

A CONTEXTUALIZED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR EMERGING CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN CAMBODIA

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BACKGROUND

Cambodian society has been traditionally rooted in a syncretistic Buddhist worldview and its way of life. In recent history, Cambodian people were deeply scarred by the Khmer Rouge genocide and the subsequent civil war. Between 1975 and 1990, more than a quarter of the population of 10 million, especially the educated and those in any kind of leadership positions, perished. It has significantly affected Cambodia on all levels of society and impacted every citizen. Currently, Cambodia is rapidly changing—indiscriminately influenced by globalization, urbanization, secularization, technology and other forces. Especially in Phnom Penh, the capital city, changes are visibly evident with and incredibly fast-paced, creating a sense of out-of-control chaos and causing a great sense of uncertainty and confusion for its people.

In this dynamic society, the Cambodian church has been growing fast. According to the 2013 report of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Cambodia ranked 9th in the top 20 countries where Christianity has the highest percentage growth rate during the period between 2000 and 2010.¹ In the same report, Cambodia also ranked 5th in the top 20 countries having the highest Average Annual Christian Conversion Rate between 1970 and 2020. However, the Cambodian church is relatively young and small. Although the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Cambodia in 1923 and the Roman Catholic church entered even before then, Christianity had not made any significant growth or impact in this Buddhist stronghold until 1970s prior to the Khmer Rouge and 1990s after the end of civil war. Even with the significant growth rate in recent years, less than 2% of the population claim to be Christian according to Mission Kampuchea 2021.

Most Cambodian Christian leaders are first generation believers with minimal training and experience. There is a lack of understanding about their formation, especially that of the emerging leaders under 40 years of age. Over 50% of the population is under 24 years, and the median age is 24 years.² On every account, the leadership development of emerging Christian leaders is crucial for the Cambodian church and society for today as well as for the future.

As a missionary, serving in leadership training, I desire to see increased capacity for mission among

these young Cambodian leaders. They need the necessary training and tools to pursue their missional calling. As I continue seeking ways to equip and empower Cambodian emerging leaders, I realize these young leaders lack support systems to deal with increasing pressure, and temptations of different kinds as society at large is going through major changes. It is indeed of utmost necessity to meet their development needs so they can be contextually relevant and spiritually empowering. This led me to my research on emerging leaders in Phnom Penh with the questions: Who are these emerging leaders in Cambodia? How did they become leaders? What are the current issues and challenges facing them? What do they need to grow and fulfill their callings? In this article, I will address these questions based on my field research in order to present what a contextualized leadership development model for emerging leaders in contemporary Cambodia may look like.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EMERGING LEADERS IN CAMBODIA

Who are the emerging leaders in Cambodia? For the sake of research, I delimit them to those who were born after the Khmer Rouge (1975-79) and are holding leadership positions in their churches or organizations. I conducted personal interviews with 24 leaders and facilitated three separate focus groups of different sizes. I also attended four different meetings to observe and learn. As a result, I came to better understand these young leaders and appreciate their Christian leadership journey more deeply.

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Over all impressions of the emerging leaders with whom I interacted can be described as dynamic, resilient, receptive, relational, fun-loving, open, busy, torn and vulnerable. They all hold more than one

1. The full report can be found online at <https://archive.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>

2. CIA World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cambodia/>

position in the church and are involved in multiple tasks. Some of them have side jobs and additional responsibilities (i.e. university study, board members of other organizations). Most of them are married with young children and under a lot of pressures from both immediate and extended families. Because of busy schedules and multiple demands on their time, these young leaders have little space and time left for rest and reflection.

Many of these emerging leaders are bi-vocational church leaders, working full-time or running small businesses in addition to serving local churches. It was not clear whether their current work outside of church was simply for financial support for family needs or anything to do with pursuing a vocational calling in the non-church sector. However, a few of them indicated that the local church ministry was where they felt God's calling. A couple of them even mentioned that they wished they could serve the church ministry fully without financial concern. On the other hand, a number of them expressed their desire to see God's kingdom expanding beyond their local churches and shared their big dream of engaging mission work for their community and the whole nation. They seem to lack theological understanding of the Kingdom of God and its relation to local churches and the calling and identity of pastor.

