Governance – Foundations for Flourishing Ministry (Jason Ferenczi)

Jason: Welcome! I'm looking forward to this time. I'm Jason Ferenczi; I come to the LDC from Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the United States. I served there with Cornerstone Trust which is effectively a family foundation located in Grand Rapids. But over the last 20 years or so I've worked quite a bit in the area of theological education, both formal and non-formal, and have done quite a bit of study in the area of how those kinds of organizations and institutions function. I'm going to share with you a little bit of my research later today, before the end of the time and then there's also a handout that has some more information that we'll pass out. Some of you already have it, but this is very much a time when I want us to learn from one another, and frankly looking out across the experience in this room I want to learn from you as well.

So we're going to talk today about governance. Governance is in my mind a subject that doesn't get nearly enough attention. It was interesting – a couple of Chinese brothers came in a few minutes ago and they said, "We can't be part of this session, but we're very, very interested in the topic and what an important issue this is in the Chinese Church context. There's a lot of resources available of varying qualities for leadership – how you lead something – but there's very, very little available about governance." And I think that's actually very much a global issue. In my experience, I just don't think many people have given good thought about it. And I really want to approach this today from the perspective of thinking about organizations that flourish; organizations that don't just exist, organizations that don't just get by, but organizations that flourish.

We're going to move back and forth between some group time, some reporting back time, and some time with me talking. First off, I just want to ask you in your groups to talk about these questions. Tell one another who you are, where you're coming from, but then questions of why you chose this session, what you hope to learn, and what has been your experience in governance. So we'll just take 5 or 10 minutes to do that, and I'll just kind of make my way around the room and hop in and out to hear a bit too.

Joe: So I'm Joe, and I work with a ==[inaudible 00:03:36]== Asian Access of all sorts in 13 countries in Asia and exploring about church origins right now. Why did I choose this session? That's a little bit mixed ==[inaudible 00:03:49]==. One is that my friend Jason is here leading it and I wanted to see him. The second is that governance is becoming an increasingly important ==[inaudible 00:04:01]== of many of the companies that we're working with. And so I thought, why not stop here and see what's happening and learn from each other about particularly our organizations – a little more fluid, as somewhat we're seen more as a movement than as an organization – and governing in that scenario ==[inaudible 00:04:26]==. So what do I hope to learn with what I said about

governance? I'm just curious, how can we strengthen what we do and is there any genius in the room that can help me do what I do? My experience in governance is all over the map. I'm old enough to have been around a while, sat on several boards from very large organizations, to kind of mom-and-pop smaller groups. And then I was a pastor in a church [inaudible 00:05:09] leading a very significant segment of its ministry, so had heavy governance related to kind of the mega-church environment in America. Now I am a leader of our ministry [inaudible 00:05:24], the next level of governance experience. All that says is, I'm here to learn.

Jason: Let me just tell you a little bit about my own journey in these kind of [inaudible 00:09:53]. Like I said, I worked for a number of years, about 15 years, with a nonprofit in the United States that worked with theological seminaries, overseas council; a couple of my former colleagues are here. And one of the things as I visited seminaries in various places, I came to realize that when institutions really had problems, or when they were doing very well, you could almost always trace it back to governance. Because I visited school after school after school in remarkably different cultures around the world. It just seemed to be a rule that held almost every time. And I started to ask the question, "What does governance look like cross-culturally?" A lot of the times when I would see people doing seminars – including some of my former colleagues – they were basically John Carver's work, which has been in the past one of the most influential thinkings on governance in the United States and Canada.

I really just was wondering if the Carver method is really appropriate to this. So that actually led me to my dissertation work, which basically revolved around that question, "What's really happening in a few seminary contexts?" And rather than looking at a survey of an enormous number of schools, I really wanted to look at three or and see what was really happening in terms of governance, and that's really what we'll come to in a little bit. Beyond that then, I also have reported to boards – I currently serve on a few boards and I'm always learning very, very much. I was just actually involved in a conversation with the chair of one of the boards while travelling here. I had a meeting while I was gone and we were talking about some issues, so governance is very, very real to me.

