Little Seeds: A prototype of collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis

by

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“Every place of mission is a place of partnership in the twenty-first century”.

– S.W. Sunquist[1]

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[1] S.W. Sunquist, 2013:370.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Nioma Venter, with student number 21750000, hereby declare that this thesis with the title 'Little Seeds: A prototype of missional diaconal praxis', is my original work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution. All consulted sources of information – whether printed, by e-mail or on the internet – were properly acknowledged and referenced according to the plagiarism prevention policy of the University of Pretoria.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the university of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

ABSTRACT

Little Seeds is a prototype of an integrated approach to early childhood development to combat poverty, inequality, and unemployment systemically. The project is undertaken between the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Uniting Reformed Church (URC), and the church-affiliated professional social service organisation, Badisa, in the Western Cape. Knowledge gained by studying the prototype intends to contribute to the development of diaconal praxis based on interdisciplinary collaboration between the church and the social service organisation. Trends in ecumenical diaconia support network-thinking, partnerships, and collaboration. Since 2002, declarations of intent for transformative involvement from the DRC in all its facades have testified to the church's commitment to contribute to a better life for everyone in South Africa. However, it appears in practice that the impact of the DRC's response is limited by a disposition for separate operatives between the different forms of ecclesiastical diaconate. An outdated 1994 diaconal policy in the DRC supports this silo approach and allows an ecclesiocentric focus of the diaconate. The development of a missional theology and accompanying ecclesiology necessitates the DRC to rethink its diaconal theology and practices within this framework. The scope and complexity of socio-economic realities convinced the DRC of the realisation that the church can no longer work in isolation but should at least explore interdisciplinary capabilities within its own ranks. Interdisciplinary collaboration is likely to help the DRC to get out of the groove of its traditional short-term, charity approach to the relief of need. Experiences elsewhere in the world indicate that there are challenges in attempts to collaborate between local congregations and social service organisations. Research in this respect in South Africa is limited. A Research Strategy for Missional Transformation in 2018 places prototypes such as Little Seeds in a position to contribute significantly to the development of knowledge and practices.

KEYWORDS

Church-affiliated social welfare organisation

Collaborative-integration paradigm

Diaconal praxis

Diaconate

Diakonia

Diapraxis

Missional diaconate

Missional ecclesiology

Networks

Partnership

Polarisation management

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BMC	Barry Matthews Consultancy
CAQDAS	Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software
CCSS	Council for Church Social Services
COVID-19	Coronavirus
DGMT	DG Murray Trust
DOE	Department of Education
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FBO	Faith-Based Organisations
GSC	General Synod Commission
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ISDM	Integrated Service Delivery Model
LEAN	Local Ecumenical Action Network
MODA	Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis
MOI	Memorandum of Intent

MOU   Memorandum of Understanding

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

NIV   New International Version

OCAI   Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument

OTB   Out of the Blue Creative Communication Solutions

SACC   South African Cacil of Churches

SAPMC   South African Partnership for Missional Churches

SSIR   Stanford Social Innovation Review

StatsSA   Statistics South Africa

URC   Uniting Reformed Church

URCSA   Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa

USA   United States of America

WCC   World Council of Churches

WPCC   Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction: The context in which Little Seeds originated

Little Seeds, focusing on early childhood development (ECD), is the prototype of a praxis model that promotes a collaborative-integrated approach between theology and the social work discipline. Little Seeds deliberately seeks integrated collaboration between Diaconia and Badisa. Diaconia is a joint ministry representing 520 congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) (Western Cape Synod) and Uniting Reformed Church (URC) (Cape region). Badisa is a registered non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded in 2003 as these two churches' collaborative professional social service organisation. Badisa is one of the largest service providers engaged by the provincial Department of Social Development (DSD) in the Western Cape.

A paradigm shift occurred in the DRC's theology and ecclesiology in post-apartheid South Africa following the events of 1994. Missional theology transformed the ecclesiology of the DRC over the last three decades. Reflection on the ecclesiological position of diakonia in this new paradigm needed to catch up. One example is the outdated official church documents such as the *Barmhartigheidsbeleid vir die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (DRC 1994)[2]. The outdated policy is problematic in more than one way. After 1994 'charitable projects' and short-term outreach became the norm in local congregations. Synodical organised social service organisations, working mainly in the formal social welfare sector, became well-developed and professional social service organisations (Van der Merwe 2014:12). The complexity of transformation in the post-apartheid context and the demand on the social welfare sector in South Africa with its continuous battle for sustainability, dominated the diaconal agenda of the DRC over the last three decades, whilst the development of theology for the diaconate was neglected. Socio-economic realities in South Africa, such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment, became an

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[2] Policy document of the DRC on its ministry of compassion/mercy (1994).

enormous challenge for society and the church. Befitting diaconal praxis cannot develop without a clear and firm theological foundation.

The scope and complexity of social issues require knowledgeable responses. Crain (2005:55) advocates for dual-skilled ministry, stating that compassionate communities are built through different kinds of skills sets. The question increasingly arises in the DRC whether there is the prospect of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal approach between the church and its affiliated social welfare organisations. The meeting of the General Synod of the DRC in October 2019 represents a meaningful moment in the conversation regarding a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal approach for the church and its ministries. Increasing distance between the church and affiliated social welfare organisations led to a Memorandum of Intent (MOI) brought before the General Synod by a group called the Church Council for Social Services (CCSS). The CCSS, which came about in 2006 as a national network of ecclesiastical social service organisations, operates as a joint action of the DRC family, and functions under the direction of the General Synod of the DRC.

In the MOI (DRC 2019:407, translation is mine), the CCSS refers to Church Order Article 2 of the DRC as mutual conviction:

> The Dutch Reformed Church was called by God Triune to participate in the mission of God in the world. The Holy Spirit builds the Church to serve God's glory and proclaim the ministry of reconciliation and the salvation of Christ.[3]

The CCSS explains its position in affiliation with the DRC:

> … that ecclesiastical social services are an integral part of the missional calling of the Dutch Reformed Church and undertakes to support member organisations so that the services will be conducted according to the ethos/character of the Dutch Reformed Church.

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[3] Original Afrikaans text: (Die KMDR erken) dat kerklike maatskaplike dienste 'n integrale deel van die missionale roeping van die NG Kerk is, en onderneem om lidorganisasies te ondersteun sodat die dienste volgens die etos/karakter van die NG Kerk bedryf sal word.

The significant contribution of the MOI is that it proposes the development and implementation of mechanisms that will support a collaborative-integrated approach to missional diaconate.

Despite lagged development of a missional diaconate, the DRC remained committed to a meaningful contribution to society, particularly deeds of compassion to accompany its Word ministry (*kerugma*). When the General Synod of the DRC requested in 2015 that poverty, inequality, and unemployment in South Africa should strategically be addressed through ECD as a systemic intervention, Diaconia and Badisa in the Western Cape intentionally sought integration. In May 2019, Diaconia and Badisa amalgamated their ECD services and formed a joint programme, Little Seeds. Little Seeds is positioned to support 520 congregations and 145 social work programmes in its direct network.

Concurrent with the experience of a rift between the DRC and its social welfare organisations, international ecumenical trends report similar challenges. At its 10th assembly in Busan, the World Council of Churches (WCC) addresses the fact that diakonia should be dynamic, contextual, and versatile, and that it should affect partnerships with larger church structures, among congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to witnessing to God's transforming grace through acts of service. The diaconate is a primary expression of the church's participation in the ongoing mission of the Triune God. The report continues to speak on more extensive institutional expressions of diakonia and what it takes to sustain these services. It concludes that "Christian communities have come to see themselves either as supporters or beneficiaries and rarely as participants in diakonia" (WCC 2013:105). Following, is the WCC in 2022 that encourages the ecumene and diaconal agencies to reassess their structures and practices "and collaborate to form new strategies and creative approaches that answer the issues of today" (WCC and ACT Alliance 2022:110). In a report titled Called to Transformation, Ecumenical Diaconia (2022), the WCC and ACT Alliance declare that it is a kairos moment for the church to embrace a shared vision; to share in the richness of gifts God bestowed on the church; to strengthen structures, networks, and diaconal capacity; to build good ecumenical communication platforms; and to agree on a

shared code of conduct (WCC and ACT Alliance 2022:110-114).

Ecumenical trends support the rethinking of diaconal theology and the position and practices of the DRC in South Africa with its compelling socio-economic realities. Little Seeds creates the opportunity to do a case study and utilise valuable practice experience to design diaconal praxis further.

1.2 The use of 'diaconal praxis' terminology in this study

The words we use are essential. Even more important is to grasp or discern the biblical imperative in words, as we find it in Scripture. The Greek word 'diakonia' guided the church's compassion ministry to those in need for centuries. From the Greek word 'diakonia' (also spelt 'diaconia'), the whole word group arises, including deacon, diaconal ministry, and diaconate. The widely accepted meaning of the Greek word service or serviceability was recently challenged by Collins (2014), who translates the 'diakon' group as the action of being a go-between. The one who is sent is sent as a 'go-between' or 'bridge builder' to serve. This interpretation takes its significance from John 20:21b, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you". God sends the church as His ambassador or representative to those in need (Anim 2021:203).

When the ecumenical community, in reaction to the Lausanne Congress in 1974, adopted a more holistic understanding of 'diakonia' to include social justice and action as part of God's compassion to the world, the DRC distanced itself from the broader interpretation. When the ecumenical world embraced the diaconal terminology with its theological implications in the previous century, the DRC chose the Afrikaans 'diens van barmhartigheid' when referring to either its congregational or institutional diaconal work. This resulted in the development of a diaconal theology in the rest of the world, where it seems the DRC kept its distance. One can only gather from De Klerk (1990:6) that this isolation was caused by the political context in South Africa at the time of this evolution. His experience of the holistic understanding of 'diakonia' was that it was politically driven and served the agenda of upcoming socialism and neo-Marxism.

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> There will have to be clarity on the question of what connection exists between this form of the diaconate and the political setup of the emerging socialism and neo-Marxism with all the political slogans with which it is shrouded in a neo-messianic garment (De Klerk 1990:6, translation is mine).[4]

The Protestant Church in Germany, Scandinavia, and other European countries, commonly refers to the church's organised and professional social service delivery as 'diaconia'. At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church prefers the word 'Caritas-ministries' for its institutionalised organisations (ed. Addy 2009:9). Eurich (2020:2) explains that in many European countries, diaconal organisations are part of the church. Still, some have become professionalised service providers, with the connection to the church often reduced to institutional links.

As the missional movement in the DRC gained momentum in the 21st century, the preference for terminology in terms of the diaconate once again came to the forefront. The DRC had to rethink its ecclesiology and embarked on creating a new (missional) language. Reading through official documents of the DRC since 2000, the term 'missional diaconate', under the influence of the missional movement, is used frequently but also with caution. Gradually the exact need is expressed in these reports for the theology of the diaconate in the DRC to be rethought, especially as a shared interest of the General Synod and its congregations and in its collaboration with church-affiliated social welfare organisations. A conference in August 2021 between the DRC and the CCSS at eMseni Conference Centre, Johannesburg, considered the following definition of 'missional diaconate' proposed by Van der Merwe (2021:7, translation is mine):

> The missional diaconate is aimed at restoring God's rule in the world. Through missional diaconate, the church, in various forms, as a servant and participant in God's mission, is involved in the prevention and combating of the suffering and social distress of individuals, groups and communities, as well as the promotion of

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[4] The original text reads: "Daar sal duidelikheid moet kom oor die vraag watter verband daar bestaan tussen hierdie vorm van diakonaat en die politieke opset van die opkomende sosialisme en neo-Marxisme met al die politieke slagspreuke waarmee dit in 'n neo-messiaanse kleed gehul word" (De Klerk 1990:6).

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honest relationships within the church and society.[5]

At the conference, participants from the social work profession reacted by challenging the church to explain the practices it foresees when it speaks of missional diaconate. The church needs to answer this question. It is not only the theology of diakonia that calls for deliberation but specifically tried and tested practices that bring about social change.

Diaconal praxis is the sum of the interaction between theory and practice (Van der Merwe 2014:23-24). The praxis model for contextual theology gives the framework for Christian thoughts and convictions (orthodoxy) to progress in transformative action (orthopraxy). Expression of the Christian faith, according to Bevans (2008:72), is only complete with a commitment to Christian action. Then theology goes beyond just interpreting the world differently but strives to change it. He quotes Karl Barth saying that only the doer of the word is the true hearer (Bevans 2008:72).

Rasmussen (2011:59) introduces the concept of *diapraxis* as a relational-based process instead of discursive dialogue only. 'Diapraxis' refers to the cooperative-discursive development of theory and practice, culminating in praxis. People living together and working together collaborate in developing praxis together. It is the relational intonation of diapraxis that appeals to me. The context in which Rasmussen (2011:59) uses the concept is also important. Diapraxis is used as an approach to practise development in inter-sectorial contexts, namely between theology (church) and politics (state). Diapraxis thus helps the church to take up its place within civil society by making the unique voice of the church heard in different contexts.

Van der Merwe (2014:23-24) cites Anderson (2001:51) and Hendricks (2004:30) in his explanation of the framework of the praxis model as a discernment process. God is busy restoring and re-creating the world. He invites the church to join Him in His mission.

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[5] The original text reads: Die missionale diakonaat is gerig op die herstel van God se heerskappy in die wêreld. Deur missionale diakonaat is die kerk in verskillende gestaltes, as dienskneg en deelnemer aan God se sending, betrokke by die voorkoming en bestreiding van die lyding en maatskaplike nood van indvidue, groepe en gemeenskappe asook die bevordering van regverdige verhoudings binne die kerk en samelewing.

Listening to and following God in His mission comes through reading the Word, considering the lessons from history, being aware of the current context, and responding to it through actions. Bevans (2008:71) regards reflective action as a prominent feature of the praxis model: It is reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection-both rolled into one. As such, it remains an ongoing discipline between action and reflection, adding the relational angle suggested by Rasmussen (2011:50). Bevans (2008:171) calls it knowledge at its most intense level and compares it with the prophetic tradition in the Bible that does not tolerate words without action. Bevans (2008:72) believes that the praxis model offers a profound way to deal adequately with the experience of the past (scripture, tradition) and the experience of the present (human experience, culture, social location, and social change). Diaconal praxis in the DRC takes particular forms or modalities, including relief, care, transformation, empowerment, liberation, advocacy, and hospitality (Van der Merwe 2022). All considered praxis follows God in His mission, and diapraxis contributes to consensus between believers on what this calling looks like in everyday life and ministry.

In this study, '*diakonia*' is used to refer to one of the four ministries of the DRC next to *koinonia* (church as a community), *kerugma* (church as messenger) and *leitourgia* (church as sacrament). As such, *diaconal, diaconia* and *diaconate* are used interchangeably. The noun Diaconia, the name of the ministry group in the Western Cape Synod of the DRC, might be very confusing. This group was previously known as 'Diensgroep vir Armoede en Sorg' (Ministry Group for Poverty and Care) and offered synodical support in terms of its ministry of compassion to congregations. Diaconia, as a noun in this study, should not be mistaken for a similar meaning of European institutionalised organisations.

1.3 Applying the 'collaborative-integration paradigm' to diaconal praxis

Linguistically, a distinction is made between the meaning of collaboration and integration. Industrial psychologists describe collaboration as a model of professions working closely together but not subsumed into a single organisational framework (i.e., integration). Integration requires collaboration, but collaboration does not require integration (Boon,

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Mior, Barnsley, Ashbury and Haig 2009). On the way to designing a model between the DRC and social work organisations, the collaborative-integration paradigm derived from IGI Global (n.d.) is proposed.

> The collaborative-integration paradigm describes the relationships among purposes for collaboration, types of partners, and degrees of integration from diverse individual, organisational or disciplinary partners into the processes and outcomes of the collaboration (IGI Global n.d.).

The concept also seems well known in e-commerce (El Sawy 2003:119):

> [With] collaborative-integration, there is a tightly-coupled collaborative relationship among all partners, deep visibility across all supply chain tiers, and near-real-time information exchange and knowledge sharing around supply chain processes. Enterprises seek to implement collaborative-integration to realise superior supply chain management's value-added benefits and cost savings while enabling intelligent action and faster response to environmental variability (El Sawy 2003:119).

Applying the principles El Sawy (2003:119) proposes in his definition and adding to the definition IGI Global provides, collaborative-integration offers the following directives for a diaconal model:

- The paradigm allows for different types of collaboration and partnerships, unique to the context and purpose.
- Different degrees of integration are possible.
- Diverse partners can join the collaborative effort – individuals, organisations, and interdisciplinary partners.
- Knowledge sharing is clear.
- High emphasis is placed on communication within the process.
- Management capacities and capabilities are shared.
- Avoid overlap and save double costs on specific activities.
- Optimise the potential of joint effort.

These terms will be contextualised theologically in Chapter 2. Another paradigm of foremost importance to the current study is the missional theology paradigm. The rapid

onset of the missional movement in South Africa underpins the development of diaconal practice in the DRC post-1994.

1.4 Missional theology: A fifth wave

The reformed character of the DRC signifies an ever-present willingness and openness toward new ways of thinking. A reformed church is always reforming itself (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*), constantly rethinking itself, and changing its form (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) when necessary.

Missional theology directed the DRC through the changing context in the period post-1994. It provided a framework to rethink its theology and engagement with society, characterised by severe socio-economic and other challenges. Benadé and Niemandt (2019) names this movement as a fifth wave in the history of missional movements in the DRC. Broadly defined, the fifth missional wave was a move from *Gemeentebou*[6] to focus on the whole of society. In this fifth wave, the DRC shifted from ecclesiocentric discernment to theocentric discernment. The reformational rethinking of the essence of the church was based on the belief that the church's mission (*missio ecclesiae*) is embedded in God's mission (*missio Dei*). In 2013 the DRC adopted a motion to amend its Church Order by adding a section 2 (Article 2) to capture its identity and calling following the *missio Dei* (Van der Merwe 2021a:195). The amendment in the DRC Church Order (DRC 2019b:1, translation is mine) reads as follows:

> The Dutch Reformed Church was called by God Triune to participate in the mission of God in the world. The Holy Spirit builds the Church to serve God's glory and proclaim the ministry of reconciliation and the salvation of Christ.[7]

The article states that the DRC responds to the Triune God's calling to be part of His

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[6] "*Gemeentebou*" is a concept that indicates an ecclesiocentric focus – the building up of the local congregation as a primary focus.

[7] The original text reads: "Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk is deur God Drie-enig geroep om deel te neem aan die missio van God in die wêreld. Die Kerk word deur die Heilige Gees opgebou om God se eer te dien en verkondig die bediening van versoening en die heil van Christus" (DRC 2019b).

mission. To this end, the Holy Spirit empowers the church to reconcile with God through Christ. The church becomes a participant in God's mission, but by no means the primary agent. The influence of missional theology resulted in the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013)[8]. The document explains the participation of the church in God's mission (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:3):

> The fact that God chooses to involve the church in His missio Dei does not mean that this mission has now been handed over into the hands of the church or that it has become dependent upon the church's obedience, dedication, understanding and faithfulness. God is busy with His work on earth! Not even an unfaithful, disloyal church can foil and frustrate God's mission.

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) is a compilation of several studies on the nature of the church under the influence of missional theology. The document provides a meaningful framework to create new (missional) language, stimulate conversation and imagine new possibilities. It will be discussed in the next chapter.

The document clarifies that the DRC's ecclesiology and missiology were historically shaped when the church was the influential centre of almost all communities because of people's identification with Christianity. The context has changed dramatically over the last few decades, and the church often has to function and thrive in a non-Christian (even post-Christian) environment. In this document, the DRC calls for serious reflection on the church's ecclesiology and missiology and its role as servants in this world.

Missional theology eventually found its way into the church order and polity of the DRC (2019b). Furthermore, a research cycle evolved to assist the DRC in practices of missional transformation (Niemandt, Marais, Schoeman, Simpson and Van der Walt 2018). This research cycle will be applied as a broad framework methodology for this study.

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[8] The report was originally submitted in Afrikaans (Raamwerkdokument oor die missionale aard en roeping van die NG Kerk) but has since been translated.

1.5 Problem statement

The fragmentation of the diaconal approach of the DRC in South Africa is indicative of stagnation in the theological development of a proper missional diaconal response. The theological development of missional diaconate fell behind the missional transformation process in the DRC. The existing policy is outdated and incomplete on a collaborative-integrated response between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare programmes. Missional diaconal praxis is lacking, and dialogue and research in this field in the DRC are limited.

In his seminal study on the diaconate of the DRC in South Africa, Van der Merwe (2014:253) questions the relevance of the church's approach to social distress. He concludes that the current reality still shows remnants of a traditional diaconal position. In the post-apartheid era, he is convinced that the DRC experienced an inability to become diaconally involved in a meaningful way that transforms social realities. One of the main reasons is the fact that the ministry framework of the DRC does not harbour distinctive operational models and practices to be openly relevant in addressing systems that upholds social challenges in South Africa. Charitable church practices became obsolete and could no longer be considered the appropriate response. Furthermore, church policy shows a dual character between the congregational diaconate and the work of ecclesiastic social welfare organisations (DRC 1994:267). Although historical reasons explain this, Van der Merwe (2014:234) warns that this division can be problematic. Van der Merwe (2014:123–156) therefore proposes a theological framework that could support the development of praxis to deepen the impact.

