

Competing Values: How I continually manufacture *non-change*.

The final foundational issue that we must take a look at is the issue of competing values. This is a concept that has just begun to get traction in the last few years. But it is critical to understand. Individuals and churches are loaded with competing values, and these competing values tend to get a whole lot of churches into all kinds of conflict and difficulties because the whole process is not well understood. So let's take a closer look.

I was recently coaching in two places, one right after the other. The first was at the FAA with a top executive who was telling me how she was experiencing the agency. The agency contained a set of values that we deemed essential to align the workforce and fulfill the mission (A safe and efficient National Air Space). This executive went on to explain how, in real time, one or more of these values were violated by various leaders within the organization.

I was then on a call to a pastor, who essentially told me the same thing. His church had a distinct list of values that were to guide the church, values that were anchored in the principle set of beliefs of that organization. One of these values was respect for one another. He then detailed how the leaders of this church displayed little respect for one another, went behind each other's backs, sabotaged, blame-shifted and in numerous other ways violated what they had stated was so important to their church (one value being respect, the other being to gain the upper hand or to appear more competent than fellow leaders).

What has become more apparent to me is that those I work with often have little understanding of the true nature of values – the importance of them, and how values are actually lived out in real time. And, the fact that as these core values are violated by leadership, trust erodes and the entire organization suffers.

Values are beliefs or principles about what is important in life – a belief that a specific action or behavior is preferable to the opposite action, a statement as to what is most worthwhile. When business plans are cobbled together, or when strategic planning sessions are conducted, leaders are encouraged to identify core values, to let them emerge from what they already sense is important to them. This exercise supposedly yields the foundation stones upon which the organization will be built and maintained.

But sadly, what is often offered in these planning sessions is a list of aspirational values – principles that we *should* live by or hope to live by. What so often happens is the core value list is cobbled together – a list of what we should hold dear -- then promptly filed away and forgotten. Or worse yet, the values are posted on the website and on the wall in the narthex for all to see, and promptly forgotten. And the true list of values, the one that we actually use to make all the critical decisions within the church, is taken out (unconsciously of course, another one of those processes, so we aren't even aware we've done this) and we go about

merrily making decisions that directly contradict what we said we stand for. This is what incongruence looks like organizational. And it erodes trust and breeds cynicism.

Values are like force fields that protect the organization. When leadership of any given organization demonstrates a coherent set of beliefs consistently lived out over time (they're congruent), the values permeate the system and influence all those who come in contact with that organization. Values need to be not only spoken of frequently, but also lived out constantly.

The Leadership Triangle

Values, though constantly unconsciously directing our activities, tend to rear their heads most prominently when we are considering change. Let's first consider the nature of change, and especially the three profiles that change assumes.¹ Ministers over and over miss this point and pay a high price as a result. At the core of leadership is our belief that different kinds of leadership challenges call for different types of leadership options, choices and postures the leader must assume. The most pressing leadership question of the moment is not just about profits or growth or shareholder value or market share. It is: What does it mean to lead in such a way that my team or organization can adapt, compete, and thrive? This is the case whether you are leading a family, a business, a department, a volunteer board, an army, or a faith-based committee. We understand that there are three primary types of leadership challenges: the technical (or tactical) challenge, the strategic challenge, and the transformational (or adaptive) challenge. Note this graph.

	Tactical	Strategic	Adaptive (Transformational)
Role	Expert	Synthesizer	Facilitator
Tone	Confident	Vision-casting	Creative
Key Question	What's wrong?	What's the focus?	What's the question?
Problems are to be...	Solved	Planned	Reframed
Interaction	Training	Inspiring	Free-flowing and robust
Tense	Present	Future	Past, present, future

In our work with hundreds of organizations, we've observed that successful leaders use three primary modes of leadership: tactical, strategic, and transformational. Let us explain.

Tactical Problems

¹ For a much more thorough discussion of the leadership triangle, see my partners' book, *The Leadership Triangle*.

