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# On the Same Page: The Value of Paid and Volunteer Leaders Sharing Mental Models in Churches

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# On the Same Page

## The Value of Paid and Volunteer Leaders Sharing Mental Models in Churches

Stephanie T. Solansky, Dennis Duchon,  
Donde Ashmos Plowman, and Patricia G. Martínez

### Abstract

We examine the idea that mental models shared among paid and volunteer leaders are associated with improved financial performance in nonprofit organizations. Our empirical analysis of thirty-seven churches yields evidence that organizations are more effective if paid and volunteer leaders have a shared task mental model – that is, if they report similar conceptualizations of organizational goals and decision-making processes. These findings suggest that the extent of leaders' agreement on organizational goals and the processes of how decisions are made matter for organizational performance. We argue that it is as important to ensure that everyone is on the same page with regard to goals and how decisions are made as it is to have the “right” goals or right decision processes in place. Implications for practice and future research on shared mental models are discussed.

“We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.” – Anais Nin

Getting people “on the same page” means having people see an issue the same way, and share the same reference points, the same images, the same vocabulary. Such cognitive unity is believed to facilitate understanding, communication, decision making, and ultimately effective operations. Yet a number of research studies suggest that achieving this cognitive unity is difficult because individuals tend to rely on their own idiosyncratic representation of an issue. For example, managers' perceptions differ among one another (Mezias and Starbuck, 2003) and people's organizational roles affect what they see (Mezias, Grinyer, and Guth, 2001; Payne and Pugh, 1976).

Getting people on the same page essentially acknowledges the socially constructed nature of organizational life (Weick, 1995), which

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means that factuality is important only to the extent that people can interpret and understand it, and they will interpret and understand facts consistent with who they believe themselves to be (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988; Hogarth, 1980). Getting people on the same page requires creation of shared representations or shared mental models of issues, which in turn enables group or organizational functioning (Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001; Gibson, 2001; Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994). More formally, shared mental models refer to the knowledge structures held by people "that enable them to form accurate explanations and expectations for the task, and, in turn, to coordinate their actions and adapt their behavior to demands of the task and other actors and levels in the system" (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, and Converse, 1993, p. 228). A shared mental model acts as a coordinating mechanism of individual ideas, concepts, and images for how work is accomplished in an organization.

But achieving a shared mental model is no simple task. Individuals develop mental models that are idiosyncratic to their experience, particularly because of work roles, titles, and level in the organization (Golden, Dukerich, and Fabian, 2000; Ashmos, McDaniel, and Duchon, 1990; Ireland, Hitt, Bettis, and de Porras, 1987). There is some evidence, however, that individuals at the same organizational level or with similar jobs can develop what Dougherty (1992) terms subcommunities or thought-worlds which reflect a group mental model. Generally, however, getting people on the same page means crossing thought-world boundaries and creating mental models that can include different levels in the organization. For example, managers and technicians collaborate more effectively when they go beyond their respective thought-worlds (Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian, 1999).

Mental models allow prediction of future events and determination of causes of events, and they are the basis for making decisions on appropriate action. When mental models are shared by individuals, those individuals share or possess similar conceptualizations. Shared mental models, then, connect the actors in the way they think about what they are doing; thus they facilitate coordination, foster efficiency, and promote predictability (Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994). Shared mental models are believed to enable better task performance and processes, as well as more positive attitudes (Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001). More specifically, Klimoski and Mohammed (1994) argue that shared mental models affect the speed, flexibility, and implementation of decision making and thus increase the likelihood that the actors in the organization will better predict the organization's specific needs, be adaptive, and successfully coordinate their actions. These shared mental models are thought to function as a frame of reference in guiding and facilitating organizational action (Holyoak, 1984; Duncan and others, 1996). Finally, shared mental models can be particularly important in the kind of nonprofit organization we focus on in this study, where

management and governance responsibilities are not clear and role ambiguity can make cooperation toward goal achievement both difficult and rare (Hansson, 2006).

If representatives of different thought-worlds are able to share a mental model of the task processes and goals of their nonprofit organization, does the organization perform better financially? To answer this question, we focus on shared understandings between professional paid leaders and volunteer leaders of thirty-seven churches, exploring the extent to which shared mental models of decision-making processes and organizational goals are associated with improved organizational performance.