I'll just talk very briefly again, as we get to that cross-cultural aspect – what does governance look like in relationship to culture? A lot of the thinking around governance, a lot of the structures around governance, have emerged in the North American environment. And they rose around something called voluntary associations. Voluntary associations are when people come together in a community to get together to do something. To have schooling for their children, to have better cleanliness of water, to have whatever it might be and this was really pioneered in colonial New England. It's where a lot of the models came from, where people in small communities in New England in the 18th and early 19th century came together to do something in their community. They brought women representatives from the community to sit around together and think about how can we best achieve this, and then, are we continuing to

achieve it? Not only to do it, but then to evaluate it, to make sure it kept happening. A lot of models of governance have been very much affected by American public education models. The idea that community should have public education available to its children. Of course, this has spread to other parts of the world too, but a lot of the structures around this came out of the conversation in North America.

So just to stress that a lot of the thinking about what boards are came up in fairly high autonomy cultures. So that's very much affected how thinking about boards has happened over the years; it's arisen in the context. And then as we look at organizations in other parts of the world, organizations that have been brought by NGOs or by mission, there's, of course, a very complex admixture; it's not just an import of American ideas – I'm not saying that at all. But as I've kind of scratched at this in a lot of places in the world, I find that a lot of those same ideas are there. Often kind of given a little bit of different flavor in an Asian context, or Latin American context. But a lot of the roots tend to get back a bit. There's been some good research on that as well, and some good historical writing on that.

So out there on the top, this would be sod brick schoolhouse on the frontier; I think it was in Nebraska if not mistaken, back at the late 19th century. Pioneers that came to this part of the central United States settled and said, "Now, our kids need schooling – who's going to do that? We need to get a group of people together to make sure the schooling functions effectively." So I want us to take a little time in your context, and we're going to take maybe seven or so minutes to talk about this. But I'd like to talk a little bit to your group about how governance is practiced in your context. Are governing boards well understood or is there a lot of confusion around them? How functional are the boards you know, and don't limit yourself only to ministry circles; think about other forms of governance as well. What are some of the things that you think hold them back? I don't want you to do all these questions, but just have some talking in your groups about what you feel some answers to those questions might be. And then what I'll ask you to do is just listen to one another, and then I'll ask each of the groups when we reconvene to just sort of give some key ideas that came out of your group back to the whole for us to think about.

Jason: Does every group have somebody that reflects back to us something that you heard in your group conversation? This group in the back, is there someone that can speak about some of the themes that came up around your circle?

Participant: I'll give it a try. One theme that came up repeatedly in my group was the ministerial [inaudible 00:26:40] differences and lack of understanding we'll see like between Africa and India context versus boards in America. So those on the ground will feel like they have sufficient

input in decision-making, and those who are making the decisions don't really have a full picture of what's happening [inaudible 00:27:00].

Jason: What about this group?

Participant: So we just shared some of our experiences; some have been a part of boards. We had two models, one of the board that was not involved – disconnected. And then maybe a board that we've talked about, a healthy model. The organization I work with, they're involved, and then we know them, they know us. They want to understand the organization better. But they support us and encourage us to lead. And we just talked a little bit about a church concept of elders giving input but not so much telling how to run day-to-day, and how do you do things day-to-day. Just the tensions that come up.

Jason: Good. Different kinds of experiences there. In the back corner.

Participant: Yes, our group shared some similar issues. We heard of a board in Africa which takes a long time and works very relationally to build consensus before making decisions. And that process takes longer than is found in western context. We heard about very different expectations of boards in India, less from an understanding that board offers governance. The center of gravity is more the director of the organization. We heard about issues where boards have a different understanding – they don't function. The boards understand their role as to manage the organization, which can cause great tensions with the director of the organization. We heard about issues in bringing the boards together around an existing organization founded by a visionary. Where the board actually does not know details about what the vision is, and what the organization is intended to accomplish, and it's ineffective in that way.

Jason: And maybe just functions out of trust of that visionary [inaudible 00:29:34].

Participant: People say that about expectation supports in career, not so much government, not fundraising. So we had a whole range of different expectations of what a board might or might not do.

Jason: Great thank you. Noticing some real differences in each group. What about this group here?

Participant: We can't summarize all of what we heard; everybody's talking with the different visions [inaudible 00:30:05] and every board functions in a different style. And the [inaudible 00:30:12] with the board and with the leaders, without CEO, and others are different. We found every ministry is different, so [inaudible 00:30:28] are different and they're working nature is different, but they are doing good.

Jason: So a lot of diversity is what I'm hearing you say.

Participant: We all have, I mean I come from the [inaudible 00:30:42] think about always the structure of the organization and the single structure. [inaudible 00:30:47] so that's totally different [inaudible 00:30:51].

