BEST PRACTICES TO NEXT PRACTICES
(A Converge Global Document)

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Introduction
To be the innovators of tomorrow, we have to keep updating our mindsets, knowledge, methodology, approaches and learn the new tricks. We have often heard "message cannot change but methods must." As Evangelicals, WEA members or associates we would all agree that there is an unchanging Gospel message, as seen in the WEA doctrinal statement. In line with the purpose of the General Assembly, we invite you on a journey to "re-examine, re-align and re-commit ourselves to the needed mindset, processes and structures to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation and the next."[1] The journey has many bridges and varied terrain. We will find some answers but ask many questions as well.

This paper primarily focuses on the practices of Christian organizations/ministries/movements and their present or near-present challenges to those practices. First part of this paper focuses on the differences there is between 'Best Practices' and the 'Next Practices.' Best practices developed in the context of global north euphemistically western perspective in which the already existing church/organization structures were able to accommodate the new movements. However, Next practices are developing in the context of global south or majority world where movements are outgrowing the existing church/organization structures. It would be minimal to suggest that such a shift even impacts language and its corresponding mindset which calls for contextualization of structures. The second part of this paper highlights intricacies of 'Next Practices.' This paper is suggestive in nature. We hope these thoughts would help bridge the oft noticed polarity between strategy and its execution in youth ministry. Additionally it would suggest dealing with the fast changes in the society versus skepticism of people.

PART 1

i. Differences between Best Practices and Next Practices
By 'best practices' we mean those useful and productive practices which have been practiced by Gen X and 'Next practices' refers to emerging practices of Millennials and post-Millennials.[2] This difference is largely based on the assumption that Gen X as the last Analog generation whereas the Millennials and post-Millennials are Digital.[3]

The years of Best Practices have yielded itself into becoming well documented in contrast to Next Practices which are not widely known or documented. Perhaps one of the reasons is that Next Practices rely on innovation and therefore believe in leading the way. In contrast Best Practices are clear about limitation and often feel guilty of lagging behind. Every organization/ministry/movement over a period of time consolidates certain practices as Best

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[1] From the WEA website relating to the link for the General Assembly, https://www.jakarta2019.org/en/
[2] Gen X (born between 1965 to 1980). Millennials (born between 1981- 1996). Gen Z (Mid 1990s to early 2000s). Alpha Generation (born between 2011- 2025)
[3] (https://agingcapriciously.com/2010/03/20/are-you-an-analog-or-a-digital-person/) Digital people see the world broken into discrete increments of time, like minutes and seconds. Digital people must multi-task to manage their time. They cannot stop moving from texting to emailing to blogging to tweeting. Analog people see the world as a continuous stream of activities and events. Analog people go with the flow and tackle tasks one at a time. The analog person will rely on the phone or voice mail to make connections to the rest of the world.

practices because they help accomplish the ministry objectives. These in-turn are endorsed by colleagues/peers/authorities/governing bodies so much so seem to be internally decreed. The concept implies that if an organization follows best practices, a delivered outcome with minimal problems or complications will be ensured.

One must accept that fact that these practices have been fruitful and helped to not only to maintain quality but also served as a form of evaluation. Therefore conventional wisdom suggests is effective in achieving desired outcomes with the next generations. However, it cannot be overstated that each of these 'Best practice' seems to be tailored to a specific problem. Therefore one cannot stay relevant by copying the methods to different generations whose context is different. This requires from youth ministry practitioners- the real skills of discernment, subject matter expertise and the difficult challenge to understand how they can rebuild them to become unique, into a leading practice that cannot be copied.

In order to explore possible 'Next Practices' let us look at difference in perspectives between Gen X and Millennials and post-Millennials concerning management. This is essential to set our feet on this continuing journey of evaluation and building constructively both the past and currently accepted practices in youth ministry.

ii. Perspective Differences of Gen X and Millennials and post- Millennials on management

A. Perspective on Organization[4]

Gen X's approach on management is similar to 'Theory X management' which is 'hands-on' and usually involves micromanaging people's work to ensure that it gets done properly. Since this kind of management emphasizes on stability & predictability, big organizations prefer 'Theory X' due to the sheer number of people that they employ and the tight deadlines that they have to meet. However, Millenials and post-Millennials would like to take pride in their work and see it as a challenge. They are interested in agility, adaptability & innovation. Therefore prefer a participative management style which reflects their desire more meaningful careers that provide them with more than just money.[5]

B. Perspective on leadership

Gen X primarily concerned itself with parts or silos in which they functioned. This resulted in being internal focused and development of specializations in particular fields. On the other hand Millennials and post-Millennials want to know how they fit into the whole. This challenges the organizational model (top-down) and instead favors network and social capital. This has resulted in specialization in cross-discipline collaboration.

