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ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING MISSION THROUGH STRATEGY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION-DRIVEN EXCELLENCE STRATEGY

by

Osvaldo S. Santos, Jr.

Chair: Randy Siebold

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: STRENGTHENING MISSION THROUGH STRATEGY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION-DRIVEN EXCELLENCE STRATEGY

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Date completed: April 25, 2022

The Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) for the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) churches in the North America Division (NAD) is beginning to implement a new strategy that focuses on mission. The OSR designed the strategy, created tools and materials to support the churches in implementing the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy. MdX combines planning and direction that helps church leaders to think strategically. MdX is a combination of pre-events, processes, and resources combined with local church strategies toward mission. The purpose of this study was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengthens and weaknesses, and how it could be improved.

This study used a qualitative method design and formative research methodology to focus on what worked well, what did not work well, and gathered suggestions for improvement on the MdX phenomena.

The study's population is found within the 67 pilot churches involved with the MdX implementation in the NAD. Thus, the population for this study is the pastors and selected church leaders within the 67 pilot churches who participated in leading the implementation of the MdX strategy at their local church. The sample involved six of the 11 pilot churches in the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in Canada. The study found that MdX, besides being a unique NAD and SDA strategy, was also a step-by-step strategy that provides clear direction to the churches focusing on goals versus outcomes. Participants urged that MdX should not be optional and should provide more training for the leaders. Among many improvements suggested, three of them were (a) to improve the MdX materials, (b) to make [MdX] simpler by simplifying the language as well as by instead of ten, no more than five habits in total, and (c) to improve the kind of leadership the MdX needs. The MdX strategy can be used by any church as a model or tool for implementing their local strategies. As a theoretical strategy, MdX needs to be periodically re-evaluated to maintain the theory's relevancy, refinement, and improvement.

Andrews University

School of Education

STRENGTHENING MISSION THROUGH STRATEGY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION-DRIVEN EXCELLENCE STRATEGY

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Osvaldo Souza Santos, Jr.

April 2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Acts of the Apostles
FR	Formative Research
IDT	Instructional-Design Theory
IRB	Institutional Review Board
GC	General Conference
MDX	Mission-driven Excellence Strategy or MdX strategy
NA	North America
NAD	North American Division
NKJV	New King James Version
OSR	Office of Strategy & Research
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
TM	Testimonies to Ministers

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is a "worldwide community of believers united in [its] mission" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2013, pp. B-1). Since its establishment in 1863, the SDA church has been preaching the gospel and advancing its mission worldwide. The organization is formed by "primary building blocks" consisting of local churches, conferences, unions in 12 world divisions, making up the "General Conference" (GC) (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2013, pp. B-1). The North American Division (NAD), one of the youngest divisions to be constituted in 1985, includes the population of the United States, Canada, Bermuda, Federated States of Micronesia, the French possession of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Guam, Johnston Island, Marshall Islands, Midway Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, and Palau. Like all world divisions, the NAD is responsible for fulfilling the SDA church's mission and for preaching the Gospel in its territory.

To support this mission, the NAD has an Office of Strategy & Research (OSR). This office is responsible for studying, planning, analyzing, and developing strategies that support the churches to be more effective in accomplishing their mission. Yet, pastors in the NAD often struggle with strategy.

In a 2014 Pastoral Self-Assessment by the NAD Ministerial Association, 600 pastors found that of a list of 70 job tasks, they felt least prepared to promote a clear, written strategy for the church (see Appendix A – NAD Ministerial On-Line Survey, May 2014). Furthermore, in a 2017 electronic survey of over 250 Adventist leaders, this office found that 75% of the respondents recognized their churches had outstanding leaders and busy departments in the church. Still, the churches were fragmented (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c). The researchers characterized the average church as "pre-occupied with tradition, church politics, social life, ego, apathy, and a crowded church calendar" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). Thus, the leaders recognized that something was missing to make them more strategically mission focused.

Since the reports identified that the pastors lack strategies and had good people but fragmented churches, the churches engaged in mission have been searching for effective methods, projects, planning strategies, and tactics to reach more people in the communities. They see the necessity to "study carefully the best methods" (White, 2017, p. 263). They realize that the success and effectiveness of methods or processes vary in different contexts. History has shown that churches are not always mission-focused. For this reason, cultivating mission-driven churches has become a consuming focus for the NAD. In a book, Brantley, Jackson, and Cauley (2015) argue that "anything other than a mission-driven church is unacceptable to heaven" (p. 7). These authors suggest that the mission-driven church should be the main focus for NAD churches.

Furthermore, a focus on a mission-driven church requires people "adapting themselves to circumstances and meeting the people where they are" (White, 2017, p.

60); in other words, elaborating and implementing a strategy to support the local churches towards mission accomplishment. For Brantley et al. (2015), “a robust, Spirit-directed strategy helps the church anticipate and prepare for the future rather than merely react to it” (p. 9), and this also is another good reason to focus on being a more mission-driven church.

The NAD churches have been using many different approaches towards the mission to reach the world with the “Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness” (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21). However, regardless of all the work already done towards the mission, the NAD envisions the achievement of much more.

In response to this need for mission-driven strategy within churches in the NAD, the OSR, Paul Brantley, the director, coach, and mentor for the MdX strategy, developed a series of pre-events or processes, submitting a strategy called MdX (Mission-driven Excellence). The MdX tool aids churches to engage in mission through planning and implementing a series of pre-events, processes, and strategies towards mission accomplishment. The MdX calls itself a strategy stating that MdX is a “strategic process, rather a program, that can flexibly accommodate various tools, resources, and approaches for advancing mission” (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018b, p. 8). The MdX strategy was the NAD’s next step towards becoming more mission-driven. It aimed to guide the churches through strategic techniques and methods to transform the church culture by growing specific church habits supporting the church mission. The strategy was finally presented to the churches through the MdX Inventory of Specific Mission-driven Habits (Appendix B), a combination of ten habits that a church self-scores and

analyzes its results. Each habit has a series of activities to be explored, planned, and implemented. The NAD then recruited churches among some of the United States and Canada conferences to test the MdX strategy as pilot churches to introduce and refine MdX.

Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) is a set of practical guidelines on how to do mission through processes, strategies, and tactics for "making your church a best-run organization to the glory of God" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 4). To fully understand the MdX itself and the transformation that MdX promotes inside the churches, it is beneficial to review some areas involved in the project that connects leadership, organizational culture, organizational change, strategic leadership, and implementation. The reason to review those areas is that MdX is a "church transformation process designed to help churches focus like a laser. . . on accomplishing its mission . . . with excellence" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 5). Included as one of the churches' transformation tools, MdX implies a culture change followed by the formation of new church habits, which are an "ongoing process and not a quick event" (p. 5). MdX "starts your congregation on a continuous pathway of change that leads to results" because "God's Church deserves to be the world's best organization" (p. 5). Therefore, MdX seek to fulfill a church necessity turning congregations into Mission-Driven churches.

MdX is also important for the NAD churches because it will help the churches to transform their culture focusing on the mission. Therefore, due to its importance to the SDA church and NAD, MdX connects to other church areas or departments. These church areas or departments are seen independently in the literature, but they interconnect

themselves. This interconnection becomes central not only for the MdX as strategy implementation but for the church life in the future years.

Because too many churches do not see themselves as mission-driven churches, implementing the MdX requires skilled leadership, even "disruptive leadership." This term will be better explained in Chapter 2. Indeed, this type of mission-focused leadership draws its energy from a spiritual calling that makes God's plan for this world a driver of all the church does (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011), and this kind of leadership became a need for the churches.

Skilled leadership reinforces the NAD mission, "to spread the gospel and reach North America with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21). Day (2018), Director of Special Projects for the NAD, states that "our primary contemporary Adventist mission is figuring out how to reach the secular in our communities and the post-modern in our churches" (p. 51). Within this context on figuring out how to reach communities, the reality is that the SDA church in the NAD, with its 1,257,913 members (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2019a), is only a tiny fraction of the total North American population of 367.6 million as of December 10, 2019 (Worldometers). The Statistical Report of 2018 (General Conference of the SDA Church, 2019) indicates that the NAD encompasses 5,606 churches divided into 58 conferences and nine unions, plus the NAD military church and the Guam-Micronesia Mission. Table 1 gives details of the NAD membership figures.

The goal aimed by the NAD in bringing MdX to the churches is to help the NAD churches spread the gospel with a message of hope and wholeness and, in the process,

increase awareness of the church in the general population. Despite its 1.2 million memberships in North America, many people

Table 1

Statistical Membership of the NAD Union Conferences

Union	No. of Churches	Membership
Atlantic	601	124,847
Canada	392	72,085
Columbia	745	155,256
Lake	504	88,536
Mid-America	463	64,743
North Pacific	445	102,450
Pacific	713	223,546
Southern	1,139	299,082
Southwestern	581	121,548
Guam-Micronesia Mission	22	5,796
NAD Military Church	1	24
Totals	5,606	1,257,913

still have not heard of the SDA church. One example is Donald Trump, in his 2016 presidential campaign, who, in an interview with George Stephanopoulos, declared that "I know nothing about it [the SDA church] - Really" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2017, p. 9). According to the Barna organization, cited in the same report, "62 percent of the American public say they know nothing about the Seventy-day Adventist Church" (ibid, p. 9). All this despite many notable facts about the church such

as (a) its contribution to health care, (b) the recognition of one of its founders, Ellen G. White, by Smithsonian magazine "in 2014 as one of the 100 most significant Americans of all time" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2017, p. 10), and "one of the most-translated woman authors of all time" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 20), (c) the distinction in 2011 by *USA Today*, as the "fastest-growing Christian denomination in North America (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2017, p. 10), and (d) the realization of the Pew Research Center in its 2014 Religious Landscape Study that SDA is one of ". . . the most racially diverse religious groups in the United States" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2017, p. 10).

Despite these glowing assessments, the SDA church struggles to be mission-driven. In a survey of over 300 church leaders, Day (2018) reports that "more than 70 percent of our leaders have asserted that we are in trouble. We are neither mission aware nor mission aligned. And we are especially not mission accountable" (p. 46). Weigley (2016) indicates that this problem is compounded by the fact that "most pastors and some local conference departmental leaders have minimal experience in strategic planning or dealing with organizational assets such as finances and personnel" (p. 55). Indeed, the "lack of strategic planning" combined with its "poor execution or implementation" are "two major flaws in Adventist leadership" in fulfilling its mission (Day, 2018, p. 7; see also Reddy, 2019).

Because the mission of the NAD is "to spread the gospel and reach North America with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21), the OSR of the SDA in the North America Division (NAD) has started a project to engage and transform churches into

MdX churches. The emphasis on this new strategy towards mission accomplishment is to promote a culture change in how the pastors and leaders do mission. To initiate cultural change and move its mission forward, the SDA church "also has to deal with existing bad organizational behavior" (Day, 2018, p. 52) of the "entire organization … for a spirit of receptiveness to be created for strategic efforts" (p. 57). Thus, to be an MdX church and achieve a complete organizational culture change, the strategy calls for developing a set of organizational habits that can help NAD churches accomplish their mission.

> [MdX is a] church transformation process designed to help churches focus like a laser light on accomplishing . . . [their] mission and to do so with excellence. Now, we're talking about a change of culture, and changing culture involves forming new church habits. This is an ongoing process and not a quick event. (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 5)

Paul Brantley, the key architect of the MdX strategy, is concerned about creating a genuine culture change, "[It] is never a quick fix." Instead, it is a call for churches to realize that "the rewards of pursuing excellence God's way far exceed the effort required" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 11). Thus, culture change is something that the churches have to deal with and apply all efforts in transition to a mission-driven church.

Statement of the Problem

In an October 2016 meeting, the NAD Mission Effectiveness Committee of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Oct. 2016) published a report entitled *Advancing Mission Effectiveness In The North American Division: Seven Actionable Ideas.* The report presented realistic data, information, and arguments to advance the mission. It also reported the basics for the NAD toward becoming a more mission-driven church organization claiming that "mission-driven organizations are focused… [and] do not allow themselves to be hijacked. They are committed to a

mission" (ibid, p. 5). From the several ideas presented in that report, one of them, Idea #2, was the "Mission in action: a NAD-wide strategy that really works" (ibid, p. 12). This idea about a wide strategy that works presupposed that "once [the churches] have a statement of mission in writing, what would be the best way to accomplish it? Also, how could they [NAD] make a strategic plan a road map for missional excellence? (Ibid, p. 12). This idea became the NAD framework in promoting that kind of strategy, guiding the churches towards mission-driven excellence. The important factor here is that the churches need to work on their mission and then find ways to accomplish the established goals according to the MdX strategy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses and how it could be improved. The project will help to understand the value of the MdX Strategy throughout its implementation and analyzing MdX not only through the culture of ten habits implementation but the materials and resources and applying all church efforts combined to turn to a mission-driven church excellence.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What did participants testing the MdX find most valuable about the strategy?

2. What did participants testing the MdX identify as challenges or difficulties with the strategy?

3. What did participants testing the MdX suggest as improvements to the strategy?

Study Design

To address the purpose of the study and to answer the research questions, this study was designed as a qualitative research method using a formative research methodology. Formative research seeks to identify the strengthens and weaknesses of the MdX strategy and looks for ways to improve it. The qualitative approach gives the methodological tools for collecting and analyzing the data.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study includes the MdX strategy and the theory upon which the strategy is based. MdX as a strategy is a set of plans and actions designed to help churches become more mission-driven. Thus, the mission-driven strategy (MdX) in itself, is not a theory, but is based and built on a theory. Therefore, this study uses a set of methodological steps to seek empirical data that can suggest improvements to the underlying theory and consequently, the MdX strategy.

Additionally, the conceptual framework also includes disruptive leadership. Disruptive leadership is a comprehensive way to lead and achieve leadership success. According to the literature and based on my own interpretation, disruptive leadership presents a new age for leaders to be on top of their organization and lead them to success. It is important to recognize that the word disruptive itself, as understood in leadership theory, is not a negative attribute or different skill for the leaders, but disruptive leadership is a new and positive way to face challenges, promote changed, and encourage innovations.

A conceptual framework, according to Rudestam and Newton (2007), is "simply a less-developed form of a theory, [and] consists of statements that link abstract concepts to empirical data" (p. 6). In the same reasoning, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) declare that "the conceptual framework draws on theory, research, and experience, and examines the relationship among constructs and ideas. In essence, it provides the theoretical and methodological bases for development of the study and analysis of findings" (p. 7). As a result, the conceptual framework becomes a working tool that analyses, categorizes, and makes the link among the research problem, the literature, and the methodology for the research.

A theory is simply "a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints. It is no more than a linguistic device used to organize a complex empirical world" (Bacharach, 1989, p. 496). A theory often describes the relations among concepts and actions and then predicts these action steps will increase the likelihood to achieve specific results. Similarly, a strategy can be understood as "an integrated, overarching plan of how an organization will achieve its objectives" (Lussier & Achua, 2013, p. 405). In other words, a strategy is a thoughtful process of plans, processes, and action steps to achieve particular results. Thus, in this study, the MdX strategy is based in mission-driven theory, and formative research, used for the improvement of a theory, is used for the improvement of the MdX strategy.

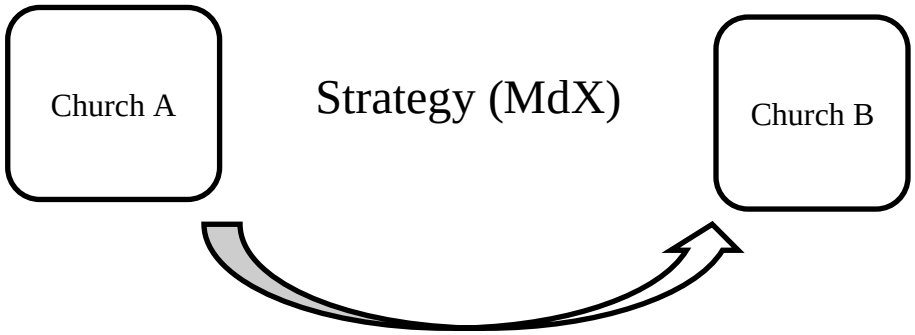
The premises of this whole study is built on the conception of the idea that there are two different types of churches. In a practical view, MdX compares two types of churches, A, the mission-drift church, and B, the mission-driven church. The first, Church A, "has good people and busy departments, but they're fragmented. Church A is

pre-occupied with tradition, church politics, social life, ego, apathy, and a crowded church calendar. All of this distracts Church A's leaders and members from [the] mission" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). In contrast, Church B is "strategic in accomplishing their mission. The congregation does not rely on luck, chance, or even the pastor's sermons or charisma. They're intentional, disciplined, and passionate. They're motivated to work hard because they share a common, compelling mission" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 8).

The MdX strategy moves from Church A, or a typical mission-drift church, to become Church B or Mission-driven church. MdX includes the desire to move from Church A to Church B. Consequently, MdX "is a simple, step-by-step strategy for creating Church B's" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). According to the strategy, if Church A follows the pre-events and processes suggested by the MdX strategy, which includes the ten habits of implementation, it will become a Church B. An illustration of this conception in presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Mission-Driven Church Route



Theory: Church A + MdX = Church B

Strategy: If Church A implements MdX, then Church B is the outcome

Note: Created by Osvaldo S. Santos, Jr.

As this whole study is going to explore, MdX is a strategy based on a theory. Thus, the Mission-Driven Church Route could be explained in the following: Church A (left side) and Church B (right side) are theoretically connected by the MdX strategy. Essentially MdX is a strategy on how Church A is transformed into Church B. So, *IF* Church A follows some methodological steps, ideas, processes, and analysis (MdX Strategy), then it is more likely that Church A will have morphed into Church B. Further details of this MdX strategy, as well as its methodology, appear in Chapter Two and Three.

Data Collection

Since the purpose of this study was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to understand better how the participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved, it was imperative to understand the participants' viewpoints and hear their voices. It was likewise vital to have an accurate interpretation of what the participants perceived was working well in the strategy as well as the challenges or difficulties of what was not working well. As a preparation for the interviews, MdX documents and a variety of materials were examined.

This study used purposeful sampling and collected data through multiple sources such as interviews (one-on-one and focus group), survey, videoconferencing, email

messages, field notes (limited observation, perceptions, and feelings), and document analysis.

The analysis focused on the strengthens and weaknesses of the methodology and also focused on looking for specific suggestions for improvement (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 5). The interviews with the pastors and the focus groups were crucial for disclosing the strengthens and weaknesses, and revealed several issues for MdX improvements.

The study's population is found within the 67 pilot churches involved with the MdX implementation in the NAD. Thus, the population for this study included the pastors and other church leaders within the 67 pilot churches who participated in leading the MdX strategy at their local church. Of the 67 pilot churches working with the MdX in the United States and Canada, eleven churches were selected from the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada that appeared to be more advanced in their implementation of MdX. In the end, this study's research sample involved six of the 11 pilot churches located in Canada that appeared to have acquired more experience implementing the MdX.

To address the research questions, a set of interview questions were prepared for the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed, and using *Dedoose*, a qualitative analysis software, the participants' perspectives were analyzed into themes and patterns. This identification and classification process helped clarify how the participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy strengths, challenges and how it could be improved. Due to the COVID-19 travel limitation, I could not personally visit the local

churches, and the meetings and interviews were conducted by phone and online videoconferencing.

Significance of the Study

This study hopes to contribute to the OSR of the NAD of the SDA by analyzing how implementing the MdX strategy worked among the selected pilot churches. Even though these churches were already implementing the strategy, little was known about how well the churches implemented it. There was no data except for various anecdotal stories with people in various churches involved in the implementation. The NAD sought to better understand how this implementation was working and how it could be improved. This study hopes to provide meaningful feedback on the strengthens and weaknesses of the MdX and point out ways for future improvement of the MdX strategy.

This study is significant to me as an SDA church member, assistant pastor, and encourager seeking for the best practical church tools towards mission accomplishment as I have been involved in duties as a church leader for local communities.

This study's results will provide data to the NAD as it could potentially help the NAD strengthen their support for pastors and church leaders to reach effectiveness towards mission more quickly. For the NAD leaders, the key beneficiaries of the study, discoveries could potentially guide them in creating additional ways to support and incentivize more NAD churches to participate in the strategy. As a result, the NAD could reach more churches and local communities, spreading Christ's message.

This study could also contribute to the academic literature helping scholars, pastors, students, and SDA leaders to better understand the MdX strategy and its relevance toward mission. People are rational and emotional, so leaders can use analytical

techniques and emotional appeals to influence followers; still, they must also weigh their actions' rational and emotional consequences (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2012), and these may strengthen approaches for the leaders to support the MdX implementation.

Finally, this study may also provide guidelines for any church leader engaged in denominational strategy implementation. This study may provide further discussion areas that can anticipate the church's effectiveness towards developing successful strategic churches and church leaders for the future.

Limitations of the Study

The current study may have limitations due to the participants' biases, understandings, and perceptions when describing their identification with the MdX and their experiences implementing it. Some limitations may include:

1. The study assumes that the pilot churches' pastors have been part of all the MdX implementation pieces of training and processes. However, giving the duties and demands related to their positions, there is a chance that some pastors have not fully participated or not fully informed themselves in the MdX strategy implementation.

2. The original plan was to gather data based on visiting the churches in person and interview individuals and the focus groups. However, due to COVID-19, this direct visitation was not possible. Instead, I conducted the interviews through the phone and online videoconferencing. Online interviews, even those that use videoconferencing can still lack the ability observe many non-verbal reactions of the participants in the same way that I would be able to do it in a face-to-face interview. Nevertheless, non-verbal cues were noted during the interview and were used later as one factor in the analysis of the participants' statements.

3. This study's conclusions cannot be generalized to other churches in the NAD or SDA divisions. However, the findings of this study may be useful as a resource for other churches in their MdX implementation.

Delimitations of the Study

While the MdX strategy was used by SDA churches, pastors, and church board members of churches across the North America Division (NAD), this study focused on those participating in pilot churches in the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following definitions may help the reader understand how the key terms are used throughout the manuscript.

The mission of the church: The mission to be accomplished by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in the North American Division (NAD) is to reach North America with the "Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21).

Church board: The SDA Church manual states that every "church must have a functioning board whose members have been elected during a church business meeting. Its chief concern is having an active discipleship plan in place, which includes both the spiritual nurture of the church and the work of planning and fostering evangelism" (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016, p. 129).

Division: To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference has established regional offices on different continents, known as divisions of the General Conference. Divisions have general administrative oversight for designated groups of

unions and other Church units within specific geographical areas (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016).

General Conference (GC): The GC represents the worldwide expression of the Church. When in Session, it determines the stated fundamental beliefs of the Church and gives directions for the church being recognized worldwide as the voice of the Church (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016).

Mission: According to the SDA Church manual, the mission has the goal to serve the whole person and preach the gospel to the world, growing into an organized church or multiplying house churches in their local communities (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016)

Mission-driven Excellence (MdX): is a "church transformation process designed to help churches focus like a laser light on accomplishing [the] mission and to do so with excellence" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 5). MdX is a practical guideline on how to do mission through processes, strategies, and tactics for "making your church a best-run organization to the glory of God" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 4). MdX, as a strategy, is a "simple, step-by-step strategy" for creating a strategic church that is wholly focused on mission accomplishment (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). More detail on the MdX progress can be found in chapter 2.

North American Division (NAD): The NAD is a regional office of the SDA church covering the area of Bermuda, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, the French possession of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Guam, Johnston Island, Marshall

Islands, Midway Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, and the United States of America.

Pastor: The pastor is the church's spiritual leader and adviser. The conference committee appoints him or her to act as a pastor or district leader. Pastors cooperate with the conference to carry out the plans and policies and provide pastoral care to the church (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016).

Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA Church): The SDA Church is a Protestant Christian denomination (Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck, 2009), with churches, hospitals, schools, and clinics located all around the world. The SDA Church is recognized by the observance of the seventh day of the week, Saturday as the Sabbath, and preaches with an emphasis on the imminent Second return (advent) of Jesus Christ (Wikipedia, n.d.). Seventh-day Adventists are a global family of Christians who hold the Bible as the ultimate authority (Adventists, 2020c).

Summary and Organization

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background, the statement of the problem, the study's purpose, research questions, the study design including the conceptual framework, and briefly describes the methodology and the significance of the study. Chapter 1 also includes the limitations, delimitations, and a definition of terms.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to (a) the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its strategy for mission including a thorough explanation of the MdX, (b) leadership, (c) strategic leadership and implementation, (d) organizational change, and (e) organizational culture.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology of the study. It explains in detail the study design and discusses the formative research methodology, formative research format, the theoretical framework, and the population. It also describes the data collection procedures and the data analysis. Chapter 3 also includes methodological issues, such as the researcher's role, and ends with ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. It first analyzes how participants described the MdX strategy as a whole. Then it presents the results of the interviews focusing on the participants' experiences in managing and leading the MdX in their churches. This chapter gives voice to the participants of the MdX process and captures their perceptions of the strategy. Finally, it brings together their suggestions on how the MdX strategy could be improved.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and discusses the major findings, before ending with the study's conclusions, and implications for practice, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in the North American Division (NAD) is to reach North America with the "Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21). The Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) at the North American Division has developed a method that supports churches in how to be more strategic in implementing their mission. The emphasis of this method, Mission-driven Excellence (MdX), is to promote cultural change within local churches through organizational habits. The purpose of this study was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses and how it could be improved. Once habits are formed through a repetition of a sequence of actions, this research will help to understand the value of the MdX strategy through the culture of ten specific habits implementation inside the churches.

The literature reviewed in this chapter explores the conceptual framework and is structured in the following way: (a) literature search strategy, (b) the SDA and strategy for mission, which includes an extensive explanation on the MdX, (c) leadership, (d) strategic leadership and implementation, (e) organizational change, (f) organizational

culture, and (g) a concluding summary. The topics are analyzed in detail, connecting them to this study's focus, the MdX strategy and the theory upon which the strategy is based, thus, the conceptual framework.

Literature Search Strategy

The search included articles, dissertations, and references from journals and databases on the topics of leadership, organizational culture and change, and strategic planning and implementation. I also explored websites from different Christian churches on pastoral leadership, mission, and organizational habits.

In my search I used the following library resources and databases: James White Library at Andrews University, EBSCO, Sage, Wiley Online, Academia, ProQuest, as well as Google and Google Scholar. I used books and journals as well as internet resources on specific topics such as *disruptive leadership*, *disruptive leadership mindset*, and *culture of innovation*.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Strategy for Mission

In this section, an overview of the church and its mission is presented, followed by mission and strategic focus, a highlight on the SDA church in the Ontario Conference and MdX endorsements. Next, there is an extensive description of the MdX history and background. Then, the section concludes with the MdX and the spiritual climate.

The Mission of the Church

The SDA church's mission is to find ways to proclaim God's kingdom, share the hope of the Second Coming, and demonstrate His love. Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the

Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6-12) (Adventists, 2020b). Seventh-day Adventists recognize the Bible as the only source of their beliefs. They consider the Bible as the only standard of faith and practice for Christians due to the Protestant conviction of *sola scriptura*. Currently, Adventists hold 28 fundamental beliefs that can be organized into six sub-categories: God, Man, Salvation, the Church, the Christian Life, and Last-Day Events (Adventists, 2020a). The SDA Church is called to reach the world, communicating God's love and care to all people with a hope, the message of Christ.

If the mission is the foremost purpose for an organization to exist, how important must it be for a church to be clear about its mission? In fact, according to Dr. Brantley, mission "must continuously guide the direction of the church" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 15). In reality, the church should continuously plan for different ways to fulfill its mission. The work done towards fulfilling the church's mission is a challenge that requires a continuous evaluation of its goals, methods, strategies, and tactics to work in the communities, reach people, and advance the mission.

Indeed, the church's mission is really God's mission or *Missio Dei;* understanding this is vital for churches (Murray, 2001). It is crucial for the church to understand that there is work to do that involves more than a church daily routine, it involves mission. Still, the work flows from God's character and purposes (Bosch, 2011). Further, Bosch argued that M*issio Dei* "enunciates the good news that God is a God for people" (p. 10). Reddy (2019) expressed the relationship between God and the church this way, "God's self-revelation [is] the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, embraces both the church and the world, and in…

the church is privileged to participate" (p. 10). As a privilege to participate, the church carries the responsibility to work in different ways for the members, to reach the people, and to preach the gospel. The mission established by the church commitment is to work toward its accomplishment.

Murray (2001) expressed the idea that "all that the church does in mission must be related to the missionary work of God" (p. 39). For this reason, the church is not the sender, but the one sent (Reddy, 2019). In sum, the motive for the church to be the one sent, simplifies the idea that the church exists and is driven by the *Missio Dei* or God's mission (Bosch, 2011). Authors Stott and Wright (2015) added to that concept in their book *Christian Mission in The Modern World,* saying that: the "mission [of God] arises primarily out of the nature, not of the church but God Himself. The living God of the Bible is the sending God" (p. 35). The church, God's church, was created to, and driven by God's mission, and was sent to do God's missionary work.

Suffice it to say that when the church understands its work and role as the mission of God, "it will undoubtedly have a purpose" for the members and leaders are being used by God in doing His work within the churches. (Reddy, 2019, p. 35). In addition, the church exists as Stott and Wright (2015) claimed, "in its historical journey on earth, for the sake of God's mission in the world" (p. 35). According to these authors, all the work that a church does has its focus on mission, to preach the gospel and reach people showing that the *Missio Dei* for the church is to "Go" and work towards God's mission. For the NAD there is no difference. The NAD mission is to spread the gospel and "reach North America with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North

American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19,21). Ultimately, the mission is "GO."

Since its establishment in 1863, the SDA church "has understood that the purpose of its existence is to perpetuate the proclamation of God's plan of salvation for all humankind" (Stunkard, 2014, p. 49). The SDA church is a global organization where the church's worldwide administrative leadership, the General Conference of the SDA Church, starts with leaders from around the world and is divided by divisions, unions, conferences, and churches. The SDA church in the NAD represents more than 1.2 million members, just a small number if compared to the over 350 plus million population in the territories of the division. Ellen White (2002) has written, "the church is a God-appointed agency for the salvation of men [….] its mission is to carry the gospel to the world." The NAD, over the years, has made a significant effort in spreading the gospel and reaching the North American people. Thereby, as the mission is to carry the gospel to the world, NAD continues to work towards refining a new method to accomplish the mission. This new method is the MdX strategy.

Mission and Strategic Focus

In a study on the experience of first-time conference presidents in the NAD, Weigley (2016) states that "most pastors and some local conference department leaders have minimal experience in strategic planning or dealing with organizational assets such as finances and personnel" (p. 55). This statement had been previously mentioned in a 2002 study on leadership practices and success in pastoral ministry titled *Leadership Formation in Ministerial Education – Part I: Assessment and Analysis of Leadership Traits in Seventh-day Adventist Pastors in North America*. In that study, Bell and Dudley

(2002) advocate for a "mission-driven church, characterized by qualitative and quantitative growth" (p. 282). The authors stated that "church health and mission are seen inseparable. The priority of winning souls to Christ would be hard to deny" (p. 282). They claim that "a pastor's role in evangelistic leadership, empowering, and equipping is prioritized over the functions" (p. 282). In this study, Bell and Dudley (2002) surveyed sixty-two members of eight conference executive committees in various NAD regions, including eleven pastors, seventeen administrators, with an additional thirty-four who were not church employees or ministry professionals. The survey asked to evaluate thirteen criteria leadership practices for successful church growth in pastoral ministry. Some of the criteria were the leadership practices of goals, vision, training, healthy lifestyle, communication, empowering people, and motivation. The ability to lead a church in effective long-range planning was ranked eleventh of 13 criteria (Bell & Dudley, 2002, pp. 283-285). In spite of much work that has been done, there is abundant evidence that pastors and administrators in NAD churches have struggled to plan and implement mission-oriented strategies in their local churches for about twenty years. This is evident throughout this study, since Bell and Dudley (2002) made an excellent argument for the NAD's necessity to develop a process to help pastors, administrators, and churches become equipped to design and implement strategies.

Additionally, in one of the MdX sources, *Creating a mission-driven church - Presenter's manual: A step-by-step guide to mission-driven excellence,* claimed that any outstanding achievement with excellence has: "(1) a simple, compelling mission, and (2) a strategy for accomplishing it" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 9). All the combined arguments above indicate that the lack of strategic planning,

combined with its poor execution or implementation, are “two major flaws in Adventist leadership” for focusing the mission (Day, 2018, p. 7). For these reasons, the NAD has been thinking, planning, and implementing a new approach to doing church in a more strategic and mission-focused way, they have called Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) using long-range strategic planning for mission which will be described in the next sections. However, before I go deeper into the MdX meanings and concepts, I will present important endorsements gleaned from many sources that illustrates the core of the MdX as an institutional NAD project concerning mission.

Ontario Conference

The “story of Adventism in Ontario goes back to 1850 and is associated with the Millerites” (Adventist Heritage, 1992, p. 28). Between the years 1851 and 1882, many evangelical efforts were carried out in Ontario. From 1883-1895 several colporteurs and bible workers came to Toronto until the first SDA church was organized in 1895. A few years later, in 1899, “F. D. Starr was elected the first conference president” (p. 29). Since the message was introduced to the Ontario Canadiens, the SDA message has been preached to them.

The Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada has its headquarters in Oshawa, Ontario. The Ontario Conference is one of the Conferences that is part of the NAD. This conference serves its congregations across Ontario, giving the churches the support to work toward the mission. As a non-profit organization, the Ontario Conference of the SDA Church in Canada is formed by 175 congregations comprising 131 churches, 26 companies, and 18 groups, with 34,705 members (Ontario

Conference of the SDA Church, 2020). Typically, the congregations are led by a pastor, where the conference and the board of directors are responsible for appointing them.

The conference supports the pastors, churches, church members, and the communities through more than 30 specialized departments. Among the departments established by the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada that are related closest to active mission service are Community Services and Disaster Response, Church Growth, Evangelism, Personal Ministries, Prison Ministry, School of Evangelism, and Church Planting. All ministry departments support mission in some way. But these seven departments combine their efforts with the special focus of working towards its mission, that is, "To REACH Ontario with the Christ-Centered message of hope and wholeness" (Ontario Conference of the SDA Church, 2020). Further, these ministries support the churches in the local communities as well as advance their mission.

Context of the MdX in the Ontario Conference

According to Pastor Halsey Peat, the history of Ontario Conference's experience with mission-focused strategies (REACH and MdX) is informed by six important events (personal communication, October 19, 2020). First, in 2012, the concept of the REACH approach was introduced to the conference office. Second, in 2013, the conference began to officially support the REACH concept, a strategic approach, by promoting it in their literature and churches. The mission focus was the goal. Near this time the conference created a guide for churches to approach strategic plans and bring together the committee.

Third, by 2016, the OSR in the NAD, with Paul Brantley as Director, participated in the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada mission's convention. He gave a speech to roughly 70% of the pastors of the Conference to explain

the REACH approach. Brantley also oversaw the transition process between the two different strategies used by the NAD—REACH to MdX, a mission-driven church. The REACH approach evolved with the term mission-driven; however, the strategic direction had been there all along.

Fourth, in 2017, a new name was created, and the Mission-driven Church Excellence (MdX) became the focus. It was the same strategic approach only refined and made simpler to understand. Fifth, in May of 2019, the Ontario office divided the conference into nine regions, with one church for each region working to become a Mission-driven church. Brantley, Randy Siebold, and Dan Day addressed the Mission-driven church focus to approximately 10 pastors coming from these different regions. They went through the entire process of how to lead their church through the MdX curriculum, including all the MdX tools and resources available. By conducting the training for those pastors in attendance, it was planned that those pastors would go back to their region and implement MdX as a pilot church. Once they had received the expertise, coaching, and as they implemented the strategy, they could become a coach for their region.

