A Motivational Model for Consulting with Not-for-profit Organizations: A Study of Church Growth and Participation

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Abstract: This study found support for the application of a theory of motivation to counseling churches regarding member enjoyment and involvement. The suitability of one of self-determination theory's assessment instruments to this type of consulting situation was also demonstrated. The research revealed a relationship between the level of experience of three categories of variables associated with intrinsically motivated behavior and the growth or non-growth of church membership, attendance, and giving. Organizational behaviors found to tap into the intrinsic motivation systems of members are identified. The author suggests an intrinsic motivation approach to consulting might be useful not only with religious bodies but also with other nonprofit groups such as charities and fraternal groups reliant upon volitional behavior.

The nonprofit sector of American enterprise, including houses of worship, charities, and fraternal groups, does not escape the consequences of difficult economic times and changing social norms. Should churches be viewed as business entities (not inappropriate since most are legally obliged to provide a formal accounting of their income and expenses), these organizations represent a significant amount of revenue. Protestants alone account for about half the population of the United States, and contribute over $17 billion annually to their local churches (Bedell, 1993). Increasingly, religious institutions are turning to professional consultants to learn ways to increase both participation and contributions (Ritschard, 1993; Bird, 1993).

Consultants from the discipline of psychology, as opposed to general business advisors, would appear uniquely able to serve this special client category since more complex intrapersonal dynamics are involved in intrinsically or self-motivated behaviors than in extrinsically driven ones (Deci, 1975). Satisfaction with a church experience can be attributed either to the intrinsic enjoyment it offers or because it helps meet the internalized needs of attenders (Ryan, Rigby & King, 1993). The author suggests that churches can provide members with greater opportunities to experience intrinsic motivation at church. In doing so, congregants are able to experience greater enjoyment and satisfaction, and will likely have a stronger commitment to those organizations. The required attributes to support intrinsic motivation are attainable by any church, synagogue, or charity without compromising its beliefs or mission.

While approximately 80% of all Americans identify themselves as Christians (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1992), current estimates place weekly attendance rates at only about 25% of congregants (Hadaway, Marler & Chaves, 1993). Similarly, church membership in most major denominations continues to decline (Woodward, 1993; Finke & Stark, 1992). Associated with this lack of involvement is not only the relative failure to fulfill a church's mission of developing humanity's spirituality, but also reduced capacity to fund benevolence programs, such as caring for the needy.
butions to religious groups are down mark-
edly in the past decade (Ronsvalle & Ron-
svalle, 1993).

Yet the drop-off is not universal. There
are denominations and individual churches
that are thriving. Within Christianity, there
are three generally recognized categories,
each of which account for between 25% and
28% of the U.S. population (Kosmin & Lach-
man, 1993): Roman Catholicism; main-
line Protestantism, including such denomi-
nations as Methodists, Lutherans, and
Episcopalian; and evangelical Protestant-
ism, housing such groups as Baptists, Pente-
costals, and Nazarenes. While Roman Ca-
tholicism and mainline Protestantism as a
whole report either declines or relatively
little growth, evangelical Protestant church-
es as a group are prospering (Kelley, 1986;

Demographic trends alone, such as
immigration patterns and the aging of the
population, do not appear to account for this
disparity in growth experience (Wuthnow,
1988), but the psychology of motivation
does provide insight into characteristics
more closely associated with the growing
evangelical Protestant churches than with
the other two Christian categories (Ryan,
Rigby & King, 1993). Significantly, it ap-
pears that it is not necessarily a theological
difference which accounts for growth or
decline, but rather an organizational ap-
proach perhaps more characteristic of one
denomination than another.

**Consulting with Churches**

The field of consulting with churches
and charities is growing (Ritschard, 1993),
with some consultants focused particularly
on church growth but usually from a mar-
teting perspective, such as advising on
fund-raising for building expansion. The
Barna Research Group is a dominant player
in the evangelical Protestant market, yet still
has only a relatively small client base
(Barna, 1991). A number of mainline Prote-
stant congregations are employing traditional
marketing methods such as advertising
(Schaller, 1990; Bird, 1993), though the
evaluation of such is more positive by the
clergy than by the public (McDaniel, 1986).

