

# TRANSCENDING THE 80/20 RULE IN THE BLACK CHURCH BY USING SELECTED HUMAN RESOURCES TOOLS AND PRACTICES<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

*Spread the Word Christian Ministries (SWCM) for all intent and purposes is a thriving midsize Black church in an African American College Park community. It is a church boasting a membership of 250.*

*This article reveals deep-rooted problems affecting this church's membership retention and satisfaction. The researcher is using SWCM as an example of how small and midsize churches experience a myriad of issues relating to membership retention, membership care, support for ministries, fundraising, and attracting millennials. The premise of this article is that churches lack membership satisfaction due to a lack of regular evaluation of their operation to identify areas of strength and weaknesses. The article also suggests that*

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*churches should apply the Pareto Principle<sup>2</sup> to assess how involved its members are in the ministries of the church.*

## **Introduction**

I am a member of Spread the Word Christian Ministries (SWCM) where Bishop John S. Battle, III, an alum of the Interdenominational Theological Center is the pastor. SWCM, located in College Park, GA, has over 250 members primarily from the surrounding Black community. Spread the Word is very impactful within the community and its members. Besides feeding the homeless, SWCM collaborates with the city of South Fulton to assist the community with paying utility and other bills. In addition, the church offers mental health, finance, and other workshops to the community to support the people in identified areas of need. Spread the Word Christian Ministries serves its members in multiple

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<sup>2</sup> “Maciej Duszynski,” Pareto Principle & the 80/20 Rule (Updated for 2021), ACCESSED April 19, 2021, [https://resumelab.com/career-advice/pareto-principle?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=sem&utm\\_campaign=6540517835&utm\\_term=%2Bpareto%20%2Bprinciple&network=g&device=c&adposition=&adgroupid=104311758447&placement=&gelid=EA1aIQobChMIInr-tg-GV8AIVLm5vBB2iCQmLEAAYASAAEgIdOvD\\_BwE](https://resumelab.com/career-advice/pareto-principle?utm_source=google&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=6540517835&utm_term=%2Bpareto%20%2Bprinciple&network=g&device=c&adposition=&adgroupid=104311758447&placement=&gelid=EA1aIQobChMIInr-tg-GV8AIVLm5vBB2iCQmLEAAYASAAEgIdOvD_BwE)

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capacities, including the following ministries: Deacons and Deaconess Ministry; Usher and Greeter Ministry; Men and Women Ministry; Outreach Ministry, Marriage Ministry, Seasoned Saints, and many more.

The various ministries that the church engages in imply that SWCM is vital and flourishing flawlessly. However, SWCM recognizes that it has underlying issues requiring church resolution. For example, the church experiences the challenges of a few people doing all the church ministry while the majority only attend worship and also engage in much of the complaining. This behavior is not unique to SWCM or the church in general. It is how voluntary organizations operate.

According to the Pareto Principle, the church operates on the 80/20<sup>3</sup> rule in its various aspects of the church ministry. For example, ministry leaders, those

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<sup>3</sup> “Maciej Duszynski,” Pareto Principle & the 80/20 Rule (Updated for 2021), ACCESSED April 19, 2021, [https://resumelab.com/career-advice/pareto-principle?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=sem&utm\\_campaign=6540517835&utm\\_term=%2Bpareto%20%2Bprinciple&network=g&device=c&adposition=&adgroupid=104311758447&placement=&gclid=EAfaIQobChMInr-tg-GV8AIVLm5vBB2iCQmLEAAYASAAEgIdOvD\\_BwE](https://resumelab.com/career-advice/pareto-principle?utm_source=google&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=6540517835&utm_term=%2Bpareto%20%2Bprinciple&network=g&device=c&adposition=&adgroupid=104311758447&placement=&gclid=EAfaIQobChMInr-tg-GV8AIVLm5vBB2iCQmLEAAYASAAEgIdOvD_BwE)

assigned leadership over a ministry and not necessarily licensed or ordained ministers were appointed to their positions over 20 years ago. Because of their longevity in various posts, they now feel that they own the positions and have created mini fiefdoms that other church members find difficult to penetrate. Another outcome of the 80/20 rule at SWCM is the challenge for new members to volunteer in activities. They must first understand the proper protocol for engaging the ministry leader in charge of the activity. Otherwise, the ministry leader feels threatened and discourages the new member from participating. This blocks potential members from engaging in church activities because they are criticized for spontaneously supporting the church without following unwritten protocol imposed by various church ministry leaders.