C. Perspective on Digital space[6]

Gen X are users of information technology. Digital space was a tool for convenience of daily business & cheaper method for management. Millennials & post-Millennials live on the web and

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[4] This idea is developed from Theory X and Theory Y as explained by Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006).

[5] Jonathan Gifford & Dr Mark Powell. *My Steam Engine Is Broken: Taking the Organization from the Industrial Era to the Age of Ideas* (London: LID Publishing, 2015). Gifford and Powell argues that many organizations are unintentionally stuck in the management mindset of industrial era, with its focus on control, measurement and efficiency. They suggest ways suited to 'the age of ideas.'

[6] These reflections are based on inferences from the following chart: https://blog.hypeinnovation.com/forget-best-practice-it-is-all-about-next-practice

are participants in information systems. Post-Millennials are tech savvy and not know a world without social networking. Gen Alpha will be introduced to mobile phones so sophisticated that they will primarily use their phone over a laptop or desktop computer. To reach them from a marketing or recruiting perspective, one has to have a mobile friendly website.

D. Perspective on data/information[7]

Gen X viewed data/information as a tool for optimizing ministry and often operated in isolation from others. However accessibility to data/information was not only expensive but difficult. On the other hand for Millennials and post-Millennials data/information is continuously generated everywhere. They view data/information as an asset for creation of value to their profession and as at tool to connect with others.

By way of conclusion we can notice three differences between Best Practice and Next Practice:
  a. A best practice is a clear and concrete behavior that solves a problem or achieves a goal but Next practices take advantage of an idle opportunity at a low cost and little risk. Next Practices breaks loose from conventions and assumptions
  b. Best practices look to achieve goals in a particular fashion therefore are easy to evaluate in comparison to others but Next practices are adaptable to various conditions, have many operational features, and can employ similar but diverse ways to achieve their goals.
  c. Best Practice is typically about today, while Next Practice is about tomorrow's success.

PART 2

What we have received in history should be passed on for the future. This will mean a concerted reflection of the old and the new. This principle is seen in Matthew 13:51-52, as Jesus responds to the old in light of the new: "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

We hold these treasures of the Scripture in light of the old and new. As the late Dr. Warren Wiersbe notes on this passage: "The steward guards the treasure, but he also dispenses it as it is needed. He dispenses both the old and the new. New principles and insights are based on old truths. The new without the old is mere novelty and will not last. But the old does no good unless it is given new applications in life today. We acknowledge the need of both."[8]

The rest of the paper seeks to highlight what are generally observed and consented 'Next Practices', though there are exceptions to any statements. Due to constraint of space, time and know how we are unable to highlight many next practices but we recognize the importance of them.

i. Embracing of Fringe Groups as partners

There are many regions in Europe where most movements are affiliated to church denominations/groups or like NGOs that reach out to campuses and communities. An increasing trend observed in many urban centers of majority world is the rise of Christian youth associations/groups who do not claim affinity to any local church or denomination. Some of them

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[7] These reflections are based on inferences from the following chart: https://paul4innovating.com/2016/12/14/please-forget-best-practice-it-is-all-about-next-practice/next-practice-2/#main
[8] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 48.

are disenchanted with the established church and others are encouraged by cause based movements in their vicinity. These groups comprise of teens and university students from various churches/denominations in the city who are primarily looking for ministry (like groups / hobby groups) opportunity to their peers without involvement/disruption of senior leaders. These groups are more organic and have a life span of two to seven years before many from the group take up employment or engage in family responsibilities.

Almost, every city in India today has many local city groups without any affiliation to churches. This provides a unique opportunity for youth organizations/ministries for partnership as many of these groups do not have resources. The challenge is they can only be relied on for short-term partnerships. However these groups provide small gains and inroads to hitherto unchartered areas and people.

ii. Grass root and young leaders shaping national and global policies

The proliferation of networks - local, national, regional and international consultations/ networks/partnerships/associations/coalitions has opened doors for many grass root leaders/workers to be a part of global teams like never before. For national government policies, the youth are able to have their voices heard through the social media. There is less opposition from their leaders in aligning and connecting with other groups. Of course, one cannot deny the advancement in communication and transportation aiding such endeavors.

