

CREATING THRIVING, COHERENT AND INTEGRAL NEW THOUGHT CHURCHES USING AN INTEGRAL APPROACH AND SECOND TIER PRACTICES

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Summary of Doctoral Research Study conducted by Gary Simmons, Th.D.

Introduction

Ken Wilber's integral theory (methodological pluralism), as applied to Unity and New Thought churches, is a holistic lens through which to view spiritual communities as living systems. Two-hundred ninety-eight Unity, Religious Science, and other New Thought churches participated in a survey designed to map key indicators associated with the four quadrants of the organizational holon of the church: Organizational Practices, Social Systems, Culture, and Consciousness; and along developmental lines within each quadrant: Structures, Intimacy, Identity, and Intentionality. The study compares two groups of respondents—those that self-identified as leaders of thriving, coherent, and integral ministries, and all others—across 75 organizational issues. The study examines leadership practices and indicates how, in those instances where second tier practices were prevalent, churches reported a high degree of organizational health and integrity. In those churches where first tier practices dominated, the tendency was for the church community to be driven by subsistence imperatives.

Overview

This study required the formulation of a research instrument called *Integral Church Profile Survey* to identify a broad spectrum of organizational practices, relational dynamics, cultural imperatives, and leadership characteristics prevalent within each New Thought church surveyed. Whenever possible, survey questions were designed to pose gradient selections indicative of Level 1, 2, and 3 dynamics in each quadrant or the generalized distinction between 1st tier and 2nd tier tendencies.

- **Level 1** selections reflected simple and utilitarian organizational structures and practices; the prevalence of family system dynamics; a cultural identity embedded in the minister or eclipsed by its history; and intentionality driven by external circumstances.
- **Level 2** selections pertained to more complex organizational practices and structures supportive of best practices; an egalitarian social environment where intimacy / care-giving functions are shared by community members; a ministry-centric cultural matrix; and intentionality driven by intrinsic values.

- **Level 3** selections are indicative of very complex organizational structures, integral practices and a high degree of systemic congruence; a world-centric cultural matrix; and a purpose driven disposition.

In addition to questions designed to identify trends and practices throughout the AQAL matrix, respondents were asked to provide demographic and contact information.

The analysis of the survey is based on comparing two groups of respondents:

- Those who selected Thriving on a scale of Surviving, Neutral, Thriving; **and** Coherent on a scale of Incoherence, Neutral, Coherence; **and** Integral on a scale of Out of Integrity, Neutral, Integral. This group is designated the thriving, coherent, and integral ministries (TCIM).
- The All Other group (AOG) consisted of those that did not align with Thriving and Coherent, and Integral responses (all other variations and combinations of responses).

Determination along each scale was made solely by the individual respondent based on the following explanation of terms:

- **Thriving:** If *thriving* is all about having more than enough of everything needed (money, volunteerism, and capable people), and *surviving* is about just making it from month to month, indicate where your ministry is along the spectrum: Surviving / Median / Thriving.
- **Coherent:** If *coherence* is all about clarity of purpose (shared identity and shared future) and single mindedness of intent where everyone knows what the church stands for and where it is going, and *incoherence* is about confusion, competing agendas, or lack of shared purpose, indicate where your ministry is along the spectrum: Incoherence / Median / Coherence.
- **Integral:** If *integrity* is about the minister / board / membership partnership where members possess the capacity to hold the leadership accountable, where membership is only available to those who are in ownership of the organization, and *out of integrity* is where anyone can become a member and there is no real process where members are held accountable to competency standards, indicate where your ministry is along the spectrum: Out of Integrity / Median / Integral.

Data Sources

Population: Credential spiritual leaders of a nationally recognized and sanctioned New Thought church, ministry, or center. It is estimated that 800 North American New Thought churches are eligible.

Inclusion Criteria

- Senior minister or credential spiritual leader of an established (at least one year) New Thought church who is willing and able to complete the online research survey (Integral Church Profile Survey).
- Serve in a church organization affiliated with its denominational headquarters, conduct regular worship services and ministry operations.

Exclusion Criteria

- Serve in a church with less than one year of established history.
- Serve in a church with no denominational affiliation to a recognized New Thought sanctioning entity or conduct worship services and ministry operations only irregularly.

