CST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A11 is a local church leader and, during COVID-19, was the lead pastor and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention and the Macro level in his church. During the interview, Participant A11 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A11 was calm and sitting at a desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A11 prayed for God's blessing on the study and let it encourage other pastors. Participant A11 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** I think, like everyone else, COVID-19 was unknown territory. It was a shift in the church schedule and how ministry is done. Depending on where you live may depend on where you are affected; I would count our country as sort of middle of the road; we did have restrictions, and we did not meet for services. And in other ways, we did have some stricter restrictions than the U.S., but not as strict as elsewhere. So, I took advantage of that: a lot more hiking and biking and a few of those things. And my wife and I have a strong marriage, so we are used to being together. The lack of face-to-face interaction was difficult, and the uncertainty and learning how to lead the church were challenging.

> **SP:** I think God's grace already grounded me. I think we did see many people dealing with fear and the fear of disease. As for me, it was not this great growth time. So, I will say it was not a decrease in faith, but it reaffirmed many things in my faith. I was glad everything slowed down, but I would not say I liked the schedule. Honestly, it was very, too slow for me. And I did some things that I usually would not do. My wife's mother passed away in 2020, and my mom passed away in 2022.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A11 described his role during COVID-19 and the leadership he provided as the senior pastor. Participant A11 described that leading an international church during COVID-19 was uncharted territory and made you think about correctly navigating host country laws and how you care for people now that you are physically separated.

LP: I think, at least so in my case, I have been at the church for 21 years. And so, when COVID hit, we were here about 18 years and had built great trust. We had structures in place with our senior leadership team and board of directors and regularly met with those groups. And so, I think having been a pastor for a long time was very positive. However, no courses were offered or taught about ministering during a pandemic. So, leading during that time was a little bit different. We did try things differently.

LP: It hit our country hard because we depend highly on tourism. And so a lot of the tourism section was affected, and our church responded positively, with people willing to get out and help. We started a Food Distribution Program to help those in need, and that program continues today. We did several limited community projects-based things on what you could do. I think there were some positives.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A11, communication was vital to the outreach with their members and to grow online during COVID-19. Participant A11 also relied on the collective leadership of the church and social networking capability to transmit and receive information in the church to keep unified and connected. He used the core leadership of deacons and life groups to keep the church body connected and interacting.

CP: I think that successful church communication is those who can, who belong to that church, generally have a sense of what is going on and what is coming, whether it is the times of the services, the locations of the services, and online. During COVID-19, I involved our deacons and life group leaders to provide outreach to our members. I had our key leaders contact ten people this week and check on them via phone or chat to see how they are doing. And I made myself available online, and we had open forums, prayer meetings, and meetings with the pastor online, inviting our people to interact to understand their issues and stay connected.

CP: We improved our lines of communication with our congregation, especially in the early days of the pandemic. We had an online presence, but we upped our presence on Facebook®. We were already on Instagram®, but we also started communicating via online platforms. When we started to come back, we continued to be clear about our mission, values, and the COVID-19 rules and processes required. When we returned to services, we over-communicated what the service would be like and what people would be expected to do because we had a rigorous process. So, we filmed the video, let people know that we are going to have one entrance point, you must register, you must wear your mask, you must be seated, you know, and we communicated those things and re-communicated those things for quite some time.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A11 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A11 used administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using leadership interactions to sustain church operations, keep the body connected, and conduct community outreach during COVID-19 (GLI/CBI/IG/IU). Participant A11 said communication and transparent information flow were vital, especially in a multicultural church, to listen to the challenges of the congregation and the local community and organize ways to minister to both (CBI/IG/IU). These five complexity leadership interactions guided his LCL leadership.

Participant A12 Interview.

The ZOOM® interview occurred on Wednesday, August 30, 2023, at 1230 CST. The interview used the Local Church Leader interview guide (Appendix G).

Lived Experience Insights. Participant A12 is a local church leader and, during COVID-19, was the senior pastor and operated from the Meso leadership level in the International Protestant Convention and the Macro level in his church. During the interview, Participant A11 described the effects of COVID-19 on personal life, faith, leadership role during the pandemic, and thoughts on communication and information flow. Participant A12 was calm and sitting at a desk when the interview began. Before asking the first question, Participant A12 prayed for God's wisdom and discernment for the interview session and the study. Participant A12 provided insight into the personal and spiritual effects of COVID-19.

> **PP:** We were in extremely strict lockdowns here in our country, to the point where only humanitarian flights could leave the country. We were locked down inside our homes where men could only go out three days a week, and women could only go out the other three days for one hour each day. We could only leave the compound of our house for a maximum of three hours a day as men and three hours as a wife, and there were separate times for each of us. I am very active and like being with people, which was extremely hard during COVID. I was devastated as a pastor because I loved being with people, and I loved connecting with people. And it was like we had just started to hit our stride. The

church was growing; we were baptizing people, and everything stopped. It was highly discouraging, as a pastor, because I felt like we had just hit our stride.

SP: My faith was reassured. There were times of doubt, but I know it was amid those doubts that God reminded me of who He was and his promises, and I remember we would always pre-record our messages. My wife and I were prerecording a message. I remember breaking down once, being so filled with doubt and discouragement, and then trying to go back in and rewrite the sermon because I did not feel like it was good. I am just breaking down and falling before God and saying, look, you know, teach me what You want me to teach me during this time.

Leadership Insights (RQ1/RQ3). Participant A12 described his role during COVID-19 and the leadership he provided as the senior pastor. According to Participant A12, the church lost 70 to 75 percent of its people, and most left the country because of the strict lockdown restrictions. Participant A12 relied on the remaining church body to use their talents and gifts to lead through COVID-19.

LP: So, before moving to lead this church, I was part of a larger church that went through a leadership moral failure, and I was on staff at the time and just watching but also having to lead in it and not so much lead during this crisis. I got to see what it looked like to take ownership and lead in a way that would bring trust to those sticking around. And so yeah, there was leadership, but also like, invite other people in and, and, and do different things. I invited other people in to lead, so it was not just me but other people in the church and our leadership team.

Information Flow Insights (RQ1/RQ3). According to Participant A12, communication was vital during the COVID-19 crisis; it provided the requisite information to make decisions on church operations, care, and feeding of the congregation.

CP: Well, I think communication is key to leading. We doubled our communications because we were so locked up here during COVID. When we used only to send one email a week, we went to two emails. We communicated through Bible studies, small groups, and various ways to keep connected. You need good communication to develop a community and deepen relationships. We had people come who would not communicate; I would not say they felt like they were part of our community because they never really contributed or communicated to any of those things. I would say the relationships and the community became more deeply connected after COVID-19 than before the pandemic. From a leadership standpoint, I would say we would communicate and encourage people to communicate.

After the interview was complete and no questions needed clarification, this researcher closed the interview session in prayer and thanked the leader for his words and insight into his COVID-19 leadership experience.

Participant A12 Summary (RQ2)

Participant A12 used generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using leadership interactions to sustain the church and keep the church community connected during COVID-19 (CBI/IG/IU). Participant A12 described that successful communication develops the necessary trust in leadership and is essential in developing the church community. During the COVID-19 interview, Participant A12 described the importance of communication and connection: "Those of us who were left were one body was working together and involved in this, and I would say that was the best part of COVID-19. We are close like no other, and we saw intense relationships among those with us during that time." These four complexity leadership interactions guided his LCL leadership.

ELT and LCL Interview Findings

As described above, this study discovered four main themes that emerged from the coding process that schematized data structure, and the interviews described lived experiences, leadership, and information flow insights. During the participant interviews, the concepts of complexity leadership interactions of administrative, generative, community-building, and social networks enabled complexity leadership functions of information-gathering and information-using, which were described in their actions and words (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The first three complexity leadership functions--generative, administrative, and community-building, are how people interact or relate in an organization for complex organizing (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). The information-related functions of information-gathering and information-using relate to what complex organizing interactions are about (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Community-Building, Generative, and Administrative Leadership Interactions (RQ1/RQ2)

In response to RQ1, through the data collection process, the ELTs and LCLs indicated that they operationalized complexity leadership in their approach to leading in, through, and beyond the COVID-19 crisis through their words and actions. Through the interview responses, ELT and LCL leaders indicated they needed to adapt to the changing circumstances and the importance of being a shepherd focused on people, relationships, and the church community. Community-building interactions to stay connected were more needed during COVID-19 rather than on tithes and the administrative functions of the church. In response to RQ2, although community-building, generative leadership interactions, and information-gathering and information-using functions were predominately described in detail by the twelve ELTs and LCLs, nine LCLs discussed administrative leadership to ensure their witness was not watered down and to show compassion for others. Participant A8 discussed the importance of unity and a sense of belonging in the church for fellowship and to create a cohesive church community (Jensen, 2021; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Pettit, 2008). Participants A1-A12 stated that engaging in a shared life together in a multicultural and multilingual convention requires relationship and leadership skills that embrace the diversity of the different nationalities but are unified as the body of Christ (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; ESV, 2011, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Lingenfelter, 2008; Pettit, 2008). Participants A2, A3, A5, A6, A7, A8, A11, and A12 detailed that trust was essential during COVID-19 so the church body respected and understood why decisions were made during the pandemic (Jensen, 2021; Sanders, 2017; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Koinonia helps to form a oneness or identity in the body of Christ but understands the distinctiveness of each individual (Pazmino, 2008).