This is a welcome development as it opens doors for many voices to shape the policies. One of the major reasons for this development seems to be the drive for 'relevance' and 'trust'. Many of these networks led by young adults are in turn influencing each other. But it is felt that there are not enough women voices in these. In such a context, there is a need to empower teens and young people to contribute and for their voices to be heard, at least in specific topics.

iii. Rethinking cost-effective

a. <u>Task oriented remuneration</u>

Millennials look at the 'call for ministry' with extreme caution. Many of them would like to consider it as a season in their life before moving on to another profession. Even those who recognize their divine call generally are reluctant for long term employment with any organization. They are constantly looking for better opportunities to be of use. The size of the organization does not excite them as much as new approaches and methods (and WWIFM- what's in it for me/ personal resume/ stories). They do not want to stick around if they can't influence. It would be a mistake to think that all of this is driven by monetary gains for many are willing to embrace new approaches involving financial uncertainties.[9]

Firstly, I think this has much to do with their idea about 'faithfulness' which does not necessarily mean - stay put in one place, organization or being among a people group. But 'faithfulness' means to maximize their potential, influence, labor for the Kingdom. Secondly, the remuneration to youth workers especially, is dismally very low. In Latin America, there is a growing emphasis on being bi-vocational. While vocation is their call to mission, occupation is what they do to make ends meet.

Such a scenario presents a challenge to organizations/employers whose remuneration system is dependent on traditional accounting involving salary, perks and pension plans. But on the other

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[9]   https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/how-to-deal-with-challenges-while-managing-millennial-workforce/story-pSjkgDIRrPO82ZFU97fmLK.html

hand, a project/task based remuneration protects from liabilities as they look for employment for a short period. There is a need to think in terms of project orientation rather than time orientation.

    b. <u>Specialists vs Multi tasking</u>

Convenience has afforded more time to do many things. Some of them may want to be involved part-time fully. Millennials want to multitask.

    c. <u>Converting Volunteers into Assets</u>

The best practice model tends to rely much on professionals who do much of the weight lifting. The volunteers are seen as additional help.
- Train Voluntary Staff just like paid staff
- Treat them as stakeholders
- This would result in effective cost cutting

iv. Bringing Research into Mainstream thinking and decision making

Research needs to go beyond questions of growth/decline. We need to hear the heart dreams, frustrations etc of the Millennials and then we need dialogue to work out a plan going forward. This could include:
- Research for and collect relevant sociological and psychological evidences
- Critically appraise the evidence
- Integrate the evidence
- Evaluate outcomes of Non-Christian NGOs

    a. <u>Exploring new learning methods for young people and youth ministry practitioners</u>
- Spaced repetition
- Continuing professional development including basic skills in social and technical areas of ministry.
- Peer Mentoring: This is counter model of the mentor-mentored relation. In peer mentoring, few people or friends mentor one another. This model provides space for peers to express fears, hopes and aspirations in the language of their time. However, the challenge to this model is that while it is therapeutic, it is not directional like the traditional model.

    b. <u>Development of Courses in Youth Ministry</u>

In the North American context, most of the youth workers have little or no formal training despite the access to an abundance of resources which is a problem of a different kind. Nevertheless, the new trends in this arena may be the very answer to that very challenge i.e., the trend of youth ministry courses to move away from formal, theological and theoretical youth ministry training and education to more informal and practical training.

This becomes hugely relevant in the majority world where the demographics are turning young. The challenge in this context is not the question 'How to do youth ministry?' which still seems to depend more on anecdotal evidence and charisma but 'How to do church?' for the church would be composed of young people.

v. From Selective Discipleship to Holistic Discipleship

Much has been discussed/debated/deliberated about holistic missions. There are also many churches/organizations/movements who are successfully transforming their ministries into holistic missions. In the present context, one can notice that there is a growing concern among Millennials

& post-Millennials about justice and environment. This provides an impetus to think about holistic discipleship. Perhaps this is the reason North American context is looking for tying up narrative theology to systematic and practical theology.

It is suggestive that we begin the process with the question: What would it take to think about holistic discipleship? i.e., a discipleship which would not only address spiritual needs but also life skill needs (stress, depression), addictions (pornography, social media), justice (sexual slavery, trafficking), environmental (stewardship), poverty.

vi. Focusing on Urban youth without sacrificing Rural youth

The reason for youth ministries to focus on urban centers is either one or many of these following:
    a. Colleges and Universities are mostly situated in urban centers
    b. Cost effective - the numerical reach of young people, per staff
    c. Urban youth tends to influence rural youth
    d. By 2050, half of the world would be in Urban centers

All of these reasons are valid and need due attention. However, in countries like India 60% or in Latin America 50% of the young people are in rural settings. There are large numbers of young people to whom ministry opportunities are open in rural areas.

