HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

Polycentrism in the *missio Dei*

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Research Project Registration:
Project Leader: N. Niemandt
Project Number: 04317734

Description:
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Dates:
Received: 05 Aug. 2015
Accepted: 21 Nov. 2015
Published: 31 May 2016

How to cite this article:
Franklin, K. & Niemandt, N., 2016, Polycentrism in the *missio Dei*, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1), a3145. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3145

Structures for mission have been under review as a result of many factors. In particular have been the widening influences of globalisation, and to a lesser degree, glocalisation. Various models of leadership praxis and structures have been proposed along the way. As Christianity moved farther away from the Christendom model of centralised control to other models of structure and leadership, other paradigms have been proposed along the way. However, one possibility, called the concept of polycentrism, has not been considered with any significant effort. In order to understand polycentrism, this research covered a literature review of seven spheres: (1) the urbanised-economic context; (2) political-ideological associations; (3) global-glocal socio-cultural situations; (4) organisational-leadership contexts; (5) missional movements; (6) the global church; and (7) the journey of the mission agency called the Wycliffe Global Alliance. The application of the concept of polycentrism to the specific context of the Wycliffe Global Alliance has enabled conclusions about the relevance of polycentrism in mission structures that are part of the *missio Dei*. The study concluded that polycentrism was a very helpful methodology that understood and resolved the inherent tensions and influences brought about by globalisation upon structures in God's mission. The implications shaped what leadership communities look like in terms of values and ideals because of the benefits of polycentrism. Through polycentrism, there has been a deliberate movement away from established centres of power, so that leadership occurred among and with others, while creatively learning together in community.

Introduction

The concept of polycentrism is an outcome of globalisation and glocalisation and it provides a deliberate movement away from established centres of power, so that leadership takes place among and within a community that learns together. Polycentrism assumes self-regulating centres of influence within a given structure. This occurs when there are many centres of power or importance within a political, cultural, or socio-economic system. The multiple centres may be of leadership, power, authority, ideology, or importance within a larger 'political boundary' (Dictionary.com n.d.).

We suggest that polycentrism offers inspiration, models, and methods for defining and understanding current and future structures within the *missio Dei* and its global mission contexts. In this regard, Woodward (2012:60) notes 'the vulnerabilities of a centralised leadership structure' especially in regards to the many 'megashifts' that affect us today and influence the way an organisation does its work: (1) from print and broadcast media to digital; (2) from modernity to postmodernity; (3) from rural to urban; and (4) from Christendom to post-Christendom. In response, leadership methods must move from hierarchical to polycentric so that they may more 'meaningfully connect with the digital generation' (Woodward 2012:60).

Missio Dei

The Latin phrase *missio Dei* literally means, 'the sending of God'. Its roots go back to the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 when Karl Barth thought of mission as the activity of the missionary God and that mission is the labour and 'attribute of God' (Oborji 2006:134). At the Willingen Missionary Conference in 1952, Karl Hartenstein positioned mission 'as the cause of the Trinitarian God' (Oborji 2006:134) because mission occurred within the triune God's overall plan for salvation because 'God is mission' (Bevans & Schroeder 2011:57). Bosch (2011:402) stated that mission originates only from the heart of the triune God who acts as a 'fountain of sending love' (Oborji 2006:134). The meaning of mission is found in the relationship within the Trinity expressed in this progression: the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit send the church into the world (Bosch 2011:399; Wright 2006:63). The final result of God's mission will be a state of *shalom* when God's 'universal reconciliation and peace' will reign over all (Oborji 2006:134).

Globalisation and glocalisation

Mittelman (2000:4) suggests that globalisation is really a 'syndrome', not in a medical sense of signs of disease, but because of widespread acceptance of its dominant set of ideas, actions, and patterns of behaviour within economic policies that now affect most nations.