During COVID-19, generative leadership produced innovations, resiliency, and adaptations to address the risk and uncertainty of face-to-face meetings, church gatherings, and social interactions (Jensen, 2021; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Participant A7 discussed how COVID-19 spurred his creative juices, and he encouraged the church, through collaboration and communication, to find creative ways to meet as a church and still maintain country guidelines (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Participants A7, A10, A11, and A12 detailed how, through a collective leadership approach and building an organizational learning culture in the church (CAS), new ideas and knowledge emerged during COVID-19 (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hall et al., 2010, Avery & Gaede, 2007). Participants A1-A12 discussed the adaptations and changes through technology and innovation that were used or implemented (*coarse-grain properties*) to stay connected and communicate during COVID-19 (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). During COVID-19, administrative leadership was discussed by Participants A1, A2, A4, A6, A7, A8, A10, A11, and A12 to indicate how they followed the country guidelines and established simple rules (*coarse-grain properties*) for COVID-19 to provide clarity amidst complexity (Jensen, 2021; Plowman et al., 2007). Participant A8 indicated that during COVID-19, the church organizationally restructured for efficient resource control when church membership dropped (Tumblin, 2017; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Welch, 2011). Participant A5 specified that after COVID-19 restrictions started to wane, it was necessary to align church culture and organizational structure (*coarse-grain properties*) by refocusing several church policies and rewriting the church constitution (Tumblin, 2107; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Information-Gathering Interactions and Information-Using Interactions

According to Jensen (2021), Wheatley (2006), and Gleick (1996), information is the lifeblood of an organization and is necessary for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems

monitoring. Participants A1-A12 communicated that the information-gathering and information-using functions were essential during the lockdowns. ELTs and LCLs employed the macro, meso, and micro social networks in the convention and the churches to discover and learn new information through fine-grain interactions (*integration and synthesis*) about what was happening in the convention, the churches, and the congregations (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2105).

At the macro level, the ELTs and LCLs prayed together and shared information and innovative ideas to keep connected and linked together through a common purpose of helping each other during the crisis. At the meso level, the LCLS and their staff connected the body with administrative, generative, and community-building interactions focused on communication and connection. At the micro level, each church member interacted and connected through their life groups and church ministries to stay spiritually connected and live as Christ's body. Participants A1-A12 discussed that information-gathering was vital to assessing the convention and the church's health. ELTs and LCLs used the gathered information to make decisions, aid, and give directions during the COVID-19 crisis.

Information Flow and Social Networks (RQ1/RQ3)

Relationships, social interactions, and communication exchanges are the heart of church life (Högberg, 2021; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Wieck, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). In response to RQ3, through the data collection process, the participants discussed how they used or leveraged the existing convention and church social networks to send and receive information to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis. Several participants indicated that they increased or doubled the amount of information flowing through social networks to sustain their connectedness and fellowship to reduce the anxiety and panic from the isolation of the pandemic (Jackson & Williams, 2021). People relate to each other through interconnected social networks

and interactions to facilitate communication exchanges and information flows (Hansen et al., 2011; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). It is through the fine-grain socio-spiritual interactions of the church community and families' social networks to keep the church and believers interacting and connected (Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Campbell & Garner, 2016; Bolsinger, 2015; Black & Smith, 2003).

Evaluation of the Research Design

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of International Protestant Convention ELTs and LCLs who led during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. The effect of a qualitative research design is contingent on information and collected data discovered during the participant's lived experience interviews. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), qualitative research aids a researcher in detecting complex procedures, relational interconnectivity, and operational barriers. In this transcendental research, 12 ELT and LCL participants described their lived experiences in-depth, which enabled this researcher to perceive the true essence of the phenomenon (COVID-19), what they felt, and how they led through the pandemic relative to complexity leadership theory. Leading a church through this complexity and dynamic change required leaders to understand how to balance church operations, maintain community-building activities, and generate problem-solving ideas and action plans (Elkington & Booysen, 2015; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Chester & Timmis, 2008)

The guiding research theory influences a research design's strengths and weaknesses. The strength of this research design would be the application of Hazy and Uhl-Bien's Operationalizing of Complexity Leadership Theory. The theory guided the development of the three guiding Research Questions. This research used the three questions to guide the ELT and LCL interviews and capture the essence of each participant's lived experience to discover the

emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic. Four dominant themes emerged that revealed the complexity of leadership interactions through the research data analysis of the participant interviews. The themes validated that the transcendental phenomenological approach was correct for this study and appropriate for the research purpose statement.

A weakness of the research design was the social connectivity section of the questionnaire. A questionnaire was sent to all convention participants inquiring about demographics, research eligibility, and the participants' network connectivity. Despite the questionnaire's validation in the pilot study and the recommended changes requested by the pilot study participants, there was still some confusion. Due to the confusion, the participants did not fully use the social connectivity section of the questionnaire, and it was eliminated from the study results.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the observations and findings of complexity leadership interactions research and the lived experiences of 12 International Protestant Convention Participants. The chapter started with an overall outline of the chapter and the research protocols and measures, followed by the questionnaire demographic and sample data, ELT and LCL data concerning their leadership roles, and emerging and recurrent themes tables. The participants' narratives of the phenomenon are described by each individual with rich and detailed descriptions. Finally, Chapter Five presents the research's conclusions, implications, and applications, describes the research limitations, and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This research studied the lived experiences and in-depth leadership descriptions of the International Protestant Convention executive leadership team and local church leadership interactions to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis. Chapter Four examined several emergent themes and recurring patterns related to the participants' lived experiences and leadership insights. Chapter Five will reiterate the research purpose and the questions that guided the research design and conclude with the study's limitations and further research recommendations.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research was to assess, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the Convention leadership teams to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis (Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020; Dailey, 2020; Veldsman, 2020; Borgatti et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018).

Research Questions

The following Research Questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ2. What complexity leadership interactions, administrative, generative, community building, and information-gathering and information-using, did the selected participants rely on the most to lead an organization (*church*) through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

In Chapter Four, four themes emerged from the participant interviews and the coding process. This section provides a summation of the research findings, implications, and application of the research findings. COVID-19 disrupted the habits and routines of church ministry. It required ELTs and LCLs to rapidly respond to the emerging threat of brick-and-mortar church closures, adapt to an online church community, and still provide care, support, and guidance. The chaos caused by the pandemic created ministry challenges and opportunities for the LCLs to rethink and reframe how they conduct church and extend their outreach into their communities (Widjaja et al., 2021; Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Communication and Connection (RQ1/RQ3)

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

The communication and connection theme correlates to community-building, generative leadership, information-gathering, and information-using interactions in RQ1 and the effect of information flow in RQ3 as it shows the participants' lived experiences and their leadership approach concerning Complexity Leadership Theory. Based on the research findings from the 12 participant interviews and coding, the ELTs and LCLs agreed that a critical component of leadership in a crisis is effective and constant communication to shepherd the convention and the 60 churches during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Obolensky (2014) indicates that leaders are complex adaptive systems that interact and adapt to their ecosystem. The ELT and LCL participants, who are complex adaptive leaders, revealed the necessity to adapt their leadership to engage, cope, and make sense of the emergent virus conditions to sustain the requisite social network interactions and information flow for the church community (Bolsinger, 2020; Wright, 2020; Bolsinger, 2015; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Ashby, 1956). According to Kaiser (2020), people look to leaders for hope and the way forward in times of crisis. The data analysis revealed that the ELTs and LCLs" use of community-building, information-gathering, and information-using functions allowed ELTs and LCLs to reframe the crisis, reduce uncertainty, and help provide context to the congregation from focusing on fear and anxiety to focusing on the refuge and strength of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the hope found in the Word of God (Ross, 2021).

According to ELT and LCL leaders, keeping the lines of communication open and information flowing (*fine-grain interactions*) was necessary because of the constantly changing circumstances and uncertainty. The ELT leaders relied on constant communication and information flow with the convention leadership team and the pastors to understand and contextualize each LCL country's challenges and how the convention could assist (Obolensky, 2014). The LCLs described the intentional process of information-gathering, information-using, and relying on the inherent social networks embedded in the church to understand what was happening in the congregation and then use the information to provide assistance and direction. The social network enabled information-gathering functions and information-using for sensemaking and sensegiving, which was critical for the LCLs. They relied on the church social networks of life groups, corona care groups, and women's, men's, and children's ministries for communication and information flow. The pandemic showed the ELTs and LCLs the

significance of remaining connected as a church community for worship and fellowship through technology (Cormode, 2020; Rainer, 2020).

