

Chapter 6

Practice orientated research in service of the study of multi-cultural congregations

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1. Background introduction: The complexities of multicultural contexts

Within an increasingly interconnected world and global society, the idea of independent, coherent, homogeneous and stable cultures becomes increasingly irrelevant and difficult to sustain. The processes of globalisation and constant migration are increasingly drawing people from different cultural origins into close relationships (Hermans & Kempen, 2000).

At a local level, South African society cannot escape globalisation, and neither can culture, race, ethnicity, language and congregations escape globalisation. The “new” context does provide new realities and opportunities, but as Naidoo (2017) writes “Churches, instead of being places of acceptance and love, become an arena for subtle racial tension, sexism and homophobia”. The notion of trying to maintain mono or homogeneous cultural spheres, is slowly being tested and shifted as broad stream societal shifts are taking place towards more inclusivity and a more multicultural meta society.

No group, cultural or church, can escape intergroup contact with others. The 1996 constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) with its intrinsic Bill of Rights and the demographic shifts that occur within all contexts, are introducing a new hybridity of group-forming and consequently pose a challenge to existing homogeneous groups. Jonker refers to this as the inevitability of intercultural exchange (Jonker, 2006:22).

Seekings (2008:12) found in his research that most South Africans continue to live in mono-racial neighbourhoods, but because of South Africa's changing demographics, the fast-growing trend of spatial integration in existing neighbourhoods as well as newly established, more integrated neighbourhoods, has resulted in more racial integration, thus setting the scene for more multicultural environments to form of which multicultural congregations are part of.

This chapter digs into the potential of utilising practice-oriented research as a methodology for investigating multicultural congregations. Beyond merely gathering empirical data to comprehend the dynamics within such congregations, this approach is seen as an intervention tool. It not only sheds light on the functioning of these congregations but also aids them in discerning their purpose in accordance with God's will and their role within the larger societal context.

2. Exploring research options for multicultural congregations

What would an appropriate congregational research approach be for multicultural congregations where research needs to deal with these complexities, imbedded rights, and deep-rooted attachments to culture, ethnicity and language? The South African context can be mentioned as an example of such a context. Baugh and Guion (2006:8) remind researchers in the field of culture that any research methodology needs to have a cultural sensitivity. They then state 3 "main foci" of such research and that is a) instead of using the individual as the unit of analysis, culture that drives human behaviour should be the main focus, b) the relationship between changes in behaviour and contact with culture should be addressed and c) researchers should note the difficulty in comparison data because behaviour is distinct for that culture under examination.

Moving forward with this in mind, one research approach would be a linear dichotomous approach where a division into two (or more) parts or classifications are done by simply distinguishing between for e.g., "African", "coloured", "Indian" and "Western or white" cultures that exist within a congregation. Existing research has shown that apartheid established a

mind-set of Western culture being superior to African culture and that this is strongly opposed by calls for decolonisation and Africanisation.¹

Another route could be to move away from the dichotomies towards dialogue and interconnectedness and forms of hybridity that provides options to enhance inclusivity and not continue patterns inherent separation. In this line of thinking, both Carbaugh (2007) and Hermans and Kempen (2000) argue for a discursive or dialectical approach in dealing with culture in a globalised and diverse world. Carbaugh treats culture not as a set of abstract dimensions but as a system of discursive practices which invoke conversation about who we are (and should be), how we are (and should be) related, how we can (and should) act, how we feel about what is going on and how we dwell in our places (Carbaugh, 2007:5). Hermans and Kempen argue for a rediscovery of people through cultural dialogue attributable to the increasing cultural connections with the phenomenon of hybridisation. Hybridisation, in turn, is a consequence of the emergence of a world system that implies an interpenetration of the global and the local, and the enlarged cultural complexity because of large-scale distribution of cultural meanings and practices (Herman & Kempen, 2000:1119).

From this approach that is in line with relational thinking and a dialectical approach, the argument is made that practice-orientated research as a methodology for research within multicultural contexts do provide a research methodology which is in its essence a dialectical process between practice and theory. Given the past and present complexities of the South African context and the strong group sentiments towards culture and language, and the strong pull towards dichotomies, a research approach that is in essence dialectical could bring forth not only different research results but also different interventions. Within multicultural contexts an intervention would seek to bring cohesion and inclusivity. A more dialectical research approach would stimulate dialogue and interaction more so if it is combined with focus groups.

1 See Arowolo (2010) and Booysen et al. (2007) e.g. the educational model of Verwoerd, which stated equal but separate education, but which ended up in a Bantustan lower-grade education in Davenport's section on "Verwoerd's new vision 1959-1960" Davenport (1991, 352-356)

3. Practice-oriented research in multi-cultural contexts

Practice-oriented research stems from action research, which in turn is defined by Reason and Bradbury (2006) as a methodology that is working towards practical outcomes. They also argue that it is about creating new forms of understanding because action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless (Andriessen, 2014).