According to Peat (personal communication, October 19, 2020), the atmosphere and comments at the end of the meeting were diverse. Some of the people expressed that they had accepted the MdX and shared their excitement and desire to implement the MdX strategy: Others were unsure about their ability to implement the MdX, and just a few declared they were too busy to do it. Only the pastors received training for their churches; no lay members attended. The pastors who agreed to implement the MdX created a cohort and communicated once a month among themselves, with Paul Brantley as a

coach and Pastor Halsey Peat from the Ontario Conference supporting the implementation. They gave the pastors and churches all the support they knew to give the churches the best knowledge and ability to help the churches to implement the MdX strategy, focusing on the mission-driven church and accomplishing the mission.

Was there a 3-year gap and more recently, at the end of September 2020, the Ontario Conference brought all the pastors together to review the MdX strategy. Paul Brantley was there to renew the effort to implement MdX in the churches. We found that process was a bit slow, and then COVID-19 intervened. Right now, the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada is in transition to encourage more churches to adopt and implement MdX.

MdX Endorsements

The SDA church and the NAD are committed to the mission. Since the SDA church formation in 1863, the church and later, the NAD, have both been teaching and preaching the gospel and working toward the mission. Even though NAD has already done much to focus its churches on mission and realizing the challenges in leading a church in effective long-range planning, they understood that they had to do more. However, there were concerns and challenges on how to work more effectively towards mission. Within this concept, MdX is launched.

MdX is a strategy for developing mission and is the most recent project focusing on the mission ever implemented by the NAD. The MdX resources are based on the relevant literature, Bible Scripture, SDA literature, books and manuscripts, and extensive research findings. Regardless of NAD's being organized, the MdX survey results from

other SDA division church administrators, local administrators, pastors, and church members, revealed a knowledge gap in the skill of strategic development.

In his dissertation *Planting Healthy Churches Through the Lens of Missional Discipleship*, Melvin R. Reddy (2019) stated that "methods and strategies for church growth have been debated, implemented, revised, and repackaged. The church continues to seek ways to fulfill its mission, which requires an ongoing evaluation of its goals and methods" (Reddy, 2019, p. 32). NAD, after evaluating the methods already implemented in past years and looking for new ways to reach the church's mission; churches and administrators have worked diligently to find ways to work more effectively, thus creating a new project.

Based on the idea of continuous work towards mission, an NAD Mission Effectiveness Committee report by the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Oct. 2016), *Advancing Mission Effectiveness in the North American Division: Seven Actionable Ideas*, presented data information and arguments to advance the mission. In that meeting, they reported the basis for the NAD becoming a mission-driven church organization claiming that "mission-driven organizations are focused… [and] do not allow themselves to be hijacked. They are committed to a mission" (ibid, p. 5). The report showed that mission was vital for the NAD churches, and presented quotes from the Bible, SDA literature, books, and manuscripts. Additionally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church – NAD – Headquarters, presented on October 2017 the Annual Report of the NAD Strategic Plan, including the 2020 Vision *Strategy*.

Also, included in that 2016 report were seven actionable ideas for advancing mission, of which #2 is: *Mission in Action – A NAD-wide strategy that really works,*

which asked the questions, “once we have a statement of mission in writing, what is the best way to accomplish it (strategy)? How can we make a strategic plan a road map for missional excellence?” (North American Division of the SDA Church, Oct. 2016, p. 12). This actionable idea (#2) eventually became the MdX strategy that is the focus of this study.

During the development of this NAD-wide strategy, many texts of the Bible as well as SDA literature, books, and manuscripts, were used as the rationale for the strategy. Bell and Dudley (2002) stated that “. . . the influence Ellen White exerted in the formation of church organization and mission is an important part of Adventist church history” (p. 279). Ellen White once wrote that the priority of a pastor’s ministry is: “To win souls to the kingdom of God must be their first consideration. With sorrow for sin and with patient love, they must work as Christ worked, putting forth determined, unceasing effort” (White, 1945, p. 31). In an article for the Review and Herald magazine, titled *The Call for a Spiritual Revival and Reformation*, Ellen White wrote, “Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices” (White, 1902, p. 2). Undoubtedly, Ellen White directed and inspired the church’s work through her writings. She believed that unceasing effort must be made in the church’s ideas, theories, habits, and practices towards a reformation regarding mission.

Two documents, North American Division of the SDA Church (2019b, p. 4) and North American Division of the SDA Church (2018d, p. 42), have cited some references from the Bible and SDA literature, books and manuscripts, that gave support to this new method for a strategic process towards mission:

1. The reason for the church: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV),

2. God’s strategic plan: “For I know what I have planned for you, says the Lord… plans to give you a future filled with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11 NEB),

3. The power of language: “ ‘Look!’ The Lord said, ‘The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible to them!’” (Genesis 11:6),

4. The church as a business: “‘Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?’” (Luke 2:49),

5. Purpose of the church: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men... and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning, it has been God’s plan that through the church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency” (White, 2002, p. 9),

6. Satan’s strategic plan: “We must cause distraction and division. We must destroy their anxiety for their own souls, and lead them to criticize, to judge, and to accuse and condemn one another...” (White, 1923, p. 475).

7. Mission-drift a sin: “It is a sin to be heedless, purposeless, and indifferent in any work in which we engage, but especially in the work of God” (White, 1884, par. 14). “It is essential to labor with order, following an organized plan...” (White, E. G., Ms 24, 1887, par. 19). Nevertheless, mission is the SDA focus in the NAD.

North American Division of the SDA Church (n.d.), in another project that preceded MdX, called, *The Feedback Loop: Pastoral Development for Leadership Excellence,* stated that,

> A strategy is to a church what GPS is to a traveler. A church without a strategic plan is like a car without a steering wheel. Good strategy keeps the pastor and church focused on a compelling mission along with the audacious goals and activities needed to accomplish mission. (p. 47)

Knowing the necessity of a new mission plan and endorsed by inspired writings, the mission of the SDA church in the NAD turned to reach North America with the "Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19, 21), creating a variety of tools and giving support on teaching the churches how to be more mission-driven.

Brantley et al. (2015) supported the NAD mission statement, "To reach the NAD with hope and wholeness." That statement contains "three highly significant 'power' words: reach, hope, and wholeness" (p. 82). The word *reach* means that "every member may not be able to "preach" or "teach," but everyone can "reach" others with genuine Christ-like love. Reaching the world through love is the most powerful argument that Seventh-day Adventists possess" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 82). The word *hope* means that "Our [SDA] church has been charged to reach North America and the world with a distinctive message… based on… Revelation 14:6-12", and this special message "points prophetically to His second coming—a concept that is embroidered in our very name, Seventh-day Adventists!" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 83). For the message of *wholeness,* according to Brantley et al. (2015), states:

> Our distinctive, Christ-centered message not only points toward the future – it also adds abundant life to the present! Health of body, mind, and spirit invariably lifts humanity up to higher planes of living. Hundreds of scientific studies have confirmed the benefits of our Adventist message of health. Sabbath

> rest nurtures the soul. Our ideas of education involve the harmonious development of the whole person – the physical, mental, spiritual, and social – extending from life on this earth through eternity. (p. 83)

There are enough arguments combined with the Bible and SDA literature, books and manuscripts that have given the necessary foundation to the NAD in working and planning this new method to help the churches work more diligently and strategically towards mission.

Understanding the MdX Path

The REACH Framework

Initially, what is now named MdX, was called REACH. MdX was developed over time. In 2015, Brantley et al. (2015) launched the book *Becoming a Mission-Driven Church: A Five-Step Strategy for Moving your Church from Ordinary to Exceptional*, after which the Mission-Driven Church renamed Mission-Driven Excellence. Mission-driven church organizations are focused and committed to a mission, where every church's efforts are toward mission accomplishment (Brantley et al., 2015). Parallel to the book, many other materials were created to provide the churches sufficient material to help them work towards mission.

The MdX strategy was originally built upon the strategic framework of REACH, the five core values that help church organizations reach Excellence by focusing on the mission. Brantley et al. (2015) defined REACH as:

> A strategic framework officially adopted by both the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, October 2014, and by the North American Division (NAD) at its year-end Executive Committee meeting, October 2011. The NAD version is not a top-down model. Rather, it is a set of time-tested ideas that church organizations adapt and use to accomplish [the] mission. (p. 7)

The authors described the components included in the REACH strategic framework. The first component talks about the mission statement. It should consist of "a mission statement that expresses the desire to REACH people everywhere with the distinctive, Christ-centered, Seventh-day Adventist message of hope and wholeness" (p. 7), being both measurable and descriptive. The second component expresses a "set of five REACH values that define core priorities in the life and operation of church organizations," and the third and last component is "a five-step, Spirit-filled, research-based process for developing mission-driven church organizations of excellence" (p. 7).

Brantley et al. (2015) building on the REACH format, expressed that "On October 28, 2011, the North American Division Executive Committee voted five core values as its enduring priorities" (p. 103). They are as follows:

> R – Revival and transformation: Connecting with God through public and personal worship
>
> E – Education for discipleship: Every youth and adult learning, growing, and becoming more like Christ
>
> A – Alignment within the church: Connecting effectively within our diverse church family
>
> C – Community outreach and evangelism: Connecting with our communities – sharing hope and wholeness
>
> H – Healthy leadership and management: God's stewards insisting on personal and church-wide excellence. (p. 103)

Thereafter, what was once known as the Mission-Driven Church through REACH, became Mission-Driven Excellence (MdX).

From REACH to BASIC

This section aims to help the reader understand the MdX strategy path and discuss the participants' commitments, the model where the MdX was built, and a detailed

explanation of the habits. The MdX is a strategy outlined by Paul Brantley, Director of the OSR in the NAD. The Presenter's Manual stated that "Why strategy? I hope we all see that without both a mission and a strategy for accomplishing it, we're like a ship without a sail adrift in the middle of the ocean" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 12). As a strategy, MdX is "a plan of action. It is a living, breathing design for actual performance, a guide to execution. It is a playbook for the church to plan the best way to accomplish mission" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 115). It combines methods and strategies by implementing new habits and culture change in the NAD churches.

On the commitments, the pamphlet *Creating a mission-driven church: Orientation for church leaders* (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2019b, p. 1) explained that the Mission-driven church is committed to the following:

> A commitment by all, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to learn MdX habits and make these habits part of its ongoing operating culture
>
> A commitment by board members to track progress month-by-month in implementing these habits
>
> Pastors' commitment to candidly share successes and challenges with others on the same journey in a 100 percent threat-free environment. (p. 1)

Commitments are vital when planning to implement the MdX because, without them, the church would keep working on different projects that could move the church but not reaching the results proposed by MdX that emphasize mission working through habits and culture change.

As seen above, MdX involves a strategy that generates specific commitments helping churches promote a cultural change towards mission. Since MdX is the

outgrowth of the REACH framework, it is essential to understand where the habits came from.

From BASIC to MdX

The REACH framework, included five steps for becoming a mission-driven church of excellence that created the acronym BASIC. Brantley et al. (2015) explain BASIC as follows:

Step one: *B*uild a team – a Spirit-filled team transformed in heart and mind.

Step two: *A*gree on a strategy – a mission-driven strategy of excellence.

Step three: *S*trategize in writing – and in the heads, hearts, and hands of people.

Step four: *I*mplement your strategy – fully deployed throughout your church.

Step five: *C*reate a culture – a permanent, mission-driven culture of excellence.

Brantley then turned each of these steps into actions that he hoped could become part of the habitual repertoire of a church focused on mission. He called these actions "habits." Each one of the five steps featured one or more habits to a total of ten. Explaining habits, Brantley et al. (2015) argued that habits are the results of repetitive steps that help create an ongoing culture in the organization in opposition to action plans that work towards specific goals. This is the reason why the ten "habits" became a core feature of MdX.

To get churches going, MdX starts with the MdX Inventory of the Habits (see Appendix B). Using a 10-point scale, the churches rate themselves on the habits. The results are said to show a potential for greatness (1- through 6-point scale), good (7- 8-point scale), or great habit strength (9- 10-point scale). Implementing the series of ten habits transforms the church's routine from busy churches to committed, vibrant, growing, and focused churches (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, pp.

8-10). After the church analyses the results, they decide if they want to be a mission-driven church.

Using the acronym BASIC, habits #1 through #10 are associated with a series of five planned activities to be implemented by the church. Using the BASIC letters,

"B" means Build a cohesive team - Habit #1, #2, #3, and #4

"A" means Agreeing on mission – Habit #5

"S" implies Strategy in writing – Habit #6 and #7

"I" means Implementing strategy – Habit #8 and #9

"C" means Continuous learning - creating a culture of missional excellence – Habit #10.

Naming and turning the BASIC five-steps into the ten habits, Day (2018) numbered them as follows:

Habit 1: Taking inventory, it shows the present level of the church in all five steps.

Habit 2: Making a commitment shows the general commitment that includes the leaders and groups working on the MdX strategy implementation.

Habit 3: Checking climate, it measures how healthy is the culture of the church.

Habit 4: Developing leaders it expects long-term success for leaders. It is about the leader's development through coaching, mentoring, and performance assessment.

Habit 5: Envisioning mission, it has to bring a short, simple, and compelling mission statement that every member can remember. It must be connected to the church's principles of hope and wholeness.

Habit 6: Strategy in writing, it is the process of writing everything on strategies and tactics towards the mission.

Habit 7: Aligning departments; all departments in the church organization must be aligned and coordinated among them.

Habit 8: Accomplishing mission, it is the mission in action through the church mission projects.

> Habit 9: Accessing impact, it comprehends the report and key indicators on how the strategy runs in the church and the community.
>
> Habit 10: Becoming a model, once the church as a whole is working toward mission accomplishment, the practices, and the culture are installed, now keep the church organization efforts working towards the mission. (pp. 53-61)

The consistency and efficiency of the habit's implementation turn the church to focus on Habit 10 – Becoming a model, which is the focused habit where all the other habits become ingrained habits in the church. Habit #10 promotes a culture change in the churches and implies that the churches work consistently and permanently, improving the habits themselves.

To help churches visualize what a mission-driven church looks like, MdX compares two types of churches, A, a *mission-drift* church, and B, a *mission-driven* church. The first, Church A, "has good people and busy departments, but they're fragmented. Church A is pre-occupied with tradition, church politics, social life, ego, apathy, and a crowded church calendar. All of this distracts Church A's leaders and members from [the] mission" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). According to Brantley et al. (2015), Church A has a series of activities such as:

> 1. Meeting agendas start with and are driven by activities, events, and problems, 2. Busy, cluttered, overloaded calendars, 3. Too much time spent reacting to urgent matters, resolving crises, and solving problems, 4. Lack a clear, unified focus, 5. Staff assessment and growth systems are weak or non-existent, 6. Silos; officers' work performed mostly in detachment from that of other church departments, 7. Look inward; most church operations center on church members, and 8. Little interest/time to document impact; decision making relies on impressions and anecdotes. (p. 102)

In contrast, Church B is "strategic in accomplishing their mission. The congregation does not rely on luck, chance, or even the pastor's sermons or charisma. They're intentional, disciplined, and passionate. They're motivated to work hard because they share a common, compelling mission" (p. 8). Brantley et al. (2015) describe this Church B as:

> 1. Meeting agendas start with and are driven by mission, 2. Do fewer things – but do them well, 3. Systematically improve processes before they become problems, 4. A written strategy provides focus, 5. Assessment and growth are strong; the church sees people as central to its mission, 6. Work largely done by teams and based upon the initiative at hand, 7. Look outward; church activities are planned with the community in mind, and 8. Are accountable – they are diligent in measuring and reporting results. (p. 102)

The MdX strategy moves from Church A, or a typical mission-drift church, to become Church B or Mission-driven church. MdX includes the desire to move from Church A to Church B. Consequently, MdX "is a simple, step-by-step strategy for creating Church B's" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). According to the strategy, if Church A follows the pre-events and processes suggested by the MdX strategy, which includes the ten habits of implementation, it will be more likely to become a Church B (see Figure 1).

MdX means that "everything your congregation does will now be guided by its mission – not by busy-ness [business], politics, complacency, controversy, ego or a thousand other distractions" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 4). In this project, churches, leaders, and pastors should involve all the church board and the entire congregation, not only a few people. The church must be engaged in participating by learning, presenting, meeting, planning, analyzing, praying, motivating, cooperating, and implementing the MdX strategy.

In understanding that the church's mission is to "GO" and that the mission-driven church for excellence means every effort is focused on mission accomplishment, the MdX strategy supports the churches in how to lead using strategy and tactics, making them a "best-run organization" to the glory of God (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, pp. 4,14). This is the desired goal for accomplishing the mission.

Tzu (2014) helps to understand the counterpoint between strategy and tactics, pointing out that, everyone can see the tactics of my accomplishments; however, no one can determine the strategy that generated the triumphs. Accordingly, the difference is that the church can plan and implement a set of small strategies or tactics based on their resources, tools, goals, leadership, church potential, and the local church community to achieve the habits moving from Church A to Church B. Furthermore, the MdX strategy is well defined and explored through the leaders' goals for their churches throughout the ten habits implementation.

Everything regarding the MdX is best explained and detailed through the resources available such as the books *Becoming a Mission-Driven Church*: *A five-step strategy for moving your church from ordinary to exceptional* by Brantley et. al., (2015), *8 Secrets to a Mission-Driven Church: Understanding the Power of Strategic Thinking and Deliberate Actions* by Dan Day (2018),), and *Mission-driven BASICs: Church Strategy Made Simple* by Paul S. Brantley (2020). Two additional books are also important as a tool to get more information; the book *Mission Expedition Manual: A Workbook for Experiencing Mission-driven Leadership* by Michael F. Cauley (2020), and *The Role of the Local Elder* by Dan Day (2019). Also comprised in the resources are the Newsletter, *Adventist Learning Community* (ALC), Podcasts and the Mission-driven Church kit that includes the Pastor's Implementation Guide, the Presenter's Manual, the Participant's Manual, and the USB drive with additional material regarding the strategy. Additionally, plenty of MdX information is available through the www.mission-driven.org website.

MdX and Spiritual Climate

The spiritual climate for the church is aimed at the MdX. The spiritual side of MdX involves the pastor of the church, church leaders, and members. Basically, it involves the church as a whole. Brantley et al. (2015), elaborating on why spiritual climate matters, described that "when the atmosphere of your church is deeply spiritual, everything else feels the impact – communication, worship, fellowship, ministry, and evangelism…the spirituality of a church sets the stage for wonderful things to happen" (p. 32). All these areas of church function are influenced by the spiritual climate contributing to a better environment that benefits the MdX implementation in the churches.

The *Creating a mission-driven church - Presenter's manual: A step-by-step guide to mission-driven excellence* pinpoints two arguments discussing the importance of the church's spiritual climate. The first argument reads that "The Mission-driven church diagnoses its spiritual climate as to whether it is a place that encourages personal worship and spiritual support for church members experiencing problems" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 27). The second argument is, "A Mission-driven church makes sure that members and visitors are inspired by the church services it conducts being filled with the holy spirit is an individual and corporate reality" (ibid, p. 27). The spiritual climate is vital for the churches. Its diagnosis takes a special part during the MdX implementation. This diagnosis is made through a Spiritual Life Inventory to be filled out by all the church members and participants going through the MdX implementation (see Appendix C.)

Furthermore, directing the importance of the spiritual climate through a spiritual leadership for the church pastor or pastoral leadership, Gyuroka (2016) states that

pastoral leadership is "first and foremost spiritual leadership by nature" (p. 2). Dr. Alex D. Montoya, a Senior Pastor and Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministries at The Master's Seminary, once wrote regarding effective pastoral leadership, ". . . [it] is the need of the hour, and for the church under [a] mandate to evangelize the world, it is an indispensable requirement, indeed an urgent agenda" (Berean, n.d.; Gyuroka, 2016, p. 1). As these important arguments apply to the spiritual side of the churches, pastoral leadership also implies spiritual leadership. In contrast, Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) affirmed that:

> Holding a leadership position in a Christian organization does not make you a spiritual leader. Nor does working a secular occupation preclude you from being a spiritual leader at your workplace. Spiritual leadership is not an occupation: *it is a calling*. Christian businesspeople—physicians, educators, politicians, and parents—should be spiritual leaders. No matter what their occupations, more and more men and women are taking their calling as spiritual leaders seriously, and they are dramatically impacting the world and extending God's kingdom. (p. xiv)

As a calling and not an occupation, spiritual leaders are called to hold this vital position inside the churches as a tool to make the churches prosper in this spiritual area.

Gyuroka (2016, p. 2), argued that spiritual leadership "within the Church is the ability to influence a group of people to accomplish God's mission while lifting them to a higher vision and a closer walk with God." Spiritual leadership implies that the task to influence the spirituality of a group of people (church members) falls on the churches' leadership. But not only that, spiritual leaders open up the souls to receive the influence of the Holy Spirit towards that specific mission.

Further, Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) state that "according to the Bible, God is not necessarily looking for leaders, at least not in the sense we might think. He is looking for servants (Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 22:30)" (p. xiv). Servants that could help the churches

being more mission-driven, so the task of the spiritual leader "is to help reconcile people to understand and fulfill God's mission for their lives and for the church" (Gyuroka, 2016, p. 3). One more argument about the spiritual climate is stated as follows "A climate of spirituality, warmth, and total involvement is the trademark of a growing, healthy church!" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 27). Grounded on these arguments, churches have a vital role in the MdX for their spiritual leadership and the members' spirituality as they implement the MdX strategy.

Leadership

The SDA church, similar to any successful organization, "[is] intentional in preparing those who lead… [and should be] deliberate about preparing those who ultimately lead them" (Weigley, 2016, p. 1). MdX is built and facilitated by leadership. Leadership comes from the pastors, the church board, and church members. MdX combines planning and direction that helps church leaders to think strategically. This means that MdX is a unique approach to accomplish mission through strategy as created by the OSR in the NAD.

Press and Goh (2018) stated that "as a leader, you must shape your future, not just accept your present" (p. 5). The leaders' prerogative is that they "must do something much more substantial and, frankly, much more different… from anything they have ever done before in their professional careers" (Gentry, 2016, p. 6) even with the risk to commit mistakes and failure. But more importantly, the leaders need to learn to grow in their leadership and learn from their errors and setbacks. Every leader works with a risk of failing; however, the same leaders may achieve success. The most crucial concept to recognize is that both success and failure are crucial to ultimately achieving success. In

talking about leadership, these authors agree that in addition to doing something different and shaping their future, they might encounter barriers that may imply failure. However, leaders should consider that everything is presented as a blessing or a lesson in their professional lives.

In an attempt to find the best fit definition for leadership, in his book, *The Leadership Factor,* John P. Kotter (1988) defined "leadership as the process of moving a group (or groups) of people in some direction through (mostly) noncoercive means" (p. 16). Goleman (2005), in his landmark book titled *Emotional Intelligence,* stated that "leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal" (p. 149), which resonated with the idea that "leadership is, in part, about managing emotions" (Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009, p. 250). Among all descriptions, Hughes et al. (2012) stated that "leadership is a process, not a position" and "involves something that happens as a result of the interaction between a leader and followers" at the point of motivating and inspiring a group toward goal accomplishment (p. 1). Indeed, these authors gave some definitions that express the vital role of the leader inside the organization. Leadership works by putting the leader close to the followers to strengthen the connection between the leader and followers. For SDA churches, leadership is as vital as it is for other business companies, and the MdX implies a different kind of leadership.

MdX requires leader development. The *Participant's Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence* states that "every pastor desirous of leading a Mission-Driven Church must enroll in a leadership development program" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, p. 16). Further, it declares,

> Leader development is one of the most neglected of all church functions, and yet it is one that promises to bring high dividends when done right. A Mission-Driven Church is where people use their best gifts and talents for God. (p. 18)

There is a consensus that to reach a good level of leadership, the leaders should enter into a leadership development program which is neglected among all church functions. An awareness for constant actualization is fundamental for leaders in conducting their leadership. Not only that, but the recognition that the leadership development that transforms people and organizations, "must start at the top and be a strategic priority" (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013, p. 233). On the other hand, Dan Day (2018) points that a commitment to leader development, "also pushes leaders away from approaches that are too complex or so demanding that they never get the opportunity to work" (Day, 2018, p. 56). For this reason, leaders are challenged to commit to developing themselves. Accordingly, through trained, developed, and inspired leaders, the churches can plan and engage the members, working together on strategies to reach the community.

The next section of this chapter addresses leadership through a viewpoint called disruptive leadership. The section discusses the leadership challenges in promoting an organizational culture that involves diversity and innovation. The section also presents organizational change as the need for change, resistance to change, and how to minimize the resistance. It concludes by analyzing literature regarding strategic leadership and implementation that helps establish enough knowledge and skills that can focus the church into successfully implementing the MdX.

What is Disruptive Leadership?

Leadership requires a constant and overlapping adjustment in the leader's duties and encompasses different ways to achieve effective leadership. In this challenging world, disruptive leadership is a comprehensive way to lead and achieve leadership success. Based on my research, disruptive leadership presents a new age for leaders to be on top of their organization and lead them to success.

It is important to recognize that the word disruptive itself, as understood in leadership theory, is not a negative attribute or different skill for the leaders, but, disruptive leadership is in reality a new and positive way to face challenges, promote changes, and encourage innovations. Disruptive leadership has its roots coming from the theory of disruptive innovation, primarily developed by Christensen (1997), referring to a process in which an underrated product or service starts to become popular enough to replace or displace a conventional product or service. Charlene Li, in *The Disruption Mindset: Why Some Organizations Transform While Others Fail*, claims disruptive leadership "as the ability to challenge the status quo and to try to change a situation for the better" (Li, 2019, p. 109). Due to constant technological and market advances, Li expresses her conviction regarding the importance of disruptive leadership. Disruptive leadership is defined by Billington and Ellersgaard (2017) as a call "for leaders who envision boldly, think innovatively, and listen intensely to the needs of customers and employees" (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p. 133). Within the context of continuous world challenges, globalization, innovation, and competition, disruptive leadership is vital to organizations. It will aid the leader to envision different ways to attain success, changing the organization's situation for the better.

Disruptive Leadership Mindset

Leadership is a "mindset, not a title" (Li, 2019, p. 105). Li (2019) supports the rational that to be a leader is more than holding a title or position in a hierarchy. Leader implies giving directions or the established set of attitudes held by the leaders, in this case, their mindset. By mindset, Anderson and Anderson (2010a) affirm that "our worldview, [is] the place or orientation from which we experience our reality and form our perceptions of it" (p. 162). The authors argued that the cornerstone of mindset is our values and core beliefs we perceive and maintain about others, life in general, and ourselves, reflecting our assumptions about reality. In reality, what we perceive is impacted by our mindset, the same way our mindset influences our experience of what we see (Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). The authors suggest that the mindset is the beliefs and assumptions about reality and is responsible for how people experience and see that reality. Under my perspective, mindset is influenced by our worldview because it gives the orientation on how to proceed towards some reality envisioned by others and ourselves.

Peter M. Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, proposes a very similar meaning to mindset, calling it mental models. By mental models, Senge (1990) claims that they "are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 8). The author stressed that mindset "includes the ability to carry on *learningful* [sic] conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to [the] influence of others" (Senge, 1990, p. 9). Mindset also balances the

equilibrium between assumptions and advocacy. Generalization or the ways of thinking are also attributes that help to understand the mindset.

A disruptive leadership mindset requires not only a change in the leader's mindset but also employs mindfulness. Mindfulness "is the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences inside the self—body, mind, heart, spirit—and to pay full attention to what is happening around us—people, the natural world, our surroundings, and events (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 112). It works similar to a "*metanoia* or a shift of mind" (Senge, 1990, p. 13), which encompasses a more in-depth learning process that ultimately will turn the change or movement of mind into a reality, promoting growth. The reason is that "you cannot force people to march into the unknown with blind faith or force them to change their mindset, behavior, or way of working" (Anderson & Anderson, 2009, p. 3). Accordingly, a mindset cannot be forced. From my perspective, the authors in one way or another, they consider that mindset requires a free-will shift of mind that, in the end, promotes growth. Mindset is fundamental to disruptive leaders.

In contrast, it is critical to understand that mindset is different from awareness, knowledge, thinking, or emotions and behaviors. Anderson and Anderson (2010a, p. 163) assert the following:

> 1. Metaphorically, awareness is the blank canvas upon which our perception draws our reality. Mindset is the filter through which we perceive, determining what gets drawn and how it is interpreted.
>
> 2. Whereas knowledge can be seen as the content of our mind, mindset is the mental framework that constructs a particular meaning from that content.
>
> 3. No matter what type of thinking (rational, strategic, intuitive, visual, or linear) we are engaged in, mindset is the context within which all of our thinking occurs.
>
> 4. Emotions are the qualitative descriptors you place on the sensations caused in your body by your mindset. (p. 163)

As the authors describe these mindset differences, it is understandable that the results people create in the world coming from feelings, attitudes, actions, and behaviors; are all ingrained in our mindset. Further, if all the results are embedded in the mindset, disruptive leadership is rooted in the leader's mindset.

Requirements for Disruptive Leaders

Awareness

As important as understanding the meaning of mindset and disruptive leadership, is to realize that disruptive leadership implies another essential component, awareness. Anderson and Anderson (2010b), in the book *The Change Leader's Roadmap: How to Navigate Your Organization's Transformation*, argued that "your state of awareness is the greatest determinant of your success as a change leader. Your level of awareness impacts every aspect of your change leadership capability, experience, and outcome" (Anderson & Anderson, 2010b, p. 11). Moreover, the leader's success in the process of change is fundamentally determined by their state of awareness.

Focusing on awareness and, more specifically, self-awareness, Goleman (2000) declared that self-awareness is usually seen as an individual attribute that claims "the ability to read and understand your emotions as well as recognize their impact on work performance, relationships, and the like" (p. 6), while still recognized as being "aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood" (Goleman, 1995, p. 47). Additionally, self-awareness is one of the skills "most necessary to succeed in life" (M. Hughes & Terrel, 2012, p. 47). Stein and Book (2011) described self-awareness as the "ability to recognize how you are feeling, why you feel that way, and the impact your emotions have on yourself and others' thoughts and actions" (pp. 21-22). Day (2018) explored the

idea that "people who are self-aware are far more sensitive… of their own proclivities and are willing to embrace the idea that they need to change, not just the people around them" (p. 124). According to my understanding, self-awareness through emotions is an essential component when describing self-awareness for leaders because it combines thoughts and actions. Besides that, self-awareness reflects both the rational and emotional momentum and the impact on yourself and other people, allowing us to have an awareness of our present and past behavior. These recognitions of rational and emotional balance are indispensable for leaders. In understanding how important it is for the disruptive leader to have awareness, this state of consciousness regarding the impact of their emotions, is directly related to the second requirement—assumptions.

Assumptions

The second requirement for disruptive leaders is how they handle their assumptions. Daft (2011) argued: "the more aware [a] leader is of his or her assumptions, the more the leader understands how assumptions guide behavior and decisions" (p. 137). The role of assumptions is critical for leaders to understand because when the leader is aware of his or her assumptions, it is reasonable for them to see their assumptions as temporary ideas in opposition to fixed ones. Moreover, as seen above, there is a connection between leaders' assumptions and awareness. As a leader's assumptions and awareness are connected, a third requirement, optimism is needed.

Optimism

The third requirement for disruptive leaders is optimism. In brief, Steven J. Stein and Howard E. Book, in the book *The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success*, defined optimism as "the ability to look at the brighter side of life and to

maintain a positive attitude even in the face of adversity […] it involves remaining hopeful and resilient, despite occasional setbacks" (Stein & Book, 2011, p. 208). Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, in his book, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, makes a connection between peoples' successes and failures, claiming that optimistic people see a loss as due to something that can be changed so that they can succeed the next time. On the other hand, pessimists take the blame for failure (Seligman, 2006). Optimism can be seen as the expectation to see the positive side of things tied to the confidence that things will go well (Daft, 2011), which also "can be learned" (Goleman, 1995, p. 89). In The *Emotionally Intelligent Leader*, Daniel Goleman recently wrote that "optimism and organizational commitment are fundamental to leadership – just try to imagine running a company without them" (Goleman, 2019, p. 40). These authors express different aspects of optimism. However, there is a consensus that optimism differs from negativism once optimism reveals the positive side to the people facing a variety of situations and the belief that things will flow well.

Not less important than awareness, assumptions, and optimism, is critical and independent thinking. Being a critical and independent thinker makes the disruptive leader look for adequate solutions.

Critical and Independent Thinking

The fourth requirement for disruptive leaders is critical and independent thinking. Critical thinking is exhibited when the leader determines when to think and act strategically and when to think and act tactically (Stein & Book, 2011); in other words, critical thinking is related to the ability to ask the right questions, identify issues and

problems, and come up with new resolutions (Hughes et al., 2012). As the authors express, the leader who is a critical thinker should be able to ask questions, note the problems, and look for solutions. By these actions, the leader should be able to give directions and promote changes that will impact the organization.

Together with critical thinking, independent thinking is also important for guiding the skillful disruptive leader. Independent thinking means "questioning assumptions and interpreting data and events according to one's own beliefs, ideas, and thinking, not according to pre-established rules, routines, or categories defined by others" (Daft, 2011, p. 138). The connection between critical and independent thinking means "to think independently, [. . .] staying mentally alert and thinking critically" (Daft, 2011, p. 138). People who exhibit independent thinking stand up for their own beliefs and opinions and say what they think regardless of what others may think. Therefore, disruptive leaders should bring the requirements of awareness, assumptions, optimism, and critical and independent thinking to their leadership. The following section explores the strategic leadership and implementation.

Strategic Leadership and Implementation

Several articles, types of research, and books talk about leadership, strategy, planning, and implementation, but none have connected the SDA church to those fields fully as in this study. Therefore, this section attempts to bring enough articles and literature to present a better understanding of the MdX for the SDA-NAD churches.

Strategic leadership "is the province of top management," which generally speaking "is the process of formulating and implementing strategies" (Schellenberg, 1983, p. 19). According to this author, leadership is vital to create and execute strategies.

The original meaning for the word *strategy* comes from the battlefield; it meant "the art of the leader" (Goleman, 2013, p. 213), where the strategy was "how you develop your resources; tactics were how battles were fought" (p. 213). Goleman continued:

> A new strategy means reorienting from what's now business as usual to a fresh focus. Coming up with a radically innovative strategy demands perceiving a novel position, one your competitors do not see. Winning tactics are available to everyone, yet are overlooked by all but a few. (p. 214)

It is confirmed that "as your strategy shifts to address new growth opportunities, the way you work will most likely have to change as well, along with your culture" (Li, 2019, p. 125). However, every new project or strategy that is about to be implemented brings its challenges.

In the book *Resonant Leadership*, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee (2005) asserted that "it takes courage to change patterns that have always worked well, to let the old behaviors and attitudes go and try new ones" (p. 95). No matter how difficult the change can be, the authors argued that it is essential to start with an incredibly motivating vision that can fuel the transformation. Also, there is a high chance that changes will instigate some resistance, which I will come back later in the organizational change section in this chapter.

Furthermore, Duane Ireland and Michael Hitt (1999), in their article titled *Achieving and Maintaining Strategic Competitiveness in the 21st Century: The Role of Strategic Leadership,* defined strategic leadership as "a person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization" (p. 63), setting directions, making important decisions, and rallying the followers or employees (Harrison & John, 2014).

These abilities, which also make disruptive leaders, are required from leaders and their leadership teams in general.

In *The Simple Secret of Successful Disruptive Strategies* book by Li (2019), a statement is made affirming that "disruptive, exponential growth comes only from your customers of tomorrow" (p. 18). While some may confuse and imply that good leadership handles good strategy, disruptive leadership calls for leaders who can disturb an organization's status quo so they can promote or cause change, innovation, and transformation to subsist or grow (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017). These changes, innovations, or transformations are the traits of disruptive strategy, promoted by disruptive leaders.

