

ChoosingChange

Coaching and Consulting

Assessing Congregational Culture and Priorities (Using the Competing Values Framework)

Congregational priorities reflect a congregation's most meaningful values, and values can be in tension with each other. For example, all congregations value an inward focus (for organizational maintenance and general well-being) and an outward focus (for mission involvement and numeric growth), but giving more priority to one value can diminish the priority given to the other. Discovering the values that form a congregation's life helps one appreciate the stance a congregation has relative to the wider community beyond the walls of the building and is indicative of how a congregation will live its life in the foreseeable future. This kind of assessment provides strong hints regarding a congregation's intentions and capacity for change and / or growth.

Studies have shown that assessing organizations through two pairs of "competing values" can provide a quick and reasonably accurate depiction of the organization's culture. I have taken the standard Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)¹ and modified the questionnaire for use specifically in congregations. Congregations can be described by assessing the priority given to two fundamental pairs of competing values:

<p><u>Internal Focus</u> (which leads to a priority for maintaining habits and traditions meaningful to current congregants)</p>	<p><u>External Focus</u> (which leads to a priority for ensuring cultural relevance to potential congregants)</p>
<p><u>Attractional Model Congregations</u> (congregants want people to come to their congregation and become like them. I call these churches "being congregations").</p>	<p><u>Transformational Model Congregations</u> (these congregations are not satisfied simply "being" but are focused on "doing". Congregational life is intended to help change happen: either for the congregant within or people beyond the church walls)</p>

Every congregation expresses the four values to some degree. What makes a congregation unique is the proportion of priority that is given to the values of each pair, and the interaction the two set of pairs have with each other. These two pairs were chosen because when combined they describe the four current major "functional ecclesiologies" that are most prevalent today.

The Belonging Congregation (Internal Focus / Attractional)

The typical mainline congregation, emphasizing worship and group activity. This type of congregation seeks stability, harmony, solid teamwork, care, wellbeing and continuing a congregational life that is meaningful to those presently a part of the congregation. This kind of congregation asks, "How can we **maintain** our congregational life that we have always found so meaningful to ourselves?" These congregations wish to attract newcomers, but little effort is given to retooling the congregation to make it more relevant to society's culture. The assumption in this type of congregation is "if we find our

congregation very meaningful then newcomers will also find it meaningful.” This type of congregation has been well described by sociologists Jackson Carroll, Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow.²

The Spirituality-Authenticity Congregation (Internal Focus / Transformational)

These congregations have been labeled as “practicing congregations”, emphasizing spiritual growth and self-development. This type of congregation seeks greater meaning in the lives of congregants, intentional spirituality, acceptance of diversity, individuals becoming more authentic and growing deeper as Christians and human beings. This kind of congregation asks, “How can we **develop** our congregational life, to build on our strengths and meet unmet needs, and so foster and find even greater meaning for ourselves?” This type of congregation has been well described by historian Diana Butler Bass, sociologist Robert Wuthnow and Alban author Graham Standish.³

The Church Growth Congregation (External Focus / Attractional)

The typical evangelical congregation, emphasizing overall congregational health, a growth orientation, “market responsiveness”, and finding the balance between meeting the needs of present congregants while at the same time looking for how to meet the needs of potential congregants. This type of congregation pursues quality improvement, numeric growth, and seeks to align people’s values and behaviour in ways that create a healthier congregation that is subsequently appealing to outsiders. These churches ask, “How can we be the best church **in** our community?” because the assumption is that church-shoppers will most likely choose the best church. This type of congregation has been well described by the church growth literature and is typified by Kennon Callahan and Christian Schwarz.⁴

The Missional Congregation (External Focus / Transformational)

Missional congregations give priority to the needs of people in the wider community and society. This type of congregation is culturally savvy, entrepreneurial, risk-taking, innovative, compassionate, giving as much priority to meeting the needs of others as they do to meeting the needs of congregants. This type of congregation wishes to be a servant to those beyond its walls, and if growth happens as a consequence then that’s nice too—but growth is not their primary motivation. This kind of congregation asks, “How can we be the best church **for** our community?” and enjoys the idea that they are unique and “externally focused”. Such churches have been well described by missional writers such as Alan Roxburgh and Craig Van Gelder.⁵



It is highly unlikely that any congregation will fall exclusively within one type, and so the OCAI report will show which type is the congregation’s primary emphasis, which types are secondary and how the four types are expressed relative to each other. The OCAI tool is helpful in two ways as it provides an assessment of the current congregational type as well as a desired type the congregation aspires to become. The OCAI, then, assesses current reality as well as aspirations. Knowing both provides

congregational leadership with an appreciation of:

- The congregation’s starting place for change
- The preferred direction for change currently prevalent in the minds of congregants.