Many of them are well aware of their spiritual gifts and using them in the church to different degrees. They have strong sense of ministry calling and are committed to pursue it for the rest of their lives. However, they have difficulty of either identifying the areas of weakness where they want to improve themselves or sharing them openly. Being asked about the areas of their life they struggle with, many hesitated and took a while to answer. I wonder how much of it has to do with their cultural tendency that sharing or showing weakness to others is not common or encouraged. Maybe they had not thought about it (or never been asked). Overall, many young leaders I interviewed gave answers to this question about their weakness more on general surface level.

However, some gave sincere answers about their areas of needing improvement, including priority/time management (mentioned by a number of leaders), English, Bible reading, theology, management skills, financial managing, delegation, outgoing confidence, patience, encouraging leadership growth of others, excuses to not respond to God's leading, communication skills, relationship building, discipline, taking responsibility without excuses. Most of them mentioned either their positive experience with mentoring or desire for mentoring relationship. Those who understand what mentoring is seem to be more self-aware and desire personal improvement.

Emerging leaders value and desire continuing education and formal training of some sort. Cambodia lacks Christian institutions or degree programs for continuing education of church leaders except for periodic seminars and workshops, so

most interviewees of the two churches have gone through numerous seminars and workshops over the years but not any formal degree programs. There are options to pursue regular degrees part-time as several universities in Phnom Penh offer evening and weekend classes for Bachelor and Master programs. But those business-driven schools offer only marketable majors like management, English, IT, business, finance and accounting that are mostly irrelevant to the pastors who are heavily involved in church activities like evangelism, discipleship, worship and prayer ministry. Also, the educational quality of these schools is below international standard.

THE PROCESSES OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR EMERGING LEADERS

How did the emerging leaders become Christian leaders? Most of them were from poor rural families who couldn't support their education. They moved to Phnom Penh and got connected with the churches or ministries that provided English and computer classes and dormitories, although they were from non-Christian background. Usually in those settings Bible studies were held either as mandatory or being highly encouraged to attend. Accompanied with hospitality and loving care, missionaries, Cambodian leaders or friends shared the gospel to them and helped them to become Christ's followers. Many emerging leaders came to Christ and began their faith journey that way. Majority of them were baptized after the age of 17 years old.

The emerging leaders are mostly first-generation believers who often faced persecution from their unbelieving families. I have been to a number of baptism ceremonies where mostly young people were baptized. I noticed there was hardly any immediate family members present for the occasion. The new believers could not expect much support for their new faith from their families but rather facing suspicion and persecution.

Many became leaders of the church or organization rather early without much experience or training. It is related to the unique situation of Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge genocide caused the shortage of qualified leaders. In many cases, they started exercising their leadership gift at the church or the mission organization they had taken part as members, and eventually they became pastors and directors.

Many of the emerging leaders I interact with are called "pastors" in the church. It is not very clear how one becomes a pastor in their church. In most Cambodian churches, a proper candidacy process is absent. The term "pastor" (*kru-gong-veal*) is used rather loosely. Many become "kru-gong-veal" without any formal training or ordination process of some sort. They have clear sense of calling to ministry and to the church they serve now in particular. All of them could share their experiences of divine moments and confirmation

for their calling. For many, their church has been the central place for their development and experience as Christian leaders.

In terms of formal leadership training and program, their involvement had been quite minimal. Among the bi-vocational pastors, some of them finished degree programs at regular university, and only few have attended and completed traditional Bible school. Most of emerging leaders participated in different types of short-term training workshops and intensive pastoral training programs. They all expressed their interest and desire for more formal education but could not see how that could be possible considering they are already busy with their schedules and financial challenges.

Those who serve under the older senior pastors identified their senior pastors as current mentors. They see them often and regularly but mostly for church ministries since they are on the church leadership. They said the senior pastors are available to see them most of the time they have problems or issues. In organizations, the situation is often similar between the young leaders and their seniors. To me, that sounded more like seeking advice to solve a problem. It can be a form or part of mentoring in which a mentee seeks out a mentor for advice and resources. This type of relationship is common in Cambodia and is related to the patron and client relationship as a cultural norm in Cambodian society historically.