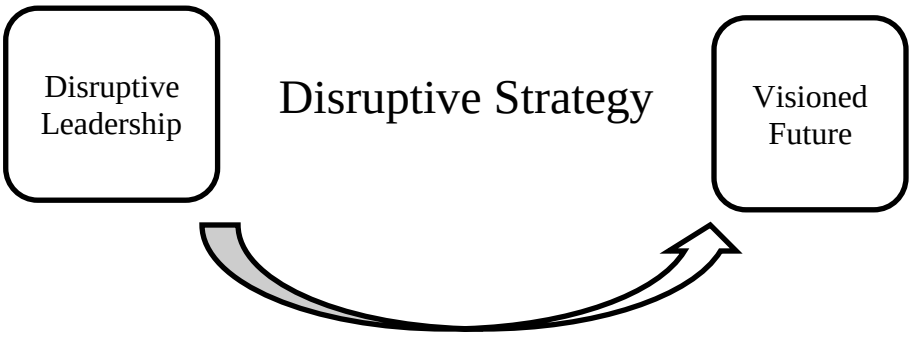
It is essential to connect the strategy to leadership, making it strategic leadership, where "one of the most important responsibilities of a strategic leader is to establish direction" (Harrison & John, 2014, p. 6). Disruptive leadership suggests disruptive strategy in the same way that disruptive strategy demands disruptive leadership (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017). Moreover, the strategic leadership transformation connects disruptive leadership to a newly visioned future through disruptive strategy.

In another article, *Strategic Leadership: The Essential Skills,* by Paul Schoemaker, Steve Krupp, and Samantha Howland (2013) inferred six vital skills for leaders. They present the ability to (a) anticipate, (b) challenge, (c) interpret, (d) decide, (e) align, and (f) learn, allowing them to think strategically and "navigate the unknown effectively" (p. 2). Through these six abilities, leaders may not achieve success following the same path used in the past. Something new and innovative has to happen, which "challenges traditional leadership competencies" (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p.

133). These six abilities also tie to the requirements for disruptive leaders which includes awareness, assumptions, optimism, and critical and independent thinking. The representation of this process is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2

The Strategic Leadership Transformation



Note: adapted from Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p. 133; by Osvaldo S. Santos, Jr.

Regardless of the organization, disruptive leadership in its focus on disruptive strategies cannot grow well towards mission without a "clear viewpoint and framework for the future" (Daft, 2011, p. 396). The author still affirms that strategic leadership is accountable for bringing both the external and internal environment regarding choices on the vision, mission, strategy, and how to execute them well (Daft, 2011). It also conducts evaluation and control (Lussier & Achua, 2013). According to Billington and Ellersgaard (2017), "leaders must develop and strengthen innovative and intuitive competencies to support a disruptive strategy and lead through turbulent times that may describe the world for years to come" (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p. 133). Moreover, leaders need to be aware of their need to develop those competencies.

Those reasonings above are congruent to strategic leadership, where well said that strategic leadership "is the process of formulating and implementing strategies" (Schellenberg, 1983, p. 19). This idea of formulating and implementing strategies connects to MdX, the strategy and reason for this study. For a long time, the NAD has been thinking, planning, and preparing different ways to support the churches focusing on mission. As the MdX was created, it was the right time for the NAD to launch implementing the MdX in some pilot churches as well as get feedback from them that can help to improve the strategy throughout the ten habits implementation. This idea of formulating and implementing strategy is well explained through the Strategic Management Framework.

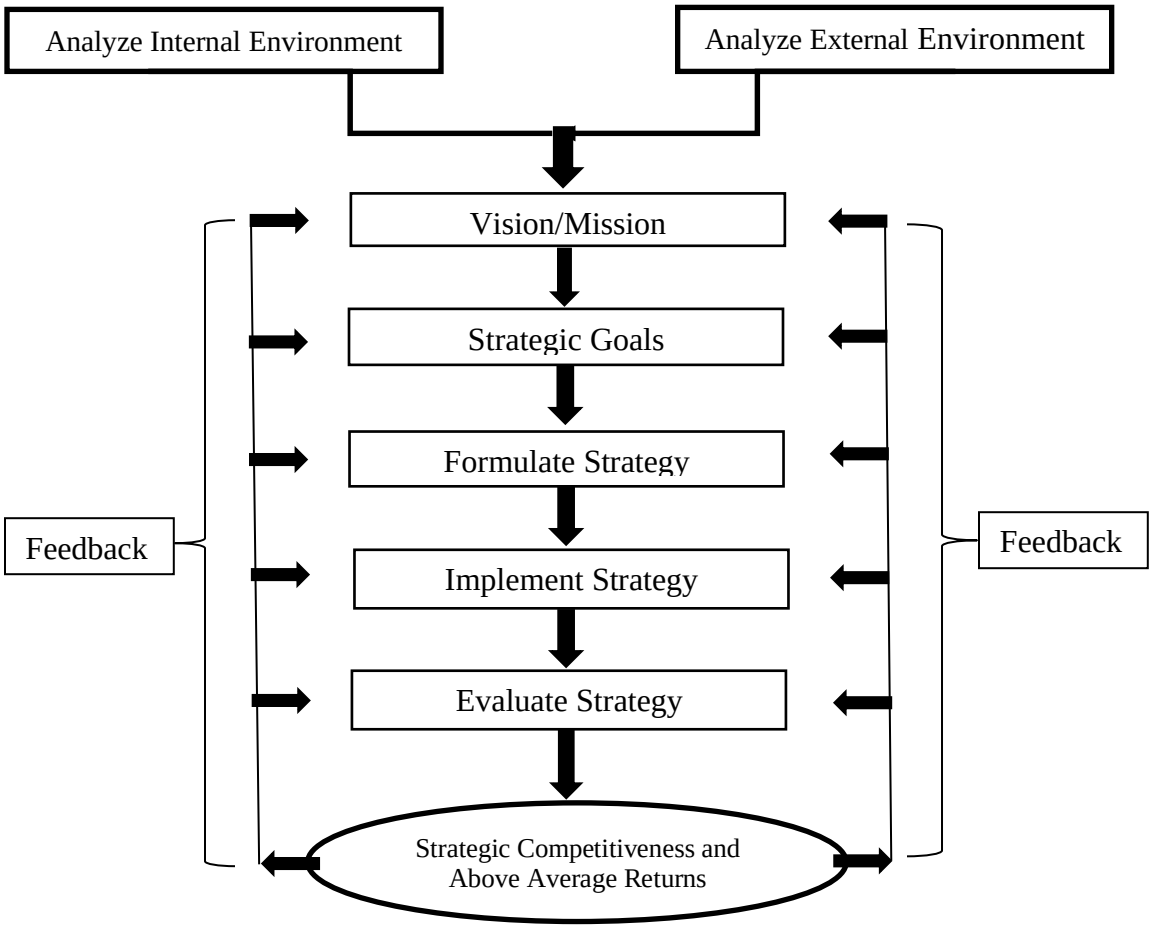
As Lussier and Achua (2013) proposed and illustrated in Figure 3, the Strategic Management Framework is a four-step process that moves an organization through change toward success. The four steps are (a) environmental scanning, (b) strategy formulation, (c) strategy implementation, and (d) strategy evaluation and control.
The first step is environmental scanning. Through this process, the strategic leader detects significant internal and external environmental factors related to the vision, mission, goals, strategy, and organization model (Lussier & Achua, 2013). Connecting it to the MdX strategy, the OSR in the NAD has been studying, planning, and implementing a method that supports churches to be more mission-driven by implementing such a strategy and turning it into a model. Habit #1 through habit #4 represents this first step (see Appendix B).

The second step is strategy formulation. A strategy is the general plan of action that describes how to allocate resources and other activities that may include the

environment and help the organization achieve its goals and vision (Daft, 2011). Strategy formulation is a combination of actions for the organization and its departments (Harrison & John, 2014). Furthermore, it connects to the mission of the organization.

Figure 3

Strategic Management Framework



Note. From (Lussier & Achua, 2013, p. 399)

The mission is not the same thing as a vision; however, they work together. The mission is the companies' core values, the purpose for existence along with the reasons for being, and specifies the basis for creating the companies' vision, being the "glue that

holds the organization together in times of change and guides strategic choices and decisions about the future" (Daft, 2011, p. 406). In general, an organizational mission is "what the organization is" (Harrison & John, 2014, p. 80). The organizational mission is a reality that represents what is, in fact, the organization. The OSR in the NAD has formulated a project that supports churches in how to do mission through culture change and habits implementation towards mission. Habit #5 is envisioning mission (see Appendix B).

The third step is strategy implementation or searching for the ways to get there. You only know if something will work if you try it (Hoque, 2015), and this is the strategy in action. It is not possible to verify if a strategy implementation has value if it "has been poorly or partially implemented" (Hord, Rutherford, Huling, & Hall, 2004, p. 12). You can have excellent and great strategies; however, they are nothing if they cannot be implemented thoroughly and entirely. Strategy implementation "represents a pattern of decisions and actions that are intended to carry out the plan" (Harrison & John, 2014, p. 8) to achieve strategic purposes. The combination of the tools proposed through the strategy may reflect the organization's effectiveness towards the goals.

The MdX strategy is a series of habits that allow the churches to create their small strategies or tactics to fulfill the need and reach success in that specific habit. Paul Brantley stated that "even after the strategy is laid out in writing, strategic and tactical decisions need to be made in executing the strategy" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 115). Based on its history, leadership, and work towards the community, each church might create different strategies or tactics to accomplish the mission in its territory. Habit #6 and #7

are respectively the strategy in writing and aligning departments that submit the top one to three outcomes to accomplish for the year (see Appendix B).

The fourth step is strategy evaluation and control. The authors claimed that this step "compares actual results (outcomes) with expected results (stated objectives), which then provides feedback for necessary adjustments throughout the model" (p. 409). Strategy controls can be created at all levels in an organization. Controls assess the organization's strategy's efficiency of its progress toward goal accomplishments, supporting areas where existing inconsistencies need attention (Harrison & John, 2014). Most importantly is that each level or step of this framework "supports the level above it" (Daft, 2011, p. 397). Habits #8, #9, and #10 represent this fourth step (see Appendix B).

In the MdX strategy, the reason for this study is Habit #10: Becoming a Model – identifying extraordinary Mission-driven organizations is the desirable goal for this project now and in the future. Habit #10 states that "we consistently score high on all the items above, to the point that they are all ingrained habits in our church culture. Our congregation is officially recognized as a demonstration site for missional excellence in action" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, p. 40).

MdX is a strategy that supports the local churches towards mission. The methodology needed for the MdX implementation, explained in Chapter 3, works through qualitative data gathering. The formative research methodology guides this study, examining the strategy's strengths and weaknesses, and providing feedback for improvements.

Organizational Change

Organizational change is entrenched in MdX. The MdX gives the local churches all the tools and support in implementing the strategy. This section helps to understand the connection between organizational change and MdX. Several authors discuss the process of change. Anderson and Anderson (2010a) claimed that leading transformation demands a clear and profound understanding of the change process and a combination of new skills and strategies for the leaders. The authors elaborated on this idea with the following argument: "Leaders must broaden their understanding and insight about what transformational change requires, let go of or build off their old approaches and guide the process of transformation differently" (p. 3). It is obvious that going through the process of understanding the progression of change together with new leaders' skills, an organization will work towards organizational change when it understands its need for change.

Change is "a function of the relative strength of the change forces and resistance forces that occur inside and outside of organizations" (Williams, Kondra, & Vibert, 2008, p. 287). According to Lussier and Achua (2013), many organizations agree, "real change does not start to happen until the organization is experiencing some external threat or imminent danger of significant loss due to internal weakness" (p. 412). Usually, change is the process of turning something into something else, where the latter is the result (Ford & Ford, 1994). This process of transformation from one thing into something else is fundamental when thinking about organizational change and its impact for the organization as a whole. Day (2018) argues that "organizational change is long-term and requires repeated commitment" […] "we are really serious about changing our culture" (pp. 54-55). Organizational change works in both ways, before the change occurs and

after the change is done. No matter the events or situations, the change is there, waiting and happening all the time.

The MdX is a combination of pre-events, processes, and strategies that support the churches towards mission. As MdX works towards specific mission-driven habit's implementation, it promotes change in the churches naturally. The MdX Inventory of Specific Mission-driven Habits (see Appendix B), based on the rating, where rate from 1 [Definitely NOT] to 10 [Absolutely YES], gives the churches a visual positioning of the churches and the need for change. The clarity and originality from the leaders, church leaders, and members on filling out the inventory is crucial to establish what, how, why, and when the change is needed.

The MdX supports churches towards mission with total guidance and resources from the OSR in the NAD. Lussier and Achua (2013) declare that a critical first step in managing change is "to identify and analyze the need for change before embarking on any implementation plan" (p. 411). As the MdX strategy is intended to help and support the churches going through the implementation towards mission, it falls back on the local churches to study and analyze the church rating as a result of the inventory and direct changes. Moreover, the need for change is expected to happen when organizations face different situations that reveal the organization's present experience unsustainable. Nevertheless, change likely opens doors for resistance. I will touch, in the next section, important points on how to overcome resistance.

Resistance to Change

Although resistance to change might be inevitable, it "is caused by self-interest, misunderstanding, distrust, and a general intolerance for change" (Williams et al., 2008,

p. 288), which are crucial points when implementing change. Indeed, when facing resistance, people feel uncomfortable with changes, even with minor ones. On the other hand, frustrations can arise and flourish if the visioned changes are not achieving the results expected.

Resistance to change is seen as one reason that can cause difficulties in implementation since chances of failure exist in the change projects (Erwin & Garman, 2010). People resist change because they fear that it will cost or deprive them of something they value, causing fear of loss. Eric Abrahamson (2000), in his article *Change Without Pain* suggested that change, as customarily planned, makes implementers of change initiatives over-burdened with stress resulting in organizational chaos, which in turn generates resistance from the people involved. The authors above pointed to vital issues or difficulties caused by changes in the organization. It is agreed that when people feel discomfort during the change that resistance is inevitable. Lussier and Achua (2013) presented seven reasons for resisting change:

1. A threat to one's self-interest,
2. uncertainty (fear of the unknown),
3. lack of confidence that the change process will be successful,
4. lack of confidence that change is needed,
5. lack of trust in the leadership,
6. there is a threat to individuals' values. Roberto (2011) claimed that "there is a fear of personal failure as people worry about whether they can succeed in a new environment and whether their power or status will be lost" (p. 24), and
7. fear of being controlled. (p. 417)

Moreover, leaders need to know different ways in how to manage the resistance and offer assistance to the followers in dealing with their dissatisfaction by "setting realistic expectations, demonstrating a high degree of patience, and ensuring that followers gain proficiency with the new systems and skills as quickly as possible" (Hughes et al., 2012,

p. 567). Furthermore, as important as recognizing the resistance, it is crucial to know how to minimize resistance to change, reduce, or eliminate it.

Minimizing Resistance to Change

Lussier and Achua (2013) suggested some guidelines that can considerably reduce resistance during the change implementation process.

> From a humanistic point of view, resistance to change has a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimension. From a cognitive standpoint, there is a rational calculation that change cannot occur unless the forces driving the need for change are stronger than the forces resisting it. From an emotional point of view, the fear of loss (status, position, job, pay, and so forth) and fear of the unknown causes a lot of frustration and anger. Resistance to change as a behavior focuses on the actions of members opposed to the change. (p. 419)

Nevertheless, strategies for diminishing resistance to change focus on organizational members' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral circumstances. Lussier and Achua (2013) suggested six recommendations to reduce or eliminate resistance to change:

1. Transmit to everyone the urgency as well as the need for the change process,
2. demonstrate support and commitment throughout the process,
3. conserve an ongoing communication about the progress of change,
4. give the people the power to implement change,
5. ensure that all efforts are satisfactorily staffed and supported, and
6. advise the people that some necessary adjustments may need to happen, such as retraining, counseling, mentoring, or coaching. (p. 420)

Working with both the need and recognition for change, and reducing or eliminating resistance, are critical factors when discussing MdX implementation. The reason resides in the fact that MdX implies a change in the churches' culture through a set of specific mission-driven habits implementation. The changes occurring through the MdX implementation may cause resistance in some leaders and members based on many different reasons. The following section explores the influence of culture when implementing change.

Organizational Culture

It is possible to define organizational culture as a "system of shared backgrounds, norms, values or beliefs among members of a group" (R. Hughes et al., 2012, pp. 489-490). Culture "is an organized system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral meanings related to one another, society's physical environment, and other cultural groups" (Thomas, 2016, p. 20). Culture, argued Daniels, Radebaugh, and Sullivan (2014), is sometimes an obscure topic to study because "people belong to different groups, based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, work organization, profession, age, political party membership, and income level, and each group comprises a culture" (p. 50). Given these definitions, the authors discuss the culture inside an organization as something that naturally happens because there is no way to detach people from their culture. Thus, culture is a critical point inside the organizations. Due to its importance, it should "not to be overlooked, especially when considering the group dynamics within an organization" (Taylor, 2019, p. 29), which is affected "by the social dynamics of not only the leader but also the followers" (Taylor, 2019, pp. 29-30). Although the culture is a combination of norms, values, and beliefs in a group, both the leader and the followers' culture are affected by both the leader and the followers in their social interactions.

Charlene Li (2019) advised that culture is more than an informal combination of different people and their backgrounds or still a common way to perceive and interpret the jargon 'how we do things in here'. Culture can be displayed by how people share meaning and beliefs that shape how they interpret information, make decisions, and implement actions (Daniels et al., 2014). On the other hand, culture serves two crucial functions inside the organization. First, it promotes integration among members, allowing them to know, relate, and behave to one another, working together effectively. Second, it

guides how to adapt to external environments, achieve goals, and deal with unknowns (Daft, 2011). These two crucial functions presented by Daft (2011) are essential when talking about the cultural impact in the organization. Furthermore, these two crucial functions are essential going through the MdX implementation because the culture is "an important consideration when it comes to implementing change" (R. J. Thomas, 2017, p. 33), and MdX connects different cultures inside the churches.

Given the SDA church's history and shared intense experiences since its formation, "it is argued that the church has a strong organizational culture" (Verhoye, 2015, p. 33). As culture influences change, the MdX strategy attempts to create a new culture in the NAD churches. As MdX is a strategy that supports the churches towards the mission, culture is connected to the MdX implementation since it helps the members work effectively, promoting integration among the departments inside the church. The *Presenter's Manual: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence* argues that the process of transitioning from Church A to Church B "requires a change of culture" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c). When connecting the process of implementation to culture and then to the specific mission-driven habits, the same source declared "we establish a culture in our church by forming good church habits […] as leaders in our church we can bring about culture change one habit at a time" (ibid, p. 19). Working towards and forming good church habits highlights the second crucial point. It makes the church adapt to the external situation, focus on achieving goals, and be prepared to deal with the unknown.

As we advance on this thought of culture, The *Participant's Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence* (2018b) affirmed that "we can think of

culture as deeply ingrained habits of thinking, feeling, and behaving that characterize a group of people" concluding that "as a leader in your church, you can, with God's help, bring about cultural transformation – one habit at a time" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, p. 7). Indeed, going through a process of strategy implementation, the implementation is influenced by culture. As the leader goes through a process of strategy implementation, the leader should recognize the culture and understand the multicultural variety of people or employees, and engage with them to build an atmosphere that "leverages their unique skills and abilities and then model the multicultural experience for all employees" (D. C. Thomas, 2016, p. 14). The point behind recognizing the organization's culture is vital because "culture determines how much disruptive transformation your organizations can create" (Li, 2019, p. 125). This is true because people are attached to their culture, and going through a process of change, the culture impacts how the process is conducted. The authors present sufficient argument discussing on culture once it is a sensitive point inside the organizations.

As important as it is to understand a person, we should first understand the influence of the culture they bring to add value to organizations and relationships. Every person displays some cultural formation based on two specific principles: (a) contact with different cultures, which can be ascribed as raised by culturally diverse parents, or (b) acquired by migrating to a different culture (D. C. Thomas, 2016). Regardless, "culture can fluidly blend the intentions of top leaders with the knowledge and experiences of frontline employees" (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 4). It is worth pointing out that a culture that fosters change boosts organizational performance by motivating employees to work on goals shaping their behaviors according to the planned strategies

(Daft, 2011). So, culture turns out to be an ever-present component inside the organization.

MdX seeks to promote changes in the church's routines and require joint work from different people and cultures. The route towards success is how you, as a leader, bring people together to advance the mission, vision, tactics, and strategy, creating and adding value to the organization. David Thomas stated that "multicultural experience leads to greater creativity. People who have multiple cultural identities (multicultural) are at the top of the list of people with significant multicultural experience" (D. C. Thomas, 2016, p. vii). Furthermore, as the leaders bring multicultural people to work together in an organization, they understand the group dynamics' effect and power, respects and embraces those different cultures working towards the organization's mission and goals.

This section suggests that the correct understanding of the organizational culture is vital to the MdX. Many authors have explored one phrase that connects culture and strategy. Groysberg et al. (2018) wrote, "as someone once said, culture eats strategy for breakfast" (p. 4). Li (2019), who attributes this phrase to Peter Drucker, stated it this way, "culture eats strategy for breakfast every day" (p. 124). Petters (2018), who asserted that this affirmation comes from Ed Shein, MIT professor, generally considered the founder of the culture movement, once said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast" (p. 64). Finally, Denison, Hooijberg, Lane, and Lief (2012), wrote that "without careful attention to aligning people, the strategy is just a plan, and what happens when a new strategy clashes with an old culture? Culture eats strategy for lunch" (p. 50). The *Participant's Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence* presents a similar argument that "culture is a formidable force in the life of the church. Culture trumps logic, rationality,

and good intentions. We could say, “culture eats strategy for lunch” (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, p. 7). As seen above, many authors described not only the importance of the culture to the organization going through a strategy implementation but showed that culture is vital for strategy success at the point that culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch, as well as dinner. For the MdX, culture exerts an imperative role in the churches going through its implementation. Nonetheless, based on the affirmations described above, culture ultimately determines strategy’s success.

Culture of Innovation

Innovation is based on the creative combination among previous and current elements in an innovative and valuable way (Duggan, 2013). Innovation is a process within organizations that require management going through activities such as supporting and stimulating ideas, describing the desired goals, prioritizing projects, communicating better, and inspiring teams (Kuratko, Goldsby, & Hornsby, 2019). Furthermore, the authors claimed that “for organizations to sustain their mission, they must continuously innovate and replace existing products, processes, and services with more effective ones” (p. 9). Innovation is a straightforward process of performing changes, small to considerable, or even extreme. It promotes advancement to operations, products, and services that result in the inclusion of something new for the organization that transfers value to customers and participates in its knowledge store (O'Sullivan & Dooley, 2009). However, there are differences between innovation and creativity, and can be treated separately as explained next:

Innovation is “the ability to create and implement” (MacMillan, 2019, p. 32). In the short term, “innovation = creativity + exploitation” + exploration (Kuratko et al.,

2019, p. 6) where "the most creative idea that is not implemented does not result in innovation," since "innovation requires the ability to see problems in new ways and to know which ideas are worth pursuing" (Thomas, 2016, p. 14). By exploitation, Goleman (2019) argued, innovation requires "concentration on the job at hand, whereas exploration demands open awareness to recognize new possibilities" (p. 89). Creativity plus exploitation plus exploration that creates innovation should be a reality in the life of people and organizations. In reality, to survive the organization needs to work on innovation and be creative.

Teresa Amabile, in her article, called *Motivating Creativity in Organizations: On Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do*, pointed out that the generation, development, and implementation of new and improved ideas occurs when individuals have the expertise, are motivated, and most importantly, think differently (Amabile, 1997). These components, motivation, expertise, and thinking, are critical for a high success level in implementing a strategy.

According to Kuratko et al. (2019), achieving innovation "is not something that you as a manager can simply decide to do, a 'corporate innovation' must be understood by each individual, and there must be a realization that it does not produce instant success" (p. 4). The authors still stated that "it requires considerable training, time, and investment, and there must be continual reinforcement" (p. 4). They further said:

> By their nature, organizations impose constraints on innovative behavior. To be sustainable, innovative thinking must be integrated into the mission, goals, strategies, structure, processes, and values of the organization. The managerial mindset must become an opportunity-driven mindset, where actions are never constrained by resources currently controlled. We call this the "innovative mindset." (p. 4)

Perhaps, the better wording that describes the innovation processes is re-invent, re-think, and do it differently. The MdX implies these actions. Kuratko et al. (2019) indirectly describe the process of MdX in the quote above.

Summary

The literature review showed that the SDA church in the NAD needed a strategy to support the churches towards mission, which instigated the development of the MdX strategy. Chapter 2 presented the rationale for a better understanding of why the MdX is a strategy that involves different church areas such as, church board, committees, and members.

In this chapter, a few topics were explored, such as leadership, strategic leadership and implementation, organizational change, and organizational culture that can be used to understand how important they are and how they can be tied to the SDA as well as the MdX.

Many texts from the Bible as well as SDA literature, books, and manuscripts were used to support advancing mission through strategies. Also, several surveys showed weaknesses in church leaders of planning and implementing strategies. The MdX strategy came to fulfill these weaknesses and help the leaders to plan and implement a long-term strategy in their churches. The qualitative method for collecting data and the formative research methodology used to evaluate the MdX strategy are presented in detail in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and to how it could be improved. The MdX strategy seeks to transform the organizational culture of a congregation by cultivating ten strategic habits. MdX is a strategy to improve the ability of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) local congregation to intentionally reach their communities with the Gospel of hope and wholeness. This strategy has been developed by the Office of Research and Strategy (OSR) of the NAD.

This chapter will first present the research questions, then discuss the study design, which includes the formative research methodology, and the theoretical framework for this study. Next, it will describe the population, the participants, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. The final section considers my role as a researcher, a few methodological issues, and some ethical considerations.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What did the participants testing the MdX find most valuable about the strategy?

2. What did the participants testing the MdX identify as challenges or difficulties with the strategy?

3. What did the participants testing the MdX suggest as improvements to the strategy?

Study Design

This study was conducted with a qualitative research method using a formative research methodology to attend to the purpose of the study. The formative research methodology helped to gain feedback on the strengthens and weaknesses of the MdX and aimed to improve the strategy.

Formative Research Methodology

This study used a formative research (FR) methodology to analyze the MdX strategy and seek insights into how it could be improved. The FR methodology was used because of its systematic and developmental approach to evaluation and improvement which fits this study's purpose. MdX is a combination of processes working together as a strategy towards mission. The FR methodology initially was created as "a kind of developmental research or action research that is intended to improve design theory for designing instructional practices or process" (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 1). According to Kim (2016), design theory is

> A kind of knowledge that identifies the best available methods for accomplishing given goals within given situations, and formative research uses an iterative process of implementing and improving interventions in collaboration with practitioners, thereby making it possible to improve [sic] the design theories in the field. (p. 29)

More specifically, formative research is a methodology used for developing studies to improve a design theory or "develop a new grounded theory for designing

instructional practices or process" (p. 30). Formative research, in this study, was used to improve and fine-tune the MdX strategy. The MdX is a strategy that fits under the category of theory, because MdX was based in the mission-driven theory. Just as EQ Training theory is a systematic way to describe some cause-and-effect phenomena, strategy is similar because it lays out steps and then expects something to happen. Therefore, knowing that strategy and theory follow the same pattern, I felt that this was a very appropriate methodology.

The formative research is guided by three questions: "What methods worked well?" "What did not work well?" and "What improvements can be made to the theory?" (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 5). These three guiding research questions were reflective of the research questions for this study. They furnished a solid theoretical framework and an organized way of uncovering the strengths and weaknesses and further developing the MdX strategy. The logic underlying formative research is to find or "create an accurate application of a model, then any weaknesses that are found in the application may reflect weaknesses in the theory, and any improvements identified for the application may reflect ways to improve the theory" (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 4). Moreover, as stated by the authors, "the methodology has proven valuable for identifying ways to improve [many] theories and models, and it could also be used to improve theories and models in virtually all fields of education" (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 5). Thus, these three guiding questions of formative research are the theoretical framework of the study.

The formative research methodology is a method that has been used in many situations, such as in Smart Schools as "Theory One" (Reigeluth, 1999), a design theory to facilitate systemic change in public school districts (Doblar, 2010; Joseph, 2003), an

Instructional-Design Theory (IDT) for fostering self-efficacy through gamification in a Midwest university (Zurek, 2017), an instructional design model for the design of computer simulation for teaching statistical concepts (Hsu, 2009), as a tool to develop a healthy eating social marketing campaign for low-income families (Mathews, 2017), to improve another existing IDT (Antwi, 2017), to launch a national sanitation campaign in Tanzania (Czerniewska, Muangi, Aunger, Massa, & Curtis, 2019), as an educational design theory for the theory development of an Adventist learning environment design process (Siebold, 2000), among many others. Since formative research methodology has a proven track record as a tested and efficient method in various situations, and since it fits the purpose of this study, which was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses and how it could be improved, the formative research was chosen as the methodology for this study.

Formative Research Procedures

Frick and Reigeluth (1999) recommend four procedures for conducting formative research:

1. Select a design theory
2. Select a case
3. Collect and analyze formative data on the case
4. Offer tentative revisions for the theory

In this study, I adapted these four steps to understand and analyze the MdX strategy. This adaption is reflected in the wording of the following detailed application of four phases to the MdX strategy.

1. Select the strategy

The strategy selected for this dissertation was the MdX strategy, which was also the phenomenon studied.

2. Select a case

The cases studied were the implementation of the MdX strategy in the pilot churches that agreed to participate in the study. The pilot churches launched the MdX strategy by learning a series of habits defined by the strategy. It begins with Habit 1: *Taking Inventory* up to Habit 10: *Becoming a Model*. The MdX Inventory of Specific mission-driven habits assesses the implementation of these habits as "an informal self-rating of [the] church's strategic preparedness on the 10 Habits that make up a Mission-driven Church" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018a, p. 8). See also Appendix B.

3. Collect and analyze formative data on the case

This third phase consisted of collecting both positive and negative feedback on participant perceptions of how well the strategy processes being implemented in the churches, as well as gather suggestions for its improvement. [Any comments about the analysis?]

4. Offer tentative revisions for the strategy

This study was the first in-depth analysis ever conducted on the experience of churches implementing the MdX strategy. The data collected were focus on the MdX

strategy strengths (what should not be changed), and at the same time, looked for its weaknesses (what should be changed), or how it could be improved (Hsu, 2009; Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). As important as it was to analyze strengths, it was also essential to pay attention to the criticism of the strategy's weaknesses, searching for ways and ideas on improving each weakness (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). In summary, the data were collected to answer the study's research questions.

Qualitative Methodology

Formative research methodology can technically use both qualitative and quantitative research methods. However, Frick and Reigeluth (1999) give preference to the use of qualitative research methods for formative research rejecting quantitative research methods such as surveys, experiments, and correlational analyzes, claiming that they "are not particularly useful for improving instructional-design theory, especially in the early stages of development" (p. 2, see also Van den Akker, 1999). Formative research, "which is qualitative in nature" (Chen, 2007, p. 149), gathers data through multiple sources, which improves the data quality and facilitates triangulation in qualitative research (Patton, 2001). These are essential components in a qualitative study.

Kim (2016), identified four characteristics to understand the nature of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research focuses on the meaning, process, and understanding: How people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and the meaning connected to their experiences.

2. Researchers are the primary instrument for data collection and analysis: with the goal of understanding, the human instrument is the ideal pathway to collect and analyze data. It is not less important to monitor the biases when collecting and interpreting the data.

3. The process is inductive: “researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories, rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in quantitative research.

4. The findings require detailed description: “instead of numbers, words, and pictures [that] help learn about the phenomenon. (Kim, 2016, p. 29)

This study exhibits all four characteristics. According to the study’s purpose, and due to its nature of gathering recommendations for improvement, qualitative research combined with the formative research methodology was essential.

Case Study

Formative research shares similarities with case study research. Both methods rely on the researcher’s influence on the situation. As cited in Zurek (2017, p. 74), “a case study focuses on a single instance or example to test or investigate a research question.” Creswell (2013b) defined case study research as:

> A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources (i.e., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

Accordingly, case studies can be classified as designed cases or naturalistic cases to improve an existing theory or develop a new theory (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999) or, in this study, to improve strategy. A designed case denotes “an instance that was created using the design theory, while a naturalistic case refers to an instance that was not designed according to the design theory but has many features in common” (Kim, 2016, p. 30). A designed case intentionally ties the researcher to apply the theory and then evaluate its application. Besides, there are naturalistic cases (in vivo and post facto). It can be “in vivo” if the evaluation is done during its implementation and “post facto” if the review is done after its implementation (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). See Table 2.

In naturalistic cases, the researcher cannot manipulate in any way the situation under investigation. When the investigation is for improving an existing theory, the researcher analyzes the circumstances to determine if the ways have been consistent with the theory, the guidelines they fail to implement, and what valuable elements they have that are not present in the theory. Additionally, a naturalistic case study formatively seeks to evaluate the cases looking for how each element identified might be improved.

Table 2

Kinds of Formative Research Studies

Case Type	For an Existing Theory	For a New Theory
Designed case	A designed case for an existing theory	A designed case for a new theory
In vivo naturalistic case	*In vivo* naturalistic case for an existing theory	*In vivo* naturalistic case for a new theory
***Post facto* naturalistic case**	*Post facto* naturalistic case for an existing theory	*Post facto* naturalistic case for a new theory

From: (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999, p. 5-7)

This study was an *in vivo* naturalistic case to pursue the study's purpose which was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. The project helped to understand the value of the MdX Strategy through the culture of ten habits implementation. The investigation took place while the

implementation was being done. Within this MdX context, the *in vivo* naturalistic case was more appropriate.

Population and Sample

This study's population is found within the 67 pilot churches involved with the MdX implementation in the NAD. A population "is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic" (Creswell, 2013a, p. 142). Thus the population for this study is the pastors and other church leaders within the 67 pilot churches who participated in leading the MdX strategy at their local church. The list of the churches working on the MdX strategy implementation was provided by the Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) for the SDA church in the NAD.

Purposeful sampling was used and data through multiple sources were collected. Describing a sample, Creswell (2013a) stated that "a target population or sampling frame is a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study" (p. 142). Determining the purposeful sampling, of the 67 pilot churches working with the MdX strategy in the United States and Canada, eleven churches were selected from the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada that appeared to be more advanced in their implementation of MdX among the churches in the Conference. Ten of the eleven responded to my call. I had initial phone conversations with the ten pastors requesting an update regarding their implementation. Out of ten churches that responded, six indicated that they were familiar with and actively using the MdX strategy. Three were in some aspect of a decision stage, and one church ignored further attempts to connect and participate in this study. Thus, this study's research sample involved the pastors and elders of six of the 11 pilot

churches located in Canada. This study did not focus on those churches that were still in the decision stage.

The criteria for selecting participants were as follows:

1. All participants belonged to the SDA church and worked in a pilot church implementing the MdX strategy including paid (such as pastors) and unpaid volunteers (such as elders)

2. All participants were leaders in the implementation of the MdX strategy. They were involved and committed to their church and were willing to transform their churches from a "Church A" – busy, event-driven, and barely known in their community, to a "Church B" – a mission-driven church with a passion for excellence

3. The participants had taken the time to inform themselves by reading, examining, and understanding the MdX strategy and at least one or more resources. Among the resources are included the book *The Mission-Driven Church: Understanding the Power of Strategic Thinking and Deliberate Actions* by Dan Day, the book *Becoming a Mission-Driven Church* by Brantley et. al. (2015) and the *Mission-driven Church Tool Kit* that included the *Pastor's Implementation Guide*, the *Presenter's Manual*, the *Participant's Manual* and the USB drive with additional material regarding the strategy and other resources on the mission-driven.org MdX website

4. The participants had participated in the MdX strategy initial training sessions promoted by the Ontario Conference or their local churches.

5. The participants had participated in the spiritual retreats or spiritual journeys promoted by their local churches as part of the pre-events or the processes of the MdX

strategy. Some of the participants should have also attended Paul Brantley's visit, when he explained the MdX strategy before implementation.

Data Collection

The six churches in this study were actively implementing the MdX strategy in Canada. All participants interviewed in this study, including the pastors and church board members, did so voluntarily. Interviews were conducted by phone and videoconferencing. The data were transcribed verbatim using appropriate software, verified their accuracy, and stored directly on my computer, requiring a personal password to access it. All data collected were securely stored until the completion of the study.