The notion of globalisation has a number of core concepts: (1) It is powered by the interconnectedness of technological and economic factors where seemingly random developments in one part of the globe are affected by events in some other part of the world (Tiplady 2003:2); (2) It is enabled by broad economic advancement that embeds itself within the global context, allowing it to rely upon the free flow of trade, capital, information, and labour across borders (Roach 2009:89); (3) It pushes to extremes the progress of information technology which enables all manner of activity, such as the global transfer of financial investments (Livanos Cattaui 1998:168); (4) It is a multidimensional process and interconnection that multiplies and intensifies social interactions (Steger 2003:13), and that creates 'shared social space' (Hanciles 2008:15); (5) It enables the exchange, integration, and resulting consequences of human and non-human causes and activities across the globe (Al-Rodhan 2006:5); and (6) It is a political response to the rapid growth and expansion of the influence of the marketplace, both in the forms of dominance and marginalisation (Mittelman 2000:7).

Because globalisation is multidimensional, not only does it affect politics and economics, it also influences culture and religion (Netland 2006:19). An effect of globalisation on Christianity has seen it progress from being solely a 'Euro-American religion' to a global one (Jenkins 2011:xi). The fact that the number of Christians in the global South and East now exceeds those in the West illustrates its global impact.

Globalisation, according to Hanciles (2008:36), is 'unfeasible without localisation' because of the juxtaposed relationship between global/globalisation and local/localisation. The term 'glocal', derived from 'global localisation', highlights this relationship (Vanhoozer 2006:99). Robertson (1992:172–173) notes the causes and effects of our understanding that we are now citizens of the global world, but at the same time the processes of globalisation provide means for developing the glocal cultural values that may facilitate harmony and overcome conflict.

Wuthnow (2009:77) traces glocalisation to the Japanese business acumen of making products for a global market, but customising them for local contexts. This openness of a local context to foreign concepts is an indicator of its ability to glocalise. It is a dynamic, multifaceted, and multidirectional relationship between the two (Van Engen 2006:159). In other words, it is how the 'local and modern' occurs alongside the 'global and Western' (Zakaria 2009:82). In addition, web-based research into personal information allows merchants to direct their sales pitch locally to individuals.

The global character of Christianity

Kim (2009:10–12) notes the shift of church structure whereby local work and overseas work were led by two different bodies – the home context (assumed to be already Christianised) and overseas missions (assumed to be unconverted and therefore needing to be evangelised). Noll (2012:283) describes this as the 'single originating and single receiving cultures'.

In reality this situation has been changing for some time. For example, Kim (2009:15) stresses the reality of multiple centres of the Christian faith, rather than moving from one centre (in the West, for example) to 'the rest'. Historically, the Christian faith has had multiple centres (polycentric places) of influence or a 'mosaic' of communities and churches (Kim 2009:16). For example, Kim (2009:15) notes in Europe how Protestants held allegiance to 'German heartlands of the Reformation'; the Orthodox churches to Moscow or Athens; and the Roman Catholics to Rome. Furthermore, Kim states that the Christianity of the global South and East is not unified and has many centres of influence, whether in Nairobi, Kenya or Seoul, South Korea. Kim notes, 'it is not contained by any human boundary' (Kim 2009:16). This is also the claim of Walls (2008:202), who notes that Christianity's 'character… has always been global' rather than just regional or local.

Polycentrism as an outcome of globalisation

Polycentrism is now explored within these seven situations: (1) urbanised-economic context; (2) political-ideological associations; (3) global-glocal socio-cultural situations; (4) organisational-leadership contexts; (5) missional movements; (6) the global church; and (7) the journey of the mission agency called the Wycliffe Global Alliance.

Urbanised-economic contexts

Polycentrism in an urban setting occurs within a municipal area where there is an array of authorities, each with autonomous units. All of these units recognise the authority of the other centres (Afegbua & Adejuwon 2012:148). Davoudi (2007:65) defines a polycentric city as one that comprises a centre with an 'organised system of concentrated subcentres' referred to as a 'polycentic urban region (PUR)'. This occurs within a geographical region when there are 'three or more cities' in close proximity with each other, each with separate historical and political histories that 'demonstrate a high degree of functional interconnections and complementarities'. Examples include 'the Rhine-Ruhr region in Germany and the Flemish Diamond in Belgium (consisting of Brussels, Leuven, Antwerp, and Ghent)' (Davoudi 2007:65).