Data Collection

An invitation to participate in the study was sent via email to all New Thought churches in North America by their respective organizational headquarters, representing approximately 800 churches, centers, or ministries. The email contained a hyperlink to the Integral Church Profile Survey. Multiple requests to organizational leaders to resend the original invitation were made to optimize the promotion of the study. In addition, 360 postcards were mailed to New Thought churches containing the invitation to participate in the study.

The Integral Church Profile Survey was administered online by www.surveymonkey.com which provided a complete itemization of all responses in a password protected virtual environment. Participants who do not meet the inclusion requirements were expunged from the data base. The collection period was from December 15, 2006 to May 15, 2007.

Data Analysis

Two-hundred and ninety-eight viable responses were collected. Using www.surveymonkey.com's filtering options, the two study groups were identified. A total of 28 (9%) of total responses indicated complete alignment with Thriving, Coherent, and Integral criteria. The TCIM group was compared to AOG. Thirty-nine data charts were composed displaying percentage comparisons between the two groups across 75 organizational issues.

With respect to the Integral Church Profile Survey—thriving, coherent, and integral ministries (TCIM) and all other (AOG) survey respondents—when the two groups are compared the following trends are indicated:

- **Minster’s Tenure:** Fifty-three percent of TCIM’s have a minister’s tenure greater than five years. Eighteen percent of TCIM’s have a minister’s tenure greater than 20 years as compared to only 4 % of AOG survey respondents with a greater than 20 year minister tenure.
- **Church Size Distribution:** The greatest percentage of TCIM respondents are from Pastoral and Program churches. However, when the *TCIM to AOG* ratio is compared within each church size category, the Mega church configuration is 50 % more likely to be thriving, coherent, and integral (TCI) than the Corporate church, but only 25 % more likely than the Program church. The Program church is 75 % more likely to be TCI in comparison to the Pastoral church. The Pastoral church is 83 % more likely to be TCI in comparison to the Family church. Thus, the larger the church the more likely the church will be TCI.
- **Ethnic Diversity:** TCIMs are nearly twice as likely to have ethnically diverse congregations when a church is situated in an ethnically diverse community.
- **Sunday Attendance:** No TCIM reported a decline in church attendance. Furthermore, TCIMs are only half as likely to report an attendance plateau. They are twice as likely to report an increase in Sunday attendance in the past two years.
- **Financial Support:** TCIMs are half as likely to report a decline or plateau of financial support. 78 % of TCIMs report an increase in financial support.
- **Membership Process:** TCIMs are three times more likely to have a tiered membership process where there is a distinction between joining the church and becoming a voting member. By comparison, TCIMs tend to have a more complex and demanding process for becoming a voting member of the church.
- **Components of New Member Orientation:** TCIMs are twice as inclined to require a prosperity class, *I of the Storm* class, Peacemaking or Non-Violent Communications class, Truth Basics, commitment to follow a grievance procedure, and commitment to prayer, service, or spiritual education programs. TCIMs are more inclined to include in their

orientation process information regarding the organization's policies, bylaws, mission / vision, and request some form of meaningful service to the ministry.

- **Components of Trustee Service & Board Practice:** TCI's are more inclined to report that their board members are held accountable to performance, ethical, sexual conduct, and conflicts of interest standards, participate in formal board orientation, annual training and retreats; and they are significantly more inclined to require a financial commitment from their trustees. TCI's are nearly twice as likely to provide disclosure of the board's needs and church issues prior to recruiting new board candidates, require an *I of the Storm* class, and attend regional or national conventions.
- **Board Practices:** In comparison to all others, TCIMs are significantly more likely to report clear channels of communication between leadership, staff, and volunteers. Within their group, TCI's are 25 % more likely to be conscious of their responsibility to be role models to the congregation in comparison with all other respondents. 100 % of TCIMs reported that their Bylaws were up-to-date as compared to 66 % of AOG. TCIMs were twice as inclined to inform the congregation regarding financial issues and concerns. They were 20 % more likely to fill vacancies with candidates who were best qualified vs. those who were most willing. TCIM board members were more informed regarding the parent organizations and more likely to remain involved in the church following their board service.
- **Leadership Development:** TCIMs were twice as inclined to report that leadership development was a high priority in their church.
- **Clear and Up-to-Date Policies:** TCIMs are nearly twice as likely to report having clear and up-to-date policies and procedures.
- **Church Identity:** A slightly larger percentage of TCIMs describe their church as a spiritual community rather than their spiritual home. This trend is reversed for AOGs.
- **Management of Disagreement:** TCIMs are twice as likely to report agreement regarding the effective management of disagreement.
- **Gossip, Triangulation & Parking Lot Conversations:** TCIMs are nearly twice as likely to report having no problems with community discontent.
- **What People Say & Do:** TCIMs are more inclined to report congruence between what people say and do.