The interviews proceeded as follows:

1. The interviews with three pastors (one-on-one) between March 27, 2020, and April 6, 2020, were only audio recorded, and

2. The other interviews (three one-on-one and two focus groups) were conducted and recorded via videoconferencing and audio between April 20, 2020, and May 4, 2020.

Emails received from the pilot churches and their lead pastors as updates from the churches working towards the MdX implementation were collected. The participants contributed by answering the research questions, describing their perceptions, giving a better understanding of the MdX, and contributing with many ideas for its improvement. After all the material was gathered, the information was transcribed, organized, and coded using *Dedoose,* a qualitative analysis software. Themes and patterns were selected to identify and assign to categories of strengthens and weaknesses that helped focus the findings according to the research questions and the study's purpose. Based on the

multiplicity of ideas and the number of times the participants described their experience with the MdX implementation, then, themes, codes, and sub-codes were defined.

During data collection, English was a second or even a third language for many participants. In this case, in order to avoid embarrassing them, their grammar was edited where necessary for grammatical flow or to facilitate understanding of their statements. Still, wherever possible, their opinions were left as expressed to report as accurately as possible their intent, even with the language challenge.

When I contacted the churches, I needed a set of questions to help select the of most informative participants. These questions were:

1. Who is the person that is driving the MdX strategy implementation in the church?
2. What do I need to know to ascertain if the strategy was successfully implemented or not?
3. What do I need to know to determine the processes that worked, did not work well, and what improvements needed to be made to the MdX strategy?
4. Who are the best people inside the churches that I could talk with to get an excellent insight to answer the research questions?
5. How would you suggest I deal with people who have never read the materials, books, and resources but claim to participate in the implementation of MdX?

Steps to Reach the Churches

Below is a list of steps that were followed for reaching out to the churches until the conclusion of the data collection:

1. The Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada leader agreed to contact the churches and pastors implementing the MdX strategy. The churches had to be active in promoting the MdX strategy implementation.

2. After the consent was given, the Assistant to the Ontario Conference President was contacted to obtain a list of the churches and pastors participating in the implementation. The Assistant sent me a list of eleven churches and their pastors already working on the MdX strategy implementation.

3. An email to the pastors from the Assistant to the Ontario Conference President was sent to introduce my name as a researcher for this study and invite them to participate in this study. Also, the Assistant requested their update report regarding their implementation. These documents also contributed to the data collection and further analysis.

4. The pastors were called to confirm their initial commitment and ascertain that their church was continuing with the implementation of the MdX.

5. A text message or an email with a thank you message was sent to the pastors regarding our first conversation and their feedback on the MdX strategy.

6. Due to COVID-19, all travel was prohibited and canceled. The pastors were called and explored their availability (day and time) to be reached for an online interview.

7. The pastors also reached out to the church board members to get a list of those willing to voluntarily participate in a focus group interview. Two pastors sent me a list of names and email addresses of those volunteer church board members.

8. The church board members were called, and the importance of this study for the SDA church was explained to them. They were also told how the study was going to proceed.

9. An email was sent to the six church pastors and the two groups of church board members with the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix H), including the questions that would be discussed in our meeting (see Appendix E).

10. The requested forms were filled out by the participants and returned to me.

11. I conducted one-on-one interviews with six church pastors and two focus group interviews with the church board members (four and five individuals, respectively). It also was asked if they could be reached again if necessary to check a member's response at any time after the comments were transcribed.

12. The participants received a thank you email for their availability and time invested in participating in this study and making me available for any further questions they had.

13. After the transcriptions were completed, the pastors received an email with their individual transcription to check their responses for accuracy. All the participants agreed with the transcription.

Data Collection Methods

This study employed corresponding data collection methods through different procedures to gain information and understanding to improve the MdX strategy. The data collection methods are listed in order of occurrence:

1. Emails
2. Survey

3. One-on-one interviews and focus group interviews
4. Field notes recording limited observation, perceptions, and feelings.

1. Emails

This first data collection method of gathering emails from the churches in Canada had the purpose to be aware on how well the 11 pilot churches were progressing through their MDX implementation. The initial email inviting churches to participate was sent by Pastor Halsey Peat, the Assistant to the President for the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada. The responses from the churches helped paint a larger picture of how all the participating churches were not only committed but working in the MdX implementation.

2. Survey

The participants were asked to complete and send back the *Sample Survey for Demographic Data* by the interview time. The purpose of this survey was to determine the role and level of engagement of participants' connection to the MdX going through the implementation. The survey helped to clarify their role in the church, their interest in MdX, along with their gender, age, race, role in the department. For more details, turn to Appendix D to view the survey instrument.

3. Interviews

The participants came from six different churches. Six pastors participated in one-on-one interviews, and nine lay leaders were divided into two 15s: one group with four, the other with five. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a personal onsite visit to those churches was not possible. Each of the participants from the selected churches had

acquired extensive knowledge of the main processes in the MdX strategy. These participants had invested time in the implementation. Consequently, when they made either positive or critical remarks about the MdX strategy and its resources, I was confident that the comments came from a well-informed person.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand better how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy and how it could be improved. The purpose of including semi-structured interviews in qualitative research for data collection was to obtain in-depth information from participants who have acquired experiences, viewpoints, ideas, and observations about the strategy (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Semi-structured interviews, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), are different from structured ones because:

> Semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a great chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding a preset interview guide, allowing the interviewer to focus more on important things in relation to the study. (p. 579)

Furthermore, interviewing and conversing with the participants is the "most direct and useful way to collect formative data" (Hsu, 2009, p. 68).

I started with broad questions and narrowed them down to fully understand their perceptions of going through the data collection (Williams, South, Yanchar, Wilson, & Allen, 2011). I audio recorded the participants' answers and transcribed them verbatim. While the original design of the study was to do all interviews in-person, however, due to the Covid-19, phone and videoconferencing were used for the interviews.

The types of interviews used in the MdX strategy data collection are as follows.

One-on-one

The one-on-one interview was used to collect information from the MdX strategy's participants. The one-on-one interview is a data collection procedure where conversation occurs with only one participant at a time (Creswell, 2013a). The goal was to generate an honest discussion that addressed the MdX implementation. The interviews took about 25-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded as follows:

Pastor 1 (audio)

Pastor 2 (audio)

Pastor 3 (audio)

Pastor 4 (videoconferencing)

Pastor 5 (videoconferencing)

Pastor 6 (videoconferencing)

All interviewees were male pastors for the SDA church and had been members of the SDA church for 16 plus years. Three pastors with ages of 50 plus years, two between 41-50 years, and one with age range of 31-40 years. Out of these six pastors, two had been pastors at their present church for over 6 years, two in the 3- 5-year range, and two in the range of 0-2 years. There was a mix of ethnicity as Native Canadian, White, African American, and Asian. Before the interview, the pastors were provided with the Interview Protocol (see Appendix E), which contained the questions that guided the interview sessions. I recorded the answers and transcribed them for a better understanding of the data collected.

Focus Groups

An online videoconferencing interview was performed with the two focus groups to collect information from the two pilot churches of the MdX strategy. A focus group interview is a process of collecting data where the conversation occurs with a group of people, usually four to six (Creswell, 2013a). Participation was voluntary, and the selection of the participants was based on the defined criteria established above. This study had two focus groups that lasted about 50 to 90 minutes. The focus group interviews were done in the following way:

Focus group 1 (videoconferencing)

Focus group 2 (videoconferencing)

The group size was four participants in group one, and five participants in group two. The participants were chosen based on their contribution to the MdX strategy implementation in their churches. There were male and female elders with duties in other departments such as prayer ministry, music ministry, personal ministry, treasurer, and sabbath school superintendent. All of them are members of the SDA church for more than 16 years. The majority of them were ages 50 or older. Out of these nine elders, four were in their present church function for over 6 years, three in the 3- 5-year range, and two in the range of 0-2 years. There was a mix of ethnicity as Native Canadian, White, African Canadian, African American, and Asian.

Before the interview, the Interview Protocol was sent to the participants, which contained the questions that guided the interview sessions (see Appendix E). Again, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed them for a better understanding of the

data collected. The goal was to generate an open and honest conversation that addressed the MdX strategy implementation.

Comparing a one-on-one interview with a focus group interview, Patton (2001) indicates that:

> In a focus group, participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need to not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. (p. 386)

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix E). An interview protocol "is a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes of responses from the interviewee" (Creswell, 2013a, p. 225). This protocol included the project name, time of interview, date, place, church name, interviewer, interviewee, and role or position. It also included a brief description of the project, followed by a set of questions to explore how they perceived the MdX strategy, looking for strengths, weaknesses, and collecting ideas for improvements. This set of questions was based on the research questions for this study.

4. Field notes

In my interview with the participants, I took notes to help me to understand if the churches followed the processes and the habits according to the MdX strategy implementation. The purpose was to get as much information as possible that could help me to interpret their facial expressions, feelings, and answers accordingly. Feelings can represent precise data regarding the environment, people, and the situation (Yin, 2016).

Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, only a limited observation was conducted with the interviewees and at the time of the videoconferencing. Observation is

a practice of collecting open-ended and firsthand data by only observing the participants at a research site (Creswell, 2013a). Observing, noted Yin (2016),

> can be an invaluable way of collecting data because what you see with your own eyes and perceive with your own senses is not filtered by what others might have reported to you or what the author of some document might have seen, so they are a form of primary data, to be highly cherished. (p. 150)

Observing attempts to clarify and interpret the answers to questions such as what, who, when, why, and how to implement the MdX strategy. The interviewees' responses were observed, including the pastors in the one-on-one sessions and the church board members in the focus group. During my time with respondents, I considered it essential to watch how they answered the questions, how deep they went in their answers showing knowledge and confidence in their implementation, and how they interacted and interrelated with each other when answering the interview questions.

While going through the interviews, I made written notes when feelings were expressed nonverbally or verbally. I noted how, when, and why they occurred. Thus, instead of being present at the churches with the intention to perform the observation, using videoconferencing, I could get only limited observation going through the interviews. However, the field notes gathered through limited observation, perceptions, and feelings) helped to add more value to their answers and their facial expressions helped to interpret their answers going through the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was achieved through the filter of the conceptual framework using the following steps. Themes and patterns were identified through the consistency of how many times participants responded to the questions viewing under the same description, respectively. I analyzed all the transcripts and defined the themes by the

number of times the participants expressed the same views regarding what was being explored. This identification and classification process helped to better understand how the participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy implementation and how it could be improved. The qualitative method requires quality in the data collection, which results in "much effort in case study analysis… devoted to interpreting data" (Schankman, 2006, p. 82). Qualitative data analysis "is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the masses of data collected" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 135). Therefore, the qualitative data analysis was vital for this study once it brought all the structure into the data collection.

Data analysis occurred in three phases:

The first phase. All the information was gathered, organized, and transcribed verbatim using the Express Scribe software, with the exact wording including "aspects of nonverbal communication such as laughter, pauses, or interruptions" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 136). The data were securely stored on my computer in well-labeled computer files.

The second phase. The data were uploaded into the *Dedoose* software for coding and data analysis by codes and sub-codes. This software helps the coding process, stores and organizes, categorizes and analyzes, visualizes, and discovers data allowing more efficient work.

The third phase. As proposed by Creswell (2013a), to increase the thoroughness and credibility of this formative research, the data were processed through triangulation and member check methods (discussed below).

Methodological Issues

Frick and Reigeluth (1999) address three methodological issues regarding formative research methodology, which other case-study scholars also treat. The three issues addressed are construct validity, accurate data collection and analysis procedures, and the transferability and generalizability of the study. Each of them is discussed in the following sections.

Construct Validity

Many authors address directly or indirectly construct validity. Validation, according to Angen (2000), is "a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research" (p. 387). Furthermore, construct validity, explains Yin (2009), is "identifying correct operational measures for the concepts studied" (p. 40). The credibility criterion implies that the findings have credibility because the data are precise and reaches the researcher, participants, and readers with the same information and interpretation level (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All investigation carries the obligation of persuading oneself and one's audience that the discoveries are based on critical examination (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Newman and Benz (1998) explain that as researchers, "[we] need to have confidence that our test, data or design does indeed measure or reflect what we intend to measure, reflect or produce" (p. 31, as cited in (Scarone, 2014, p. 125). Frick and Reigeluth (1999) suggest various techniques that can enhance credibility: (1) triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), (2) chain of evidence (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), (3) member check (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), and (4) clarification of the researcher's assumptions, biases, and theoretical orientation.

Triangulation

Triangulation is known as gathering data through multiple and diverse sources as "a means of cross-checking and corroborating evidence and illuminating a theme or theory" (Rudestam & Newton, 2007, p. 114), comparing one information with one another (Weigley, 2016). Multiple sources were used, such as interviews (one-on-one and focus group), survey, audio-videoconferencing, email messages, field notes (limited observation, perceptions and feelings), and document analysis. Various sources furnished data points that corroborated the collected evidence. Data collection was done at various points in time (Zurek, 2017). All of these methods combined helped to triangulate.

Chain of Evidence

According to Yin (1984), the study ought to be performed as if somebody is looking over the researcher's shoulder (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012, pp. 109-110) explain that this technique "would include details such as how codes were developed and applied to the data […] methods used to address coding reliability and assess intercoder agreement (many coders involved)." *Dedoose* was the software used to organize the interviews by codes and sub-codes. I read and analyzed all the transcripts and interviews and based on the number of times that the participants referred to the same view in the findings, I chose the codes and subcodes.

Member Check

Member checking is "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2013a, p. 259). After the interviews were transcribed, participants were asked to confirm their responses and check the transcription's accuracy. I sent an email to the participants asking them to

review and clarify any discrepancies that might have occurred during the interview. They reported no changes in the transcripts. This process allowed me to correct errors and misconceptions and ask additional questions to clarify the information (Lee & Reigeluth, 2003). In doing that, a better understanding of their perception was reached regarding the meaning of what they had said through the interview.

Researcher's Bias

To diminish the researcher's bias, another technique that strengthened credibility was to share the analysis of the data and the findings with other professionals, who confirmed that the data collected from the participants was satisfactorily reflected in the conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). As a researcher, I had to clarify my understandings and biases that I brought to the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Weigley, 2016), and did my best to not allow anything to influence the interpretation of the data collected.

Rigorous Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

To ensure thorough data collection and analysis procedures, I aimed at (a) the completeness of the data (thoroughness) and (b) the accuracy of the data (credibility) (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). To ensure completeness of the data, Frick and Reigeluth advocate several technics that include: preparation of participants in advance, an emergent data collection process, gradually lessening obtrusive, iteration until saturation is reached, and increasing the method based on its strengths and weakness. To ensure accuracy, I used various techniques: triangulation, chain of evidence, and member checks (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999), as explained previously.

Transferability and Generalizability of the Theory

Transferability indicates to the extent to which the qualitative research results can be transferred or applied to other situations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the reader, the generalizations were based on the amount of information received through the study where the findings can be applied to another situation. Other studies can receive insights coming from this study. Accuracy within formative research was expanded by improving how the results can be generalized to the theory (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999). Two significant strategies helped to attend this generalizability to the method: (a) recognizing situationality and (b) replicating the study.

Recognizing Situationality

To investigate situationality, Frick and Reigeluth (1999) affirmed that it could be done in at least two ways:

1. At whatever point, you discover different outcomes in different rounds (iterations), seek to find the differences in the situation. This study consisted of one round of data collection covering the MdX strategy in two steps of its implementation: interactive data collection (during its application) and non-interactive (after its application). For this study, only one round of data collection was done at this time; however, the OSR for the SDA church in the NAD could be interested in conducting further research.

2. Intentionally shift components of the situation in your rounds of data collection to examine if the results, by chance, are going to diverge. Once NAD conducts further research on the MdX, this second method will be possible.

Replication of the Study

When a study is replicated, it strengthens the formative research methodology (Frick & Reigeluth, 1999; Zurek, 2017). This study is the first known attempt to fully evaluate the MdX strategy. Therefore, this study's results need to be considered preliminary results that may need to be replicated in further studies.

Self as the Research Instrument

Because in qualitative inquiries, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering all the information and processing and analyzing them, I am sharing a few things about myself that have influenced me, and at the same time, that gave me direction to my research. I am originally from Brazil. I also have a Canadian citizenship and am pursuing an American citizenship. Working and studying in three different countries such as Brazil, a developing country, Canada, and US, first world countries, I could learn and experience different ways on how to deal with diversity as well notice different kind of leadership. I am experienced in duties that have included CEO for big companies, bank vice president, and church leader among others.

I will look at three main periods that have contributed to my development as a researcher. These periods are tied to my three directions of leadership, where I bring experiences to this research being a musician, businessman, and church leader.

Musician

There is no way to be a musician and not to be an observer; music touches all the senses. At an early age, my parents enrolled me in piano classes. Music is culture, satisfaction, love, history, perception, and lifestyle, but for me, it was more than that; it became my passion. Music powerfully touches and moves me, unlike other forms of

communication. The desire to play an instrument is not enough; it requires self-discipline, perseverance, persistence, and determination. From November 2003 until the present, I have held the music school director and music teacher's position. This area gives me the chance to teach music and coach, mentor, train people and teams, and extend my knowledge to lead people and promote, manage, and develop my business.

As a church music ministry director and pianist, I assumed creating and preparing, directing, coordinating, and producing musicals and music programs for the SDA church and communities in three countries. My main reason was to show Jesus and preach the gospel to them through the songs we sang. My understanding and vision are that through gospel songs, we can talk, sing, and share many aspects that not only reflect Jesus Himself but through the songs, we can change lives and let them know more about Jesus and His ministry. Observation is the fundamental skill to interpret and act towards musical decisions. Thus, music has helped me to be a constant observer, in addition to leading and teaching.

Businessman

I started my business career at Citicorp, a multinational bank in Brazil. During my time working for Citibank, I pursued my bachelor's degree in Business Administration, followed by a Specialization in Finance, and two years after completing my Bachelor's degree, I graduated with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA). I worked in a few bank areas until I was promoted to be the President's assistant and responsible for the Southern Region's MIS (Management Information System). I also actively participated in conferences at the headquarters office in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. We discussed new ideas in those corporate conferences regarding new strategies, technology,

marketing, quality, human resources, and sales to make Citibank the most reliable bank in Brazil. I developed the target distribution for the Southern Region, which was extended to all 21 branches. I also had opportunities to work as a sales manager for personal bank and business accounts.

After my years with Citibank, I worked for the Montalve group in several areas, including the financial manager, general manager, and the Montalve's Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and a Volkswagen car dealership in Parana, Brazil. As the CEO of the car dealership, I was able to restructure the company in all areas. I had the privilege of applying my leadership skills to elaborate a vision and connect it to its strategies and goals. As a result, in 1999, the Montalve dealership was chosen as one of the best car dealerships in all Parana states and was featured as a model dealership. From my perspective, there is no way to reach success without being an observer. In these leading and observing situations, my roles shifted back and forth as a participant and a participant observer.

Church Leader

My third area was developed as the Assistant Pastor and church leader. From April 2004 to June 2012, I held the position of Assistant Pastor, first elder, church leader, and music minister of the Westchester Luzo-Brazilian Church in Mount Vernon, New York. A church that belongs to the Greater New York Conference. As the Assistant Pastor, I faced many situations where people came to the church for various reasons. Some people came to church only to get some food or personal needs showing they neither had nor wanted a commitment to the church, the pastor, or its members. On the other hand, many people came to church looking for a place where they could feel

satisfied and comfortable. Still others still came only to get some spiritual needs met or seek prayers that could give them some relief. In all those circumstances, I was able to help them when they were there looking for something that could make a difference in their lives.

On many occasions, I could show the people in need our values and spirituality as a Brazilian church community. Among my duties, I (a) was recruited to lead the church choir, (b) was appointed First Elder and the Assistant Pastor with counseling roles for personal and cultural challenges, (c) developed and hosted multiple, complex holiday music programs, and (d) was appointed spokesperson and charity program manager to the surrounding community.

As an assistant pastor, I observed the need to have better strategic planning in the SDA churches to help them be mission-driven churches focusing more effectively on mission accomplishment. My role was connected to this study's purpose to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. The project helped to understand the value of the MdX Strategy through the culture of ten habits implementation. Discoveries were made regarding the strengths and weaknesses that anticipated challenges that could improve the MdX strategy. Creswell (2013b) clarified that researchers "do not use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers" (p. 45) since the researcher's suppositions and convictions can impact how the data are collected and analyzed (Antwi, 2017). As a former assistant pastor, I put aside my experience and expectation as a church leader and focused on interpret the data

in a way that could eliminate any bias or reference to my church roles. Thus, my interest in this study resonated with the desire to have a refined, focused, practical, and committed mission-driven church. The kind of church that would work to accomplish the mission following steps or processes as presented in the MdX.

Ethics – IRB Approval

Creswell (2013a) stated that "in all steps of the research process, you need to engage in ethical practices" (p. 23). This research involved human participants. Therefore, I had to ponder ethical issues to protect and preserve the participant's privacy, the gathered data, and take some research precautions throughout the study. The protection of both the respondents and the information is the researcher's responsibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

First, this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Andrews University. To approach and access the participants' websites, permission was formally requested from a human subjects review board, a campus committee that reviews the research study to avoid potential harmful impacts on and threats to the participants (Creswell, 2013b). The dissertation proposal was defended to the dissertation committee and then submitted to the IRB for approval following its guidelines. This proposal included a summary of the context, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions. This study's background was also given through an overview of the literature review, and the proposed methodology. The IRB approval letter allowed me to move forward with the study and collect data. Refer to Appendix F.

Second, a letter of endorsement to the OSR in the NAD was requested and received (see Appendix G).

Third, I explained to the participants that I had to "protect the anonymity of the informants" (Creswell, 2013b, p. 174). Their voluntary cooperation was essential to the study. The purposes and processes of how we would work through the data collection were explained. Ethical considerations also included the "expectation of confidentiality" (Bayer, 2017, p. 75), which means that I treated all the information respectfully and confidentially.

Fourth, the participants read and signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix H). All data collected was securely stored, and only the researcher has had access. All data will be deleted after the study is done.

Summary

This chapter presented the rationale for using a qualitative method design and the formative research methodology to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. I used these methodologies for data collection and data analysis following the three research questions. Because this study is aimed at gathering recommendations for improvement, a formative research methodology was essential for evaluation and improvement of the MdX strategy which was shown to have the structure of a theory. The analysis focused on the strengths (what worked well) and weaknesses (what did not work well) of the methodology, looking for improvements (better ways to implement the strategy).

A complete and robust data collection was performed using a qualitative methodology, which helped to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, the MdX. On the other hand, the formative research methodology helped identify the strengthens and

weaknesses, making suggestions for its improvement. Accordingly, participants were enabled to share their experiences with the MdX implementation and reflect on those experiences in a free and open-ended climate.

Participating in this MdX implementation, the church board members and pastoral leadership had to have resilience during the project implementation and the newly acquired culture to accomplish the mission. Therefore, my perspective was that through the implementation, the churches would concentrate more diligently on strategic planning and implementation, which in turn would give direction on how to reach more people with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness. In Chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The MdX Strategy

The purpose of this study was to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. The project helped to understand the value of the MdX Strategy through the culture of ten habits implementation. MdX is a strategic approach to focus the energies and activities of local churches towards their true God-given mission to share the Biblical Gospel of hope and wholeness with their communities. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings of the perceived strengthens of MdX, the challenges and difficulties that churches faced in the implementation of MdX, and possible improvements suggested by the leaders interviewed.

Data Sources

The findings are based on data that came through a combination of the multiple data sources that included the six one-on-one interviews and two focus groups, survey, audio-videoconferencing, email messages, field notes (limited observation, perceptions, and feelings), and document analysis. I read and interpreted the interviews' transcripts and the surveys intensively. I watched the videos many times, and I read and analyzed the

emails message and documents available that speak to MdX. Each of these data sources contributed to the findings of this study.

Emails: As soon as I had permission to perform the research in the Ontario Conference, Pastor Halsey Peat, the Assistant to the President, sent an email to the 11 pilot churches' pastors requesting an update on their MdX strategy implementation. Through these emails I could get some earlier feedback and insights about how they were using and implementing the MdX strategy. Emails set in research question 1 and 2.

Survey: The survey was important because I could have a mix of information from the pastors and church leaders such as gender, age, race, church member for how long, role at the church, how long each participant was participating in the department, and the purpose for participating in this research. The survey helped me to understand the scenario in regarding the participants and their roles going through the MdX implementation.

Audio-videoconferencing: I could only perform the interviews through audio and videoconferencing once due to Covid19, travels were not allowed. Audio-videoconferencing fits in all three research questions.

Interviews: Contributed to all three questions. One-on-one interviews were powerful in describing in great detail all the most important facts that the church had going through the MdX implementation. The pastors were the participants on this kind of interview. On the other hand, focus group gave a different approach as people built on the ideas together, they started to refine the most relevant points going through the set of interview questions.

Field notes: Contributed to all three questions. However, due to Covid19, traveling was not allowed. Thus, using videoconferencing, I could get some field notes through limited observation, perceptions, and feelings, where all three methods helped me to understand better the participant's answers going through the interviews. The limited observation also helped to add more value to their answers, and their facial expressions helped to interpret their answers in the interviews.

Document analysis: Contributed to all three questions once they elevated my level of knowledge making me more prepared to conduct the research. Before I performed the research, I read and analyzed all possible MdX strategy material available such as books, the MdX kit, and websites.

The interview and focus group findings were based on data obtained through six, one-on-one interviews with pastors of participating congregations in the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada and two focus group interviews with nine congregational lay leaders of those same churches. The interviews asked participants to describe their experience with MdX implementation. Together with the description given by each participant, a thorough discussion was brought up by the participants that supported and explained their experience. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using *Dedoose*, a qualitative research software program. This process allowed me to capture the participants' perspectives and understand their thinking and experiences more fully. A set of interview questions were used based on the research questions (see Appendix E).

The findings presented in this chapter result from analyzing the recorded conversations, recurring coding themes, and subthemes that emerged during the reading

and rereading the transcripts, and the repeated listening of the interviews. Originally, my first round of analysis produced six themes for research Question 1, five themes for Question 2, and six themes for Question 3. Also, I found a variety of sub-themes for each theme discovered at first. On my second round of analysis, I found commonalities among the themes. These I synthesized, and they developed into three themes for each research question.

Particular attention was paid to recurring ideas and similar viewpoints in participant's descriptions of their experiences with implementing MdX in their churches. Repeated ideas were captured as themes and assigned to one of the research questions.

Overview of MdX

First described are the main features of the MdX strategy introduced to the Ontario Conference's participating churches. While the MdX strategy is detailed in chapter 2 of this study, this section recalls its primary attributes. Paul Brantley, the Director of the Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) in the North American Division (NAD), is the key architect of the MdX strategy. One of the materials calls MdX a strategy stating that it is a "strategic process, rather than a program, that can flexibly accommodate various tools, resources, and approaches for advancing mission" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018b, p. 8).

Accordingly, to implement MdX, the churches needed to participate in a series of pre-events or processes "to set the stage." This stage consisted of several activities to be completed before launching MdX as a strategy, such as (a) ordering the book *The Mission-Driven Church: Understanding the Power of Strategic Thinking and Deliberate Actions* by Dan Day and the book *Becoming a Mission-Driven Church* by Brantley et al.,

(2018); (b) receiving coaching services through MdX consultants; (c) ordering the *Pastor's Implementation Guide* as well as the *Presenter's Manual*; (d) copying the *Monthly Rollout Calendar* that is a timeline with things to do during the twelve months; (e) launching a Mission-driven weekend rollout with a Sabbath sermon and a weekend of inspiring worship services and workshops; (f) presenting mission moments during the monthly board meeting to make mission the first item on the monthly church board agenda (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018b), and (g) taking the MdX Inventory of Specific Mission-driven Habits (see Appendix B), which is the first of the "ten habits" of the MdX strategy. These pre-events or processes can be seen as an organized set of tactics to prepare a church to accomplish its mission by implementing the necessary MdX steps to maximize the expected results.

The MdX introduces congregations to two types of churches, simply called Church A and Church B. The first, Church A, "has good people and busy departments, but they're fragmented. Church A is preoccupied with tradition, church politics, social life, ego, apathy, and a crowded church calendar. All of this distracts Church A's leaders and members from [the] mission" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). According to Brantley et al. (2015), Church A has a series of activities such as:

> 1. Meeting agendas start with and are driven by activities, events, and problems, 2. Busy, cluttered, overloaded calendars, 3. Too much time spent reacting to urgent matters, resolving crises, and solving problems, 4. Lack a clear, unified focus, 5. Staff assessment and growth systems are weak or non-existent, 6. Silos; officers' work performed mostly in detachment from that of other church departments, 7. Look inward; most church operations center on church members, and 8. Little interest/time to document impact; decision-making relies on impressions and anecdotes. (p. 102)

On the opposite end, is Church B, which is "strategic in accomplishing their mission. The congregation does not rely on luck, chance, or even the pastor's sermons or charisma.

They're intentional, disciplined, and passionate. They are motivated to work hard because they share a common, compelling mission" (p. 8). Brantley et al. (2015) describe this "Church B" as:

> 1. Meeting agendas start with and are driven by mission, 2. Do fewer things – but do them well, 3. Systematically improve processes before they become problems, 4. A written strategy provides focus, 5. Assessment and growth are strong; the church sees people as central to its mission, 6. Work largely done by teams and based upon the initiative at hand, 7. Look outward; church activities are planned with the community in mind, and 8. Are accountable – they are diligent in measuring and reporting results. (p. 102)

The MdX strategy basically consists of moving a church from a typical church (Church A) to becoming a mission-driven church (Church B.) Thus, MdX "is a simple, step-by-step strategy for creating Church Bs" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 8). To support that transformation process, Church A has to learn to implement the ten habits of MdX designed to help it become a Church B. The ten habits are as follows:

Habit 1: Taking Inventory

Habit 2: Making Spirit-filled Commitments

Habit 3: Checking Climate

Habit 4: Developing Leaders

Habit 5: Envisioning Mission

Habit 6: Strategy in Writing

Habit 7: Aligning Departments

Habit 8: Accomplishing Mission

Habit 9: Accessing Impact

Habit 10: Becoming a Model

There is a series of activities for every habit that can be tactics or the church's own strategies that the church has to implement so the habit is achieved successfully. These habits to be followed are the core of the project that needed to be implemented by the churches. The implementation tools and the resources suggest a series of activities for every habit that begins when the churches assess their current level of the reality that anticipated their desire to implement the MdX.

The Strengths of the MdX

This section presents the findings addressing the first research question: What do participants testing the MdX [in their churches] find most valuable about the strategy? These findings were obtained through a combination of the multiple data sources that included the six one-on-one interviews and two focus groups, survey, audio-videoconferencing, email messages, field notes (limited observation, perceptions, and feelings), and document analysis. After analyzing the resulting transcripts in *Dedoose*, three themes emerged: (1) MdX is a uniquely Adventist approach, (2) MdX provides concrete steps toward actions, and (3) while MdX at first appears to be simple, it takes time to sink in, affect long-held habits and traditions, and ultimately change attitudes. In each theme, I am attempting to give the participants a voice and let them speak for themselves.

Theme 1: MdX Is Uniquely Adventist

In my conversation with the 15 participants and getting their input about their experiences with the MdX implementation, the MdX was seen by several participants as a strategy that was unique to Adventists of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. MdX represented a more contemporary and better format to accomplish the mission that

combined efforts from the North American Division (NAD) office and churches. There was no similar strategy presented from the NAD/SDA to the churches, and for this reason, the participants were excited to work on a project that the SDA church created and owns fully.

This theme resulted in several sub-themes: (1) Adventist-owned, (2) Helpful growth-oriented SDA tool, (3) Paradigm shift for SDA churches, and (4) Strategic church planning for SDA churches. In the first theme, MdX is uniquely owned by the Adventist as seen in Table 3.

Adventist Owned

MdX seemed to be a project created and owned by the SDA church, making it uniquely Adventist. It appeared that there is nothing similar in the North American SDA market. When participants talked about what they had experienced in implementing the MdX, they were struck by the fact that it was an Adventist approach produced and supported by the Adventists churches. It was a new initiative that the NAD took to help and support the churches to work locally and accomplish their mission. In their perception, MdX, in its Adventist language of mission, gave a sense of ownership and revitalized the mission outlook of the SDA churches towards mission.

Several participants noted that MdX seemed to be a unique strategy entirely owned by the SDA. Participant #2 said: “The [MdX] strategy that Paul Brantley is providing is something unique [for Adventists].” For some, it seemed the MdX strategy was seen as something never done before, and they appreciated the fact that it was produced and entirely owned by the Seventh-day Adventist church. Participant #6 expressed: “What I like about the strategy is that it is SDA, straight off.”

Table 3

MdX Is Uniquely Adventist

Sub Themes	Description
Adventist-owned	Produced by Adventist A new Adventist initiative towards mission Uses Adventist language of mission Revitalizes the mission outlook of the SDA church Enables churches to feel supported by the SDA church structure There is nothing similar in the NAD-SDA churches
Helpful growth-oriented SDA tool	A tool to fulfill the mission of the church A new framework for the churches to focus on mission Encourages growth in quality Encourages growth in spirituality MdX focuses and supports the church towards mission accomplishment
A paradigm shift for SDA churches	Requires a shift in thinking about church life Requires the application of a strategy Requires churches to own their mission strategy Requires a different kind of leadership
Strategic church planning for SDA churches	Provides a starting and ending point Provides a straightforward way to work on mission Promotes ways to become a Mission-driven church Provides a strategy to get the churches onboard Provides a strategy with pre-established goals

In fact, when I was talking to one of the participants and written in my field notes, I recognized his excitement by the fact that the MdX was mentioned as owned by the SDA church in NAD, using the church's own language. Furthermore, through his words, perceptions, and feelings I was reminded of this moment throughout the interview.

Participant #3 was excited about MdX endorsed by the NAD to revitalize the mission as the SDA church supported it. He said: "MdX our own, SDA. That it is North American Division endorsed. In fact, it gives me as a pastor the authority to speak to my

board and say [that] our Church in the NAD is revitalizing the mission." The fact that the MdX is uniquely Adventist, a strategy supported by the SDA church structure, and nothing similar was found in the NAD-SDA churches, was seen as a very positive strength. These participants were excited when talking about the MdX because it seemed to bring a feeling of ownership.

Helpful Growth-Oriented SDA Tool

Besides being uniquely Adventist, MdX appeared to be a new SDA tool that comprises a new framework for the churches to focus on mission. The participants expressed their encouragement when MdX was presented because they could visualize the church's quality and spiritual growth.

According to the participants, MdX seemed to be a helpful growth-oriented SDA tool that focuses and supports the churches moving towards mission. Exploring further with the participants, they were asked how they would describe MdX to someone that had never been exposed to it. Here are some of those responses: "[MdX] is another tool to help the [SDA] church to fulfill its mission" (Participant #2). Participant #6 said: "[MdX] gives a framework for Adventist churches around the world not necessarily to look the same, but to have a common strategy, or a common way of doing mission." So, "it provides a framework for ministry, from a pastoral level, and a lay person's level [to focus on mission]."

Participant #3 elaborated on the framework and its usefulness as a tool to help churches towards accomplishing their mission when he declared:

> What steps do we need to take to get there? So, [MdX] gives the format. You see, it doesn't tell the church what its strategy should be. It doesn't tell the church what its vision should be. It simply keeps [the] church accountable to

> have a vision, to have a strategy. Not to be asleep. Not to play control games, but to actually get involved and do the work.

Several participants were excited about how the MdX gave the impression of focusing more on quality work inside the church, members' churches, and their spirituality. It seemed that MdX was found and perceived as a strategy that gave the churches a pathway to grow in different areas. Participant #3 said: "Our [SDA] church has produced a tool that helps its churches to grow in quality as well as spiritually. And this is a curriculum that keeps you and your team accountable for the process." Participant #6 voiced: "[MdX] provides a focus and quality work. It provides a way of getting the mission accomplished along with a growth in spirituality."