The PUR is the opposite of the model of the city depicted by Park and Burgess (1967:50) 'as a series of concentric circles' starting with the downtown area with its headquarters for business; the next circle is for light manufacture; the next is

for the workers who want to live closer to their places of employment; with the final circle being various forms of residential areas spread out and involving lengthy commutes to the central area. Many cities of the world are modelled this way, such as Chicago, Melbourne, London, and so forth. Cattan (2007:65) calls these 'dispersed' cities represented by 'disorganised urban sprawl'.

The polycentric model is thought to be democratic because it enables widespread ownership by its participants. Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012:148) suggest the model produces a context of 'peace, cooperation, and institutional integration' within all of the participating units.

Polycentrism promotes a balanced form of 'sustainable territorial development' (Cattan 2007:XI) because of its principles of equality and cohesion among all of its units (Cattan 2007:IX).

Carrière (2007:16) indicates, in order for polycentrism to economically benefit clusters of urban centres, there have to be meaningful exchanges between each of the urban centres within a region. The model promotes socio-economic competitiveness through 'balanced development' (Davoudi 2007:68). This provides an increase of organised networks and 'multilevel forms of governance' that arise from the 'bottom up' (Davoudi 2007:72).

Because globalisation works across national boundaries, it may make the state form of governance less effective. In its place, polycentrism emerges through the 'interconnectedness between municipal, provisional, national, regional, and global sites', and there is no single site that rules over the others (Scholte 2005:n.p.).

Political-ideological associations

Hogue (2003:2) states that Pamiro Togliatti, the leader (1927–1964) of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), was the first to use the term polycentrism. Post-Joseph Stalin, polycentrism described the 'independence among states and parties' within the communist or socialist arena and the occurrence of 'one real and several potential rival centres to the Soviet Union'. Bracke (2007:63) detects that for PCI, 'de-Stalinisation' led to PCI replacing the Soviet Union with its own history instead of making mention of the 'actual Soviet system'.

Marxist economist Samir Amin applied polycentrism to the capitalist world economy following World War II. As Japan and China emerged as powerful economies, this in turn led to the disintegration of Western automotive-centred economies (Hogue 2003:2). In other words, Western nations faced new rival polycentric economic influences.

Bracke (2007:64) found that by the early 1960s, it was not just the communists but also the entire world that was becoming polycentric. The emerging signs of polycentrism were brought about by decolonisation and détente. It was the 'end of bipolarism'.

Amin and Togliatti's use of polycentrism describes what happens when rising differences are not managed well in a hierarchical system, one that gives privilege at the centre; marginalises and represses the periphery; and denies validity to those who are affected. In such cases, polycentrism allows for differences without needing to address structures that are different but equal in status or power. Polycentrism is interested in empowering the disempowered and does so through reconfiguring all of the texts and discourses that stand in the way. It operates 'from the margins' because it views marginalised (or 'minoritarian') groups as active participants (Hogue 2003:4). This polycentric approach of the dispersion of power creates a democratic environment that enables 'popular participation', encouraging a diversity of 'decisions and authority centres' (Afegbua & Adejuwon 2012:148).

Polycentric groupings and gatherings are in contrast to 'unicentrism', which is likened to colonial theories and institutions. Such 'monocratic order' as Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012:149) call it, limits 'popular participation' because those with the power are able to determine what is 'right'. Issues such as human rights or public morality may be considered unimportant. Such a system may be known by its 'high-handedness, occasional unrest, lack of press freedom, shrinking space for civil society operations, and contested political legitimacy' (Afegbua & Adejuwon 2012:149). It is most noticeable in nations ruled by one-party political systems (such as in China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), absolute monarchies (such as in Saudi Arabia), or military regimes (such as in Laos and currently Thailand).