## **Leadership and Shared Mental Models in Nonprofit Organizations**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of many nonprofit organizations is reliance on two types of leaders: paid professionals and unpaid volunteers. The Girl Scouts, United Way, Planned Parenthood, hospitals, and churches are but a few of the organizations that rely on both types of leaders for their management. Although paid leaders exercise leadership in the daily course of managing the organization, volunteers also function as leaders on the board of directors or advisory committees, where they formulate policy and approve budgets and key operating decisions. It is likely a mistake to assume that these two types of leaders enjoy the benefits of shared mental models just because they are devoted to the same organization.

In this article we focus on shared *task* mental models. Task mental models represent knowledge structures not only of why a work group or organization was formed but also of goals to be achieved and the specific techniques that should be used to achieve the goals (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, and Converse, 1993; Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994; Mathieu and others, 2000; Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001). In other words, a mental task model is essentially an understanding of the nature of “what we do” (Mohammed and Dumville, 2001), and this basic understanding represents the kind of goal agreement that underlies all organizational activity (Cohen, Mohrman, and Mohrman, 1999).

## **Leaders and Shared Task Mental Models**

Considerable evidence at the group level of analysis points to the importance of shared mental models for effective group functioning (Hinsz, Tindale, and Vollrath, 1997; Mathieu and others, 2000; Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001). We build on the group-level research and argue that the same thing should be true at an organization level. Given the important role leadership plays in organizational success, it seems even more important that leaders, not

just organizational members, have a shared understanding of tasks, processes, and goals. If leaders have diverse perceptions about critical tasks, resources, and situations, their responses to unexpected events and environmental surprises are likely to be confused and at odds with one another, creating an incoherence for organizational members who are trying to be good followers. If there is little effort at “managing meaning” and leaders hold inconsistent views about what is important and what critical activities mean, the organization is likely to stumble (Sutcliffe and Weber, 2003). Alternatively, if organizational members and leaders share the same understanding of critical organizational tasks such as organizational goals and decision processes, they collectively know what needs to be done, how it will be done, what resource constraints might apply, and what situational constraints exist. These shared understandings support a coherence that helps guide the behavior of others.

In this research, we argue that organizations developing shared task mental models between paid and volunteer leaders outperform organizations that do not. In these organizations, shared task mental models, which clarify tasks, goals, and processes, produce coherence in the system and better performance. Coordination of disparate actors requires sufficient sharing or overlap of these models such that a common, collective model informs everyone in the same way. Some attention has been devoted to development of shared task mental models in group settings (cf. Cannon-Bowers, Salas, and Converse, 1993), but it is clear that such models must cross hierarchical boundaries if an organization is to function effectively.

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### **Shared Mental Models of Decision Processes**

The decision-making literature has long held that decision outcomes improve when decision-making processes improve (Janis, 1989; Nutt, 2002; Dawes, 1988; Russo and Schoemaker, 1989). Thus, much attention in the decision-making literature has focused on how to avoid decision-making mistakes (Russo and Schoemaker, 1989) that lead to disastrous decision outcomes (Nutt, 2002). Joint or collaborative decision making involving several actors has received a great deal of attention (cf. Locke and Schweiger, 1979), although its effectiveness is a matter of some debate (cf. Leana, Locke, and Schweiger, 1990). Even though the practical performance consequences of participative or shared decision making are equivocal (Cotton and others, 1988), participative decision making is generally viewed to produce a useful social outcome: participant buy-in or acceptance of the resulting decision (Wagner and Gooding, 1987; Nutt, 2002). The value of participation in decision making depends on both the type of decision under consideration and the type of participation involved (Vroom and Jago, 1978; Cotton and others, 1988). Though participation in decision making is a well-known process, our interest is not the utility of participation in decision making, but rather the role of agreeing on the extent of participation in decision processes.

The socially constructed nature of organizational life (Weick, 1995) led us to consider how participation in decision making may affect organizational outcomes when people agree on its role in their organization. The sense-making/interpretation literature suggests that people make sense of their situations and surroundings, and this shared understanding forms the basis for their organized behavior (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 1995). Organizational life, then, is an exercise in sense making, a way of developing a "contextual rationality ... and negotiated agreements that attempt to reduce confusion" (Weick, 1993, p. 636). If organizational leaders share the same understanding of organizational processes, such as participation, and are on the same page about the extent of participation, such shared understanding ought to affect the organization positively. Perhaps it is not whether participation occurs in decision making that matters to performance but the extent to which organizational members agree on the role of participation in decision making. Participation can occupy a central role in a democratic system where leaders and members share an understanding and agree on the importance of members' roles in organizational decision making. Alternatively, participation may have no role in an autocratic system where leaders and members agree that members play no part in decision making. It may be that participation does not matter as much as agreement on the degree to which participation is used in a given organization. Agreement about participation demonstrates a shared mental model, and it is the reliance and reference to the shared mental model that is important. Thus we hypothesize relationships between shared task mental models about decision-making processes and organizational performance:

**H1:** Leaders' shared task mental models of organization decision processes (participation in decision making) will be positively associated with organizational performance.