Going further, it seemed that the participants perceived that MdX focused on quality work and supported each other towards mission accomplishment turning the churches into Mission-driven churches. Participant #6 expressed: "It also creates a situation [where] there can be dialog at the church board at the same time critical, not in the negative sense, but critical and evaluative focusing on the mission and everything we do."

These participants described the MdX as a helpful tool that seemed to support the churches in implementing the MdX focusing on mission. They also saw how MdX helped the churches grow in quality work and, most importantly, their individual spirituality.

Paradigm Shift for SDA Churches

MdX requires four components to work on mission:

1. A shift in thinking about church life
2. The application of a strategy
3. Churches to own their mission strategy

4. Different kind of leadership

These four components combined produced a paradigm shift inside the SDA churches as described by their pastors and elders.

Participants described MdX as a paradigm shift that seemed to move churches to a new thinking and practice about church life. Participant #7 expressed it this way: “The MdX is an excellent concept. It is a paradigm shift from what churches do nowadays.” This participant expressed how encouraged he was to see his church working quite differently than the church’s past days.

It seemed that the churches have some freedom as MdX is an approach to mission-based principles applied to all churches. Furthermore, while giving churches this approach to mission-based principles, it also can denote guidance on how to work strategically. As a point of observation, the churches have the freedom to apply the principles of MdX in their own unique way. What MdX provides is strategic focus on the Biblical mandate that churches are on earth to accomplish God’s missionary purposes. In addition, MdX is tailored to the Adventist governance structure. Thus, the churches have a lot of freedom to choose how they want to work focusing on their mission. Participant #6 underlined the Biblical dimensions emphasized by MdX when he said: “I think that the MdX is not just Seventh-day Adventist. It is [totally] biblical.”

Participant #6 emphasized and highlighted the Adventist governance structure, which MdX recognizes. He said: “It is a lot different from other [non-SDA] churches. We [SDA] have a way of governance that mission-driven excellence takes into account.” While recognizing the importance of pastoral leadership, MdX can make churches less dependent on a specific pastor. Because the pastor in an Adventist church can be moved

to another church, shifting its mission strategy to the local church helps to ensure more continuity of the church's mission. Participant #6 continued and expressed: "For me, as a pastor, I can be moved to another church, and I can say, what is your mission. As an administrator, I can see what the churches' missions are and say: Which person fits this sort of mission that the church is involved in?"

Besides MdX being uniquely Adventist, there was an understanding that the MdX was not a program but a strategy that any SDA church could adopt. Participant #1 said: "[MdX] is strategic church planning, an action plan, to prepare the church to have a mission. It is not a program; it is unique. It is our [SDA] strategy, a strategy that people can use and apply in any church."

The participants reported that MdX can make the local church and leaders accountable for using and implementing MdX, as well as requires churches to own their mission strategy. Participant #3, in an email message, said: "This model gives a comprehensive format for accountability on pursuing excellence." Other participants seemed to emphasize that leaders should be willing to implement MdX as a priority and be accountable for its success. They saw that the success of MdX was tied to local church leaders as it invoked a different kind of leadership. Participant #6 saw this dynamic at work when the church was engaged in lay leaders' annual nomination process. He said:

> I waited for the official launch of the nominating committee process. And while we were doing the nominating committee, I was thinking about: Would this person be more interested in their own thing, or would they be willing to come on board with what we are trying to accomplish in mission-driven excellence? It also became a part of the criteria for the new leadership.

Some participants noted that MdX, at some level, seemed to require a different kind of leadership which looked crucial to the implementation. Not only leaders that are

accustomed to the church, but leaders that can visualize the strategy to do mission and are open to work tirelessly for God's cause.

Participant #4 perceived changes in the leadership when there was a difference among leaders that shared MdX knowledge. He said, "I see the church as everyone being a leader. But I think that we rob the creativity of the church when a select few are always the ones giving information." He explored his way of thinking in the following:

> Because what if leadership is not trusted? So, you have been around long enough to know that there is often a perception of whether leaders can be trusted. What is the underlying agenda behind it, etc.? Now, when you have a cross mix of different individuals, the leadership perception changes.

MdX may require a different kind of leadership and leaders who can invest more time into their ministries and departments with their SDA membership. This point about time invested seemed to raise issues for some churches. Participant #12 said: "It places [more significant] requirements and a greater amount of time on the ministries and department leaders. The nominating committee has difficulty finding leaders because we want to put more responsibilities on those leaders now.

Despite similarities regarding the type of leadership that the churches should work on, Participant #14 described the kind of leader the church was expecting to have. She said: "The pastor wants us as elders to become more disciple-oriented. To disciple other churches [and members], and to be mentors for them. So, encouraging leadership is an important part as well."

A paradigm shift for SDA churches can require a shift in thinking about church life. The application of a strategy, churches developing their own unique mission strategy, as well as different kinds of leadership, were all seen as essential factors contributing to the churches' paradigm shift. All these requirements combined seemed to

have encouraged new leaders to invest more time and incited the desire to work in their departments and ministries according to the strategy.

Strategic Church Planning for SDA Churches

MdX provides strategic planning that brings the starting and an ending point and a discernable way to work on mission. MdX promotes ways to become a Mission-driven church as it turns the churches into a strategic church mentality that gets the churches onboard working through pre-established goals.

Several participants saw the MdX as a strategy that focused and supported the churches towards mission accomplishment. MdX seemed to promote churches' new ways to become a Mission-driven church of excellence, while at the same time supported a strategy to get the churches committed. Participant #10 said: "I believe the MdX is a fully designed strategy with a starting, middle, and ending point that will help our churches to get on board. A strategy where all leaders can come together and envision how [the] church can be mission-driven." This way of thinking presented by the participants seemed to be tied to a new mindset inside the churches once it inspires the churches to become mission-driven.

MdX gave the impression to be a strategy with pre-established goals. This was an essential point that Participant #9 described. In fact, Habit 6 is a strategy in writing. In this strategy, the departments bring their goals to write them down as a church strategy. She said: "So, [it is a strategy with pre-established goals], where all leaders work altogether supporting [each other] to achieve [the goals], instead of working [separately]." In doing this, the MdX appeared to provide a straightforward and

transparent way to work on the mission. MdX helped and supported the churches in the strategy implementation and their work towards mission.

Nevertheless, the participants seemed to describe that MdX as not just being a program. Rather, it provided a starting and ending point going through the implementation, as well as a straightforward way to work on mission and get the church onboard to become a Mission-driven church. Any SDA church could use it because it encouraged the church to grow in quality and spiritually, focus, and support its mission accomplishment through a strategy that prioritize pre-established goals.

Theme 2: MdX Provides Concrete Steps Toward Action

MdX provides concrete steps toward action was the second theme excerpted from the participants. The MdX promotes various steps that indicate action to be pursued by the church's members, leaders, and departments. This action taken by the churches required leaders to think outside the box when planning and implementing their own local church strategy. This action, as seen in Table 4, can bring more commitment from the church while MdX empowers more people to do the church work.

This theme resulted in three sub-themes: (a) Changes in the church's climate, (b) Provides clear direction, and (c) Encourages a new set of commitments to fulfill God's mission. These steps combined, influenced how the church was united, working through the goals, and pursuing mission.

Changes in the Church's Climate

MdX provokes changes in the church's climate once it promotes a need for a spiritual openness to change. The basis for that is when the church is more mature spiritually, the members are more willing to get together and work toward mission.

Moreover, the climate tends to be different in the church. MdX works on steps to action that make the church curious about the MdX and raise expectations that something positive will happen when MdX is accepted and implemented.

Table 4

MdX Provides Concrete Steps Toward Action

Sub Themes	Description
Changes in the church's climate	Promotes a spiritual openness to change It makes the church curious about the MdX Provides concrete steps to raise expectations that something positive is going to happen
Provides clear direction	It gives direction to the churches and how the departments and leaders can work together instead of working alone It gives direction on how to change the old ways of the churches to get focused on the mission Reorients the whole church towards evangelism
Encourages a new set of commitments to fulfill God's mission	Commitment to be a spiritual church Commitment to get more serious about what the church was doing going to the implementation United commitment from the conference, church, church members, and teams Commitment through a focus on mission Commitment to become a church modeling what an MdX church is like Commitment to learning through the resources so they could reach an adequate level of implementation Commitment to a different approach to leadership that uses wise strategies to gain buy-in into MdX Commitment as MdX empowers more people to do the work

While working on the MdX implementation, several participants described the importance of having an ideal church climate, something that could bring the church together to know and stimulate the desire to learn and reach the decision to implement the

MdX. In an email message, Participant #3 recommended that "Before we make any commitments, we must do the first step – Pentecost Revival – a total church climate change." The Pentecost Revival looked as if MdX was as an important factor to change the church climate. On the other hand, the method Participant #1 used to change the climate in his church was to make the church curious regarding the MdX, raising expectations on positive things that were going to happen, and then talk a little deeper about the specific mission-driven habits. He expressed:

> The first thing that we need is to have the church understand how curious they are and where they are and then have them see the church's climate, and then I would share with them the step-by-step habits one to ten.

Some participants seemed fascinated and surprised when describing the climate change in their churches that came right after the MdX implementation. Participant #6 related behaviors that the church adopted with the MdX also changed the church climate. He described the following:

> We had [deacons and deaconess] standing by the door in the parking lot, welcoming people. The guests would be met in the parking lot, escorted to the door. As they got to the door, one of the deaconesses would say a prayer with them, and welcome them into the church, and let them know what was happening for the day and that they were welcome to stay for lunch. I was just proud to see them doing it.

Participant #6 seemed very pleased with the work of the church's team. All members and leaders were working towards the habit's implementation. It gave the impression that the churches worked as a team to be a better church, created a new climate, and worked together towards mission accomplishment.

Provides Clear Direction

MdX seemed to suggest a clear direction to the churches that worked intensively in the MdX implementation. Clear direction brought more clarity for the church on

What? How? Why? and When? to work on the steps towards the action needed to implement the MdX. With the change in the church's climate, the churches looked like they had reached a clear path towards the MdX implementation. MdX appeared to provide a clear route that would give the churches the feeling of crystal-clear understanding of all the steps needed to be done, so that the MdX was pursued effectively. The action was also seen on how to focus on the mission leaving behind the old ways to do mission, and now reorienting the church towards evangelism.

Participants seemed very emphatic to this point. Participant #4 said: "MdX strategy is a tool to help give a new and clear direction to the church and the organization." Participant #1 expressed the same point declaring: "Because now it is not the chaos like before, [now] we have a clear direction that we go together." It appeared that the MdX supports a clear direction once the church follows its step-by-step guidance.

Clear direction was defended by many participants using different approaches. With a clear direction in mind, Participant #3 expressed to his church:

> I never give the option of choosing MdX or not. MdX is here to stay. We are here to have a particular strategy and vision, and we are not playing your games anymore. This is where you must decide; either you are working together as a team, aligning your priorities, or not. You decide.

Participant #3 appeared to accept the MdX as a focus strategy that committed his church to a new direction and decided to change his church's way of working with MdX. This point presented by Participant #3 seemed to be also related to a different kind of leadership where the pastor presented the MdX as a strategy that would change his church's ways to work.

Another critical action that became routine as it was adopted as part of a church team seemed to be when all leaders worked together and helped each other instead of

working alone. Through this, they could reach an adequate level of implementation not only by learning MdX through the resources but as a commitment to support and learn from each other, as described by Participant #2: “What can we do to help this person achieve our goal to get this habit to number ten? So, we do them simultaneously in a way that we can speed up this process.” Also, as part of the commitment, the results needed to be evaluated as Participant #6 said:

> So, everything that we do from this point on is going to be evaluated. And don’t be afraid to ask, how did we, no, why are we doing this, how do we do it, how do we execute it? What was the result? Did we meet the community? Did we meet our goals? And ask those questions around evaluation. And those kinds of things.

Several participants looked very enthusiastic when describing that the MdX encouraged the committee and all the departments to complete the local strategies planned through the MdX implementation. Participant #13 expressed the idea of teamwork, saying: “Focusing us on being mission-driven … wanting all of our departments to come together to have that focus instead of one department doing something, another department doing another thing; That is not connected.” Moreover, according to the MdX, “Each department will bring three outcome plans, and we [church board and department leaders] combine all together as a church strategy” (Participant #1).

Many voices expressed how important it was for the church that the apparent direction was reinforced in their minds and as result, it changed the old ways of the churches to get focused on mission. Participant #6 said: “We got to change what we are doing around here, and how we do it. Because I was looking for a way [to change] the direction, we were doing it. So, it helped me to introduce Mission-driven Excellence. We got to be excellent [at] what we do.”

The clear direction was described by Participant #11 regarding how the church used to work in the past when compared to how the church is working now. Now is the time to direct the church to do its work differently. MdX seemed to provide a clear direction on how to change the churches' old ways to get focused on mission reorienting the entire church towards evangelism. He said:

> I can remember thirty years ago in our church; when we thought of evangelism each year, it was always the only thing that would come to mind was evangelistic campaign once a year, where we would have somebody come in and speak for two or three weeks, and that was our evangelism. Now, the thinking is reoriented with the [MdX] strategy that every department, no matter what we are doing, every ministry is thinking evangelism.

Participant #11 continued: "Today, nobody comes from the community if we try having evangelistic series. It is not working, that type of strategy." The strategy done by this church was based on the new direction and approach toward the community:

> Now we have moved, changed our thinking. We have health seminars out in the community, and we have our music choirs and things like that that go out into the community. Now, all these various ministries, international food fairs, everything is oriented to a mission-driven strategy. (Participant #11)

In the end, providing a clear direction gave the impression to be a fundamental step toward action, and it seemed to be vital for the churches working in the MdX implementation. Clear direction appeared to help the churches and church departments reorient themselves, work together and not alone, and look for new ways to promote evangelism.

Encourages a New Set of Commitments to Fulfill God's Mission

MdX seemed to encourage different kinds of commitments and roused among the members the desire to be more committed to the mission that, in the end, turned into action by the church. For example, when talking to the participants, I could see that the

MdX enhanced commitment in the church departments and went through the people involved in the implementation.

Several participants seemed to express their way of demonstrating a variety of commitments from their churches. One of those commitments mentioned by one participant was the commitment to be a spiritual church. Spirituality was broadly described above when discussing the changes in the church's climate; however, according to the participants, spiritual commitment to be a spiritual church seemed to contribute to fulfilling God's mission by making the churches more serious about what the church was doing through MdX implementation. Participant #3 explored the advancement that the MdX brings to the church in terms of spirituality, saying that:

> This mission-driven curriculum moves our church from playing games, status quo, just doing church as a formality; to becoming serious about spirituality, serious about spiritual warfare, serious about what we are doing in the implementation. So, the change in this commitment is serious.

Participant #3 continued: "Some people have to step up and step down […] this forced us to rethink our own spirituality, to get more serious and committed about what we are doing working on the implementation."

Another point that seemed to be as important as when talking about spiritual commitment was raised by Participant #2. This participant connected church spirituality to the concrete step toward action. In describing how to do it, he mentioned that "Every leader and member had to fill out the spiritual life inventory as proposed in the resources" and continued: "But let me tell you exactly what I found extremely interesting. The spiritual life inventories." This spiritual life inventory (see Appendix C) is a report filled out by the members of the church, so Participant #2 still said:

> [Do you know] Why? Because the church members fill out this form, the leadership can see. [So] the church or the [church's members] trust us as spiritual leaders. And it is imperative to have that assessment.

Along with the commitment to be a spiritual church and get more serious about what the church was doing going to the MdX implementation, it seemed that many other commitments set up toward action were forthcoming that connect the church to fulfill God's mission. These commitments appeared to generate a new obligation from the church and church members toward fulfilling God's mission for the church. The participants mentioned a variety of commitments such as:

- United commitment from the conference, church, church members, and teams.
- Commitment through a focus on mission.
- Commitment to become a church modeling in what an MdX church is like.
- Commitment to learning through the resources and reach an adequate level of implementation.
- Commitment to different leadership approaches that use wise strategies to gain buy-in into MdX.
- Commitment as MdX empowers more people to do the work.

More details on these commitments are explained in the following paragraphs. Part of this uniquely Adventist project for the churches seemed the fact that it promoted united commitment from the conferences, churches, church members, and teams, getting them excited about becoming a mission-driven church, implementing the MdX, and developing ways to work as a team focusing on the mission accomplishment. Some participants shared enthusiasm by saying that once MdX was going through the

implementation, they could see different kind of commitments along the process. Participant #3 said:

> When we got into this curriculum, it moved me from simply good ideas to the process. So, this gave me the process of taking ideas and putting them into practice. I am hoping that all the churches would step up. I also hope that the conferences would recommend this [strategy] to their pastors and create a united commitment to the mission. My church is already committed and united, working toward its mission.

Another essential step toward action was the church commitment through a focus on mission. Participant #6 connected his focus to the mission, comparing it to a process of galvanization. The word "galvanizes" was used by Participant #6 to translate the level of commitment his church had to the MdX. He expressed: "That is what Mission-driven excellence does. It galvanizes [commits] the church to rally around that one mission. And each department has a role to play in the accomplishment of that mission."

Several participants expressed the commitment to inspiring churches to become a model and example for other churches. This kind of commitment seemed to be vital because it transformed how the church worked in the past, turning it into an MdX church model. Participant #3 said:

> We could be a church that would inspire other churches and become a resource church to others. That's what is inspiring people. To see how our church, if we succeed in what we are doing, could become a model and an example to other churches.

The commitment to learning through the resources and reaching an adequate implementation level appeared to be higher when the board members had to present the habits to other members. The person in charge of delivering the habit was committed to giving details on what was done and what needs to be done. Continuing, MdX was also explored through the commitment to the leaders' goals in the board meetings. Participant #2 said: "But again, we have the other process we felt through each habit. This means

that at our board meetings, we give the floor to the person who is in charge of habit number one." The person had to explain in the meeting "what was done versus what needs to be done." It seemed that this participant expressed his commitment to the leaders involved in the strategy not only by sharing what was planned to do but what needed to be done. Also, it looked like a new mindset was transferred to the church and members.

The list of commitments presented above gave the impression to be fundamental because they made the participants think about the need for constant learning through the resources to reach an adequate implementation level. It looked like all the efforts directed in their learning of the MdX helped the churches achieve success in their implementation. MdX seemed to promote the commitment to constant learning of the materials from all the people involved in the implementation. It also seemed to commit the leaders to acquire the knowledge on how to do things and capture all the information needed so they could perform a better MdX implementation.

Several participants described the value of constant learning that the MdX brought to the church. Moreover, "Everybody can follow this if they really spend time to study it. And read the booklet before they apply it" (Participant #1). Participant #6 said: "I read up on just about everything that they had, I even got the books, I got the mission-driven excellence book, and yeah. I did some prereading. And gave some of my elders some of the books to read [too]."

On the commitment from the leaders on what was missing to reach a good implementation, Participant #5 said: "We have a mission statement, we have a vision statement, and we have goals, but we do not necessarily have a strategy in writing. This is something that we need."

The commitment from the leaders through a different approach to leadership was also observed in the church services. Participant #2 denoted a person's commitment towards the MdX in working on the mission "This person is constantly doing this assessment for worship service, Sabbath School, prayer meeting. What can we improve? What the church stands for when it comes to these habits and so forth."

Furthermore, a conversation with the leaders seemed to commit more people to the MdX implementation to gain their buy-in into the MdX. The commitment worked toward more engagement among the members in general. It meant the majority of the people were working together to accomplish the mission. So, everyone had to "buy-in" (Participant #14). That means they had to accept and agree with the direction the leaders were taken from that time on. Participant #14 expressed the "buy-in" in the following:

> I think that people [hear] the strategy; people are being explained the strategy. It's just to get them to buy in and jump on board. I believe you can tell them a million times, but it's just a lot of hot air to them if they don't buy-in. And I think that is the issue. That will always be the weak point in any strategy, which is getting everyone to buy-in.

Furthermore, to reach different commitment levels going through the buy-in status towards MdX, could be perceived as the way the participants approached the church leaders and their leadership differently. The initial and first conversation was vital on how to present the MdX, said Participant #4:

> I first had the conversation with the elders, saying [that]: we need to have a direction which is not unique to the pastor who is assigned to the church, it has to be a vision that you subscribe to, whether or not I am you pastor, or not.

Participant #4 continued, "And then we began to have the conversation at the board level. Once we had the conversation at the board level, we had a business meeting. That business meeting took place in February 2020. Of course, at that time, we had already committed that we would be working with the MdX." It seemed that when Participant #4

reached the business meeting, many more people were committed and willing to accept the strategy.

MdX appeared to bring more people to be committed by working together through the buy-in process. Participant #2 described one critical condition to implement the MdX in the churches. He said: “Because this strategy is made for a very stable church that has good leaders, you need at least ten committed folks to help you do this accordingly.”

Because some churches were already working on previous strategies, it seemed that the commitment to implement the MdX was quickly reached. Commitments to fulfill God’s mission for the church were vital because they brought various leaders and their church members to renew their commitment to work together towards mission. Some churches were already working on other kinds of strategies before the MdX was presented to them. According to Participant #1:

> I think it is more than 80 percent of my church board and is the same for church members. Because, by the time we start [MdX], I already was pushing [a] [strategy] before that. Without my stuff before, I would say, a church where people had never done that before, it would be at least 60 percent, maybe 60 percent approval, but 40 percent would disagree with that because they like the old original way when they have their own authority to make their plans. So, they don’t want to join the whole church.

MdX gave the impression to empower more people, more members, more leaders, more departments that make them responsible for the church’s future. For example, due to the many various commitments to fulfill God’s mission for the church, it was vital to see the commitment that surged through the empowerment given to more members. It seemed that the churches started not relying on one person to do the work. Still, all team members took a step ahead to do the work.

Participant #15 affirmed that "I think [MdX] is a very effective strategy. However, we do not want to rely on one individual [or] pastor to do everything." Participant #15 expressed: "By empowering all the different members and leaders to be able to take the wheel at [some] point in time, it puts us in a position where we are more a united, as opposed to relying on one shepherd to lead us." As a result, "You can see that it empowers the members to be able to see themselves as actively involved and actively responsible for the fate of the church." (Participant #11)

Other participants discussed the intense level of commitment that resulted from empowered people doing the work. They saw the effectiveness of the strategy. Participant #12 said:

> I can see the effectiveness of that strategy, and I see it working because more than in my life, more than I have noticed before, I see a lot of different members and departments taking an active role in the happenings in the church.

The commitment by empowerment seemed to be a vital point once it gave more independence and involvement for the people to do the work. On the other hand, some participants declared that with less commitment, less learning, and less study, the level of understanding is lower, as declared by this participant:

> Most pastors don't even get it yet. They don't even understand what we are talking about. But fortunately, because my mind has always been in that direction, it is easy for me to catch it up quickly. But most [people] who were [in training] with us don't even understand. Because they say it is one more program from the North American Division, but it is not. (Participant #7)

The steps toward action seemed to promote the idea of preparing the church towards the MdX implementation in new and different ways to achieve the mission. The participants appeared to be connected to the MdX by encouraging a new set of commitments that started with the strategy's spiritual side. The set of commitments coming from the members, pastors, church leaders, moved the church to work united

towards the implementation. The MdX also seemed to bring a clear direction and evaluation by working as a team towards the MdX goals versus the outcomes that the strategy implied. In this commitment, the participants described their perception of the MdX as constant learning. Learning and involvement through a new set of commitments to fulfill God's mission seemed to be vital for the strategy.

Theme 3: MdX Seems Simple, but Takes Time

MdX gave the impression to be an uncomplicated strategy by many participants; however, it became a project that required plenty of time to reach a point of complete implementation. This theme, displayed in Table 5, is discussed into two sub-themes: (1) Simplicity and (2) It takes time.

Table 5:

MdX Seems Simple but Takes Time

Sub Themes	Description
Simplicity	MdX was succinct and straightforward MdX focused on what was important Everything in the MdX was essential, and everyone can understand and follow its logic. MdX was practical and pragmatic MdX was aligned – helped the churches by its step-by-step processes
It takes time	MdX cannot be done quickly. It takes time to implement it.

Simplicity

MdX seemed to be a simple step-by-step process going through the implementation. Simplicity means it was simple, straightforward so that everyone could

understand, learn, and embrace it. I could observe some happy faces among the participants only by the fact that now they had a tool, a route to be followed that allowed them to work on mission more appropriately. Some participants commented that MdX was succinct, and that the NAD did not need to create anything else to make it better. Participant #3 said: “I don’t have to invent anything. I don’t have to create anything. All the information is there for me to customize.” He continued: “What I like that it is brief and succinct. It does not have any fluff. It does not have any extra unnecessary stuff. It focuses on what is important.” I could see that Participant #3 was vibrating, he showed his enthusiasm with the MdX. Participant #10 expressed the idea that the MdX was concise. He said: “When you look at it, it is very [concise].” This participant re-emphasized that the MdX seemed concise and straightforward, and that was valuable to them.

In describing her excitement on these points, Participant #10 said: “So that [simplicity] is definitely a pro.” Furthermore, looking to the continuousness for the strategy […], “I think that we should continue to keep the strategy as concise as is and as sort of put in pockets that are small enough that our leaders will understand each step of the way” (Participant #10). Even though she agreed with the simplicity of the processes, she still mentioned that the project should keep its conciseness.

I observed that Participant #3 described that simplicity was a process used to create and shape the MdX. He described happiness with the processes used to make MdX strategy a perfect one that the churches needed. He, Participant #3, expressed: “So, whoever developed that curriculum, they put thought into it. Because some other

strategies or books they bring this and that, and a lot of tangential non-essentials. But here [MdX], everything is essential."

A few other participants saw MdX as simple, practical, and pragmatic so everyone could follow and understand it. Participant #2 presented the idea that the simplicity of the MdX strategy turning it into an efficient tool for the churches and delivered the following statement to prove it:

> I like it very practical and pragmatic. It tells you step-by-step what to do. Here is the first, the second, and so forth. Every person and any member who didn't study too much about it can understand and even apply it. That is something I really, really enjoyed.

Simplicity also seemed to be tied to alignment. Some participants expressed contentment as the MdX was simple and aligned to their understanding. Here are the words expressed by Participant #10: "I think the pros and the strengths of the strategy are that it is aligned. It is put together in such a way that it allows our leaders to see the bigger picture." Participant #10 continued: "and the steps are broken down in such a way that there are not too many steps so that it is not overwhelming or confusing."

Other participants expressed the following "I think the strength is that MdX is a step-by-step strategy; it is easy to follow. Anybody can follow this" (Participant #1). Participating #8 said: "It is step-by-step. We take a survey, then we plan, and then we implement, and then we evaluate and all of that. Also, it is very simplified."

It is relevant to remember that the project examined the MdX through the culture of ten specific mission-driven habits implementation and its resources. Throughout the habit's implementation, the participants gave the impression that the habits are excellent. Nonetheless, the MdX seemed to be aligned and helped the churches by its step-by-step

processes, as reported by Participant #2: “Because there are some very good habits. I don’t think they should be changed.”

On the other hand, Participant #3 stated a bit of concern regarding the MdX, expressing that the church should not turn the MdX into an idol:

> [However] we have to be careful not to turn this into an idol. Not to start embellishing this program [MdX] for the sake of just beautifying it. We need to keep it to the point, simple, and that’s it […] the simplicity of it and its [conciseness]. It is simple already. I think it is well done and simplified enough already.

The MdX seemed to be a big church strategy for the NAD. Going through the habit’s implementation, every habit implemented through the MdX contains a series of activities, pre-events, or processes planned and developed by the local churches. It looked like the churches worked in planning and implementing small strategies to achieve every habit. Many participants presented the reasoning on the simplicity of the MdX where MdX seemed to be simple as a strategy as well as its implementation.

It Takes Time

MdX seemed to require time to be implemented. Thus, time is the essence. This term is used in legal situations where the time to complete something becomes as important as priority, meaning that it must be achieved following due dates. For the MdX, it seemed to be no difference. The time to execute and implement the habits must be determined by the church board and the leaders involved in the strategy implementation. Follow up also is required so the local church departments that elaborated the strategies can be updated in regarding its goals versus outcomes.

The MdX launched in the pilot churches following a series of pre-events or processes followed by small strategies or tactics developed by the local churches. These

steps combined took time to implement correctly. For the MdX, the leaders and pastors seemed to work according to what was pre-established throughout the church board's resources and meetings.

Two participants conveyed the following way: "Right now, for this plan, it is for the whole year plan" (Participating #1). Participant #3 said: "If a pastor's vision is small, he could do it quickly. But if a pastor's vision is big and the strategy is huge, it cannot be done quickly. It takes time. So, the time of the process depends on the size of the vision."

In fact, as I was talking to Participant #3, in my field notes, I recognized his feelings where he stated that to implement a strategy like MdX, it should not be attempted in less than a year. The reason seemed to be because MdX was so detailed, it should take at least one year. Furthermore, by the time Participant #1 expressed this idea about the process versus the size of the vision, I observed that his voice intonation changed, and his words became more emphatic. Participant #1 continued expressing: "Everybody can follow this if they really spend time to study and read the [material] before they apply it." Likewise, it seemed that the leaders' time to learn and implement the MdX was in proportion to the vision they have for the church and their availability to read, study, and understand the MdX.

Summary of the Strengths of the MdX

This section described the strengths of the MdX, addressing the first research question: What do participants testing the MdX find most valuable about the strategy? Three themes were presented to explore the first set of findings. The first theme discussed was that the MdX is uniquely Adventist, an Adventist owned. The participants described their perception explaining how MdX encourages the church growth in quality and

spirituality. The participants also connected how MdX focuses and supports the church towards mission accomplishment.

Secondly, participants indicated that the steps toward action seemed to involve essential steps the pilot churches took and were seen as valuable towards the MdX implementation. In this finding, change in the climate among the church members and leaders appeared to be a vital approach to implement the MdX. The steps toward actions also empowered the leaders not to rely on one person to do the work but to work with alignment as a team. The MdX seemed to afford a clear direction for the churches in planning and implementing the MdX. This finding also described that the MdX provided the church's members and departments a new set of commitments towards the project. It means that they worked together and were committed to fulfilling God's mission for the church. Learning and involvement seemed to be vital for the strategy as well.

Finally, while the MdX was perceived to be a relatively simple and straightforward approach moving towards implementation it took time to help members reach a better level of understanding of the goals. The time invested in completing the tasks going forward with the implementation also seemed valuable to many participants. The leaders and pastors worked according to what was pre-established through the church board's resources and meetings.

The Challenges of the MdX

This section presents the themes that addressed the second research question: What do participants testing the MdX identify as challenges or difficulties with the strategy? After analyzing the resulting transcripts in *Dedoose*, they were organized into three themes: (1) Challenges with the materials, (2) Difficulties with the process, and (3)

Leadership challenges. These themes gave the participants a voice, letting them speak for themselves and describe their challenges with the MdX implementation and its materials.

Theme 4: Challenges with the Material

The MdX seemed to present several challenges going through its implementation. Some challenges were noticed as the participants described their difficulties going through the resources during the learning process and MdX implementation. In my conversation with 15 participants and getting their input about their experiences with the MdX implementation, the challenges were seen under different viewpoints.

Several participants described that some habits were difficult to see as habits, since they were not understood as habits. In their thinking, some habits could be placed in a different sequence in the inventory as they were implemented differently. Other participants said the resources gave the impression of theoretical and academic language, and for that reason, they could not understand the meaning correctly. To some, the terminology was hard to understand because English was not their first language, the meaning of some words could not be understood fully. Besides that, as described by the participants, MdX verbiage looked as if it was designed for university level. Disconnection among the resources seemed also to be a challenge when implementing the MdX.

This finding is classified into four sub-themes: (a) Theoretical/Academic language – hard to understand, (b) Some habits are not easy to see as "habits," and (c) Disconnection among the resources. Table 6 presents the summary of this finding.

Table 6

Challenges With the Materials

Sub Themes	Description
Theoretical/Academic language - hard to understand	MdX language was more academic MdX brought a business strategy language Difficulties in understanding the habits and their meaning MdX language was not understandable The wording was not simple Language is difficult for people whose first language is not English The wording was for a university level
Some habits are not easy to see as "habits."	More clarification on the habits' meaning Some habits could switch position in the inventory Some participants felt they were working on something they were already doing Some habits were very repetitive – they talk about the same thing
Disconnection among the resources	The suggested pages and references to additional information did not match The linkage among the resources were disconnected

Theoretical/Academic Language – Hard to Understand

The challenge described by the participants seemed to be that the language of MdX was very academic and theoretical. For that reason, it presented challenges related to a complete understanding of the resources when board members were reading and studying the material and learning about MdX. Some participants expressed the reasoning that the MdX resources appeared to incorporate business strategy language that felt strange and uncommon for a church context.

When the knowledge of the MdX was presented to the participants, the resources seemed to be difficult to understand and follow their meanings. Some participants

described their concern regarding the language used by MdX. Participant #1 said:" "[The language] was more academic than practical. Thus, [MdX] is not practical." Also, he continued: "Those two books are so academic. They are so high [level] for normal people to understand. They would not be able to finish [reading and studying] the books." Participant #5 expressed:

> I read this stuff, and I had to read it five times to understand what I was trying to get at. When I presented [the habit] to the board, since I didn't fully grasp it, I could not explain it well to the church board. When they read the habits, some did not understand their meaning.

It appeared that these two participants expressed their dissatisfaction when reading the material because the language was hard to understand. They could not grasp the majority of the contents presented in the material due to its theoretical and academic language approach.

Participant #1 suspected that the difficulty resided in the business concepts embedded in MdX as the reason pointed for the material to be hard to understand. He pointed the following:

> Even though it was practical, step-by-step, the language sounded more complicated than for [ordinary] people – the language, the words, and the vocabulary that was used. Some people who are not working in the business or strategic planning, they [get] lost. Even my church board was lost. They did not know what we were talking about.

Later, in an email message, Participant #5 shared: "My elders are each presenting two habits to the board and ministry leaders meeting in the hopes that the elders will own and understand the process" However, he said, "I have to admit, habit #2 [Making spirit-filled commitments] was a difficult presentation," despite the resources, "Yet, I am having difficulty [to follow] the process and habits as they are presented. Perhaps it is because this is taking more a business approach to excellence, which is a process totally

foreign to most pastors and church members." This point seemed to be a critical comment because the language could deviate from the purpose of the implementation. The participants were reading the material and presenting difficulties in comprehending the material and the exact meaning of the habits and how to work on the implementation.

Some other participants described a lack of understanding the material received by the time they began their participation in the MdX training promoted by the Ontario Conference. Most of them seemed to not understand the language as Participant #7 said:

> The [pastors] did not even understand what we were talking about. But fortunately, because my mind has always been in that direction, it was easy for me to catch up quickly. But most pastors that were in training with us, they didn't understand. Because they said it was one more program from the North American Division, but [MdX] it is not.

Talking about the material's theoretical and academic language, Participant #6 described his concern and suggested that the conference could take some way of switching the academic language in the resources so many others could understand. He expressed: "Instead academic, college-speak." Participant #6 still indicated that what was needed was a language similar to a high school level: "If they can understand the message, [using a high school level], then I have communicated well to everybody."

The wording seemed to be a problem. So, while some participants described their frustration with the language presented in the MdX, other participants were more specific and said that the wording was a problem. Some participants declared that the language looked to be hard to understand since the language was not appropriate for multicultural churches.

In fact, as I was talking to Participant #5, in my field notes, I recognized his frustration with the wording and language issues. Participant #5 continued recalling that "When the [church board members] were reading the habits […], they did not understand

what they meant […].” The lack of being simple in the wording was a frustrating experience for Participant #5, who presented the MdX to his church. He said:

> I was excited about the habits […], But I found that when people read the habits and rated us on them, they didn’t [totally] understand what they were [doing]. They just had the strategy on a piece of paper [MdX Inventory]. And then they read that, and then they gave us a grade. The wording was so hard to grasp.