Theory-oriented research focuses on solving a theory-related problem encountered in the theory development in a particular scientific area and on theory developing and theory testing as problem-solving methods. Practice-oriented research aims at providing knowledge and information that can contribute to a successful intervention in practice to change an existing situation as is encountered in the congregation (or context) that is studied (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Leading scholars who moved from action research and developed practice-oriented research are Verschuren, Andriessen, Hermans and Schoeman (Verschuren, 2009b). Hermans, and then Schoeman joining him, unambiguously introduced practice-oriented research into practical theology and hence the argument to propose practice-oriented as a research methodology within multicultural congregational contexts (Hermans, 2014b; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

The remarks of Andriessen and Verschuren, respectively, need mentioning here as they depict and support reasons why a research project opts for practice-oriented research: *“Praktijkgericht onderzoek vereist competenties die te maken hebben met praktische relevantie én met methodische grondigheid.”* [Practice-oriented research requires competencies related to practical relevance and methodological thoroughness] and *“Praktijkgericht onderzoek is onderzoek waarvan de vraagstelling wordt ingegeven door de beroepspraktijk en waarvan de opgedane kennis direct bij kan dragen aan die beroepspraktijk”* [Practice-oriented research is research whose research question is inspired by professional practice and whose acquired knowledge can contribute directly to that professional practice.] (Hermans, 2014a). In his farewell address in 2009 at Radboud University in Nijmegen, Verschuren outlined in detail the historical development and importance of practice-oriented research within the framework of research methodology. He states that a prerequisite for

practice-oriented research should be “*carried out by social scientists, should meet scientific-methodological criteria and procedures, and should take human practices as its object*” (Vershuren, 2009b).

Every scholar mentioned, emphasises the importance of making use of practice-oriented research that is practice-relevant and methodologically grounded in solid method. Hermans states, “*All practice-oriented research emerges from an ACTION problem or FIELD problem*”. Therefore, having made a decision to start from a practice problem, a next question would be what happens to theory because theory could provide significant answers to the practice problem (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013).

As research focusing on the complexities found within multicultural congregations, it can be said that the problem does not stem from theory but from a practical congregational problem. Hence, the knowledge that is created will not only contribute to the improvement of the congregational practice, but it will also contribute to theory and could even introduce new theory or new knowledge on theory. The model of Andriessen, whereby the knowledge stream is combined with the practice stream, is viewed as a useful methodology for conducting this research. There is a coherent and deliberate combination of the knowledge stream and the practice stream in his proposed model for practice-oriented research (Andriessen, 2014; Andriessen & Butter, 2013).

Schematically this process appears as:

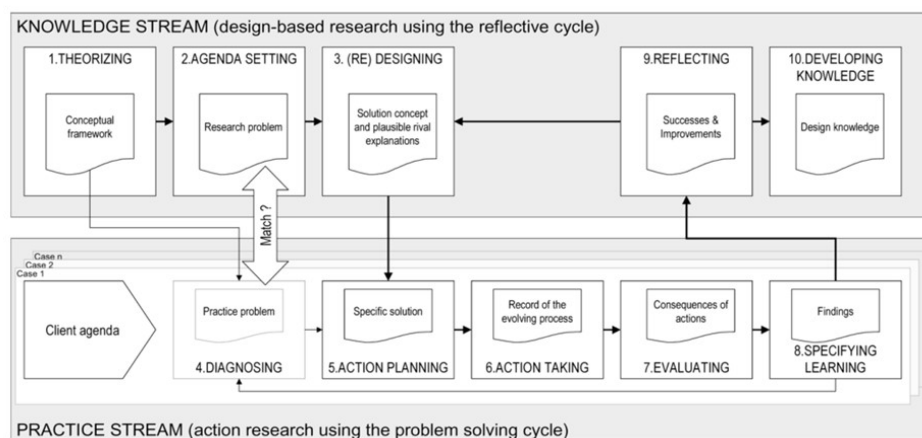


Figure 1: Model for practice-oriented research (Andriessen & Butter, 2013)

4. Practice orientated research in practice – a case study

Working within the framework of qualitative research, a research project was undertaken where a choice was made to use practice-oriented research as methodology within a multicultural congregation. As practice-orientated research derives from the practical life or *beroepspraktijk*, it was deemed an opportunity to make use of practice-orientated research to conduct the research project within an urban congregation that identified itself as a multicultural congregation.