Constant and Disruptive Change (RQ1/RQ3)

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

The constant and disruptive change theme correlates to administrative, community-building, generative leadership, information-gathering, and information-using interactions in RQ1 and the effect of information flow in RQ3 as it shows the participants' lived experiences and their leadership approach concerning Complexity Leadership. Based on the research findings from the 12 participant interviews and coding, the ELTs and LCLs indicated that dynamic change disrupted the fellowship and in-person meetings of the church. The disruptive change created a pre-COVID and post-COVID environment that the convention and churches struggled to respond to initially.

The ELT and LCL participants characterized this as a liminal time of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity with no defined or clear-cut rules for leading and ministering. Administratively, Participants A1-A12 established simple rules (*coarse-grain properties*) for social distancing, church cleanliness, masking, and church attendance to reduce uncertainty and provide clear roles and responsibilities for church operations (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Welch, 2011; Plowman et al., 2007). During the interviews, Participants A2, A5, and A11 (LCLs) discussed that their seminary training had not prepared them to lead during the crisis. Meanwhile, Participant A3, an ELT, discussed that several of the leaders in the convention expressed the same concern to him (Baumgartner, 2017; Elkington et al., 2015).

Since the International Protestant Convention has churches in 25 countries, each country and each leader handled the virus response differently. The uncharted waters and territory that emerged from the pandemic challenged each leader to understand what was happening and how to respond. After the initial lockdown, some churches could continue meeting through social distancing efforts, but others, based on the country's regulations and guidance, could not meet for up to 18 months. The change forced every church to go online and use prerecorded sermons or live-streaming services. Because of this change, churches have continued with live-streaming services (*coarse-grain properties*) with taped sermons after the live-stream to meet the needs of those who still feel uncomfortable meeting due to COVID issues or pre-existing diseases.

Several churches also experienced disruptive and dynamic changes in their church membership because of the uncertainty and impact of the virus. Churches lost members due to restrictions in the countries they were currently residing in, issues concerning mask mandates and COVID-19 requirements, social distancing, and the lockdown of the church by the governments. Several LCLs indicated that members left because they felt it was better to go back to their home countries to go through COVID-19. The reported loss of church membership by LCLs ranged from one church losing 75% of their congregation while other churches reported losing only a few members. The data analysis revealed that the ELTs and LCLs use of administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using functions allowed church leaders to face complex and dynamic situations daily and quickly adapt to the challenging cultures, changing circumstances, and complex crises and problems (Gibbons, 2009).

Technological Adaptability and Creative Innovation (RQ1/RQ3)

RQ1: *What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering,*

and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

      RQ3*. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?*

      The technology adaptability and creative innovation theme correlates to generative leadership, information gathering, and using interactions in RQ1 and the effect of information flow in RQ3 as it shows the participants' lived experiences and their leadership approach concerning Complexity Leadership. Based on the research findings from the 12 participant interviews and coding the ELTs and LCLs, they believed that adapting to online and streaming technologies and finding innovative and creative ways of meeting was critical in a crisis. Technologically, for many international churches, the only online presence before COVID-19 was a static website that indicated the church leadership, times of service, and directions to the church. COVID-19 forced them to establish a more significant online presence to reach out to the church members in lockdown.

      This was not a welcome change for all LCLs, as they begrudgingly adapted to the crisis. The technological adaptations that Participants A1-A12 implemented included online live streaming capabilities of ZOOM®, WhatsApp®, Facebook®, WebEx® and YouTube®, new video cameras and lighting to keep the lines of communication open to hear concerns, issues, and feedback from the church body. The adaptive ministry methods included outdoor sermons in a Roman-style amphitheater, on the hillside, parks, life group meetings in the park, and daily and weekly online prayer groups with breakout rooms for individual counseling.

      Aside from not meeting in person, and for some churches, it was 18 months before they could meet again in person as a church, the fine-grain interactions of live-streaming church services, virtual life groups, ZOOM® coffee conversations after church, daily and weekly telephone calls, backyard small groups, meet in the pastor in the park walk-bys, drive-by

farewells, and daily and weekly online prayer meetings all helped each church do life together. This was an essential theme because complexity leadership operates in and through the social dynamics of social networks of interconnected relationships, communication exchange, and meaningful dialogue (Goldstein et al., 2010; Hazy et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

The data analysis revealed that the ELTs and LCLs use of generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using functions allowed church leaders to learn new skills, develop innovative leadership practices, and implement new coarse-grain properties to meet the needs of the congregation and the changing environment (Christianson & Barton, 2021; Francis, 2021; Jackson & Williams, 2021).

Scriptural Focus

RQ1: What are the selected participants' lived experiences that show their leadership approach in relation to administrative, generative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using complexity leadership interactions in leading the convention and churches through the COVID-19 crisis?

RQ3. What effect did the information flow through the convention and church social networks have on reducing uncertainty and providing sensemaking during the COVID-19 crisis?

The scriptural focus theme correlates to community-building leadership, information-gathering, and using-interactions in RQ1 and the effect of information flow in RQ3 as it shows the participants' lived experiences and their leadership approach concerning Complexity Leadership Theory. The body of Christ and the Vine which Christians are grafted into is an interrelated living organism, a socio-spiritual community defined by the living Word and in relationship with the Triune God and His creation (Erickson, 2015; Osmer, 2008; Van Gelder, 2000). In John 15:9-10 (ESV, 2001), Jesus tells his followers that he is the Vine and source of life and fruitfulness. From the Vine, a Christian leader gains strength and sustenance from Christ during complex and challenging times. Based on the research findings from the 12 participant interviews and coding, the church leaders believed that their dependence on God, relationship

with Christ, and scriptural focus were essential to thrive and not just survive in the crisis. The

pandemic has reminded church leaders that the true church is not a brick-and-mortar building but

the people (Francis, 2021). The scriptural focus suggests the church is a relationally complex

social system and a living body of many parts (ESV, 2001, Acts 2:1; Romans 12:4-8; 1

Corinthians 12:12-31; 1 Peter 1:1). It is a networked social system bounded by a Biblical

worldview, shared Christian values, and an interconnecting faith in Jesus Christ, and God's truth

(Krieger, 2009; Avery & Gaede, 2007; Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). Love is the foundation of

the relationship between Christ and the church community (ESV, 2001, 1 John 4:7-21; Romans

12:10; Hebrew 13:1). Ross (2021) states, "These are strange times and for some terrifying times"

(p. 86). She explains that people are desperate for hope in difficult times like COVID-19, as in

the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The data analysis revealed that the ELTs and LCLs' use of community-building,

information-gathering, and information-using functions allowed church leaders to focus on

helping the anxious and stressed congregate and have them focus on the eternal, unchanging

foundations of their faith, the inerrant Gospel, and the unfailing love of Jesus.

Dominant Complexity Leadership Interactions

RQ2. What complexity leadership interactions, administrative, generative, community building, and information-gathering and information-using, did the selected participants rely on the most to lead an organization (church) through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis?

Based on the research findings from the 12 participant interviews and coding, the

complexity leadership interactions that the ELTs and LCLs relied on the most to lead an

organization through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis were community-building,

information-gathering, and information-using. Community-building is a complex organizing

function that uses day-to-day information, communication, and social interactions to reinforce

organizational policies, values, and goals to create an inspiring collective identity (Momeny &

Gourgues, 2019; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Community-building was essential to keeping the

church connected and interacting to continue reducing the isolation and lack of human

connectivity and growing spiritually, and the participant's discussions specified how they used

information and feedback to create effective dialogue that helped reduce uncertainty and

anxieties (Borgatti et al., 2018; Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010; Freeman, 2004; Wasserman & Faust,

1994). Momeny and Gouges (2019) state that "how and why a leader communicates is just as

important as what a leader communicates." Participants A1-A12 stated that community-building

was important to thriving in COVID-19 but essential for churches locked down for up to

eighteen months, and information-gathering and information-using functions for sensemaking

and sensegiving to provide form and context to the emergent challenges to understand better and

respond to the needs of the congregations.

ELT Participants

Participant A1 stated, "We needed to have ways that we continually hear from our people to understand what was happening in their lives."

Participant A3 commented, "I would say everything we knew about the conditions of the churches during COVID-19 came directly through communication with the pastors. The information flow and communications allowed us to get through COVID-19 together by sharing ideas and best practices and praying together."

LCL Participants

Participant A7 discussed, "Our church is multicultural and multilingual, so dealing with all the different cultural dynamics of how we communicate is essential to understanding. I feel information flowed freely during COVID because people wanted to connect, give feedback, and be open and honest."