According to Participant #1, the challenge ties the wording throughout the material to how the habits were simplified and presented in a “piece of paper,” with no extra information, like the MdX Inventory. It seemed to be a challenge because they did not have any other information to add to what they were rating for. This included some of the books they did not have access to read. For many participants, this step, the MdX Inventory, sounded like it was not fully understood. Participant #1 insisted on the wording used throughout the MdX material and resources. Referring to the words and the vocabulary used, when it was challenging, he said:

> The wording is for the student [is at a] university level. So, I would change some words if I were the one to edit this thing. I would change some words, make it simple. Even though it is practical, the language sounds more complicated than what ordinary people usually use.

The challenges presented in the theme and with the materials, appeared to be a consensus among the participants because the language used in the resources of the MdX as a whole was more academic than practical language, and not recommended for multicultural churches. Besides, the material seemed to bring a business language common to companies in preparing and executing their strategic planning.

The language of the habits presented in a piece of paper gave the impression to be confusing because it seemed to lack significant information that could have helped the participants to rate their churches differently. The participants seemed to get lost on how the MdX was presented to them throughout the existing resources and materials. Many

participants suggested that the materials should be more similar to elementary or high school level language. These concerns regarding language were voiced by the participants who seemed to have difficulties in understanding the meaning of multiple parts of the MdX resources.

Some Habits Are Not Easy to See as "Habits"

The lack of participants understanding the habits and their definitions is seen as a challenge—that many habits needed more clarification regarding their meaning and how further explanation would help them through the MdX implementation. Some of the participants did not adequately understand the definition or context of "habits" as applied in their situation. Others lacked understanding of some habits, and still others said that some habits would be better understood and implemented if they were placed in a different position or order in the inventory.

Participant #2 said: "the MdX suggests that all the churches should sit down and write their mission statement, their strategy and whatever. It makes no sense; why?" Participant #2 continued his statement complaining: "Number ten, that [one] is not a habit." The reasoning behind this discontentment seemed to be the following: "Once we score on each of the other [nine] habits above, they become ingrained habits in our church. Is this a habit? You called it habit number ten - Becoming a model." Participant #2 seemed to question if habit 10 was a habit that really had to be included or a part of the inventory. According to him, once the church scores high in all other habits, they become ingrained in the church's life. In the church achieving success going through the other nine habits, there was no need to have a specific habit once the church was already meeting the previous MdX habits with success.

The number of habits listed in the material appeared to be a concern for some participants. Talking about the number of habits suggested throughout the materials, Participant #4 expressed: “I think it could be a little bit less. I see a little bit of an overlap [in the habits].” He continued: “Habit #1 is the inventory. It is just a way to make the church aware about the other habits. No sense.” He still said: “Habit #10, becoming a model is also useless because once the church reaches success in the other eight habits, they are already part of the daily-basis church routine.” Indeed, these participants gave the impression to be very preoccupied with the quantity of habits to go over and the real efficacy of some of them.

Participant #5 stated his concerns not only on the proper order for some habits, but some of the habits are already implied by the people involved in the MdX implementation:

> Where I am with my church and where my leadership is, we feel that our feet are in the mud because we already have [many] things. Habit 2, making a commitment; we are already all committed. We are all for sure.

Exploring a bit further regarding the proper disposition of the habits and their sequence, Participant #4 said:

> You have habit five, which is envisioning mission. Then you have habit six, set a strategy in writing. And if you also look at habit #4, developing leaders was also another good one. So, I was excited about #4. But then #5, you envision a mission? I think that should be before. You should have a mission before you develop leaders. And then after that, you have [habit] #6, strategy in writing…

Along with the participants’ description regarding some habits’ positioning and their meaning, Participant #5 reported that some habits were very repetitive. He said:

> I found that the first three habits were very repetitive and that the people [are] kind of, okay, let’s move! And so, after the first three habits, we’re kind of talking about the same thing. We got bogged down with habit 2 and habit 3. It was kind of like, okay, we were repeating the same thing. To me, it felt that way, especially in Habit 3.

In an email message, Participant #5 expressed: “I found habit #2 redundant as we had already “committed” to doing the process at all three levels, so I hope that going through habit #3, we will begin to sink out our teeth into something more tangible.”

Participants expressed that some habits appeared to be in the wrong position, and that their roles as leaders already encompassed many habits. Other participants said that the habits appeared to be very repetitive and talking about the same thing all the time. Understanding habit #10 – Becoming a model – seemed to be a huge concern because, they said that the churches going through the implementation with success, the habits are automatically ingrained, so the church should naturally become or turn into a model.

Disconnection Among the Resources

Some participants described the challenges when reading and studying the resources. They said that the material appeared to be disconnected, meaning there was lack of integration among the resources. The main issue appeared to be that when they looked for the references looking for more information from one source to another, the references did not always match. They gave the impression to tie the success of the implementation of MdX with the level of information they received from the resources and materials together with the connection presented among them. In receiving the material integrated, then, they seemed to be able to deliver the correct information on the MdX to the other leaders.

Moreover, they seemed to expect more from the material. The participants’ expectations reflected through some complaints. Having so many materials without a connection among them, seemed to make the participants confused on how to use the material fully. Participant #5 said:

> There were presentations there, a short presentation and a long presentation, and they weren't matching with the information in the PowerPoint. If you look at the presenters' manual, they were not matching. The numbers on it weren't matching with the numbers on the PowerPoints. There was not synchrony among the materials."

Participant #5 described complaints with the material where the meanings presented in one material seemed to be different from another material under the same title. This point was a huge concern to Participant 5 because it seemed that the materials from the OSR were rather unprofessionally organized. Despite the continuous improvements done on the developed materials over the years, Participant #5 continued saying:

> When I am going through this [topic] with my leaders at the church, they say, wait a minute, on this list, it says this about habit 1, but in that book, it says something different. So, people quickly began to see this as unprofessional . . . [because the material . . . [was] not always [consistent]. . . For instance, if you look at the roll-out calendar and the measurements of strategies, they don't always necessarily say the same thing. So, we were very [very] confused.

This point was a big concern to Participant #5 because it seemed that the materials OSR developed through the years was seen as amateurish. Thus, these comments on the disconnection among the resources seemed to bother the participants. From the 15 interviewees, nine participants described similar issues when studying and analyzing the material presented to their church and church board members. One participant described in the following way:

> I understood the whole process because I had to do my own research. And I was doing my presentation, and that's where I found some deficiencies when I was doing my research because I could not find some of the pages pointed at the presenter's manual. (Participant #7)

Similar reasoning regarding the disconnection among the materials was presented by Participant #10:

> I noticed a few minor inefficiencies when I was looking for and cross-referencing the materials to put it together so that our board would understand them—a sort of linkage among the pages not being there if you went to the referenced pages.

Several participants described and insisted on talking about the disconnection among the resources. They seemed to picture a huge challenge for the leaders when preparing their presentations to church members about how to participate in the MdX implementation. The participants asserted that the wording used to describe a habit in one resource seemed to be a lot different from the other resource. The linkage among the pages also appeared to be a challenge. The resources' disconnection gave the impression to be a challenge by the fact that presenters could not verify some previous information or knowledge among the resources and ratify the information to the participants using the broad materials recommended by the NAD.

Theme 5: Difficulties with the Process

Several participants seemed to identify some difficulties with the MdX process going through its implementation. The most relevant challenge under this theme appeared to be that the MdX required the church and church leaders to receive more training. The lack of training was voiced by many, and I noticed a considerable concern among the participants and their churches regarding the MdX implementation.

Several participants gave the impression to explore the idea that MdX was a time-consuming strategy that required more than the church and church board's desire to implement the strategy. It needed long meetings to fully grasp the materials and resources and plenty of time to implement as MdX was so extensive and not practical.

Two sub-themes are presented as difficulties with the process: (1) Lack of training and disposition to accept new roles, and (2) Time-consuming. Table 7 displays a summary of this finding.

Lack of Training and Disposition to Accept New Roles

As sure as the MdX brought value to the strategy, many participants described their challenges with the MdX implementation. They could see that the MdX implementation's success hinges on presenting the ideas, transforming attitudes, and developing new skills. These skills seemed to suffer from a lack of trained leaders to communicate, present, and implement the MdX accordingly in their churches. Participants expressed this viewpoint of the lack of training for the people involved in the MdX implementation in various ways. It looked that there was a common concern that "some leaders can present it well; but some leaders cannot," as expressed by Participant #8. He continued: "I don't have a problem with the structure, but the barrier was the trained leaders. Imparting the lesson is different than just presenting."

When talking on the strengthens of the MdX, the first theme mentioned that the MdX is uniquely Adventist. Its sub-theme—a paradigm shift for SDA churches—expressed that even being s shift for the SDA, MdX seemed to require a different kind of leadership. As presented as challenges, it looked as if the lack of trained leaders together with the disposition from the leaders to accept new roles was brought in contrast to that strength.

Table 7

Difficulties with The Process

Sub Themes	Description
Lack of training and disposition to accept new roles	More trained leaders to implement the strategy Leaders may step up or step out Leaders denied a new position because MdX demanded more significant requirements and more time invested Leaders with the skills to write strategy NAD assessment to clarify the leaders' strengths and abilities
Time-consuming	Time-consuming to read, learn, understand, present the habits to other church leaders, and implement It required too many meetings It also was time-consuming because it needed a cultural change inside the church As time-consuming, it was also tied to wasting time to follow all the steps and implement it

Commenting on the need for the leaders to be trained and developed, Participant #3 said:

> The biggest challenge for us was developing leaders. Simply because our leaders feel that they are leaders in their own right, it really caused us some serious discussions because it's very true that we need to have a solid program of coaching to make sure that our leaders are growing.

Participant #3 continued: "MdX has the potential of challenging leaders, either step up or step out."

Several participants seemed to identify the lack of trained leaders necessary for the MdX while they also described that well-trained and involved leaders are required to invest more time in their leadership positions working in their roles. As described by the participants, the fact that the participants had to invest more time seemed to be the reason for potential leaders to deny accepting a new leadership position once it was seen to

require additional commitment; as Participant #11 said: "It places greater requirements and a greater amount of time on the individual leaders of those ministries and departments. And for that reason, a lot of people are more reluctant now to take leadership positions because they are more involved." In fact, as I talked to this Participant #11, in my field notes, I observed and recognized his feelings when he described his church's lack of trained leaders to implement MdX in his church.

With the need for more trained leaders and the concern of more involvement throughout their roles, a particularly challenging aspect of the implementation was on how the leaders were to write the strategies. When Participant #1 described this challenge as part of the MdX strategy implementation, he sighed: "The writing, yeah." Furthermore, Participant #5 noted the reasoning regarding some habits implementation and declared: "We have a mission statement, have a vision statement, and have goals, but we don't necessarily have a written strategy."

Although the participants above praised the value of the MdX while pointing out some challenges, other participants seemed to express the need for the leaders to grow in their roles and create not only *buy-in* but also get the right people involved in departments or ministries according to their gifts and strengths. They said:

> I think that people hear the strategy [and] people are being explained the strategy. It's just to get them to buy-in and jump on board. I believe you can tell them a million times, but it's just a lot of hot air to them if they don't buy-in. Certain members don't feel that they are important enough, or you can't use me. God can't use me. (Participant #14)

> Sometimes just having a stronger personal connection with the people that we are empowering plays a larger role. Sometimes it comes across as empty when you try to put people in positions without actually understanding their abilities. I think that sometimes just understanding more where people's strengths are can prove a more effective strategy. Maybe some kind of assessment from NAD would help. (Participant #15)

The difficulty with the process seemed to involve a lack of trained leaders. Furthermore, according to the leader's role, the involvement needed, making the right people buy-in, and the lack of some kind of NAD assessment to help the leaders be pointed in the correct department or ministries, looked like to be among the challenges for the MdX that tied the leaders to the necessity to receive more training. All these challenges seemed to require the actual leaders to approach the implementation of MdX willing to face difficulties.

Time-Consuming

When discussing the amount of time they invested in the MdX implementation, the participants commented that the MdX appeared to be time-consuming. While some participants understood that MdX took time and effort to coordinate the activities to come together as a focused strategy, they seemed also to note that it took time to wrap their minds around the new thinking of MdX and understand the process. It also seemed that there was a perception that the MdX involved a time-consuming process in planning and implementing. A few of them appeared to question whether MdX was a time-wasting process.

In contrast to the strengths of MdX, the participant responses seemed to reveal two important aspects of the MdX: (a) the MdX takes time to implement, and (b), the MdX cannot be done quickly. Several participants seemed to express the reality that the MdX required a lot of time. By this reason, MdX looked as if it was a challenge. Participant #3 said:

> It took us [a] few months journey to examine our mission and our vision statement. It literally took about three, four months to get there when we agreed that we would have [a] clear vision and mission statement. (Participant #3)

Participant #2 said the process was too long and that it required many and extensive meetings. He said:

> I think it was kind of too long. It required you to attend many meetings. If you watch MdX videos and read some of the resources, they were encouraged to play the videos at one core meeting and then the other. So, if churches meet every month, it will take you one year to introduce this strategy to the church.

Participant #6 described that as he started the MdX from ground zero, once the MdX process has ten habits, it would take approximately ten months to implement it. He said: "Because we are doing basically one a month when I say that my church is starting from ground zero, they really are starting from ground zero."

Participant #3 and Participant #1 seemed to show a positive challenge with the MdX implementation saying that MdX took months to reach agreement in regarding the vision and mission. Also, they seemed to be positive that the MdX cannot be done quickly. In an opposite challenging thought, Participant #2 expressed that to reach a fully MdX implementation, MdX seemed to go over a year, which is too much time.

Participant #1 said: "Right now, for this plan, it is for the whole year plan." Time in studying and understanding the resources seemed to be vital to the MdX implementation. Participant #8 said: "I really took time to read it and understand." Participant #1 appeared to be very positive in his time invested in the resources. He said: "Everybody can follow this if they really spend time studying and reading the booklets before they apply." Participant #5 seemed to describe a similar point in time invested in reading, learning, and implementing. He said: "Because my elders [present] each habit to the board once a month, I need at least ten months, so it is ten habits."

Another perspective described by the participants still in regarding time-consuming appeared to be that while some participants described their concern regarding

the time to implement, others revealed that working on the cultural change inside the church also impacted their implementation time, making it time-consuming. However, he seemed to propose a mindset change. Participant #3 said:

> If you are really going for a deeper foundational cultural change, you need more time. I'm not talking [about] changes like bringing the drums for worship. No. I'm talking [about] a mindset change.

Because implementing the MdX took time to understand and study, wasting time appeared to be described by some participants. It gave the impression that the motivation to have things done was lost because of the time required to do the "stuff" was not perceived as contributing to their growth. Some participants described: "I felt that sometimes we were wasting our time" (Participant #2). Participant #5 said: "We felt that our feet were in the mud because we already had [many] things."

The participants described their thoughts after having gone through all the steps that guided them to the MdX implementation. To follow all the steps implied by the MdX implementation according to the mission and the written strategies proposed by local churches, MdX gave the impression of taking a long time not only to reach the complete implementation and understanding, but to study, and apply the steps accordingly. For some participants, MdX seemed to be wasting time.

Theme 6: Leadership Challenges

Several participants appeared to identify leadership challenges with the MdX strategy going through its implementation. Besides MdX being a new strategy inside the pilot churches, it looked as if MdX was also challenged for its effect on the culture. This leadership challenge seemed to cause tensions with existing realities inside the pilot churches. Several participants gave the impression that MdX provoked some tension with

the suggested mission statement sample from the NAD. Others suggested the lack of integration with existing approaches.

I classified this finding into three sub-themes: (a) lack of integration with existing approaches, (b) church culture, and (c) perceived tension with the NAD mission statement. Table 8 presents a summary of this finding.

Lack of Integration With Existing Approaches

Several participants described their impression to be a fear that MdX was just part of a new fad or emphasis that some other director's new program would soon replace. They had been through other cycles of programs proposed by previous pastors and pushed by church administration. Participant #2 expressed it this way:

> Now we went to ten habits, the MdX. After that, Paul Brantley will retire; another [pastor] will come and change the structure. We will get tired of this thing at one point, and people will not try the strategies provided [by] the NAD. Why? Because we learned already, this is going to change in the next few years, or even months.

Participant #8 said: "[We need consistency] and a group of influential leaders that could move the strategy forward, and not change [with] every church cycle."

Another point raised seemed to be the fact whether church administrators are really in alignment with the local church's realities. Participant #6 explored this viewpoint, saying: "Will the administration consider what the mission of the [local] church is? I do not think that administration really knows what the local church's mission is when [the administration] assigns pastors to the churches." Participant #8 said: "The church administration should participate in the local church, [know about] what is happening, what is new, what is changing, what has changed."

Table 8

Leadership Challenges: Tensions with Existing Realities

Sub Themes	Description
Lack of integration with existing approaches	Leaders to move the strategy forward and not change with every church cycle More alignment between the church administrators and local churches First, the project was Natural Church Development (NCD). Now it's the MdX. NCD was a smoother process
Church culture	Concern if MdX would be valued for different cultures The collaborative process from the leaders throughout the implementation depends on the culture Leaders need to be careful to connect MdX with the church's past success Culture can "eat strategy for breakfast."
Perceived tension with the NAD mission statement	When the leaders had to analyze and write based on the suggested mission statement that included the three words: Christ-centered message, hope, and wholeness Our mission is to go and make disciples based on Matthew 28:19-20

For these participants, it seemed that the MdX is one more project and other different ones can follow it upon a new NAD or OSR director election.

Participant #5 seemed to describe one strong argument regarding the church cycle's consistency regarding the NAD projects. He compared the MdX strategy to a previous program called Natural Church Development (NCD) and conveyed his thoughts in the following, which seemed to be also related to the church cycle:

> We are very experienced with NCD in our church. We've done NCD for the last five years, and so that was one of our struggles. If the conference is pushing

> NCD and then talking about Mission-driven church excellence, people are reading these habits, and they know that it is totally different. Anyway, I found NCD was a smoother process.

Some participants seemed to complain about the church administration in bringing new projects initiated by the churches that could be switched for a new one as the church administration cycle changes from time to time. Also, it seemed to have a need for more unity between the church administration and their intimate knowledge regarding the churches' local needs when the administration appoints a pastor to the churches.

Church Culture

Participants described what seemed to be some concerns when dealing with the church culture. Different people imply a different culture inside the same church. Based on culture, everyone deals differently with different situations and viewpoints. Thus, the church's behavior and responses change accordingly. Some concerns that were raised seemed to be the fact presented by a few participants as an attempt to connect the MdX success once MdX was introduced to a variety of cultures among a diverse range of churches. Since each church has its character and culture, some participants wondered how this new strategy [MdX] influenced how the churches saw the MdX. Participant #4 said:

> Every church has its own culture. So, I have a culture, and I am the pastor of a predominately [x] church, not just [y], but [x]. Now, suppose I were to try and use what I have tried to implement at a European church or an Asian church. In that case, I don't know if it would be received the same kind of way because the rules for making decisions and changes look different for the pastor of those contexts […] In some cultures, they don't want to come up with this together. [It is culturally rooted that:] You are the pastor, you tell us what to do, and we do it. But in some cultures, we want to be collaborative [and democratic.]

Even the meaning of collaboration seemed to vary among church leaders and their cultures. In some cultures, there is an apparent reluctance in the church culture to be collaborative. Participant #4 said: “Collaborative versus autocratic doesn’t look the same. [Thus, based on my church culture,] I don’t know if I would want to use 10 [habits] unless I could guarantee that the church agreed and helped throughout implementation.” In the end, by this fact, it seemed to impact the MdX implementation.

Culturally talking, Participant #4 seemed to describe his concern regarding the MdX being presented to a variety of cultures inside the churches. The pilot churches seemed to be predominantly diverse churches. One of the pastors mentioned to have more than 25 different cultures inside his church, and that the leaders of his churches came from a mix of these cultures.

The influence of the new culture coming with the MdX seemed to impact the past church way to do church. The church’s past success influenced the church culture to implement MdX. For this reason, it gave the impression that the leaders should be careful to present the new strategy because it would clash with the church’s past achievements. Participant #3 said:

> When the church has been in existence for over [x] years, it establishes a certain culture. So, when you introduce a new vision and a new mission, you have to be careful. I have to be careful to connect it with their past success. Because this is where the old-timers become very defensive, they feel that this new vision you bring up makes you disregard all the legacy and accomplishments they have achieved. That [cultural aspect] caused some [adverse] reactions, literally some fights, and some resignations [in my church.]

In an email message, Participant #3 reported, “People need to buy into the vision for the strategy to work; otherwise, the current culture will “eat strategy for breakfast.” Now, how to change the churches’ culture, which has other habits, behaviors, and modus operandi deeply ingrained? This participant expressed his concern: “The board discussed

different behaviors tied to the culture that exists in the church which may be preventing the Mission-driven."

Based the fact that the MdX will face multicultural churches, in the pilot churches, it looked like many participants presented their concern regarding the church culture and its impact on the MdX in their churches. One of the participants' concerns seemed to connect the already installed church culture that comes as part of the church's existence through its past history of success and achievements. That concern seemed to be regarding the fact that the culture could exert some impact on new future projects, particularly the one presented in this study, the MdX strategy.

Perceived Tension With the NAD Mission Statement

Several participants described what seemed to be the church leaders' tension when writing the local church's mission statement based on the proposed sample by NAD. The challenge surged while analyzing and thinking on adapting the suggested mission statement that includes the three words: Christ-centered message, hope, and wholeness. Participant #3, in an email message, shared a concern about the format of the mission statement the NAD and MdX proposed. He reported that when the church was working on the mission statement as proposed by the NAD and when the format (To reach [X] with Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness) was presented; his church board members raised several objections:

1. To "reach with a message" does not invoke action and is just talk
2. The word "hope" does not sound confident
3. The word "wholeness" is associated with Eastern philosophies
4. The mission statement must be more "sticky" and "catch" attention

Therefore, writing and adapting the church's mission statement for the local church based on the NAD sample seemed to be a challenge. Some of the arguments appeared to be that the reality for each local church is different from other churches in many aspects such as leadership and culture. They also said that the sphere of influence of the local churches seemed to change according to the cultural needs inside and outside the local community.

Other participants described their concern on regarding the installed mission statement already given by Jesus. They mentioned that Jesus already gave the mission statement in the Bible in Mathew 28:19-20, and it was forgotten. Participant #3 said: "I believe that Christ has given us vision and mission in the Bible. Our mission is to go and make disciples." Participant #2 concurred, saying:

> Christ, Himself, [gave] the best strategy. If you read The Acts of Apostles by Ellen White and the first chapter there, you have the strategy. I think it would be very encouraging for our church's leadership just to adopt the strategy given by Christ. Why are we always trying to come up with something new? Our mission is defined in Matthew 28, verses 19 to 20. Why hundreds and thousands of board meetings should be taking place across the world to sit down and discuss and come up with a mission statement? The mission, we already have it.

Connecting the challenges presented by some participants where they saw that the MdX mission should follow Matthews 28, Participant #6 said: "Matthew 28. That is the mission." He continued: "Go into the world, to not make people Adventists, but to make them disciples of Jesus." Additionally, he concluded his viewpoint saying that "[And] only by this Bible argument, the MdX mission statement should touch this point, and it has not touched it."

The MdX seemed to encourage a positive challenge in making all the departments work together where they had previously worked separately. This change in the church culture to work together instead of separately also seemed to cause tension among the

participants. A focus where all departments work together on the church to establish the mission statement together with the local strategies is expressed by Participant #13:

> Focusing us on being Mission-driven. And instead of wanting all of our departments to come together to have that focus, instead of one department doing something, another department is doing another thing that is not really connected. So that is what the MdX has provoked.

The local churches seemed to work on the writing part of the mission statement. Further concerns on how to write the right the mission statement that could direct the local church and apply its principles and intentions, seemed to be challenging for some pilot churches. On the other hand, MdX seemed to suggest and focus on being a Mission-driven church—the kind of church where all the departments and teams worked together instead of separately.

Summary of the Challenges of the MdX

While going through the process of implementing the MdX, some participants in the pilot churches described several challenges or difficulties in their understanding and experience with using MdX in their churches. One challenge was connected to learning the MdX process. Several participants voiced that they had difficulties following and understanding MdX steps as a whole. While that was a challenge, MdX also seemed to require additional trained leaders to do the work of implementation. Some participants described their viewpoint that they had some fear that the MdX could become a new fad or emphasis that would soon be replaced by some other director's new program, as well as raised a question if administrators are really in alignment with the realities of the local church.

Some participants pointed out challenges to the church culture by the fact that MdX seemed to provoke a culture change inside the churches. Some churches described

the conflict between what seemed to be the church's success from past years to how the churches understood the recent and innovative strategy that focus on mission-driven church through the MdX strategy. Several participants described their challenges when writing the mission statement because they seemed to see the Bible text as the right one. For this reason, they brought up concerns about why the NAD did not recommend the use of that specific Bible text. Furthermore, the participants consistently identified MdX as a challenge by asking every church to write their own mission statement. This assigned task assumes that every individual has the skills to craft and write a mission statement, which is also part of the specific mission-driven habits, MdX habit #5.

Some participants found understanding the MdX "habits" challenging. Some participants expressed that the MdX gave the impression not only to be a repetitive process but carried the university or academic language. The participants suggested that the language should be similar to a high school level. MdX seemed to present some other challenges: (a) the need of more clarification on some habits; (b) some habits should be in a different sequence or order in the inventory, (c) the repetitive process as the attempt to launch MdX, (d) the disconnection among the materials, and (e) the participants described the challenges and difficulties needed to complete all the steps and processes so the MdX could be successfully implemented.

Some participants felt that MdX seemed to be a time-consuming project to be studied, understood, and implemented. As a result, there was a perceived waste of time by some participants. On the other hand, for other participants, MdX seemed to reach a consensus that the time invested in studying and understanding was vital not only to the project itself but to the leadership involved in going through the MdX implementation.

The Suggestions for MdX Improvement

This section presents the themes that addressed the third research question: What do participants testing the MdX suggest as improvements to the strategy? Suggestions for improvements were based on the following. As ideas, reactions, and voices were raised in conversation with the participants, they were noted for further analysis. In the end, specific suggestions were gathered for improvement that either came up in the conversation several times or were voiced by several participants. At times these suggestions were voiced as multiple suggestions at the same time. With others, suggestions were scattered throughout the data gathering.

Not included are concerns or suggestions for improvements that seemed to be based on one person's specific situation. These seemed to include various reasons why something was not working for the church, but that issue was not confirmed by any of the other participants.

After analyzing the resulting transcripts in *Dedoose*, they were organized into three themes: (a) improve the materials, (b) improve the process of the MdX implementation, and (c) improve or define the kind of leadership MdX needs. These themes echo the three themes identified for Research Question 2: the Challenges of MdX. As in the previous sections, this section gives the participants voice, letting them speak for themselves and describe their suggestions for improvements going through the MdX implementation and its resources.

Theme 7: Improve the Materials

In my conversation with the 15 participants and getting their input about their experiences with the MdX implementation, the suggested ideas for improvement were

fundamental to reframing the current MdX to a better version. The participants suggested several ideas to improve the materials to turn the MdX into a better strategy. Several participants described the suggestion for making MdX simpler. Other participants suggested that the MdX should improve its consistency throughout the resources and materials. Along with improving the consistency of resources, simplifying the language seemed to be a huge issue that could impact the future of the MdX strategy in the churches.

This theme is classified into three sub-themes: (a) improve the consistency of the resources, (b) make it simpler, and (c) simplify the language. Table 9 presents a summary of this theme.

Table 9

Improve the Materials

Sub Themes	Description
Improve the consistency of the resources	Improve the consistency among and throughout the resources
Make it simpler	Make the habits shorter and simpler Combine the material – make one book
Simplify the language	Language level throughout the resources as middle school level and not higher than high school Language for the boomers to understand and the generations that come behind

Improve the Consistency of the Resources

Most participants, at times, seemed to struggle with the MdX sources and materials. They pointed out inconsistencies among the various materials used to study and implement the MdX which were seen as amateurish. As a researcher and according

to the MdX history, I had to remind the participants that the MdX had a long journey, and the materials were developed to fit specific needs according to the strategy development. They not only understood the reason about what appeared unprofessional but contributed significant suggestions for improvements that could make the MdX a better strategy. For instance, Participant #6 said: "I felt lost in terms of resources. So, they should improve the [MdX] resources." Participant #7 said: "I could not find some of the pages that were being pointed at the presenter's manual." Discrepancies among the materials seemed to make the participants disappointed with the resources. Participant #10 said: "I noticed a few minor inefficiencies when I was cross-referencing the materials to put them together so that our board would understand it. Just sort of like linkages to the pages, not being there, or if you go to the page."

Some participants complained that some online presentation features appeared to not work correctly. Participant #6 expressed:

> I've been to the website, and I downloaded a couple of things, but when it came to working it, I couldn't work it for some reason. I'm having difficulties with the presentations. Some of the things wouldn't work in the presentations, like the videos.

Participant #10 described her disappointment with the resources, not getting what she expected to find to help with her presentation. She said:

> When I was doing my research for my presentation on habit #6 - strategy and writing, I went to the actual MdX website, it referenced YouTube videos. So, when I went back to YouTube, it only had the first three intro videos, and then a video presentation on habit #1, #2, and #3, and then it just sort of stops at that. I was disappointed that there wasn't a video for habit #6, which I would be presenting.

Participant #7 interpreted that as MdX gathered much of the material since its beginning, the information seemed not to be tied and aligned. He said: "I think it really was something the [NAD] church launched a little bit too early with all this, and not all

the information was tied together." Nevertheless, the participants suggested that improving the MdX resources' consistency, improve the material was suggested as vital for the participants once they used the material and website as a source of their search to improve their knowledge and presentation to other leaders. Even with these inconsistencies, the participants seemed to use the resources as best as they could to work on the MdX implementation. They also seemed to take their time studying and understanding the MdX strategy, resources, and materials.

Make It Simpler

The participants often wished for the MdX instructions to be more concise and uncomplicated. The topic often came up with having only one manual that should combine all the important MdX information in a simpler and less complicated way. For instance, speaking of their viewpoints on make it simpler, Participant #6 said: "Yeah, simpler, simpler." Participant #1 wondered if MdX could be simplified conceptually when he said: "Make it simple. So, I would say if you want to save money, cut down to five or six [habits]. Make it shorter; make it simpler." Participant #2 focused on the same point, saying: "There are so many materials and stuff. They could combine it. Make it simpler. If you analyze them [the habits], you can make them five out of ten. And you give a smaller recipe to people."

Participant #2 gave a thorough description of how he thought it should be:

> Two habits can be [incorporated] into one. For example, habit number one is taking inventory. Take the inventory and discuss the results. Then you have number nine. Keep a current display of your impact [that] the entire congregation can follow your progress. So, number one and number nine are very similar. You go through; you keep your scoreboards; everybody knows what we are doing. So, I don't see the reason to have these two habits.

This participant gave an example of combining habit one and habit nine and making it simpler combining two in one. In order to simplify and make it easier to the church members and leaders involved in the MdX implementation, this participant looked at how to simplify and tie one habit to another similar habit. This process of combining habits seemed to be a very important point he presented when, in his mind, habit #1 and habit #9 could be tied as only one habit.

Simplifying the habits or cutting them down to fewer habits was also a concern expressed in different wording by other participants. Participant #1 suggested:

> Less than ten habits. Because when you come to ten, it's a little bit too much for people to be able to take it. I would say five the maximum. Maybe just narrow down the habits, but the habits are still step-by-step. Just make it simple because right now is too much. They cannot remember. They all don't remember what habit six, what habit seven. They don't remember that.

In fact, out of the 15 people I interviewed, 14 of them indicated that there should be a simplification process that included the reduction in the number of habits, and nine actually mentioned no more than five specific habits in total.

Many other participants described their suggestions regarding the recommended books. As part of the resources, MdX has books plus the tool kit, which includes three booklets. Analyzing the books and booklets appeared to be another concern voiced a few times, that the various manuals, workbooks, and the main books should have the same language and be worded similarly. Participants pointed out that the examples used as illustration throughout the materials could be different, but the terminology used in each one should be the same.

Participant #2 said: "Link the strategies in one book, and you have everything you need there." Participant #5 said: "Make one book. Just one." He described his view with this regard and suggested:

> I think that you need to make the literature coordinate better. It's too much to read. Pastors' implementation guide. Presenters' manual. The workbook. And then you have two books that talk about Mission-driven Excellence. These books have to say the same thing. They must be more aligned.

Suggesting how the books should be, Participant #5 described:

> You could have sections in there that just say, for instance, for presenter only. I'm using my participant's workbook and the presenter's manual, plus the pastor's implementation guide. It was too much. And they don't say the same thing. So, after a while, I am just using the participant's workbook. I have read the Mission-driven church, but that is too much too.

The books seemed to be an inherent issue also expressed by Participant #6. He explicitly referred to the book:

> The book itself could be a little bit simpler. I could understand the book, but I wouldn't say to one of my regular members to read this book because it was too much. I say this with every single ounce of respect for my members and for things like that. So, simpler, and shorter.

The participants seemed to voice in chorus to make the MdX resources simpler, all in one material resource as well as to use simpler, non-academic language. They suggested that the language should be improved to make the MdX simpler and more understandable. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I interviewed multicultural churches where for many of them, English was not their mother language, for some the second one, and for some even the third one. Indeed, there seemed to be a misunderstanding of the materials for many participants based on the wording throughout the resources.

Participant #14 said: "Because even some of the videos can be overpowering, and some of the words that you don't know, and you're like, okay, what is this talking about? So, making it simpler. For people to understand it better." She gave a bit more explanation. She said:

> Especially if you are a church that doesn't understand [x, y, or z], how do they incorporate [MdX] into this? Making it simpler. If it is in a simpler dialog, it will be easier for other members to understand even, because English is not

> their first language. They are coming to an English church, but they don't understand what we are talking about. If it were in a simpler language, they would appreciate.

Participant #14 still suggested that to make it simpler, justifying that they do not need more verbiage or more wording. They need to get to the point. She said:

> Sometimes less is more, or more is less. I think that we don't need more verbiage, and we don't need more wording. We need to get it to a point where somebody can see it [on] one page and follow it. Because people don't have the time. So, less is more.

According to the participants, it seemed that making it [MdX] simpler was voiced by several in different ways. The suggestion for simpler materials was seen in different ways. The material "as is" presented minor inefficiencies that suggested combining the habits to have fewer of them. The suggestions also directed to gather all the essential MdX knowledge and make only one book.

Simplify the Language

Some participants suggested that the language of MdX needed to be simplified. Although the language was pointed to as one of the challenges already explained in the challenges section, they suggested that the language level should improve and probably be similar to a high school level and not as academic as presented through the resources. The participants pointed out that easier language would still reach different audiences and as many people as possible. Participant #1 said:

> Those two books are so academic. They are too high for everyday people to understand them. The leaders are not able to finish reading the books. The language sounded more complicated than for ordinary people—the words, the vocabulary used.

Participant #10 suggested: "The [language] more simplified is better. I think that sometimes when there is too much detail, too much information, we get a little bit

overwhelmed and get lost." She still said: "The whole idea gets lost because it gets too wordy. People get confused when there is too much information."

Other participants described that the language in the material appeared to bring a different interpretation. It meant that the material provoked difficulties with a complete understanding when the leaders were reading and studying. The consensus seemed revolved on the fact that if the language was simplified, the leaders could read and understand more quickly. It would be more extensively understood not only by the participants, but all people interested to learn about the MdX strategy.

Participant #7 shared: "When we try to read the paragraphs or the sentences there, it was so hard to understand the language. Different readers could interpret it differently. Some other people would skim through it and assimilate its meaning." These arguments regarding the language suggested to improve the language, turning the language as similar to a school grade seven, even four, elementary school, or middle school. Participant #14 suggested: "Having the strategy written at a grade 7 reading level, or even a grade 4 reading level so that even kids could understand. Even kids could understand what the strategy was all about. Middle school level."