1.6 Hypothesis

Being familiar with the proposed direction of thinking in the DRC as will be revealed in official mandates (Chapter 2); being part of the strategic team who designed Little Seeds; and having received the current research assignment, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

An appropriate and effective diaconal praxis for the DRC is

- Clear on its theological foundation;
- Integrated systemically between the church (theology) and its affiliated social welfare organisations (social work);
- Appreciative of diversity and knows how to promote interaction;
- A living relationship that manages polarisation effectively to scale compassion.

Supporting this hypothesis are the findings of Van der Merwe (2014:251-252), stating that:

- Missional theological thinking in the DRC should be applied to the diaconate of the church as it has not yet been done sufficiently;
- The diaconal policy of the DRC is out-dated, and several other declarations incomplete as it does not include practice models;
- The development of guidelines for a diaconal praxis (that incorporate professional social services) should therefore be a priority for the DRC.

The DRC should have a unique missional-diaconal praxis that can enable this church and its partners to be relevant in the social issues of society in South Africa. The church should consider how it can utilise all its available resources to serve the calling of being a missional church.

Several South African theologians confirm that developing practice models in the church has proven to be a strenuous exercise. Burger (2021) reminds us that mission and ministry should always lead structuring, which complements Van der Merwe (2014:251–252) who says the DRC should start with developing a missional theological framework for the diaconate. For one, the nature of the relationship between the church and its affiliated organisations, in general, is not adequately explored; therefore, optimal integration is not reached.

A gap in research in the DRC becomes apparent when the problem and the hypothesis are clarified.

1.7 Research gap

Praxis models for a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal approach in the DRC have been identified as a research gap. Van der Merwe (2014:254) advises that a purposeful study should be undertaken on the collaboration between the church and its social welfare organisations. The multidimensional nature of the diaconate insists on integrated, strategic partnerships. With acknowledgement of the recent research by Van der Merwe (2014), the DRC has made progress with a framework for missional-diaconal theology. However, it has not yet been officially adopted. The gap is that no research has been done on integrated diaconal practice models post-1994 in the DRC.

1.8 Research question

Diaconia and Badisa already explored in 2016 the possibility of consolidating their ECD service offer. Diaconia was committed to congregations and aimed to mobilise and support congregations to become involved in ECD. Badisa provided existing ECD services to selected communities and was limited to where Badisa programmes were located. The two parties could not reach an agreement during the first deliberations. Diaconia partnered with SmartStart, a secular specialist social enterprise for ECD, and Badisa was excluded from this arrangement. In 2018, discussions with Badisa were resumed at the request of Diaconia. Progress was made the second time around.

In May 2019, the amalgamation of Diaconia and Badisa's ECD programmes in the joint initiative 'Little Seeds' was announced. An intensive and facilitated development process followed. Three years later (2021), the need was indicated to record the developmental process of Little Seeds and initiate a critical reflection. The researcher has been part of the development since 2018 and, therefore, a participant-observer in this research.

The research question is very specific: How can Little Seeds, focusing on ECD, be a prototype of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that can be applied to

other areas in the context of ministry (church) and social welfare interventions?

The DRC and Badisa consider Little Seeds a pilot project with a particular aim and objectives.

1.9 Aim and objectives

Little Seeds is a deliberate effort for integrated collaboration to increase impact through ECD in eradicating poverty and inequality in South Africa. Little Seeds is a prototype for a diaconal praxis and, therefore, a learning experience. Over the last decade, the DRC, with its rich history of compassion and service delivery, has noted that collaboration between congregations and social service organisations needs further research for the sake of impact.

The research aims to design a collaborative-integrated model between theology and social work disciplines with ECD as the focus. The following objectives support the aim:

Objective 1: Record and reflect on the Little Seeds development process. In the reflection, identify the challenges that had to be overcome and the gains it accomplished. Note the distinctive influence of both parties and gather lessons learned from operational and relational matters in the process.

Objective 2: Review the underlying theological framework, regulatory policy, and other official documentation that directs and informs development in the diaconate of the DRC.

Objective 3: Review and compare ecumenical trends, including interdisciplinary perspectives between theology and social work.

Objective 4: Explore relevant organisational elements that will support the development of a collaborative-integrated model between congregations and church-affiliated social service organisations.

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1.10 Methodology

Hofstee (2006:107) uses the metaphor of a roadmap and says that the chosen methodology leads the way to arrive at the preferred destination. Although this is likely more a journey than a destination, the DRC envisions the transformation of its ecclesiology and ministry that resembles the theological foundation implicit in the missional movement.

The Research Strategy for Missional Transformation[9] (Niemandt, Marais, Schoeman, Simpson, Van der Walt, 2018) is a roadmap. It provides a scientific framework for the development of praxis. This strategy was developed by five DRC leaders and academics in reaction to the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013). The strategy was designed to enable the DRC to reflect on the progress of the missional transformation process, record the narratives and design innovative interventions (Niemandt et al. 2018:1). It builds on systems theory (Scharmer 2018 and Senge 1990) and places the current study within a precise research positioning.

The desired outcome of this study is to propose a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis between the church and affiliated social welfare organisations as part of the DRC's transformation.

In the Western Cape Synod of the DRC, Badisa and Diaconia collaborated in designing a prototype for an integrated response to ECD. 'Little Seeds' is an innovative practice that unlocks a learning experience. In search of a collaborative-integrated praxis model, it has the potential to create a landing strip for the future (Scharmer 2009:627-628, as cited in Niemandt et al. 2018:6). During the development process, it became custom to speak of Little Seeds as a *silver bullet*, going forward in applying the developing model to social service and ministry areas other than just ECD. Insights and practices from this prototype may contribute to assimilation and, ultimately, praxis for ministry (Niemandt et al. 2018:3) around a broader spectrum of witness, social development, and care.

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[9] Published in Afrikaans as *'n Navorsingstrategie vir missionale transformasie* (2018).

1.10.1 A participant researcher

The researcher's position in the system should be clarified.

- The researcher is a minister in synodical service (Western Cape Synod of the DRC) and ministry leader for Diaconia.
- The researcher represents the Western Cape Synod of the DRC on the management board of Badisa.
- The researcher is one of the strategic team members of the Little Seeds project implementation team.
- The researcher is a dual-skilled social worker and theologian.
- Apart from the researcher's involvement with all these bodies in the Western Cape, the researcher also represents the General Synod of the DRC on the Christian Council for Social Services (the national forum for church-affiliated welfare organisations).

With the very close interest of the researcher declared, the risk of subjectivity is noted. Nonetheless, with this specific study, the researcher's positioning, experience, and dual-skilled ability could benefit the design of a collaborative-integrated approach between the church and the organisation. De Vos (2006:283–284) mentions the numerous advantages of participant observers, of which the fact that the researcher is not an outsider in this process. The researcher adds to a comprehensive perspective on the development of Little Seeds and lived the whole process with the research participants. The risk for a too theoretical approach is limited because of the researcher's specific link to the practice of this design development.

1.10.2 A qualitative research process

The study is approached as a qualitative process with missional theology as a paradigm, with resulting implications for a collaborative-integrated, and missional approach to the church's diaconate, applied to a model of integrated ministry. Typical of a qualitative research strategy, the outline of the research plan is tentative and

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flexible (De Vos 2006:106).

1.10.3 A total-system-strategy

The DRC envisions missional transformation. The Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018) is a total-system-strategy aimed at unlocking research, design, training, and formational capacities within the denomination and seeks to achieve synergy. It works with a problem owner who is a vital partner in the research process. Little Seeds (Badisa and Diaconia) is the problem owner, and there will be a continuous dialogue between the problem owner and the researcher.

Furthermore, the strategy aims at the empowerment of congregations by developing new insights, beliefs, processes, and plans, and enables them to implement innovations. It guides a process of contextualisation and responsible reaction to contextual change. The strategy targets missional challenges requiring adaptive intervention (Keifert 2006:88-92, cited in Niemandt et al. 2018). It ensures that faith communities, as the owners of the challenges, remain in control throughout the process, thus keeping the strategy focused. The research furthermore emerges from the practice-oriented demand for a collaborative and integrated approach or model for ministry between theology and the social work profession. It, therefore, represents one of the outcomes of a MOI between the General Synod of the DRC and the CCSS (DRC 2019a:500).

1.10.4 Practice-oriented research

A few aspects of a practice-oriented research methodology, as described by Hermans and Schoeman (2015:26), make it ideal for this research project.
- Practice-oriented research is scientific and aims at the church's diaconate and the practice and continued improvement of praxis.
- Practice-oriented research is research in which the research goal comes from the professional practice, and the knowledge created in the research contributes directly to this professional practice.
- Practice-orientated research is especially relevant to congregational studies. Congregational ministry is conducted within a specific context. It is challenging to

remain relevant.

1.11 Research approach

The development of Little Seeds as a joint initiative of Diaconia and Badisa is a prototype for a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal model. The Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018:2) provides an approach that allows discernment in developing ministry praxis. The approach follows an innovative cycle that functions as an unfolding strategy. The overall research design consists of three cycles, each with distinct phases or movements (see Figure 1.1). The three cycles interact on four strategic angles, namely: *Guidance, Research, Design, and Training* (Niemandt et al. 2018:5).

**Figure 1.1: Research strategy for missional transformation
(Source: Niemandt et al. 2018:5)**

A biographical case study of Little Seeds will be undertaken within the first cycle and within Quadrant 3, referred to as 'Movement 3'. Table 1.1 illustrates the placement of the Little Seeds research within the research strategy.

Table 1.1 Location of Little Seeds research within research strategy

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Quadrant 1: Guidance	Articulate the pain	Practice capacities	Accept into culture
Quadrant 2: Research	Clarify the question	Observe new patterns	Describe the breakthrough
Quadrant 3: Design	**Develop prototype**	Build a product	Support the learning community
Quadrant 4: Training	Test	Implement	Institutional alignment

The research approach includes a discussion of Movements 1 and 2, building up to Movement 3, which includes the empirical study.

1.11.1 Quadrant 1 (Guidance) Movement 2 – Identifying the pain

Research originates with an action problem (Niemandt et al. 2018:2). The research problem in this study starts with the question whether Little Seeds could be helpful as a model for the collaborative-integrated diaconate. The growing distance between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations hinders close collaboration. The DRC wishes to make a real impact on socio-economic challenges in South Africa and went to lengths in consulting and discerning the most effective way of engaging with poverty, inequality, and unemployment. It became clear that ECD is widely recommended as the most effective way to impact this situation systematically through a collaborative-integrated approach between the church and affiliated social welfare organisations, which seems to be a logical strategy. However, these historically bound partners appear to have found it challenging.

1.11.2 Quadrant 2 (Research): Movement 2 – Clarifying the question

The theoretical framework on which Little Seeds was designed needs to be established. A descriptive approach will be followed to acknowledge a recent study by Van der Merwe (2014), *Met woord én daad in diens van God - Die diakonaat van die NG Kerk in postapartheid Suid Afrika.*[10] Van der Merwe (2014) proposes a theological framework that grounds the diaconate of the DRC in the triune God as origin, basis, and final purpose. His theory will be described and supplemented with a record of the most relevant DRC declarations, decisions, church order adjustments and policy documents of the last two decades (2002–2022). Trends in collaboration between church and organisation in the ecumene will be recognised in the review.

1.11.3 Quadrant 3 (Design): Movement 3 – Develop prototype ('silver bullet')

This movement, which marks the creative place of prototyping, is of particular importance for further developing a collaborative-integrated praxis. Marais (2017:77) explains the importance of tried and tested prototypes. In order to reimagine ministry, a knowledge base and skill set must be found to sustain the missional movement in the DRC. Prototyping creates the opportunity to innovate, evaluate, and adapt to learn on our way to transformation. The employed staff members of Diaconia and Badisa were the *'early adopters'* of the innovation. Not everyone was ready and willing to adjust; this prototype implies change. Almost four years down the line (2018–2022), the research process serves as an opportunity not only to reflect on their own experience of the disruption but to look back and identify the possibilities and challenges much clearer.

Various techniques were used to reach the desired outcomes of the research.

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[10] Freely translated as "With word and deed in service of God – The diaconate of the DRC in post-apartheid South Africa".

1.12 Techniques

This section describes the choice for specific research techniques utilised to collect data. Techniques include a biographical case study, semi-structured interviews, and additional literature reviews.

1.12.1 Case study

The design of Little Seeds is studied as a biographical case study. The problem owner requested that the narrative of the development of the Little Seeds collaboration should be documented. Hence, the reference to a 'biography'. Usually, a biography is used to report on and document an individual's life and experiences to construct life's history. Bretschneider (2014) defines a biographical case study as a systematic collection of a person's life and points out the significance of a timeline. A timeline is often vital to shaping perspectives and understanding that person's life or the life of the phenomenon studied. Momentous events influence the narrative. In this study, a biographical approach was followed to record or construct the followed process to develop a model allowing collaborative integration (De Vos 2006:272). Given the timeline of the study as such, immediate mention can be made of the COVID-19 pandemic, and, as Bretschneider (2014) predicts, it has significance for the biography of Little Seeds.

In this study, the Little Seeds narrative was observed as a prototype for diaconal best practices. Specific attention was given to new patterns for collaborative integration. De Vos (2006:272) describes this kind of case study as instrumental. As discussed again later, the findings were found to be instrumental in gaining a better understanding of a social issue, in this case, the perceived challenges for collaboration in a multidisciplinary way between theology and social work.

The biographical case study was approached as an in-depth analysis of the process, activity, event, programme and the participation and experience of multiple individuals. Data collection methods included interviews, documents, a timeline, photographs, questionnaires, and personal stories (Bretschneider 2014). De Vos (2006:269) says that for a biographical case study to succeed, the researcher needs to collect extensive

information from and about the subject of the biography. Data collection therefore included:

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews with different levels of role players: stakeholders (Badisa and Diaconia), management (project implementation team), and employees (Little Seeds staff members).
- Documents compiled by several facilitators involved in the design and process of implementation.
- Little Seeds minutes and documents of meetings.

De Vos (2006:270) adds that the researcher should:

- Have a clear understanding of contextual material.
- Have a keen eye for finding the particular trends (stories or angles) that 'work' in writing a biography.
- Bring and declare as a participant-researcher one's own perspective to the report.

1.12.2 Semi-structured interviews

De Vos (2006:293) explains that interviews are social interactions in which meaning is negotiated between several selves. Interviews allow engagement and willingness on the researcher's side to understand the Little Seeds participants' responses in the context of a broader reality. It has already been said that the researcher is known to both teams as a participant-researcher.

Particular interests are summarised in three questions that were given to respondents beforehand. Questions broadly include the more practical/operational experiences, the cultural/emotional experiences, and insights obtained for the way forward. The same questions were posed to the two respondent groups involved in this research. The questions were:

Question 1: When two worlds meet
The idea of a collaborative-integrated approach is to work together towards a

shared vision and strategy. What was your experience in joining Diaconia and Badisa as partners in ECD in this regard? (Distinguish between the emotional/relational and functional/operational experiences).

Question 2: Appreciative but honest reflection
If you now look back, what is the unique contribution you think each party (Diaconia and Badisa) brings to a partnership in ECD?

Question 3: Thoughtful considerations on the way forward
What would you consider the main challenges and opportunities of a joint venture between Diaconia and Badisa?

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allows for additional information to be shared.

1.12.3 Additional data collection through a literature study

Since missional theology in the DRC is the paradigm that underpins the study, and because missional theology also determines the point of view, the researcher applied a fundamental model to inform the development of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis in the DRC. A thorough document study was undertaken as part of the research process. Included in the official document study were minutes and agendas of the General Synod of the DRC, the concept of missional church order of the DRC, previous PhD studies on the diaconate of the DRC post-1994, relevant conference papers as well as international academic publications. De Vos (2006:314) encourages the study of documents in addition to interviewing, as written material contains information (and, therefore, a more comprehensive context) about the phenomenon being researched.

It has been mentioned that collaboration between the church and its social welfare offspring is an international research theme. To avoid compromising the biographical case study of Little Seeds, a literature study was employed towards the end of the case

study. It was mainly aimed at, as De Vos (2006:265) proposed, comparing trends, discovering alternative possibilities, and formulating proposals. A literature study of international experience were secondary to the case study and limited to generalised challenges and possibilities for a collaborative-integrated diaconal approach between theology and social work.

1.13 Sampling, data collection, data analysis and report

Appropriate data was collected through purposive sampling and a scientific process of coding to analyse this data. The qualitative research report is the result of this process.

1.13.1 Sampling

As De Vos (2006:329) suggests, sampling was done purposefully within the stakeholder context of Little Seeds that includes Diaconia (church) and Badisa (organisation). More specifically the sample consisted of two groups of respondents, namely:

i). Four members of the tactical team responsible for strategic design and direction with the founding of Little Seeds;

ii). Four employees of Badisa and Diaconia as part of the operational team in the founding of Little Seeds.

1.13.2 Data collection

Interviews were used to collect data. Permission was first obtained by the researcher to record the interviews; thereafter, the verbal reports were transcribed (De Vos 2006:298).

1.13.3 Data analysis

Open coding was used to analyse the data. Phenomena are named and categorised by examining themes that emerged from the respondents' replies (De Vos 2006:299, 341).

1.13.4 Report on the data

De Vos (2006:351–352) cites Guba and Lincoln (1989) who identify four criteria for a

qualitative report on data. Applying criteria to the current report and the desired outcomes, the following can be noted:

- The report must reflect the guiding paradigm of a missional theology as the epistemological framework of this study.
- Findings must be presented in a clear and simplistic way that can be applied to a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal practice model that promotes collaboration between the church and welfare organisations.
- The report must empower role players in the church as well as the church-affiliated social work organisation to take action.
- The report must offer various experiences whereby the church and organisations can draw inferences from their own contexts.

The researcher's close interest in Little Seeds has been declared. It could be a risk for subjectivity. Measures were therefore taken and reported on to remain as objective as possible and to ensure credibility (De Vos 2006:353). One of these measures was to continuously reflect on the process with the problem owner.

1.14 Chapter outline

The thesis consists of the following seven chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

The first chapter introduces Little Seeds for ECD, which was developed in the Western Cape as a prototype for a collaborative-integrated approach to the church's diaconate. The 'pain' (Quadrant 1, Movement 1 – Research Strategy for Missional Transformation, 2018) is that a rift exists between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations, reducing the impact that a consolidated response is likely to have. Hypothetically integration and collaboration are proposed as biblical concepts, supporting the idea of a collaborative-integrated approach. Consolidation in a collaborative-integrated approach seems to be the way forward if impact is the desired outcome.

The Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt, Marais, Schoeman, Simpson, & Van der Walt 2018) provides a methodological framework to study Little Seeds as a prototype. Within this strategy, chapter 1 focuses on a description of the pain (research problem) and the methodology to do so.

Chapter 2: Moving from fragmentation to integration

The problem that was named in chapter 1 is clarified even further in this chapter. This corresponds with Quadrant 2, Movement 2 in the methodology. One of the study's objectives is to review the underlying theological framework and regulatory church policy that might contribute to the current fragmentation between the church and its related social welfare services in response to social distress. Conceptualising integration and collaboration as biblical concepts, the influence of the missional movement on ecclesiology in the DRC, and an exploration of ecumenical experiences with collaboration between these two parties are addressed in this chapter. Chapter 2 concludes with an outlined theoretical framework for a collaborative-integrated model by looking at different concepts and possibilities to be considered during the prototype design.

Chapter 3: The biography of an evolving model

Moving to the prototype (Little Seeds), the question needs to be asked: 'Why ECD and why the church?" This chapter will lead Quadrant 3, Movement 3, as it outlines the background and motives for developing Little Seeds as a prototype and some of the leading environmental influences in this process. The development of Little Seeds is reconstructed to capture the background, the intent, and the process followed. The idea of collaborative-integration within a structure such as Little Seeds partly originated with the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) of the Government's Department of Social Development (DSD 2005). Relevant principles from the ISDM will be captured to support the design of collaborative-integration between the DRC and church-affiliated social welfare programmes.

Chapter 4: Findings – A fast-cycled learning experience

Chapter 4 reports on findings from the empirical study. The outcome of the qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the strategic and operational teams, which have been part of Little Seeds since 2019, is documented. Relational and operational issues are explored, reflecting on both the possibilities and challenges experienced by the participants.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – The crystalising of a diaconal praxis

Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the empirical study and literature review and concludes in three main categories: i), theological conclusions; ii) theoretical cornerstones for collaboration; and iii) pragmatic and operational conclusions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – The Scaling Diaconate Model

Chapter 6 brings together findings of the literature review and the empirical study in a model proposal. The Scaling Diaconate Model builds on a supportive theological framework and promotes collaboration in an integrated way between theology and social work to scale impact.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

Chapter 7 suggests applications to be considered by the DRC.

1.15 Summary

Little Seeds originated in a context where the DRC and church-affiliated social welfare organisations are in search of praxis models that contribute to impact through diaconal ministry. The rise of missional theology and subsequent ecclesiology contributes greatly to the rethinking of the diaconal nature and calling of the DRC. A research gap on collaborative-integrated praxis is identified, which will therefore be explored further in this research.