Four Models of the Church: Competing Values Framework

Attractional (Being)

Internal (Traditional)

<p>Belonging</p> <p>Mainline Congregations</p> <p>Primary spiritual priority: Christian community</p> <p>Faith is habitual for insiders</p> <p>Wants to assimilate people</p> <p>Assumes a stable society, “appreciative” society</p> <p>Culture: clan culture, stable and mature culture</p> <p>Values: cohesion, participativeness, a sense of “we-ness”, feels like extended family, teamwork, individual involvement, commitment to congregation, friendliness, bound together by loyalty and tradition, premium on consensus, Change defined as: managing the organization, values people sharing a lot of themselves, images of “family” and “home” important, church building as “our home” important,</p> <p>Priority for: institution</p> <p>Faithfulness (success) defined by: cohesion, high morale & satisfaction, needs (individual and organizational) being met, evident teamwork. <i>Believe</i> that committed satisfied members breeds success.</p> <p>Spirituality as belonging to and participating in congregation. (Wuthnow 1998, pg 30)</p> <p>What attracts people: familiarity, who are connectors</p> <p>Attraction is: passive</p> <p>Emphasis on organizational structure and rules, long term benefits of belonging</p> <p>Belief: shared belief helps one belong</p> <p>Tradition: is static</p> <p>Identity thru: self-location</p> <p>Organizational glue: loyalty and/or tradition</p> <p>Leaders are: mentors, facilitators, managers, encouraging / enabling participation, promotes loyalty, team builders, nurturers and supporters, <u>pastoral</u>.</p> <p>Relevance defined as: “how it has been”</p> <p>Orienting question: “How can we maintain our way of being church that we have always found to be meaningful?”</p>	<p>Church Growth</p> <p>Evangelical Congregations</p> <p>Primary spiritual priority: great commission</p> <p>Faith is relevant to outsiders</p> <p>Wants to accommodate people</p> <p>Assumes a consumer society, “hostile” society</p> <p>Culture: market culture, willing to evolve, results oriented</p> <p>Change defined as: market responsiveness</p> <p>Priority for: goal</p> <p>Faithfulness (success) defined by: numeric growth</p> <p>What attracts people: needs / preferences, who are consumers (relevance)</p> <p>Attraction is: active</p> <p>Identity as: team member</p> <p>Emphasis on market responsiveness, immediate benefit of belonging</p> <p>Belief: one needs to change beliefs to belong</p> <p>Orientation: goal-oriented, emphasis on external positioning, operates through market mechanisms, feels competition</p> <p>Leaders are: goal oriented, hard-driving, want to win, direction-setting, <u>purposeful</u></p> <p>Orienting question: “How can we be the best church <u>IN</u> our community?”</p> <p>Relevance defined as: meet needs “where we are”</p> <p>Organizational glue: congregational purpose and success in fulfilling it</p> <p>Example Church: Willow Creek (realizing that it needed to be more practicing), “unchurched Harry and Mary”</p>
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External (Relevant)

Internal (Traditional)

Spirituality / Authenticity

“Practicing Congregations”

Primary spiritual priority: knowing the fullness of God

Faith is a journey of discernment and transformation for us

Wants to change those who join them

Assumes a “seeker” culture in society

Culture: congregation’s culture is meant to transform

Change defined as: making what is most important to us even more meaningful

Priority for: personal practice

Faithfulness defined by: active practice (not like assumed practice in belonging)

What attracts people: sharing the journey

Emphasis on finding and strengthening spiritual meaning

Belief: grows through the shared spiritual journey

Tradition is dynamic

Identity as: self-actualization???

Organizational glue:

Relevance defined as:

Orienting question: “How can we develop our sense of being church so our Christian life (individual & corporate) will be even more meaningful and significant?”

Leaders are: spiritual

Quote: “to create or renew a congregation that would touch the lives of spiritual nomads—serving as spiritual bridges from the nomadic life to a life of faithful discipleship.” (DB Bass, *From Nomads to Pilgrims*, pg. 168)

Missional

“Missional Congregations”

Primary spiritual priority: love your neighbour, generosity

Faith is generous to others

Wants to change those who aren’t here

Assumes a society with needs

Culture: like being on the cutting edge, is a young culture

Values: ad hococracy, entrepreneurial responsiveness, grassroots activity, flexibility, creativity, partnerships,

Change defined as: having an increasing impact on our community; congregation’s context is meant to transform

Priority for: others

Faithfulness defined by meeting concrete needs (relevance) “where you are”

What attracts people: want t share in what you do

Emphasis on concrete needs

Belief: grows by reflecting on shared social action

Orienting question: “How can we be the best church FOR our community?”