Participant A10 stated, "During COVID-19, I involved our deacons and life group leaders in providing outreach to our members. I had our key leaders contact ten people this week and check on them via phone or chat to see how they are doing."

Participant A12, "From a leadership standpoint, it is good communication, but also the development of the community. I would say that keeping connected through COVID-19 deepened the relationships and our community."

Research Implications

The emergent challenges of the virus generated disruptive effects and dynamic changes that created turmoil, stress, and overwhelming challenges to meet government-mandated lockdowns and social interaction restrictions almost overnight (Kinnaman, 2022; Francis, 2021).

Implication One: Christian Crisis Leadership

During COVID-19, church leadership faced and dealt with the rapidly changing and unpredictable environment created by the crisis (Stetzer, 2022; Harney, 2022; Cho, 2021; Klasche, 2020; Van Wynen & Niemandt, 2020). Veldsman (2020) posits that a crisis, such as COVID-19, is an unforeseen and threatening event that creates a significant disruption in the life of a church, community, or society. As indicated by the participants in this study, COVID-19 was an overwhelming event that challenged them as leaders and affected their lives. However, one essential crisis leadership element emerged that a Christian leader should incorporate into their leadership practice. According to Norman et al. (2010), the leadership challenge in handling a crisis is gaining followers' trust through positivity and transparency. A leader can help alleviate fear and anxiety through transparent communication and dialogue. Designing and implementing communication methods that increase transparency during a pandemic can unify a department and build trust.

Furthermore, the Christian perspective understands that through Christ and the Holy Spirit, a leader has the efficacy to lead through a problem. A leader makes sense and provides meaning to a crisis by relying on the Scriptures and understanding how to communicate effectively with everyone and their culture. During the interviews with the ELTs and LCLs, as the chaos and uncertainty caused by COVID-19 created anxiety and multiple church challenges,

the leaders relied on God and the Scriptures for help in the trials and struggles, not just their understanding.

Leadership Application

Kaiser (2020) indicates that during a crisis, people look to their leaders to make sense of and provide hope in times of crisis. A Christian leader must not rely on their or even the world's understanding to make sense and give meaning to their people during a crisis. A Christian leader should seek God to provide peace, understanding, and hope during a crisis. Faith and prayer provide hope. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (ESV, 2001, Romans 12:12). Relying on the Scriptures first and asking God for guidance a Christian leader can help alleviate fear and anxiety in the leaders and their people. Christians amid a crisis sometimes waiver in their faith, as Peter did on the Sea of Galilee, but the Scripture states in Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (ESV, 2001). Firestone (2020) posits that a crisis is an excellent time for a leader to build a stronger community as people recover. A Christian leader needs persistence, perseverance, and faith to endure a crisis. Persistence allows a leader to keep pressing on toward the goal or outcome until the desired outcome is achieved. At the same time, perseverance is the leadership and church's ability to endure a challenging situation with unwavering fortitude and not give up. 2nd Corinthians 4:8-9 (ESV, 2001) states, "We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (ESV, 2001). Finally, amidst the chaos and complexity of a crisis, a Christian leader has the peace of knowing the simple truth that God is with them to persevere in navigating difficult times or crises (Stanton, 2019, p. 147).

Implication Two: Decision-Making Analysis

In Chapter 2, this researcher described two decision-making processes: the Cynefin framework and Osmer's Heuristic methodology that could have assisted the leaders in understanding COVID-19 pandemic challenges. During the interviews, the ELTs or LCLs described how the pandemic was unknown territory and nothing any leaders had experienced. It challenged their leadership and decision-making capability to rapidly understand what was happening and how to respond to keep the body of Christ connected (Harney, 2022; Cho, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021). Although the ELTs or LCLs did not mention the Cynefin Framework in the interviews, their words indicate they operated in a liminal space of the Chaotic and Complex categories at the beginning of COVID-19 (Snowden & Boone, 2007). As the "unknown unknowns" of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted to "known unknowns" and the "known knowns," the leader's decision-making moved to the Complicated and Simple categories of the Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007). By combining both tools, the ELTs and LCLs could have analyzed and diagnosed the challenges and the responses. A practical leadership application is displayed below.

Leadership Application

Descriptive-empirical: What is going on? Global reaction to the rapidly expanding and emergent COVID-19 virus has created restrictions, lockdowns, and curfews worldwide that impact the ability of the church to gather together in person (CDC, 2020; Murugan et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). The pandemic's uncertainty and complexity are categorized as complex and wicked problems and require a leader to probe, sense, and respond. **Probe:** Despite the uncertainty of the dynamic and unfolding events, be prepared to provide counseling and assistance as needed. Establish clear lines of communication to gather information (*integration*

and synthesis) across the convention and in the churches to understand the impact of the

emergent lockdowns and closures. Continually pray for God's guidance and strength to lead like

a shepherd.

Interpretive: Why is it going on? The uncertainty of the consequences of COVID-19

created global fear and panic that spread across the globe just as fast as the virus. **Probe:** Seek

counsel with local government leaders and the church council on expectations and direction.

Start to generate ideas, tactics, and procedures for spiritually connecting the body of Christ

(Convention and Churches). Continue communicating and gathering information (*integration

and synthesis*) through life groups, men's prayer groups, and women's, student, and children's

ministries to sense and respond to the spiritual and mental well-being of the convention and

congregations. Continually pray for God's guidance and strength to understand how to lead in

the crisis.

Normative: What ought to be going on? Christian leaders are called to be wise leaders

and make informed choices even when knowledge about the current or future outcomes is

limited. In a complex and emergent environment, a leader must have the same requisite

complexity in their leadership, which Katz and Khan (1971) call the "incremental influence," to

lead amidst the complexity of the organization (internal complexity) and the environment

(external complexity) (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2013; Ashby, 1956). **Sense:** Used gathered information

to connect the contextual clues and emerging patterns of the leadership challenges to understand

each church and congregation's challenges and issues. As complex adaptive leaders the LCLs

begin to adapt to the lockdowns through innovative and novel ministry methods and engage

digital platforms (*ratcheting*) to continue to do life together. ELTs establish digital prayer

meetings to engage, receive information, respond to the LCLs, and seek God's guidance and comfort together.

Pragmatic: How might we respond? Church leaders need to understand and make sense of the disruptive impact of COVID-19 and learn to detect and respond to the emergent dynamics of the pandemic to recognize the disruption as a catalyst for healing, renewal, and change (Laxton, 2020). **Respond:** Implement sustainable and survivable church strategies *(ratcheting)*, technological adaptations, and innovative changes to stay connected, communicate, and build resiliency during COVID-19. Continue to monitor the dynamic situation and make changes and conditions change. Continually pray for God's guidance and comfort as the crisis unfolds and new challenges emerge.

Implication Three: Advanced Leadership Development

The emergent virus and the chaos and confusion it created for church leaders stress the need for complex adaptive leaders who can lead during uncertainty and complexity (Christianson & Barton, 2021; Beukes, 2020; Rainer, 2020; Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006). During the interviews, the research participants described being unprepared, ill-equipped, and uncertain about leading. Participant A4 described how he received a leadership course during his Doctor of Ministry education that helped guide him through COVID-19. Bawany (2016) posits that the key leadership challenge confronting leaders today is learning to lead in ever-increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, or VUCA. Baumgartner (2017) and Elkington et al. (2015) assert that church leaders, especially those in seminary, need a better understanding of the challenges of a complex world. COVID-19 and the global disruption it created are dynamic challenges for leaders in an interconnected and complex world.

Complexity science, complexity leadership theory, and understanding CAS principles are essential for church leaders to comprehend the dynamic structures of a world where chaos and disorder continuously transpire (Stanton, 2019; Reeves et al., 2016; Black & Smith, 2003; Waldrop, 1992). This researcher advocates for developing a curriculum (Appendix J) combining orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Christian leadership and applying Complexity Leadership Theory and Social Network Dynamics to understand the complex challenges of leading through the web of interconnected relationships of the church (Elkington et al., 2015; Osmer, 2008; Avery & Geade, 2007; Black & Smith, 2003)

Leadership Application

In the curriculum, the Christian student discovers the complex adaptive qualities of the church that occur through social interactions, organizational dynamics, and social networks and that leadership is a social construct. Complexity leadership is a framework that specifies that leadership emerges through formal and shadow network interactions and daily social interactions that influence organizational dynamics and behavior. The student would be able to investigate and apply the operationalizing complexity of leadership interactions to facilitate church administration skills, community-building activities for relationship-building, and generative interactions to produce innovation in the church.

Furthermore, the student could apply social network applications to understand the interconnective relationships between the church members and the church. Information and communication, which are the lifeblood of organizations, flow through social networks (Friedrich et al., 2016). A complex adaptive church leader will be equipped to engage with the complexity of emergent challenges and circumstances with equally requisite complex emergent leadership strategies (Veldsman, 2020; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Obolensky, 2010).