CHAPTER 2
MOVING FROM FRAGMENTATION TO INTEGRATION

2.1 Introduction: Parallel structures as a research problem

The first chapter introduced the research question and the methodology that is followed to explore Little Seeds as prototype. The second movement in the Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018) is to clarify the research problem. The current reality is that the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations operate as parallel structures with minimal collaboration if any.

Niemandt et al. (2018:5) explain that a research problem are investigated at different levels and from different perspectives in order to find strategic and practical solutions. Therefore, the particular problem of fragmentation is investigated systematically by asking strategic questions, as systemic challenges never occur in isolation but are part of a more significant systemic problem (Niemandt et al. 2018:6). What causes fragmentation and what are the larger systemic challenges that contribute to the current phenomenon? Do the DRC's church order and policy prepare the way for a collaborative-integrated approach to ministry? What are the challenges of integration? And what are the possibilities of collaboration? In this study, the researcher believes that the rift in the DRC between church and organisation is deepened by the fact that the development of a missional theological framework for the diaconate has not kept pace with the development of such ecclesiology in the last two decades. Existing policy is outdated and incomplete regarding a collaborative-integrated response between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare programmes. Recent practice-orientated research to develop practice theory for the diaconate of the DRC in the 21st century is limited.

In this chapter, recognition is given to the work of W.C. van der Merwe (2014), who proposed a present-time theological foundation for the diaconate of the DRC. As of yet, it has not been officially recognised within the DRC. It is not reflected in any official decisions or documentation of the DRC. Therefore, a discussion on theology for the

diaconate for the DRC will be demarcated by Van der Merwe's study and complemented by a review of relevant DRC declarations, decisions, and church order regulations and policy.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: The first part of the chapter provides an overview of the rise of missional theology and missional ecclesiology in the DRC as it renders a paradigm for the development of diaconal praxis. The second part discusses Van der Merwe's theological framework for missional transformation. The latter provides an applied structure for the diaconate of the DRC that builds on the onset of the missional movement in this church. Thereafter, collaboration and integration are conceptualised theologically. The chapter concludes with a view of pragmatic considerations that affect collaborative integration.

2.2 Missional transformation in the DRC takes shape

The missional church movement that originated in the United States of America (USA) towards the end of the last century found its way into the DRC after 1994, when the political context in South Africa went through dramatic changes. Marais (2017:65) refers to this time in the church's life as *an* 'extraordinary decade of rapid missional growth unprecedented in South African church history'. Since 1998, the DRC has taken research on the meaning of missional theology and its implications for a transformed ecclesiology, leadership, and education very seriously. Theologians and scholars involved in this research include Burger (2021); Niemandt et al. (2018); Benadé and Niemandt (2019); Burger, Marais and Mouton (eds. 2017); Van Niekerk (2014); and Sheridan and Hendriks (2013).

When you study official documents of the DRC, such as agendas, minutes, declarations, and amendments to church order and regulations, you notice the distinctive influence of missional theology on the transformation of the ecclesiology of the DRC. The course of development of a missional ecclesiology with a specific focus on how it involves *diakonia* will be followed in this section. In this roadmap, there will be a deliberate search for

indications that the DRC is open and ready to break any isolation that may exist and seek collaboration in ecumenical and other networks. Also, how the DRC progresses in its discernment processes to find strategy and praxis for such a collaborative approach.

One way to explore the development of missional theology in the DRC and how it begins to lay a foundation for transforming a diaconal ministry is to offer a summarised review of official documents in the DRC. The documents were selected based on prominence and according to the researcher's judgement of applicability within the current field of investigation.

2.2.1 A declaration of calling

The DRC's intent to react to the distress of a society in need cannot be made any clearer than in the formulation of its *Roepingsverklaring* (Declaration of Calling) at the General Synod of 2002. It is quite touching when these minutes are read, and one notices the question the delegates wrestled with at this Synod (DRC 2002:583 translation is mine):

> South Africa, how are you really doing, and what can we as a church learn from you and do for you?[11]

The outcome is a vocation declaration which became a basis for similar declarations in 2004, 2007, and 2011. In the 2002 declaration, the DRC
- recommits itself to God and to His Word;
- commits to act on suffering;
- commits to expand ecumenical ties and join hands with all other Christians to rebuild the country and alleviate painful circumstances;
- calls on all congregations to join this course in the healing of our land.

From this declaration, it is remarkable how strongly the DRC placed itself on a path of

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[11] Original text in Afrikaans: Suid-Afrika, hoe gaan dit regtig met jou en wat kan ons as kerk by jou leer en vir jou doen?

collaboration in 2002, both to the ecumenical church and as a sectoral agent within the larger societal context. Convinced by its identity and calling, the DRC is determined to be a committed participant in bringing relief to social distress. Van der Merwe (2014:101–106) gives an in-depth report on the momentous 2002 General Assembly and concludes that the declaration made, more than anything else, places the DRC on a road of transformation. Against the background of the missional movement that simultaneously emerged at this time, the DRC gradually began to speak of *missional transformation* and, up to this day, continues to discern the implications for the ecclesiology of the DRC.

2.2.2 Appreciation for early indicators

One has to acknowledge that *Kerk en Samelewing* (General Synod Commission [GSC] 1986)[12] was possibly the starting point for the 2002 declaration. Van der Merwe (2014:26) argues that *Kerk en Samelewing* (GSC 1986; GSC 1990) laid the foundation for the change of direction in the church regarding *apartheid* and opened new doors on the church's way to the challenges of the new millennium. *Kerk en Samelewing* (GSC 1986; GSC 1990) was a timely change of course that opened important doors for the DRC, especially in the nineties of the last century, but also paved the way for finally breaking its isolation in the ecumenical world. It was, after all, criticism from the ecumene because of its support for the *Apartheidsregering* (*apartheid* government) that forced the DRC to rethink its identity and calling. This is how, in the preamble of *Kerk en Samelewing* (GSC 1990), P.C. Potgieter, moderator of the General Synod at that time, explains the need for a confession and new policy based on the Word of God and the reign of God in this world.

The status quo of the DRC's understanding of *diakonia* in *Kerk en Samelewing* (GSC 1986:12–13; GSC 1990:8–9) and, more specifically, how it clearly understood and structured its response to social distress promoted the fragmentation of ministries. *Diakonia*, as a ministry of the church (according to its identity and calling), was distinguished from professional social work services, even though the latter was an institutionalised action of the church itself. This understanding is reflected in the outdated

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[12] Translated as 'Church and Society'.

1994 policy for the ministry of *diakonia* in the DRC (*Barmhartigheidbedieningsbeleid* vir die NGK[13], DRC, 1994:264).

2.2.3 Outdated policy and practices

This policy is the DRC's most recent official policy document regarding the diaconate ministry. Given the dating of this policy document, it clearly could not keep pace with the social context of post-apartheid South Africa and totally and utterly with the missional movement that gathered momentum in the DRC shortly after 1994.

The one primary objection to the policy is that it creates a clear distance between the diaconate of congregations and what is then so-called specialised and institutionalised care. Under the heading 'The principle by which assistance is provided', the policy document clearly distinguishes what can be done by congregations and what can be done by 'the church's professional services and institutions' (sub-heading 2). The next section then describes the various aspects of the church's diaconal ministry, where again, a distinction is made between the 'diaconal congregation' (sub-heading 2.3.1) and 'the church's professional services' (sub-heading 2.3.2).

Van der Merwe (2014:223) describes the problem as follows (the quote is translated):

> … specialisation and institutionalisation … are systemic traits characteristic of the modern era and may lead to the separate aspects of the developing diaconate in independent sub-disciplines operating in silos.

It should come as no surprise then that fragmentation in the practice of the church and organisation's activities is the order of the day.

2.2.4 Continued commitment

The period between 2002 – 2022 follows a consistent message. After 2002, 2004, and

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[13] Translated as the policy document for the ministry of compassion and mercy (*diakonia*) in the DRC.

2007 declarations of the DRC with similar confessions, the General Synod in 2011 once again showed its sincere conviction to respond in collaboration with others (DRC 2011b:155):

> The Dutch Reformed Church thanks God that we can be God's church in such a challenging time, within a Southern African context with other churches. His love and grace are undoubtedly great.

The DRC (2011b:155) commits to work actively and constructively to alleviate social distress in society:

> Our communities are poor, unemployment is high, and discouragement characterises many of our young people. We call on the state to carry out its responsibilities, and also to preserve our fragile democracy. At the same time, we continue to commit ourselves to the fight against immorality. In the light of our calling, we promise to work for the establishment of values that can make a peaceful society a reality and to work actively for the alleviation of hardship and suffering.

It is crystal clear: There is abundant evidence of the church's intention to be constructive and relevant in terms of social distress in society. The agenda is also clear: the DRC is concerned about poverty and social injustices in this current reality (DRC 2015a:297).

> The General Synod reaffirms that the ongoing fight against poverty and injustice must be a high priority on the church's agenda.

Nevertheless, how to address this situation effectively remains the burning challenge. The nagging question of strategy or praxis does not materialise despite lively discourse. It comes up continuously in official documentation whenever the General Synod assembly or its subcommittees meets in this period.

2.2.5 A paper trail of good intentions

Numerous agendas, minutes, and reports as official documentation of the General Synod of the DRC from 2011–2022 convinces of the church's sincere intent to be of service and, increasingly, it becomes clear that the DRC discerns collaboration between church and church-affiliated welfare organisations as the way to go.

The General Synod of 2013 reports the following resolutions (DRC 2013:190):

- Research should be done on the relationship and collaboration between congregations and church-affiliated social service organisations concerning the fight against poverty, unemployment, and injustice.
- Forthcoming guidelines of such a report should be developed into a strategy that congregations can implement.
- Appropriate training material must be developed to support congregations in carrying out their diaconal calling.

Between the 2013 and the 2015 assembly of the General Synod, various church meetings and the CCSS[14] brought to the table the practice of church involvement in collaboration with its ecumenical and other partners. A task team for Poverty and Social Justice was appointed and reported in 2015 on their assignment to encourage research, development strategy, and see proper training. Regarding strategy development, the task team identified ECD as a practice-oriented missional opportunity for congregations to be collectively encouraged. This was the first step towards praxis. Furthermore, the task team appointed Dr W.C. van der Merwe and Dr B. van Aarde to develop a *Basic Document for the Theology of Missional Diaconate* (DRC 2015a:298). Such a document has not yet been released. Since 2019, a task team consisting of representatives of the General Synod's missional diaconate task team, executive management members of the CCSS, and individuals representing academic institutions has taken up the assignment again. It is busy preparing recommendations for the General Synod, which will convene in October 2023.

In 2015 ministry guidelines for the involvement of congregations, presbyteries, and synods in poverty, inequality, and injustice were developed. In these guidelines, collaboration between church and other networks becomes even more prominent (DRC

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[14] Church Council for Social Services – consisting of ten DRC-affiliated professional social welfare organisations.

2015a:303):

> Participating in economic partnerships and community networks can increase congregations' involvement in the fight against poverty, unemployment and injustice. Human capital is thus strengthened by releasing a variety of knowledge, experience, skills and resources.

The argument in this thesis for collaboration between church and welfare organisations through a collaborative-integrated approach leans intensely on the last parts of the argument in the quote above. Collaboration strengthens the optimal responses. The researcher believes this to be a guiding principle that is substantiated theologically, sociologically, and pragmatically.

2.2.6 A honest review of impact

Another argument to actively promote collaboration between the DRC and its affiliated social welfare organisations results from recommendations in a Hugenote College report (Van der Westhuizen 2013) on the impact of the DRC on social distress. This research confirms that charity projects are the DRC's single most significant practical response to the large gap between privileged and poor and forthcoming distress.

The desired outcome of transforming suffering en route to recovery is not reachable or sustainable with a charity approach as the presiding strategy. Ad hoc actions should be integrated with long-term strategies. The research report emphasises congregations' potential and important role, namely, to establish partnerships that help create momentum for true transformation (Van der Westhuizen 2013:110, the translation is mine).

> In order to ensure greater effectiveness and sustainable change, it is necessary to integrate ad hoc short-term actions with long-term strategies. Furthermore, congregational projects and professional church social services must be seen as different projects on one continuum, namely the church's involvement in the fight against poverty, unemployment and injustice.

The Hugenote College report clearly alludes to a different approach needed by the DRC (congregations) to increase impact. This recommendation includes collaborative efforts

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and a more development-oriented approach to the diaconate.

2.2.7 A Memorandum of Intent (2019)

Moving on to 2019, special mention needs to be made of the MOI, the group of church-affiliated social welfare organisations brought to the assembly of the General Synod in October 2019. Essentially, it calls for collaboration between the DRC and the social work councils that form the CCSS. In this MOI, the CCSS confirms its shared vision and calling with the DRC (2019a:500):

> The Dutch Reformed Church was called by God Triune to participate in the mission of God in the world. The Holy Spirit builds the Church to serve God's glory and proclaim the ministry of reconciliation and the salvation of Christ

The CCSS identifies itself as an integral part of the missional calling of the DRC and undertakes to support member organisations so that the services will be conducted according to the ethos/character of the DRC. The memorandum then calls for a commitment between the two parties to develop and implement mechanisms to support constructive collaboration.

2.2.8 A Western Cape reaction to the call for transformation

At this point, in the Western Cape Synod of the DRC, Diaconia and Badisa already set in motion the merger of all synodical (congregational) and welfare interventions when Little Seeds came about in May 2019. Little Seeds was a direct result of the movement mentioned above and, specifically, the direction indicated since 2015 when ECD was identified as a focused approach to systemic intervention in poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Chapter 3 will expand on this development.

2.2.9 A framework for missional transformation

In addition to official minutes and reports from church meetings, the publication of the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) become fundamentally important, not only for further ecclesiological development in the DRC but also for any development of theology, strategy, and praxis

in *diakonia* that supports such movement.

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:2) states that the existing ecclesiology and missiology of the DRC before 1994, was shaped when the church was the influential centre of almost all communities because of people's identification with Christianity. The context has changed dramatically over the last few decades, and the church often must function and thrive in a non-Christian (even post-Christian) environment. The missional movement played an essential role in the discernment of the identity and calling of the DRC.

Marais (2017:64-78) gives an insider perspective on the history and challenges of the missional movement in South Africa since 1994. Only six years after the publication of *Missional Church* (Guder 1998), the ten synods forming the General Synod of the DRC started the Southern African Partnership for Missional Churches (SAPMC) in 2004. The partnership followed the movement for Missional Churches in the United States and the Minnesota-based Church Innovations under the inspiring leadership of Patrick Keifert, professor in systematic theology at Luther Seminary in St Paul. Member churches of the SAPMC studied and discussed the classic work on missional theology, including *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Bosch 1991) and *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Guder 1998). Another nine years later, the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:1-17) was unanimously adopted as a policy document by the General Synod of the DRC. It compiled several documents and reports into a framework that should assist the church in working out its missional polity, creating new (missional) language, facilitating new conversations, and imagining new possibilities for the future of the church.

Since the rise of missional theology in the DRC, there has been a hunger for developing innovative missional practices with viable alternatives. Transformed missional practices require a radical systemic change in the denomination. For one, the DRC had to move from ecclesiocentric to theocentric discernment. Marais (2017:77) explains that tried and

tested prototypes must be found. To re-imagine ministry, a knowledge base and skill set had to be found to sustain the missional movement in the DRC. The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) lays a foundation for this purpose. Furthermore, analysing this document shows its significance for developing a missional theology for *diakonia* and a collaborative-integrated, diaconal praxis.

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) affirms the DRC's journey (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*) within a changed context post-1994. It also indicates some implications for being a church in the 21st century and comments on what it means to be servants to the community and an active part of God's recreation of the world.

2.2.9.1 Affirming the missional movement in the DRC

As explained in the previous paragraphs, the DRC embraced missional theology over more than two decades. The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC *(*Niemandt & Meiring 2013) unpacks the underlying missional paradigm's elements. It places the DRC as a covenant community within God's mission (*missio Dei*) and is deeply connected to God Triune, the faith community, and the world.

With the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) the theological transformation in the DRC is officiated. In reflection on the significance of what the document contributes to the development of ministry practice, the researcher believes the following deserves to be mentioned: Firstly, the DRC, with this policy framework, officially declares its participation in the deposition of a missional theology in the ecumenical world. With this, the DRC strongly confirms its presence in the ecumenical discourse and discerning journey. Secondly*,* the document lays down an epistemological framework that can bring forth meaningful principles for being a church. Thirdly, the document provides language to express the newfound understanding of God, self, church, and mission.

Although the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) makes it clear that mission is not as much action (*doing*) as it determines the nature (*being*) of the church, the document does point out that its confession and ministry should imitate the mission the church confesses to be part of. Its Church Order should articulate the understood identity, customs, and arrangements in which it organises its daily life and ministry. Policy and Church Order are, after all, not the last of it. The DRC has to work out the praxis where theology (theory) and practice meet. In this thesis, this is especially true for the DRC's calling as servants to the community. The perception, however, is that the DRC, as it has been for the past ten years, is clear about the need to develop the practice around the diaconate but is stagnated in older paradigms that still dominate the practice of the diaconate. This statement will be substantiated when the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC*'s* (2013) principles for servanthood in the community are described.

2.2.9.2 Repositioning of the missio ecclesiae

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:4-7) reflects on the church's reason for existence and confesses that God's mission is the starting point. The church is a participant in God's mission. The mission remains primarily God's mission, and neither the church's faithfulness nor unfaithfulness affects God's continued involvement in the world. The document encourages the DRC to work out its missional nature in participating in God's mission.

Missional theology proposes several values and principles for a church to work out its ecclesiology. The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) officiates the self-understanding (ecclesiology) the DRC has been working out for the last two decades. These principles align with the classical missional theological basis known at this time. The major shift for the DRC that has probably come is the shift from an ecclesiocentric focus in the 20th century towards a theocentric focus as has been mentioned earlier (section 2.2.2) in this chapter:
- It involves a fresh confirmation of God's rule (his Kingdom) in all of creation.
- It relocated the DRC's focus from itself and its survival to the world and

participation in God's mission in a context that needs hope and cries out for support.

- A Kingdom-shaped (missional) church has the calling to embody the gospel, especially through life-giving words of encouragement, but also in pragmatic ways (acts of service).
- As Christ gave himself, a missional church has the calling to empty itself (a kenotic existence) in the service of God and others.

The particular question that directs the review of the document is the following: Does the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) provide any support for a collaborative-integrated approach to the diaconate to deepen its impact in society? In other words, does the latter document support agreements and models that encourage collaboration between the church and others within its immediate sector? Reflection on this very critical question deserves a subdivision in the flow of the discussion.

2.3 The shaping of a missional theological diaconate

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) is an attempt to compile strides in theological development in the DRC in the 21st century into one report. For this thesis, the theological grounding, principles, values, and early indicators for being servants to the community (*diakonia*) need a more comprehensive treatment of the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (2013) than the mere section that addresses *diakonia* directly (DRC General Synod 2013:10-11).

The theological framework in this document grounds *diakonia* distinctively within the *missio Dei*. Even more than just being grounded in the mission of God, *diakonia* is grounded in God himself: His love, mercy, justice, reconciliation, and in his peace. The theological framework in this document reaffirms the nature and calling of the DRC to bring new life and the presence of the Triune God to this world. The diaconate of the

church finds its place and part in all aspects of the church's life in participation in God's mission: *diakonia* (service) and *leitourgia* (worship) are part of one calling; *diakonia* (service) and *koinonia* (communion and community of saints) are part of one calling; *diakonia* (service) and *kerugma* (preaching/proclamation) are part of one call.

It may seem unnecessary to overemphasise these principles, but history has shown that the DRC was/is also inclined to apply these elements of *being* in silos. Knoetze (2002) dedicates a study to the theoretical separation of the concepts *diakonia* and *kerugma*, which, although the different emphases can be distinguished, is essentially one ministry of the Word. We often see in the DRC that in ecclesiastical structures, two (separate) commissions exist (Knoetze 2002:3). The researcher also did a master's research dissertation on the separation of *diakonia* and *kerugma* and how it is institutionalised in silos in the ministry approach of the local congregation (Venter 2007). This separation puts the finger on the exact essence of the research problem. Division and fragmentation cannot be continued in a missional ecclesiology, and especially not between *diakonia* and the other elements of being a church. Fragmentation results in the weakening of separate actions.

Diakonia is not a 'project' or a separate ministry of the DRC; it is the essence and the nature of the church, as it is the essence and nature of God. The church pours itself out (*kenosis*) in acts of service as Jesus did when sent by the Father (DRC General Synod 2013:7). Therefore, there is no such thing as failure when believers reach out to the needs of the world: the mere presence of believers when others suffer, is an act of service (DRC General Synod 2013:10).

Although there shouldn't be a tension, the effectiveness and relevance of the church's acts of service remain important when the DRC sincerely wishes to bring healing in distress caused by socio-economic realities in South Africa. Hence, the need for diaconal praxis that will contribute to transformation. Innovative practices are a gift and stand in service of God. The Holy Spirit leads the DRC in insightful ventures of developing ministry to serve the purpose of transformation (DRC 2013:10). Little Seeds is believed to be a

prototype of such Spirit-led innovation.