Global-glocal socio-cultural situations

Polycentrism offers alternative viewpoints to parochialism (the assumption that one's belief or way of operating is superior to others) and ethnocentrism (one's assumed ethnic or cultural superiority). Ahstrom and Bruton (2010) note that polycentrism is the opposite of ethnocentrism in that people try to do the things 'the way locals do' or 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'. The end result can be that the local culture has the last word on matters such as the status of women or the acceptability of bribery, even if these issues may be in direct conflict with 'the parent firm or even homeland laws'. Caution is required because adopting polycentrism without reflection may lead to 'ethical lapses' for participants.

Balia and Kim (2010:255) observe that 'cultural polycentrism is a fact of our time' because cultural diversity is increasingly a global reality. Polycentrism in intercultural situations is an 'awareness of otherness', which is an attitude of openness and curiosity that is willing to put aside both doubt about other cultures, and acceptance of one's own (eds. Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001:5). This is the ability to 'decentre' oneself as one takes on the 'perspective of an outsider' with their different set of beliefs, values, and behaviours (eds. Byram *et al.* 2001:5).

According to Morse (1998:234), effective communities broaden their sphere of leadership to form a polycentric model of numerous leadership centres that interconnect with each other. These centres enable the vision for the community through finding opportunities for its diverse array of people to make decisions, collaborate, and to act together on suitable ways to reach the community's goal.

Bowen *et al.* (n.d:11) suggest that informal and formal networks within a context operate like 'turbines' that are not 'centralised or pyramidal' in how they are governed but, instead, are polycentric with many interconnected centres of leadership. This provides 'social energy' for building capacity in the community. Hustedde (2007:53) refers to this as an 'entrepreneurial community', operating with a number of circles of influence, such as social services, youth, the arts, local government, and so forth. The leaders from each circle are enabled to make decisions directed by the mutual vision. Hustedde (2007:53) states that polycentric leadership works well when it moves beyond team building to 'team learning', where leaders think collectively and learn to work in a coordinated way.

The polycentric model of leadership and cooperation amongst global players in response to broad concerns is noted in the Global Partnership for Climate, Fisheries, and Aquaculture (PaCFA, n.d). It describes itself as 'a voluntary global level initiative' amongst more than 20 international organisations and bodies that share a 'common concern for climate change interactions with global waters and living resources and their social and economic consequences'. Its collaborators work together to create alertness to the importance of issues and suggest means of addressing these issues.

Organisational-leadership contexts

Some theorists, such as Brafman and Beckstrom (2006:19), provide analogies for centralised leadership structures (e.g., a spider) and decentralised leadership structures (e.g., a starfish). In a centralised structure it is clear who is in charge with a specific place where 'decisions are made' (i.e., the corporate headquarters or the boardroom). This leadership is 'coercive' because the leader holds ultimate power and authority and 'uses command-and-control to keep order'.

This coercive arrangement depends on hierarchy, like a pyramid in structure, where someone is always in charge (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:46). The organisation is divided into departments, which acts as silos from each other. These are the legs of a spider and when it is functioning well, each leg does its job and supports the organisation. However, cut off the head of the spider, and it dies. The analogy is the same with a hierarchical structure – without the CEO as the head, the organisation will move into decline and eventual organisational death.

In contrast, an open or decentralised organisation is 'amorphous and fluid' (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:50). Because it is flat, 'anyone can do anything' (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:46). Knowledge and power are dispersed and this creates great flexibility as entities respond quickly to any type of situation by 'spreading, growing, shrinking, mutating, dying off, and re-emerging' (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:50).

This structure operates like a starfish because it does not have a head that gives central commands, and its main organs are duplicated throughout each of its arms, because it is actually 'a neural network' that functions as a decentralised system (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:35). Just as with a starfish, a decentralised organisation can lose a leg or two and still survive, but with all legs working well together, a decentralised organisation can be highly effective (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:87).