The question that was framed for the research project was: *How can attentiveness to a spatial ecclesiology enhance inclusivity within a multicultural urban congregation?* The premise was that the knowledge gained from the research project will be applied to enhance the practical life of an urban faith community in a changing environment. It was also viewed that the research process itself would serve as an intervention that can be evaluated in terms of how this intervention(s) can improve the practices of members of the congregation.

4.1 Understand the concepts

4.1.1 The Actual (A) and the Desired (D)

Moving into the research identifying the action problem is crucial. Action problems express the discrepancy between the actual (A) and the desired (D) situation where we (based on the existing knowledge) have *no knowledge* how to solve this discrepancy.

The A-component may be identified by asking questions about the current position of the congregation, what are the challenges that the congregation is facing, how does the problem manifest itself and how is it experienced or communicated in the congregation? The answers to these questions would contribute towards the description and understanding of the action problem (Mostert & Schoeman, 2020).

The description does not create an action problem. There needs to be an awareness that ‘it should not be like this’. If not, there is no action problem and people and organisations simply continue to do what they are doing.

The D-component is the prescriptive or normative dimension of the action problem. It does not refer to questions of true or not true, but of what is desirable in terms of what we should be able to do. The D-component is formulated in action terms of a dream for the future, what practices would shape the future of the congregations or what, from a missional perspective, would be the calling of the congregation? (Hermans & Schoeman 2015a:30). In this instance, the NG Hugenoet (the congregation selected for the research) congregation, and her leadership expressed a need to be more inclusive, thus framing the action problem.

4.1.2 *The action problem*

In the category of an action problem, a next question would be whether the intention is to contribute to an improvement of the problem or whether it is to design something new, leaving the researcher with a choice between making use of an intervention cycle or a design cycle. Because the object of research is a congregation already in existence and with established practices, the choice was made to use an intervention cycle that will fit into the methodology of practice-oriented research to move from a practice problem through research back to contributing to better practices within the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

4.1.3 *An intervention cycle*

Using the improvement of practices within an intervention cycle as a base for studying the congregation, it was anticipated that it will contribute to the observation and tracking of shifts made in practice in the congregation, as well as to facilitate an intervention to discover a desired outcome and suggestions for improving practices to be more inclusive. An intervention cycle, as proposed by various scholars, with the aim of diagnosing, intervention and improving practices within the practice stream, will be as follows:

1. Problem analysis
2. Diagnosis
3. Conditions for a solution

4. Intervention plan
5. Implementation
6. Evaluation

(Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

4.1.4 The research framework in schematics

Verschuren and Doorewaard describe a research framework as a schematic representation of the research objective that includes the appropriate steps that need to be taken to achieve it (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). A schematic outline of the research was drawn up plotting the process and methodology and then argued how and why certain steps should be taken and what kind of knowledge will be generated in doing so.

4.2 Designing the research praxis (From theory to praxis/ A practical application)

A next step would be to outline how practice-oriented research works and how it would be used within the process of a specific research project. The researcher in the project being used as a case study for this chapter, made a choice for a dialectic approach where the combination of knowledge and practice, based on sound practice-oriented research methodology, forms the foundation of the research framework. The decision therefore to utilise, with adaptations, the practice-oriented model of Andriessen (see Figure 1), is based on that it best suits the relational interface between theory and practice employed by this research.

Next, a schematic framework that depicts the methodological practice-oriented process for this research was drawn up to track the reasoning of a knowledge stream and practice stream as core and it incorporated the positioning of each step of the intervention cycle. The purpose of such a frame is described by Verschuren and Doorewaard as “a schematic representation of the most important research phases” (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). Schematically it can be presented as follows:

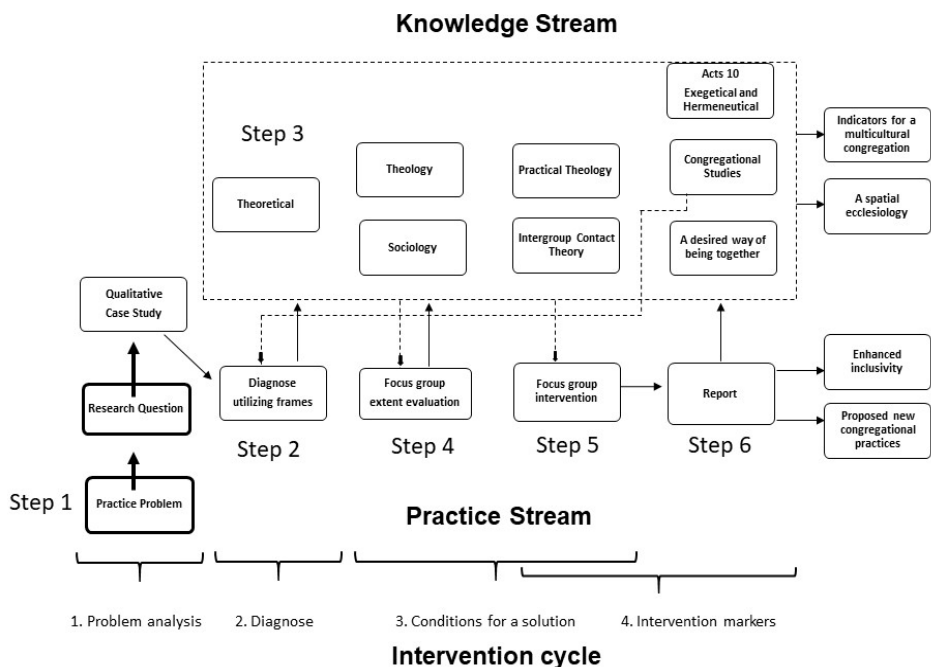


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the most important research phases ((Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013)

In this framework or flowchart, the methodology as well as the method that was followed, is outlined. It also indicates how the researcher understands the process as relationally working with and between the knowledge stream and the practice stream to conduct the research, not only to arrive at findings and reporting the results, but also to contribute by adding knowledge to the practice and knowledge stream. Following the lines that connect each section, the reader will be able to track flow and relation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Solid line arrows indicate a movement from the practice stream to the knowledge stream and dotted arrows indicate movement from the knowledge stream to the practice stream. The choice for an intervention cycle is incorporated into the framework, at the bottom, and will be discussed in detail in step 6 to explain why certain choices were made.

4.3 Plotting the steps within the process

With the schematic research process frame in place, clarification is needed to show how this frame will be used by the research process. The research then formulated a step-by-step process that consists of six steps. The researcher opted to follow the process as proposed by Verschuren & Doorewaard, and Schoeman & Hermans with adaptations relating to this research (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013).

Hermans and Schoeman propose in their article, *Practice-Oriented Research in Service of Designing Interventions*, an eight-step process for conducting practice-oriented research (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). The six-step process in the research differs slightly from the Hermans and Schoeman proposal in that some of the steps have been merged because of the method of approximation followed by the research. All actions are included, just in different steps. It was performed as follows:

Table 1: Six-step process

Hermans & Schoeman	This research
Introduction Step 7: Formulate research questions Step 8: Definition of concepts	Step 1: Problem analysis, problem owners and roles
Step 1: How are the roles of researcher, researched and problem owner distributed?	
Step 2: What is the action problem?	Step 2: Framing the practice problem, describing the actual or the A-component
Step 3: Is the action problem an improvement or design problem?	Step 3: Conditions for improvement: Finding appropriate knowledge to describe the normative or the D-component for an improvement
Step 4: What is the knowledge problem connected to the action problem?	

Hermans & Schoeman	This research
Step 5: What is the contribution of the research for practice (professionals and/or congregations)?	Step 4: Conditions for improvement: Extent evaluation to track shifts
	Step 5: Conditions for improvement: A first intervention
Step 6: Decide which stage(s) of the intervention or design cycle will be the focus of the research	Step 6: A step in a different direction

Step 1: The problem and the owners

The point of departure, Step 1, ensues from professional practice with a practice problem and in this case, from a multicultural congregation in urban Bloemfontein, in South Africa. Included in Step 1 were arguments presented regarding the purpose that logically led to the formulation of the research question, concepts mapping and hence the choice for practice-oriented research. To complete Step 1, clarity had to be obtained about the identity of the problem owners, and the role and interest of the researcher (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Vrystaat, 2013).

Defining the problem owners

Hermans and Schoeman define a problem owner as “a person (for example, a minister), groups of persons (for example, a policy body within congregations), or an organisation as the ‘stakeholder’ of an action problem”. It is not only a matter of owning the problem, but it is also a matter of taking responsibility for the action in question. Concerning the problem itself, they remark that it may not always be viewed as something negative; it can also be viewed as a positive challenge or as an area where there is need of growth for the person or the group (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015b).

Deduced from the above-mentioned criteria, the problem owners in the research project were identified as the leadership of the NG Hugenoet congregation. In the Dutch Reformed Church - the denomination that they are part of - the leadership of the congregation is vested in a church council or *Kerkraad*. This council is elected from the members of the congregation

and usually consists of male and female members. According to the church order or *kerkorde*, the polity document regulating the order and defining the decision-making authority within congregations, the council forms the leadership and determines the policies of the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Vrystaat, 2013: Artikel 15, 16, 17).