The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) is quite clear on its in-principal support of a collaborative-integrated approach for *diakonia:*

- Relationships and unity are strongly supported and even cherished given the solid theological foundation of overflowing relationships going out from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (2013:6).
- The relationship moves from believers to the whole of the world. The church moves to places and networks where they do not yet have any presence with the gospel's message. The church enters areas where the presence of the church has not been established before. The church becomes part of networks where the gospel can be shared in word and deed. Moving into new and foreign contexts brings challenges. However, the church perseveres in these places and relationships for the sake of the calling to be salt and light to the world (2013:6).
- The whole idea of *koinonia* and community alluded to on several occasions in the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:5, 6, 8, 9) supports collaboration, partnership, and networking for the good course of the Kingdom of God.
- A strong ecclesiology for *diakonia* is expressed in the document when the nature of the church is described as a communion of believers in the presence of the risen Christ (2013:9-10). Communion (*koinonia*) implicates collaboration.
- The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:13) quotes the 2007 Declaration of Calling of the DRC that supports the principle of collective response to distress in society. It is suitable to highlight the entire point in the Declaration of Calling:

We want to take hands with all other Christians in order to be able to build up our societies and relive the painful situations people find themselves in. We want to lovingly encourage, lead and empower each other, as congregations and leaders, to become involved in the healing of our countries. We make ourselves available for, and commit ourselves to, acts of service within communities.

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The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:16-17) lays down principles for possible amendments to the Church Order of the DRC. A missional Church Order must be clear on how it views service to the world and provides regulatory guidelines to include a collaborative-integrated approach as one of its pragmatic models for ministry, especially regarding the diaconate.

2.4 The DRC has a dream of collaboration

A final reference to official documents and processes on the transformational journey has to mention the DRC's 2030 'Dream Scenario' as it lays the perfect foundation for the design of a collaborative-integrated praxis for the diaconate (DRC 2020). In this dream, the DRC envisions a dynamic movement:

- From self-care to caring for the most vulnerable places in South Africa.
- From survival to serviceability.
- From uncertainty to hope for the broken.
- From self-interest to life in love.

The DRC, therefore, formulates its 2030 vision as follows: 'We dream of a network of inclusive congregations at grassroots level, driven by God's love, serving our communities' (DRC 2020). The DRC vision is in line with ecumenical trends. There is a reference to the most recent WCC and ACT Alliance (2022) and the call for collective ecumenical action for greater impact that is supported by network thinking in Chapter 1 (section 1.2). The DRC vision creates a plethora of prospects for the realisation of a collaborative-integrated, diaconal praxis. A reformed spirituality calls for a firm theological foundation though.

2.5 Six cornerstones to ground a missional diaconal theology

Van der Merwe's study in 2014 will be used to demarcate a discussion on a theological framework for the diaconate of the DRC. A clear theological framework is needed to bring forward good diaconal praxis. The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013) lays a foundation, but what Van der

Merwe's seminal study does is to apply the missional paradigm specifically to the diaconate. Not only does he prove in his historical overview and in-depth discussion of the diaconate of the DRC his agreement with the missional-theological basis that has been laid but leaps forward in constructing an applied framework for the diaconate. He proposes the structure and expands on the nature and content of the diaconate that builds on a missional-theological substructure. Van der Merwe (2014:iii) bases his theological framework on the belief that God Triune is the 'origin, basis and final purpose of the diaconal ministry'. The study of this South African theologian is in line with two major ecumenical discourses from the mid-twentieth century, namely God Triune, and the mission of God (*missio Dei*) (Van der Merwe 2014:124). The author suggests six cornerstones (Van der Merwe 2014:147-155). It clearly complements the principles for missional ecclesiology as found in the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013).

2.5.1 God calls out a new community of His people in this world

Van der Merwe (2014:147-148) ties the first cornerstone for a missional diaconate to the notion of being a participant in God's mission. The church discerns what God is already busy doing and joins God in this movement. As such, missional diaconate implies being instrumental in God's work. God includes the church in His compassion and care for the world.

2.5.2 *Diakonia* implies both 'being' and 'doing'

In its essence, *diakonia* is an expression of the nature of God Triune. Van der Merwe (2014:148) describes the Trinity as a community of love and mutual care. *Diakonia* can therefore never merely be a programme or project of the church but represents the very heart of the mission of the church. God is the source and the *telos* (purpose) of the diaconate (Seamands 2005:15, cited in Van der Merwe 2014:149).

2.5.3 *Diakonia* is about the coming of the Kingdom of God

Diakonia is a key activity in the re-creation of a world in which the harmony and peace of

God's original purpose with creation have been disturbed. Systems and structures that disturb this harmony and peace are addressed by acts that testify to God's mercy and justice (Van der Merwe 2014:149). The Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013:2) explains that the church's mission is to bring new life and to announce the loving presence of God in the world; that is, to proclaim his rule in his Kingdom.

2.5.4 Diakonia in solidarity with the world

Transpiring from the preceding cornerstone, the diaconate moves from a deep understanding of communion between Father, Son, and Spirit into the world (Frederickson 2007:47, cited by Van der Merwe 2014:150). This appreciation for relationships moves the church to a position of solidarity (close relationships) through acts of kindness, mercy, and justice. For the diaconate of the church, this is a nuanced position:

2.5.4.1 Diakonia is about being a neighbour

Being someone's neighbour should be a way of life, grounded and coming forth from the grace of God. Therefore, *diakonia* is not a specific deed as it is an attitude and a disposition altogether. God's love renews the believer and moves the believer in such a way that His love and mercy flow through the believer to the world (Den Hertog 2009:122, cited by Van der Merwe 2014:152).

2.5.4.2 Diakonia is about sharing with your neighbour

Solidarity with the neighbour implies sharing creation and sharing God's mercy with others (Van der Merwe 2014:152).

2.5.4.3 Diaconia is about care and justice

God is concerned about and involved in situations of injustice and inhumanity. Therefore, solidarity with one's neighbour results in acts of justice (Den Hertog 2009:117, cited by Van der Merwe 2014:153). Deeds of compassion and caring include concern for situations of injustice.

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2.5.5 Jesus as the example

The fifth cornerstone for a theology for a missional diaconate for the DRC rests on the imitation of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. According to De Klerk (1990:21, cited in Van der Merwe 2014:153), the message of God's reign is proclaimed through *diakonia;* his Kingship is honoured through obedience to his Word; and a priestly role operates in the community of loving and gracious relationships among each other.

2.5.6 Compassion and care begin with God Triune

Compassion and care originate in God Triune. This is a core truth significant to the diaconate as it determines not only the nature but also the content of the diaconate. It is on this point that Van der Merwe (2014:149) cites Seamands (2005:15) saying: 'God is the source and the *telos* (purpose) of the diaconate'.

Van der Merwe (2014:248) brings all the motives underlying the cornerstones for the diaconate of the DRC together in a meaningful illustration (Figure 2.1).
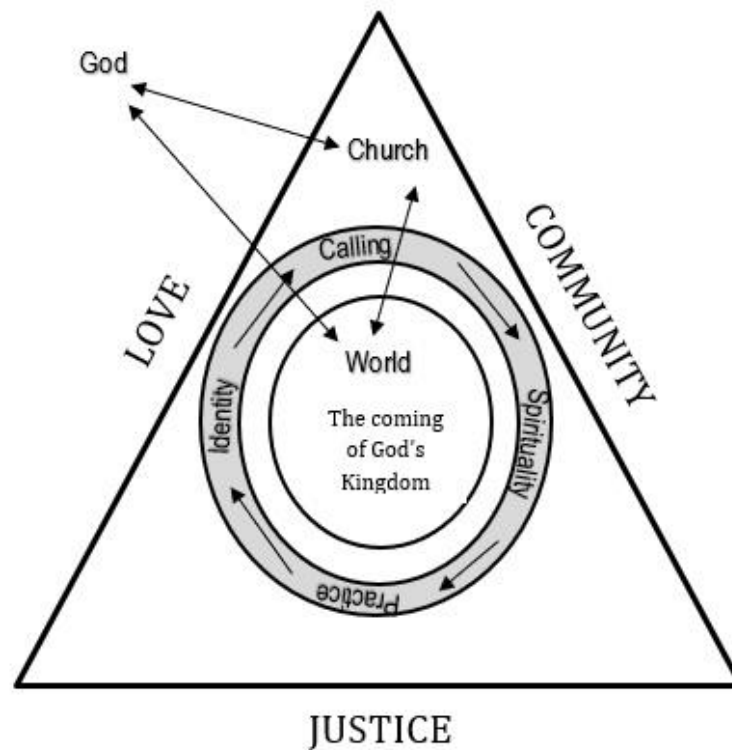
Figure 2.1: Theological framework for missional diaconate

(Source: Van der Merwe 2014:248)

A Trinitarian perspective brings more dimensions of God that also allow for a broader understanding of the diaconate. The love, community, and justice between the Father, Son, and Spirit form the centre of this understanding. The motive of God's reign in his Kingdom has implications for the diaconate. The church has been conceptualised as a sign and an instrument for the purpose of working for the coming of God's Kingdom. God calls the church from the world and then sends the church back into the world to join him in his mission. The church is a gift to the world, helping to transform the world so that it becomes ever more a likeness of the Kingdom of God. All these motives inform the identity, calling, spirituality, and practice of *diakonia* (Van der Merwe 2014:247-248).

In conclusion, Van der Merwe (2014) anchors a theology for the diaconate in the Trinity

and the *missio Dei.* He concludes that it broadens the theological motive for the diaconate of the DRC. Historically, the diaconate of the DRC was anchored Christologically. The fundamental motives for the diaconate were the love of God as embodied in Jesus, and Jesus' servant form on which the DRC built its understanding of the diaconate.

2.6 'Making whole' what has been divided

Before moving to the case study of the prototype of a collaborative-integrated model for the DRC, it still remains necessary to conceptualise collaborative integration theologically.

Scott Sunquist (2013:370), in his chapter titled 'Global Community, Partnership and Mission', makes this profound comment: "Every place of mission is a place of partnership in the twenty-first century".

He claims that partnership has become a central issue, as the global context we live in demands it, and theology provides enough scope to justify and ground collaboration within the Christian missional movement (Sunquist 2013:371). Mission, according to Tankler (2022:74-75), is meant to happen in partnership and mutuality, but 'partnership in mission is not a matter of efficiency so much as a matter of theology'.

The researcher will now attend to the theological conceptualisation of collaborative-integration based on directives from the introduction of such a paradigm in Chapter 1 (section 1.3).

2.6.1 Theological interpretation of 'collaborative-integration'

The word integration comes from the Latin word 'integrat', which means 'made whole'. Stevenson and Lindberg (2010:16973-16974) define "integration" as the process of combining one thing with another to form a whole (to make whole). It is the process of bringing two or more groups or systems together into equal participation in a shared goal.

Collaboration comes from the Latin '*collaborat',* which means 'worked with'. The verb

means to work jointly on an activity or project (Stevenson and Lindberg 2010:6292–6293). The notion of partnership (working together jointly to make whole) is also worth exploring in this context. The word partner comes from the Anglo-French *parcener*, an old legal term that denotes 'co-heirship' (Ross 2019:145).

What we gather from this linguistic point of departure, are a few nuances that can be interpreted theologically:
- The whole is larger than its separate parts.
- There is a shared interest (co-heirship) at stake.
- It is a joint effort to bring about the expected outcome.

Now building on the theological principles brought forward by a missional theology and the cornerstones suggested for a theology for the diaconate of the DRC, the linguistic notions of 'collaborative-integration' touch on several levels:

- The relational nature of a joint effort correlates with the dogma of the Triune God and the idea of close relationships (solidarity) through deeds of kindness and mercy and justice.
- The *missio Dei* beckons believers into a shared interest of compassion for the world – an invitation to 'work with' (collaborate). The priestly role that Jesus played manifests in the community of loving and gracious relationships among each other.
- Co-heirship of goals in a shared vision reminds of the Kingdom of God, under his reign, with all his children being co-heirs in his Kingdom. Harmony and peace under his reign implicate a community where systems and structures resemble collective responsibility to ensure this harmony and peace.

These directions will be key when Little Seeds as a prototype of a collaborative-integrated model is examined to see whether it succeeds in facilitating collaboration and co-heirship of a shared vision.

Unity and diversity come to mind along with Paul's teaching on the body of Christ and the

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interdependence in the body. Biblical images add to a theological understanding of collaborative-integration.

2.6.2 Biblical images in the conceptualisation of collaborative-integration

The literature review revealed a theological richness to be discovered in this regard. Celesti and Bowers du Toit (2019:2) note that partnership is easily 'translated' into the Christian community with terms such as relationship, fellowship, sharing, commonality and *koinonia*. Furthermore, Jesus erected signs of the Kingdom through his sacrificial caring and healing (*diakonia*) (Kritzinger 2007:28, cited in Celesti and Bowers du Toit 2019:2). Integration, collaboration, and partnership speak, among others, to community, interdependence, mutuality, and solidarity. Sunquist (2013:376) agrees that when we depart from God Triune, we learn what it is to participate in the community. The foundational word about God is his oneness. In missional partnership, therefore, we all stand before God and each other with our own gifts and personalities, but we are one. This is, without doubt, the most powerful Biblical concept in which collaborative-integration can be grounded theologically (1 Pet 4:10-11, NIV).

> [10] Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. [11] If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen

Primuth and Kaspar (2019) mention that underlying the theology of partnership are the themes of 'unity' and 'diversity'. Fundamentally, unity and diversity begin within the Trinity. Then, unity and diversity are seen within the body of Christ. And then Jesus also prays for his disciples in John 17:13-25, that there might be unity within the diversity, as to testify to the oneness of God Triune.

- **The Body of Christ**

Collaborative-integration as the practice of unity and diversity, comfortably fits the image of the church being the body of Christ. The biblical image builds on both themes, unity and diversity. Varying roles, gifts, and functions in ministry come as a gift from God. We are reminded of the Latin meaning of the word, *'to make whole'* and can gather from this meaning that diversity is needed to make whole.

Paul is best known for his use of the image of the body of Christ. The body is a communal reality and therefore clear to portray God's desire for both a relational unity and functional diversity in the church. Primuth and Kaspar (2019) claim that God values diversity but not division, and that true partnership is not simply a matter of equality but a matter of synergy. There are more scriptural directions of diversity and unity than just Paul's handling of the body image in 1 Corinthians 12 and other references to this particular image in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 3:1-9. The Scriptures also say that one plants while another waters, and one sows while another reaps, 'so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together' (Jn 4:35-38).

- 'That all of them may be one…'

The high priestly prayer of Jesus for his disciples in John 17 is of great significance for the ecumenical movement and for collaboration within the Christian faith sphere. It offers a firm theological foundation for the concept of 'collaborative-integration'. Butler (2006:20) sees the outcome of collaboration as a signal and a sign that Jesus' work restores relationships. Working together within the body of Christ has a powerful effect on the credibility of the ecumenical church – whether the audience believes our message or not (Jn 17: 20–23). The same argument, from a different angle, is that of Sunquist (2013:377) who points out that division within the church misrepresents God before the world. It might sound like a harsh judgement on the DRC to claim that fragmentation within its own ranks is a misrepresentation of God, but let's hold on to the notion for a while.

The best word to describe the gift of unity that comes with collaborative-integration is most probably the word *koinonia*. In a semantic study of the word, Louw and Nida

(1989:562) define *koinonia* as an association involving close mutual relations and involvement. It refers to partners or associates who participate with one another in some enterprise or matter of joint concern. Burger (1999:231) applies *koinonia* to the supportive and community-creating activities when believers are connected to one another by Christ. In this togetherness (and working together) the caring and healing power of the gospel is experienced. *Koinonia* is about people who see and respect each other. Collaborative-integration can be regarded as a type of organised *koinonia.*

Collaboration for the sake of effectiveness, bringing hope and healing to the world, might just be the most powerful witness the DRC and close associates can make in the 21st century.

As indicated earlier by Ross (2010:145), collaboration should be characterised by equal cooperation that can be achieved by acknowledging a common loyalty to something outside any individual agenda. In Jesus's high priestly prayer, this external focus is the glory of God (Jn 17:23, New International Version [NIV]):

> [23] "I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me".

Despite this richness of Biblical grounding for a collaborative-integrated take on ministry, Hancox and Bowers du Toit (2021:171-172) note that a traditional Christendom-derived understanding of the church more than often leads to a dualistic treatment of faith-based organisations (FBOs). They cite Flett (2010:196) who builds on Barth's trinitarian theology and claims that the Christian community shows a breached nature when it prioritises 'contemplative being and a derivative missionary act'. Therefore, we ground collaborative-integration firmly within a theological framework, but we also keep in mind that the conceptualisation should assist the tangible outcome of healing and restoration in the world.

Consensus on an ethical framework is important in strengthening relationships and

determining identity when different role players come together.

2.6.3 Working out a distinctive ethos

Within the prototype being studied, principles and values resemble a mutual ethos and will be mentioned in discussions of the empirical study in Chapter 4. The hypothesis of this study suggests that mutual appreciation will unlock the strength of the desired model. Collaboration is never an end in itself but requires constant and purposeful maintenance, mutual trust, and respect. Ross (2010:145-146) lists three conditions for collaboration which lay the foundation for collaboration ethics, namely: involvement, responsibility, and liability.

Involvement, responsibility, and liability begin with a shared missional vision and goals. Involvement implies developing these goals in an inclusive process. Mutual trust and respect are vital for a process like this. For the benefit of integration, individual identities should consciously be preserved. No one partner should control the relationship, and responsibility should be shared in all aspects of the greater cause. Love, mutuality and understanding distinguish dynamic partnerships in mission (Ross 2010:145-147). The researcher would like to add that these conditions resemble the nature of the Trinity and should therefore be cherished as part of a diaconal spirituality. A Christian ethos strengthens the theological thrust behind the proposed model.

From collaborative-integration, we can move to collective impact, which is the ultimate incentive of the proposed model.

Summary: Collaborative-integration is theologically richly supported. The concept links directly to God Triune who is relational in nature and inviting in his mission. Unity in diversity resembles a wholeness that can be biblically justified.

2.7 Towards praxis for collective impact

In the DRC, it remains a mandate of the General Synod (DRC 2015a:297) that has not

yet been adequately addressed or processed, namely, to address the distance between the church and social structures with the building of relationships and networks. Purposeful relationships, networks, and integration are discerned as the way forward for the DRC in the 21st century. The mandate the General Synod gives implies the development of practice theory and praxis (models of excellence) for collaboration.

The research addresses this exact theoretical gap within the framework provided for missional transformation in the DRC. Practice theory and praxis for a collaborative-integrated, diaconal approach between church and organisation have yet to be developed. The kenotic existence of the DRC as servants to the community needs to take effect in practical and relevant ways that ensure true transformation. Several resources reviewed claimed that we are in an era of network thinking and collaboration in our global context (Eurich 2020; eds. Kok and Van den Heuvel 2019; WCC 2013; Reupold 2009). The potential for collective impact lies within the collaboration. Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer (2012:2) believe that collective impact is not just a way of referring to collaboration. Large-scale social impact is achieved with a particular approach, and it is disciplined and higher-performing than individual efforts.

Early in the missional theology journey of the DRC, Niemandt (2007:124) pointed to the role leadership will play in transformation. With network thinking and collaboration as one of the faith practices of missional ecclesiology, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and authority-dominated leadership will not do anymore. The success and power of teams will lie in the effective organisation of networks and teams and not as it is in the individual dynamics of a single leader or system (Niemandt 2007:130). He argues that the Divine Trinity became, through the treatment of theologians such as Barth, Rahner and Moltmann, a structural framework for theological reflection that lies a foundation for network thinking. The church is fulfilling something of the loving relationship within the Trinity, here and now on earth. Community and mutual unity are images of God himself (Niemandt 2007:126).

The broader understanding of partnership, collaboration, and networks is narrowed down in the current study to a structured model of collaborative-integration between the DRC

in the Western Cape (through its ministry group Diaconia) and its affiliated social welfare organisation (Badisa) in the field of ECD. Gradually working towards the case study, the researcher will begin by referencing the broader concept of 'networking' and network theory.

2.7.1 Different levels of collaboration within networks

The literature review confirms that the current search for integration in the DRC concurs with a greater worldwide ecumenical search for collaboration in networks and forms of interdisciplinary praxis. It was particularly evident in the 2013 assembly of the WCC in Busan and in theological thinking in Germany.

Contexts differ, but realities in the 21st century seem to encourage both church and diaconal institutions globally to explore more collaborative-integrated approaches. The WCC, at their 10th assembly in Busan in 2013, made a serious appeal to Christian communities to unite in a diaconal calling through partnerships (WCC 2013:105-106):

> … diakonia has to be dynamic, contextual and versatile. It must affect partnerships, not only at the level of global or larger church structures, but also among congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels.