Informal organisational structures have been thought to be a limitation. However, in the 'absence of structure [and] leadership', there is an advantage: It is ideology rather than structure that is the essential glue that holds the decentralised organisation together – the 'fuel' that drives the decentralised organisation (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:95, 206).

Although a decentralised structure may tend to appear 'ambiguous and chaotic', it still may achieve measurable results (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:89). The measuring criteria, however, is different: how active are the circles of networks, are they distributed, are they interdependent, and do they bring new kinds of connections between them?

This is very similar in concept to Plowman *et al.*'s (2007:354) 'Complexity Leadership Theory'. They point out that fast-responding leadership is dynamic, emergent, and adaptive and inspires others to be innovative and solve complex situations and problems. This is done through interconnected relational teams of 'distributed intelligence' that do not depend upon the limitations of a few people in top-level leadership positions.

Morse (1998:234) claims that a structure that is neither centralised nor decentralised is therefore polycentric. This is a hybrid model with a 'bottom-up approach of decentralisation', but with at least some degree of control and structure of centralisation (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:164). The 'sweet spot' of the decentralised-centralised continuum is the point that 'yields the best competitive position', although this is often in 'a tug-of-war' between the forces of centralisation and decentralisation (Brafman & Beckstrom 2006:164).

Missional movements

Volf (1998:217) hints at a Trinitarian premise for polycentrism through his description of subordination within the triune God when he says: 'The structure of Trinitarian relations is characterised neither by a pyramidal dominance of the one…, nor by a hierarchical bipolarity between the one and the many…, but rather by a polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of the many'.

Woodward (2012:20) believes that hierarchical forms of leadership create 'an individualistic approach to spiritual formation', whereas polycentric leadership provides 'a community of leaders within the community'. This is especially relevant amongst the Millennial (born in the 1980s–1990s) and Digital generation (born after 2000) where 'cultural architects' equip others in the community (Woodward 2012:61). The cultural architect creates a missional culture that enables 'the priesthood of all believers' (Woodward 2012:60).

The polycentric model of missional leadership gives people 'equal authority and revolving leadership' as they pursue community and 'wholeness together' (Woodward 2012:100). Spiritual maturity is modelled by an interdependent community of leaders with their various strengths and weaknesses, who are open and transparent to others in the community. This is quite a contrast to the pastor who is expected to function with the same level of authority as the North American business world CEO model where merits and performance are associated with the role (Woodward 2012:93).

Polycentric leadership enables more of a communal approach in which leaders operate within an array of interconnected communities. Through polycentrism, there is a deliberate attempt to move away from established centres of power, so that one leads from among others. In this way there is creative learning in a community, with attentiveness to others in the community, especially those from within the margins of the community.

Polycentrism recognises that leadership can come from anyone the Holy Spirit empowers, regardless of age or experience. Formal leadership structure does not necessarily guide the relationship between the leader and follower. Instead, it is more likely to be the Holy Spirit who does so (Woodward 2012:213). Those who are leaders intentionally rotate with other leaders so as to give breaks and rest to all concerned (Woodward 2012:214).

The global Church

The past 100 years of growth of the global church has birthed, according to Balia and Kim (2010:166), 'a polycentric world church'. Koschorke (2014:18) suggests that the various epochs in the history of World Christianity should also be viewed as polycentric movements. Throughout church history has been the plurality of centres of the church, cultural expressions of Christianity, confessional variations, and 'indigenous initiatives' of the emerging churches.

Koschorke (2014:18) cites Ethiopia as an example of polycentrism in church history. The Ethiopian church claims its biblical origins dating back to King Solomon. Ethiopians have had their own biblical Canon, their own liturgical language called Ge'ez', differing church customs with their practice of the Sabbath and of circumcision, and unique structures of the church. The Ethiopian king resisted the onslaught of missionaries from Europe in 1881 'on the grounds that the Ethiopians were already Christians' (Koschorke 2014:18). Ethiopia in colonial times was also the only African country to resist European colonialism when the Italian army attempted its invasion in 1896. Consequently, Ethiopian Christianity had a great impact upon the African elite of the nineteenth century because it inspired them to be 'religiously-modern' (meaning Christian), without desiring to become dependent on Western missionaries. It was as though the word 'Ethiopia' became 'a symbol of political and ecclesial independency' because it was 'black, it was free, and it was Christian'. These effects were seen to affect churches of the African Americans, the Caribbean, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Koschorke 2014:19).