- **Reliable Volunteers:** TCIMs are twice as likely to attract reliable volunteers.
- **Accountability:** TCIMs are more inclined to hold people in their church accountable for failing to live up to promises.
- **Financial Support Ratio:** TCIMs are significantly more likely to have a giving ratio above the 20/80 % rule in comparison to all others.
- **Overall Functioning:** TCIMs report a greater coherence ratio between what goes on behind the scenes and what is demonstrated in public.
- **Shared Identity & Shared Future:** TCIMs are twice as likely to report a strong sense of congregational shared identity and future in their church.
- **Formulation of Mission & Vision:** TCIMs are twice as likely to link their mission / vision to social action and are significantly more likely to revisit their mission / vision every two years. A greater percentage of TCIM use an AI or Future Search process to formulate their mission / vision.
- **How Financial Challenges are perceived:** TCIMs are more likely to view financial challenges as feed-back to their creative process rather than a problem to solve.
- **Dealing with Challenges:** TCIMs report spending significantly less energy dealing with challenges.
- **Past Issues:** TCIMs are nearly twice as likely to refrain from projecting past concerns onto present conditions.
- **Congregational Attitude:** TCIMs are more inclined to have an optimistic view of circumstances.
- **Congregational Well-being:** TCIMs are twice as likely to differentiate their well-being from issues relating to money or attendance.
- **What Drives the Church?** TCIMs are twice as likely to be mission or purpose driven, then situation or circumstance driven.
- **Integral Leadership:** One hundred percent of all TCIMs have ministers or spiritual leaders who report a medium to high score in being thriving, coherent, and integral in their own personal lives.

Trends and Deductions

Based on the indicated practices, relational dynamics, and distinctive trends, thriving, coherent, and integral ministries possess the following attributes by comparison to the all others group:

- TCIMs are predominately Mega and Program size churches, but can also be Pastoral and Family size
- TCIMs are tenured by long-term, capable leadership
- They are ethnically diverse
- They are more likely to report an increase in Sunday attendance and financial support
- They are more likely to have a tiered process for becoming a voting member
- TCIMs tend to have a more challenging process for becoming a voting member and board of trustee
- They require financial commitment from board members
- TCIM leaders value capacity building, clear communication, healthy ways of managing concerns, accountability, leadership and membership competence, and being role models unto the congregation
- TCIMs refer to themselves as a church community rather than a spiritual family
- They are less dominated by family system dynamics and more egalitarian
- They place a high value on shared identity and share future
- TCIMs are purpose driven, optimistic, and can differentiate themselves from their experience
- They commonly link their identity and purpose with community service and social action
- TCIMs refrain from projecting past concerns onto present circumstances
- And, have ministers and spiritual leaders who are thriving, coherent, and integral in their own personal lives

AQAL Comparison.

<i>Quadrants</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>
Organization Simplex To Multiplex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple new member orientation process • Minimal board member requirements • Less financial requirements for board • Utilitarian structures • Less accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex new member orientation process • Extensive requirements for board members • More financial requirements for board • Integral structures • More accountability
Relationship Family System To Egalitarian System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister is primary care-giver • Family system dynamics prevalent • Church is spiritual home • Ownership ratio equals or less than 20/80% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency toward small group ministries fulfilling care-giving needs • Functional dispute resolution system • Church is spiritual community • Ownership ratio equals or greater than 20/80%
Culture Pseudo To Authentic Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less ethnic diversity • Identity linked to minister • Weak sense of shared identity & future • Mission less likely to be linked to social action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More ethnic diversity • Identity linked to ministry • Strong sense of shared identity & future • Mission likely linked to social action
Consciousness Associative To Differentiated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May see the glass half empty • Eclipsed by history • Driven by financial issues • Tendency to have spiritual leaders who are not thriving, coherent or integral in their personal lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to see the glass half full • Integrated history • Driven by purpose • Tendency to have spiritual leaders who are thriving, coherent, and integral in their personal lives

To receive a copy of the entire doctoral dissertation, contact Dr. Gary Simmons, gary@unity.org.