Commenting from a Western European perspective, Eurich (2020:1) conceptualises the coming together of congregation and organisation as the creation of '*social space networks'*. Reupold (2009:62) explains that networks originates in social developments in the previous century. Globalisation contributed meaningfully to social development in multiple disciplines. Meaningful relationships between people, and especially between multiple disciplines, delivers a social return over time. Reupold (2000:63) thus offer a definition for networks to be 'a set of social relations that are created by interactions of actors and that in turn influence the behaviour of those involved'. Eurich (2020:1) is convinced that the church can play a significant role in creating these spaces with the aperture for collaboration. The challenge is the more practical matters of integration and collaboration – pragmatically shaping cooperation within this social space. His

examination of practical aspects unveils various challenges and possibilities that concur with the Diaconia and Badisa experience in the Little Seeds case study.

A network mindset in general prepares the way for the development of praxis that constitutes certain levels of integration. Networks, collaboration, and integrated approaches lead to eco-systems in which capacities and capabilities can be shared as those involved or engaged in common evolutionary development. Andrea (2009:62) calls this "co-evolution". The fibre of society is characterised by an openness for collaboration in mission and this has the potential to transform the world. The core strengths of networks in these ecosystems are trust, knowledge, skills, resources, and common effort.

The Committee on Ecumenism (WCC 2013:191) in its report mentions two basic models of networks that were noticed in the ecumene:

  i). Either the collaborators concentrate on particular issues which allow for the cooperation of a broad coalition of different actors, or
  ii). They concentrate on one set of actors with the ability to address a broader agenda.

Networks can either have formal or informal ties. Holzer (2010:34, cited by Eurich 2020:5) explains the nature of networks from a social science perspective. Networks are based on selective connections (edges) between several elements (nodes), which may form a certain pattern. Hereby a specific goal or focus could bring different agencies together and enable them to optimise their efforts by joining capacities. Furthermore, hybrid forms of networks can exist. Networks can accommodate high degrees of diversity, but require high levels of involvement, responsibility, and liability, as explained by Ross (2010) earlier in this chapter (section 2.6.3). The WCC and ACT Alliance (2022:112) encourage the strengthening of structures with bilateral or multilateral agreements to build alliances and networks of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

Network thinking concepts are used interchangeably. There is therefore a danger that they become vague and confusing. Without oversimplifying it, an attempt is made to suggest different levels of cooperation or typologies of social space networks. The

different forms of joint ventures remain a specialised field with many hidden interconnections between components that arise from intersections (Keast and Mandell 2013:3). The distinction offered therefore remains tentative. Building on the work of Romero and Molina (2011:447-472) and Keast and Mandell (2013:1-19), the following levels of networking on a continuum from isolation to integration are suggested. These simple definitions for sensemaking will be worked out in further detail when partnership agreements are made, specifying the expected roles and responsibilities and other dynamics of the relationship.

ISOLATION	COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COLLABORATION	INTEGRATION
The need for collaboration is not recognised. Activities in silos.	Silos are compromised. Share information, space, and other resources. Mostly short-term. Often explorative of longer-term networking possibilities.	Align activities for a shared goal. The idea of collective impact serves to motivate. Deliberate action towards joint planning and joint programmes. Organisations remain separate.	Shared vision (goal), and interdependence. Formal agreements and strategy. Significant access to each other's resources.	Linking, leveraging, aligning. Deep trusting relationship. Formal and institutionalised agreements.

Figure 2.2: Typologies of social space networks

(Romero and Molina 2011:447-472; Keast and Mandell 2013:3-4)

The researcher would like to briefly add interdisciplinary input from the Stanford Centre

for Philanthropy and Civil Society on the matter of collaboration. The desired outcome of networking is to achieve collective impact. The Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)[15] introduces the concept of '*collective impact*' and describes several examples of highly structured collaborative efforts that have achieved substantial impact on large-scale social problems (Hanleybrown et al. 2012:1). The SSIR states in this report that "*a fundamentally different, more disciplined, and higher performing approach to achieving large-scale social impact is needed*" (Hanleybrown et al. 2012:2). The report clearly argues that there is no other way society will achieve large-scale progress against urgent and complex problems unless a collective impact approach becomes the accepted way of doing business. This argument resonates against the background of the DRC's urgency to really make an impact on a larger scale, and to be more relevant to the complexities of societal distress.

The WCC proposes the following considerations in building strong networks for collective impact: (i) Engage with local congregations and develop the ability to engage in civil society, especially in matters of advocacy and public witness, as part of the diaconal calling of the church; (ii) develop and share strategies for building partnerships and guide congregations in this skill; (iii) focus on learning through knowledge and skills acquired through practice (*diapraxis*); (iv) share resources (both financial and human), as well as knowledge and best practices on diapraxis, and include this material in professional training (WCC and ACT Alliance 2022:114).

Summary: In situations like the one in South Africa, where there are significant social problems on a large scale, it is crucial to consider collaboration with its potential collective impact. The DRC can play a significant role in creating social space networks for collaboration on local, regional, and national levels. Dynamic, contextual, and versatile *diakonia* can contribute to the achievement of substantial impact in society.

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[15] Stanford Centre for Philanthropy and Civil Society is a research centre for students, scholars, and practitioners to explore and share ideas that create social change. As publisher of Stanford Social Innovation Review, Stanford PACS informs policy and social innovation, philanthropic investment, and non-profit practice.

With this in mind, and against the background of the literature review, the researcher proposes a few considerations on the way from fragmentation to integration considering the diaconal role the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations in South Africa can play.

2.7.2 Positive learning experience during COVID-19

If COVID-19 contributed anything to the social fibre of transformation, it is the openness to networking and collaboration that we saw in the DRC in South Africa. Van der Walt and Venter (2021) describe the rapid rise of LEANs (local ecumenical action networks) as a diaconal response to the deprivation of people during the first months of hard lockdown during COVID-19 in South Africa.

The pandemic was unique in its nature, but socio-economic realities and resource scarcity are usually some of the obvious reasons for the inclination for collaboration. This is also the 'new normal' since the pandemic in Germany. According to Coenen-Marx (2021:68-71), cooperation between intersectoral agencies and a network mindset was 'system-relevant' and called for at the time of the pandemic. We can only hope that the virtue in terms of networking does not go to waste when this specific crisis subsides.

Unfortunately, it seems that LEANs in the DRC were only the answer for a moment and that most networks were disbanded when the immediate crisis was over. On the other hand, it may also be that networks come and go precisely as the moment demands and that this is as a matter-of-fact part of the nature of networks. Nonetheless, in the activities of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches (WPCC), LEANs are still actively encouraged, and support is given to facilitate the formation of ecumenical networks.[16]

Eurich (2020:4) warns that in an effort to collaborate between church and organisation,

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[16] The researcher serves on the Executive Committee of the SACC WPCC as coordinator of the ministry task team that promotes the establishment of LEANs.

one deals with two different types of organisations and you need to be clear on the different logic they follow.

2.7.2 Contrasting logics with complementary agendas

Although two entities share a vision, it remains complicated to bridge the differences when they occur. Eurich (2020:4-5) demystifies one of the reasons for the estrangement between the DRC and its affiliated social welfare organisations when he describes the theory of different logic and goals that guide different entities. He distinguishes between the church and the organisation by referring to the church as a movement of volunteers with elements of institutionalisation and the organisation as a service deliverer. He then points out the paradoxes of a logic of volunteers (church) and a non-profit logic (organisation):

- The church has more volunteers (believers) than full-time workers. In contrast, the organisation has more full-time workers than volunteers.
- The church approaches its mission as charitable and sympathetic. The act of involvement is more important than the so-called outcome. The organisation is compelled to operate according to professional standards that require efficiency and where output is a guiding criterion.
- Relationships are open and inviting in the church, strengthened by unity and other biblical images. Contracts and formal agreements regulate collaboration in the organisation.
- Movements (the church) and organisations differ in their relation to different markets. Böckel (2016:93, cited in Eurich 2020:5) explains that organisations are much more environmentally responsible than the church, where economic and political markets and market feedback on service delivery are concerned. Organisations are compelled to 'integrate different stakeholders and the impulses from three sectoral areas: the state, the market, and civil society. Competition, economic power, and strategic positioning are decisive markers in the market' (Eurich 2020:5).

The different logic of Eurich (2020) corresponds with the observations of Scheie, Markham and Mayer (1998:74-75), who did a study on partnerships between church and organisations, working in the field of community development. They point out a few more paradoxes:

- The church and the organisation operate on different timelines in which the pace of the church is usually much slower.
- Development is most central to the organisation's mission and, therefore, the desired and measurable outcomes. The mission of the church might slightly differ. Even though the church wants to participate in the development, the church places just as much emphasis on relationships and spiritual care, with less urgency for immediate and measurable outcomes. The notion of success differs between church and organisation.
- The church does not 'earn an income' through involvement in developmental work. Organisations manage state-subsidised, or donor agreements measured against outcomes.
- Obtaining consent for partnerships is more complex in the church as a broad-based institution. Decision-making and consent in the organisation are less complicated, with fewer staff members and a managing board with a mandate for decision-making.

The Little Seeds case study adds observations that support the idea of different logic between church and organisation. In Chapter 4, observations will be discussed thoroughly, but for now, the following will suffice:

- Badisa works in a highly regulated environment. Legislation, protocols, and standard procedures direct daily operations. This poses a threat that congregations will not be willing to follow all the red tape. Decision-making in Badisa can be very bureaucratic and hierarchical.
- Diaconia (representing DRC congregations) is innovative, passion-driven, and acts freely on opportunities that arise. Initiatives are local and can be acted on swiftly.

If networks create such a creative aperture, they can manage the seemingly paradoxical approaches between church and organisation to bring about collective impact. In his book, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems*, Johnson (2014) argues that polarity management offers a solution when collaboration has reached a dead-end. Polarity management is beneficial when dealing with collaboration challenges that appear to be persistent and where two poles are interdependent. Johnson (2014:80) distinguishes between 'problems to solve' and 'polarities to manage':

> Problems to solve have a solution that can be considered an endpoint in a process; i.e., they are solvable. Polarities to manage do not get 'solved'. They are ongoing. We are always in the process of 'solving them' if you will. However, they do not have a clear end-point solution. There is a never-ending shift in emphasis or focus from one pole to the other and back. I have chosen to call the ongoing process managing (polarities).

Polarity management considers the whole picture: the contributions and challenges posed by each role player. Johnson (2014:4-5) uses a polarity map which he divides into two halves (left and right), each half representing a pole (role players). Each pole divides into an upper half and a lower half. The upper half of each pole represents the possibilities or positive outcomes, and the two lower halves the challenges or the adverse outcomes. In his theory, he explains that the 'downside' of one pole is managed by moving to the opposite 'upside' pole. The predicted movement is that, from the upside, a shift will eventually occur to the downside. This is a signal to repeat: to move from the downside to the opposite upside. Johnson (2014:11) calls this movement the polarity two-step. Figure 2.3 shows the four windows and the two halves with an indication of the polarity two-step.
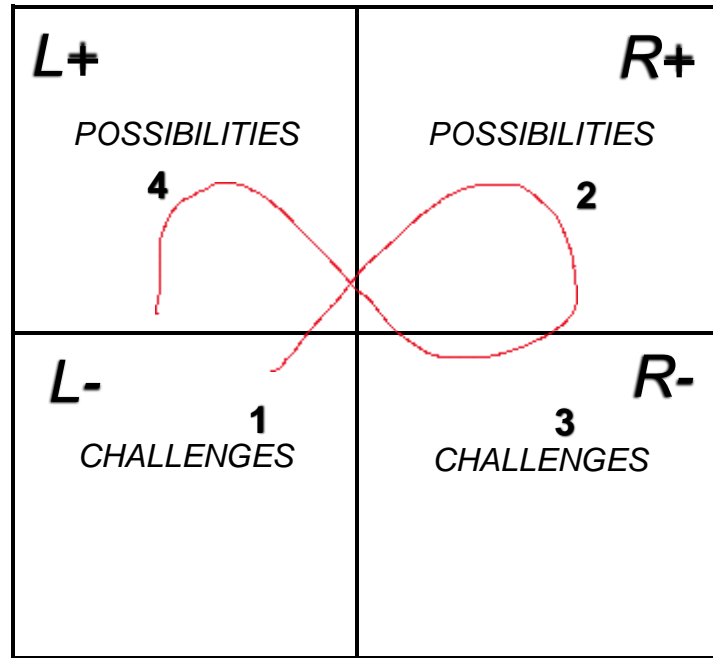
Figure 2.3 The polarity two-step between realities of interdependent poles

In Figure 2.4, the researcher applies the different logics of Eurich (2020) to the model Johnson (2014) suggests. Polarity management is illustrated by looking at client relationships at both poles.

L+	R+
Plentiful full-time workers Efficiency and outcome-driven Professional standards and protocols Strong relation to economic and political markets **Excellent market feedback on service delivery** Inter-sectoral approach and impulse from other sectors Strong strategic position in social market **4**	Plentiful volunteers Charitable and sympathetic approach Act of involvement meaningful **Open** and **inviting relationships** Non-competitive High visibility **2**
Challenging to get volunteers **Contracts** and **agreements regulate** relationships Economic power risky **1** L-	Less full-time employees Not so much outcome-driven Weak relation to political and economic markets **Minimal market feedback on service delivery** Operate as isolated sector **3** R-

Figure 2.4 Different logics in a polarity management frame

In the organisation, relationships with the client system are regulated by contracts and agreements. Such formality seems inappropriate in a ministry culture, with open and inviting relationships. Because the church does not have formal agreements with its 'clients', market feedback (on service delivery) is challenging. Feedback can be managed by moving to the opposite upper pole. A collaborative-integrated approach assists interdependent partners in reaching sophisticated goals and improving serviceability.

It now remains to decide/prove that integration is possible despite apparent challenges. Polarity management might be one option. Nevertheless, integration does not end with the church and the social welfare organisation working together. The WCC at Busan in

2013 raised another concern. Collaboration is more about the *way* of working as it is about *who* is working (together).

2.7.3 The voice of the not-so-silent partner

Even when the church and the church-affiliated social welfare organisation collaborate, there is a third 'partner' to consider. The ecclesiastic landscape changed radically towards the end of the 20th century. Historically, Christian mission was characterised by a movement from a centre to the "unreached territories". What we have today can be described as "world Christianity", mainly caused by multi-directional migration. This is according to the new WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism (WCC 2013:52). The transformational impact is caused by the phenomenon known since Busan 2013 as 'mission from the margins' (WCC 2013:58-59). The shift it brings about is life-giving and directly impacts the approach to mission in a South African context. It is a shift from paternalistic charity to a deeper understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities.

For the DRC, 'mission from the margins' will be a ground-breaking transformation. Van der Merwe (2014:233-234) denotes it as a '*koinonia* approach' and anticipates what such a transformed diaconate in the DRC will look like:

- Context-oriented: True to the nature of missional theology.
- In solidarity with others: the DRC no longer unilaterally sets the agenda of the diaconate but works inclusively with those in need, who become co-workers (partners) in ministry.
- Developmental in nature: It moves away from the traditional charity approach to include the community (individuals or groups) in choosing the intervention and setting the agenda.

Van der Merwe (2014:243) reiterates that a charity approach in the DRC no longer fits the missional paradigm. A new diaconal culture needs to be established and requires a dedicated process. He quotes Swart (2006:17) who warns that a charity approach is

nothing less than 'paternalism inspired by pity'. In contrast, the WCC (2013:64) proclaims the diverse nature of the Christian community in the 21st century and the importance of finding ways of common witness in the spirit of partnership and collaboration.

One can conclude that collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis will have to embrace these essential elements. Even more, the DRC will have to attend to these fundamental principles on all institutional levels: a theology for the diaconate of the DRC, adjustments in the Church Order and regulation of ecclesiastic activities, the development of practice theory, and the development of practice models.

We are now moving towards pragmatic considerations for the development of a microcosm (prototype) that will assist the DRC and its social welfare partners for high-impact collaboration.

2.7.4 Framework for building a prototype

The third movement in the first quadrant of the Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018) is to design a prototype. Little Seeds is a prototype for collaborative-integrated collaboration between Diaconia and Badisa. Scharmer (2009:420) suggests seven criteria when designing a prototype. Gathering that it will be just as applicable to consider these criteria in hindsight when testing the prototype, the researcher will revert to it in Chapter 6 when conclusions from the empirical study are discussed.

Building on the theory of Scharmer (2009), Niemandt et al. (2018:7) presents seven criteria for prototyping:
  i.   Is it relevant – does it matter to the stakeholders involved?
  ii.   Is it revolutionary – is it new? Could it change the game?
  iii. Is it rapid – can you do it quickly? You must be able to develop experiments right away, in order to have enough time to get feedback and adapt (and thus avoid analysis paralysis).

iv.   Is it rough – can you do it on a small scale? Can you do it at the lowest possible resolution that allows for meaningful experimentation? Can you do it locally? Let the local context teach you how to get it right. Trust that the right helpers and collaborators will show up when you issue the right kinds of invitations.

v.   Is it right – can you see the whole in the microcosm that you focus on?

vi.   Is it relationally effective – does it leverage the strengths, competencies and possibilities of the existing networks and communities at hand?

vii. Is it replicable – can you scale it? Any innovation in business or society hinges upon its replicability, whether or not it can grow to scale. In the context of prototyping, this criterion favours approaches that activate local participation and ownership and excludes those that depend on massive infusions of external knowledge, capital, and ownership.

It remains to be tested if Little Seeds focusing on ECD could be a prototype of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that can be applied to other areas in the context of ministry and social welfare interventions. The empirical study and the initial conclusions represent the fourth movement in the Research Strategy for Missional Transformation when the 'early adapters' (Niemandt et al. 2018:7) of Little Seeds share their exposure to the design and first phase of Little Seeds operations.

2.8 Summary

The DRC and affiliated social welfare organisations aim at moving from fragmented diaconal response to integration. Missional theology has had a transformative effect on the DRC's ecclesiology over the past two decades, and the DRC has demonstrated a benevolent intent to serve society's greatest needs. Openness for collaboration is visible declarations and formal agreements. The reformed tradition calls for theological reflection in diaconal ministry and practice theory development. Network thinking will play a central part in such innovation. The research question remains whether Little Seeds can serve as a prototype, helping to facilitate transformation. The next chapter gives a biographical overview with the background and motives for developing Little Seeds for ECD, as well

as some leading environmental influences towards a model of deeper integration.

CHAPTER 3
THE BIOGRAPHY OF AN EVOLVING MODEL

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reflected on the rise of missional theology and its implications for the diaconate of the DRC. It explores the problematic nature of the current reality of separation between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations, operating as parallel structures with minimal collaboration. Preliminary consideration of cooperation and integration begins. Chapter 3 recounts Movement 3, which falls within Quadrant 3 of the research cycle for missional transformation: A prototype is being developed (Movement 3) within the design quadrant of the Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018:6–7). Since the design of innovative practices, according to Niemandt et al. (2018:6), is not traditionally part of theological research, this study's value is to record the design process thoroughly. The process was indeed challenging. Although the intention was clear in Diaconia (the church) and Badisa (the organisation), and both parties were convinced that integration was the way to go, the process was marked by intense uncertainty. Challenges further included mistrust, resistance, and conflict. Nevertheless, the goal of developing a workable model continued to drive the process.

This chapter reports on the overall process of the formation of Little Seeds. The report can be compared to writing a biography. De Vos (2006:269–270) describes the biography approach as a strategy to construct the history of the life of a person or phenomenon. In this case, the development of Little Seeds as a prototype for collaborative-integration between the DRC and an affiliated social welfare organisation is reconstructed. De Vos (2006:269-270) states that extensive information must be collected, and a clear understanding of the context is required. According to De Vos (2006:270), the researcher should not withhold a personal contribution and standpoint into the narrative. The biographical case study is instrumental in the eventual recommendation of diaconal praxis.

The narrative report begins with the rationale for ECD, as the chosen intervention captures all the elements considered in the development of Little Seeds, and ends with an argument on why ECD is such an exciting missional opportunity for the DRC.

3.2 The rationale for Little Seeds

If poverty is the problem, children are the answer. Little Seeds originated within a clear and compelling reality. The African continent, including South Africa, is considered one of the poorest in the world.

The World Bank (2020) reports that although South Africa has made progress in reducing poverty since 1994, the trajectory of poverty reduction was reversed between 2011 and 2015, resulting in approximately 55.5% (30.3 million people) of the population living in poverty. This is threatening to erode some of the gains made since 1994.

> A total of 13.8 million people (25%) are experiencing food poverty. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini index of 63 in 2014/15. Inequality is high, persistent, and has increased since 1994. Extreme poverty is estimated to increase in South Africa by 9% in 2020 (The World Bank 2020).

In 2022, at the time of writing, the official unemployment rate in South Africa is 34.5%. Approximately 18 million South Africans are vulnerable to poverty or need state-supported social grants, relief assistance, or social aid. About 18 million people in South Africa live on state-supported grants (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA], n.d.). The DRC wishes to know how it can help in this desolate situation: "South Africa, how can we help?" (DRC 2002:583).

Interdisciplinary evidence confirms that a nation's development depends on how much it can unlock the potential human capital inherent within its very youngest population. Therefore, child poverty is a significant focal point for developing radical interventions within the broader scope of poverty.