These challenges are a sample of the impact of the 80/20 rule in SWCM, which causes church members to operate in anger, bitterness, disagreements, and disgruntlement. If they go on unchecked, these challenges may cause emotional upheavals that may drive faithful members to leave the church. This trend leads to a decline

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in church membership or to continuous member turnover. SWCM is aware of these problems and is taking steps to address them. SWCM aims to teach its members to have an adaptive leadership mindset. As Todd Bolsinger states, “Adaptive leadership is about ‘letting go, learning as we go, and keeping going.’ It’s about loss, learning, and gaps: ‘Adaptive leadership consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face.’”<sup>4</sup>

During Ministers/Navigators’ monthly meetings, the Pastor and Administrative team shared that a few SWCM members expressed their dissatisfaction with leaders feeling entitled and powerful because of their position. These informal conversations are the premise behind transcending the 80/20 rule in the church. In addition, a comprehensive survey and multiple interview sessions with church members discussed several issues which are: lack of training to move forward in ministry, unresolved issues with other members, lack of

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<sup>4</sup> Tod Bolsinger. “Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory.” (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 88.

understanding of the church culture and their fit into this new system of worship, and lack of opportunity to move into church leadership positions. Based on the study of the Black church's administrative system, there is evidence to suggest that pastors, ministers, ministry leaders, and a few church members are doing most of the work in the church while a large number of congregants are not actively participating.

During my thirty-year journey navigating church dynamics, I experienced many discouraging personal and church administrative issues. The issues were not resolved by moving from church to church because they are normative of how the church as an organization operates. Whereas other members respond to their frustrations by abandoning the church altogether, I chose another way: to enroll in the DMin degree at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) to seek answers by studying church administration and innovation.

I chose to do my doctorate in ministry at ITC for several reasons. Its mission statement includes the important elements I missed in my educational journey. As an employee of UNCF, I was immersed in the African

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American experience, and that exposed my ignorance of Black culture and experience. ITC has helped me to see the church, particularly the Black church, in its historical and Africentric perspective. It has opened my eyes to see the world with an Afrocentric lens, tearing down decades of Europeanized mentality and philosophy. The faculty has a rich understanding of biblical history, Africentricity, and a genuine love for teaching the unadulterated truth from their respective perspectives. Because of this, I have already acquired the necessary tools and skills to conduct my research on the 80/20 Pareto Principle as it applies to the Black church.

Educated in human resources, I argue that if the churches could adopt a business model, utilizing the HR processes, church members and their leaders that are doing most of the work would not experience burnout. Moreover, an increased number of people would participate in church ministries than is currently the case. The key to resolving church administrative and ministries issues lies in resolving how church members view the church vis-à-vis the secular organizations,

The question is often asked whether the church should be run as a business. That is to say, should the church be accountable for the money it collects for various mission projects, church upkeep, salaries, and more? Should the church provide a budget, periodical financial statements, and an end-of-year statement? Should the church keep a correct and up-to-date membership list in various categories: adults, youth, children, etc.? Should the church train its leadership to run the church, conduct mission projects, train officers and others to succeed them? Should the church conduct an evaluation of its performance annually in order to improve its services? While the answers to these questions should be affirmative, many pastors and church members would argue that the church is not a business enterprise. The argument is not about whether the church is a business enterprise. It is whether the church should be run on a business model.

No matter how people might differ in their response to these questions, it is a fact that if the church were to adopt a business model, it would run more efficiently, avoid unnecessary conflicts, train members for



leadership and ministry involvement, offer an opportunity for those aspiring for leadership positions, and stipulate clear expectations for new members.

Business organizations follow business administrative methods, strategies and processes and that is how they prosper. By not using the business model, the many churches, especially Black churches weary their members by poor church administration.