Recommendations

Throughout the ELT/LCL lived experience research, several insightful observations were discovered during the interviews and from the data analysis process; however, Participant A6 provided insight that this researcher used to make recommendations.

Participant A6

I do not think we can wrap our minds around how complex it was for organizations and communities and groups, particularly looking at the local church. So, I think it will take us years to unpack what happened, what we learned from it, and how we learned individually and corporately. This is a unique historical season for Christians and unbelievers to think about things such as a worldwide pandemic. How the world governments, churches, businesses, and families were trying to figure out something we have never dealt with before. It was a new learning experience for a generation.

The following recommendations for using complexity leadership interactions as a leadership approach for the Christian leader are:

- A Christian leader should learn to lead as a complex adaptive leader and embrace the uncertainty and ambiguity of an interconnected and hypercomplex world. The phenomenological leadership research indicated that pre-COVID-19, ELTs and LCLs were comfortable in the daily routines of convention and church operations, and then COVID-19 disrupted and changed the routines. This sudden and emergent disruption of the daily life routines created anxiety and confusion about conducting ministry with no congregation present and keeping the information flow constant. According to the research participants, some churches were prepared for the rapid transition, while others scrambled to bring their churches online to conduct worship services. Moreover, several research participants commented that they were not prepared for or not trained for this magnitude of chaos, uncertainty, and ambiguity created by the pandemic.

- Christian leaders should recognize that their churches are complex adaptive systems. As a living organism and an organization, the church is a CAS as a body of believers in the

Scriptures (Avery & Geade, 2007; Black & Smith, 2003). In Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV, 2001), Paul demonstrates how a believer, the body of diverse believers (Church), Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are reciprocally interconnected and interact as a unified CAS and a single living ecosystem that needs diversity to survive, just as the Church needs variety to reduce divisiveness and create unity in the World (Avery & Gaede, 2007, p. 94). The phenomenological research indicated that ELTs and LCLs understood the complex adaptive system concept by understanding the church as the body of Christ. The recognition of the participants that the multicultural nature of the church as a living body of believers, with many diverse and interconnected people that grew together as one body and unified as the body of Christ, is the definition of a complex adaptive system (ESV, 2011, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Lingenfelter, 2008; Pettit, 2008ESV, 2001, 1 Corinthians 10:17). The mutually reciprocal relationship of interconnectedness, fine-grain interactions, and information exchanges create a confluence of emergent properties of spiritual nutrients and spiritual growth (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 137). This recommendation recognizes that the socio-spiritual communication and connections of the church congregation provide the feedback and information flow through social networks and system dynamics for the spiritual growth of the church (Stanton, 2019; Black & Smith, 2003).

- Christian Universities and church leaders should learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare the next generation of leaders. As presented in Chapter One, Widjaja et al. (2021) and Rainer (2020) posited that the church should learn, adapt, and reframe the experiences and trials of the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic to create new leadership approaches and practices to enable the church to thrive in an uncertain and challenging

world (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Complexity theories and the principles of complex adaptive systems are valuable processes for Christian and secular leaders to understand the dynamic structures of a complex and unpredictable world where chaos and crisis are ever-present (Stanton, 2019; Waldrop, 1992). This recommendation is essential since there will be another crisis, small or large, that leaders will need to lead through.

- The final recommendation discovered during the research is for Christian leaders to remember to lean on God first during a crisis to clarify the complexity of a crisis. Each leader in this research was initially overwhelmed by the suddenness and uncertainty of the virus and the international government responses. The small beginnings of the COVID-19 virus produced significant systemic changes that created cascading effects for each international church (Obolensky, 2014; Gleick, 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). God prepares leaders for each crisis or challenge in the Scripture. Through times of peace, disaster, war, struggles, and uncertainty, each led with the certainty that God was with them. (ESV, 2001, Psalm 78:72, Psalm 119, Proverbs 2:6; Luke 22:26, 1 Timothy 3:1-3, 1 Peter 5:2-3). This dependence and reliance on God as the refuge, strength, and comfort gave the participants hope to persevere in difficult times or crises (Stanton, 2019, p. 147).

Research Limitations

This study was limited to studying the lived experiences of the International Protestant Convention Participants during the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis. The Liberty University IRB also limited this study to 15 participants from the 60 ELTs and LCLs of the Convention. This research was limited by the participant's ability to remember their lived experiences and leadership perceptions correctly. Furthermore, this research was similarly limited by the researcher's biases and expectations, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Further Research

This researcher recommends the following further research based on the conclusions, limitations, and delimitations. The first suggested study for further research is to conduct this using a more comprehensive cross-section of the International Protestant Convention and include the leaders from South Africa, the Middle East, and other church ministries. This study would provide a broader scope of the effect of COVID-19 on the International Protestant Convention and its people. A second suggested study for further research is to use the same framework and study an Asian-Pacific International Protestant Convention and churches to see the different cultural responses. This recommendation emerged from Participants A2 and A6's discussions concerning their experiences as missionaries in China and Hong Kong. This study would provide a cross-cultural aspect of the effect of COVID-19 and the cultural differences in Asia instead of Europe.

Another recommendation for further research would be to research a United States Protestant or Baptist Convention to understand the effect of lockdowns, restrictions, and social justice issues on complexity leadership interactions. This research would provide the religious freedom and social justice aspects of COVID-19 that did not affect international churches. A fourth recommendation for research is to do a social network analysis of the International Protestant Convention to understand the social density, connectedness, nodes, ties, links, and edges between the ELTs and the LCLs. This research would provide a deeper analysis of the mutually reciprocal relationship of interconnectedness, fine-grain interactions, and information exchanges to create a confluence of emergent properties of spiritual nutrients and spiritual growth (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 137).

The last recommendation would be to conduct a deeper dive into this research's scriptural focus to discover how the VUCA of COVID-19 affected pastors. The research could use the two questions that were part of this study.

1. What passages of Scripture did you rely on most to reduce your uncertainty and concerns during COVID-19?

2. What passages of Scripture did you use to help others look to God for their strength and refuge during COVID-19?

This research could provide insight into how pastors reacted and which scriptural passages are most relied on in a crisis. These five recommendations could add to the existing research literature on complexity leadership and church leadership and help inform Christian leaders about what needs to be taught to pastors in seminaries today.

Chapter Summary

At the beginning of the chapter, the research purpose and questions were restated, followed by the research conclusions, applications, and implications of the study. The chapter provided answers to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 from the participant interviews, conclusions for the emerging themes, and discussed further research recommendations and suggestions. The following section concludes this research study.

Summary

The 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic changed the world when the emergent fast-paced virus disrupted and overwhelmed societal life, creating pre- and post-COVID bifurcation points that will shape world dynamics and social interactions for years (Warren, 2022; Christianson & Barton, 2021; Bolsinger, 2020; Pierce, 2020). The qualitative phenomenological complexity leadership study aimed to collect detailed and in-depth descriptions of the executive leadership team and local church leadership interactions and leaders' lived experiences of the phenomena. The research revealed that the ELTs and LCLs used complexity leadership interactions and

social network dynamics for information flowed throughout the 2020-2023 COVID-19 crisis to lead the convention and the 60 churches. (Garretsen et al., 2022; Veldsman, 2020; Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The research indicates that the participants effectively used the five organizing functions to lead the convention and the churches through the crisis. Furthermore, the research exhibited how information flowed and through the use of information-gathering and information-using functions allowed the ELTs and LCLs to make sense, provide meaning, and move the convention and churches forward during the crisis (Veldsman, 2020; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

As Rainer (2020) described, church leaders should learn from the COVID-19 crisis, adapt to a post-COVID environment, and learn quickly from challenging cultures, changing circumstances, and complex crises and problems. One key takeaway from this research was the International Protestant Convention leaders' resolve to lead with God's guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden shock of the global Society lockdown impacted the ELTs' and LCLs' decision-making in responding to the crisis. The ELTs and LCLs described the uncertainty and ambiguity of COVID-19 as devastatingly interrupting the daily convention and church operations, ministry and pastoral practices, and church community routines. The ELTs and LCLs struggled to adapt to the new convention and church operations to keep connected as the body of Christ. Despite the innovative and creative methods and technological uses, the leaders did not only lean on their understanding but turned to God for guidance, direction, comfort, and refuge.