3.2.1 Multidimensional child poverty in South Africa

When Grobbelaar and Jones (2020:22) consider the context and think of children at risk in South Africa, they suggest an ecclesiology (and a missional diaconal hermeneutics) of groaning and vulnerability. They draw this suggestion from the Confession of Belhar, applied to children at risk in South Africa:

> To weep about and with the children is a deep theological ethical value. It is part of our Christian vocation to remember them and their suffering, their plight, and their vulnerabilities and to take them to heart

Vulnerable, they are indeed. In a Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) report by StatsSA (2020, n.p.), it is said that more than 6 out of 10 (62.1%) children aged 0–17 years are multidimensionally poor. The report defines multidimensional poverty as follows:

> A child is said to be multi-dimensionally poor when living in households deprived of at least three out of seven dimensions of poverty.

The seven dimensions of poverty include housing, protection, nutrition, health, information, WASH (drinking water source, sanitation, and waste disposal), and education/child development. The vulnerability of children in South Africa is overwhelming. On average, children in South Africa suffer from four out of the seven dimensions of poverty. Children in rural areas (88.4%) are at greater risk than children in urban areas (73.7%). For children aged 0-4 years, the four dimensions of poverty that put them at risk are housing, WASH, health, and child development. The MODA report indicates that black African children (68.3%) are even more vulnerable than other population groups in South Africa (StatsSA 2020).

Despite the overwhelming reality of at-risk children, the smallest of efforts can have influence. The DG Murray Trust (DGMT 2016) shares the insight of American psychologist Ann Masten in an awareness and information YouTube video on this matter. The documentary asks, '*What will bring about the next real change in South Africa?"* All

children can flourish despite poverty. All it takes is a loving parent, one other significant adult, and opportunities to develop, even though modest and small. She calls it 'ordinary magic'; any caring system (congregation or individual) can contribute.

3.2.2 Vulnerability as a relational concept

In the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (DSD 2015), government offers an extended definition of "vulnerable children", which reads as follows (DSD 2015:14–15):

> Vulnerable children are those who experience compromised caregiving and/or compromised access to quality early childhood development services because of one or more structural, social, economic, geographic, physical, mental, psychosocial, racial, familial or any other risk factors associated with poor access to services, and/or poor early childhood outcomes.

To this definition, the DSD adds categories of vulnerabilities, such as children living in poverty; children experiencing developmental difficulties; children with chronic health conditions, including HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome); orphaned children and other children living without their biological parents; children living in child-headed households; children living in under-serviced rural areas.

From a theological ethical perspective, Grobbelaar and Jones (2020:2–32) reflect on the vulnerability of children. Children are especially vulnerable and at risk because they cannot sufficiently protect themselves or provide for themselves when in need. Children depend on parents and other significant adults for protection and nourishment, especially during the early life period (Grobbelaar and Jones 2020:10). Goodin (1985:112) elaborates on the implied relational aspect of child vulnerability that puts children at risk. He defines child vulnerability as a relational concept that entails dependency. Children depend on somebody to provide something needed for optimal functioning. In this object-agent relationship of dependency and protection lies the opportunity for the church, among other role players.

We will get back to the object-agent relationship and the opportunities it creates for a diaconal ministry when we get to why the DRC should choose ECD as an entry point into the socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Some of the challenges children experiences are complex. Poverty in South Africa is systemic. Nevertheless, some of the challenges children experience are easily overcome if a concerted effort is made by significant role players in a local community that organises themselves for an integrated, holistic, and encompassing approach. One such opportunity is for a local community to ensure that no child is left behind regarding access to quality development opportunities.

3.2.3 Insufficient access to quality development opportunities

If early learning is one of the seven dimensions of risk for young children in South Africa (see section 3.2.1), then access to opportunities is one of the possible interventions. The Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (DSD 2015:11) describes early childhood as the period of human development from birth until the year before a child enters formal school (0-6 years). In these years of human development, the foundation is laid for children's survival, growth, development, and protection across all domains and competencies. The early years of a child offer a "unique and invaluable window of opportunity to secure the optimal development of the child, and by extension, the positive developmental trajectory of a country". Shonkoff and Phillips (2000:6) state that the optimal development of young children depends on their extraordinary capacities for physical, emotional, and social growth and learning in the earliest years of their lives. Once again, no effort is too small to assist a young child in reaching his or her potential.

Unfortunately, access to early learning opportunities alone is not enough. Quality development exposure is needed. Even preschool access during the early years does not mean equal opportunities. Inequality in development opportunities is part of the problem in South Africa. In his report, Poverty and Privilege: Primary School Inequality in South Africa, Spaull (2013:442) concludes that the impact of two years of preschool education is 230% larger for students attending the wealthiest quartile of schools (0.23 standard deviations) compared to students attending the poorest three quartiles of

schools (0.1 standard deviations).

> This is to be expected since students from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to attend well-equipped preschools staffed with trained professionals. In contrast, some preschool facilities offered to the poor are more accurately described as child-minding services, with unqualified staff, few educational resources, and little cognitive stimulation.

In chapter 2 it was indicated how the DRC came to ECD as a missionary opportunity.

3.2.4 A missed opportunity if the church does not act

It is widely agreed that good quality early learning can be the great equaliser South Africa needs, as it allows all children to make the most of the development and educational opportunities they will receive regardless of their background. Eventually, optimal early life development guarantees a positive developmental trajectory for a country (Lundie, Hancox and Farrel 2018:20).

DGMT (n.d.) challenges the church to imagine a South Africa where every person has the opportunity to attain their full potential. Unfortunately, we come from a political past where the potential of the majority was ignored and wasted. The effects of that past continue to exclude people. Our nation will not get off the ground if most people are left behind. The time has come to harness our entire talent pool for a more innovative and inclusive society. Early life is the place to start. A supportive and secure environment, proper nutrition, and exposure to quality stimulation for personal development are needed (DSD 2015:18).

The DRC's decision to explore ministry opportunities in ECD flows from recognising poverty, unemployment, and inequality as symptoms of systemic poverty (DRC 2015:298).

> The best way to fight poverty is through higher education and training, which ultimately give people the opportunity for better jobs and entrepreneurship. Children should enter the education system at a higher school readiness level to succeed. This is exactly where congregations, with expertise within the congregation and without unaffordable expenses, can majorly contribute to poverty prevention.

This, and the discernment of the DRC that its response to the overwhelming and complex socio-economic reality should be consolidated, is the origin and rationale for the development of Little Seeds in the Western Cape Synod of the DRC.

3.3 Initiation of the ECD movement in the Western Cape Synod of the DRC

In 2015, at the Western Cape Synod of the DRC, medical practitioner and chief executive officer of the DG Murray Trust, Dr David Harrison, inspired synod attendees to consider ECD involvement as possibly the most exciting missional opportunity of the 21st century (DRC Western Cape 2015:18). The logic of his presentation on the science of human development was so compelling and inspiring, that the whole assembly agreed on the way forward. Internationally and interdisciplinary consensus on ECD as the most effective intervention against systemic poverty spelt out the work of the ministry group Diaconia (at that time known as 'Armoede en Sorg'[17]) unequivocally. The DRC discerned ECD to be the praxis it was looking for to respond to socio-economic distress in South Africa. At this assembly, Diaconia committed to:

-   developing partnerships with 80 congregations as first adopters;
-   making R1 million per year available as seeding money to get congregation ECD initiatives going;
-   developing other strategic partnerships to support the movement in gaining strength.

The DG Murray Trust introduced Diaconia to SmartStart, but Diaconia's first strategic consideration was to approach Badisa with a proposed joint effort.

3.3.1 Early deliberations between Diaconia and Badisa (2015)

Badisa is a designated child protection organisation with established ECD programmes that include registered centres and childminder projects as a community-based approach.

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[17] Translated as 'Poverty and Care'.

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After some deliberations, and even though the two parties had much in common, Diaconia and Badisa could not find each other in a collaboration agreement. The details are not relevant at this stage, but let's say that a history of growing tension and distance between the DRC and Badisa contributed to the situation. After the failed attempt with Badisa, Diaconia entered a partnership with the social franchise organisation, SmartStart, in 2016 and became one of 14 franchises in South Africa, one of two franchises in the Western Cape, but overall, the only faith-based franchise (until the time of writing in 2022) within the SmartStart group.

Within two years, Diaconia had to approach Badisa again. The fast-growing ministry innovation confronted Diaconia with several operational challenges. ECD is a highly regulated environment and requires multi-disciplinary and systemic involvement. The movement from within the congregations required more and more full-time and hands-on management capacity. Also, it became even more obvious that the DRC was fragmented within itself with the separate existence of Badisa and Diaconia initiatives within the same communities.

3.3.2 New beginnings: 2018–currently

With the growing Diaconia involvement in ECD and personnel fluctuation, renewed efforts for collaboration commenced in 2018. At this stage the researcher became part of the process, being appointed at Diaconia as a dual-skilled social worker and theologian in February 2017.

Two senior management team members of Badisa and two senior management team members of Diaconia was tasked to form a project implementation team (PIT) to explore the current reality and the ideal future for collaboration. A simple graph gave direction to the initial discussions. On a horizontal axis, a continuum from fragmentation to integration is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. The ECD involvement of Badisa and Diaconia is distinctly fragmented and, therefore, on the far end of the continuum.
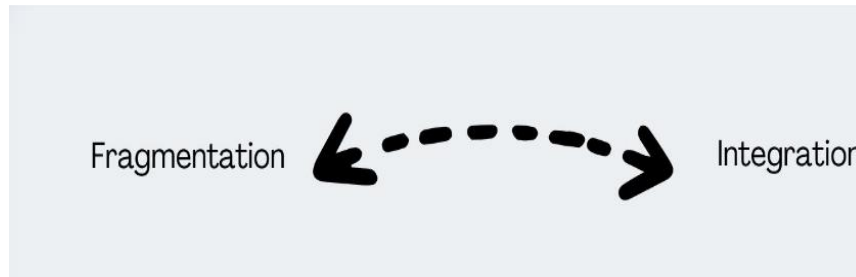
Figure 3.1: Collaboration continuum (PIT 2018)

A vertical axis illustrates a continuum from stagnation to optimisation. If either Diaconia or Badisa wishes to optimise their response to poverty through ECD, integration might be one of the options that need to be explored. A variety of possible shortcomings might lead to stagnation. Working with the same vision and within the same communities, optimisation through a collaborative-integrated approach seems the logical strategy. By combining these two continuums a strategic model started to take shape:
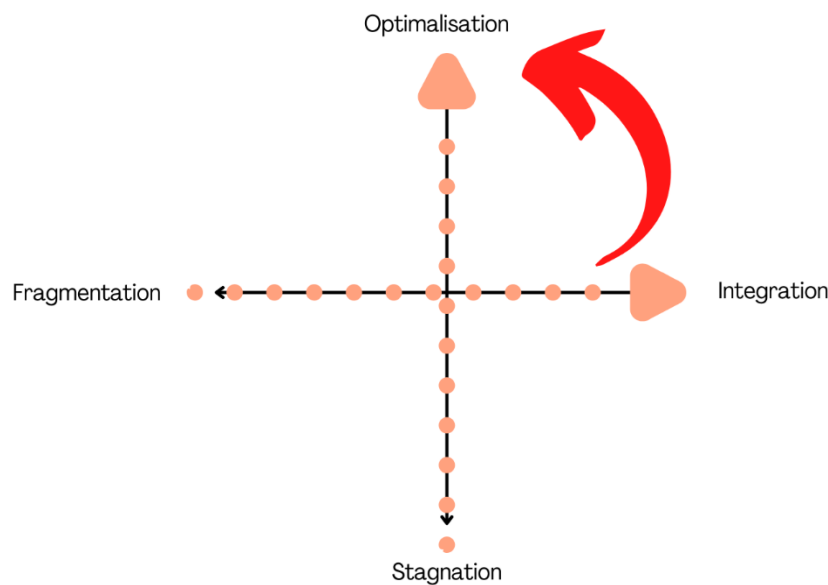
Figure 3.2: Portraying potential shifts (PIT 2018)

Following this strategic line of thinking, the next question was how such an integrated approach would be structured and what the role of the different partners would be.

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3.3.3 The Integrated Service Delivery Model (IDSM)

A familiar model in the Badisa and Diaconia environment came to mind: the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) introduced by the DSD in 2005. The ISDM (DSD 2005) played an important shaping role in the initial thinking, even before starting directly with the design of the Little Seeds model. It is especially the way in which different role players are brought together, the levels of intervention that are distinguished, and the allocation of different roles and responsibilities as an institutional mechanism, that aroused interest at Badisa and Diaconia.

The rationale of the ISDM is to provide a framework for the transformation of fragmented social service delivery. The framework operates from a developmental approach and includes service providers as well as individuals and communities at stake. It encourages continuous learning and the ongoing strengthening of a shared vision which is decisive for collaboration (DSD 2005:13–14). The model goes into detail on its desired outcome, principles on which it operates, policies underlying its functioning, norms and values, differentiated roles and responsibilities, and levels of intervention. It is clear that the model assumes synergy and collective impact through collaboration and executes a very specific change management plan to accomplish it.

What particularly attracted the attention of Badisa and Diaconia is the developmental approach of the ISDM and the levels of interventions with specific role definitions within these levels. Several references have been made to the DRC's intention to move from charity to development, thus the interest in the ISDM approach. Four levels of intervention are proposed, and role distribution from a position of strength within each of these levels is distinguished.

The four levels of intervention overlap and provide a continuum of services:

(i) Prevention

      This is the most important aspect of social service delivery. Services delivered at this level

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are aimed at strengthening and building the capacity and self-reliance of the client. At this level, the client is functioning at an adequate level but there is a possibility of at-risk behaviour at a later stage (DSD 2005:30).

(ii) Early intervention (non-statutory)

Services delivered at this level make use of developmental and therapeutic programmes to ensure that those who have been identified as being at risk are assisted before they require statutory services, more intensive intervention, or placement in alternative care (DSD 2005:30).

(iii) Statutory intervention/residential/alternative care

At this level an individual has either become involved in some form of court case or is no longer able to function adequately in the community, and services are aimed at supporting and strengthening the individual involved. At this level, a client may have to be removed from his/her normal place of abode, either by court order or on the recommendation of a service provider, to alternative care (e.g., foster care), or placed in a residential facility (DSD 2005:30).

(iv) Reconstruction/aftercare.

The previous intervention is aimed at providing alternative care which should wherever possible be a temporary measure, followed by reconstruction/aftercare services to enable the client to return to the family or community as quickly as possible. Services delivered at this level are aimed at reintegration and support services to enhance self-reliance and optimal social functioning (DSD 2005:30).
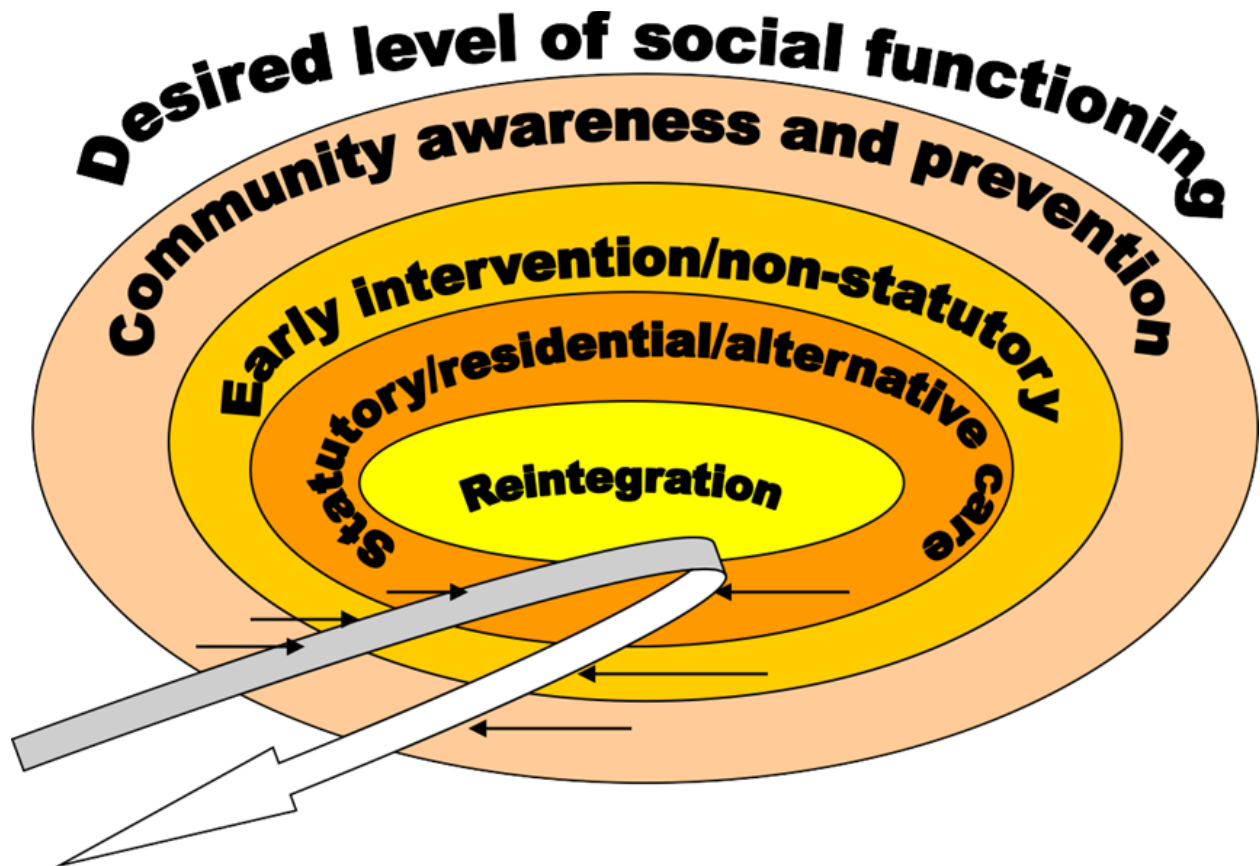
Figure 3.3: ISDM levels of intervention
(Source; DSD 2005:31)

The arrow in figure one implies that clients can enter or exit the system at any of the levels.

Considering the historical relationship between the DRC and Badisa, it became clear in these early deliberations how the third level of intervention (statutory intervention) slowly escalated the distance between the DRC and its affiliated welfare organisations. The distance developed to such an extent that later little or no collaboration was evidenced in any of the other three levels of intervention. In comparison, each of these three levels has substantial potential for collaboration.

The foundation was laid to explore a joint venture with Badisa management and Diaconia management committing to the process. With the assistance of Creatividad Consultancy,

a desktop review followed, and a report was submitted (Van der Westhuizen 2019:1-51).

3.4 The unfolding of a facilitated design process

This section reports on the period between December 2018 to December 2020. This period was characterised by the involvement of various external facilitators, each with a different assignment and role in the development process. At first, a desktop review was done to explore the landscape between Badisa and Diaconia and identify early indicators of challenges and possibilities in a joint venture. The second intervention addressed identity development, and for the third, an organisational culture and leadership process was undertaken. The fourth intervention was a more prolonged facilitated change management process.

The desktop review was conducted from December 2018 – January 2019 and a written report was delivered.

3.4.1 Creatividad Consultancy: Desktop review

A situational analysis was conducted with the use of questionnaires, follow-up interviews with all staff members, and written documents that included job descriptions, programme outlines, minutes of meetings, stakeholder contracts, and other relevant documents revealed in the process.

3.4.1.1 Invested interest and significant contributions

The desktop review made it clear that Diaconia and Badisa both had an established interest in ECD, although Badisa's involvement was more extended than that of Diaconia. Both organisations are in direct relationship with the DRC and the URC, and both churches share the conviction of a calling to reach out to young children in South Africa in a meaningful way. From a position of strength, both Diaconia and Badisa are able to add value to a partnership. Diaconia, through its congregations, has a footprint in every community. This opens a door for Badisa to allow its service offering to reach more communities. Badisa, on the other hand, is an experienced implementer of ECD services

within legislative frameworks and policy. Furthermore, Badisa is familiar with a developmental approach to community engagement, compared to the DRC's charity approach, which the church is aware of and seeks transformation in its ministry methods. Diaconia and Badisa share the belief that collaboration will increase impact.

Regarding existing ECD programme applications, it is clear from the desktop review that consolidation between Diaconia and Badisa will deliver a more comprehensive and one-stop service solution to congregations and communities and prevent overlap.

3.4.1.2 Comprehensive basket of products

The Creatividad report lists the ECD programmes offered jointly by the parties at the time of the desktop review (Van der Westhuizen 2019:13-15).

Badisa programmes (since 2003–2019):
- Isiqualo Day programme (aka Magdalena Home). Pregnancy to 1,000 days of life. The programme includes healthcare for pregnant mothers, emotional support and counselling, family planning, infant care, skills development, entrepreneurial training, and adoption services. This is a highly institutionalised and programme-structured service that is offered with limited reach.
- ECD centres (15 centres) for 0–5-year-old children that offer a nurturing, caring and safe environment for children to develop, be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, and socially competent and able to learn.
- 'Boksies vir Buksies' and 'Boksies vir Babas'[18] – home-based ECD programmes for childminders. A resource box and training are offered for adults who care for children 0-5 years who do not have access to a crèche or ECD centre. These programmes are limited to where Badisa programmes operate.
- Social work offices (programmes) where statutory care for children is secured when needed (Van der Westhuizen 2019:13-21).