Another example is with the development of diaspora churches in Western countries that originated from the global South and East. Through extensive migration, Christians from the global South and East bring new examples of theological education and formation to the West. The outcome is theology that is better suited for the challenge of mission in the West as the Western church learns from the churches from the global South and East.

Christianity can be viewed as polycentric because it has many 'cultural homes' (Tiénou 2006:38) within a diversity of contexts and is not permanently attached to any particular one. With the centre of gravity of the church shifting from the West, the polycentrism of cultures and languages is one reason that Christianity has spread across the globe, because it is at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and environments. Diversity in the global church is the reality of twenty-first century Christianity.

Western influences of the church are transmitted globally because of a disparity of power such that the receiving context becomes dependent upon the Western church. The Ethiopian example is why leadership from the global South and East must be enabled to provide a balancing influence on Western mission strategy. This is possible through a polycentric missional leadership that utilises equal authority and revolving leadership through a community of leaders working together.

Kim (2009:15) stresses the genuineness of polycentric places of spiritual vitality and missionary expansion of the Christian faith. This occurs in the global South and East where Christianity has many centres of influence, whether in Ibadan, Nigeria; São Paulo, Brazil; or Seoul, South Korea. Kim (2009:16) concludes, such centres are not 'contained by any human boundary' but instead appear as a 'mosaic of churches and communities' (Kim 2009:283).

The polycentrism of cultures and languages has been a reason that the Bible's translatability has been a vehicle for the spread of Christianity across the globe, demonstrating that it is 'at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and conditions of people' (Sanneh 1989:51). The

Bible's translatability bears witness to its adaptation into the local context of any language and culture. Bible translators reject the thought that God speaks only in a special, sacred language in the Scriptures; instead, God speaks in any vernacular. According to Bediako (2004:32), the Christian faith is 'the most culturally translatable' of all religions because it feels 'at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character'. Because Christianity places its authority in the Bible, it does so without claiming a 'sacred' language. Consequently, 'Christianity has developed as a "vernacular" faith' to the extent that each person with a Bible in their mother tongue 'can truly claim to hear God speaking to them in their own language'. Sanneh (2003:97) elaborates:

> Being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians translated their Scripture well or willingly, but that without translation there would be no Christianity or Christians… the church would be unrecognizable or unsustainable without it.

The journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance

The political associations of polycentrism have implications for the Wycliffe Global Alliance's governance and structure because as a global alliance, the more than 100 self-governing organisations that make up the alliance collaborate together as a community, but retain their individual distinctions. As a result, there are four ways that polycentrism affects the Alliance:

Transitioning from the 'West to the rest': This transfer in ownership and responsibility for mission has occurred because of the shift in the global church. Rather than being centred in North America, where Wycliffe Global Alliance's roots are, it has relocated its operational headquarters to Singapore (2011), with a leadership team from eleven countries – four are Western and seven are global South and East. Its board of directors is from ten countries – four are Western and six are global South and East. Of the more than 100 organisations that comprise the Alliance, 70% are from the global South and East.

Consequently, multiple centres of influence and polycentric places of spiritual vitality and missionary expansion and influence have an impact on the Alliance in a positive and dynamic sense. They exist from Kenya, to South Korea; from Papua New Guinea to Paraguay; and from Singapore to South Africa.

Transitioning from a Western agency, to an international organisation, to a global alliance: This shift is one of structure – when Wycliffe Bible Translators was first formed, it created operating units in other countries, similar to the post-World War II metaphor of divisions. Now, it is an alliance of like-minded organisations, with movements collaborating together for Bible translation around the globe.