Focusing only on urban youth would mean ignoring a massive opportunity to reach rural youth. While it is true that by 2050 half of the world would live in urban cities, we must not miss the point that many of the rural towns are emerging into new cities with better city planning and infrastructure facilities. They are the urban centers of 2050. Our resources and strategies need to cater to the growing need in the urban but would that be at the cost of rural youth ministry is a question we need to ponder upon.

vii. Tapping into 20 to 25 year old youths as third level leaders

In Asia and Latin America, many of the Millennials & post-Millennials are serving in market place in key roles. But often in Christian circles they are sidelined as immature. Championing young people without giving leadership roles would not yield much fruit. However, in some contexts like the European one, we cannot overlook the challenge of the lack of numbers and getting the age group to make even short term commitments. In other contexts, tapping into 20 to 25 year old youths provided them hands on experience on the field rather than a class room set up. This not only brings creative approaches but also prepares the third level leaders.

viii. Design thinking

Among the Millennials & post-Millennials, there is a changing culture towards design thinking. In contrast to the top-bottom approach, they want to be a part of the thinking. Design thinking stimulates innovative thinking and releases creativity into the wider. Though youth ministry in Europe seems to be ahead of the curve, its effects are not quantified yet. Some suggestive practices to explore are:
    a. Leverage working practices & resources of today, with the future of your ministry in mind.
    b. Journey Mapping
    c. Maintain a culture of inquiry, creativity and learning
    d. Harnessing Information Technology: One of the reasons that social media caught the attention of the Millennials is its ability for hitherto unknown - people, thing, practice, talent - being able to catch the attention without chase.

ix. Recognition of the rise of Digital Evangelists

In the early part of the twentieth century, mass Gospel meetings also known as Gospel crusades became very effective in bringing the Gospel to millions of people. These methods were effective till the 1980s. Even though mass crusades are still organized, the effectiveness of these mass Gospel meetings on the society has waned. However, in the second half of the Twentieth century another method of presenting the Gospel to the mass became effective via Television. It gave rise to Tele-evangelists. The best part of this method was that they could reach homes and people who were hitherto inaccessible. But in the last decade, the influence of Tele-evangelists has been waning. One of the recognized factors for the waning influence of Television is the availability of high-speed internet. Since most of the Millennials, Gen-z and Alpha Generation have a smart phone and spend their waking hours on the internet, we are unlikely to meet some of these teens except on social media.

But this has also opened doors for the Gospel to be presented in the Digital Space. Perhaps we can call these young people who want to present the Gospel in this space as 'Digital Evangelists'. This would call us to empower young people to present the Gospel in the Digital Space in our curriculum, youth camps, trainings and other such avenues. What is lacking is the funding and intentionality for digital ministry. The challenge of ministry in the Digital Space is to connect the virtual world to the real world (local touch) or moving from Digital Space to real life relationships.

Conclusion

The vision of Next Practices is to bring about change and to imagine what the future will look like, laying the red carpet for new opportunities. We are not recommending a blatant disregard for existing methodologies, but rather a very critical eye as to whether or not they are appropriate beyond the fact that they're already in use. Next Practices imply the ability or means of achieving a goal in a cost-effective manner. It seeks to employ similar but diverse ways to achieve the goals.

This requires clear and careful strategic planning including forecasting, financial planning and monitoring of performances. But this is not possible unless the Gen X leads by example and communicates clearly both the mission and strategy. On the other hand, Millennials and post-Millennials need to develop contextual practice i.e ensure that the context from which the practice is derived is comparable to the context in which it will be applied. But this cannot be done by sacrificing the uniqueness of a particular ministry pioneered by Gen X on the altar of change. All of these possible implementations need to be undergirded by sustainability.

Although this path seems to be a simple three-part path from the message on one side of the bridge (the methods) to the other side where generations abide, the path is actually unending until Christ returns. The road and bridge from one generation to the next actually repeats itself as each generation must reconsider how they take the unchanging message using the next bridge of methods to the next generation.

May we be courageous enough to tear down some long-standing guardrails on the methodological bridge and expand the number of lanes that connect the limitless message of Christ to the limitless global needs using a biblically grounded methodological bridge that will carry us into the future.