Analyses of church decline and growth
have been provided primarily by sociolo-
gists and theologians (for example, see
Kelley, 1986; Schenk, 1983; Hoge & Roozen,
1979). Psychologists, however, are exhib-
ing an increasing interest in providing
insight into psychological and motivational
aspects of religion (for example, see Ryan,
Rigby & King, 1993; Bergin, 1991; Goleman,
1991; Donahue, 1985). Houses of worship,
as well as organizations such as charities and
fraternal societies, rely primarily upon
unpaid, volitional behavior, characteristic of
intrinsic motivation. Theories of intrinsic
motivation attempt to identify the circum-
stances found to enhance the likelihood that
individuals will be drawn to participate in,
and contribute to, a range of endeavors in
the absence of external controls.

With approximately 300,000 local
houses of worship in the United States
(Bedell, 1993) and many more nonprofit
organizations desiring growth, there ap-
ppears to be ample opportunity for consult-
ing psychologists to enjoy heightened activi-
ty on these fronts, bringing deeper insights
into human behavior to this prospective
clientele. One attempt by a group of psy-
chologists to address this consulting oppor-
tunity resulted in a compilation of articles
focused largely on the role of counseling
psychology. The collection of papers sug-
gested, for example, how to help a pastor
under stress, ways of establishing self-help
groups, etc. (Malony, 1986), and none ad-
dressed matters specific to organizational
growth. Consultants conversant with issues
that impact members' and prospective
members' motivation, and how that can be
affected by organizational behaviors, would
appear to have a unique opportunity to
have influence in the area of satisfaction
with church. By identifying the conditions found to enhance intrinsic motivation, consulting psychologists can add another dimension to their counseling repertoire.

**Different types of motivation**

Expending personal resources such as time, energy, and money with respect to a charitable, fraternal, or religious initiative usually entails the engagement of a different motivational system than does, for example, working in an occupation for monetary compensation. Intrinsic motivation is that type characterized by enjoyment of an activity itself, largely apart from consequences outside of that endeavor. It is the "...innate, natural propensity to engage one's interests and exercise one's capacities, and in doing so, to seek and conquer optimal challenges" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 43). The primary rewards for intrinsically motivated behavior are "...the experiences of effectance and autonomy" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 32). This kind of drive is at the heart of what Maslow describes as "self-actualization," the highest level of human motivation (1970). There is not a preoccupying concern with the possibility of obtaining a reward outside of the satisfaction of doing the task itself, nor is there worry to avoid some potential punishment for failing to do it. In fact, the introduction of extrinsic rewards to an intrinsically interesting activity has been found to undermine enjoyment of it, and can lead to amotivation, a disinclination toward what had been a desirable task (Deci, 1971).

Intrinsic motivation has been associated with longer involvement in endeavors, greater persistence with tasks, and higher levels of satisfaction and creativity (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In the church domain, intrinsically motivated individuals might be described as those delighting in the worship service experience, looking forward to it each week, expecting to learn and to be involved with other members of the congregation. Intrinsicly motivated persons feel self-determining in their roles as churchgoers (Ryan, Rigby & King, 1993). While the experience of religion can be intrinsically satisfying, for example, praying and singing for the pure enjoyment of doing so, to varying degrees some of the engagement in religion is attributable to instrumentality or performed for external consequences, and could be considered extrinsically motivated.

Extrinsic motivation entails those activities engaged in largely out of a desire to gain a reward or recognition, or to avoid an ill consequence such as guilt, or damnation in the religious extreme. Extrinsic motivation is often clearly in evidence in such domains as school (the pursuit of "A's") and work (striving to gain promotions). This type of motivation has been found to be associated with feelings of anxiety and pressure, and is linked with less long-term persistence (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and with depression in the religious arena (O'Connor & Vallerand, 1990). Extrinsic controls can be external in nature, such as when pursuing praise or prizes, or avoiding a potential punishment; they may also be internal as in compulsions, the origin of which might have been the expressed expectations of significant others from childhood. Rigby, Deci, Patrick, and Ryan (1992) see extrinsically motivated behaviors falling along a continuum ranging from more self-determined ones, those which are valued and perceived as chosen by oneself, to less self-determined experiences which are externally regulated. In a more self-determined condition, a person may, for example, attend church "because it starts my day out right." In a less self-determined state, an individual may feel obliged to go to a worship service, having been urged by others to do so.