When the problem is technical (tactical), the leader's role is that of an expert or an expert-finder. His/her tone is confident – “we can apply our current base of knowledge to solve this”. The key question s/he raises is “What's wrong here?” and the evident problems are to be solved. As s/he interacts with his/her people she functions as a trainer, authority figure if you will, bringing knowledge to bear. And s/he functions in the present tense – “how can we solve this problem right away so that our today can be better”.

Tactical problems are solved by experts. If the roof leaks, hire a roofer. If your computer network is down, call the Geek Squad. If you break your leg, get an orthopedist. If a congregant is unclear on a theological issue, instruct them. Most ministers function in this mode most of the time. Leaders have risen to the top of their organizations precisely because of their expertise in handling the various situations that have confronted their companies. So with their subject matter expert (SME) hat firmly in place, they go about directing the organization forward.

Ministers bring their own expertise to the table: theological, financial, technological, managerial, and so forth. If the church is considering a new building project or capital campaign, it is appropriate for others to bring their expertise to the table. To solve a tactical problem, simply find a person who has the expertise and authorize that person to solve the problem. Tactical leaders exercise their will through their expertise. But be very careful. Something that appears on the surface to be technical often has a great deal of transformational material lurking under the surface.

Strategic Challenges

When the problem is strategic, the minister's role is that of a synthesizer, bringing together knowledge of the internal organization, the external constituency, and the broader climate. His tone is that of casting vision, introducing an inspiring picture of the future that takes advantage of and confronts the changing landscape. His key question is “What should be our focus?” and he realizes that the key way to tackle problems is through innovation and integration. His interaction with his congregation is best described as inspirational and he focuses on the future tense-- the imagined and aspired-to results of careful adherence to a clearly articulated strategy.

Strategic challenges relate to external changes. They are future-oriented. They are about major transitions. Such challenges require more than a tactical fix. Strategic challenges require strategic leadership, the art of leveraging strengths in order to minimize weaknesses and capitalize on opportunities. But strategic leadership often involves dealing with opposition, as internal stakeholders may resist the needed change. Strategic leaders are on a quest to understand their external environment. They must ask big-picture questions.

Transformational (Adaptive) Challenges

When the problem is adaptive (transformational), the minister's role is that of a facilitator, inviting dialogue and discovery, particularly in the areas of values and beliefs. The tone he strikes is one of creativity— whether in problem-solving or in conflict! He knows that the key question now is itself “What’s the question?” and that problems are not so much to be solved or planned for as much as navigated and re-framed – considered in an entirely new way. He knows that group interaction at this level of leadership needs to be free-flowing and robust – everything on the table – and that his focus is not only on the present but also on the past and the future. Transformational challenges are the very stuff of leadership and require a leader operating at full creative capacity. It is in this arena that most ministers, and leaders generally, have the most difficulty. And the first problem they have is in actually seeing that there is a transformational issue lurking.

An issue requiring transformational change is much more complex and is sometimes hidden within the systems and structures of the organization. We are seldom aware of transformational issues. They mostly revolve around competing values. This is why strategic direction often surfaces transformational issues. The new direction challenges the status quo.

Transformational (Adaptive) issues are often hard to identify clearly, require changing hearts and minds, and often are championed by someone who cares but may not have the authority to effect change. When adaptive issues are involved, people have to learn new ways and must choose among what appear to be contradictory values. Technical or tactical issues can be *managed*. Adaptive issues require leadership to help the stakeholders to navigate them – hence the name Transformational or Adaptive Leadership.

Adaptive leadership is difficult work, difficult because it involves helping individuals make hard value choices and difficult because it challenges what people hold dear, and thereby generates resistance from many of those affected. When people resist adaptive work, their first goal is to preserve what they have, and that means shutting down those advocating the change.

Transformational issues always bring competing values to the fore. They aren't easy decisions. Transformational issues require different skills than tactical problems, especially the ability to manage and occasionally even orchestrate conflict. Very few people in positions of leadership have developed these skills.

That's look at an example. First Church has historically been a pastor-driven, pastor-controlled church. It generally worked well for many years when they had extraordinary senior pastors who could get it done. The last pastor was a very gifted teacher and a warm and friendly care giver who was also was very autocratic (historically what the church was used to). The congregation was aging and the Senior Pastor had a vision to reach out to younger families. Thinking tactically, he got rid of traditional worship and went to a blended worship (more contemporary than traditional). This caused great conflict, but as long as the senior pastor was there he was able to have the power and authority to keep it going and people gave in to it. The elder board over the years had been a "Yes-Board" in the fullest use of that phrase.