A second takeaway from this research was the International Protestant Convention leaders' resolve to remain connected as a multicultural and multi-diverse body of Christ throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. During the turmoil of a crisis, communication barriers in a

multi-diverse church are heightened and can cause miscommunication, so active engagement by the church leaders provided open communication lines and interactive dialogues to alleviate fears and reduce anxiety. The insight provided by the participants indicates that when leading a multicultural church with diverse people, differing languages, and multi-generational experiences, it is essential that a leader understand the multicultural, emotional, and social behaviors of the congregations. Finally, Dailey (2020) posited that crisis and chaos are part of the reality of life for Christians, and a Christian leader should prepare for when a crisis happens and not if it will happen (p. 6).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 27, 2023

Thomas Narofsky
Leonard Momeny

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1516 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP INTERACTIONS OF AN INTERNATIONAL PROTESTANT CONVENTION DURING COVID-19

Dear Thomas Narofsky, Leonard Momeny,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: Permission Request Letter and Response Template

02 May 2023

General Secretary
International Protestant Convention
XXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

Dear General Secretary

     As a Ph.D. candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, I am conducting research as part of my requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of the study is to explore, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the Convention and its leaders to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis.

     I request your permission to contact your staff/church/organization members to invite them to participate in my research study. The study consists of one questionnaire and a ZOOM® interview with 18 open-ended questions. The questionnaire includes demographics and social networking questions to determine the Convention's social network connectivity, information flow, demographic makeup, and COVID-19 leadership experience. The questionnaire requires one hour of your time. After the questionnaire, a small sample of leaders will be selected to conduct a more detailed ZOOM® interview with eighteen open-ended questions to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions. I anticipate one hour of total time needed for the ZOOM® interview.

     The digital audio records of this study will be kept private. The video capability of the ZOOM® will not be used to protect the identity of the participants. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. A consent document for this research contains additional information about my research. After reading the consent form, please sign, complete, and return the questionnaire. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate in the study. Please email me both documents when you are done.

     Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to ██████████████ A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

In Christ,

Thomas S. Narofsky
Liberty University
████████@liberty.edu
████████

Permission Response

Note: Please provide this document on official letterhead or copy and paste it into an email.

[Date]

Thomas S. Narofsky
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Dear Thomas Narofsky,

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled Phenomenological Study of Complexity Leadership Interactions of a Major International Protestant Convention Leadership during COVID-19, [I/we] have decided to [permit you] [not permit you] to contact our faculty/staff/others and invite them to participate in your study.

☐ [[I/We] [grant/do not grant] permission for Thomas Narofsky to contact Convention leadership teams to invite them to participate in his research study.]

☐ [[I/We] request a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.]

Sincerely,

[Left blank until sent]
General Secretary
[Left blank until sent]

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

Title of the Project: Phenomenological Study of Complexity Leadership Interactions of a Major International Protestant Convention Leadership during COVID-19
Principal Investigator: Thomas S. Narofsky, a Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a leadership team member of the International Convention. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of the study is to explore, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the Convention and its leaders to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

Study Agreement Tasks: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Participate in a demographics and social connectivity questionnaire to understand the leadership team networks' social connectivity and information flow. (1-hour time frame)
2. Selected participants will participate in a video and audio-recorded interview with 18 open-ended questions that will take 1 hour to complete.
3. After the interview, send the participant a reflective document after the interview is complete. (30-minute time frame)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Benefits of the Research: The direct benefit the participants should expect from participating in this study includes understanding how information flows within the peer network of the Convention and how complexity leadership interactions shaped the COVID-19 response.

Benefits to society include:
1. It may inform Christian Universities to establish classes that provide an understanding of complexity leadership and social network dynamics for emerging church leaders.
2. It may add to church leadership literature on recognizing the need for adaptive leaders and the church as a complex adaptive system.
3. It may serve as a model for future complexity leadership research by highlighting the interactions the Convention used to survive and thrive in turmoil and turbulence.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

Research Risk: The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- **Questionnaire**: Participant responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms or assigning a code number to identify your participation.
- **Online Interviews:** Interviews will be conducted online, and the researcher will be in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Participant responses during the interview will be recorded electronically and through reflective note-taking.
- **Future Research:** Your data may be used in future research studies. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- **Data Collection and Safeguarding**: Interview responses and replies will be reviewed and analyzed for emerging themes, patterns, and correlations. Interviews will be recorded for data collection purposes. All recorded data will be stored on one terabyte offline storage unit that is password protected. All coded data and pseudonyms will be further encrypted by password-protecting the files.
- **Recorded Data**: Data will be maintained for three years for the research's validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. Collected data will be erased after three years. The researcher will have access to these recordings. The final research dissertation/report will not use names or any identifying information of the convention or convention leadership.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may stop anytime. Your participation will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the questionnaire.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

Withdrawal from Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Thomas S. Narofsky. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at ████████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Leonard Momeny, at ████████████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional

Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is ███████, and our email address is <u>irb@liberty.edu</u>.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX D: Recruitment Letter

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Thomas Narofsky, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am conducting research as part of my requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of the study is to explore, through complexity leadership theory, the lived experiences of the Convention and its leaders to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions and how information flowed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to lead a church in, through, and beyond the crisis. I invite you to join my study as you have the requisite knowledge for this study within your current role as a Convention leader with COVID-19 leadership experience.

The study consists of one questionnaire and a ZOOM® interview with 18 open-ended questions. The questionnaire includes demographics and social networking questions to determine the Convention's social network connectivity, information flow, demographic makeup, and COVID-19 leadership experience. The questionnaire requires one hour of your time. After the questionnaire, a small sample of leaders will be selected to conduct a more detailed ZOOM® interview with eighteen open-ended questions to discover the emergent or consistently applied complexity leadership interactions. I anticipate one hour of total time needed for the ZOOM® interview.

The digital audio records of this study will be kept private. The video capability of the ZOOM® will not be used to protect the identity of the participants. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. A consent document for this research contains additional information about my research. After reading the consent form, please sign, complete, and return the questionnaire. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate in the study. Please email me both documents when you are done.

My research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the selected participants in leading a convention of multilingual and multi-diverse churches in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America during COVID-19. I hope that this research will provide insight into the church leaders' lived experiences, leadership interactions, and social network dynamics used to pilot their churches through the turbulence and turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and may provide insight into how a church can persist and prosper in a complex and ever-changing world. Your assistance will help in discovering the essence of this phenomenon.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

In Christ,

Thomas S. Narofsky
Liberty University
██████@liberty.edu

APPENDIX E: Demographics/Social Connectivity

DEMOGRAPHICS
1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been a Christian?
3. How long have you been a part of the Convention?
4. How long have you served in your leadership role?
5. Did you serve in the Convention during or through COVID-19?

SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

Please answer the following questions.
1. Who do you connect with (talk/email/seek guidance) within the Convention?
   a. Please indicate all executive team members you connect with in the Convention. (nodes/edges)
   b. Please indicate the church leaders you connect with in the Convention. (nodes/edges)
   c. Indicate if you receive and give advice (R/G), receive advice only (R), or give advice only (G) for each connection.
2. How frequently?
   a. Daily
   b. Monthly
   c. Only during Convention-led meetings
   d. Once a year
3. Do you feel your social connectivity helped you lead during the COVID-19 crisis?
4. Do you feel that your social connectivity helped you spiritually during COVID-19?
5. Do you feel that information flowed freely throughout the Convention during the crisis to help you lead effectively?
6. Do you feel that information flowed freely throughout the Convention during the crisis to help you spiritually?
7. Do you feel you provided enough information to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity to calm those who were anxious or fearful?
8. What passages of Scripture did you rely on most to reduce your uncertainty and concerns during COVID-19?
9. What passages of Scripture did you use to help others look to God for their strength and refuge during COVID-19?

APPENDIX F: Executive Leadership Team Interview Protocol

Hello, (Participant Name). It is good to meet you finally.

First, thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. As stated in my first email, I am Thomas Narofsky, a Ph.D. candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am researching for my dissertation on the role of complexity leadership interactions and social network dynamics in leading in, during, and beyond the crisis of COVID-19. Before we begin, I would like to pray for this time together.

Second, this study and your interview aim to understand your experience leading the convention during and beyond COVID-19. I hope that your viewpoint will provide insight into the church leaders' lived experiences through the turbulence and turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and may provide insight into how a church leader can persist and prosper in a complex and ever-changing world. Your assistance will help in discovering the essence of this phenomenon.

Finally, I will use a digital tape recorder to record the ZOOM® interview. The video capability of the ZOOM® will not be used to protect the identity of the participants. The interview audio recording and transcriptions will be stored offline and encrypted with a password to ensure confidentiality and cyber security measures. During our interview, please let me know if there is a need to stop. If you are ready, we can start the interview.

(Begin Interview)

Once again, thank you for taking part in this study. I have questions that will help define your leadership roles during COVID-19. My research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the selected leadership participants in leading a convention of multilingual and multi-diverse churches in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America during COVID-19.