Jason: You think that's an increasingly important question. I believe it is; we're moving into a world where there are more and more networks, and they tend to be dispersed in little pieces here and there and how do you govern that? That's a huge question. I think a couple of overarching themes that I've heard is different cultures coming at these kind of things in different ways, different organizations. Every organization is different. When I first posed that question about what is seminary governance wanting to look like in Latin America, I really went into my research expecting to come out with this is sort of a Brazilian model of governance, or this is kind of a Sri Lankan model of governance, and it really actually didn't work that way. I was looking at particular institutions, but I also talked to other institutions. And what I found that even institutions within the same city were radically different. It was actually I think much more their institutional history, their organizational culture, that impacted a lot of these things. And of course there are commonalities among Brazilian schools, and commonalities among Philippine schools. But I think that's a really important point [inaudible 00:32:11] issue about networks too. I hope somebody can maybe give some wisdom on that because that's an area that I've thought about but don't have a huge amount of wisdom to give.

I want to talk just very briefly about constituencies. Because ultimately, go back to what I was talking about earlier with the one-room schoolhouse, boards helped an organization to respond to its constituency. No matter how big, no matter how small, no matter how simple, no matter how complex – one of the board's key roles is to hold that organization in trust for its constituents. Now that sounds very simple, but in reality when you really start to think about

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that, it's actually quite complex. Because not every organization has just one defined constituency. An example that I have again, I mean the one-room school that we were talking about, who would be the constituency in that picture that we had a little bit ago of the teacher and the children? Who would be the constituency in that? The kids, yeah, the families, exactly. There's probably, as time goes by, there'd be some kind of adherence to local law or county, state, educational regulations, that kind of thing.

But the constituency is fairly clear. What about when we think about a large university anywhere in the world – it could be in China, in India, in Africa, in the United States? The constituency of a large university is much, much more complex because you're serving a much more diverse group of people. And sometimes it's my experience working with organizations that boards don't think enough about whom they're serving. One of the unique attentions we have in the United States (and I heard it in this back group here expressed), also in Korea is that boards tend to be focused primarily on the task of fundraising. I don't know, but there's a number of CEOs of North American organizations in the room here; it seems like that's becoming even more important [inaudible 00:34:42]. So this is a late 19th-century kind of picture, but in the United States context you often get seated around the table a group of people who are giving money to the organization.

Now, how could that potentially confuse the question of governance in terms of the constituents when your board is composed mainly of those who are giving money? I think when you look at Christian organizations in North America, most of them are governed by business people, mostly businessmen. When you go to Continental Europe, which is the other area where I've done more research, that's actually not the case in places like Germany and the Netherlands; it doesn't tend to be that way. And for that reason, fundraising matters are quite different. I mean, the issue again raised from the back group about boards being focused primarily on fundraising in a Korean context. This has a huge impact on the constituency. What I've seen happen in a number of Christian organizations – and this is cross-cultural, this is not just in the US; I've seen it at other places – when you get a group of people around the table who are giving the majority of the funds, there's a sense sometimes that, *this is ours, this is our thing. We're giving the money*.

If you're sitting around the table … and the group back there, at one point someone jokingly said "I'm chairman, you need to stop." … I've actually seen that happen! Where a board member who's giving the majority of funding will actually say, "No, I'm giving the money, and I want this to happen." That can be a very dangerous situation. What about the others that are served? We dealt with this in a very real way when I was working with overseas council. The board tended to think the constituency was them; it was the donors. Where in reality, I think a lot of us felt like, "Yes, they are absolutely part of the constituency, but what about those we serve?" What about theological schools around the world that the organization was trying to serve – are they nice constituency too? Whose voice should be heard?

Another thing that I have found a lot in mission organizations is the role of clergy. A lot of times boards of Christian organizations tend to be packed with pastors, and that brings another [inaudible 00:37:42] to the room. So in the mission world, which I guess most of us are working in some aspect of this. The work of mission – Protestant missions dating all the way back to the pioneers – has leaned into a constituency of supporters, those who were providing financial support. And those are people who've had influence over how the organization is functioning. Do any of you work for organizations that have like a membership where the membership has a governing role, where they vote on major issues? Are any of you in organizations like that where you have that kind of governance model? It's fairly rare anymore, but again in a lot of ways the whole structure of mission in the 19th and 20th century was built on mission going out.