### **Shared Mental Models of Goals**

In addition, Hutchins (1995) suggests that redundancy or overlap in group members' conceptualizations of the group goals or processes make groups more efficient, because when a tacit understanding is shared there is less need to explain or demonstrate. Others argue that "where the individuals' knowledge bases are different, teamworking is slowed and complicated" (Sapsed et al., 2002, p. 81). In addition, Levesque, Wilson, and Wholey (2001) suggest that in the face of members having differing views of goals, a team can experience frustration, too much time consumption, and ineffectiveness, whereas shared mental models make coordination easier and efficient. Cohen, Mohrman, and Mohrman (1999) argue that it is critical for organizations to understand how they can stimulate shared understanding of what the organization is trying to ac-



comply because it cannot accomplish its goals unless there is clear agreement on what the goals are. For example, the greater the overlap among members' task mental models of organizational goals, the greater the likelihood that members coordinate activities effectively (Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994). Thus a shared understanding of the team's goals can serve as a foundation for team effectiveness (Cohen, Mohrman, and Mohrman, 1999). Because leaders often establish the goals of the organization, it is imperative that all levels of leadership share the same mental model as to which goals are important. Thus we also hypothesize:

**H2:** Leaders' shared task mental models of organizational goals will be positively associated with organizational performance.

## Methods

To test these two hypotheses, we developed a study of the shared mental models of leaders in religious organizations. The research sample consisted of volunteer lay leaders and paid clergy from thirty-seven churches of a large mainline denomination in the southwestern United States. A church is an organization dependent on both paid clergy and laypeople who voluntarily assume leadership roles in carrying out its mission. Hansson (2006) calls churches the oldest form of nonprofit organization and notes that the governance systems in churches similar to those in our sample are complex, with responsibilities divided between pastors and elected lay leaders. Such divided governance often results in poor management and conflict (Hansson, 2006). Further, churches are organizations in that their leaders, as in any other organization, must manage people and resources to provide a valuable service (Duncan and Stocks, 2003). Torry (2005) also makes the point that churches are a special case of nonprofit voluntary organization, where members perform a variety of roles, which, as Hansson (2006) argued, results in "messy" hierarchical structures (even though many people experience a strict hierarchy). The messiness of church hierarchies and management systems is further complicated in the United States by the fact that churches are economically dependent on their parishioners (Hansson, 2006). Thus lay leaders are not only leaders but also important clients or customers.

Our initial sample included 180 lay delegates and 83 clergy delegates representing seventy-four churches at the annual conference of a denomination in a southwestern state. The analyses required us to match clergy and lay leaders from the same churches, so our final sample included eighty-four laypeople and forty-six clergy representing thirty-seven churches (some churches have more than one clergy member). Fifty-one percent of the lay leaders were male and 49 percent female. We also had an interest in understanding the tenure, age, and conference participation profile of our sample. Lay

leaders were on average 52.1 years of age ( $SD = 12.5$ ), had on average been a member of the church 16.2 years ( $SD = 14.3$ ), and had been a conference delegate 3.6 years ( $SD = 3.3$ ). In addition, 85 percent were college graduates; 34 percent held a graduate or professional degree.

The clergy delegates all hold formal positions of authority and responsibility in their churches. In addition to pastoral duties, they are also responsible for long-range planning, fundraising, staff supervision, and overall management of the church. Large churches are served by several clergy members, each of whom can specialize in a management function. The clergy delegates were on average 46.9 years old ( $SD = 13.1$ ) had on average been a member of the current church for 8.3 years ( $SD = 13.1$ ) and a conference delegate 15.4 years ( $SD = 12.7$ ). Some 84 percent of the clergy were male and 16 percent female. Ninety-six percent of the clergy had a college degree, and 93 percent held a graduate degree. Clergy are typically rotated among churches and so have a shorter tenure at their current church than the lay delegates.