The DMin that I am pursuing at ITC program has enlightened me on gathering data from people. I have interviewed various people of different ages and church affiliations to gain a cross-section of data regarding their church participation, interest, and feeling of church involvement. This project is still in its nascent stages. However, it has already demonstrated that the twenty-first-century church must adopt a business operating model to be more effective and efficient in delivering its ecclesial services.

There is no doubt that the church could resolve most of its problems by adopting the four HR practices. These practices comprise onboarding, training and development, employee relations, and succession

planning. In the book, *Canoeing the Mountains*<sup>5</sup>, the readers will observe a tension between business lessons and their application to the church. Yet, we do understand that the church is the body of Christ. Since we recognize it as a body, we must consider it a living construct that requires systems to thrive in cooperation with God's wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the church's unique perspective is difficult for most people. This is exacerbated by the church's lack of self-analysis regarding its mission and understanding of those it serves. It is difficult for church leadership to express clear expectations from church members without knowing our values, morals, and drivers. It is also vital to recognize that personal challenges can impact the effectiveness of church member management and relationships.

Mary Tucker, *et al.* point out, "... a logical approach to applying human relations is knowing one's

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<sup>5</sup> Tod Bolsinger. *Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Tod Bolsinger. *Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 100.

values, abilities, and goals, before trying to manage or lead others.”<sup>7</sup> Tucker further highlights specific patterns that stem from different relationships or human behavior in the work environment. Her analysis is apropos to the way the church should operate as a business.

I have chosen to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods because it was essential to hear the opinions of the lay and ministers and assess their needs and their thoughts on how to revitalize the church. To ensure that the research was not dependent on just one person agreeing with the theory, the researcher needed multiple voices sharing their opinions on the 80/20 rule in the church and the potential effectiveness of implementing certain HR practices.

It was necessary to form five focus groups, three focusing on lay members and two focusing on pastors and executive leadership. The focus group questions concentrated on the specific tools of training and development, onboarding, succession planning, and

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<sup>7</sup> Mary L. Tucker, Anne M. McCarthy, and Douglas A. Benton. *The Human Challenge: Managing Yourself And Others In Organizations* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 5.

member relations. In the interview, participants were asked if HR tools such as training and development, onboarding, succession planning, and employee relations play a role in increased church member participation.

The respondents expressed their desire to participate in church services but many stated that they had to deal with issues like leaders not being willing to listen to ideas from other individuals; did not allow members the opportunity to learn and serve in the ministry; did not fully indoctrinate new members in the church or share tools to navigate various ministries; were not training members for leadership positions, and were not willing to leave positions for other members to have an opportunity to serve.

Based on data gathered from surveys by SWCM members, it is obvious that most members do not help because they feel excluded, unprepared and unheard. Members involved in ministries expressed feeling extremely tired and overwhelmed, unsure of their capacity to continue the same level of engagement, anger and bitterness towards non-participating members, and lack of ability to build awareness of the problem.

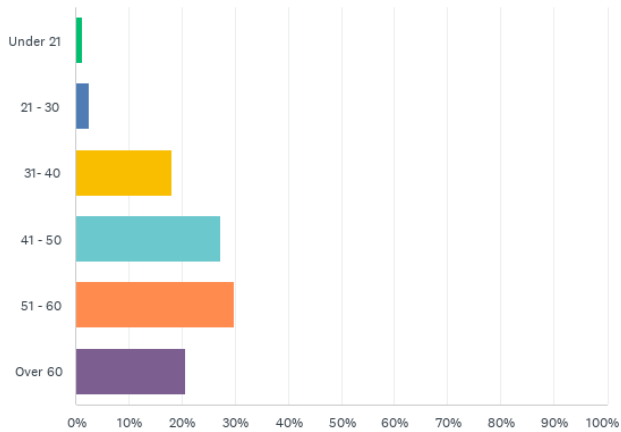
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These initial data from the research shows that specific tools can guide leadership in supporting members to serve and participate in ministry

A 58-question survey was administered to hear the voice of churches of other denominations. Because of COVID-19, racial unrest, and churches closing their doors, the survey was administered via social media. All church members, family, and friends were invited to respond with a goal of 100 participants. Out of the expected 100 participants, 77 responded, which is a 77% response rate. The survey is broken up into four sections: (1) Demographics – includes questions of gender, race, church membership, and church activities information; (2) Current Church Engagement Status – includes questions of level of engagement in church activities and need for more inclusion; (3) Opportunities for Engagement – includes questions of ability, capacity, and competency to lead; and (4) HR Tools/practices to Increase Engagement – includes questions or interest in HR tools to support further engagement.