The underlying conflict and unhappiness of the older members (the vast majority of the membership) continued. The Elder Board finally could not take it anymore and let the pastor go (another tactical solution that usually solves nothing, or merely drives the conflict underground). Everyone personally liked the fired pastor (even most who were unhappy) and his being let go did not go well with the membership. The elder board then decided to change the culture of the church from a pastor-centered/pastor-led church to an elder-led church (another tactical solution with major transformational implications). The elder board studied scripture, studied board governance models and prayed. About six months of hard work went into a total rewrite of the constitution. The one thing they did not do was engage the stakeholders (i.e. the congregation) as they carved out this new document.

The new constitution gives the senior pastor (now called teaching pastor) no power over vision or strategy and none of the staff reported to him, thus in the board's mind, freeing him up to teach and preach. The staff now reported to elders, not the teaching pastor. At the same time the elders did this, they decided to tell the worship team that they will be doing traditional hymns now and quite a bit less contemporary music. The elder board was made up almost exclusively of Baby Boomers and older who did not like all the loud drums and guitars, and wanted to go back to the church of the 50's, "the way it should be." As of this writing, the church has yet to fill the position of teaching pastor.²

The elder board simply cannot understand why people are so upset. They really did their homework, they thought. They had many meetings to explain the new governance model to the congregation (of course, never really asking for feedback). This was not a quick change in their eyes. Nor was it a grab for power. In fact, since the elder board has all of these new responsibilities they are working harder than ever, already getting burned out from the workload not to mention the arrows which are being fired at them by the staff and the membership for being 'control freaks.' Welcome to the land of transformational challenges.

Competing Values

The reason we first looked at the three leadership challenges was to allow you to understand the landscape of change, and the particular challenges that must be negotiated for each concern – tactical, strategic and transformational. Competing values exist most prominently in the realm of transformational concerns. This realm resides in the deepest recesses of our being, where our values shape our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. But as we've already seen, we live in the shadows. These deep recesses within each of us aren't easily accessed but are easily distorted. Values are not neatly arranged and aligned, but in fact often compete one with another, creating cognitive dissonance. The dissonance generates anxiety, which must be dealt with. But if not properly dealt with, the person becomes incongruent in her behavior, saying one thing, but doing another.

² *Well Dah!*

So there's competing values internal to each of us. And as we saw in the above example, there are competing values that reside in every organization. Let's consider two areas that are fertile ground for developing competing values:

- The gap between what we value and how we behave. We find ourselves in particular situations where we end up acting in ways that differ from what we say we value and believe about ourselves – the result of cognitive dissonance.

A church that has been in the same neighborhood for the past 50 years sees the demographics of the neighborhood changing from predominately middle class Caucasian to Hispanic. The church has always valued reaching out to the least, last and lost as their values statement proclaims. But what now to do with this surrounding community? These people like a different kind of worship style (a mariachi band would be perfect to lead worship). They have different outfits worn to church, and generally differing ways of seeing life. The church votes to move to an area that has been more in conformity to the historical profile of the members.

- Competing Commitments. Like individuals, organizations have numerous commitments. And sometimes these commitments come into conflict. I'm committed to the youth in the church, but I'm also committed to the older folks, who give the lion's share of the budget and demand programming that benefits them.

As an example of competing commitments, an assistant pastor was elevated to the lead pastor role during the interim when the senior pastor retired. Though this assistant had wanted to become senior pastor, leadership went a different direction. The assistant was now caught in competing loyalties. His extended family lived in the community, and he did not want to uproot his small growing family from grandparents and cousins. But he also knew that staying on in his position as assistant, having wanted to be the senior pastor, would undoubtedly compromise his unfolding relationship with the new senior pastor, and could create a tricky situation with the congregation if not handled carefully.

