

Challenges in Leading and Managing Volunteers Across Cultures: A Study of Afrikaans Churches Operating in Auckland

HASHTAGS: #ImmigrantChurches #SilentExodus #SecondGenerationImmigrants
#CrossCulturalLeadership

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Immigration can be a challenging life experience, and churches can play a vital role in supporting immigrants by providing a spiritual home and social belonging. Throughout New Zealand immigrant, or transplanted, churches offer immigrants a sense of “home away from home” by being aligned with their culture and language. However, these churches may face unique challenges as they operate within a broader community that differs in language and culture. This tension can be particularly pronounced for the second-generation immigrants, who may identify more closely to New Zealand language and culture than with that of their parents. This study examines the specific challenges Afrikaans churches in Auckland encounter in leading and managing volunteers within this multicultural context.

I interviewed 12 people who were actively involved in the leadership of four Afrikaans churches operating in Auckland. After the interviews I looked for patterns and themes and then collated them to explore the challenges that these churches face. I asked various questions with the aim of answering the following three main questions:

- How is the “silent exodus” (when second-generation members quietly stop attending) affecting Afrikaans churches in Auckland, and why does it matter?
- What are the main communication and cultural challenges these churches face as they adapt to life in a new country?
- How do these cultural differences create challenges in leading, motivating, organising, and working with volunteers?

It was evident that the Afrikaans churches in Auckland face challenges related to language, culture, leadership style, and the exit of the second-generation immigrants.

Probe

The 6 dimensions model of national culture by Geert Hofstede

Ley, D. (2008). *The immigrant church as an urban service hub. Urban studies*, 45(10), 2057–2074. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0380-2>

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Insights

- **THE NEED FOR FAMILIARITY:** Participants shared that joining an Afrikaans church was beneficial in navigating the trauma of immigration and the experience of culture shock. Belonging to a spiritual group that felt familiar gave them a positive self-image and serving in these churches made them feel as though they were making a positive difference in the lives of other immigrants.
- **LANGUAGE BARRIERS:** One of the major challenges that the Afrikaans churches faced was language. Participants shared that it was challenging to communicate their faith in English because it was their second language, and yet their children found it challenging to understand faith in Afrikaans because Afrikaans had become their second language. Language was one of the reasons second-generation immigrants were leaving the Afrikaans churches.
- **INTERNAL CONFLICT:** It seems that members of these Afrikaans churches are all along a journey of adapting to the New Zealand culture, with many at different stages of cultural adaptation. The result is that leadership style, communication approach, motivation and a sense of belonging (which are all influenced by culture) are different for people at different stages of this culture shift, often resulting in conflict within the churches. This culture shift combined with a strong need to belong to a group has possibly created smaller groups within the church that have a strong bond, which could cause the fragmenting of these churches.
- **BICULTURAL SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS:** It is evident that some second-generation immigrants choose to be bicultural and the Afrikaans churches provide a space for them to connect with their Afrikaans culture. This could be key for Afrikaans churches in navigating the “silent exodus”. Although they struggle with the Afrikaans language, they long for experiences of the Afrikaans culture.
- **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:** Based on the findings I made some practical suggestions on navigating the challenges within these Afrikaans churches, some of these are outlined below:
 - Create leadership positions for second-generation immigrants and create cultural experiences for the second-generation that are not necessarily focused on language, but rather focus on other cultural aspects such as food, music etc.

Discuss

In what ways do language barriers between first-generation and second-generation members affect faith communication, participation, and retention within NZ migrant Churches ?

How might the various stages of cultural adaptation among members contribute to internal conflict, subgroup formation, and potential fragmentation within NZ migrant churches?

What practical strategies can NZ migrant churches implement to overcome communication barriers, reduce internal conflict, and create inclusive leadership opportunities for second-generation migrants?

FOR NON-MIGRANT NZ CHURCHES:

What signs of cultural adaptation stress do you see in migrant families attending your church?

What practical initiatives might you implement to recognize and support the transition needs of first and second generation migrant members?

What resources and/or professional development does your ministry team need to better support the particular needs of migrants and their families?

- Reduce the noise of language barriers by using simple Afrikaans in church instead of complex Afrikaans theological words. Display translations on the screen for songs and readings to help second-language Afrikaans speakers and vice versa when using English. Offer bilingual or English services for the second-generation members and train members in communicating faith in English to minister to their children and the wider community.
- The importance of a common goal: Having a common goal that each subgroup within the church works towards would help diminish internal conflict and bridge the gap between the cultures, or subcultures, within the church.