Leaders are: visionary, innovative and risk oriented, future-oriented, hopeful

Relevance defined as:

Organizational glue: commitment to the cause, as well as to innovativeness and experimentation

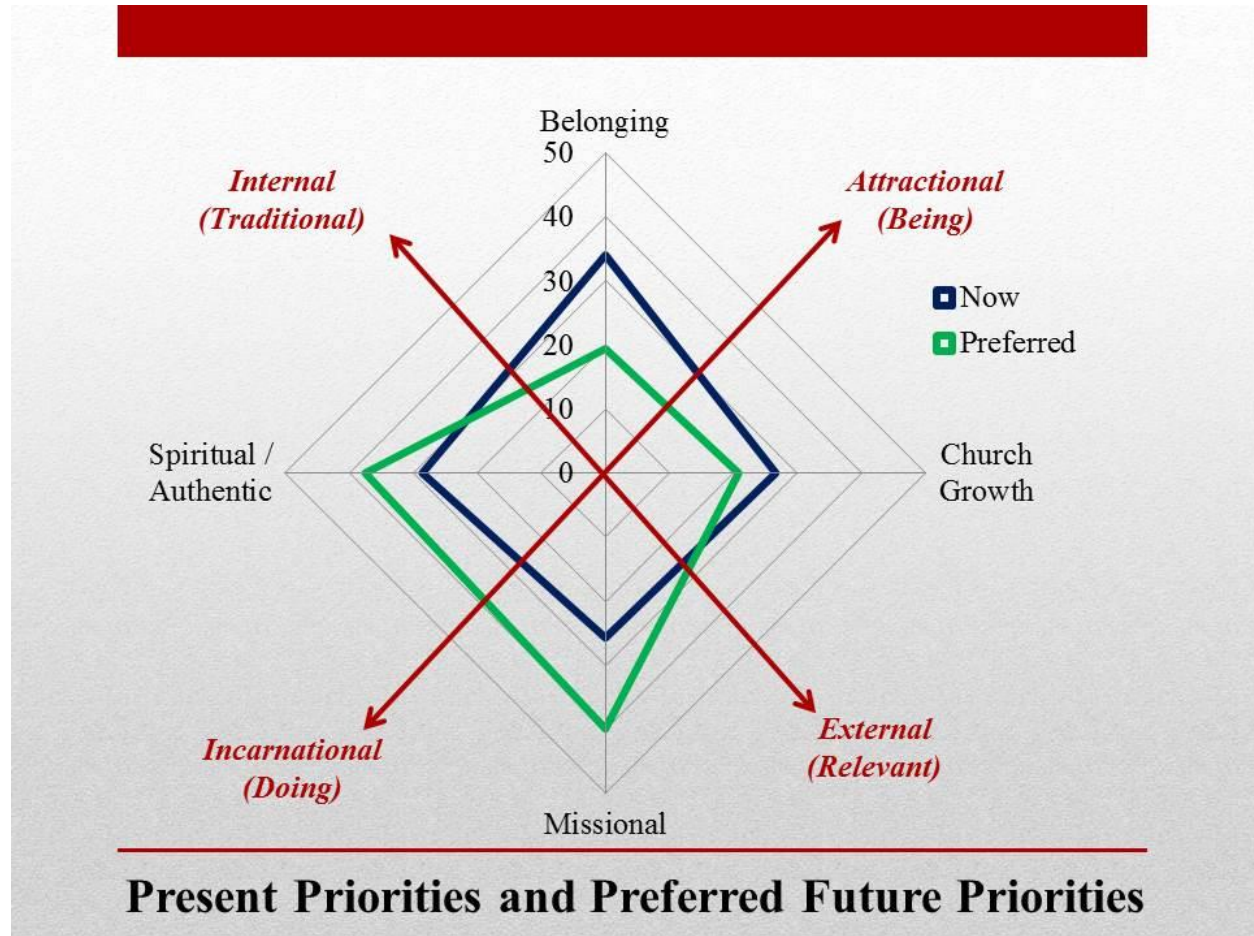
External (Relevant)

Transformational (Doing)

Surveying The Congregation

All congregants can participate in the questionnaire using the on-line survey tool called SurveyMonkey. The results are then tabulated and plotted so people can visualize how current priorities (blue line) compare to preferred priorities of the future (green line). The data can be used to also show:

- How pockets of people in the congregation hold divergent views
- How the present and future priorities of the congregation compare to the view of the pastor
- The percentage of the congregation that desire to maintain the status quo vs. those who desire real change.



In the above example, the current priorities of this congregation are mostly balance with a modest priority for maintaining the congregation's sense of tradition and community. The preferred future balance would give greater priority to congregants becoming more active in their faith, through both spiritual growth of the individual and missional impact in the wider community. Results such as this are a clear indication that the congregation as a whole is very prepared to undertake congregational change, and that they have two distinct goals for that change.

¹ Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 3rd edition. Jossey-Bass, 2011.

² See Jackson Carroll & Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations*. Jossey Bass, 2002. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's*. University of California Press, 1998.

³ See Robert Wuthnow footnote 2. Graham Standish, "Paying Attention to God" in *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations* by Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking. The Alban Institute, 2006. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. Harper, 2006.

⁴ Kennon Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*. Harper, 1983. Christian Schwarz, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development: Experiencing all that God has Designed You to Be*. NCD Canada, 2005.

⁵ Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Baker Books, 2011. Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: a Community Created by the Spirit*. Baker Books, 2000.