As competing values rear their heads in our ongoing community life together, people most often turn to the authorities (i.e. the ordained folks and the ruling board) to solve the problem. These authorities 'rise to the bait,' and assume the problem is theirs to solve, and almost invariably turn to tried-and-true tactical solutions. People are hired into ministry positions and authorized to perform particular tasks in certain prescribed ways. Leadership, however inhabits a different sphere.

When we lead, we actually help people confront these complex knotty transformational problems that don't lend themselves neatly to tactical solutions. That's precisely because these problems involve competing values – one church constituency holding one set of values, another group another set. And by the way, this doesn't mean that there is one good value, and one bad value. Both are valid and good, they just compete. That's why leadership must point up the conundrum (people usually can't see these, for they are more unconscious and buried in

the processes) while assisting the stakeholders in wrestling through these. Unfortunately, because every leader is wired a particular way, which bends each toward a particular preference, the leader tends to move people toward one value, ignoring the other, and creating difficulties in the process.

- Exclusion (building kingdom community *versus* inclusion (reaching the unchurched)
- Quality (building a professional music program) *versus* quantity (allowing many congregants to participate in leading worship, utilizing their subpar but developing talents).
- Efficiency (the worship service needs to begin and end on time) *versus* innovation (the Spirit may take us to new places in worship, expanding the worship time allotted).
- Protection (congregants must feel safe at church no matter what measures are employed) *versus* challenge (we can't turn our campus into an armed camp).
- Expansion (as new people arrive, the need to alter the tried-and-true forms of worship is more apparent) *versus* preservation (we've always done it this way, and must continue).
- Transparency (everyone must know everything about everything) *versus* confidentiality (certain matters must be close held because of legal and personal concerns).
- Individual considerations (what's good for and the preferences of each congregant) *versus* community considerations (what is good for the collective).
- The letter of the law (a potential board member is found to have been previously married, violating church operating rules) *versus* extending grace (a potential previously married board member has been clear about circumstances of his divorce and has embraced his own culpability in the matter).

The list can go on and on. You, the transformational leader, must first be able to spot these competing values, then place them before your congregation (note the activities of leadership in Chapter 2).

In our corporate life together in the church, one side of the competing values is very often financial. "I can see the value in doing X, but we can't afford it, or we need to channel limited resources in another direction." That is how competing values look in the corporate life of your community. Let's turn our attention to our own internal competing values.

Resisting Change

Have you ever noticed how we tend to resist the very changes we *ourselves* say we want to make? Remember, values are those things that matter most to us, the priorities that govern the decisions we make. Most of us would hope that our values are always aligned and consistent. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case. Life in general has a nasty habit of offering up choices based on values that aren't always aligned, values that often compete with one another.

Let's take a few examples of competing values. We work a lot with the FAA, tasked with keeping our air space safe and efficient (their mission statement). But *safety* as a value tends to compete directly with *efficiency* as a value. In other words, as I become safer, I might find that I become less efficient. Or the opposite, as I become more efficient, I begin to sacrifice safety concerns.

Scripture enjoins us to reach out to the lost and bring them into the community. It also directs us to build strong community. These two values compete with one another. If I want to build strong community, it is better to close the doors and relate mostly to my own tribe, not reach out to others.

As we have said, competing values don't involve one good value competing with a bad value. That would make for easy choices. The trick is in the fact that a good value competes with another good value, they're just at cross-purposes with one another. We usually don't realize it, but we are constantly dealing with competing values as we make our way through life. What is important is to understand how these competing values operate in our lives, and how they in fact can lead to incongruent living on our part (I say one thing, I do another).

Let's walk through several statements and see how competing values may in fact be blocking you from going forward in those things that are most important to you. Look first at the top row: 1 through 4. Note the progress. I'm committed to on value (#1 which is the logical value that I proclaim), but then (#2) I in fact do/don't do something that sabotages #1. That's because of #3, a competing value underneath (springing from the emotional centers in my brain) that is fueled by a big assumption (#4) which rationally makes no sense but has been laid down in my subconscious long ago and continues to exert inordinate influence on my behaving. This big assumption has to do with my unconscious blueprint for achieving and maintaining security and significance and triggers a great deal of anxiety when it is activated.

