

Competency Exercise

Leading the Church into Mission and Interpreting the Past for the Church

For the competency exercise joining Leading the Church into Mission and Interpreting the Past for the Church, the student will design and test a hypothesis for adaptive change in her or his congregation. The student will demonstrate that she or he has met the LM competency goals by conducting a study, leading an exercise in the congregation, and writing a congregational analysis and brief proposal on the potential for adaptive change. See details, below. The student will integrate the IP portion of the exercise into the whole by demonstrating an ability to understand and express the value of the church's shared past as a legitimate "lens" or vehicle through which Leading the Church into Mission may be viewed and appreciated.

The student will submit to the faculty members a portfolio of the following materials:

- a critically written statement (1,500 words) concerning the relation of Church History and congregational leadership today, which includes
 - a statement concerning the significance and value that the Church's past should hold for contemporary congregational life;
 - a statement about the nature and purpose of pastoral leadership through adaptive change; this statement will be formulated by drawing both on historical resources and on contemporary discussions of congregational leadership;
 - a statement about the changing nature of the church and its mission today that shows why adaptive change is needed; this statement will be formulated by drawing both on historical resources and on contemporary discussions of congregational leadership.
- A research paper (2,000 words) that focuses on the church's historic experience (from the Second through the Twentieth centuries) with and reflection on the ministry issue chosen for adaptive change. In this paper the student will 1) use both primary resources (documents from the historical periods engaged) and secondary resources (scholarly work on the historical periods engaged that utilizes contemporary critical methodology) to develop an historical perspective on the issue(s) (seven eighths of the paper); 2) reflect on how the historical analysis deepens and/or changes their analysis of the ministry and possibilities for change (an eighth of the paper)
- A congregational analysis paper (1,500 words)
- A link to a video of the exercise led in the congregation
- A Proposal (500 words)
- Surveys from congregational participants in the exercise

Two faculty members (one from Leading the Church into Mission and one from Interpreting the Past for the Church) will grade the competency exercise. Students will receive two grades for the exercise—one for each curricular area covered. Students will also receive a rubric evaluating their work.

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LM Competency Exercise Instruction Details

General Explanation

The core of the LM curriculum at LTS is learning how to identify adaptive challenges in the church and learning to mobilize people to do adaptive change work.

The LM Competency is a longer version of the Congregational Analysis assignment that you did in LM520 plus a new piece of work. Now that you have completed the required core of the LM curriculum, you have learned more about leadership for adaptive change since taking that introductory course. This competency is therefore your second opportunity to demonstrate the competency goals you have met in this area. (Your capstone will be your third and final opportunity.)

For your LM520 congregational analysis, you chose one shift in congregational culture from Tony Robinson's book *Transforming Congregational Culture*, and correlated it with a specific issue in your congregation that you researched and interpreted for its potential for adaptive change. In this exercise, you will work the other way around: start with an issue in your congregation and correlate it with the deeper shift(s) in congregational culture that it represents. Your issue can be either a problem or an opportunity but it must be something that merits further study. Your issue can be the same or different from the issue you studied for LM520. Most important of all is that your issue be an issue that you are curious about and you do not already think you know the answers to!

You will engage in the same three modes of study that you did in LM520—direct observation, artifact review, and/or interview—and your reading will be the same texts, plus any other reading you have done since LM520 that is relevant to your issue.

The new piece of work will be an exercise in leadership in your congregation. This is your opportunity to demonstrate your skills in mobilizing people for adaptive change. You will use one of the methods you have learned in LM: the one-on-one, power analysis, time line, shield/award, Appreciative Inquiry, A-A-D interview, Chait exercises on governing, etc.

You will then produce two pieces of written work: a congregational analysis, and an essay that realistically assesses the potential for future congregational change on this issue and proposes future work.

Step-by-Step Instructions

I. (Re)read the following:

- Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture*
- Thumma, "Methods for Congregational Study"
- Block, "Questions are More Transforming than Answers"
- other relevant reading in the LM curriculum and beyond (consult with me)

II. Conduct your Study

- A. Draft a hypothesis that you plan to study: “*My congregation is changing from _____ culture to _____ culture because _____ and will have the potential to do so if _____.*”

Note #1: See the examples, below. This statement should be a hypothesis, not a declaration such as “My congregation needs to get rid of committees.”

Note #2: There are three parts to this statement, all of which you need to test through study. 1. Is change really underway? 2. Is change happening because of the reason(s) you think? And perhaps most importantly (because most difficult to discern) 3. Is your hunch correct about what adaptive work needs to happen? The third part cannot be a technical change like “if people get properly trained” or “if we switch to a narrative budget.” It has to be adaptive work: a change in fundamental priorities, beliefs, or habits. That means it will almost certainly be controversial and difficult.

- B. Interview at least two people involved in or implicated by the change. Ahead of time, you will have prepared “powerful” questions (Block) that help people engage the adaptive change you have in mind. Your questions will test your hypothesis and they will at the same time start to “give the work back” to the people. Do not disguise your own agenda as questions but make them real questions about which you are curious. Listen carefully to the responses you receive and improvise as necessary to get more.
- C. Review any artifacts that your congregation has produced about the relevant ministry (“artifacts” can include data, documents, historical records—anything created by people).
- D. Observe the relevant ministry directly.

Note: The study techniques in B, C, and D (interview, reviewing artifacts, and direct observation) are the skills of congregational analysis and form the basis of your interpretation of the potential for a shift in congregational culture. They test your hypothesis. Not all issues are equally amenable to all techniques; you will have to use your discretion and imagination to find the right ways of studying the hypothesis you have chosen. The point of a study is this: it helps you to step away from your everyday, taken-for-granted perceptions and gives you “balcony” perspective.