People in other parts of the world providing the resources to support that from the United Kingdom, Sweden, United States etc. Or even from parts of the majority world to other parts of the majority world, but alongside that what I'm trying to say is that there [inaudible 00:39:10] power that came alongside that. And I think as I look at the world today, those models of governance are breaking down. They are very deeply challenged. I heard from the back group back there a conversation about having an Indian board and a US board and how do you coordinate the decisions among them? I'm guessing it probably would have been a little different 25 years ago. A lot of organizations – I'm not going to speak to yours – but in a lot of organizations probably this would have been assumed; the US, the central board, wherever that is, would have made a decision. I think a brother from Zimbabwe was saying, if I understood you correctly, that in your situation there's been greater autonomy today at a national level to make decisions than maybe what there was in the past. I think this is something we're seeing throughout the mission world as organizations do become more truly global. But it raises a complicated factor of how we think about constituency.

So let's take a few minutes and talk about that. Whom do you serve? In your organizations, how much clarity is there around your constituency, particularly those of you that are serving in international organizations? How do you see this evolution in terms of a more global voice arising? How is your organization dealing with that? How are you dealing with resources, where resources come from, where resources used to come from, maybe where they don't come from anymore? How much of an issue is this constituency question? Is it easy to answer the question or is it hard? I think that's just a very simple way to put it; is it really clear who the constituency is or is it more broad, is it fuzzy? I'd be interested in hearing your question about networks – is the constituency of your network clear? Do you know exactly who you're serving? So take a few minutes to talk about that; we'll do a similar thing – we'll do some reporting back to the room afterwards.

Alright, why don't we start with this here. Just go ahead and share something that you heard in your circle that you found interesting.

Participant: Some thought their constituency was easy to define but most, like such as in [inaudible 00:50:45] case, she felt her constituency that she worked with knew exactly who they were. In our case, it could be the churches we serve, the pastors we serve, the leaders we train, or the kids they ultimately reach. It depends on how you want to look at it, or how you want to clearly answer the question.

Jason: But that in and of itself is saying that there is a diversity of possible answers. What about this group over here?

Participant: I think we had some similarities that way as well. We've got different kinds of organizations [inaudible 00:51:31] in your circles. And is there one person that benefits or are there many [inaudible 00:51:42] mission statements. I heard them talking about that too, and we thought about that. [inaudible 00:51:47] main constituency in there. But then also recognizing that we've got to deal with the different groups. I think it's pretty similar to what you just said over there [inaudible 00:52:02].

Jason: A comment I heard in your group – and I saw several heads nodding around it, which I thought was very important – was it's easy sometimes to think of our constituency being those who [inaudible 00:52:17] do what we do. Maybe if we're working with churches to accomplish some end that we think about churches as our constituency, but in doing that, they are part of it, but you can lose sight of those you're ultimately trying to serve at the end – the ultimate impact [inaudible 00:52:35]. I think I heard a little bit of that in one of the conversations too.

For a board to really do that work well is very difficult. It's a lot easier to just read financial reports – that kind of thing – and say, "Well, we give money so therefore I mean … Thinking about those kinds of issues or the issues you were talking about here, that takes a lot of energy and a lot of input from board members. What about back here in the back corner?

Participant: Our group I think there was [inaudible 00:54:58] people we serve in terms of ministry that reaches out to [inaudible 00:55:10] where it's a little more complex with [inaudible 00:55:16] because of the different cross-cultural elements of [inaudible 00:55:21]. But I think another thing that came up was how sometimes it's possible for the founder's passion for the particular constituency to overshadow other people to what we [inaudible 00:55:35] in helping that happen. And so as our sister from India expressed, the desire to see

that [inaudible 00:55:44] directly involved in giving care to these kids. Whereas it's not yet very [inaudible 00:55:53] level of the director in those things. [inaudible 00:56:02].

Jason: I'm hearing two themes coming out of these conversations; more than that, but two in particular. One is how in complex organizations that are international, how the pieces work together and when you put into that how that functions in terms of multilevel national, regional, international governance. But also I've heard little bits and themes too around another issue that I think is very important, which is kind of founders [inaudible 00:56:28]. When you have a visionary leader, who steps forward to really take on an issue. Often I think in the 70s and 80s this was evangelist. Our really passionate evangelist starts a network, starts an organization and gathers people around him and we trust him to do that. I'm sure it's him or her – the example I'm thinking of in that era were mostly men. But I think that strong visionary leader is something we're going to circle back to here in just a little bit. I think we're getting to some of the very real issues, and honestly, I think we're also getting to some of the differences that we see and how our individual, the context of our organizations, the context of the countries and regions where we're working also fit.