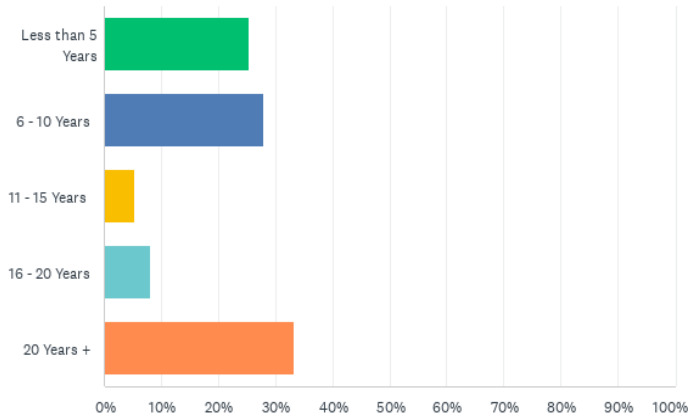
Of the 77 survey respondents, 21.33% were aged 21 – 40; 57.33% were aged 41-60; 21.33% were 60 years

of age and over.

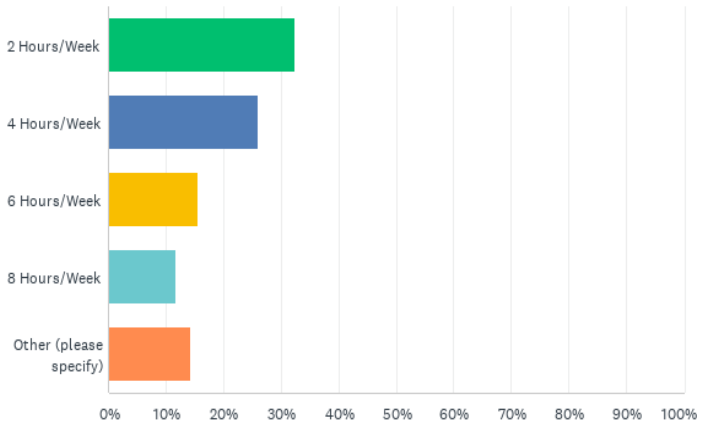


Of the respondents, 25% have attended church for less than five years, 33% have attended 6 – 15 years, and 42% over 16 years.

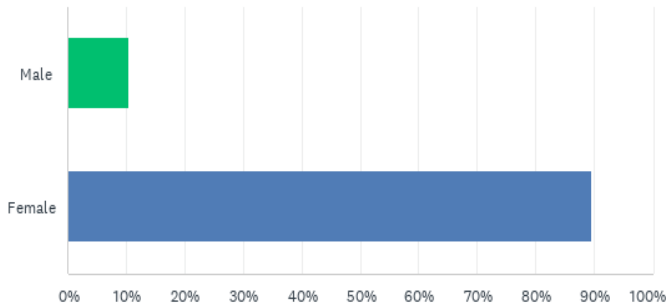
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Sixty-six percent of respondents are non-denominational, and the remaining are either Baptist or other denominations. Approximately 75% of respondents attended church regularly, and 15% had irregular church attendance. Of those attending church, 58% spend at least 2 – 4 hours, and 27% spend 6 – 8 hours participating in some church activity to include Sunday services, Bible study, and other church activities.



Besides the previously listed activities, the Women’s Ministry was the most active. Most respondents were married, Black females.

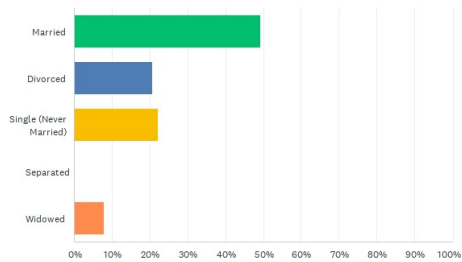




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### Q9: Marital Status:

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

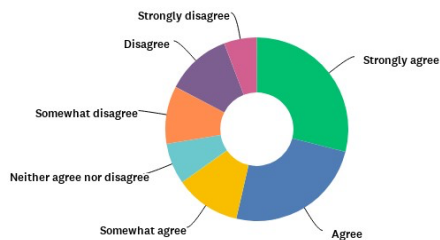


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When asked if the respondents wanted more opportunities to lead in church ministry, 40% neither agreed nor disagreed, 22% agreed or strongly agreed, and 30% felt under-utilized, with 64% wanting to participate more in church activities.