To solve the problem regarding the practices of the congregation, the leadership needs to be viewed as the owners of the problem as they not only determine the policies but also influence the entire congregation. In this case, it would be the *Kerkraad* of the Afrikaans group. This was part of the practice problem in the congregation, the absence of a joint legal decision entity where decision-making resides in all the groups present in the congregation and not merely in one group. The Afrikaans-speaking *Kerkraad* were then identified as a constituted legal entity and were therefore considered the problem owners.

Cognisance needs to be taken of the conditions set out by Hermans and Schoeman regarding the problem and the problem owners as they write, “*A description in itself does not create an action problem. There needs to be an awareness that ‘it should not be like this’. If not, there is no action problem and people and organisations simply continue to do what they are doing*” (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). For this reason, the researcher opted to select the focus group of the Afrikaans-speaking group, from the leadership serving on the church council. This was the body that will receive the report and who can then implement the recommendations of the research that will hopefully lead to a practice or action change in the congregation. It is this leadership structure that should realise that the current action should not be like this.

The role of the researcher

Dreyer provides a detailed description and role clarification of the researcher and the researched in qualitative studies. In an article called “The Researcher: Engaged Participant or Detached Observer?”, he explains the historical understanding of the subjectivity/objectivity issue that is vested in a detached researcher to give scientific validity to the research. In dealing with the criticism from social science scholars

a researcher as a detached observer is able to stand outside the research situation and is able to have control over subjectivities including his/her own, Dreyer refers to the work of Habermas who explained that only through entering into the lifeworld of the researched as an insider, could the researcher hope to gain understanding of meaning embodied in actions, institutions, products of labour, words, networks or cooperation, or documents. Pursuing the argument of Habermas, Dreyer proposes a hermeneutical dialectic between belonging and distantiating, which is at the heart of the methodological dialectic between the insider/engaged participant perspective and the outsider/detached observer perspective (Dreyer, 1998).

Moving to the role of the researcher within the framework of practice-oriented research, Hermans (2014b) and Hermans and Schoeman (2015a) propose three options or models that can be followed:

- Expert model: The researcher has the role of an expert with much knowledge on the subject, related to the problem and problem solution. Roles of the researcher and the researched are separated or detached.
- Knowledge-generating model: The focus of the research is on the production of new knowledge and insight that can be applied to the solution of the problem as soon as it becomes available from the research; hence, the research is mainly data-driven and the roles of the researcher and researched are clearly distinguished and detached.
- Problem-solving model: The focus of the research is on an attempt to come to a partial or complete solution of the problem that occurred in a specific situation or place of practice. The roles of the researcher and the researched blur in the problem-solving model of practice-oriented research. There is participation between the researcher and researched which leads to a practice where the solutions to solve the problem are generated from within this relationship (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Hermans, 2014b).

In the Dutch Reformed Church (the denomination that the studied congregation is part of), the pastor forms part of the council according to the church order and the practices of the congregation. Therefore, consideration was given to the role of the researcher in this study, since he forms part of the leadership structure of the congregation. At the time when

research was undertaken, the researcher was not only the longest-serving pastor in the congregation, but he was also considered the senior pastor of the church. In the governance policy of the congregation, there is no reference to such a position - it is merely based on practice and not a formal position of authority; hence, it was difficult to separate the researcher from the research and therefore some clarification is required in this respect.

Because the researcher in this research finds himself immersed in the lifeworld of the researched, (the pastors of the congregation) it could imply that their voices (interpretations) might be muted by the researcher's interpretations. On the other hand, the researcher understands that from the outsider or detached observer perspective, the aim is to eliminate or to reduce the ideological interpretations of the researched and of the researcher himself and take a critical objective stance on the data that is gathered from the research.

Bearing this in mind, a choice was made to follow the problem-solving research model. Although the researcher is part the congregation and finds himself in the leadership structure of the congregation, his role is blurred. Yet, it nevertheless creates an opportunity for participation between the researcher and the researched to generate solutions that will help to solve problems in the congregation. He is co-owner of the research problem. To maintain research validity, the researcher was duly aware that he would have to follow Dreyer's dialectic hermeneutical methodology of belonging and distantiation with fitting rigour and personal integrity. This was a crucial presupposition of the project.

Step 2: Framing the practice the problem

Step 2 necessitates moving into the practice stream by determining the practice problem. The research question will be answered either via the practice stream through empirical work or via the theory stream by means of theoretical arguments or existing theory that sheds light on the research problem.

The changes brought about by the events of 1994 in South Africa, namely a new constitutional democracy and the dismantling of the apartheid laws, stimulated a new spatial composition of urban environments. Established white Afrikaans-speaking congregations of previously exclusive white

neighbourhoods found themselves more and more in a different spatial and demographic context.