The extrinsically motivated person may participate in religion primarily out of a sense of "should" due to an internalized rule, or because it might look bad if he or she did not attend. This is conceptualized as...
introjection by Ryan, Rigby and King (1993). A person high on this religious orientation feels manipulated or compelled in their religious orientation. Contrasted with this approach to religion is the notion of identification, wherein a person engages in religious activities as an expression of personal values, and therefore their participation is more volitional. Better psychological health and enjoyment of worship experiences are associated with this latter persuasion. Some religions and churches are characterized by a more controlling approach than others (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993), and would seem more likely to cultivate an introjection orientation. Leaders of one such church reported that this type of compliance does get children to come to church, although their attendance wanes during and after college (Baard, 1993). However, these pastors note these same individuals tend to return when they have children, perhaps to “get something” outside the religious experience itself such as feeling they are acting as a good mother or father should. These church leaders also observe that such types fall away yet again when their children go off to college, returning when elderly and again “in need.”

In the matter of donations, churches sometimes attempt to entice contributions by offering to honor the biggest givers by identifying them in a prestigious listing or placing their names prominently as benefactors of a window, pew, or room. This approach engages the less-autonomous extrinsic motivation system, and has been shown to potentially undermine intrinsic motivation (e.g., Lepper, Greene & Nisbett, 1973; Deci, Betley, Kahle, Abrams & Porac, 1981). The internationally-acclaimed management philosopher W. Edwards Deming cautioned that the use of incentives by organizations saps the natural motivation of members, replacing it with an inferior extrinsic one (“Deming’s Demons,” 1990). The act of financial giving to a church, if proceeding from the more self-determined extrinsic motivation condition, would be done out of a desire to “further the cause” or to share with others less fortunate. Such giving would be largely unrelated to formal acknowledgment of the donation.

Another type of motivation, amotivation, describes a sense of futility, of either feeling incapable of meeting a perceived expectation or failing to see any relevance of an activity to personal interests or objectives. Amotivation stems from sensing a lack of control in a situation, an inability to meet standards of performance, or of achieving one’s own objectives in a role or relationship. It leaves an individual questioning the value of the activity itself (“I don’t know why I bother to go to church”). Amotivation includes a feeling of personal helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978) and has been found to be associated with minimal compliance or dropping out entirely from an activity (Baard, 1988). In the religious realm, an amotivated person would be the one who does the bare minimum, such as attending only once or twice a year, gives a token amount of money to support the institution, or even quits entirely.

An intrinsic motivation approach to consulting

A number of motivational frameworks have examined issues in organizations, all assuming that higher levels of motivation will result if opportunities to satisfy important psychological needs are met. These concepts have been linked to behaviors, attitudes and general well-being in the workplace and in schools. More recently, Deci and Ryan (1985, 1991) suggest that individuals in a given social context will be more self-motivated and experience greater well-being to the extent that their environments allow them to satisfy certain psychological needs, namely those for autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Thus, self-
determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) identifies three important factors in an organizational environment, namely the opportunity for members to experience a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, that are associated with the experience of self-motivation.

Support for autonomy pertains to the amount of perceived self-determination one enjoys in a given situation or relationship. The requirement is to feel like the “origin” of one’s behavior, perceiving an internal locus of causality (deCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Support for autonomy in the church experience might appear in such ways as allowing parishioners the opportunity to influence how services are conducted, and by acknowledging that an individual must make his or her own decision in matters ranging from levels of contributions to personal deportment. This is not a call for permissiveness, but rather a respect for the fact individuals must ultimately make their own determinations. Pressure and attempts at coercing compliance, such as through excessive rules or elaborations of acceptable conduct, constitute violations of this prerequisite for intrinsically motivated or self-determined extrinsically motivated behavior. The publication of lists of contributors and donations in the hope this would incent parishioners to give more would be an example of a manipulative organizational behavior that might undermine this need to act in an autonomous manner.