In this study we rely on debt as an important performance variable. For this measure to be meaningful, however, it is also necessary to consider several important covariates, including congregation size and growth. The churches in this sample had an average membership of 611 ( $SD = 628$ , range 54 to 2,534) and an average attendance at the principal worship service of 270 ( $SD = 167$ ). The churches reported, on average, 4 percent growth in membership from the previous year. Moreover, they owned property and buildings worth, on average, \$1.54 million and carried an average debt load of \$260,609. All data for the churches reported here are taken from the denomination's annual report and are considered official and accurate for each church. The church data are not estimates made by conference attendees.

## Procedure

Questionnaire data were collected from lay leaders and clergy members who participated as conference delegates at a regional conference for churches. The lay leaders who completed the questionnaire were selected for attendance at this conference because they occupy leadership positions within their congregation. These leaders are not only active in their churches but also work closely with the clergy on church initiatives, such as administrative boards, program councils, finance committees, and so forth, and also participate in evaluating clergy performance. Thus they are influential in strategic management of the church and are not "subordinate" managers in a traditional hierarchical sense. The delegates completed questionnaires that addressed a broad range of issues relevant to church activities and conference procedures as part of their conference activities. Although individual leaders of a given congregation may vary in their tenure as members, the leaders of a con-



gregation are furnishing reports of the goals and decision-making processes of their church at a given point in time.

### **Boundary Conditions**

The study focused on the kinds of task mental models needed to manage church operations. Many other kinds of mental models—on matters of faith, belief, and church doctrine—are not part of the current study. Also, our interest in this study is to examine these task models at a particular point in time, to better understand their relationships with organizational performance.

### **Independent Variables**

*Organizational decision-making processes.* Respondents rated four items on a seven-point Likert scale measuring the extent of the laity's participation in decision-making processes for their church (for example, "Laypeople in my church have the authority to make decisions about church goals and activities"). All items are listed in the Appendix. Following is a discussion of how these items were operationalized to capture the shared task mental model of decision-making processes.

*Organizational goals.* Respondents rated the importance that their church places on seven organizational goals on a seven-point Likert scale developed by a conference advisory group and representing the most common goals within this church denomination (among them "revitalization of local churches" and "providing educational resources").

*Shared task mental models.* We assessed shared task mental models by calculating a measure of agreement, consistent with Ensley and Pearce (2001) and Levesque, Wilson, and Wholey (2001). A high degree of agreement represents cognitive overlap across the paid and volunteer leaders' responses. Both lay leaders and clergy possess a shared understanding, and thus a shared mental model, of task issues within each organization. This approach means calculating the within-group interrater reliability (James, Demaree, and Wolf, 1984) for the decision-making processes and goals associated with accomplishing church tasks for each church. Thus we operationalized shared task mental models using what is essentially a measure of the extent to which the conference participants (both lay and clergy) agree on the nature of decision-making processes and goals at their church. We calculated separate measures of agreement, one for organizational decision making and one for organizational goals, using the self-reported organizational decision-making and goals survey items for each church's group of leaders. The average score for task mental models of decision-making processes was .88 ( $SD = .21$ ) and for task mental models of organizational goals was .80 ( $SD = .20$ ). Values for shared mental models of decision-making processes and goals could range from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 meaning more agreement. The values for agree-

ment on the decision process scale ranged from 0.23 to 1.00, suggesting that despite the democratic traditions of this denomination there is wide variation across churches of this same denomination regarding agreement about laity participation in decision making. Although there was some risk of social desirability for everyone to indicate that participation in decision making does occur given the democratic traditions of the church, we did not find this to be true; if all respondents had put high scores on this scale, then we would have seen 100 percent agreement. The ratings for goals ranged from 0.28 to 1, suggesting that even though particular teachings or doctrine may suggest the importance of one given goal over another, variation exists in what leaders view as the most important goals of their respective churches.

### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in the current study is debt. Borrowing money is a management issue and decision that has considerable long-term implications for churches. More important, churches of various denominations, as well as their stakeholders, use the level of debt to evaluate financial stability and performance (Jordan, Thompson, and Malley, 1991; Eltringham, 1994; Kochhar, 1996; Kochhar and Hitt, 1998; O'Brien, 2003; "Keeping Faith," 2004; Daniels, 2003; LaRue, 2003).

The average debt for the thirty-seven churches in the sample was \$260,609. However, there was considerable variability ( $SD = \$487,890$ ). Some fifteen churches carried no debt at all, while the other twenty-two churches carried debt ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,257,974.