The alliance structure of the Wycliffe Global Alliance forms a polycentric concept where there are many centres of leadership interrelating – from the individual, interdependent, and diverse Alliance Organisations, to the Alliance's Area Directors; from those to the rest of the Alliance's leadership team; then to the Alliance's board and back again to the Alliance Organisations' boards, and so forth in an informed spiral. This interconnected leadership web identifies the vision for the community and then finds opportunities for its many organisations to make decisions, collaborate, and act together in suitable ways to reach the goal.

Transitioning from an assortment of self-governing autonomous organisations to an alliance of self-governing organisations behaving and working together as a community: The organisations that make up the Wycliffe Global Alliance operate in such a way that they are polycentric, with many interconnected centres of leadership. The Alliance's leadership team guides the Alliance and ensures it is committed to its vision, and enables all of the Alliance Organisations to collaborate together in a community. The individual leaders of the Alliance Organisations are able to participate in the collaborative workings of the wider Alliance. As a result, the polycentric leadership operating within the Alliance creates a learning environment where its leaders collectively reflect together and act in a collaborative manner. The glue that binds the Alliance is its ideology, which is also the fuel that enables it to move forward.

As the leaders of the various circles within the Alliance (whether the leadership teams of individual Alliance Organisations, the Alliance's regional teams, or its global leadership and board) interact with each other, they embrace differences, release energy, and build cohesion. Consequently, the larger Alliance community and the even wider Bible translation movements are enriched by the health of the many smaller communities that make up the Alliance. Because the various circles of polycentric leadership associated with Alliance are culturally diverse, there is a growing attitude of openness and curiosity, an awareness of otherness, and a readiness to learn from each other. This leadership model operates with people of equal authority who pursue wholeness in community.

Transitioning from a centralised international institutional structure to a decentralised hybrid alliance structure: Wycliffe Global Alliance's structural changes mirror moving from a spider or institutional hierarchical structure called Wycliffe International and based in Dallas, Texas, to what it is today, an alliance with an operational headquarters in Singapore that is more symbolic than structural in importance. This newer form of structure, developed in 2008, resembles many aspects of a decentralised starfish structure. Yet, in reality it maintains some vestiges of institutionalism, because of operational requirements such as maintaining its financial systems and standards, governance requirements, and how it maintains accountability from its organisations. The Alliance's current structure is therefore not centralised or decentralised,

but it is polycentric, depicting a hybrid model, with a bottom-up approach with some degree of control, structure, and centralisation in the midst of decentralisation.

Polycentrism in ecclesial structures

It is helpful to illustrate polycentrism as the modus operandi of the Wycliffe Global Alliance by referring to two counter examples: (1) the Roman Catholic Church; and (2) the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa.

(1) It is possible to see a polycentric concept of structure emerge within the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II. At that time it began 'opening itself to the multiplicity of cultures in which Christian Catholicism has taken root' (Habermas 1997:249). As the Church has done so, it faced the tension of maintaining its identity within the 'cultural multiplicity of its voices' (Habermas 1997:249). A polycentric emphasis of the Church accepts as essential the plurality of expressions of Catholic doctrine as well as a multiplicity of initiatives that are in line with its tradition of faith.

(2) Niemandt's (2015) study of the DRC notes how in 2013 and 2014, its Highveld Synod started a process of reimaging the future direction of the denomination. As it did so, it involved the regional synods in this journey. Inherent in this process was the recognition of the church's denominational structures operating as 'complex systems' (2015:3). Therefore, applying complexity leadership theory (c.f. Plowman *et al.* 2007) to this context has altered the view of the role and purpose of the individual congregations 'as self-organising, complex, adaptive, self-regulating systems' (2015:3). Niemandt (2015:8) concludes that in the process of leading change within the DRC's denominational structure, leadership emerged that was empowered to 'disrupt existing patterns, encourage novelty, and act as sensemakers'.