I anticipate this interview will last 45-60 minutes; if you need to stop or do not wish to answer a question, please let me know anytime. Before we begin the study questions, would you please verbally confirm that you are willing to participate in this study and that I have your permission to record the interview? Thank you, and let us begin the interview:

Personal Perspective

1. How did COVID-19 affect you personally? (PP)

2. How did COVID-19 affect you as an executive team leader? (PP)

3. How do you feel COVID-19 affected the convention? (PP)

4. How do you think COVID-19 affected your faith? (SP)

5. How did you feel God prepared you for leading the convention in a global crisis? (SP)

Leadership Perspective

6. Describe your role as a Convention executive leader. (LP)

7. What leadership skills prepared you for leading in a crisis? (LP)

8. What leadership experience prepared you for leading in a crisis? (LP)

9. How would you define successful convention operations? (ALI/CBI/GLI)

10. What management skills do you feel were essential to effectively and efficiently sustain convention operations during COVID-19? (ALI)

11. What innovation and adaptability leadership services did you feel were essential to staying connected as a convention during COVID-19? (GLI)

12. How did you enable a sense of belonging and a strong connection with your churches during COVID-19? (CBI)

13. How did you enable convention connectivity and social interaction during the crisis? (CBI/GLI)

Communication Perspective

14. How would you define successful convention communications? (CP)

15. What communication methods were used to stay connected during COVID-19? (CP)

16. Do you feel that information flowed freely in the formal and informal communications channels to lead effectively during the crisis? (CP)

17. How did you gather information to understand the concerns and issues of churches in the convention during the crisis? (IG)

18. How did you use the information to make decisions for the convention's survival in crisis? (IU)

Interview conclusion

The interview questions are complete. Do you need to go back to a question to clarify your response, or do you need to add anything else that might be pertinent to the research? After transcribing the research notes and the audio-recorded interview, would you like a copy to review before I add them to my research? Once again, thank you for taking time out of your day to participate in this study, and I appreciate your honesty in answering the questions.

APPENDIX G: Local Church Leader Interview Protocol

Hello, (Participant Name). It is good to meet you finally.

First, thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. As stated in my first email, I am Thomas Narofsky, a Ph.D. candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am researching for my dissertation on the role of complexity leadership interactions and social network dynamics in leading in, during, and beyond the crisis of COVID-19. Before we begin, I would like to pray for this time together.

Second, this study and your interview are to understand your experience leading your congregation during and beyond COVID-19. I hope your viewpoint will provide insight into the church leaders' lived experiences through the turbulence and turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and may provide insight into how a church can persist and prosper in a complex and ever-changing world. Your assistance will help in discovering the essence of this phenomenon.

Finally, I will use a digital tape recorder to record the ZOOM® interview. The video capability of ZOOM® will not be used to protect the identity of the participants. The interview audio recording and transcriptions will be stored offline and encrypted with a password to ensure confidentiality and cyber security measures. During our interview, please let me know if there is a need to stop. If you are ready, we can start the interview.

(Begin Interview)

Once again, thank you for taking part in this study. I have questions that will help define your leadership roles during COVID-19. My research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the selected leadership participants in leading a convention of multilingual and multi-diverse churches in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America during COVID-19.

I anticipate this interview will last 45-60 minutes; if you need to stop or do not wish to answer a question, please let me know anytime. Before we begin the study questions, would you please verbally confirm that you are willing to participate in this study and that I have your permission to record the interview?

Thank you, and let us begin the interview:

Personal Perspective

1. How did COVID-19 affect you personally? (PP)
2. How did COVID-19 affect you as a pastor? (PP)
3. How do you feel COVID-19 affected your congregation? (PP)
4. How do you think COVID-19 affected your faith? (SP)
5. How did you feel God prepared you for leading your church in a global crisis? (SP)

Leadership Perspective

6. Describe your role as a leader in your church. (LP)
7. What leadership skills prepared you for leading in a crisis? (LP)

8. What leadership experience prepared you for leading in a crisis? (LP)

9. How would you define successful church operations? (ALI/CBI/GLI)

10. What management skills do you feel were essential to effectively and efficiently sustain church operations during COVID-19? (ALI)

11. What innovation and adaptability did you feel were essential to staying connected as a church community during COVID-19? (GLI)

12. How did you enable a sense of belonging and a strong connection with your church community during COVID-19? (CBI)

13. How did you enable community connectivity and social interaction during the crisis? (CBI/GLI)

Communication Perspective

14. How would you define successful church communications? (CP)

15. What communication methods were used to stay connected during COVID-19? (CP)

16. Do you feel that information flowed freely in the formal and informal communications channels to lead effectively during the crisis?

17. How did you gather information to understand congregational concerns and issues during the crisis? (IG)

18. How did you use the information to make decisions for the church's survival in crisis? (IU)

Interview conclusion

The interview questions are complete. Do you need to go back to a question to clarify your response, or do you need to add anything else that might be pertinent to the research? After transcribing the research notes and the recorded interview, would you like a copy to review before I add them to my research? Once again, thank you for taking time out of your day to participate in this study, and I appreciate your honesty in answering the questions.

APPENDIX H: Interview Theme Codes

Thematic Coding

Codes	
Complexity Leadership	
PP	Personal Perspective
SP	Spiritual Perspective
LP	Leadership Perspective
CP	Communication Perspective
ALI	Administrative Leadership Interactions
GLI	Generative Leadership Interactions
CBI	Community-Building Leadership Interactions
IG	Information Gathering
IU	Information Using
Pseudonyms for Convention Leaders	
Each leader was assigned an Alphanumeric pseudonym ranging from A1-A60 to provide anonymity and preserve their identity.	

APPENDIX I: Interview Codes Leadership Coding

CODES	Community-Building Leadership
Short title	**Complexity/Christian Mechanisms**
Relationships	Embrace heterogeneity of people, ideas, and values to create a community supporting, developing, recognizing, and empowering (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016; Johansen, 2012; Yukl, 2011). According to Lowe & Lowe (2018), Christians grow spiritually through reciprocal interactions in socio-spiritual ecologies such as family, church, and school social networks. Relationships and information flow shape and govern the structure and function of the Church and its members and shape the viability of its social networks.
Communication	Dialogue, communication, and information sharing (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Friedrich et al., 2016; Delia Davila Quintana, Ruiz, & Vila, 2014). Using the network structures to make critical choices that forge and renew social ties (Friedrich et al., 2016). Dialogue is an essential social network capability to establish a participative communication environment and build trust, innovation, and solutions to crises (Lewin & Regine, 2003).
Diversity	Rotate membership to create a diversity of thought (Psychogios & Garev, 2012). Lingenfelter (2008) states that diverse leadership interactions and relationship skills are needed to connect to the multicultural church and diversity of ethnic and social groups.
Shared Values	Create direction, alignment, and commitment with a shared vision and values (Yukl, 2012; Drath, 2001). Koinonia is a shared life and community fellowship with God and the Body of Christ (Pazmino, 2008). Make people feel valued and significant (DeRue & Ashford, 2015). Believers engaged in life together and unified in their devotion to Jesus Christ and each other through daily fellowship, praying together, sharing meals, and apostolic instruction and teaching (Pettit, 2008).
Teamwork/Unity	Encourage the development of co-creative teams (Havermans, Keegan, & Hartog, 2015). Create a solid collective identity (Chrobot-Mason, Gerbasi & Cullen-Lester, 2016). Enabling people to use more of a relational manner (Geer-Frazier, 2014). All believers are unified in one body in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, individually and collectively through a relationship and fellowship to create a community of Christlike disciples 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27 (ESV, 2001).
Trust and Respect	Build trust and respectful relationships (Friedrich et al., 2016; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Greer-Frazier, 2014; Region-Sebest, 2013; Yukl, 2012).
Spiritual Growth	Each believer (agent) is a member of the Church to connects and interacts in an intertwined partnership to provide spiritual nutrients for spiritual worship, robust fellowship, and mutual commitment to the Gospel (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 154; ESV, 2001, 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1.