Participant #6 suggested a similar view: "But I think that what we have to do is basically gear our publication for stuff like this to that of a person, of a child in elementary school, middle school." Participant #4 suggested that the language should be for the boomers to understand and the generations behind them. He suggested:

> I do see the value in changing the language so that the boomers will understand what you are saying. I don't think that you should ostracize or leave them out of the process, but certainly, most organizations plan for the generation that is coming behind, not for the generation that is on its way out.

All these participants described their perceptions of the language and suggested that it be simplified to an elementary or middle school level. The simpler the language, the more people would be able to grasp the full impact of the MdX in their churches. Not only that, MdX would be understood by a larger number of future participants in their decision to implement MdX in their churches.

Theme 8: Improve the Process of the MdX Implementation

The participants presented several suggestions for improvements that could facilitate the process of implementation. Many of participants described the suggestion for needing more training for the leaders. Other participants said that the MdX should support progress through the church reports to help them compare themselves. Participants also suggested that social media should be used more extensively. These findings are classified into three sub-themes and is also presented in Table 10.

1. Provide more training for the leaders
2. Support progress through reports
3. Use social media more extensively to support the MdX implementation

Table 10 presents a summary of this theme.

Provide More Training for the Leaders

The majority of the participants suggested a need for more trained leaders in the local churches to help with their knowledge and experience so they could implement the MdX more effectively. The training should come from the NAD to the conferences, and from the conferences to the local churches. This training would launch other methods of preparation that could help the development of new and experienced leaders. Participant #7 suggested:

> Training for the leaders. The lead pastor, or the associate pastor, or someone from the church, should have been trained ahead of time. They should be the ones that facilitate any discussion, any questions that the other leaders or members may have.

Table 10

Improve the Process of the MdX Implementation

Sub Themes	Description
Provide more training for the leaders	More training for the leaders coming from the conference ahead of time
Support progress through reports	Assessments and reports with historical data as the number of members, attendance, tithe, offerings, number of visitors, ministries comparing to other churches/sizes
Use social media more extensively	MdX on the most popular social media platforms – YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram Use social media channels to make MdX experiences and support materials available

Participant #8 suggested that the pieces of training should come from the top. She said:

> The most important thing, I believe, is more training for the leaders. The training should always come from the management, the top. It should start from [the] conference, and then the conference can roll out with our church leaders. Committed leaders. The training must be very well planned.

A consistent concern centered on finding effective ways to transfer the MdX knowledge from the church leaders to the local churches with a training that everyone involved could be part of and really learn about.

Participants #9 and #10 suggested that the leaders receive more training from the conference and give back the acquired knowledge to their local churches and deliver their training from the conference correctly to the other leaders. Participant #9 suggested:

> Training, but sometimes some people go to training, and they go back, and it is all the same thing - constant information for them to be informed by themselves, for the conference, the pastor. So, we have to ensure that they can deliver to the other leaders and church what was happening, what was new, what was changing, and what had changed. (Participant #9)

Participant #10 suggested:

> Suppose there was training for other leaders, not only pastors at the conference level. In that case, we could hold onto and learn more about MdX and learn how we could then bring it back to our local church. We could then give the training to other leaders, train the committee, or train another set of leaders involved in the implementation.

Earlier, we noticed the concern of the participants with some of the habits. Some participants found them to be too confusing. Others seemed to struggle with the different approaches that came through presentations in the workbooks and the presenter's manual. Addressing these issues, Participant #7 suggested the use of videos to present the habits. He said: "Methods of presentation. Video presentations can be developed. The North American Division should have the funds to support this." It would include video training and video presentation, which should help the churches better understand the MdX. Participant #7 still said: "If we had a video training/presentation provided by NAD. I think that it would be very beneficial."

Along with more training sponsored by the conference, participants suggested seminars. These seminars would be extended to multiple local church leaders so more people could participate instead of only a few people. Participant #7 suggested:

> The conference should conduct a seminar for all those MdX participants, and then when they go to the church, they can roll it out; they are equipped [with] what to do about it. Because I believe that the pastor should be there, but some church leaders should support him. So, it's not, so he is not overburdened.

A similar suggestion was given by Participant #10:

> It is not necessarily just one person, but maybe an identified group of leaders who are really committed. This will be the group of leaders working more

> closely with our MdX strategy and implementing it at our church. So, we [will] send you to train [to] be more knowledgeable about what [MdX] is and how it will help our church be more improved and our mission and mission focus.

Training for the leaders seemed to be voiced by the participants once the church would have more leaders prepared to implement the MdX. This training should come from the NAD to the conferences and from the conferences to the local churches to help in the process of development of new and experienced leaders.

Support Progress Through Reports

While several participants described their ideas for improvement, some participants suggested an assessment done by the churches that could be turned into a report that would gauge their progress and compare to similar churches. The report should include the number of members, tithe, offerings, number of visitors, ministries by week, month, and statistical data analysis. Participant #4 suggested:

> Maybe simply by creating an assessment tool of the medium churches, no matter what area around the world, and creating an MdX based on the medium. Understanding that you will have greater or lesser, but the medium should at least give you an average of what you are looking at for the church.

Participant #4 described a bit more of his suggestion. He said:

> Analyzing how much ministry happens per week or even monthly. What does it look like for your local church? So again, one of those would be, perhaps, what does your weekly attendance look like? What is your online presence? What would you say is your [most significant] impact in the community right now? Whereas a congregation does you see yourself in the next five years.

All these views suggested by Participant #4 were concurred by Participant #15. He said: “I definitely can see an assessment that measures progress,” and for Participant #7: “I’d like [to see] a continuing assessment of the church growth process.” The participants described the need to have a tool that could compare data from their church size with churches that implemented the MdX and churches that did not implement the

MdX. This tool would bring not only the attendance, tithes and offerings, and baptisms, but all other essential church activities and results that could be transferred to a report and be available to them. These reports should be available on the website and other social media MdX campaigns.

Use Social Media More Extensively

As technology and social media are differentiating forces nowadays, in one voice, the participants described their need and desire to have the MdX on the social media platforms. These tools, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and others, seemed to facilitate access to MdX knowledge and make the learning more quickly accessible. Participant #3 suggested: "The improvement I see was that as we [live] in a digital age, why not have MdX available on social media platforms or YouTube." Participant #3 explored the reasons for this improvement. He said:

> MdX should have its own channel. So, pastors who are doing mission-driven processes could share their insights, could share their best practices. Or its own Facebook. That would create a whole new wave of building momentum through supporting, and sharing, and encouraging each other.

Participant #3 also suggested ways to manage social media inputs. He said: "[With] log in preview. There should always be [a] preview for review of files. And, of course, administrators should be monitoring what is posted and what is happening." Participant #3 elaborated more on the way that he saw the improvements in social media. He said:

> The churches would be modeling to other churches. And once those links are established, it could also become networking, digital networking where churches could log in and seek help and seek assistance from other churches - even asking questions. [People] sharing ideas, suggestions, asking questions, and [the] dialog is there. So, I would love to see [MdX] going digital.

To help along the MdX as a whole and add extra tools to the participants in general as well as to the other churches, social media seemed to be seen not only as a necessity but something that the NAD should invest right now. Participant #10 suggested:

> Videos on the YouTube channel. I think it would be much more effective if all of the videos were uploaded to that YouTube channel. When people [read] through the material on the website and click on the YouTube channel link, it would have all the complete video sessions already uploaded.

Participant #3 said that the videos should be extra tools to help other churches learn more on MdX: "Adding more live videos, not only from producers from Paul Brantley but also from other pastors and other churches own so to say, platform." Participant #8 suggested:

> The videos should be a series and easy to follow, and when you go together, you can review what has been said, so the follow-up of the instruction is always original. You can always get the video. You won't forget anything, because the video is always there.

Participant #7 gave some insights into how the video should be designed: "Whoever is leading this MdX should be presenting that video and communicating that concept to the whole church, all churches. It [should be] probably half an hour video. Like what is the normal presentation."

Once the video was suggested as an improvement to be done to the MdX, Participant #8 gave more reasons to have them: "I would say that there is more retention when there is a video that you can review." Also, to understand the desire to make the MdX available on social media, the videos with testimonies were described as vital to the MdX participants. Participant #4 suggested: "What I think is missing are videos with testimonies. So, the testimonies are not objective; they are subjective, [making] them very personal to those sharing the information."

Sounding as one voice, the participants suggested ideas for MdX improvement by making MdX available on various social media platforms. Social media would include a video series of presentations on the MdX that would help the participants retain and better understand the material. As a result, they would understand and assimilate the steps and habits implementation faster and more appropriately. The videos would also be used for training purposes and available for the local churches to study and for any person interested in learning about the MdX strategy.

Theme 9: Improve the Kind of Leadership MdX Needs

This last theme talks about different ways leaders could help the MdX implementation. Since MdX is a strategy, it lays out steps and expects that if you follow the steps, something will happen. In brief, strategy can be stated as, if you do this, that will happen. Accordingly, MdX seemed to be in the leader's hand to turn it into a success or not. Thus, leadership seems to be vital for MdX success. MdX success is connected not only with how the leaders conduct the implementation but how the leaders approach people, church board, local department leaders and members. After the initial approach, the leaders show MdX to everyone and then start the process of what, when, why, and how to facilitate the MdX interpretation and discussion when implementing the MdX.

In my conversation with the 15 participants and getting input about their experiences with the MdX implementation, the suggested ideas for improvements came from those that really were involved and participated in the MdX. Several participants described that the improvement should begin with a mindset change among the local church members and leaders. Other participants said that the MdX should not be optional

for the churches. Others still claimed more involvement was needed from the local leaders when working on a project with the MdX dimension.

I classified this finding into three sub-themes:

1. Mindset change,
2. More involvement between church sides, and
3. MdX should not be optional.

A summary of this theme is displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Improve the Kind of Leadership the MdX needs

Sub Themes	Description
Mindset change	New ways to do mission inside and outside of the church More involvement through mindset change
More involvement between church sides	Different people at different level coming together to discuss MdX and new projects More involvement among the people
MdX should not be optional	An expectation that the MdX should be taken more seriously The conference would recommend to all the pastors and churches

Mindset Change

While some participants seemed to think about and suggest crucial improvements to the MdX, others seemed to affirm that the most important improvement started with a mindset change among the churches and their leaders. It may not be seen as an improvement for all, but the fact is that if the mindset of the leaders is not changed, the MdX might not even have a beginning stage.

Participants described the mindset change as new ways to plan mission inside and outside of the church. With MdX, there seemed to be a higher engagement level from the church teams and members in their local communities. Some participants were very affirmative when talking about mindset change. Participant #14 said that the strategy had been changed as well as the mindset. She said: "In the past, our strategy was always to invite people from the community to come to our church. Come, come, come. Now, our mindset is changing. We are going out to them rather than expecting them to come to us."

Mindset change seemed to be tied to MdX once it promoted more involvement and engagement from the leaders and church members as suggested and described by Participant #6:

> We developed a greeters committee with the deacons and deaconess. We had them standing by the door in the parking lot, welcoming people. The guests would be met in the parking lot, escorted to the door. As they got to the door, one of the deaconesses would say a prayer with them, and welcome them into the church, and let them know what was happening for the day and that they were welcome to stay for lunch.

Participant #3 tied the mindset change as the way MdX would change the church scenario. He said:

> I see a particular pastor. He goes from church to church, and the churches are in decline. Any church he takes, there is no baptism, … no more evangelism, [and] the tithe goes down…. [Then] the conference realizes that [pastor] was killing churches. … Another church implements MdX, … baptisms increase. And not only that, because leaders got so excited, I had [even] elders baptizing.

These participants implied that the improvement they want to see in the MdX seemed to start with the mindset change. With the mindset change by the MdX implementation, the church members' involvement increased as a result that came with the mission, vision, and the strategy in writing plus the other specific mission-driven habits that the MdX brought to the churches.

More Involvement Between the Church Sides

Some participants described their feelings about how the MdX was first elaborated and introduced to them as pastors. They suggested that the administrative officers and local church leaders should gather more people to be involved by the time they were developing and discussing not only the MdX but other similar projects. Participant #4 said: "So, because each church's inception is different, you cannot always have the same worldview, that messages, and the conversation that leads to the change." He suggested:

> It would be best if you had different people at different levels hearing the idea, perhaps on some level for the very first time. It should be extended to more pastors, leaders, sociologists, psychologists, mechanics, homemakers, etc. All of the different people who make up culture to be a part of how culture and new projects are shaped.

Describing a similar view as Participant #4 did, Participant #12 suggested:

> Reach out before coming up with something new. It would seem like it was not top-down, but people felt they had some involvement in this new strategy. Let's have townhall meetings. We could talk about what we were hoping to do. We would go all across the nation, go all across the NAD conferences, and then when it was all said and done, and everybody could say that they had something to do with this new strategy. They could get involved quickly with MdX. (Participant #12)

More involvement between church NAD and conferences, and conferences and local churches, appeared to be reflected in people working in favor of the project. Some participants suggested that church administrators should involve more people when initiating a conversation or planning to launch new projects. These points were indicated as improvements to be done.

MDX Should Not be Optional

Some participants voiced a strong desire to see the MdX implemented in the churches more seriously. Others nodded in agreement. MdX should come as a commitment from the conference. The fact that many churches did not participate in its implementation was puzzling.

> [MdX] should not be optional. Because when we say it's optional, it diminishes it in significance. I know we cannot mandate, we cannot force anybody, but this should be taken seriously. It should be communicated that we expect all churches to move out [of] the status quo.

Participant #12 described a similar view regarding not being optional. He said: "I am hoping that churches would step up. I hope that conferences would recommend [MdX] to their pastors." This was a strong suggestion based on the expectation that the MdX should not be optional but communicated in the way that, once implemented correctly, it would change the churches' status quo. The new culture is implemented, and the results are real. These participants seemed to demonstrate the desire to have all the Ontario Conference as well as NAD churches get more serious about the MdX strategy once it had proved to be a fundamental factor of change turning, churches into mission-driven churches.

Summary of the Suggestions for the MdX Improvement

This section sought to address the third research question, "What do participants testing the MdX suggest as improvements to the strategy? This was the final phase for this study, where participants described their perceptions toward MdX implementation and its resources, suggesting ideas for improvements. The participants shared valuable suggestions, including:

1. Support progress through reports - This tool would allow them to compare data from their church with other similarly sized MdX churches and churches that are not MdX churches.

2. Make it simpler - The *less complicated* effect seemed to be expressed in different ways. For instance, combining the habits to have fewer habits, gathering all the vital MdX instruction and knowledge, and make one book only because the material "in its current format" presented some inefficiencies.

3. Use social media more extensively – The MdX should be featured and promoted on social media platforms. This suggestion, social media with video presentation, seemed to help the participants to have better retention and understanding of the material. The videos would also be used for training and material available for the local church and other churches anytime.

4. Mindset change – It seemed to be claimed by most of the churches because they represented a multicultural climate. Together with the mindset change caused by the MdX as a whole, the involvement and engagement among the church members seemed to increase because of the good results that came with the implementation of the specific habits.

5. More involvement between the church administrators and local churches – It seemed to claim that the church administrators should involve more people when planning to launch new projects.

6. MdX should not be optional – MdX should be communicated in a way that, once implemented correctly, changes the churches' life. Pastors shared their desire to

have all Ontario Conference churches as well as the NAD churches getting more serious about the MdX. MdX seemed to modify the church's health and encourage its growth.

7. Provide more training for the leaders – A lot more training for the leaders seemed to be fundamental for the churches once they had trained more leaders prepared to implement the MdX. These training pieces should come through the conferences and the NAD, and help the local churches develop new and experienced leaders.

8. Improve consistency of the resources – It was voiced that the MdX should have consistency in all the materials and resources, which would tend to give more credibility to the MdX.

9. Simplify the language. Several participants described that the wording used in the resource should be simplified to the elementary or middle school level. The simpler the language, the more people would understand the MdX strategy.

This chapter was devoted to addressing the three research questions. It analyzed the strengthens and the challenges, and it suggested ideas for MdX improvement. The participants' voices were pieces of evidence revealing that the pilot churches not only implemented the MdX but worked attentively reaching success in its implementation, analyzing each step done towards a Mission-driven church. The data were obtained from six one-on-one interviews and two focus groups.

The findings were organized into nine themes. Through the sub-themes, I could successfully describe the participants' viewpoints on each one. The participants gave a description followed by a discussion that supported and explained each finding. The last chapter of this study, Chapter 5, is devoted to discussion, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for the MdX.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study aimed to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how participants in the NAD pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses and how it could be improved. The project helped to understand the value of the MdX strategy through the culture of ten habits implementation.

MdX is a combination of events and processes working together as a strategy for local congregations to align their life and programs towards the accomplishment of their mission. It originated in 2012, as REACH in the Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) in the North America Division (NAD). In 2016, REACH turned into the MdX strategy and is now implemented by pilot churches around the division. This study focused on the experience of eleven churches in the implementation stage of the strategy. The goal of the study is a better understanding of this phenomenon – the MdX strategy – and to provide field-based feedback which will allow the OSR to continue its ongoing efforts to refine the MdX strategy so it can help more churches to accomplish their mission more effectively.

This study used a qualitative method, together with the formative research methodology. The formative research methodology proved to be a systematic and

developmental approach to evaluation and improvement with a proven track record as a tested and efficient method for improving systematic processes. Since it fits this study's purpose, the project described the churches' experiences in implementing the MdX strategy through a culture described by MDX as 10 habits which represent ten ways of thinking and acting in a mission driven way. Having the possibility to find ways for improvement, formative research was chosen as the methodology for this study.

This study was an *in vivo* naturalistic case to pursue the purpose of this study. The investigation took place during the implementation. The method of formative research was used for improving an existing theory. Because MdX, as a strategy, lays out a few steps and processes that are expected to yield specific results, MDX in itself, is not a theory, but is based on a theory with it functions in effect like a prescriptive theory. Therefore, knowing that strategy and theory follow the same pattern, I felt this was a very appropriate methodology.

Purposeful sampling of the 67 pilot churches involved in implementing MdX in the NAD brought me to 11 churches in Ontario, Canada. Of those churches, six ended up being part of this study. For each church I interviewed the pastor and a group of church leaders who were directly involved with the implementation process.

The data were collected through multiple data sources: one-on-one interviews with the six church pastors, two focus group interviews with a group of lay leaders, a written survey dealing with 15 participants, videoconferencing, email messages, field notes (limited observation, perceptions, and feelings), and document analysis. During the two focus groups I interviewed nine individuals (four in group 1 and five group 2). These

two focus groups included the elders and church leaders from two out of the six chosen churches.

A set of interview questions was prepared that helped manage and direct the interviews with the participants. The interview questions helped identify the findings to the research questions and captured the essence of the participants' ideas and suggestions for improvements. Those six interview questions were used in conducting the one-on-one and focus group interviews (see Appendix E).

The participants voluntarily answered the research questions, shared their perceptions, and provided a valuable perspective of MdX with many ideas and suggestions for its improvement. The surveys provided by the OSR were the starting point for this research because they positioned the churches about the strategy implementation made by the local churches. The churches struggled with planning and implementation.

In the beginning, an update through email was requested by the Ontario Conference administrator from the pilot churches. These emails were fundamental to understanding the steps the churches were taking in the implementation process. The emails also helped me to gather some insights about how the MdX was being received and implemented by those churches. Due to Covid 19, local observations were not possible; however, I wrote field notes gathered through limited observations, perceptions, and feelings during and after the interviews. The NAD provided plenty of material to the churches to read and understand the entire strategy. The responses from the participants implementing the MdX strategy were examined. Reviewing the questions, the participants described their interpretation of the questions that supported and explained

their understanding of how they perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. Afterward, I would register the participants' perceptions according to the questions and observations made in my notes.

The data analysis for this study was a vital tool to analyze the load of information the participants described going through the interviews. Afterward, through the interview transcripts' quotations, the participants' perspectives were captured to understand the fullness of their thinking and experiences while listening carefully to their responses, transforming them into themes. All the transcripts were analyzed several times for accuracy, and the themes defined by the number of times the participants expressed the same views on that particular moment.

Main Findings

The findings are organized into three sections according to the three research questions. Question 1 addressed the value participants saw in MdX for the churches. Question 2 addressed the perceived strengths and weaknesses of MdX, and Question 3 addressed possible improvements of the MdX strategy suggested by the participants. For each of the research questions, three themes emerged.

Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was: What do participants testing the MdX find most valuable about the strategy? The participants descriptions are based on the data collected from the interviews and email messages. The data collected from the participants' description revealed three themes.

Theme 1: MdX Is Uniquely Adventist

1. MdX is uniquely Adventist. MdX is a strategy produced and owned by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in the North American Division (NAD). Being unique, MdX brings an Adventist language of mission to revitalize the SDA church's mission outlook. MdX enables churches to feel supported by the church structure. Participants noted that there is nothing similar on the American SDA market.

2. MdX is a helpful tool. MdX is a helpful growth-oriented SDA tool, a tool to fulfill the mission. As a tool, it presents a new framework for the churches to align their programs and life with their mission. It focuses on the quality, spirituality of the church and supports the church towards mission accomplishment.

3. MdX involves a paradigm shift. It requires a change in thinking about church life. MdX is a principle-based strategy that is not just an Adventist one but a biblically based one. MdX is more than a NAD/SDA program. MdX is an outgrowth of how we bring the Gospel to bear on practical church life. And it requires a different kind of leadership.

4. MdX is strategic church planning for SDA churches. It provides a starting and ending point and provides a straightforward way to work towards the fulfillment of mission. MdX also promotes ways to become a Mission-driven church implementing strategies to get the churches on board while working with all departments with pre-established goals.

Theme 2: MdX Provides Concrete Steps Toward Action

1. MdX promotes a change in the church's climate. It promotes a spiritual openness to change. Changing the climate nurtures a church curiosity about the MdX and provides concrete steps to raise expectations that something positive will happen.

2. MdX provides clear direction. It gives direction to the churches and shows how the departments and leaders can work together instead of working alone. It directs the churches on how to change their old ways, get focused on the MdX mission, and reorients the church towards evangelism.

3. MdX reinforces and encourages a new set of commitments to fulfill God's mission. The participants described several kinds of commitments: (a) commitment to be a spiritual church, (b) commitment to get more serious about what the church is doing in the implementation, (c) united commitment from the conference, church, church members, and teams, (d) commitment through a focus on mission, (e) commitment to become a church that models what an MdX church is like, (f) commitment to learning through the resources so they could reach an adequate level of implementation, (g) commitment to a different approach to leadership that uses wise strategies to gain buy-in into MdX, and (h) commitment as MdX empowers more people to do the work. MdX empowers more members as it moves away from relying on a few to do the work.

Theme 3: MdX Seems Simple, But Takes Time

1. The simplicity of the MdX. The participants described that the MdX was succinct and straightforward; it focused on what was important. Everything in the MdX was essential, and people could understand and follow its logic. MdX was practical,

pragmatic and aligned to the sources and materials once it helped the churches in their step-by-step processes.

2. Despite being simple, MdX took time to implement. It could not be done quickly. It took time to read, study, analyze and connect all the material so the implementation could reach a better understand on all the processes, events, and habits.

Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was: What do participants testing the MdX identify as challenges or difficulties with the strategy? The data collected from the participants' description is revealed through themes 4, 5, and 6.

Theme 4: Challenges with the Material

1. MdX at times uses a rather theoretical/academic language to explain the tools. The participants described that the vocabulary used throughout the resources made the material harder to understand. The issue with the language was described in unison by a majority of the participants. MdX also brought a business-strategy language once it presented difficulties with the full understanding the habits and their meaning. For many participants, the MdX language was not easily understandable. The wording was not simple, and the language was difficult for people whose first language was not English.

2. Some habits were not easy to see as "habits." The participants reported that a few habits required more clarification on the habits' meaning and how to work with them. For instance, Habit #1, should not be a habit and could be changed into an assessment before the MdX strategy is launched. On the opposite end of the list, Habit #10 also should not be a habit since it reflects the result of all the good decisions made during the implementation of Habits #1 through Habit #9. Habit #2, Making Spirit-filled

commitments, should include Habit #7, Aligning departments. According to the participants, if there is no commitment, how could the church even attempt to align the departments? Additionally, the relative position of the habits could be reprioritized in the inventory. Some participants felt their work was very repetitive – they talked about the same issues multiple times.

3. MdX presented a disconnection among the resources. Participants were challenged as they looked through suggested pages and references in the materials to find additional information in a resource. The specific page cited in one material did not match their confirmation in the referenced material, so the linkage among the resources did not match. During the interviews, I reminded the participants that the MdX had a long journey, and the materials were developed to fit specific needs according to the strategy development since its beginning with the REACH approach. They not only understood the reason about what seemed unprofessional but described significant suggestions for improvements that could make the MdX, a better strategy. Based on what the participants described, it could be interpreted as a weakness. However, this also should be seen in the context of the development of the MdX process, a historical development, and thus, it should be expected that the improvement would bring changes.

Theme 5: Difficulties With the Process

1. MdX exposes the challenge of the lack of training and disposition to accept new roles as a leader. According to the participants, MdX required more trained leaders to implement the strategy. Some participants expressed that this will be the case where some leaders may “step up” or “step out,” meaning that the leaders will take on the greater responsibility of implementing MdX or give the opportunity and duties to new

more committed leaders to implement the MdX process. However, it was encouraging to find that leaders denied moving to a new position merely because MdX demanded a more significant time investment.

2. MdX is time-consuming. The participants indicated that MdX necessitates more time to read, learn, understand, present the habits to other church leaders, and implement. In their view, it also requires too many meetings and needs a cultural change inside the church. It wastes time as the steps were followed and then implemented. Depending on the leaders and church pace, it may take a year to implement the strategy.

At this point, it was evident that the churches perhaps need more leaders who are open to growing and have the disposition to work in this project. The issue of trained leaders who have or can develop the skills to implement the MdX was seen as very important.

Theme 6: Leadership Challenges

1. MdX shows a lack of integration with existing approaches. The participants described that MdX requires leaders to move the strategy forward and not to be changed every church cycle or when a new director is elected in the department. Also, more alignment between the church administrators and local churches is needed. First, the project was Natural Church Development (NCD). Then, REACH. Now, it is the MdX. NCD was a smoother process, some participants declared.

2. MdX is challenged by church culture. There was a concern by the participants if MdX would be valued among different church cultures. The collaborative process from the leaders throughout the implementation depended on the culture. It was very clear to the participants that the leaders needed to be careful to connect MdX with the church's

past success, otherwise the local culture would resist assimilating the MdX culture inside their churches.

3. MdX creates a perceived tension with the NAD mission statement. The participants described that the leaders had to analyze and write based on the suggested mission statement that included the three words: Christ-centered message, hope, and wholeness. The participants said that Jesus already gave the mission on Matthew 28:19-20, to go and make disciples.

Research Question 3

The third and final research question was: What do participants testing the MdX suggest as improvements to the strategy? The collected suggestions for improvement have proven to be a richness of the study. The participants described their thoughts on this research question in themes 7, 8, and 9.

Theme 7: Improve the Materials

1. Consistency among the resources. As described by the participants, the consistency among and throughout the resources should be improved.

2. Make it simpler. The participants described their desire to have the MdX simpler. Make the habits shorter and more straightforward. Combine the material – make one book. The total number of habits suggested is five, instead of ten "as is" right now.

3. Simplify the language. The participants described that the language level throughout the resources should be middle school level and not higher than high school. The language should be for the boomers to understand and the generations that come behind.

Theme 8: Improve the Process of the MdX Implementation

1. More training from the top to bottom. The participants shared their desire that the NAD should provide more training for the leaders coming from the conference ahead of time. More trained leaders should reflect in more leaders available for MdX implementation.

2. Support progress through reports. The participants described the necessity to have assessments and reports that include historical data such as the number of members, attendance, tithe, offerings, number of visitors, and ministries. This could be compared to other churches of various sizes.

3. Use of social media more extensively. The participants requested the MdX to be placed on the most popular social media platforms such as YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram. Use of social media channels to demonstrate MdX experiences acquired from the MdX participants and make additional materials available such as video trainings, testimonies, and change experiences.

Theme 9: Improve the Kind of Leadership Needed for MdX

1. Promote a mindset change. The participants suggested that MdX show new ways to do mission inside and outside the local church and its community. Thus, besides the mission to be done in and out the church, MdX encourages more involvement through a mindset change among the participants.

2. Seek more involvement among the people. The participants suggested that MdX should increase involvement between church sides. Encourage different people at different levels to come together to discuss not only the MdX but new and future projects.

3. MdX should not be optional. Impart expectation that the MdX should be taken more seriously. The conference should recommend MdX to all the pastors and churches, the participants also suggested.

Discussion

The research questions sought to cover basic but essential components of this research. So, looking at the research questions and based on the methodology used to study the MdX, I went through the interview questions, and that allowed me to capture what the participants felt was most valuable about the strengthens of the strategy, the challenges, and the suggested ideas for improvement. Additionally, I will address the three research questions by connecting the relevant findings of this study to the literature, where possible.

The discussion of the findings is organized into three groups based on the research questions. The first group of findings discusses the strengths of the MdX. In the second group of findings, the challenges of the MdX are discussed. The last group of findings discusses the ideas and suggestions for the MdX improvement.

The Strengths of the MdX

When talking about the MdX strengths, I observed that the participants were very excited about the MdX. The excitement began when the participants first responded to the interview questions by saying that MdX is a unique strategy that belongs to the SDA in the NAD. I listened to their words and observed their facial expressions, they had such excitement when they described that the North American Division of the SDA Church developed a unique strategy and owns the MdX.

As a strategy, MdX is "a plan of action. It is a living, breathing design for actual performance, a guide to execution. It is a playbook for the church to plan the best way to accomplish mission" (Brantley et al., 2015, p. 115), and I could observe through their words the excitement on the MdX strategy. Furthermore, as a unique strategy, NAD brings the sense of SDA belonging to the churches.

Uniqueness comes through "creative combination by bringing past elements together in a new and useful way" (Duggan, 2013, p. 146). MdX is uniquely Adventist, and the SDA church has been developing its process for many years. MdX is a straightforward process of creating changes that are small, large, or extreme inside the NAD/SDA churches. [MdX] promotes advancement to [church] operations, resulting in the inclusion of something new for the [churches] that transfers value to [members] and participates in its knowledge store.

According to Kuratko et al. (2019), achieving success with a new strategy "is not something that you as a manager can simply decide to do." A decision towards the new direction or strategy "must be understood by each individual, and there must be a realization that it does not produce instant success" (p. 4). The authors still state that "it requires considerable training, time, and investment, and there must be continual reinforcement" (p. 4). Perhaps, a better wording that describes the MdX as uniquely Adventist is re-think, re-invent, and do the mission differently. As a researcher I understand that the MdX is a project that can modify a church's life and help them to write a new chapter in their lives as a church leader working as a team towards mission. The participants' descriptions talked about the strategy's exclusiveness as the "Seventh-day Adventist, straight off" and that brings alignment, processes, curriculum,

organizational structure, and a biblical framework. It sounded clear from the interviews that this phenomenon—MdX strategy—influenced the church leaders and members to think more strategically about fulfilling their church and communities' mission.

Nonetheless, understanding that the church mission is to "GO" and preach the gospel and that the mission-driven church excellence (MdX) means every effort is made towards the mission. MdX supports the churches to lead local strategies and tactics. There is a potential to turn the churches into a "best-run organization" to the glory of God (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, pp. 4,14) using a unique strategy that belongs totally to the SDA in the NAD.

Besides MDX being a unique Adventist strategy, it also gave input to the strategic vision in how those involved in implementation started to describe the MdX in their own words. Some participants described MdX as a helpful tool that promotes a paradigm shift inside the churches through discussion. MdX also was seen as a strategic plan to get the church, and members committed, bringing a growth-oriented goal towards the mission. Yet, if the leaders do not have commitments, the MdX strategy implementation is compromised. As a researcher, I can describe MdX as a revolutionary and extensive process that can help the churches to be more united working together for God's mission. It involves a set of commitments.

Then, the MdX made the participants to enter into a new set of commitments to fulfill God's calling for the church—to focus on mission. Day (2018) presents Habit 2: in committing to missional excellence, saying that "this habit is a commitment service in which first the leaders and then the entire group decides to become more mission-focused, collaborative and accountable" (p. 54). With this habit of commitment in mind,

it is assumed that the SDA leaders have commitments to their churches already. However, with the MdX active in their churches, it could be that different kinds of commitments could be made towards the church mission promoted by the MdX.

While MdX is an approach that brings a new way to do mission, if there is a lack of commitment, this will impede the implementation. Lack of commitment occurs when "people are afraid to express their true opinions; it's difficult to gain their true commitment to decisions" (Daft, 2011, p. 297). Therefore, the counterpoint is the individual commitment. It occurs when "all ideas are put on the table; people can eventually achieve genuine buy-in around important goals and decisions" (p. 297). Another viewpoint on the commitment that Daft (2011) brings is that "the followers adopt the leader's viewpoint and enthusiastically carry out instructions" (p. 373). All combined contribute to a commitment among the leaders and followers.

MdX means that "everything your congregation does will now be guided by its mission – not by busy-ness [business], politics, complacency, controversy, ego or a thousand other distractions" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, p. 4). Throughout the MdX, churches, members, leaders, and pastors should all engage and work together towards genuine commitment, not only a few individuals.

A strategic vision is defined "as an ambitious view of the future that everyone in the organization can believe in and that is not readily attainable, yet offers a future that is better in important ways than what now exists" (Lussier & Achua, 2013). Day (2018) declares that "churches and organizations simply cannot move ahead if they are not focusing on outcomes… healthy organizations work hard to achieve good results. They are clear on realistic targets and work deliberately toward achieving them" (pp. 150-151).

Therefore, MdX, is a strategy to help the churches become more effective in accomplishing the mission, needs to be consistently given value so that leaders are not only giving themselves goals to be achieved but helping each other attain the outcomes.

Another discussion that was presented from time to time was regarding the change in the climate. Change in the church's climate is aligned with Habit 3: Checking climate. The "atmosphere inside the church determines how far the church will move in accomplishing its mission" as well as the "Mission-driven church diagnosis its spiritual climate as to whether it is a place that encourages personal worship and spiritual support for church members experiencing problems" (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c, pp. 27-28). The MdX promoted a better church climate seen by the members and the visitors. However, the church climate is more than that.

Within the churches' climate, it was essential to empower the leaders to not rely on one person to do the work, but the entire team has to step up and do the job. Day (2018) argues that "a generation of new Adventist innovators – both pastors and lay members – will be empowered to begin exploring fresh approaches to ministry" (p. 76). Lussier and Achua (2013) see empowerment in two ways:

1. Empowerment is about delegation and accountability. The leader has the goals, and followers achieve them; and

2. Empowerment "is about intelligent risk-taking, growth, change, trust, and ownership; followers act as entrepreneurs and owners who question rules and make intelligent decisions" (p. 355).

As the MdX empowers more members, it is vital to get the members and leaders engaged and working towards a successful MdX implementation.

Therefore, MdX assumes the role to not rely on one individual [or] pastor to do everything, more people should help the church in this MdX implementation. The big difference now is that the MdX strategy empowers more members to do the work, more members taking the position of reading, understanding, studying, preparing, and presenting the new plan to the church board or the entire church. At end, this is what MdX does; it empowers more members to pursue the mission.

Some participants also discussed the MdX as providing clear direction to their churches. Clear direction gives the organization, business, or company the feeling of "crystal clear" knowledge and understanding of all the steps needed to be done, so the mission and vision were pursued effectively. Clear direction brought more clarity for the church in What? How? Why? And When? MdX positioned the church towards its goal. Leaders with vision are moved by actions and attitudes to share new ideas with the team and position the church for the future. In the end, all leaders and church members worked towards a clear direction.

MdX was simple, but it took time to implement. Obviously, not talking on the MDX but to the present and future of the organization, Press and Goh (2018) affirm that "as a leader, you must shape your future, not just accept your present" (p. 5). Taking Press and Goh comments and connecting it to the MDX, the present showed that the churches were not prepared to elaborate and implement strategies, so not accepting the present and looking to the future and focusing on mission, the SDA churches worked on the MDX. Going through the processes, the leaders' prerogative is that they "must do something much more substantial and, frankly, much more different […] from anything they have ever done before in their professional careers" (Gentry, 2016, p. 6) even with

the risk to commit mistakes and failure. This suggests to churches that the implementation cannot be done quickly and that can occur that some churches can fail going through the implementation.