The competency dimension of the theory describes one’s innate desire to pursue growth, to be optimally challenged as to current skill or knowledge level, and to experience personal effectance (White, 1959; Deci & Ryan, 1985). In terms of the religious experience, support for competency might appear in the ability an individual perceives he or she has to learn new things related to God, and to address spiritual issues and concerns (Jones & Crandall, 1986). In a church setting, the experience of competency could be affected by the quality of sermons, the existence of study groups, and the perception of an atmosphere of encouragement by church leaders regarding spiritual growth. Competency also entails the exercise of current abilities, such as using one’s talents or skills. Threats to satisfying this prerequisite to the experience of intrinsic motivation in the religious setting include minimally informative or platitude-filled homilies, negative approaches to growth such as placing an emphasis on failure, and little opportunity to utilize one’s talents on behalf of a church.

The final component of self-determination theory, relatedness, has to do with caring for others, and being cared for by them in return (Ryan, 1991). In matters of church-related behavior, this could include the experience of coming to know others with whom one worships, and of perceiving an atmosphere conducive to sharing salient concerns with them. In a congregational relationship, this might entail feeling free to discuss such matters as coping with life or inquiring as to another’s “walk with the Lord,” but would also include opportunities to serve others and to be cared for by them. Inconsistent with meeting this motivational need would be worship services in which interpersonal exchanges and group participation were not supported, or where there are few readily accessible opportunities for greater involvement with one another, such as through study and discussion groups.

By identifying specific institutional behaviors found to create an atmosphere supportive of intrinsic motivation and self-motivation, consultants conversant in self-determination theory can assess current organizational activities relating to the dimensions of the theory and make recommendations for improving same. This approach may be used to guide leaders of such enterprises as to which specific steps might be taken, and which ought to be avoided. A measurement instrument permitting before and after assessments is also available.
The present study examined a means for adapting an approach and an assessment instrument of a prominent theory of intrinsic motivation, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 1991), to interventions with churches desiring to increase membership, participation, and contributions. Specific organizational behaviors found supportive of the intrinsic motivation and the more self-determined extrinsic motivation systems (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989) were identified and measured. It was predicted that the presence of greater perceived opportunities to act in a self-determining manner, to be optimally challenged in the sense of learning and doing interesting things, and to feel related to other church members would account for, in part, a church's growth experience. That is, churches providing an atmosphere more conducive to intrinsically motivated behavior would enjoy increasing membership and higher levels of attendance and giving.

A major metropolitan community was chosen as the site for the study. A qualitative assessment identified three churches which appeared representative of the three categories of Christianity. A Roman Catholic church, a mainline Protestant one (a United Church of Christ affiliate), and an evangelical Protestant congregation (a member of the Conservative Baptist Association) were approached in order to collect basic demographic data to determine if they were, indeed, reasonably representative of their larger denominations with regard to growth experience, giving, and attendance.

Method

Subjects

With the cooperation of the pastors of each of three churches in a middle-class, suburban community, questionnaires were given to people leaving services on two Sunday mornings. A Saturday evening service was also sampled for one congregation. A total of 430 surveys were distrib-

ed, entailing ten worship services. A cover letter explained the purpose of the research, and was attached to the survey form along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Returned, completed questionnaires totaled 275, a 64% response rate. The sample was distributed fairly evenly across the three sites.

Measures

The How it Feels at Church Survey is a four-point Likert-type scale where subjects indicate their level of agreement with statements by selecting Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The 23-item portion of the questionnaire devoted to the three dimensions of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) was patterned after ones used successfully in similar research at schools and in workplaces (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Ilardi et al., 1993; Baard, 1992). The How It Feels at Work Survey was modified to capture the motivational variables salient to church experiences. For example, an item measuring the competency dimension originally reading "I enjoy the challenges my work provides" was changed to "...my church provides." Similarly, on the autonomy portion, the original "I'm free to express ideas and opinions on the job" became "...at my church." On the relatedness subscale, "I consider the people I work with to be my friends" was altered to read "...the people I worship with...".