Competency Goal being met: *Student will study a congregational context.*

III. Lead an Exercise

Convene a group or a series of individuals for an exercise in mobilizing adaptive change. You have already practiced several types of exercises in your LM courses (see above). Choose a method suitable for the issue at hand. Aim for an hour-long exercise. Videotape yourself leading it.

Competency Goal being met: *Student will execute leadership.*

IV. Write an Analysis

▪Write a 1,500 paper with your hypothesis statement as your opening thesis. The entire paper will support or refute that thesis. That means, on the one hand, that you will not simply “write up” or record verbatim what people said to you. On the other hand, you will not merely sum up what you heard by writing sentences like “The general impression I got from people was . . .” Concentrate on writing a thoughtful interpretation that is backed up with evidence that you heard and saw. For example: “All five people I interviewed cited examples of having to run even minor decisions by the pastor. This is evidence of my thesis that ours is a highly staff-driven governance style.”

▪Evidence will primarily take the form of quotations (i.e., from your interviews and artifacts). Include your “powerful questions.” If there is relevant raw data (i.e. notes from the exercise, attendance patterns, budgets), put it in appendices to the paper itself.

▪In addition to evidence from your study, for this paper you may draw upon sources you have engaged in the LM curriculum—readings, presentations, discussions—that are relevant to the issue you have chosen.

Voice and audience: Imagine yourself as a consultant writing this analysis for your congregation. Barbara Blodgett is not your audience, so don’t write to her! Imagining yourself as a consultant and your congregation as audience will achieve two things: First, it will keep you from stopping at description—after all, what congregation would pay a consultant simply to repeat back to them what she saw and heard them doing and saying?! Second, writing as a consultant will demonstrate that you can practice the leadership skill of “getting to the balcony.”

On citation: In your analysis, you will cite people as well as books. The reason for citation is that even while a consultant might ultimately present such work orally in person, in this case you are also turning it in as written work. And in any case, you should always reference your sources so as to honor the community from whom you learned what you know, and to allow your readers to follow your trail. If you have any questions about citation in this kind of assignment, ask.

Specifications: Successful papers will be ones that a) show evidence of your having engaged all three study techniques through the use of quotation and documentation and b) offer a thoughtful and careful analysis that results from your learning in the LM curriculum because it is based on the content of the LM courses you took. You will cite all sources properly.

Ethical note: If your paper will contain sensitive information about people, change their names.

Competency Goals being met: *Student will critically interpret a congregational context.*
Student will explain adaptive challenges facing churches today.

V. Propose Future Work

You will write a 500-word essay proposing what future adaptive work needs to happen in order for your congregation to do (more) adaptive change on your issue. Now that you have completed your study, interpreted your findings, engaged people with powerful questions, led an exercise, and written your analysis, you should have a better sense of the potential for change that you hypothesized. You may also have discovered some technical work that your congregation needs to do or is doing, so if any concrete ideas, next steps, policy changes, or program planning has emerged, you may report it here.

Note: “Proposal” in this context does not mean a project plan. That would be doing people’s work for them.

Competency Goal being met: *Student will produce a proposal for adaptive change in a congregation.*

Examples

“My congregation is in the process of changing from embarrassment to pride in its endowment because it has just endured a conflict over investment policies and yet I think a deeper conflict still lingers, and will have the potential to change if it can think theologically about endowments as resources for ministry and mission.” [Note: This example is drawn directly from Robinson, pp 137-8.]

Study: Interviews to discern Where did the endowment come from? Who had contributed to it? What did they have in mind?

Possible Exercise: Scriptural study on wealth and responsibility
Discussing powerful questions about the purpose of an endowment

“My congregation is changing from board culture to ministry culture because we are thinking about eliminating committees and going to teams and will have the potential to do so if we can truly empower new ministries no matter who offers them and where they spontaneously arise.”

Study: Interviews with committee chairs or with somebody with an idea that got thwarted

Draw committee structure

Possible Exercise: Body Sculpture on where ministries are generated within the structure and what happens to them

“My congregation is changing its culture from Christian education to formation of our children because there’s renewed interest in VBS at the same time as there is declining interest in Sunday School, and will have the potential to do so if we release our desire that children primarily learn the content of the Scriptures.”

Study: attendance records
past curricula used
observing Sunday School

Possible Exercise: an Appreciate Inquiry on Sunday School with SS teachers

“My congregation has an opportunity right now to begin changing its culture from democracy to discernment because we are trying to decide whether to launch a capital campaign, and will have the potential to do so if we base our choices on what we believe the Bible calls us to practice in terms of stewardship rather than on the bottom line.”

Study: past practices around decision-making
Interviews with trustees

Possible Exercise: a bible study on stewardship with the trustees

“My congregation is changing its culture from fellowship to hospitality because we just voted to be ONA and want to do more than take a vote but really become open and affirming, and we will have the potential to do so if we discern what inclusion really means to us—are we a congregation that believes more in equal acceptance of all or preferential option for some?”

Study: interviews
Interpret the ONA statement adopted

Exercise: Timeline, Shield, and Award exercise on past inclusion efforts/practices

“My congregation is being challenged to change its evangelism culture from getting people in to going out where people are, because we are dying, and we will have the potential to do so if we are willing to expand our notion of what living the gospel of Jesus Christ means.”

Study: windshield study or demographic study of the town or neighborhood

Exercise: a field trip to SoulCycle to learn why millennials are so “religious” about it