Based on my interview with the participants, I identified simplicity as another valuable piece of information. Several participants described that the MdX was seen as a simple step going through its implementation. Simplicity means it is simple, straightforward, so everyone can have access and understand it. Some participants declared happiness with the processes used to make MdX strategy a perfect one that the churches needed as well as declared that habits are really good.

Another discussion that was seen as a strength was that the MdX takes time to execute and implement the habits. However, the time must be determined by the church board or the leaders involved in the strategy implementation. Whetten and Cameron (2011) argue that "one way to enhance efficient time use is to be alert to your tendencies to use time inefficiently" (p. 124). Sometimes the tendency is to work on something that is considered urgent instead of essential things. The MdX strategy is a result of a long process of meetings, shared with church leaders' experiences, books, prayers, a variety of materials that made the MdX a strategy to help the churches in their mission.

The MdX was launched in the pilot churches following a series of pre-events or processes followed by small strategies or tactics developed by the local churches. These combined steps took time to implement correctly. For the MdX, the leaders or pastors worked according to what was pre-established throughout the church board's resources and meetings. Under this discussion, the fact that the MdX takes time to implement was

seen as a positive factor and gave the churches vital time to go over all the habits implemented.

The Challenges of the MdX

When talking about the challenges in implementing MdX, I observed that some of the participants were skeptical about the MdX. They demonstrated concerns regarding the material, the time involved in the implementation, and the language and wording used to explain the MdX content through the materials. In their words and facial expressions, I observed frustration when they described that the SDA, in the NAD developed strategy, created materials that lead to the reader lacking understanding of the contents. The MdX is a strategy that implies there will be challenges going through its implementation.

The majority of the participants described additional challenges saying that the MdX strategy is not practical, and its language was highly academic and too wordy. As a result of the language deficiencies, they considered that the language used throughout the resources is not normal. Others said that the MdX was a repetitive process and carried a university or academic level language.

MdX strategy presented the challenges of having many habits that made no sense to some participants. Other participants described their frustration, saying that some habits should be in a different order or sequence in the MdX inventory. Others described the MdX as a repetitive process that presented disconnection among the materials and presented a certain level of unprofessionalism toward the material used as guiding resources.

There was a challenge for the church leaders and other leaders presenting the MdX. There is a general concern that the churches need more trained leaders to reach

success in the implementation. This point is connected with one of the ten habits of the MdX, habit 4: Developing leaders (See Appendix B). As the leaders for their churches, they commit to presenting the new strategy to other leaders, the church board members, and the church, but this kind of work was challenging. Daft (2011) argues that "although good leadership calls for actively involving everyone, leaders are still ultimately responsible for establishing direction through vision and strategy" (p. 414). Even though being a challenge, the leaders had the responsibility on their shoulders to present the MdX.

The Participant's Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d) declares that "leader development is one of the most neglected of all church functions, and yet it is one that promises to bring high dividends when done right." A Mission-driven church is where people use their best gifts and talents for God (p. 18). All these being said, MdX requires leaders to invest their time and talent towards mission accomplishment.

In his book, *The Leadership Factor*, Kotter (1988) defines "leadership as the process of moving a group (or groups) of people in some direction through (mostly) noncoercive means" (p. 16). Discussing this point, the leaders began to present the strategy, and shared their viewpoints for the departments working all together towards mission. Dreams and hopes for the future are responsible for keeping people moving towards the end. However, for leaders to make a real difference, "they have to link those dreams with strategic actions" where "vision has to be translated into specific goals, objectives, and plans … towards the desired future" (Daft, 2011, p. 415). Once the

leaders met the challenges of presenting the MdX, they could learn and become better leaders implementing the MdX.

One issue that came up from time to time on a relatively consistent basis is that people like the idea of the ten habits but find it challenging to keep them in mind all of the same time. It seems to be too complex. This concern is in line with Lussier and Achua (2013) stating the strategy should be simple when they said, "a well-crafted one is one that is the result of teamwork, simple enough to be understood, appealing enough to energize and garner commitment, and credible enough to be accepted as realistic and attainable" (p. 403). Based on this statement, the MdX should be more straightforward, concise and the language easier to understand.

The realization exists that "as your strategy shifts to address new growth opportunities, the way you work will most likely have to change as well, along with your culture" (Li, 2019, p. 125). Another challenge was that the MdX promoted a culture change by implementing the pre-events, processes, and the MdX Inventory, followed by a set of specific mission-driven habits.

MdX strategy is, by nature, a new culture in the NAD churches, and by definition, is "an important consideration when it comes to implementing change" (R. J. Thomas, 2017, p. 33). The Presenter's Manual: A Step-by-Step Guide to Mission-Driven Excellence (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018c) affirms that the process of transitioning from "Church A" to "Church B" "requires a change of culture. It requires tenacity and grit. It does not happen by chance" (p. 11), elaborating better: "we establish a culture in our church by forming good church habits […] as leaders in our church we can bring about culture change one habit at a time" (p. 19). The published

materials explain how culture can be transformed due to the MdX and was explored in Chapter 2.

In my discussion with the participants, I could observe that culture influences how the church reaches a decision. MdX was brought to the churches to help them work strategically with all departments to pursue the mission. However, when it comes to the church culture, there was a concern if the MdX would be appropriate for different cultures.

Another perceived hot point along the discussion with the participants was that MdX brought tension with the NAD's proposed mission statement, and the complaints extended in various ways. Participants said that they did not see a reason to invest time in writing the mission statement. Some participants observed that the NAD's mission statement used three words: message, hope, and wholeness, which are more closely tied to eastern cultures. Therefore, writing and adapting the church's mission was culturally challenging to follow the NAD suggestion and integrate the work of their own mission statement.

Connecting the challenges presented by some participants, many said that Jesus already gave the mission. The mission statement should follow Matthew 28, and the administration should not be too demanding in creating a new strategy. Simply, just follow Matthew 28 and going through the chapter, some felt they found a legitimate strategy. Go and make disciples is the mission that many participants felt should be already implied to them and not take their time to develop a new mission statement for their churches.

The Suggestions for MdX Improvement

When talking about the MdX, I observed that the participants were very excited about how the improvements, if followed, could change the MdX, making it more straightforward.

Leaders and their leadership drive their businesses, companies, and careers. Leadership requires a constant and overlapping adjustment in the execution of the leader's duties and encompasses different ways to achieve effective leadership. Talking to the pastors in the NAD pilot churches that worked with the MdX, the pastors did not mention that their success was under their hands. Success was because they work as a team. But the point here is that the NAD has invested a lot of effort, a lot of time, and money to develop a strategy that can change the church's future mission. Therefore, the MdX strategy sounds more like a self-service product available to churches that feel the desire to use it, and it is not passed from the NAD to the conferences and the pastors as sounding a "command" voice, which is well accepted in certain cultures and not accepted at all in other church cultures. This might be an issue in our western culture, sometimes too democratic, but MdX should be taken more seriously.

The first and most spoken improvement discussed the MdX strategy's conciseness, making it more uncomplicated, straightforward, simple, and accessible. The participants suggested a better edition of the material.

The second most spoken improvement introduced the idea of having the MdX strategy in a digital platform or social media.

The third most frequently mentioned suggestion for improvement is training for the leaders.

The fourth most described suggestion for improvement is that to improve the kind of leadership the MdX needs. Having this thought about the importance of the leadership towards the MdX success implementation, I presented disruptive leadership. This topic, disruptive leadership, is well explained in chapter 2, but I will highlight it here.

Charlene Li claims *disruptive* is "the ability to challenge the status quo and to try to change a situation for the better" (Li, 2019, p. 109). Thus, disruptive leadership "calls for leaders who envision boldly, think innovatively, and listen intensely to the needs of customers and employees" (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p. 133). The MdX strategy is a bold calling for leaders that can make a difference by understanding and communicating the vital and significant possibilities for their local church through successful MdX implementation.

Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee (2005) asserted that "it takes courage to change patterns that have always worked well, to let the old behaviors and attitudes go and try new ones" (p. 95). No matter how difficult the change can be, the authors argued that change is essential to start with a motivating vision that can fuel the transformation. Connecting the pieces or the requirements for a leadership transformation, the requirements for a disruptive leader are also something that should be intrinsic to mostly of the MdX leaders, they are: awareness, assumptions, optimism, and critical and independent thinking.

Billington and Ellersgaard (2017), asserted that "leaders must develop and strengthen innovative and intuitive competencies to support a disruptive strategy and lead through turbulent times that may describe the world for years to come" (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017, p. 133). Moreover, leaders need to be aware of their need to develop

those competencies. Those reasonings above are congruent to strategic leadership, where well said that strategic leadership "is the process of formulating and implementing strategies" (Schellenberg, 1983, p. 19). The MdX is a strategy that urges for disruptive leaders. Not the normal ones, but those leaders that are open to think outside the box and dig deeper to provoke changes in the churches.

This section focused on the most discussed points and reported suggestions for improvements that can move further actions for the OSR in the NAD to refine the MdX strategy as a whole.

Conclusions

The key conclusion of this study is that the MdX was embraced by the participating churches as a uniquely Adventist strategy brought to the SDA churches by the OSR in the NAD.

1. MdX helps churches to think outside the box and work diligently throughout processes, pre-events, strategic planning, that supports the churches in accomplishing the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church as a community which spreads hope and healing. The MdX is a series of specific mission-driven habits that support the churches in changing their culture and the way they do mission. MdX stimulates the churches to create their own small strategies or tactics to fulfill the need and to reach success through the habit's implementation. Based on its history, culture, knowledge, leadership, and work towards the community, each church creates ways to accomplish the mission in its community or territory.

2. The MdX strategy is a successful tool towards mission accomplishment. The strategy format and the steps recommended going through the MdX implementation can help the churches to be more mission focused.

3. The MdX strategy motivates a culture change inside and outside the churches.

4. The MdX requires a different kind of leadership, even disruptive leadership, to be successfully implemented. The churches should consider the different kind of leaders, understand them and be consistent with the church board as the leaders should "step up or step out" to turn the MdX strategy intrinsic to their daily duties and leaders' roles. This idea concurs very close to the concept already explained about disruptive leadership where the leaders need to make efforts to elaborate, plan, implement small strategies along the way to make the church to grow and develop towards mission.

This study concluded by pointing out that the four primary outcomes of the MdX strategy planned and created by the OSR in the NAD cannot and will not be fulfilled to the same extent by any other church organization because:

1. The MdX appears to be the most effective tool in mission accomplishment ever created by the SDA church in the NAD.

2. The MdX appears to provide a unique strategic framework that guides the church to be more focused and work together as a team toward mission.

3. The MdX appears to deliver a valuable combination of tools that can promote relevant mentoring opportunities for aspiring leaders and young leaders looking to develop their talents and help the church toward mission accomplishment now and in the future.

4. The MdX also appears to provide opportunities for churches, church leaders, and members to explore their ideas, plans, and suggestions for a better church plan and strategies that can reach success. The relevant point is balancing the MdX acceptance among the churches, church leaders, and members versus the strategy's resistance. More involvement, less resistance.

Recommendations

This study's findings have implications for the decision makers at the OSR and in the conferences in the NAD, for local churches, church leaders, and members. There are also additional areas for further research.

Recommendations for the Church Administration

1. As the MdX is an effective way to stimulate churches towards a mission focus, and as the conceptual framework indicated, if Church A follows the MdX strategy, it is more likely that it will become a Church B. Based on the stimulus to become more mission focused, I recommend MdX to church administration, to make all possible efforts to encourage the NAD churches to incorporate the MdX implementation.

2. I recommend the integration of the research findings and participant suggestions for improvement into MdX. Church administrators should consider the findings and appropriately implement the findings into future editions of the MdX. Even though the MdX is already running in some NAD pilot churches and the resources are complete, church administrators should carefully review every suggestion made toward MdX as an improvement to it.

As the formative research methodology is recognized as a systematic and developmental approach to evaluation and improvement with a proven track record as a

tested and efficient method for improving systematic processes, and as MdX is a strategy that is based in the mission-driven theory, it fits into the theory, and was used to improve MdX as a strategy and as a theory. Thus, all the findings and argumentation found and developed through this study should contribute to the MdX refinement. The church administration should analyze these findings and turn them into a better MdX strategy.

3. I recommend the training of more leaders becoming introduced to and coached in MdX implementation. To strengthen the ability of local churches to implement the MdX approach, Church administrators can identify, call, and train a significant number of *new* church leaders. Further, this training should support NAD and conference level leader training and should also be extended to the local church leaders. These leaders should work more closely on the MdX improvements when discussing new directions for the strategy. MdX must have well-trained leaders; if not, there seems to be a tendency to fail in its implementation.

4. I recommend that the NAD create a consistent team of pastors and lay persons to work regularly with the NAD and think ahead by using the MdX strategies themselves. The participants suggested that the OSR consider how it would work more collectively and involve more diverse people in developing new strategies to help the churches achieve their individual missions. Several participants declared that the conference, pastors, and leaders should be more participative through elaborating the MdX strategies or similar projects.

5. I recommend more communication and engagement among leaders. The OSR and the local conferences should promote more engagement among the leaders. In each

new strategy, there is some level of resistance regarding the new ideas and propositions. Better communication and building relationships will help overcome new innovations.

6. I recommend the MdX strategy to give more time and support for the churches to develop the entire strategy years over several years' time. The mission of the church and the key strategy to be implemented should not change in every cycle of administrators. If some administrators have a move in their career or retire, what will happen to the MdX strategy? It should have consistency in terms of the direction they endorse for the NAD churches for now and in the future.

7. I recommend the MdX to be tied to the leader's spiritual life. The OSR and the local conferences should look for MdX leaders to have a focused spiritual commitment, which appears to be a major factor in MdX success.

8. I recommend the NAD create assessments and reports for church evaluation for pre- and post- MdX assessment during and after implementation. The NAD and conferences should assess the pastor's strengths and weaknesses and work in favor of their gifts or talents. The church is a corporate company with different kinds of leaders, and they should be allocated to the churches according to their strengths, based on the assessment.

9. I recommend a strong leader voice. NAD is a diverse division within the SDA church and presents a variety of cultures inside the local churches. Thus, NAD and the Conferences should express more importance and be more emphatic when promoting MdX to the pastors, leaders, and churches; always encouraging more churches to become involved in the MdX strategy.

10. I recommend making MdX simpler. Based on the participants suggestions, the best way to simplify the process is to reduce the ten specific habits to no more than five. More recently, beyond the scope of this study, the Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) attempted to simplify by shortening the book where it has come out with a new, simpler approach by reorganizing the habits using the acronym BASIC. Each letter of this BASIC acronym details the specific habits. They are still in number of ten specific habits, but they were reorganized, condensed and better explained through one small book: *Mission-driven BASICs: Church Strategy Made Simple* by Paul S. Brantley (2020). This new approach validates the process that the OSR has been continuing to work to improve the entire process of the MdX as a whole. To view the new BASIC approach see: *Mission-driven BASICs: Church Strategy Made Simple* by Paul S. Brantley (2020), and https://mission-driven.org/habits-the-mission-driven-secret-sauce

11. I strongly recommend that the OSR consider how the MdX strategy may be refined and better suited to the churches that plan to implement the strategy and how to involve the children, youth, churches with women predominance, and other sub-cultures inside their churches. Under this recommendation, I suggest OSR create an "MdX strategy for Dummies" book. I believe it would be beneficial.

12. I recommend leaders as disruptive leaders: Based on this study I consider MdX a disruptive strategy (see Figure 2). Accordingly, disruptive leadership calls for leaders who can disturb an organization's status so they can promote or cause change, innovation, and transformation to subsist or grow (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017), Within this context, I consider the MdX strategy as in need of pastor and church leaders within the context of disruptive leadership.

Recommendations for the Churches, Church Leaders, and Members

It appears that MdX is a concept that finds acceptance in the field. MdX is a mindset change from what churches do nowadays. But it needs good training for our leaders and members. This finding indicates that the strategy tends to be the right path toward mission and should be followed by the churches and members. However, the leaders need more training. More training, more knowledge, and greater involvement to promote commitment and less resistance. Less training, less study, learning, and knowledge by the leaders and members tend to create more resistance.

1. I recommend the churches prioritize training to selected leaders and leaders in training. The training should come in many ways: videos, testimonies, social media. These different ways of training should be consistent with the church culture. MdX is a culture of innovation through a set of specific mission-driven habits implementation that promotes organizational change. In fact, by the time the churches take the MdX Inventory, the first habit, they come to realize the need for change. Therefore, to move from Church A to Church B, there are a series of ten habits of implementation. After the church implements these habits, the improvements inside and outside the church are consistent and ingrained in the church's life and routine now and years ahead.

2. I recommend an assessment to place the leaders in the right department. The local churches supported by the NAD and conferences should have assessment to evaluate the church members' strengths and weaknesses and work in favor of their gifts or talents. The leaders should be allocated to the departments according to their strengths, based on the assessment.

3. I recommend the churches to be open to implement the MdX strategy. The churches should be more open to trying the MdX strategy. With the support of the local conference, the churches should invest all efforts towards the strategy implementation. The MdX is not a program. MdX is a kind of discipleship training. This strategy is unique and created by the OSR in the NAD. Even though a few churches were already working on some type of homemade strategy or previous strategic planning, the MdX should be an inspiration to other churches.

4. I recommend MdX to be supported and mentored by other churches. The participants suggested that the churches consider, along with the engagement in the social media with all the information regarding the churches that are participating in the MdX, that they have the churches and leaders make a connection with other churches and leaders that are more experienced in the strategy to answer questions or have their testimonies through the videos.

5. I recommend the MdX through the new BASICS book approach. During the time of my research there has been a growing process of the MdX strategy. However, this growing process has confused some people because they get earlier book versions and old ones together with a variety of literature. What I found in my reading is that the bulk of recommendations for this research have been addressed by the new book produced by Paul Brantley, *Mission-driven BASICs: Church Strategy Made Simple* by Paul S. Brantley (2020), and thus my recommendation to anyone wanting to learn more about MdX, is to have access to this book.

Recommendations for Future Research

As OSR and others refine and improve upon the ideas found in the MdX, further research is needed to gather data from implementing churches for further improvement. Nonetheless, until NAD reaches complete development, enhancement, and full validation of the MdX strategy, more studies on the project may be needed in the future as more churches come on board to implement MdX.

A Final Word

As an experienced multicultural leader as well as a researcher who has experienced the participants' feelings through this research and having a great interest in seeing this strategy and support offered by NAD to succeed, I hope that the MdX can become a powerful tool for the churches to accomplish the mission in their local communities. Along with this study, I had the opportunity to work with the Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada that piloted and pioneered this implementation in the field. Yes, it was not a smooth process everywhere, yet I could see that some positive things came out of that, and my hope that this research will further the goals behind the MdX and help it to become more effective in building churches, and thus members, that are more focused on the reason why we have churches.

Based on this study and all the knowledge involved in the strategic plan since its conception, I consider MdX a disruptive strategy. Accordingly, leadership is vital to create and execute the strategy, but disruptive strategy demands disruptive leadership (Billington & Ellersgaard, 2017), see Figure 2. In doing that, it is vital to connect the strategy to leadership, making it strategic leadership, where "one of the most important

responsibilities of a strategic leader is to establish direction" (Harrison & John, 2014, p. 6). Within this context, the MdX strategy guides the churches going through strategic techniques and methods that expect to transform the church culture and the church habits in planning the church mission inside and outside.

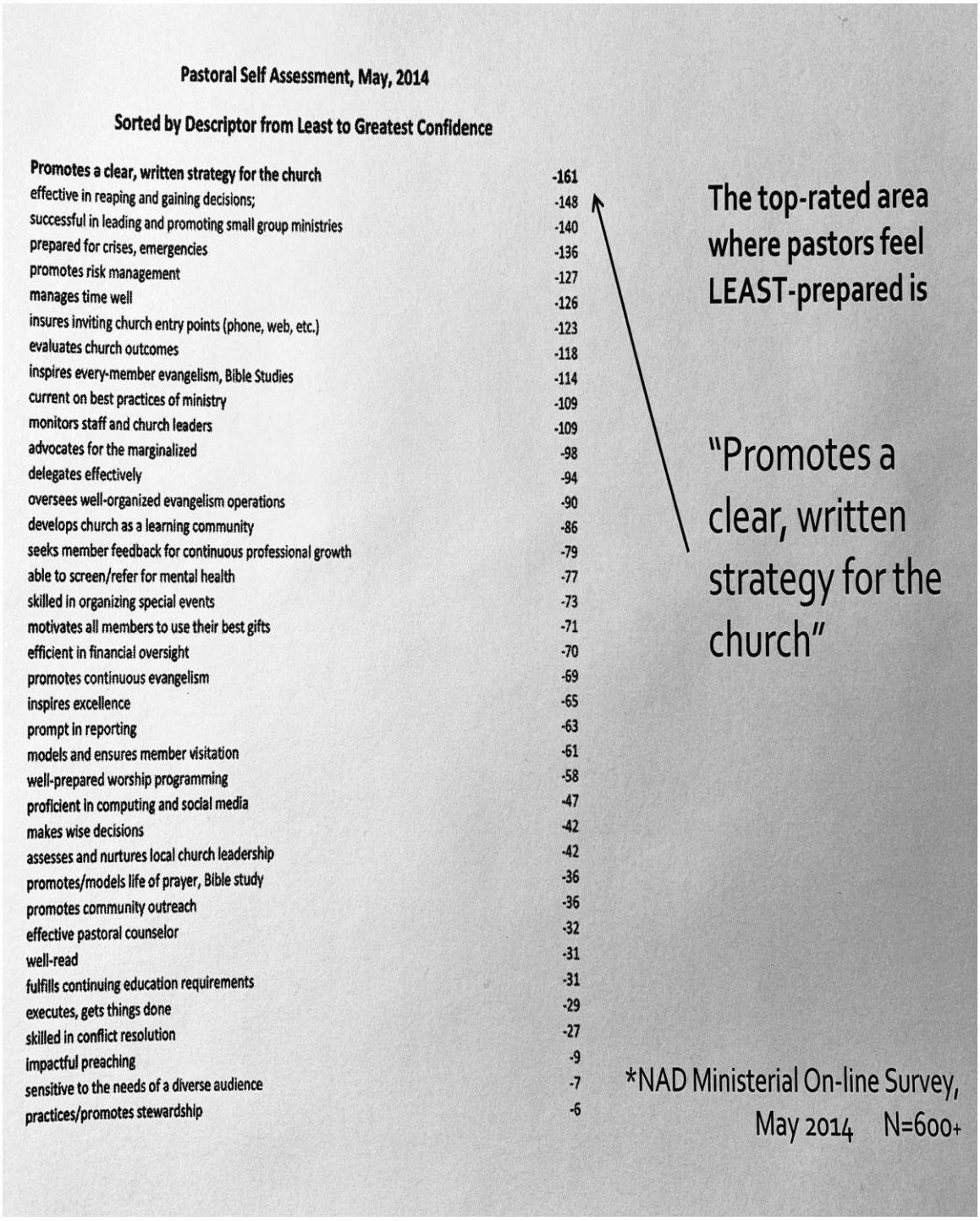
The MdX can help to modify the church culture, and not only that but MdX can support the modification of church habits, along with the way the churches used to plan and do mission. Furthermore, the churches must dig deeper to find new ideas on top of how the NAD supports the churches toward mission. Of course, this means that the final work falls back on the church leaders.

The NAD's mission is to spread the gospel and reach North America with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness (North American Division of the SDA Church, 2018d, pp. 19, 21), now using the MdX. It makes us to think that ultimately, the mission is "GO." Go and plan strategically on how to do the mission through MdX.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

NAD Ministerial On-line Survey



Appendix B

MdX Inventory of Specific Mission-Driven Habits

INVENTORY OF SPECIFIC MISSION-DRIVEN HABITS

CHURCH _____ COMPLETED BY _____ DATE _____

DIRECTIONS: Are these Habits currently in place in your congregation? Rate from "1" (Definitely NOT) to "10" (Absolutely YES), only giving a rating of "10" if every part of the Habit is in place. The entire group taking the Inventory—the church board, for example—should come to consensus on each rating. Rate this Inventory every quarter to measure your progress. No names please!

SPECIFIC HABITS

BASIC HABIT NO. 1: BUILD TEAM

1. Taking Inventory. We regularly rate our church on this Inventory and on other key indicators so we can learn and grow. We also regularly assess the needs of our communities and members so we may serve them in the best way.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

2. Making Spirit-filled Commitments. Every quarter, our congregation commits to becoming more mission-focused, avoiding all distractions. We personally and collectively pray to replace ego with the full indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

3. Creating Climate. Our church feels like a unified, close-knit family that reflects God's character. Humility, trust, and Christlike communication mark all we do. Our worship and our warmth appeal to visitors and members.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

4. Developing Leaders. Our pastoral staff, department leaders, and members all receive coaching, discipling, and nurture to become a more effective team. This helps us do our best work for God and for those we serve.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

SPECIFIC HABITS

BASIC HABIT NO. 2: AGREE ON MISSION

5. Envisioning Mission. Everyone in our congregation can recite our mission statement from memory. It guides our church's visionary goals, departmental priorities, budgets, and annual plans for evangelism and outreach.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

SPECIFIC HABITS

BASIC HABIT NO. 3: STRATEGY IN WRITING

6. Strategy in Writing. Our church strategy, or an abbreviated one-page version, is updated each year and distributed to each member. This helps us all work closely together in accomplishing our common mission and visionary goals.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

7. Aligning Departments. Every year, each department submits the top one to three OUTCOMES (not just activities) it plans to accomplish for the year. These strategic plans, approved by the board, help drive the annual budgeting process.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

SPECIFIC HABITS

BASIC HABIT NO. 4: IMPLEMENT STRATEGY

8. Accomplishing Mission. Each year, all departments and members collaborate closely in achieving our strategic goals. These include at least two *whole-church* missional events per year—one of which is evangelism. The results are remarkable!

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

9. Assessing Impact. We regularly review our visionary and annual goals. An up-to-date scoreboard reports progress on our church's key success indicators. This allows us to continuously evaluate our effectiveness as a church.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

SPECIFIC HABITS

BASIC HABIT NO. 5: CONTINUOUS LEARNING

10. Becoming a Model. We score high on all the Habits above. They're now ingrained in our culture. We're now officially recognized as a demonstration site for other churches even as we ourselves continue to learn and grow.

Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Absolutely YES

Mission-driven BASICs: Church Strategy Made Simple

Appendix C

A Spiritual Life Inventory

A Spiritual Life Inventory

Instructions: Information from this survey will help your church plan ways to enhance its spiritual environment. Please provide your honest thoughts to this anonymous survey.

If an item below has more than one thought to be evaluated, only answer "9" or "10" if all portions of the item are currently met in your organization. **NO NAMES, PLEASE.**

1. **Every Sabbath, I feel spiritually fed as a result of the sermons and other worship activities that I experience at church.**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

2. **I feel that I spend sufficient time with God each day in Bible study, prayer, and personal worship.**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

3. **When spiritual problems arise in my personal life, I feel that I can turn to people in this congregation for counsel and support.**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

4. **Sabbath School in this church enjoys excellent attendance because of the stimulating discussion and rich, personal interaction.**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

5. **If a stranger on a bus or plane questioned me about my Adventist beliefs, I would be able to recall biblical references to adequately support my beliefs.**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

6. **If our church were suddenly to disappear from the community of which we're a part, the community would greatly miss us!**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

7. **This church feels like a very close family to me!**

   Definitely NOT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely YES

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Appendix D

Sample Survey for Demographic Data

Thank you so much for being a participant in this study.
Please, complete the survey and return it to me.
Note that all information collected is entirely confidential and will only be used for this research study.

Demographic Data Sheet

1. My gender is: _____ Female _____ Male

2. My age is: _____ 23-30 _____31-40 _____41-50 _____ 50+

3. My race/ethnicity is:

   a. _____ White
   b. _____ African American
   c. _____ Asian
   d. _____ Hispanic
   e. _____ Native American
   f. _____ Native Canadian

4. Member at church: _____

5. SDA member for how many years: _____0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16+

6. Department/Role at your church: _____

7. How long in this department at your actual church: _____0-2 _____3-5 _____ 6+

8. Your purpose for participating in this MdX strategy implementation:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for completing this survey.

Your participation and time are precious and will help a lot in this MdX strategy improvement towards the mission accomplishment.

Appendix E

Interview-Focus Group Protocol

Project: North American Division, Mission-Driven Excellence (MdX) Strategy implementation

Time of Interview: _____
Date: _____
Place: _____
Church name: _____
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____
Role/Position of Interviewee in the church: _____
Did you sign the Informed Consent Form? ( ) Yes
Did you complete the Demographic Data Sheet? ( ) Yes

Basics for this interview:
1. The NAD mission is to reach North America with the Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness. The Office of Strategy and Research (OSR) at the North America Division (NAD) has started a project that supports churches in how to be more strategic in implementing this mission. This new approach towards mission accomplishment promotes a culture change through organizational habits that lead to a thriving organization.
2. The purpose of this study is to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the MdX strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved.
3. Please, note that all data collected is entirely confidential and will be treated confidentially, and will only be used for this research study.
4. The interview will take from 45-60 minutes (one-on-one) and 60-90 minutes (focus group). I will audio record all data collected through the interviews, type and transcribe them using appropriate software, and store them directly to my computer that requires a personal password to have access to it, which will be securely stored until the study is completed, being wholly deleted after the study is done.

QUESTIONS:

1. How long have you been doing MdX strategy implementation in the church?

   What did you do until now? Where are you in the implementation?

2. Did you read and inform yourself all about the MdX strategy and its resources?

3. How would you briefly describe the MdX strategy to someone who didn't know about it?
4. What do you like about the MdX strategy?
    a. What do you think should NOT be changed?
    b. What are the pros/strengths?
5. What would you suggest to be changed?
    a. What are the cons/barriers/weakness?
6. How could the MdX strategy be improved?
    a. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the MdX strategy?

Appendix F

IRB Approval

Andrews University
Office of Research & Creative Scholarship

March 6, 2020

Osvaldo Santos
Tel. 203-706-2478
Email: santoso@andrews.edu

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #:20-029 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Leadership
Review Category: Exempt **Action Taken**: Approved **Advisor:** Randy Siebold
Title: Strengthening mission through formative research: An analysis of the mission-driven excellence strategy.

Your IRB application for approval of research involving human subjects entitled: "*Strengthening mission through formative research: An analysis of the mission-driven excellence strategy*" IRB protocol # 20-029 has been evaluated and determined Exempt from IRB review under regulation CFR 46.104 (3)(i): Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written responses or audiovisual recording and in which subject identification is handled confidentially and appropriately. You may now proceed with your research.

Please note that any future changes made to the study design and/or informed consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Incase you need to make changes please use the attached report form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Katherine, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Mordekai Ongo, PhD.
Research Integrity and Compliance Officer

Institutional Review Board – 8488 E Campus Circle Dr Room 234 - Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355
Tel: (269) 471-6361 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu

Appendix G

NAD Endorsement Letter

April 7, 2022

Dr. Randy J. Siebold
Associate Professor of Leadership
Andrews University
8975 Old 31
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

Dear Dr. Siebold,

This letter is in support of Osvaldo Santos' project in the Mission-driven Church. The NAD is always encouraged by such initiatives that supports the mission of the world Church.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kyoshin Ahn
NAD Secretariat

9705 Patuxent Woods Dr.
Columbia, MD
21046 - 1565, USA
www.nadadventist.org

Appendix H

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Strengthening Mission Through Formative research: An analysis of the mission-driven excellence Strategy.

Principal Investigator: Osvaldo Souza Santos Junior

Advisor:

Randy J. Siebold, Ph.D.
Director, MA & Doctor of Leadership programs
Assoc. Director, Global Leadership Institute
Andrews University

Statements about the Research: This research study is part of my dissertation project, in partial fulfillment for my Ph.D. in Leadership at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this research is to suggest strengths and improvements to the Mission-driven strategy by seeking to better understand how the NAD participants in the pilot churches perceived the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) strategy through its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved.

Procedures: As a participant, you will be asked questions that will help evaluate the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) Strategy and make suggestions for its improvement.

This study will be conducted using a formative research methodology that will help gain feedback on the value of the MdX strategy. Due to its contribution to gathering recommendations for improvement, a formative research methodology is an appropriate tool for this study.

The population for this research will be some of the pastors and church leaders within the 67 pilot churches participating in the MdX strategy implementation in the NAD. The research sample will be approximately six churches from 67 pilot churches in the United States and Canada. I will contact the Ontario Conference and select a representative sample of churches inviting them to participate in the study. Next, I will contact the pastors to see if they are willing to participate in this study. I will visit the churches physically and attend church service, interview pastors, elders, conduct focus group(s), and talk to the church board members, etc.

The data will be collected through multiple data sources such as interviews, observation, and document analysis. Most of the meetings will be conducted at the participant's local church. The data collection will focus on how to improve the Mission-driven Excellence (MdX) Strategy, looking for its strengths [what should not be changed], and at the same time looking for its weaknesses [what should be changed]

I will receive external funding once I have contacted the North American Division (NAD) to reimburse travel expenses.

Duration of participation in the study: The interviews will take 45-60 minutes (one-on-one) and 60-90 minutes (focus group).

Risks and Benefits: I/We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

After all the material is gathered, I will transcribe the interviews using the Express Scribe software and then analyze, organize, and code all the information using qualitative analysis software *Dedoose*. I will look for themes and patterns and organize them into categories of strengths and weaknesses. After that, I will analyze the data looking for suggestions and improvements to the MdX strategy.

To protect your privacy, it is important to mention that:

1. The time invested in this process will be used to identify strengths and weakness for this project, looking for suggestions for improvements, and
2. I explained the purpose of the study and how I will proceed with the research.
3. The entire interviews will be recorded in audio, and all the data saved on my computer and deleted after the study is done.
4. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the data, and
5. I may contact you in the future for some clarification.

Confidentiality: Your identity, if any, will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. There will be nothing linking you to the study. None of your identifiers, if any, will be used in any report or publication. Your name, church, and significant identity characteristic will be private, and if you are quoted in this study, you will be pictured only by letter (i.e., participant A).

Whom to Contact: If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, contact my advisor Dr. Randy Siebold @ at 269-471-3200, rjs@andrews.edu. You can also contact the IRB Office at irb@andrews.edu or at (269) 471-6361.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and received answers to the questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.
Your Signature: _____ Date: _____
Your Name (printed): _____
Signature of person acquiring consent: _____Date: _____
Printed name of person obtaining consent: _____
Note: The researcher will keep this consent form until the full study is done.

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CURRICULUM VITA

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Professional Experience

Real Estate Professional @Century21 Scala Group – 2021- Present, Bridgeport, CT

Founder & Director Avivar Music Learning Center, 2009- Present, Danbury, CT

President & Chief Executive Officer Montalve Volkswagen 1995—2009, Telemaco Borba, Paraná, Brazil

Citicorp, Manager, Southern Region 1986—1993 Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil
Citicorp, Sales Manager, Personal Bank Accounts 1993—1995 Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil

Independent Consulting Experience 2004—2016 United States, Canada, and Brazil

Assistant Pastor, Director of Music, and Director of Community Services, 2004—2012 Westchester Luzo-Brazilian Seventh-day Adventist Church, Mount Vernon, NY

Education

- Ph.D. in Leadership (ABD), Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
- Certificate in Canadian Business for Internationally Educated Professionals, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Master of Business Administration, SPEI College, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil
- Specialization in Finances, SPEI College, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil
- Bachelor of Business Administration, FAE - Faculdade Catolica de Administracao e Economia, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil
- Professional training in leadership, marketing, new business capture, customer retention, EQ, motivation, accountancy, financial controls, sales and service, pricing, and public speaking
- Fluent in English and Portuguese, conversational ability in Spanish