These two very brief illustrations show that in the case of both the Roman Catholic Church and the DRC in South Africa, tensions inherent in global complex organisations have been dealt with by embracing complexity through centralised leadership structures. However, both institutions have sought ways to bring greater participation from those who have not traditionally been in the central power structures.

Polycentric missiological influences

As the Wycliffe Global Alliance transitions, it should not be understood from either a North American or European missiological school of thought, although both have been primary sources of missiological influence over it for decades. In fact, the Alliance's missiological perspective now comes from many cultural homes within the diversity of cultures that constitute it. Through the missiological influences at a board, leadership team, and Alliance organisational level, leaders from the global South and East continue to generate new patterns of missiological influence to the Alliance. The arising missiology will enable the Alliance and all its leaders and organisations to be better prepared to face the challenge of global mission. It follows that, for mission to be global and not owned by only one region, polycentric missiological discussions should be a standard and not optional.

There have been a number of general missiological influences upon the Wycliffe Global Alliance's leadership team. These have been governed by the nationalities of the team members, as well as their own missiological development.

Noticeable patterns of influences within the Alliance are from: (1) the USA, with its pragmatic anthropological and cross-cultural approaches; (2) Europe and South Africa, with broader theological approaches; (3) South Korea, which is closely tied to US pragmatism, but has its own form of manifest destiny that emerged after the Korean War, and has influenced an aggressive missionary movement from Korea since 1980 (though now slowing down); (4) Singapore, also closely tied to the USA, and includes some influences from Confucianism, with an emphasis on order, hard work, and responsibility; (5) the Philippines, historically closely tied to the USA, but lacking a cohesive perspective – there is a socio-economic gap between the metro Manila elites and the rural theologians; (6) Latin America, through practical theological experiences in response towards balancing liberation theology; and (7) Kenya, influenced by both European theology and Latin American liberation theology, with a hermeneutic approach that is unique to the East African experience.

These influences can be considered in a polycentric framework, with each voice bringing to the Wycliffe Global Alliance's missiological table a wide variety of tactics, and consequently, a richer missiological conversation. Although missiological variety shapes the Alliance, such variety does not attempt to accommodate or reflect every theological construct that is practiced.

Polycentrism and mission structure

In this article observations have been made about the influences of polycentrism on the Wycliffe Global Alliance, including the following: (1) the ownership and responsibility for mission has shifted from Western countries to polycentric places of influence and spiritual vitality across the globe and this is mirrored in the Alliance's structure; (2) the Alliance operates in an interconnected leadership web as a polycentric concept with many centres of leadership interrelating together; (3) the circles of polycentric leadership within the Alliance are culturally diverse, creating an awareness of others, with mutual learning; and (4) the Alliance's structure is a polycentric model with a bottom-up approach of decentralisation, and with a limited degree of control and structure of centralisation.

A simple overview of polycentrism is given in Box 1, and its application to the Wycliffe Global Alliance is given in Box 2.

BOX 1: Polycentrism in general.

Moves power through decentralisation with restricted control from established centres
Leads with attentiveness to the others in the community
Source of social energy through interconnected centres

BOX 2: Polycentrism in the Wycliffe Global Alliance.

Balances global spheres of influence, manages dependency from Western resources through influence from the global South and East
Creates new opportunities, practices, equal authority and revolving leadership
Incorporates new places of influence and spiritual vitality

Conclusion

The point for delving into polycentrism in the context of God's global mission, especially from a leadership perspective is this: Through polycentrism, there is a movement to lessen the potential autocratic effects of established centres of power, in terms of structure and centralisation in the midst of decentralisation, by means of a bottom-up approach with some degree of control. The results are: (1) one leads from among and with others; (2) one leads from creatively learning together in community and to attentiveness to the others in the community; and (3) one leads within the margins of the global church.

As a practical example of polycentrism at work, the journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance has been influenced by themes of polycentrism such as the evolution from a centralised international institutional structure to a decentralised hybrid one and the benefit has been the global church's representation and engagement in what was a Western institutional structure and paradigm.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

K.F. and N.N. contributed equally to the writing of this article.

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