### **Control Variables**

In this study, we rely on debt as an important performance variable. For this measure to be meaningful, however, it is necessary to consider several important covariates, including congregation size and growth. Even though churches might prefer to avoid debt, many of them, particularly large churches, are increasingly taking on more debt. In a study of 296 Protestant churches, LaRue (2004) reports that 52 percent of the responding churches are in debt, with mortgages and lines of credit being the primary vehicles. Nearly nine out of ten large churches are in debt, as compared to just one-third of small churches. Since 2001, the percent of large churches in debt has jumped significantly, increasing from 67 to 87 percent (LaRue, 2004). As a result, we control for church size in this analysis through the average attendance at the principal worship. The measure is deemed appropriate over total membership, because those who attend the principal worship no doubt are the active members of the church.

The churches with no debt have an average attendance of 330 (range 54 to 1,095), while the churches carrying debt have an average attendance of 803 (range 67 to 2,534), and their average debt is \$416,045. The correlation in these data between debt and member-

ship is .40 ( $p < .05$ ). Because of the size bias, attendance at principal worship service is used as a covariate.

Despite a general reluctance to take on debt, there is a situation in which debt might be seen as necessary: the situation of growth. Similar to operation of businesses in the private sector, income generally lags behind growth; yet the growing business (or in this case, the growing church) cannot wait for the finances to catch up, particularly if it needs capital expenditures such as land, buildings, and parking lots. The analyses reported here also control for growth. The churches in the sample report an average growth rate of 4 percent ( $SD = .08$ ). Although smaller churches can grow faster than large churches on a percentage basis (because they have a smaller baseline), the correlation between size and growth is .03 (ns), suggesting no relationship between size and growth.

When both size and growth are accounted for, one concludes that debt is taken on by churches to sustain ongoing operations. This may be seen (and justified) as a short-term necessity, but over time, if left unattended, debt indicates such churches are being poorly managed and are essentially failing. Thus greater debt in the analyses reported here is indicative of generally poor management practices.

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## Analysis

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables. In general, our results showed significant correlations between the independent variables (task mental models on decision-making processes and goals) and the dependent variable (debt). Limited collinearity is evidenced through the nonsignificant correlations among the independent variables.

Next, we used hierarchical regression analyses to test the two hypotheses. Table 2 shows the models tested. Model 1 presents the control variable analysis and model 2 presents a full model that includes all the variables. When size and growth are controlled for, both shared task mental models for decision-making processes

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Debt	\$260,609.86	\$487,890.61	1				
Task mental model: decision-making processes	0.88	0.21	-0.57***	1			
Task mental model: goals	0.80	0.20	-0.43**	0.21	1		
Size	270.95	167.46	0.40*	-0.38*	-0.15	1	
Growth	0.04	0.08	0.03	-0.01	-0.16	-0.20	1

$N = 37$

\*\*\*  $p = .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

**Table 2.** Results of Regression Analyses for Debt

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Growth	.11	.02
Size	.42*	.20
Task mental model: decision process		-.43**
Task mental model: goals		-.31*
R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.46
Change in R <sup>2</sup>		.29
F	3.48*	8.36***

N = 37

\*\*\*  $p = .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

and goals are significantly and negatively related to church debt; in other words, a higher level of agreement is associated with less debt. Because church debt is viewed as poor management, we expected this negative relationship. Thus we found support for hypotheses 1 and 2.

## Discussion

This article suggests that task mental models shared across two types of leaders in the churches we surveyed are associated with improved organizational performance. Having leaders on the same page makes a difference. The findings are important because previous research has established the importance of shared mental models for effective team functioning. We build on that research and examine the impact of task mental models shared across *organizational* levels (volunteer and paid leaders) and *organization* performance in nonprofit organizations. The more that both clergy and lay leaders share a task mental model, the better the churches perform. Organizational effectiveness improves because when leaders rely on task mental models, an organizational coherence emerges from this shared meaning. Leaders operating in different spheres—paid and volunteer—cannot easily integrate their substantially differing frames of reference unless they develop *shared* understanding of both goals and processes (Mohammed and Dumville, 2001). The impact of shared mental models is true for both “autocratic” churches and “democratic” ones. Being on the same page, or agreeing that this is what we are and this is how we operate, is more important than the type of decision-making processes and goals.

The idea of shared task mental models seems especially important to the study of nonprofit organizations because of their complex nature. Drucker (1990) points out that a basic difference between nonprofit organizations and businesses is that the nonprofit organization has so many more critical relationships to contend with than does a business. Thus managing the complex set of relationships requires attention to how information is shared among all

the actors in the organization and how the organization is understood and perceived by various actors.