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[18]Translated as boxes for toddlers and babies.

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Diaconia programmes (since 2016–2019):
- SmartStart franchised programme for children 3–5 years. SmartStart is a highly regulated and quality-driven programme in which childminders are selected, trained, and monitored. It allows for and requires local community (congregation) involvement and is designed to scale.
- Nal'ibali reading groups for children 3–9 years. The objective is to read for fun and develop children through storytelling and activities. It is an easy-entrance approach with limited requirements for training and skills development of facilitators.
- The Embrace programme for pregnant mothers. Pregnant mothers from different walks of life meet in a social space where friendships are encouraged and where mothers have the opportunity to support each other and learn together about the essentials of the first 1,000 days of a child's life (from conception to two years) (Van der Westhuizen 2019:22-28).

An early indication of external factors that will need to be managed in the event of a joint venture includes the current involvement of stakeholders. Both Diaconia and Badisa are obligated and bound to existing external stakeholders.

3.4.1.3 Stakeholder management

Existing stakeholders included funders, franchisee contracts, service provider agreements, partnering organisations working within the same sector, as well as congregations and communities investing in the ECD programmes. Programme selection and implementation within a joint venture need to be carefully considered in order not to compromise existing commitments and agreements (including sponsorships and subsidies).

3.4.1.4 The readiness of staff for a joint venture

The desktop review revealed conditional acceptance from all staff members of the proposed collaboration. At the management level, advanced discussions have already taken place. Several documents have been compiled and drafted conceptualising the process, potential structures, and operational matters. Operational team members

showed interest, although there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what such a new structure of integration would look like (Van der Westhuizen 2019:43).

The desktop review concludes with a preliminary proposal of possible unique roles that can be fulfilled by the respective parties in the case of a joint ECD unit.

3.4.1.5 Preliminary indication of the division of roles

Diaconia, representing congregations of the DRC and URC, is well positioned to make a unique contribution to an integrated approach (Van der Westhuizen 2019:45).
- Access to DRC and URC congregations, synods, and other denominations (the ecumenical church).
- Raising awareness and mobilising the ECD movement.
- Promote ECD as a best practice for poverty eradication and all its other benefits for human development.
- Extract resources, build networks, and manage identified partnerships such as SmartStart, Nal'ibali, and Embrace.
- Manage joint responsibility for the sustainability of the church and the organisation's service offering of ECD.
- Benevolent intent and creative execution of support and relief to those in need.

Badisa, with its organisational experience, has a unique contribution to make as part of an integrated approach (Van der Westhuizen 2019:46).
- Experienced strategy and project development skills.
- An established developmental approach.
- Existing standard operational procedures.
- Established human resource and monetary management experience, organisation development, and asset management.
- Expert legislation compliance and governance.
- Brand establishment, marketing, and fundraising capability and expertise.

3.4.1.6 Early challenge observations

The Creatividad desktop review revealed challenges around the distinctive use of professional or subject-specific language (Van der Westhuizen 2019:47–51). A new language house will have to be built that will be understood and embraced by both church and the organisation.

An own identity needs to be developed. The innovation of integration needs to establish a distinctive identity to prevent the likeliness of either Diaconia or Badisa from rising and disappearing within one of the affiliates. A participatory approach, including all staff members, will contribute to early and shared ownership.

The intended integration will have to be carefully negotiated with all invested stakeholders to manage risk. Their understanding of the process and implications for existing service level agreements need to be clear.

Cognisance needs to be taken of the capacities and capabilities of staff members. Will staff members be able to cope with the possible change of roles within reasonable measures? Is there an early indication of capacity gaps? Any new appointments, such as the envisioned programme manager, will have to be thoroughly introduced to the intended model and outcomes. This might be challenging in a complex process of bringing two worlds (church and organisation) with distinctive cultures and operational approaches together.

A personal account of early challenges is that the process was undoubtedly and clearly painful. Uncertainty of the process, leadership issues, distrust from previous collaborative efforts, power struggles, ego tensions, organisational culture, and professional distance (between the two disciplines) are but some of the symptoms of the agile initial phase. It was only the benevolent intent of both parties, and especially members of management, that sustained the process through all the obstacles.

The Creatividad Consultancy desktop review (2019) prepared the way for the more in-

depth design phase facilitated by Barry Matthews Consultancy (BMC). But before the BMC process commenced, the joint venture was branded.

3.4.2 Out of the Blue Creative Communication Solutions: Identity development (branding)

It was no easy task to find a name for this joint venture and brand the initiative. Challenges surrounding existing branding and established identities of both Diaconia and Badisa with their respective programmes and partnerships called for expert guidance. The help of Out of the Blue Creative Communication Solutions (OTB) was enlisted. A creative and participatory process was followed to arrive at the meaningful name, 'Little Seeds'. OTB developed and handed over the branding with a supportive communication identity. The Little Seeds logo can be seen in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: Little Seeds logo (Out of the Blue 2019)

In May 2019, Little Seeds was launched at the Western Cape Synod of the DRC. The branding was immediately applauded, but the challenge was to understand how it affected the existing identity of Diaconia and Badisa. It remained to be seen whether the

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new brand would set in and take on a life of its own as a collaborative-integrated initiative between church and organisation. But a name is not the beginning and end of a new initiative. Many organisational obstacles were still on the horizon.

In July 2019, Little Seeds ran a two-day organisational culture and leadership workshop led by a specialist facilitator, Paul Durrant from Clearstream Consulting. The outcomes of this workshop gave early indications of a change management process towards the ideal future of effective collaboration and integration.

3.4.3 The Paul Durrant organisation culture and leadership workshop

The group that participated in the workshop consisted of the strategic and operational staff of Badisa and Diaconia, as well as representation from communities that included local pastors, ministry leaders, and ECD programme leaders. The facilitator used scientific tools to guide the team in a reflection on the current reality of the organisation culture and leadership and steps towards change if needed.

3.4.3.1 The Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)

The OCAI comes from the work of Cameron and Quinn (2011), *Diagnosing and changing organisational culture: based on the competing values framework.* A wide variety of organisational phenomena are studied with the help of this tool. The instrument uses questionnaires to measure the current reality and explore the visualised future reality. Respondents could first assess the current organisational culture, and then, in a second assessment, describe how they foresee a future culture where partners join in close collaboration.

The framework presents four dominant culture types that potentially dominate a specific organisation's culture. The four cultures are called (i) a clan culture, (ii) an adhocracy culture, (iii) a hierarchical culture, and (iv) a market culture. Each culture type represents a predominant orientation within the organisation that is either collaborative, creative, controlling, or competing. It also specifies leadership characteristics, value drivers, and a theory of effectiveness within each cultural type. Research showed that most

organisations develop a dominant cultural style (Cameron and Quinn 2011:46). Figure 3.5 below summarises and indicates the four culture types and their respective characteristics. The thesis does not aim to discuss the theory and practices of Cameron and Quinn (2011) in detail, but simply intends to report on observations during the workshop that contributed to the unfolding of the Little Seeds narrative. The outcome of the Paul Durrant process gives an important glimpse into the prototype's distinctive and desired organisational culture and the role of leadership as it unfolds. This insight will speak to specific elements of the development of a collaborative-integrated model for the church and organisation in general.
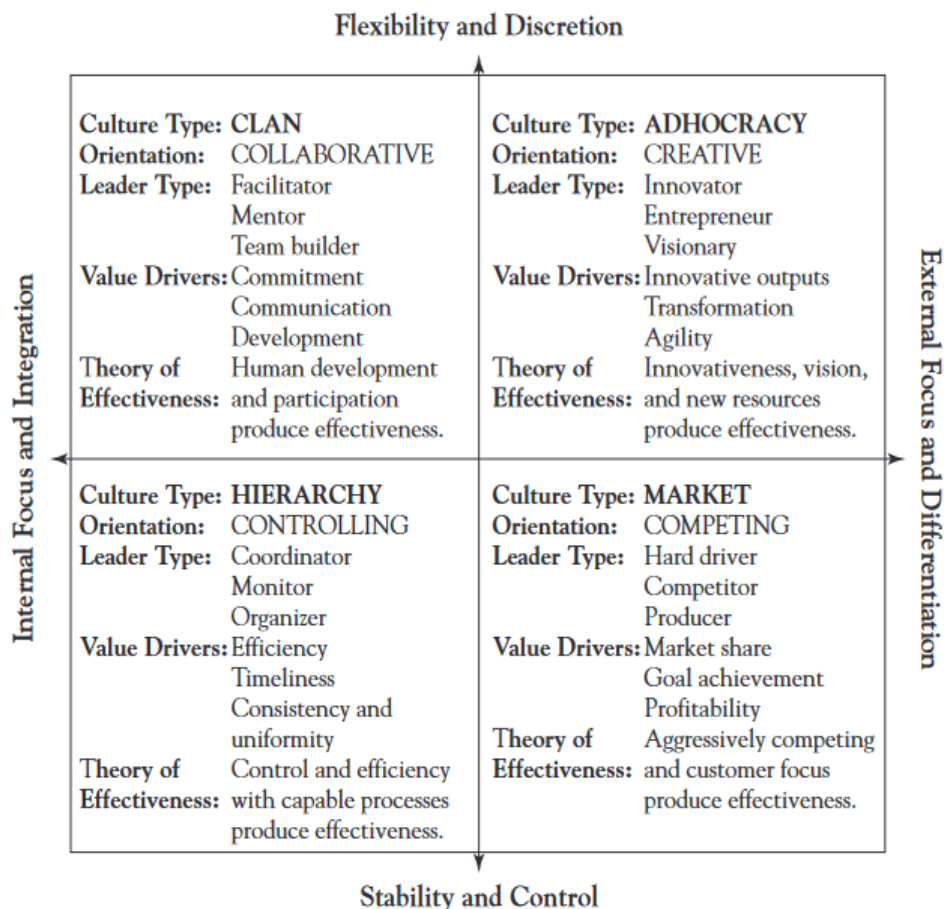
Figure 3.5: Culture types and their unique attributes
(Source: Cameron and Quinn 2011:46)

- **The place of the workshop in the bigger design**

At this point in time, the Little Seeds deliberations were on their way for about twelve months. The purpose of the workshop was to consolidate stakeholders in a desired future for its organisational culture and leadership style. In hindsight, it is questionable whether the team was ready for this exercise and, given the complexity of issues around management and culture, if two days only with no follow-up was sufficient. Nonetheless, the OCAI model assisted the newly formed Little Seeds team by confronting important issues and embarking on the road forward.

- **The current reality**

Participants received a questionnaire beforehand which they had to complete and submit for scoring prior to the commencement of the workshop. Six key dimensions of organisational culture are assessed with the tool (Cameron and Quinn 2011:24-28), namely:

1) Dominant characteristics
2) Organisational leadership
3) Management of employees
4) Organisation glue
5) Strategic emphasis
6) Criteria of success

The facilitator scored the questionnaires in preparation for the workshop, and then used the results to explain the theory and illustrate the measured outcome of the current perceived culture at that time. Figure 3.6 was used demonstratively to facilitate this session.
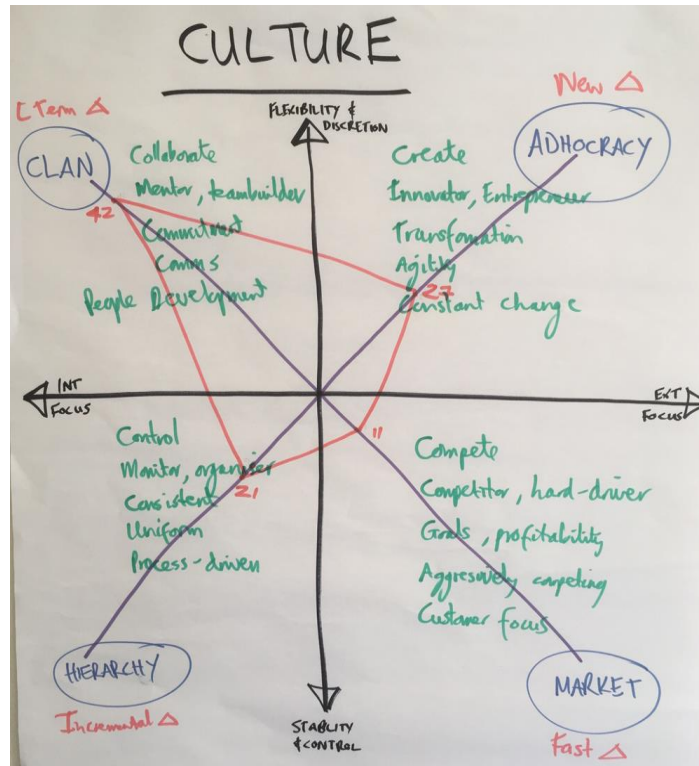
Figure 3.6: Little Seeds' measured experience of current organisational culture (Source: Durrant, 2019)

Broad indications from the OCAI questionnaire reveal the following regarding the Little Seeds team's experience of organisation culture before the workshop:

- Little Seeds does not see itself as having a competitive culture. Instead, Little Seeds considers itself part of a movement rather than in opposition to similar programmes.
- The dominant leadership style in Little Seeds is collaborative in nature. Elements of creative leadership and also of a hierarchical style is present, but not dominant.
- Leaders act as mentors and teambuilders.

The above characteristics describe a dominant clan-type organisation and leadership style. It has been mentioned that the model works with competing values. This means that a higher score on one end indicates the major approach. This does not mean that there are no elements of the opposing possibilities also part of the prevailing reality as

seen in Figure 3.6. Scores measured in the adhocracy-type culture can be very complementary to the former. With the two highest scores (clan-type and adhocracy-type) in the upper quadrants of the window, the overall attribute suggested is flexibility and discretion (versus stability and control).

Overall, it is clear that a sense of collaboration and creativity prevails in the current perception of the organisation and leadership culture at this time, which is indeed significant and encouraging for the vulnerable place where Little Seeds still is in its process. The facilitated process now proceeded to work from the current reality to the ideal future. The larger part of the two days was spent to reach this outcome. It is not necessarily the case that there will be major differences between the current reality and the envisioned ideal future, but in the case of Little Seeds, there have been notable shifts.

- **From collaboration to creative collaboration**

It became clear in the discussions that the team is aware of uncertainties moving forward as a new team into the communities. Badisa traditionally has clear household rules and protocols for managing programmes. Diaconia, collaborating with congregations who become part of the ECD movement, are still figuring out the role the local congregation should play. This reality requires freedom for innovation, agility, and the ability to work in uncertainty. An adhocracy culture type supports a creative environment better and allows for the influence of the external environment.

A clear shift was visible in the second measurement of the overall culture type. Figure 3.7 below illustrates the unanimous outcomes of the Little Seeds team with their picturing of an ideal future culture. The Little Seeds team slightly favours an adhocracy culture type. But the difference is so insignificant, that one should consider managing the two poles equally. By doing this, you will arrive at a culture that is equally creative (adhocracy-type culture) and collaborative (clan-type culture). Cameron and Quinn (2011:43-44) speak of

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"tents rather than palaces" in their description of the adhocracy-type[19] culture. It seems that the Little Seeds team wishes for a culture type that accommodates both tents and palaces.
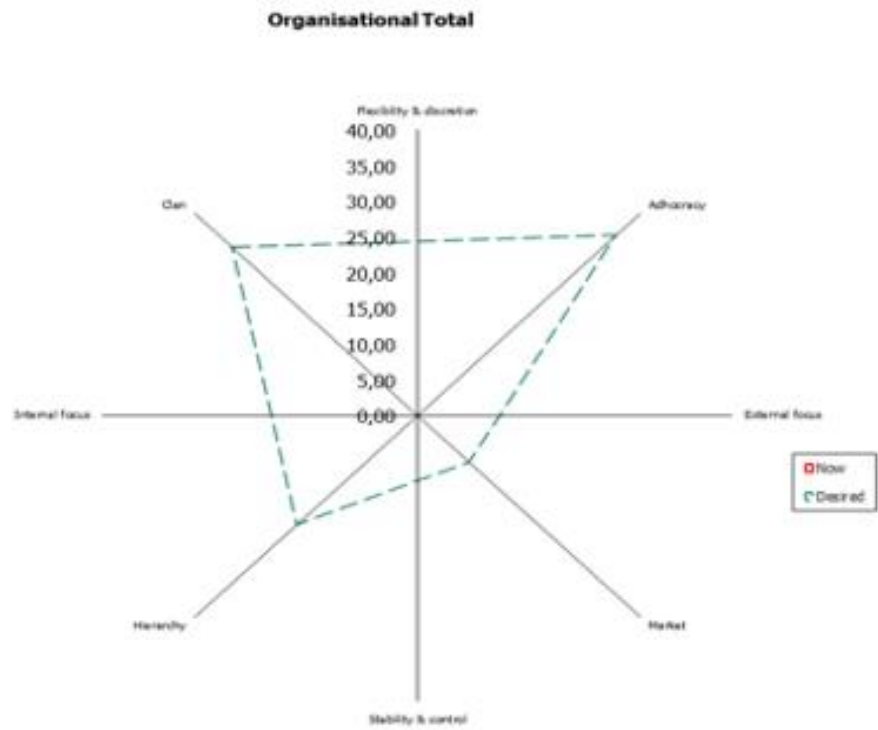
Figure 3.7: Overall organisational culture
(Source: Cameron and Quinn 2011)

The OCAI tool allows for partial measurement of cultural attributes as well. What follows is a summary of the separate elements that form the overall picture that the participants foresee for the future.

- **Employees want to be part of a creative family**

Participants had the opportunity to measure each of the elements of an organisation's culture separately. The results are presented in tabular form (Table 3.1). Appendix A

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[19] "Adhocracy" comes from the word *ad hoc.* which usually refers to a temporary task force or committee that disbands as soon as its task is completed (Cameron and Quinn 2011:43-44*).*

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shows complete graphs for each of these elements.

Table 3.1: Elements of the Little Seeds perception of an ideal future culture (Durrant 2019).

ELEMENT	CULTURE TYPE IN AN IDEAL FUTURE	ATTRIBUTES THAT APPEAL TO LITTLE SEEDS' PARTICIPANTS
Dominant characteristics	Adhocracy	A creative space, agile, with room for innovation and potential for effectiveness with added resources gained through partnership.
Organisation leadership	Hierarchical, Clan, Adhocracy	Envisioning coordinating leaders, highly visionary, who can organise, mentor, and build teams.
Employee management	Clan, Adhocracy	Some basic assumptions of the clan culture type are that: it is a friendly environment best managed through teamwork and employee development; people share a lot of themselves in the workplace; there are high levels of commitment and loyalty; and upholding the tradition is evident. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on teamwork, participation, and consensus. The organisation is almost like an extended family (Cameron and Quinn 2011:41-44).
The glue that sustains the organisation	Clan, Adhocracy, Market	In the clan type, the organisation is held together by loyalty or tradition. Commitment to experimentation and innovation is significant to the adhocracy type. Also, the emphasis is on being on the leading edge. In the market type, what appeals to the Little

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		Seeds team is not so much the emphasis on winning or being the best in the field, as it is the long-term focus on the achievement of measurable goals and targets (Durrant 2019; Cameron and Quinn 2011:67).
Strategic emphasis	Clan, Adhocracy	
Success drivers	Clan, Hierarchy, Adhocracy	Working in an overly complex reality, it seems that the Little Seeds team is drawn to elements of a hierarchy culture type. This includes relying on capable processes. Consistency and uniformity are important. Part of the leadership function in this culture type is to organise, coordinate, and monitor. Hierarchy leaders are rule enforcers, which seems to be inevitable within ECD work in general. Hierarchy culture activities include improving measurements, process control, and systematic problem-solving.

In the second phase of the workshop, the group spent only a short time getting a basic understanding of the practical and very useful social business model canvas tool. With the ideal organisation culture established, specific action steps must follow.

3.4.3.2 The Social Business Model Canvas

This tool was proposed in 2005 by Alexander Osterwalder. Paul Durrant used the social business model canvas to facilitate the Little Seeds team in a reflection on different elements of a potential business plan for the new ECD unit. The team had to reflect on its value proposition, key partners, client relationships, key resources, and key activities. A concept report with the outcome of this discussion was delivered. However, this report only gave very tentative answers, and it was the responsibility of the team to take control

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of further strategic development. It became the mandate of BMC, considering all previous process reports, to support further organisational growth.

3.4.3.3 Unresolved questions

After the two days of workshop deliberations, three questions were left on a so-called 'parking lot'. The questions were significant.

The first question was directed to Diaconia: Can the church be clear on how it sees the involvement of the organisation (Badisa) in the ECD movement? The second question came from church leaders present and was directed to the facilitator: Will it be possible to offer a similar process in a local context? The third question came from a Diaconia team member: Do we know whether congregations desire this type of collaboration, and do they have any needs and frustration that we are unaware of? Answers to all these questions lie in the unfolding of the Little Seeds narrative.

Six months later, BMC was appointed to oversee a comprehensive change management process.

Summary of this section: A two-day workshop with an extended Little Seeds team aims at (i) arriving at a clear understanding of the current organisational culture and leadership approach in a newly established team, and (ii) creating a consolidated expectation of the future that can be developed and implemented systematically. Little Seeds arrives at a desired vision for the future where the best of two culture types are managed, i.e., an adhocracy type and a clan type. In merging these two types, Little Seeds envisions innovation in collaboration in a family-like setting that allows flexibility and creativity.