As black, Indian and coloured people migrated² into the traditionally white neighbourhoods, traditional white congregations started to experience a decline in numbers and accompanying that, financial difficulties. It was further observed that many of these congregations still consisted of exclusively white Afrikaans-speaking members and little effort was being made to expand or include non-white people into these congregations. It was also observed that the rhetoric of conflict, fear and prejudice amongst the members of these congregations is very real in their conversations.

References to what can be considered expressions of fear and prejudice, and which are prevalent amongst white people, include phrases such as: “our neighbourhood is black now”; “you cannot put your children in that school anymore because it is now a black school”; “crime has increased because these black people live here now”; “we have to fight for our language because they (black people) have taken everything away from us and Afrikaans is all that we have left”; and “we have given them (black people) everything, we are not giving them our church” etc.

However, this is not a “white people only” phenomenon or problem. It is observed that within the current public discourse and especially from political platforms, similar rhetoric is expressed by black people that could be considered expressions of fear, anger and prejudice amongst black people; for example: “the white people stole our land, we need to take it back”; “racist attack by white teacher on a black child”; “a vote for the opposition is vote for white oppression”; “we will take land by force”; “white people are racist”; and “white monopoly capital” etc. Add to this the occasional media reports of race-related incidents in schools and rural farming communities, the sporadic outbursts of xenophobic attacks in townships on foreigners

2 By using the term “migrate” rather than “move”, the researcher wants to emphasise that apartheid created vastly different worlds within the same country. White urban suburbia are vastly different from black, urban townships in South Africa. One of the derivative meanings of “migrate” is a spontaneous movement of people to new areas to find better working and living conditions. The growing movement from outlying townships to the white urban suburbs is a migration and not merely the moving of home or the changing of address.

and a visible rise in support for political parties and groupings that advocate populist anti-white sentiments, and one has a context that makes it difficult and problematic to form inclusive communities.

What then makes the NG Huguenoot congregation different from many other Dutch Reformed churches in the changing South African environment of traditionally white urban suburbia? It is observed that this congregation does not follow the traditional pattern of being white Afrikaans-speaking congregants only. Although this congregation is situated in a traditionally white urban neighbourhood, the people who form part of this congregation are white Afrikaans-speaking, black Sotho-speaking and Asian (Chinese) Mandarin-speaking.

Worship services are conducted in the same building at different time slots in different languages. Not all pastoral staff members are white and several events such as bazaars, certain worship services, meetings and communal meals reflect some sort of inclusivity, which makes Huguenoot different from other congregations of the same denomination within the same geographical area.³ Why is this so and, is what is happening there, creating a more inclusive congregation amid a divided context? What can this congregation themselves do to be more inclusive?

Leading the research into determining what the actual problem (A-component) is, the following question was asked: Could an evaluation of the historical background contribute towards the understanding of segregated urban congregations?

3 This assumption is made using the statistics of the Presbytery where the NG Huguenoot is situated. The minutes of the 2016 Presbytery meeting were used, which include reported member statistics and types of worship services that are held by the respective member congregations. The Presbytery consists of five congregations situated in a traditionally white urban area of Bloemfontein. Three of them have a membership exceeding 1,000 members and two of them a membership of between 250 and 500 members. It is only the NG Huguenoot (membership exceeding 1,000) that reflects members of different ethnic groups with official services and congregational activities for the different ethnic groups. Two congregations report sporadic services for Sotho people, but no evidence could be found that these people are being considered formal members of the church or that the activities reflect something of inclusivity or togetherness.

This question was then answered by using four frames (taken from congregational studies) as empirical methodology to describe the facts surrounding the congregation. The empirical description was performed with the reminder of Hermans and Schoeman that action or practice problems need to be concrete, observable, enacted by human agents or communities in time and space (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Here, theory from the knowledge stream was needed to facilitate this empirical process. Within the field of congregational studies, the utility of frames is used as valid empirical methodology to describe what the historical actuality of the congregation entails.

In the discourse of Hermans and Schoeman, step 2 consists not only of determining the A-component, but also of asking the normative questions or the D-component (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). This research moved to separate the two components into two different steps. Step 3 was then introduced to incorporate the normative, as this step moves into the knowledge stream for gaining knowledge on how to solve the practice problem presented by step 2.

Step 3: Conditions for improvement: Finding appropriate knowledge

Moving towards determining the D-component or the desired framework, the research would need to ask questions that will determine what conditions would be appropriate for improvement of the practice problem. Within the framework of Osmer (2008), and as portrayed by other scholars in the field, this would be considered the normative task of the research (See also Hermans, 2015; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Vershuren, 2009b; Vershuren, 2009a; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). The normative in this research was linked to the question “What is the normative framework for an inclusive multicultural congregation?”