Administrative Leadership	
Short title	**Complexity/Christian Mechanisms**
Convergence Orientation and Task-oriented	Use operational business practices of exploitation, preparing, planning, clarifying, scheduling work, monitoring operations, and problem-solving (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Turner, 2015; Volery et al., 2015; Hazy & Backström, 2013; Yukl, 2012; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).
Roles, Responsibilities, and Processes	A clear chain of responsibility and efficient performance (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Provide clear responsibilities and roles and implement management processes, policies, and procedures (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Church administration ensures clarity for roles, authority, accountability, and delegation for efficient and effective operations (Welch, 2011; Tidwell, 1985).
Operational Integration and Alignment	Design and align the culture, structure, and strategy (Geer-Frazier, 2014; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). According to Welch (2011), church administration is designed to identify the church's organizational structure, strategy, purpose, statement of faith, charter, objectives, and overall goals.
Adaptive Tension for Exploitation/Entrainment	Establish specific tasks, deadlines, target goals, dependencies, and deliverables (Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Yukl, 2012; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Establish challenging but achievable goals and objectives (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Reeves, Levin, & Ueda, 2016).
Resource Control Measures	Use discretionary resource control (Havermans, Hartog, Keegan, & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Monitoring the efficient use of resources to achieve goals (Havermans, Hartog, Keegan, & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Yukl, 2012). Clear authority over resources (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Market research (Chamberland, 2015). Delegate authority over resources and responsibilities (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Church administration would include financial management of church finances and budgets, human capital management of staff and personnel, facilities management of buildings and grounds, and technology management (Tumblin, 2017; Welch, 2011; Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985).
Centralized Decision-making	Centralizes decision-making through collective decision-making tools (Havermans, Hartog, Keegan, & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Yukl, 2012).
Monitor Efficiency	Use business reports to increase transparency on organizational outcomes and expectations (Havermans, Hartog, Keegan, & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Control and regulate church activities, programs, committees, councils, and ministries through policies and procedures to ensure it operates legitimately and spiritually (Powers, 2008; Tidwell, 1985).
Human Capital Management	Build and maintain competence, expertise, and accountability culture (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Short title	Generative Leadership
	Complexity/Christian Mechanisms
Change-oriented	Use entrepreneurial practices (exploration) by advocating change, envisioning change, and encouraging innovation (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Yukl, 2012).
Experimentation and Adaptation	Experimentation, collective learning, and adaptation culture (Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016; Greer-Frazier, 2015). Divergent and creative thinking (Hazy & Prottas, 2018; Reeves et al., 2016; Volery et al., 2015; Backström, 2013; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).
Diversity of Thought	Bring diverse experiences and perspectives together and support differences of opinion (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). According to Bolsinger (2015), churches are complex social networked organizations with diverse people, multiple viewpoints, and dynamic leaders all in a relationship together.
Disequilibrium	Embrace ambiguity and uncertainty (Reeves et al., 2016; Reeves & Deimler, 2011). Stanton (2019) uses complexity science to show how Christian leaders can embrace the uncertainty and unpredictability of life.
Adaptive Tension for Exploration/Emergence	Challenge assumptions (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Set high objectives for future products, services, and processes (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).
Coevolution and Co-creative Networking	Encourage enterprise collaboration and communication through shared or collective leadership (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Yukl, 2012). Create opportunities for collaboration and coevolution of ideas (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). The church is a living system that experiences autopoiesis, self-organization, feedback loops for growth, adaptation, resilience, and systems monitoring (Hall et al., 2010; Avery & Gaede, 2007; Wheatley, 2005).
Sensemaking and Sensegiving	Complexity thinking to understand and read the internal and external dynamic environments for emergence (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Reeves et al., 2016; Geer-Frazier, 2014). Christians understand the world using Biblical/ Christian ideology for sensemaking/sensegiving (Högberg, 2021).
Fine-grain Interactions Generate Ideas and Knowledge.	Operate as a complex adaptive organization (Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). Interact with other agents and complex adaptive systems to intentionally produce ideas and knowledge (Volery et al., 2015; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2007). Christian leaders should understand the complex adaptive nature of the church to lead effectively and efficiently through networked interactions, organizational dynamics, and complexity theory (Stanton, 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2009; Black & Smith, 2003).
Social Capital Management	Social capital includes internal and external relationships, personal and professional networks, trust, norms, values, knowledge sharing, innovation, and access to valuable resources through the fine-grain interactions between heterogeneous agents (McKelvey, 2016). Facilitate formal and informal social interactive networks to broker ideas (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). People connect, interact, and share information through small church groups such as life groups, men's prayer groups, women's ministries, and student ministries; they share spiritual nutrients to develop individual and corporate spiritual formation and grow into mature fruit Christlikeness (Pettit, 2008).

APPENDIX J: Proposed Curriculum

The recommended orthodoxy and orthopraxy courses for the Doctor of Philosophy with a Complexity Leadership Cognate comprise Biblical and Theological foundations courses and Leadership Theory and Application courses. The proposed curriculum of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and research courses and the description of CLED 790, CLED 835, CLED 850, and CLED 855 are indicated below.

ORTHODOXY COURSES (12 hours)
CLED 700 Biblical & Theological Foundations of Leadership
CLED 715 Ecologies of Christian Formation
CLED 755 Biblical Character & Ethics in Leadership
CLED 800 Theological Anthropology in Leadership

ORTHOPRAXY COURSE (21 hours)
CLED 735 Leadership & Organizational Management Theory
CLED 740 Integrating Social Sciences into Christian Leadership
CLED 790 Integrating Complexity Science into Christian Leadership
CLED 795 Integrating Cynefin and Osmer's Heuristic into Decision-Making
CLED 835 Intelligence-Based Christian Leadership
CLED 845 Group & Team Dynamics: Theory & Practice for Christian Leadership
CLED 850 Social Network Dynamics: Theory & Practice for Christian Leadership
CLED 855 Complexity Leadership: Theory and Practice for Christian Leadership

RESEARCH COURSE (27 hours)
CLED 730 Research Methods for Christian Leadership I
CLED 770 Research Methods for Christian Leadership II
CLED 805 Research Methods for Christian Leadership III
CLED 830 Research Methods for Christian Leadership IV
CLED 987 Research Methods for Christian Leadership V
CLED 988 Research Methods for Christian Leadership VI
CLED 989 Dissertation Research & Defense

CLED 790

INTEGRATING COMPLEXITY SCIENCE INTO CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will analytically examine Complexity Science theories and allow the student to investigate and apply the theories to various situations in a complex and changing world. Complexity Science is a collection of hard and soft sciences, physics, biology, psychology, social sciences, and organizational design that view organizations as complex adaptive systems and organic living systems instead of a mechanistic view of organizations. This course recognizes complexity science and complex adaptive systems as leadership methods for Christian leaders to utilize in today's world's complex and constantly changing dynamics. The foundations of complexity science courses incorporate relevant readings, actual and simulated case studies, and classroom discussions to enable students to understand complexity science concepts.

RATIONALE

CLED 790 is an entry-level course serving as a primer to Complexity Science theories and their application to Christian leadership. The class aims to equip the student with a comprehensive explanation of complexity science, organizational design, and current leadership theory foundations to lead the adaptive living system called the church in a complex and uncertain environment.

CLED 835

INTELLIGENCE-BASED CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

DESCRIPTION

This course will examine cultural, emotional, moral, and social intelligence concepts and their application to leading a church with diverse people, multi-generational experiences, divergent interests and values, and different personalities and worldviews. The student will be able to investigate and apply the four intelligence constructs and integrate the concepts into their leadership to effectively lead with multicultural, emotional, moral, and social behaviors in a dynamic and complex world. This course identifies the changing dynamics of the church and the need to better connect with the church and unchurched populations. Through intelligence-based leadership, the course investigates how church leaders can better connect and interact with people inside and outside the church to share the Gospel through one case study, a group project, and discussion boards.

RATIONALE

CLED 835 is an entry-level course serving as a primer for understanding cultural, emotional, moral, and social intelligence concepts and their application to effective church leadership and community-building applications. The class aims to equip the student with a comprehensive explanation of the four intelligence theories and their application.

CLED 850

SOCIAL NETWORK DYNAMICS: THEORY & PRACTICE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COURSE

DESCRIPTION

This course will analyze social network concepts and give the student an understanding of how formal and informal social networks can influence an organization. The student will be able to investigate and apply social network applications to understand the relationships between the church members and the church as a whole. A social network can represent the interactions of church members as family units, church organizations, and church ministries. Information and communication, which are the lifeblood of organizations, flow through social network relationships and are essential for a church leader to understand what is happening in the church. This course identifies the interconnected relational aspects of social networks and their importance to the socio-spiritual growth of the church and its members. The course investigates network dynamics, interconnectivity, social interactions, and collective networked intelligence for Christian leaders to apply through one case study, a group project, and discussion boards.

RATIONALE

CLED 850 is an entry-level course serving as a primer to Social Network theories and their application to church leadership and operations. The class aims to equip the student with a comprehensive explanation of social networking, church structure, and ministry team dynamics.

CLED 855

COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP: THEORY AND PRACTICE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

DESCRIPTION

This course will examine Complexity Leadership Theory and its application to Christian Leadership. The student with an understanding of the importance of the complexity leadership capabilities for leading in a continuously changing and unpredictable world. Christian leaders discover the complex adaptive qualities of the church that occur through social interactions, organizational dynamics, and social networks; leadership is a social construct. Complexity leadership is a framework that specifies that leadership emerges through formal and shadow network interactions and daily social interactions that influence organizational dynamics and behavior. The student will be able to apply the complexity leadership theory to understand how complexity leadership interactions can facilitate church administration skills, community-building activities, and relationships and help produce innovation in the church. The course further investigates the concepts of complexity leadership through three case studies, one group project, and discussion boards.

RATIONALE

CLED 855 is an entry-level course serving as a primer to complexity leadership theories and their application to church leadership and operations. The class will equip the student with a comprehensive explanation of complexity leadership, church leadership, and the application of operationalizing the five functions of complexity leadership.