Something I personally feel (and I talk about this a lot in my work) that we do not give enough attention to, is the machine metaphor. What I mean by that – this is a term from organizational dynamics that for much of the 19th and early 20th century the dominant model for thinking about organization was the machine. This was the era of the assembly line, Henry Ford's assembly lines in Detroit. And a lot of how organizations worked was seen the same way. If you have something that you're doing that's good in social service, religious service, in whatever it might be, you just get the right pieces in the right places with the right resources and everything will be fine. Now, it's troubling to me how much Christians bought into that because in a lot of ways there's an anthropology, there's a thinking of who human beings are. It's a little bit off in that.

And it's actually much more complex than that. Interestingly, I do think it was Christians who led on sort of debunking the machine metaphor; it was actually secular people in the business thinking world. If you look at sort of the mainstreams of organizational dynamics thinking today, a lot of times you can see little threads of very scriptural kinds of things about how people interact, even though most of these people are not people of faith. Some of them are. But a lot of times when I see Christian organizations – and I see a lot of Christian organizations in what I do as a grant maker – sometimes I feel like this machine metaphor is still very strong [inaudible 00:59:05]. I don't think it's as explicit as it once was. I don't think anybody would say, "If we just get everything in the right place, it will work." I don't think anybody would *say* that anymore. But sometimes actions betray us. Sometimes I feel like particularly boards coming up their work of governance once a year (twice a year, four times a year, I don't know of boards that meet much more frequently than that), they focus their time on problem-solving, "How

can we just get the right thing in the right place?" I mean, the question I hear organizations asking everywhere is, "How can we solve the fundraising problem?" Good luck with that! But so many times I've heard boards, and I've worked with boards, I've consulted with boards that are saying, "How can we solve this fundraising problem?" and they're looking for the thing that they can slot into the organizational system. And suddenly the clockwork and the machinery is just going to work beautifully like an assembly line. Unfortunately, I don't think it works like that; I don't think that's how organizations work. I don't think that's how people work, and I certainly don't think it's how things work in terms of the complexity coming up in these conversations, especially in terms of international organizations. But I think we need to, when we think about our organizations, we think about governance. I just would encourage you to keep this picture in your mind, and ask yourselves, "Are we reverting back to a machine metaphor?" rather than a really human-based framework for human flourishing.

I will skip over that and talk a little bit about my study just in interest of time so that we can have some discussion around that. Like I said, I wanted to understand a little bit better how governance is actually happening in theological seminaries outside of North America. There's a huge amount of information and resources available around seminary governance in North America. There's even a whole organization that focuses solely on that question and produces all kinds of wonderful resources and research. But they're really very explicitly bound by their funders to not step outside of the North American environment.

So there's been very little thinking done about this on the global level. How do you look at the governance of a Christian seminary or a Christian university on a more global level? So what I did, I used grounded theory approach to qualitative research, which basically is fancy words for just saying I went and listened to people and watched people in a fairly structured way. I looked in four seminaries in Russia, Brazil, Jamaica and Sri Lanka back in 2011. Spent about a week on the campus of each one; I spent a week there when the board had gathered to meet. So I sat in on the board meeting; I observed the board meeting. Then I interviewed board members, I interviewed people on the leadership team, I interviewed other people in the institution around how they perceive governance was or wasn't happening.

And it was quite fascinating to hear these things in these various contexts. I also did some research in the Philippines, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic as well. It wasn't quite as full-scale as these four studies. But my thinking was informed by those three small studies as well. And then that resulted in a book, quite distinct from my dissertation that was published in 2015, so I have some more information on that on the handout if you want that. Does anybody here know Ron Heifetz? Is that a name anybody here knows? Heifetz and the idea of adaptive leadership – this has been one of the really important, and I think influential, approaches to questions of leadership more broadly (not governance but leadership more broadly) in the last few years. That we don't live in static times, that we live in times when the best leaders are those who can see the multiple pieces that are at work, the multiple things that are influencing change and can help people within an organizational system to adapt to those.

A person who can use what we call the balcony metaphor, when you think of a balcony up above a big ballroom, like where we're meeting. We stand on that balcony and you can see all the things that are happening from down there on the ballroom floor. Now if you're up there on the balcony watching down, you're going to see different things than if you were down there on the floor taking part. It's going to look different to you. And that's what he says adaptive leaders need to do; they need to be able to get up above, they need to be able to step up and see what are all the influences, not just the gears of the machine. It is that; but how are people interacting? Is there a conflict brewing back there in that back corner somewhere? Has somebody slipped out the back door on the other side? These are the kinds of things that adaptive leadership says that we need to look at.