To read the four columns backward tells a powerful story. Holding to a Big Assumption (#4), we are understandably committed to protecting ourselves (# 3). As we faithfully live out these commitments, we act in a particular fashion (# 2). This in turn compromises our ability to truly realize our genuinely held commitments (# 1).³

1 I am Committed to the Kingdom Value of . . .	2 What I'm doing or not doing that prevents my commitment from being fully realized	3 Competing Value Commitment	4 Big Assumption i.e. Catastrophe that I fear will lead to loss of security/significance
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³ For an expansion of this theme, see the book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, by Kegan & Lahey.

Resting in God's acceptance of me no matter what others think.	I seek to please people so they will accept me.	I must be acceptable to everyone, regardless.	If people don't accept me, I'll be abandoned and die (security)
At Jesus' baptism, God declares His pleasure in Him, though He's <i>done</i> nothing.	I must constantly strive to achieve. The parable of the talents haunts me.	I am OK and loved as long as I can perform and produce.	If I don't do enough (whatever that is), I'm worthless and rejected and a failure (significance)
God reigns. There I can rest, while empowering others (priesthood of believers)	I must patrol my world and try to order it, micro-managing whomever.	My control of my life drives out the sense of vulnerability, at least to a degree.	If I'm not in control, my vulnerability will leave me weak, powerless, susceptible to <i>being</i> controlled (security)
God is completely trustworthy. I can be dependent on Him.	I monitor my world, sensing danger everywhere, and activate to protect myself.	To trust is to be set up for disappointment and disaster.	If I get close, let my guard down, I'll be destroyed (security)
I must empower each member of my congregation to exercise his/her God-given gifts.	I must not give people 'free rein' to minister at the church without strict oversight.	I am called to lead this church, and to lead in an excellent manner. Letting others exercise their giving might lead to sloppy, subpar performance.	If things aren't done properly and 'just so,' I will be condemned for subpar performance and doomed (significance).
My stated values. What I aspire to. What I care about. The logical explanation	My own part in this mess.	My non-advertised value. This drives the status quo. The emotionally-charged reaction	The catastrophe I anticipate will befall me that generates the anxiety.

As a result of all of this, we continually manufacture non-change in our lives. Oh yes, we state that we need to change, we indeed must change. But as we set about attempting to put in place behaviors, or eliminate behaviors that need to change, we find ourselves sabotaging these changes because of competing commitments that demand to be honored. And all of this done completely out of our awareness. And all the time our minds clearing up the discrepancies to reduce our anxiety and keep us humming right along as if our lives are paragons of virtue and consistency.

What Do I Do About This?

Here are several steps that might help.

- 1. Observe yourself in relation to your Big Assumption (BA). What do I unconsciously assume will bring me security and significance?**
- 2. Actively look for experiences that cast doubt on your BA.**
- 3. Explore the history of your BA.**
- 4. Design and run a safe, modest test on the BA. After you've conducted your test, see what happens.**

Notice that much of what we've talked about involves delegation (aka empowerment). Delegation is extremely important for anyone in leadership, beginning with parents. However, so many pastor leaders get into micro-managing. There is undoubtedly a competing value at work inside of these leaders, unless they simply believe that micro-managing is the absolute best way to manage and develop their people (which flies in the face of all best management practices and doesn't lead to healthy children or congregants who can take responsibility for their own lives).

It's important for you to begin to see how one value (i.e. delegation) gets trumped by another value (competence). Think for a moment of what that competing value inside of the micro-managing leader is. There's a good chance that their need to be competent may be the competing value. What happens when you delegate? You cede quality control. You know how you would perform, but what about your children or the assistant pastor? Will they do an equally good job? The only way to know is to constantly look over their shoulder and direct their behavior in the 'right way.'

What this looks like in real time

Let's take a look at some concrete examples. Notice that I am not giving concrete answers. That's because competing values don't lend themselves handily to good answers. To go in one direction (and depending on your personality make up, you'll usually lean in one direction or another). Or you'll lean in one direction or another due to loyalties within the congregation that you are experiencing (If you're well-defined and self-aware, you'll know where you will tend to lean on various issues). So let's take a look.