THE ISSUE OF PATRON-CLIENT DYNAMICS

The Patron-Client relationship, both in its formal and informal setting, is an arrangement between an individual of higher socio-economic status or some other personal resources (patron) who provide support to another person of lower status (client) who give assistance or service in return, which is mutually obligatory and beneficial. This type of Patron-Client relationship is found in many cultures throughout history-especially in an agricultural society like Cambodia.

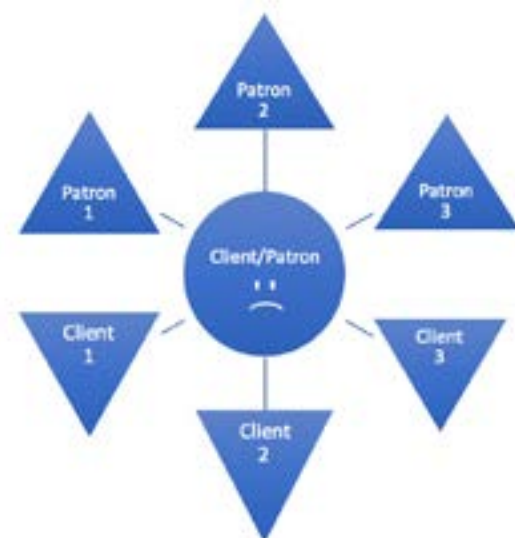
Most literature on the topic affirms that the Patron-Client relationship is deeply rooted in Cambodian culture from ancient times and explains a lot of socio-political dynamics of Cambodia today. Not surprisingly, anybody in a leadership position in Cambodia is perceived and expected to be a Patron. To some young leaders, their senior pastors were perceived as their patrons who solve their problems and thus deserve their loyalty. It comes with a set of cultural expectations and creates different kinds of dynamics. Basically, a leader should meet the needs of followers who in turn pledge their loyalty to him.

Unfortunately, there are unintended results of well-meaning outsiders who bring programs and agenda in, without sensitivity and recognition of this aspect of Cambodia culture (called the “McDonaldization of ministry”). One serious result I observe is that it brings in a distraction or even temptation for

emerging leaders for their discernment and pursuit of God’s calling. It seems some emerging leaders quite frequently move from one ministry program to another as employment opportunities. It was the case for a few interviewees from independent church background. I know personally several of them who changed their work, mostly with mission agencies or Christian NGOs, four to five times within the last five years. A couple of them confessed to me that they felt lost and were struggling in their walk with God.

Another unintended result of the McDonaldization of ministry is that some young leaders maintain partnership with a number of different ministries and programs concurrently. I know in some Cambodian churches and ministry centers, there is a constant stream of visiting teams and individuals who all come with good intentions and desire to help local churches and ministries. Sadly, it often has unseen consequences that are more harmful than helpful. The situation can be described as one Cambodian leader being the Client keeps multiple Brokers and Patrons from outside. In each relationship, there are expectations to meet and results to deliver. If multiplied, it can become a heavy burden for the Client, causing anxiety and exhaustion. I wonder how well the expat leaders, including both short-term and career missionaries, in Cambodia are aware of this Patron-Client dynamic at work in their relationship with local leaders. Although there is increasing awareness of this issue, I wonder whether the awareness is making any difference. Assessing the Patron-Client dynamics from a Biblical perspective is an important and yet different issue that needs further discussion and research.

Figure 1: Emerging Leader with multiple Patrons and multiple Clients



Emerging leaders in Cambodia are impacted by the Patron-Client dynamic which is deeply embedded in every level of Cambodian society. With respect to the expat supporters and missionaries, many emerging leaders play the role of Clients. And with respect to the church members and family members,

they are forced to assume the role of Patrons. These cultural dynamics, confounded by globalization and localization, seem to create confusion and power struggles as well as pressures for emerging leaders to navigate. In this terrain, emerging leaders are called to be spiritual servant leaders, and they are to be faithful to that calling to know and serve God and His kingdom. In order for the emerging leaders to pursue the calling to servant leadership, they need a different model of how others can support and encourage them.

CURRENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING CAMBODIA

What are the current issues and challenges facing them? A significant portion of my field research was devoted to understanding the context of emerging leaders and their self-perception of it since my research interest is contextualized leadership development. The young leaders were aware and knowledgeable of the issues and challenges their generation is facing in the rapidly changing environment.