So my final theses were quite heavily influenced by his work, and what I basically proposed was a concept of adaptive governance that also tries to get up above these issues and contemplate some of the questions like the group back there was asking. What are the things that are really impacting not only who we are today, but who we are becoming. And how can this organization function in a way that isn't just continuing what it's done, isn't just keeping the engine running, but is helping it to become more flourishing to be what it needs to be for the future. And I think there's very few organizations today that can say they just need to keep doing more of what they're doing. There's some degree of adaptability I think in almost every organization I encounter.

So what I proposed in my book was six essential elements of adaptive governance in theological education. Although I think you can scratch in theological education, I think they still hold in most cases, with possibly the exception of one, although all of us here are involved in the leadership development space. So I think these are probably applicable more broadly. And I haven't put much here on the PowerPoint about these, but I've described these much more in the handout. I'm going to hand that out later – I don't want you to be reading through it here right now, but there is more available there.

Number one, and these are in order of importance. The thing that I saw as I talked to governing board members, CEOs, deans, faculty, students, staff workers, church members that were part of the ecosystem of the seminary. The theme that rose up in these four schools was the necessity of a community trust. Trust was the glue that held everything together. In three of these situations, I deliberately sought out schools that were perceived in their regions to be very high functioning. They were perceived to be healthy institutions. One of them – I won't say which – really wasn't quite there; it had some issues underneath and quite a bit of conflict internally, but the other three were indeed, I think, very healthy institutions, well governed and well led.

They have their problems, but what I saw across those three institutions and in the fourth institution on the other side was the absolute critical nature of trust of one another. The belief that we're on the same team, we're moving in the same direction, and we trust one another.

We trust the CEO, we trust the board, we trust the faculty. What I've seen in other schools is where the board doesn't trust the faculty, the faculty doesn't trust the board, nobody trusts the CEO – when they get chewed up in the middle of that. The staff in an academic institution are someone that we often don't think too much about, but it's amazing how much influence somebody can have from those roles. Is there a holistic community of trust all pulling in the same direction? That to me was the absolute foundation stone of good governance, adaptive governance.

The second piece that I brought out was what I call alignment of the parts. The idea that there were different pieces of the organization, the board, the leadership, the faculty. And that these parts were aligned; they were again pursuing the same agenda, not just in the concept of trust but also in the concept of action. They were aligned with one another, and they understood that our role as a faculty is to accomplish this which is part of the bigger vision, which we know that the leadership and the board supports. There was a sense in these schools that you heard the same kinds of language, the same kinds of things across all these groups. I think that's something where I sense there's health – when you talk to board members, when you talk to the CEO, when you talk to faculty, when you talk to the person who cleans after your tea.

When you talk to all those people from the highest status to the lowest status, and you hear similar things, and you see similar energy. When you're hearing four different things across those and other communities, that's concerning. And I think for me as a person who is professionally looking at organizations all the time, this has probably been my go-to, that question is. It's when I talk to multiple people, do I hear the same thing, do I hear them talking about the same thing? And usually they're not, but is there alignment across them? Is there alignment, is there a sense that we're all part of the puzzle that fits into a broader vision or whole? I think that's the second element. And these first two I think are by far the most important.

Someone mentioned this earlier, the fact that if I understood you correctly, you said that the CEO, the president figure of an organization was perceived to be sort of the center of everything. That's just one of the real key findings of this research and also some research I've done since, is to say that some of the, in most of the world I think, and I think this is particularly true in less autonomous parts of the world. Places where individual autonomy is not as high as it is in say the US or Canadian [inaudible 01:10:35], that the CEO, the person who serves in the president role, whatever you call that, chief executive officer, is the linchpin. He or she is the person around which everything runs. I think increasingly this is seen as a weakness of some of the dominant thinking on governance in the United States, that it is so strongly stressed that the board must be evermore active, that the expectations on the board frankly become too high.

We need to always remember that board members have other jobs, board members are giving 98% of their time to other things, and they're giving just a little bit to this organization. And this

became very clear in all these institutions; part of the reason why these systems worked, why these institutions worked is because they had a very strong leader, who at the same time was enabling. Now you can have a strong leader who is not enabling, a strong leader who just tells everybody what to do, and I don't think that works very well. But when you have a leader who knows that it's her or his intention it's [inaudible 01:11:50] expectation that they're going to make the final decision and they're not going to let things fester but is able to do that in a way that empowers people. That was what I saw in three of these four institutions and quite a number of others as well. Did you have a question?