Statements alternated between positive and negative wording to avoid a response set. Representative questionnaire items appear in Figure 1. Several additional statements were presented in a Lickert-type manner in order to capture such variables as frequency of attendance and importance of church in the respondent's life. In the present study, the alpha coefficients for the subscales of the How it Feels at Church
Survey revealed adequate reliability (autonomy .68; competency .78; and relatedness .87).

Figure 1
Illustrative Items from the How It Feels at Church Survey*

Autonomy subscale
- My Church is really open to suggestions from the congregation.
- I feel I can be pretty much myself at church.
- My church has a lot of rules about how to conduct my life. (Reverse form)

Competence subscale
- I enjoy the challenge my church provides.
- I've been able to learn interesting new things at my church.
- I don't think the sermons I hear at my church are very stimulating. (Reverse form)

Relatedness subscale
- I really like the people at my church.
- People at church are pretty friendly towards me.
- People at my church care about me.

*Complete list of items can be obtained from author.

The Christian Religious Internalization Scale (CRIS) is a 12-item Likert-type measure designed to assess the degree of self-determination for Christian beliefs (Ryan, Rigby & King, 1993). Sample items include “I share my faith because God is important to me and I’d like others to know Him too” (identification item) and “I attend church because one is supposed to go” (introjection item). Results of the CRIS validation study showed significant positive correlations between high introjection scores and such general health concerns as anxiety (r=.55, p<.01) and depression (r=.60, p<.01), and significant negative correlations regarding global self-esteem (r=-.50, p<.01) and self-actualization (r=-.49, <.01). Identification scores correlated positively with self-actualization (r=.33, p<.05), and negatively with anxiety (r=-.39, p<.05) and depression (r=-.33, p<.05). In the present study, the alpha coefficients of the CRIS subscales revealed adequate reliability (identification .82 and introjection .72).

The inclusion of the CRIS scale permitted comparison of the profiles of the respective churches as well as intrapersonal assessment of a motivational dimension related to self-determination theory and associated with church attendance (Ryan, Rigby & King, 1993).

Results

Table 1 provides the preliminary quantitative analysis confirming the three churches to be a representative sample of the categories of Christian churches on the dimensions of church growth and attendance rates. The Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches had experienced little or no growth in membership, and only limited participation by those in their congregations. For example, weekly attendance averaged below one-third of registered members, typical of both Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993; Ronsvalle & Ronsvalle, 1993; Woodward, 1993). At the same time, the local evangelical Protestant church was experiencing a double-digit growth rate (fueled, in part, by people switching from the aforementioned congregations). This latter church’s weekly attendance rate exceeded 80% of its members, not unlike many evangelical Protestant congregations (Barna, 1991). The level of member donations in these neighboring churches followed a similar pattern. The evangelical Protestant congregation, having a membership with a socioeconomic profile comparable to the other two churches, had
an annual per household donation rate nearly four times that of the other congregations in the study.

The data for church growth were provided by employees of the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant congregations; the evangelical Protestant church provided direct access to its membership records for the past ten years. Average household contributions were derived from reports made available to the respective congregations, with amounts rounded to the nearest one hundred dollars. Church attendance

Table 1
Demographic Data for the Roman Catholic (RC), Evangelical Protestant (EP) and Mainline Protestant (MP) Churches in Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>RC</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average annual growth</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,400</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>$1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contribution*</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.60</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>22.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Contribution amounts rounded to nearest one hundred dollars.

Table 2
Mean Scores on the How It Feels at Church Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation Variable</th>
<th>RC (n=99)</th>
<th>EP (n=78)</th>
<th>MP (n=97)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>19.60 3.18</td>
<td>24.19 2.77</td>
<td>22.88 2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>21.38 2.95</td>
<td>24.15 3.35</td>
<td>23.60 3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>20.53 3.08</td>
<td>23.18 2.41</td>
<td>23.08 2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means for individual churches on each dimension of the How it Feels at Church Survey appear in Table 2. As one can see, the highest reported levels of the experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were for the church experiencing growth, the evangelical Protestant congregation. While each motivation dimension was significantly higher than those of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>RC (n=99)</th>
<th>EP (n=78)</th>
<th>MP (n=97)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td>M SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>19.60 3.18</td>
<td>24.19 2.77</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple range tests of significance: RC/EP and RC/MP on all variables at the .001 level; EC/MP on the competency variable at the .01 level.