One glaring set of competing values in church settings is that of grace versus accountability. Of course, the church is at its core a volunteer organization, and that makes things even a little trickier (to be fully discussed in chapter 11).

A small church has a janitor who is also a member of the congregation. Unfortunately, as time goes by, the performance of the janitor continues to decline, even though the senior pastor points up his various deficiencies. The question for the senior pastor: How much grace do I

extend to him? I find myself having to walk behind him and finish the jobs he has only half completed.

Another set of competing values can be seen as doing versus thinking. A church ruling board was considering relocating to a new campus. The entire board did not want to get bogged down in the details of this, so a lay team was appointed to do the 'heavy lifting,' with the board maintaining oversight as the process went forward. And the board was anxious to get the whole process rolling, in that their lease on their current property was running out in six months.

After a few months had passed, the board realized that the relocation team was made up exclusively of doers, not thinkers, people who wanted to get on with execution. Now what? The team was moving ahead way too quickly, without thinking through ramifications of decisions made. The board realized they had the wrong people, or at least half the wrong people, on the relocation team. There weren't any people whose minds were able to grasp complexity and understand the unintended consequences, given that relocating a church involves building issues, space utilization issues, programmatic issues, and all of the people issues that a thriving congregation represents.

So what to do now? We have the wrong team in place. And asking half of them to leave doesn't work well, but just adding a bunch more people makes the group too unwieldy for optimum functioning. Note: Your mind may have already 'solved' this with a technical solution. I can almost guarantee you, that once your solution is put in place, that solution will become the problem.

Let's do another. A congregational ruling board received from one of the church member families. This family was quite active in the congregation. They had two children: a seven-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. A few years ago the parents learned that their daughter has a severe nut allergy. Airborne allergens from tree nuts could potentially send her into anaphylactic shock, the board was told. Because of her allergy, the family asked that the church not allow nuts or nut products to be brought into the church building. The church health and wellness committee, after meeting with the parents and doing some additional research, recommended that we establish a "nut-free" policy, communicate the reasons for the policy to the congregation, and ask that people refrain from using peanuts and tree nuts in baked goods and other food items that are brought to the church. Through the use of written announcements in the monthly newsletter and weekly worship bulletin, notes were sent to Sunday school families and occasional verbal announcements in worship were made. In other words, the church followed the no nut recommendation.

In spite of the board's best efforts, however, foods containing nuts occasionally were brought into the church. When the parents (and grandparents) of the allergic daughter discovered nut items in the church, they became visibly angry and upset, sometimes in very public settings – the church narthex, the fellowship hall, etc. As a result, a "backlash" developed against this family among some of church members. These members believed that the parents were

expecting too much from the church, that the parents were not taking enough responsibility themselves. The parents, on the other hand, believed that the congregation is not taking the issue seriously enough. The church board then created “nut-free” signs that were posted in various locations within the building.

Even these actions, however, resulted in some tension. The parents wanted to display signs that are larger and more prominent than the ones that were used. The poor pastor in this true story fully understood and supported the desire of the parents to make the church a nut-free environment. He, along with the board chair, communicated to people the reasons for the nut-free policy, both publically and in one-on-one conversations. On the other hand, he also tried to convey to the girl’s family that we can never guarantee that no nut products will ever be brought into the building, and that their angry outbursts are counter-productive. So the question became: How does a congregation best accommodate the special needs of individual members (individuality) while attending to the needs of the congregation (collective)? And, What is the role of the pastor in helping people to see things from the perspective of the other “side”?

Take Away

- ✓ Problems within the church usually fall into three distinct categories: tactical, strategic, and transformational. The biggest error pastor leaders face is applying tactical solutions to transformational issues.
- ✓ If I’m not careful, my unaddressed internal competing values will lead to misalignment on my part, eroding trust among those who follow me.

Further Reading

- Ron Heifetz. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership; Leadership Without Easy Answers; and Leadership on the Line.*
- Ford and Tucker. *The Leadership Triangle.*
- Kegan & Lahey. *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work.*
- Richard Chait & William Ryan. *Governance as Leadership.*
- Jim Loehr. *The Only Way to Win.*