### Q15: I am being utilized in my gifts and calling (talents and skills).

Answered: 69 Skipped: 8

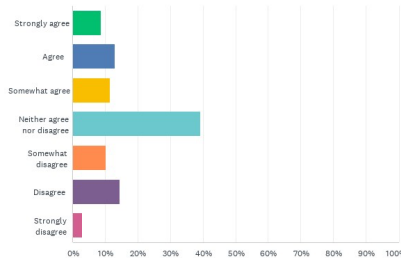


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81% of respondents wanted to be active in church ministry. Not only did respondents wish to be more active, but 85% also stated that they were available for additional work in the ministry, and 53% wanted to lead church ministries.

**Q14: I want more opportunities to become available for me to lead ministries.**

Answered: 69 Skipped: 8



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When asked if there was a clear path to leadership in ministry, 48% were unclear of the path of church leadership. When asked if they were adequately oriented to their new church, 49% said they were unsure or not correctly oriented, and 29% felt that ministry leaders were not open to new members.

However, over 85% of respondents are extremely interested in the church practicing onboarding for new members, asking for feedback on development needs,

prominently display church vision and values, identify new leaders early, align skills with church needs, implement a mentor program, rotate leadership positions, and other recommended practices.

The survey results confirm that the HR principles would revitalize the Black church in the same they operate in business ventures. Thus, the research confirms that a majority of church members are hoping that leadership will consider implementing processes and protocols that will allow them access to be more productive members of the church community. The preliminary results of the research indicates that when the church provide in-depth member orientation, training and development, church member relations, and succession planning, church members will more likely be retained at a ministry.

## **Conclusion**

The interviews and surveys that I have conducted have confirmed the following.

Joining a church community can be stressful and intimidating. New members need orientation or socialization into the church community. Thus, churches

can reduce the 80/20 rule by developing a structured and robust approach to orientation to prepare new members for integration into the church community.

The second finding is that there are tools that could help the church engage members in training and development. This assertion is supported by Randy and De Simone who has stated that employers notice the difference between the skill requirements of available jobs and the skills possessed by job applicants.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, like employers, the church must require competencies in doing church ministries.<sup>9</sup> As is done in other organizations, the church should develop a training and development team that supports new members in learning basic skills to effectively participate in church and serving in its ministries.

The administrative and worship services leadership of the small Black church is usually a set of volunteers willing to help the church in this area.

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<sup>8</sup> Jon M. Werner and Randy L. DeSimone, *Human Resource Development* (Mason, South-Western Cengage Learning, 2009), 280.

<sup>9</sup> Jon M. Werner and Randy L. DeSimone, *Human Resource Development* (Mason, South-Western Cengage Learning, 2009), 285.

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However, that does not mean these individuals have either the essential or technical skills to function in that area. Designing and implementing a training and development program within the church can build members' confidence and break the cycle of the 80/20 rule.

Moreover, there is also a need for succession planning. Proper succession planning training pivots these erroneous viewpoints to understanding that succession planning is inclusive. Church leaders also tend to have a sense of ownership to a particular position and feel intimidated when another member is interested in participating in "their" ministry. Therefore, leadership must ready themselves to relinquish a position in due time. Also, churches must consider the promising practice of rotating leadership positions to break down cliques in the church and reduce the 80/20 rule risk. Succession planning will support that rotation in the church.

Finally, the church must focus on membership relationship like corporate America does with employee relations. The church environment is tasked with daily interactions with people from all races, ethnicities, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. These

individuals are managing multiple physical, mental, and spiritual challenges. Helping people with varying levels of maturity can cause challenges. The church must develop strategies to manage members through these challenges by using tools and practices already available to them.

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