Step 3 takes the research into the knowledge stream. In this research project, it identifies and describes the two streams of theory that are applicable to provide knowledge for this research. In considering the practice problem arguments and evidence, it was evident that two disciplines will provide the underlying knowledge base for the research, namely theology and sociology.

Theology is the main field of study as this research was conducted in the faculty of theology and specifically in the field of practical theology.

Positioning the research within practical theology was a next theoretical step and the researcher chose to work with congregational studies as a sub-discipline with practical theology.

A second theoretical framework providing theory that illuminates the actual configuration and provides direction towards the desired configuration, is the field of Sociology and particularly Intergroup Contact Theory. Segregation is a practice that is deeply ingrained in South African society. The intention of the onslaught of apartheid was to limit the contact between the various ethnic groups and partition physical space in South Africa. To achieve this, spatial segregation played a major part in the strategy to limit the contact between ethnic groups. The effect of the spatial and social segregation is to be found in poor inter-group relations, prejudice amongst groups, fear of the other, and in some cases, outright conflict.

One of the most prominent, interactive approaches towards the reduction of prejudice is the contact hypothesis or contact theory that specifies conditions under which inter-group contact should take place for achieving improved and more inclusive relations. Here the theory from the knowledge stream can provide insight into the practice problem to bring about a change in practice.

Step 4: Conditions for improvement: Extent evaluation to track shifts

This research also worked with the question whether a shift towards inclusivity can be measured in multicultural congregations? Having opted for an intervention cycle, the practice stream determines that conditions for a solution should be outlined. In the case of this research, it entailed that measurement or tracking be performed to determine whether shifts in spatial sharing is possible and will the sharing of space within the congregation aid the congregation to become more inclusive?

Step 4 involved the use of a focus groups from the congregation. An appropriate selection process was followed in the selecting and the conducting of the focus groups. Working with a pre-set list of questions derived from the theoretical knowledge gained in Step 3, the focus groups provided data that helped to determine the participants' views on the theory. By using deductive coding and Atlas.ti (CAQDAS), codes were derived

from the theory and the researcher was able to plot the degree of movement of each indicator on an extent evaluation scale.

Step 5: Conditions for improvement: A first combined intervention

A prerequisite for desired future practices is described by Hermans and Schoeman as actions that need to be “*concrete, observable and enacted by human beings or communities in time and space*” (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). It is through concrete and observable actions or practices that this congregation must realise or portray itself as the body of Christ that is different from the status quo where it finds itself in time and space.

Having determined the actual (A-component) and the desired (D-component) situation, and understanding the discrepancy that exists, a condition of improvement would be a further intervention. An intervention would facilitate an awareness that the actual situation is not what it should be, thus emphasising the action problem (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). If a different understanding of spatial existence and a different embodiment of that existence is needed within a divided urban South African context, the question remains whether a shift towards inclusivity could be measured in a multicultural congregation. In answering this, a next question was asked, namely, how a strategy of attentiveness would enhance inclusivity in a congregation?

Step 5 in this research project remained in the practice stream and utilised a combined focus group (combining the same participants of the three individual groups into a combined group) to determine whether the group agrees with the findings of the individual groups, thus confirming or rejecting any shifts. The findings from the first group meetings were shared with the combined group to determine the accuracy and validity of the first meetings.

During this focus group meeting the group was asked probing questions towards formulating their own understanding of God’s desire for the congregation. This was achieved with a reading of Acts 10:1-43 and two questions to guide the discussion, namely (1), “How did the meeting of Peter and Cornelius change their way of thinking of each other?”; and (2), “What practical suggestions do you have as leaders that will help Hugenoot to become more of what God’s desire is for the congregation?”

Step 6: Explorative steps in a different direction

With reference to the theological orientation, Schoeman and Hermans, in their article, describe the core question for practical theology as a discipline as: “*How [does it] contribute to the future of the Christian religion in the historical, socio-cultural and societal conditions in which people live?*” (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). The aim of the research is to contribute towards a workable solution of the practice problem, thus improving socio-cultural and societal conditions within the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Regarding the NG Hugenoot congregation, the question would be how a strategy of attentiveness would enhance inclusivity in a congregation?

Part of the intervention was to investigate the practices in the congregation itself before markers for next or future interventions could be plotted. This entailed reviewing the actual practices, adopting better practices, and proposing strategies that would help the congregation to enhance inclusivity and work towards reaching the desired outcome of a more inclusive congregation.

Working with practice-oriented research, the contributions of the research need to be practice-driven and help to improve professional practice. Hermans and Schoeman (2015a) and Hermans (2015) offer a guideline in terms of products, processes, programmes and policies for improving the socio-cultural and societal conditions of congregations.