Roman Catholic church (p<.001), only the difference between the evangelical and mainline Protestant churches' competency scores was significant (p<.01).

The second phase of the analysis examined whether a church's relative success at presenting an environment supportive of intrinsic motivation was associated with higher levels of the identification-type of religious orientation, found to be related to better mental health characteristics as well as to religious variables. The means of individual churches on the CRIS measure appear in Table 3. The church with the highest perceived support for the intrinsic motivation variables also had the highest level of identification among its members (significant at the .001 level). In the full...
sample, identification correlated with frequency of church attendance (r=.330, 

Table 3  
Percent of Attendance in Sample Checking Strongly Agree ("Top Box")  
...Items in Addition to the How It Feels at Church Survey:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Items</th>
<th>Church RC</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(paraphrased)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look forward to going to church*</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My church is an important part of my life**</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship service is a special opportunity to get close to God</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically significant differences, two-tailed tests:  
*Look forward: RC/EP= .0001 level  
RC/MP= .001 level  
EP/MP=.02 level  
**Church import: RC/EP= .001 level  
EP/MP= .001 level  
***Worship service: RC/EP= .01 level  
EP/MP=.001 level  

p<.001), the importance of church in a person's life (r=.516, p<.001), and whether an individual looked forward to going to church each week (r=.598, p<.001).

To examine responses to an additional set of questions included due to their appearance in other discussions of church growth (for example, respondents were asked the degree to which they look forward to going to church), a statistical technique more commonly found in the field of marketing research than in social psychology was employed. The "Top Box Analysis" method (Hawkins & Tull, 1993) pertains to the isolation of the sample who selected the highest favorable agreement with statements in the survey. On a four-point Lickert scale such as was used in this research, when predicting subsequent consumer behavior with regard to the product or service under review, those who check the highest favorable response of "Strongly agree" (or "Strongly disagree" for the negatively worded versions) are found to have substantially greater conviction about their opinions, and to be three to four times as likely to buy the product or service than are those who select the next favorable "rating" of "Agree" (or "Disagree" in the negatively worded versions).

Given the nature of the present assessment which asked, in effect, "How is your church doing regarding these matters?", it was expected that a considerable number of people would respond in at least a somewhat favorable (to their church and pastor) manner. This is comparable to the "socially acceptable response" phenomenon which confounds many studies of the public (for example, see Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993). The Top Box method also made

Table 4  
Means of CRIS* Identification and Introjection Subscale Scores for Roman Catholic (RC), Evangelical Protestant (EP), and Mainline Protestant (MP) Churches  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRIS Subscale</th>
<th>Church RC (n=99)</th>
<th>EP (n=78)</th>
<th>MP (n=97)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>M = 18.79, SD = 3.50</td>
<td>M = 20.66, SD = 2.52</td>
<td>M = 18.86, SD = 3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjection</td>
<td>M = 11.78, SD = 2.57</td>
<td>M = 10.05, SD = 3.06</td>
<td>M = 9.24, SD = 2.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically significant differences, two-tailed tests:  
Identification: RC/EP at the .001 level;  
EP/MP at the .001 level  
Introjection: RC/EP=.001 level;  
RC/MP=.001 level  

*CRIS =Christian Religious Internalization Scale

Items and administration format can be obtained from the author.
presentation of all data more readily understandable in the discussions with church leaders. The data displayed in Table 4 reflect responses to several items considered salient to the church experience.

Discussion

Support was found for the application of self-determination theory to understanding church growth and decline. The most successful of the three churches in terms of growth, contributions, and weekly attendance rate was the evangelical Protestant church. It had the highest scores on multiple measures. Its “How It Feels at Church” scores indicated its members perceived the greatest level of support for intrinsic motivation variables. Its competency opportunity score was significantly higher than both other churches. A correlational analysis of the data revealed the competency dimension is most closely associated with enjoyment of church (r=.653, p<.001) and the importance of church in the lives of congregants (r=.430, p<.001). These two factors correlate with attendance (r=.303, p<.001, and r=.424, p<.001, respectively). Such a finding is consistent with those linking such variables to general satisfaction (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989) and lowered stress and better performance (Baard, 1992) in for-profit organizations.