Participant: Yes, any specific examples from the observations about the leader who was enabling?

Jason: Yes, one of the presidents of one of these schools was a man who had served in his role for about 25 years. He had actually served the school (it's a denominational school) through a period of really intense conflict within the denomination between a more progressive and a more conservative element within a very, very large denomination. And he had effectively taken a lot of body blows; he had taken a lot of flak through that time, and he fought a lot of battles. But he said (and I remember as clearly as if it was yesterday sitting in a restaurant with him talking about this) that he saw that as his first and only, or his most important role was to protect his staff from being hurt in the midst of that conflict. And you saw within the staff longevity – many of his senior staff and faculty had been there for a decade-plus. You saw that they had immense respect for him, you saw that there was just a sense of we can trust this guy to lead us. I think I saw that in all three of the organizations, and there's more about that and some of what I'll give you. So that's the third thing.

This was the one which is probably more specific to theological education context because, sad as it is to say, there's not always in formal theological education a shared commitment to education that transforms. But in each of these cases these institutions that weren't just trying to do the same old thing – they were trying to adapt their educational model, and adapt their educational process. They didn't see their constituency just being a certain kind of pastor; they were looking beyond that to a certain kind of impact. They were no longer asking the question, okay we've given 600 people a bachelor in theology, and that's our measure. They were saying we've trained a certain number of people who are being transformed [inaudible 01:14:33]. And that's a very important shift of mindset, and I think we see that in the non-formal space as well.

I think the non-formal space often enabled by the funders who fund it have very often said your chief metric is numbers, how many people can you train? Being very frank with you, while numbers matter, I think that's a metric that is pretty much rubbish. It matters what kind of leaders you've trained, it matters what those leaders should be. I aim to count, too. I'm not

saying numbers are irrelevant – they're very relevant – but if I see as a grant maker a program that's trained 10 people well, versus 100 people superficially, I know where I'm going to probably put my focus. So that was something where I think that it helped form that shared vision, this commitment to transformative education.

Number five, in each of these cases seeing reflective and responsive interaction with the surrounding community society. These are not institutions that had sort of a wall of impermeability around them. These were institutions where you saw people talking on a daily basis about what was happening in the neighborhood around. They were talking about what was happening in politics in their country; they're talking about what's happening in society in their country. They weren't just hived off in a monastic kind of setting doing biblical studies, but they were thinking about, "Does this have to do with the fact that X number of kids in this city are going to bed at night without a meal? What does this have to do with the fact that our churches are declining in membership, that the young people are not staying? What does this have to do with any number of other issues in social life?

So paired very much with the transformative education model, it was an idea that there is concern for what's happening outside; not just the machinery of the process of how they do it, but what's ultimately happening. And I should stress here too, that went all the way up to the board. And I think that's where some of the boards that I saw they [inaudible 01:16:56], they were really, because they were asking those questions. I remember very clearly in one of the situations the board member saying, "We just did a study within the denomination showing that we're losing a lot of young people. What's the seminary's role in that? You're training most of our pastors – what's happening and what's not happening?" And that was a comment that I think reflected this very good sense of what's going on out there in the world. And then like I said, three of the institutions that I looked at were very strong, one of them not quite so much and actually where this other one had really stumbled was around the issue of succession.

They had an unplanned – well it was planned, but it was poorly planned – succession of leadership from a long-time leader, a founding leader, a visionary leader. And in many ways I think more than even this visionary individual who started the school realized, it was a community that grew up all around him. And so when he stepped out, even though in a lot of ways he did all the right things, but the rest of the community didn't quite follow along to follow the new leader, and ultimately it was a failed leadership. And ultimately a failed school, a failed institution; I don't think they exist any longer. Whereas in one of the other cases the leader that I had mentioned in response to a question, he'd been serving for 25 years; he's just now entering into a leadership transition. And I think over the last two or three years he's probably given 50% plus of his time to thinking about how to do that well because he has put in such a critical role. And I don't think we can underestimate how important that is.

So those are the six things. Again, I'm going to give you some more information on that. We have about 10 minutes left. I would just add in the broad group here, we don't have to break

into small groups, but which of these are most surprising, which of these do you see most important and what is missing? I mean, what is the thing about your context that maybe we haven't talked about today? <mark>[inaudible 01:19:10]</mark> other reflections? What questions do you have; comments?