Our findings suggest areas for further research as well as specific implications for leaders in nonprofit organizations. Traditional hierarchies can be effective in ensuring an orderly, efficient routine process, but there are many organizations for which the hierarchical model will not work effectively. For example, the churches studied in this article cannot ensure hierarchical compliance because the professional leaders are not necessarily the “bosses” of the volunteer leaders. Professional staff (clergy in our case) are appointed and evaluated by the volunteers (lay leaders), many of whom might be more accomplished managers than the professional staff. The clergy possess a certain moral authority, but their effectiveness will depend on articulating and pursuing a shared purpose beyond theology. The organization prospers because its members believe in the importance of the shared purpose of “how we operate” as a church. Members can then voluntarily act in ways that benefit the church, not because they are commanded to do so but because they are aware of and committed to the church’s tasks. The leaders’ (both clergy and lay) purpose is to come to understand with greater clarity the nature and features of the tasks.

Consider that the effectiveness of a shared mental model approach to leadership will likely be true in any organization (academic setting, hospital, research setting) where the employees possess greater technical knowledge and skill than the managers, and it is the technical knowledge and skill that is the reason for the organization’s existence. These are all workplaces where formal leaders and managers cannot rely on the legitimate power conferred by a hierarchical system. A hospital administrator cannot tell a doctor how to perform an operation; a dean cannot tell a faculty member what kind of research to pursue. But these formal leaders and managers can emphasize the importance of high-quality medical care or high-quality research as a necessary part of their collective system – not telling the “subordinate” what to do, but rather reminding the subordinate of the meaning of his or her contribution. Similarly, nonprofit organizations such as the Red Cross, Girl Scouts, and United Way cannot deal with volunteers by invoking hierarchical legitimacy; rather, these organizations, like the churches in our study, are better served by having leaders work toward being on the same page.

Several limitations to the research must be noted. First, our need to have both clergy and lay reports from the same church reduced our sample, even though a sample of thirty-seven organizations would not normally be considered much of a weakness. Another limitation is that the data are cross-sectional. Although cross-sectional designs generally motivate a higher level of informant participation than longitudinal studies, they lack the capability to show any development or change (Cook and Campbell, 1979; Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). We cannot make any kind of causal infer-

ence; nor can we comment on how the management of the churches may have evolved or changed. Also, our study paints with a broad brush. A different research approach, such as a longitudinal qualitative design, would be needed to capture the social dynamics inside each church. A third limitation is the use of a survey to capture task processes. Although this is a commonly used approach in assessing shared mental models (Peterson, Mitchell, Thompson, and Burr, 2000; Yoo and Kanawattanachai, 2001; Levesque, Wilson, and Wholey, 2001), surveys have distinct disadvantages. For example, they present issues in the researcher's voice, not the informant's. Moreover, surveys cannot capture the depth, breadth, and texture that is possible in applying qualitative techniques. Field observations might prove to be better suited to capturing the relationship between cognitive processes and organizational behaviors.

## Conclusion

Traditional command-and-control hierarchy presumes that managerial coherence results from everyone doing what they are told. In such a system, a shared understanding of task depends on little more than a leader's ability to be clear in issuing orders, but such clarity is never ensured because the leader and the subordinate operate from fundamentally different cognitive perspectives. This research, in contrast, proceeds on the premise that a leader is not necessarily an issuer of orders but rather a catalyst for shared understanding. If leaders reside at different places in the organization, their efforts to enable shared meaning will do far more for the organization's performance than ensuring mere compliance down the hierarchy. The conversation resulting from an effort to understand meaning will ensure more comprehensive understanding of the collective purpose. Therefore, being on the same page about the collective purpose, not the hierarchy, becomes the integrating mechanism for the organization.

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### Appendix: Measures from Survey

Decision processes (1 = *not true*; 7 = *true*), Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$

1. The views of the laypeople who hold leadership positions at my church make a difference in the "big" decisions that get made at my church.
2. The views of laypeople regarding "big" decisions are sought by the clergy in my church.
3. Laypeople in my church have the authority to make decisions about church goals and activities.
4. Laypeople influence decisions regarding new programs and activities in my church.

List of potential goals (1 = *not important*; 7 = *extremely important*)

1. Revitalization of local churches
2. Apportionments
3. Developments of lay leadership abilities
4. Clergy professional development
5. Assisting local churches with stewardship
6. Providing educational resources
7. Hispanic ministries