The emerging leaders had a keen and common understanding of the social issues and contemporary challenges facing Cambodian society as a whole. On one hand, they were deeply concerned about the state of society and feeble witness of Christians. At the same time, they seemed quite optimistic that many things would get better as time goes, especially in the area of dependency and education. They expressed their vision of Cambodia becoming more independent and self-supporting and their desire to see Christians becoming agents of change for that.

Table 1: Current issues and challenges facing Cambodian Society

Focus Group A (bigger)	Focus Group B (smaller)	3G Gathering (biggest)	Interviews (individuals)
-Corrupted leadership -Lack of education -Materialism -Domestic violence -Poverty mentality -Aid dependency -Drug/alcohol addiction -immorality -Migration -Lack of law enforcement/justice	-Corruption -Low education -Materialism -Domestic violence -Poverty mentality -Aid dependency -Deterioration of traditional values -Migration -Land grabbing / deforestation	-Corrupted politics -Low quality education -Materialism -Domestic violence -Outside dependency -Addictions -Deforestation -Lack of health services -Violence/crime	-Corruption at every level of society -Low quality education -Materialism/greed -Addictions (pornography, drugs and gambling) -Immorality -Traffic accidents -Gap of rich and poor

As shown in Table 1, all four groups pointed out three issues as most pressing: corruption, low education and materialism. The consistency and uniformity of answers given by all four groups was quite surprising. It reflects conventional knowledge and statistics about these issues in Cambodia like many developing countries. The same can be said about the answers on the next lines: three out of four groups mentioned poverty mentality, addictions and immorality.

Further question is how the emerging leaders conduct themselves in this challenging environment. I heard a story from one of the Cambodian leaders about Cambodian father talking to his grown-up son while seeing a super expensive car driven by another Cambodian. According to the story, the father said with a look of disgust on his face, "Look at that car. How in the world can that guy afford to get that? I wonder where he cheated from. He must have a dirty secret connection." Then, he turned to his son and said with a tone of frustration in his voice, "Why can't you get something like that for me? Don't you have any connection after all these years of schooling and working?" I am not sure if this was a true story or not. However, the story, funny and sad at the same time, illustrates the inconsistency and irony of people regarding corruption. The fact that the emerging leaders are well aware of corruption and materialism in society does not mean they are exempted from the alluring influence of pleasure, power and money. Actually, current signs and symptoms show the opposite; emerging leaders are more vulnerable to the temptations because of the pressures they are under and the cultural power that is attached to their leadership position.

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What do the emerging leaders do to deal with corruption, materialism and immorality around them? Are they motivated and equipped to respond to these pressing issues in a Christian way? What example do they follow? What kind of example do they set in their family, work and church? How does it impact their Christian witness and leadership effectiveness? These are difficult questions to raise and answer. Any contextual effort of Christian leadership development in Cambodia today should provide an environment where these questions would be raised and discussed openly, helping the leaders to be aware of both external and internal conditions and inspiring them to be leaders with integrity.

What stands out rather distinctively from the data is domestic violence (three out of four groups mentioned). I remember a few years ago a village chief in rural Cambodia mentioning domestic violence when asked about the biggest problems and challenges in his village. I wonder if the emerging leaders were thinking more about the rural setting

where most of them came from or the urban setting where they currently live. It will be helpful to clarify whether domestic violence is more of rural problem (over 70% of Cambodian population still live in rural areas) although I have a suspicion based on news and reports I heard that it is a general issue everywhere, including cities and churches.

At any rate, the fact that domestic violence is such a common issue in Cambodia is alarming. According to a UN report released in 2013, shockingly more than 1 in 5 Cambodian men aged between 18 and 49 admit to having raped a woman.³ This is an exceptionally high percentage on every account even in comparison to other countries in the region. It has all kinds of ramifications on Cambodian society as a whole and families in particular. These issues of domestic violence and sexual violence present both huge challenge to face and great ministry opportunity to Cambodian church and its young leaders. I am not sure how well they are prepared and equipped to deal with them.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHURCH LEADERS