First, somebody else asked me this question in one of the groups too; I am not making any statements here about church governance. I think there's definitely applicability to church governance. This is really framed in a concept of organizational governance. The issue you raised is still very much a real one because these are Christian institutions, and I think that did come up under the discussion of strong <mark>[inaudible 01:21:07]</mark> leadership. It was also spiritual leadership; it was drawing people together around a sense of where God is leading us. And God being very much a part of that system, a part of that thinking about what we are ultimately trying to do. I haven't drawn that out as a specific piece; should it be? Perhaps. But obviously that is a critical element, and I think its part of the kind of ecosystem of Christian leadership we're obviously going to be pursuing that together.

Participant: I think for me the trust is interesting to me, but sometimes it's not that literal <mark>[inaudible 01:21:56]</mark> broader understanding that there must be trust, but people just avoid to be transparent and allow that trust with this <mark>[inaudible 01:22:10]</mark> that out but <mark>[inaudible 01:22:13]</mark>.

Jason: A healthy organizational model has to be one where you can disagree. That becomes very complex <mark>[inaudible 01:22:26]</mark> kind of cultures. I was encouraged actually through this study, and I mean I talked about this in several places where I saw some deep counter-culturalism at work in a couple of these places. In one particular situation were a very low-status person had challenged a very high-status person and the community rallied around him and handled it beautifully. So I think that that is, that's that <mark>[inaudible 01:22:58]</mark> important thing too.

Participant: I think the one that surprised me the most was number five, and it may be reflective of what I believe. That we're a distributed community all over Asia and the West, so we don't quite have that center that has a local community that we engage. That said, we have frequent conversations about politics or whatever at the local level. So my question was, I think you said these are ranked in order somewhat of importance, and the thing that surprises me a little bit is why planning for the future and especially succession planning would be more important than that one.

Jason: In terms of rank ordering, the first three I think were the ones that I see almost as a cluster, sort of the essential pieces. Now the others are essential too, but I think that they are almost in some ways derivative of some of these other issues. Strong enabling leadership, why I ended up throwing out (and this was actually an issue in my committee that drew this out) was because I had been addressing that as part of strong enabling leadership with thought to succession. And as we looked at all four of these institutions we realized this is almost a stand-alone, because you can have all these other things but if you don't think about succession properly, it could all go down. As happened in this one case. So I think that I wouldn't stress the rank order too much. I think again this is around individual institutions in a place, in a context. But I think it has applicability to a network like yours too, because I think, from what I know of Asian access, people are thinking about what's going on in Myanmar and [inaudible 01:25:01] and Nepal. And you're not seeing that as irrelevant to how you do your training; you're seeing that as the swimming pool that you're swimming in while you're doing. So I think you would tick that box, even though you have a much more diverse swimming pool.

Participant: You mentioned that 98% of the time the board has other job possibilities and only 2%. If there is so much less time they are giving, why is so much importance given to them? Because in India context, we do all the hard work; the [inaudible 01:25:42] operations what all has happened, finally the board probably has just doesn't seem worth this [inaudible 01:25:48]. And we feel very pain because without knowing the [inaudible 01:25:53].

Jason: And you shouldn't feel pain. I think that's my first suggestion about that is do not expect too much of the work; that's actually – a lot of my book is such a critique of – the Carver method. And I feel like perhaps one of the issues that's problematic in the Carver method, although there is some wonderful (I actually included on there as recommended reading because of the way he differentiates between governance and management) but I think that where it tends to lead is putting too much weight on the board to make decisions at the expense of those who are in this every single day like you were just describing. So I think we have to take some of that weight of responsibility off and put a little more on the management, honestly. And have the board come in and celebrate then what the board is when they come in, because they're able to contribute in a way that you can't because you're there every day.

You're swimming in this every single day, I mean you're down there on that ballroom floor. They come in, and they do other things; they're pastors, they're lawyers, they're professors etc. They're coming in for a couple of days and they're looking down from the balcony saying, I'm glad you all feel good about this, but there's an issue over here in the corner. I think that's where governance really can begin to thrive, not when they are coming in and second-guessing decisions they have no right to make. But I think we've set governance structures up to fail in many cases by saying they need to be the final authority. They are the final authority already. In

every context I know of, legally they are the final authority, but there has to again be trust. I think we are time and I will dismiss you as a group. Thank you for being a part of this, it was fun to hear some of your questions.