For the NG Hugenoot, it would entail the establishing of more communal space in the congregation (Yin, 2011). Aspects that could contribute to the expansion of communal space include the following: more joint worship services with shared liturgies, a weekly intercultural assembly in English in an open time slot, communal youth camps inclusive of all groups and conducted bilingually, joint activities such as poverty relief or outreach to poor communities, and a multicultural Bible study group conducted in English.

Regarding processes, it can include joint decision-making and alignment of preach topics to focus on the desired goals of what the congregation should be. Programmes that are envisaged could include amongst others, courses on cultural sensitivity, diversity and evaluating diversity training, conflict

resolution and religious tolerance, retreat programmes for discovering spiritual gifts and the sharing of gifts. Policies could include items such as a code of conduct or a credo, which all groups in the congregation could identify with; the manner of communication, e.g. multilingual; how the church office interacts with and supports the various groups, how the pastors facilitate the diversity within the congregation; and how the different ministry groups interact and work together.

The researcher cannot prescribe these programmes or policies by imposing them on the congregation, as this would jeopardise the validity of the research. Any processes, programmes and policies that might emerge from the findings of the research, were considered no more than suggestions to the congregation for follow-up and implementation by the congregation.

4.4 A critical reflection on the process

The question was whether this research should attempt to present the full complement of the intervention cycle or whether it should constitute only a specific part or parts thereof. As Schoeman and Nel, supported by Yin, rightly remarks, the answer depends on two aspects. What is the contribution to the action problem and what are the constraints in terms of time and resources? (Yin, 2003; Schoeman & Nel, 2015).

The answer to the first question was threefold, namely, to describe and analyse the conditions that gave rise to the problem faced by the congregation and then, with the available data, to detect what the actual situation or A-component is regarding the congregation. Second, following theological and social theory, to utilise descriptive frames by working with the congregation in focus groups to determine whether shifts are possible, and whether it will contribute towards a better understanding of the action problem. Thirdly, to contribute towards the conditions for solving the action problem and gain a fresh understanding of God's desire that will help to nudge the congregation towards the ideal or desired mode of togetherness (or the D-component). To achieve this, the reading of Acts 10 can contribute towards intervention markers that need to be devised by the congregation via the focus group and then be implemented by them as the leaders of the congregation.

This sufficed the intention of the research to be involved in the intervention cycle up to the intervention planning stage. Thus, the intervention cycle was determined to be as follows:

1. Problem analysis
2. Diagnosis
3. Conditions for a solution
4. Intervention plan

Reduced to the essentials, the reasons for not taking the study past the planning stages of the intervention cycle relate to scope, time and resource constraints. The compass of the study was just too wide to include the implementation and evaluation stages since the researcher was conducting the study as part of a PhD programme and where submission periods were predetermined and the researcher was compelled to adhere to those time frames. The researcher therefore opted to use the available time and resources to conduct a thorough study of the intervention planning stage of the intervention cycle research.

It would be advisable though that the implementing and evaluation stages should be performed within the scope of the research project. In this case, the researcher left the congregation soon after the results and an intervention plan were presented to the problem owners. In later follow-ups, it transpired that nothing was undertaken by the congregation after the research was conducted. The data provided possibilities for the congregation to achieve God's desire. During the data collection process in the focus groups, the participants acknowledged where they were and agreed that they should proceed towards God's desire. A guided implementation process as part of the research project with the researcher could have produced a different outcome for this congregation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the outlined research framework provides a structured approach to conducting practice-oriented research within a multicultural congregation context, aiming to address real-world problems and contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical improvements. The research

process, spanning six steps, involves identifying the problem, framing the practice problem, determining conditions for improvement, evaluating the extent of improvement, implementing interventions, and reflecting critically on the process.

The research methodology emphasises the integration of theory and practice, utilising theological and sociological frameworks to gain insights into creating a more inclusive congregation. By adopting a practice-oriented approach, researchers can engage with practitioners to address action problems within existing contexts and facilitate interventions aimed at improving practices.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the limitations of the intervention cycle, particularly in terms of time, scope, and resources. While the research may provide valuable insights and recommendations, the effectiveness of interventions may be limited without active involvement in the implementation and evaluation stages.

Future research projects should consider including all stages of the intervention cycle within their scope, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of intervention effectiveness and ongoing collaboration between researchers and practitioners. With guided implementation and ongoing support, congregations can be better equipped to enact meaningful changes and move towards achieving desired outcomes related to inclusivity and community building.

In multicultural congregations, the practices of the congregations, the cultural origins of the members and inter-group relations are crucial elements that determine how such a congregation will function. Practice-orientated research as a methodology to study multicultural congregations, does allow the researcher to produce critical empirical data to determine where such a congregation is (the A-component) and what the desired (D-component) is. It allows the research process to act as an intervention process.

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