I compiled the emerging leaders' answers about the needs and opportunities of church leaders like them who are facing current realities and trends in society and church. Table 2 shows the list arranged in order of importance. All four groups identify lack of unity as one of the greatest needs for Cambodian churches and their leaders. I personally have heard this concern many times, that Cambodia church is small but divided with factions among the older leaders who created silos under their leadership. As an example, in 1995 the Cambodian government asked Christian churches to create one blanket council. In response, Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia (EFC) was established and officially recognized by the government in 1996. EFC and three other existing councils, Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), Kampuchea For Christ (KFC) and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) represented Protestant Christianity to the government (Maher 2017). Since 1996, however, 10 additional Christian councils have been registered with the Ministry of Cult and Religion, making Christian church in Cambodia far from being united. Apparently, this reality must have affected emerging leaders. Young leaders expressed their strong desire to see the unity of the body of Christ in Cambodia. Most interviewees shared that they have limited exposures and connections outside of their church but expressed the same desire for fellowship and cooperation with other leaders.

Table 2: Needs and Opportunities for Church Leaders

Focus Group A (bigger)	Focus Group B (smaller)	3G Gathering (biggest)	Interviews (individuals)
-Unity of Christians	-Unity of the church	-Unity for same goal	-Unity of churches
-Quality education	-Education	-Capacity building	-Continuing education
-Next generation leaders	-Raising leaders	-Mentoring/coaching	-Mentoring/coaching
-Holistic mindset	-Holistic discipleship	-Holistic vision	-Discipleship
-Spiritual formation	-Healthy leadership	-Finance accountability	-Healthy leadership
-Servant leadership	-Church growth	-Entrepreneurship	-Management training
-Church growth	-Immorality	-Limited resources	-Stronger churches
-Ethics (integrity)	-Business ethics	-Priority setting	-Moral purity
-Sustainability	-Migration	-Cooperation among different sectors	-Financial stewardship
-International migration	-Media/music		
	-Sports ministry		
	-Family relationship	-Information sharing	

The emerging leaders also mentioned education and developing next generation leaders through mentorship as top need and priority. It is apparent that the emerging leaders consider education as a priority as both for their own need and general need of society. Also, they uphold holistic approach to Christian discipleship (rather than dualistic approach, I suppose) so that they could be meaningfully engaged in the world. It is not clear whether it stems from their theological and biblical understanding of Christian life or more from their experiences and desire to be integrated in the world but somehow not of the world. Many of them have been involved with business and Non-profit or Non-governmental organizations.

Three out of four groups also mentioned church growth and stronger churches as important needs. In Cambodia, I observed and heard that most local churches are relatively small, less than 50 members, and their buildings or gathering places are not so visible. Among older church leaders, there seems to be a fear of persecution from Buddhist neighbors and government. Emerging leaders want their churches to grow in number and influence.

They recognized the need for better management and financial accountability in the church. The data reveal a great need for financial accountability and transparency in many Cambodian churches and local organizations. A couple of emerging leaders told me about a number of recent cases that involved major financial frauds and mismanagements in Christian organizations. I learned that most churches do not have proper financial bookkeeping system. The emerging leaders understand these things need to be addressed and changed for the church to grow and become healthy. A contentious issue is whether pastors in Cambodia themselves need to be trained in basic finance and management. Many believe that such training is important and necessary while others disagree. Those who disagree argue that a church pastor should not be involved in the church finance at all and that finance and management should be delegated to other leaders or members.

But in reality, most Cambodian pastors, in both urban and rural settings, are leading small congregations with extremely limited number of human resources.

3. "UN Report Says 1 in 5 Cambodian Men Have Raped." 2013. The Cambodia Daily. September 11. <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/un-report-says-1-in-5-cambodian-men-have-raped-42122/>.

In most cases, they have to play multiple roles without any leader who is qualified to be elder or deacon. In most churches I have been to, elders and deacons were hard to find. A few devoted members to church and pastor were involved in different ministries but with limited capacity. In this kind of situation, to insist that a pastor should devote to shepherding without any financial or administrative involvement in the church sounds idealistic. However, everyone who participated in the focus groups agreed on the importance of some forms of accountability and shared responsibility.

Concerning the role of a pastor, the issue of bi-vocational pastor in Cambodia is also controversial and needs further study and research. In fact, Cambodian Christian leaders and those who are involved in Christian leadership development need to discuss and clarify some ecclesiological issues facing Cambodian church such as "What is church?", "Who is pastor? What is his/her role?", "How should a pastor be supported for his/her family?", "Is there any prescribed leadership structure of church in the Bible?" and "What is the most biblically correct and contextually appropriate form of church government in Cambodia?"