Similarly, the CRIS measure indicated this growing organization’s membership was characterized by a more identified or self-determined approach to beliefs, one which is associated with intrinsic motivation and greater enjoyment of the religious experience. While causal relations cannot be known from a correlational study such as this, people do tend to be affected by the atmosphere in which they are embedded. It is reasonable to speculate, particularly since the church in question drew most of its members from the other denominations represented in the study, that there exists an organizational mentality supportive of the growth of an integrated approach to religion. Some of the specific behaviors unique to this congregation appear in the Comment section below.

The research reported above measured dynamics found to affect motivation, satisfaction, and behaviors in studies of workplaces and schools. As was discussed, intrinsic motivation seems particularly salient in matters pertaining to the volunteering of time that church attendance and participation entails. This finding would seem applicable to other involvements not involving compensation, such as those associated with charities. While extrinsic motivation is often presumed to be good in that it results in an observable response to a targeted behavior, it has been found to more closely resemble, and lead to, amotivation or the cessation of involvement in an activity or institution. Thus an approach to member involvement that focuses on intrinsic motivation or at least self-determined extrinsic motivation would appear to be more fruitful for the long-term.

The methodology employed, i.e., people exiting church, probably attenuated the results of the survey. Had non-attenders been included, it is reasonable to expect the How it Feels at Church scores for the two non-growing churches would have been even lower compared to the growing congregation. The “street-intercept” methodology necessarily included only the minority of church members who regularly attend the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, only 25% and 30% respectively. It may be that the 70 to 75% who regularly do not attend these churches feel less motivation to do so and, had they been included in the sample, might have reflected this in their questionnaire responses. It is possible these non-attenders registered their motivation levels by “voting with their feet.” Additional research underway attempts to remove this effect by randomly sampling entire church membership rosters.
Comment

The consultant equipped with both the insight and assessment tools of self-determination theory has a unique ability to counsel organizations on how best to tap into the intrinsic motivation systems of their present and prospective members. The questions on the “How It Feels at Church” survey point to ways a church might improve its delivery of opportunities for congregants to be optimally challenged, autonomous, and connected with others. For example, in the competency domain, a low score on “I don’t get much of a chance to contribute my talents at my church” could lead to an assertive attempt by the heads of a congregation to invite members to take on a challenging role or responsibility at the church. The church scoring highest in this category periodically includes a listing and description of the various ministries or activities of the congregation, welcoming all to inquire about a role in them. Also, to provide an optimal level of growth, more learning opportunities in the way of study and discussion groups might be offered. The church which had the lowest score in this area also had the fewest growth or study groups.

Similarly, a poor score in the autonomy area might suggest that members of the clergy refrain from an aggressive preaching style (i.e., a “should” orientation) and reach instead for a more inviting, less-pressured approach. Asking the congregation to submit suggestions for future sermon topics, even hymn selections, would tap into this empowering or self-determining aspect of intrinsic motivation. The church scoring highest in this category had recently concluded a building fund drive. All contributions were completely anonymous; not even the pastor knew how much anyone had given. The goal of the drive was greatly surpassed as people gave willingly and sacrificially, in a non-pressured environment.

As to relatedness, the introduction of more group activities, or simply providing a Sunday morning coffee hour, might improve members’ experience of being connected with one another. The church which scored highest in this category has a practice where members of the congregation prepare complete dinners for families experiencing illness or hospitalization of a member. The church scoring lowest on the relatedness dimension had observably less interpersonal exchange at its Sunday services.

Because the approach to consultation described above entails a measurement of member perceptions, it lends itself to pre- and post-intervention assessment. Such a technique would not be unlike the use of employee attitude surveys in many commercial firms, and would be consistent with an increasing desire on the part of clients for advisors to provide some accountability for their work (Gibson & Froehle, 1991).

References


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