THE CRITICAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EMERGING LEADERS

Through the research, I wanted to explore a contextualized leadership development model for emerging Christian leaders in contemporary urban setting of Cambodia by identifying critical factors that are shaping their formation. Here is a summary list of those factors:

- Most emerging leaders are from first generation of believers
- Lack of support from their families for the leader's Christian walk
- They desire and appreciate mentoring relationships
- Lack of continuing education opportunities for leadership development
- Under a lot of pressure from work, family, and church to be superman or superwoman
- Financial burden is increasing; consumerism is growing
- Lack of experience and role model for Christian family life
- Desire Christian unity as Cambodian church is divided
- Lack of accountability for their ministry (one-man show)
- Lack of opportunities for personal retreat or learning spiritual disciplines
- Corruption level is extremely high and materialism rampant in society
- City Traffic is getting worse and chaotic; commuting time becomes longer

- Many are bi-vocational pastors. Some are lay leaders.
- They play multiple roles with respect to the patron-client dynamics
- Many are newly married and have young children
- Desire to provide quality education for their kids and continuing education for themselves
- Awareness of social issues and trends
- Optimistic about the future of society
- Fitted with smart phones and easy access to internet
- Many can communicate in English and some are really fluent
- Cambodia has a huge young population; its median age is 24.5 years old
- Cambodia is a shame/honor culture; leaders are to be seen as strong

Most Cambodian emerging leaders have moved from rural areas to the city of Phnom Penh that is increasingly becoming secular and global. They became Christ's followers with a clear sense of new beginning in new environments. They are exposed and educated and need a new way to integrate positive aspects of Khmer identity/culture and globalization. Any leadership development efforts should seek to empower the emerging leaders. So they can effectively deal with syncretistic worldview and culture of dependency and corruption in a deeply scarred society that is increasingly impacted by mostly negative aspects of globalization. They should focus on integrated learning with strongly relational non-formal elements rather than academic-focused formal education, considering people's preferred method of oral learning and circular-logic thinking. Mentoring and apprenticeship types of efforts have been proven effective.

For today's emerging leaders in Cambodia to be faithful and effective in their leadership calling, they need to be securely connected to the deeper source of their leadership strength, that is, their core identity in Christ (Gal 2:20; John 15:1-5). They are first of all Christ's disciples who need to continue learning and growing before or while leading others to Christ. This includes the practices of confession, prayer, study, silence, service and other time-tested spiritual disciplines. Facing so many overwhelming external challenges, they need to be spiritually centered and connected more than ever. But I am afraid many are disconnected and thus in danger of being thrown away and withering (John 15:6). I see an urgent need for developing spiritual support systems, processes, and culture to help these young leaders to remain in the vine. Even from casual conversations with a group of emerging leaders on their spiritual need and current engagement in basic spiritual disciplines, I heard them expressing the desire to learn how to meaningfully engage in spiritual disciplines. What is needed is a community of learning and practices.

Developing a spiritual support system takes more than sporadic individual efforts; it requires an intentional community or organic network of those who are committed to life-long learning and being open and vulnerable to each other so that the relationship with God and with each other as the deeper source of leadership maybe developed further.

IDEAL FACTORS

Thus, for Cambodian emerging leaders, I envision a place and process for formational practices to happen in a contextually relevant manner. What would that place and process look like? A leadership guru, Robert Clinton coined the term "Ideal factors" that refers to "a list of items which reflect the essential good points of the new system with problems solved that prompted the changes".⁴ I outlined a list of Ideal factors for a contextualized leadership development to take place for Cambodian emerging leaders today:

- Hospitable and conducive spaces for spiritual formation and theological reflection
- Trusting and supporting relationships
- Spiritual refreshment, renewal of ministry calling through regular retreats
- Theological conversation doing Cambodian theology together
- Accountability, commitment and system for continuing the process together
- Personal counseling and coaching available
- Inner healing process as needed
- Spiritual direction/discernment as individuals and group
- Peer learning/adult learning pedagogy applied
- Periodic seminars: Family, Finance management, Conflict management, People skills, etc.
- Effective online intensive leadership training
- Healthy/balanced involvement of expats (short-term and long-term)
- Constructive social media networking
- Fun fellowship groups (sports, artists, interests, etc.)
- Dreaming creative church planting initiatives
- Cross-cultural mission training
- Research opportunities
- Networking with Christian businesses, entrepreneurs, HR developing agency

To realize these factors will take open communities of learning and practices who pursue a common vision based on trusting relationship. In addition to individual mentoring and coaching, I have been exploring ways to develop such communities by hosting roundtables and retreats for emerging leaders. I see my primary role as setting and serving the table in order to create a space and catalyze a process for the leaders to pause, reflect and connect to each other and to Christ in a refreshing and formational way.

4. Clinton, J. Robert. 1992. *Bridging Strategies--Leadership Perspectives for Introducing Change*. Altadena, Ca: Barnabas Publishers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Christian leadership is essentially not about position or skill-set but about influence and inspiration. Anyone who is able to influence and inspire others for change is a leader regardless of his or her position. In other words, those with the ability to influence and inspire can truly lead even without title, position or professional degree. And those without the ability to influence and inspire cannot truly lead even with all the external credentials. In that light, leadership development is primarily about increasing one's ability to influence and inspire for change. How can one's ability to influence and inspire be developed? What does it mean for Christian leadership development?

I believe that with the many emerging leaders I interacted with, they already possess the ability to influence and inspire others for change. Many have become positional leaders because they showed and exercised their leadership in their churches and organizations before they got any position. They have a lot of potential to increase and exercise the leadership ability in their context while facing many challenges. What do they really need to increase the leadership ability and realize the potential? I believe for Christian leadership, the starting point and central piece lays in our capacity to follow Christ in his likeness and our ability to remain in him.

For today's emerging leaders in Cambodia to be faithful and effective in their leadership calling, they need to be securely connected to the deeper source of their leadership strength, that is, their core identity in Christ (Gal 2:20; John 15:1-5).

The ultimate aim of Christian leadership is to serve God and His mission. To fulfill that, Christian leaders as disciples first must learn to remain in Christ. Apart from Christ as the vine, we the branches cannot bear the fruit of fulfilling our calling to serve God and His mission (John 15:4-5). That is why I became more convinced and passionate about spiritual formation as the foundation for Christian leadership development, especially in the current context of Cambodian emerging leaders.

Because of the intensity and stress of the context, I realize one of the difficulties is that emerging leaders may not feel the need to go deeper. I realize that people may not see these needs unless they fail or reach a point of fatigue. For example, I have coached an emerging leader through a crisis and only then did he come to recognize some of his real needs, including strengthening his relationship with Christ, his wife,

clarifying his calling and his need for community. One of the challenges will be to help leaders reaching this point without falling or failing. However, I do feel that there is a growing sense, if not identification, of these deeper needs among them.

I also realize that for me to help the emerging leaders to seek spiritual formation process as priority, I need to engage in the process myself. As many leadership gurus agree, leadership is about leading by example and willingness to go where others need to go. I believe many individual emerging leaders are already on the journey of learning to remain in Christ and lead others by example. I learned anew how rough their journey is with so many obstacles and temptations along the way. I would like to continue walking alongside these leaders, encouraging each other to be faithful and learning from each other about how to lead many others by example. That can be a wonderful picture of mission partnership that is increasingly needed.

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Dr. Gil Suh grew up in a Buddhist family in Korea and immigrated to USA as a teenager. He was baptized Christian at the age of 19 and immediately sensed a calling for cross-cultural ministry. After seminary training, he was ordained by Christian Reformed Church of North America. Suh lived and taught at a Bible school, in a rural area of Nigeria for six years which provided a lot of life-changing experiences and profound lessons about mission realities. His family was evacuated due to tribal conflicts resulting in violence. Dr. Suh has been a member of Resonate Global Mission in Cambodia since 2008, working in leadership training and has co-founded Cambodia Research and Resource Center. He is currently a visiting missionary-in-residence at Calvin Theological Seminary in Michigan USA. Suh earned a Bachelor of Arts from Biola University (1993), a Master of Divinity from Calvin Theological Seminary (1999) and a Doctor of Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary (2017).