3.4.4 Barry Matthews Consultants: Design and operations

The BMC process commenced in December 2019 and concluded on 30 September 2020. It comprised two distinct phases, namely: the design phase, and the operations phase. By this time the proverbial plane was already in the air. Without any official structural

changes, Diaconia and Badisa started planning and working together alongside each other on a day-to-day basis, but it became essential to have more clarity on the way forward: how will the unit be structured?; what will the role of different team members be?; what will the reporting lines be?; and how will this all play out in communities, in congregations, and in existing Badisa programmes?

3.4.4.1 The design phase

The first task in the design phase was consolidating the strategic direction and alignment of a joint venture. It was a dynamic undertaking with several components as illustrated in Figure 3.8 below.
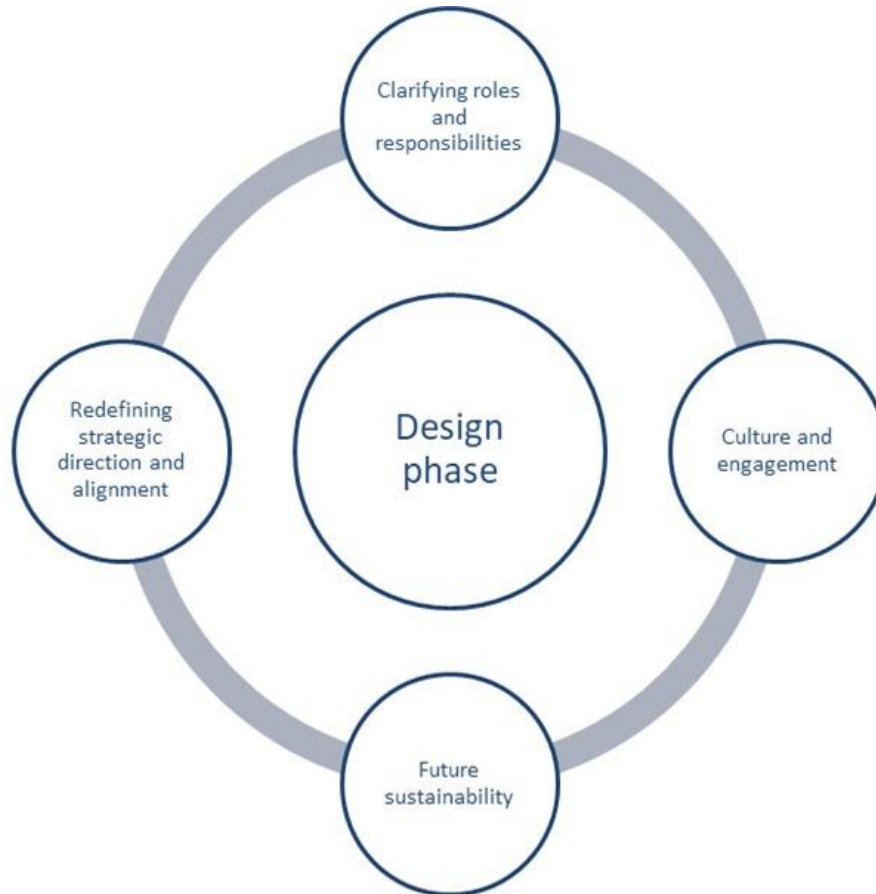
Figure 3.8: Components of the BCM design phase (Source: BMC 2020:3)

- **Redefining the strategic direction and alignment**

This included the unpacking of the Little Seeds strategy, creating a high-level operational plan, and a proposal of an organisational structure. This immediately contributed to good governance and making support available.

- **Clarification of roles and responsibilities**

Clear roles and responsibilities required a specific skills and responsibilities analysis of all staff members and reshuffling if needed. Immediate and long-term deliverables depended on clear roles and responsibilities. A change management process had to be implemented.

- **Culture and engagement**

The current climate and shortcomings within the Little Seeds team, the external context referring to primary stakeholders (DRC, URC, and Badisa programmes), and other stakeholders with an invested interest had to be analysed. A high-level communication and marketing plan was delivered. Cultural differences remain one of the most obvious challenges, possibly up to this day. This reminds the researcher of Eurich's (2020:4-5) theory of different logics in volunteer organisations and the church, as discussed in the previous chapter. Is this a paradox that can be overcome?

- **Future sustainability**

High-level steps for sustainability were identified. The corporate identity of Little Seeds had to be solidified. Supporting factors included the look and feel of its branding, a performance-driven website, cohesive brand messages, monitoring tools, and a solid stakeholder management plan.

One of the outcomes of this component in the design phase is a brand narrative report

delivered by BMC, which must be read with the vision and mission statement that was by now agreed upon.

Vision:

An Early Childhood Development movement that enables children in the Cape Region to grow and thrive.

Mission:

Inspired by our God-given calling, we promote, facilitate and provide accessible ECD services in areas of need in collaboration with faith communities and a network of partners.

We define ECD Services on two levels, namely:
- The physical, psychological, cognitive, and social development of children between birth and 6 years and
- Strengthening child protection by creating safe and secure environments for children

A synodical task team of the DRC commented on the mission statement with a critical observation that 'spiritual development' is omitted, after which it was added. This was a crucial observation, as the spirituality of the diaconate needs to be protected to not degenerate into a mere secular paradigm of social involvement.

BRAND NARRATIVE FOR LITTLE SEEDS

Little Seeds is a newly established Early Childhood Development (ECD) unit, which came into being through a need to unify ECD programs and services delivered separately by the church, Diaconia – a joint service group of the Dutch Reformed Church (Western Cape) and Uniting Reformed Church (Cape) - and Badisa, a faith-based designated Child Protection Organisation (CPO).

It has been created to allow such a dedicated ECD unit to maintain a narrow and sharp focus on early childhood development to systemically address inequality and poverty in the Cape Region of South Africa. This new structure is founded on the singular shared vision that children are the future and that each child deserves access to quality early learning to grow and thrive. Little Seeds invests in empowering, supporting, training and guiding communities to develop and stimulate their children in the most critical first five years of their life. We do this by utilising our local knowledge and expertise in the field, forming partnerships with like-minded organisations, and becoming part of a national ECD movement, thereby accessing networks where even more opportunities are waiting to be tapped in.

The union of the organisation's well-established governance, structures, and processes, combined with the church's unique reach to communities, increases access and allows for building local capacity, which leads to a more profound impact and sustainable change. Well-established partnerships allow for increased synergies. This collective movement offers resolute and comprehensive ECD services to the neediest communities. Little Seeds aims to deliver Advocacy Awareness, Prevention and Early Intervention services. The basket of services includes:

- SmartStart focuses on training and supporting community members to start their micro-enterprises in the home-based, quality ECD for children between the ages of 3 and 5.
- Day Mother program for stimulating children between 0 and 5 years.
- Reading clubs aim to raise awareness about the importance of reading for fun.
- Registration and management of ECD centres through our expert knowledge and experience in this field.

This service offering is perfectly aligned with current opportunities in South Africa. Grounded in its participation, innovation, excellence, and stewardship values, the union between church and organisation has led to its competitive and innovative edge in the ECD space (BMC 2020).

Figure 3.9 The BMC brand narrative 2020 (BMC 2020)

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3.4.4.2 The operations phase

BMC (2020) stood in the gap as a change manager for some time, specifically in this phase in which the strategy was implemented. The operations phase included the components in Figure 3.10 below (BMC 2020:7-15).

Figure 3.10: Components of the BCM operations phase (Source: BMC 2020)

- **Project Structuring**

In this phase, key performance areas of team members received focused attention as it was shifted once integration progressed. It required ongoing consultations with staff members with reports to the executive committee. The buy-in of staff members was critical. Clearly defined and communicated role descriptions supported delivery and increased accountability.

- **Strategy Implementation Facilitation**

The operations of Little Seeds continued, with organisation development still in progress. As circumstances required, strategic objectives were adjusted to ensure that expected outcomes were achieved.

- **Project Enablement and Reporting**

A detailed project plan with deliverables were agreed upon and communicated to team members. Reporting to the executive team served the purpose of gaining support to overcome challenges as they arose.

- **People Management**

In an attempt to strengthen cohesiveness, weekly team meetings were held, and team members were allowed to take the lead in facilitating meetings. Information sharing and transparency were held high to improve trust in all levels of management and operations.

- **Project amendments due to forced COVID lockdown-related changes**

COVID-19 disrupted the operations phase as it fell within the period of hard lockdown and the uncertain times that followed. Disruption was managed by determining and managing new outcomes for this time. In retrospect, this challenging time highlighted the strengths of both systems. Badisa's initiative-taking management of protocol and standard operational practices, coupled with congregations' central placement and actual action during disaster events, showed excellent synergy.

When BMC exited the process in September 2020, Diaconia and Badisa were ready to propose placing the Little Seeds initiative within the management domain of Badisa to

their respective executive committees.

3.4.5 Organisational structure and placement of Little Seeds

During its meeting on 16 February 2021, the Management Board of Badisa agreed to register Little Seeds as a programme of Badisa. This was deemed appropriate for the initial development of this joint venture but does not exclude alternative options in terms of an independent legal entity in future. The management of this programme is jointly done by Badisa and Diaconia leadership, who will eventually be replaced with a representative and independent management board.
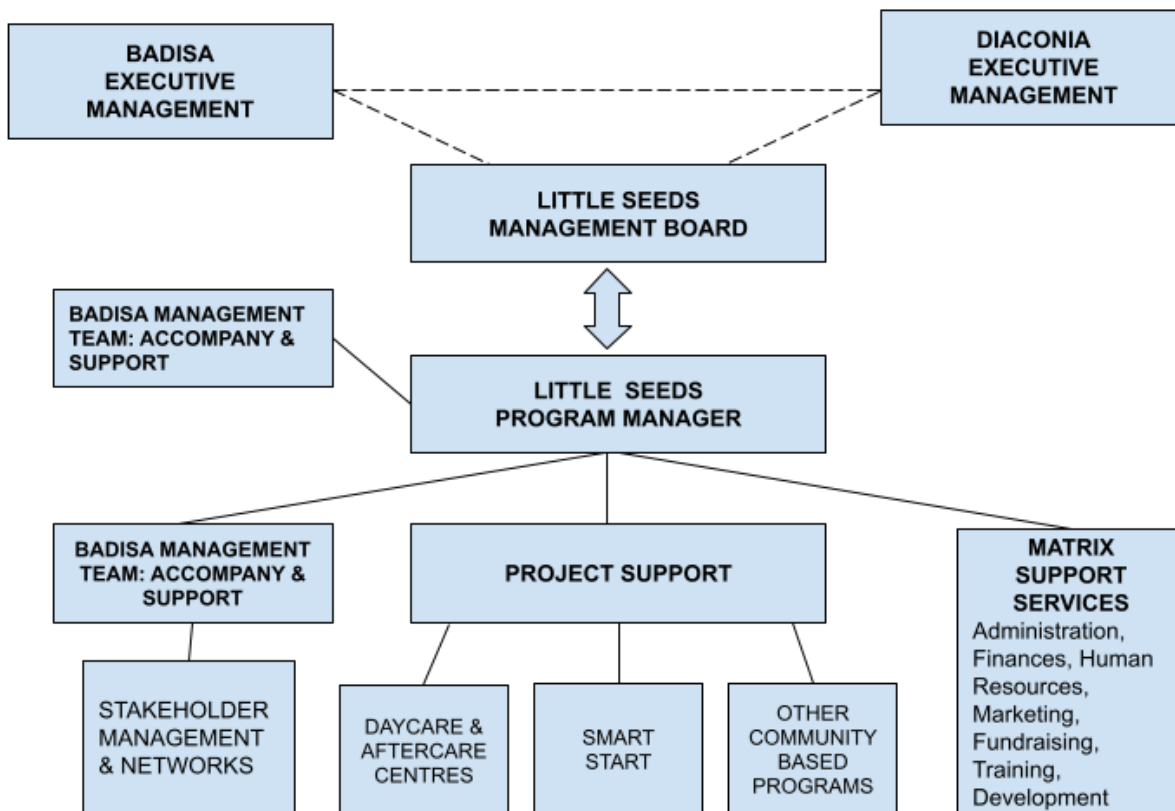
Figure 3:11: Little Seeds organogram (BMC 2020:3)

According to Figure 3.11, strategic oversight remains with a shared interest between Badisa and Diaconia. Equal representation of Badisa and Diaconia assumes responsibility for strategy, oversight, and policy. The joint ministry is registered as a sub-committee of the Badisa Management Board. However, reporting is done directly to Badisa and Diaconia executive boards. Operational management is overseen by support systems primarily from the Badisa management programme until other options can be considered.

By now, the context is clear (poverty), the strategy has been discerned (ECD), and the theology backs it all up. Now, the DRC must grab this opportunity and answer its calling in practice.

3.5 ECD as an opportunity for diaconal praxis

ECD creates an opportunity for meaningful engagement with social needs in society. A theological foundation to motivate such involvement is evident. Schoeman (2012:1) warns that developing appropriate practices is the next challenge apart from a good theological basis. The traditional DRC welfare project and evangelist approach will not suffice if the DRC wishes to contribute to social transformation in a profound systemic way. If the DRC wishes to make a relevant contribution, the church must enter meaningful partnerships. The local congregation must seek and build these partnerships of trust within its communities and engage in holistic developmental activities. ECD is a prototype worth exploring for precisely such an approach.

The development of Little Seeds and the theological focus on ECD as an intervention strategy did not occur in isolation. Movements elsewhere in the ecumene and in the DRC itself have continuously influenced the unfolding of the prototype. Two momentous recent studies reflect on the opportunity that ECD provides for developing diaconal praxis. Both studies lie the foundation for diaconal practice theory. Both groups of role players involved in these studies are closely connected to Little Seeds.

The first is an exploratory research project by Common Good, a Cape Town-based

Christian NGO working to equip churches and Christians in social justice. Common Good conducted a multi-disciplinary exploratory research process that would provide some preliminary answers to the question: "What is the specific contribution a local church can make in support of the first 1,000 days (conception to two years) of a child's life in Cape Town?" (Lundie et al. 2018).

The second is a DRC, Northern Cape Synod research project. Van der Westhuizen, Smith and Beukes (2019) explore collaboration between congregations in rural areas and Caritas, a church-affiliated social welfare organisation. This study wishes to answer the question of what the role of the local congregation as a social actor should/could be.

The goal of this section is to gather directives from these two studies for appropriate/optional approaches and the missional opportunities ECD creates. Also, in the quest for practice models, it adds to the overall objective of developing a practice theory and collaborative-integrated, diaconal praxis that can work transformatively in the DRC. Little Seeds is one prototype next to the fair offer in the two contexts under discussion in the next section.

3.5.1 Church-based support for children, from conception to two years

There are two outcomes of the Common Good (Lundie et al., 2018) research report that are of particular importance: (i) the particular strengths of the church that are valuable to ECD initiatives, and (ii) three possible approaches for consideration by the church.

Common Good has been a close ally of Diaconia since 2017. Diaconia was one of 194 respondents in their research project titled, 'The church's role in supporting human development in the first thousand days of life – exploratory research into church-based support for children from conception to two years' (2018). Other respondent groups included ecumenical church leaders, church laity, denominational leaders, ECD experts, ECD practitioners, and mothers of young children. Although the official demarcation of early life is zero to six years of age (DSD 2015:14–15), Common Good's specific focus is on the period in human development commonly known in the literature as the 'first 1,000

days of human development'. This is the period between conception and two years.

3.5.1.1 Unique strengths in the church

Common Good argues that churches have untapped resources of influence, a trusted voice in society, and can create safe community spaces with love and deep relationships. These are extremely specific (spiritual) strengths, exceptional to the church. In their literature review, Common Good came upon the work of Gunderson (1997). In his book, *Deeply woven roots: improving the quality of life in your community* (1997), he develops a list of eight profound strengths inherent to a Christian community (congregation). It is worth quoting the list of strengths from the Common Good research report and how Common Good (Lundie et al. 2018:50) interprets it within an ECD-ministry context. For simplification purposes, the content is presented below in a table format (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Working with the church's strengths (Lundie et al. 2018:50)

Accompany	To show up in each other's lives, personally and physically; to visit, care, be present, attend, and listen, one human with another.
Convene	To gather in groups of appropriate size around coffee tables and stadiums to engage opportunities and challenges of finding God's intentions for people and communities.
Connect	To create relationships among the complex lives of members and communities so that resources can be engaged, accessed, and aligned. This is a critical strength for children who cannot be expected to cope with the highly complex institutional systems that create, manage, and control critical resources needed for development.
Frame and tell stories	To place in context experience and data so that people can recognise and play their role amid their complex relationships with other humans and God. Congregations have the strength to answer, "Who am I?" without dumbing the question down to a set of statistics, labels, and legal obligations. Stories are told with words and actions, especially those repeated over time. Again,

	this is of obvious significance to the health of children.
Give sanctuary	To create safe spaces for important programmes and services that can be critical for individuals and for important dialogues necessary to align the social and political systems that determine health at the community scale.
Bless	People, especially children, grow in the direction of what blesses them and looks like life. Congregations have enormous practical power to bless. Indeed, it might be that this power is what links all the other strengths.
Pray	To help people live at the boundary of human and holy with a rich menu of vocabulary, symbols, rituals, and religious practices.
Endure	Congregations are built for slow change, long-term mundane discipline, growth and development throughout the cycle of life. This gives them quite different accountability than almost any other social structure; it might even give them patience for the countless unremarkable things a child, or a hundred thousand children, might need to grow as God intends.

It seems that these so-called strengths, in fact, portray significant elements of diaconal spirituality. Pay particular attention to the relationship aspect of these strengths. Note the potential depth these strengths offer to interpersonal relationships as something quite significant that can be offered to a vulnerable child (and his /her family).

Given the four basic building blocks for optimal development – love, nutrition, stimulation, health and safety – Common Good explored respondents' reactions to proposed ministry initiatives regarding young children and their families. The pastors' survey findings suggested parenting guidance and support. ECD is not only about young children but also about their parents and caregivers. ECD encompasses many ministry options and suggestions and includes strengthening the whole family. Here respondents add interventions on an awareness level such as antenatal classes; parenting skills; how to keep kids safe; and health and safety (Lundie et al. 2018:109). These are typical activities

the church can engage in with ease, and other respondent groups, such as mothers and caregivers, commented on the appreciated support and guidance of the church. Communities can be transformed when parents, grandparents, caregivers, and children are reached within their communities, enabling environments for nurturing care can be provided, and capacity can be built. In all this, the local congregation can be an instigator with its many strengths and its theological conviction (Lundie et al. 2018:134).

From this position of strength, Common Good continues to table three church-based responses to ECD. Their proposal falls within a typology of social development approaches, primarily based on the theory of Korten (1990) regarding four generations (or modes) of intervention in development. Each of the distinct approaches suggested by Common Good assumes the church's acceptance of its role as a social actor in social development and in the unique contribution it has to offer (Lundie et al. 2018:129–130).

3.5.1.2 Distinct approaches to ECD
Common Good suggests three possible approaches the church can follow (Lundie et al. 2018:139–140). These include:

Approach 1: ECD integrated with all activities of the ministry
Common Good links the first approach to Korten's first generation of social development. The local church (and wider church bodies such as denominational structures, ministers' fraternal, and training institutions) is encouraged to include ECD awareness and support across all activities of the ministry (Lundie 2018:129).

> This would involve moving the first thousand days of people (infants, parents etc.) and topics (conception, pregnancy, fatherhood etc.) from the periphery of church activity into the mainstream activities of a church, including preaching, mission outreach, worship, service, discipleship, and evangelism.

ECD involvement should start by developing interventions that assist their own members and then move outwards into the community. In doing so, ECD will truly be a ministry and

not a mere 'project'. Churches are encouraged to evaluate current responses and see if they can be more coordinated, strategic, and informed by science to make an even bigger impact. Churches could facilitate a multi-sectoral space for Christians vocationally involved with ECD to form connections built on their common interest and faith (Lundie et al. 2018:139).

Approach 2: Programmatic responses to ECD by and with the church

With this approach, churches can run ECD programmes in their church and surrounding (or other) communities. These could be, for example, home visiting programmes, parental training and support programmes, clinic support programmes, and fatherhood programmes, to name but a few. Such programmes would be best run in partnership with specialist NGOs – faith-based or secular – and, wherever possible, in conjunction with other churches in their area.

The Common Good report suggests types of programmes in this approach:
- faith-based (including direct linkage to the Christian faith and the Bible);
- faith-placed (secular programmes which are run by a church);
- and collaborative (designed and run in partnership between churches and specialist outside groups).

Some level of integration between the science of ECD and the beliefs and practices of the church is required. Collaborative approaches help with this. The church can by no means work in isolation in this field.

Common Good (Lundie et al. 2018:140) deems a faith-placed approach to be the least likely to succeed. The congregation need to lead to some extent their ministry; have some degree of ownership; and be able to adapt to the context and available resources. Rather, programmes that build unity across church denominations and church streams in the same community are more likely to have a wider systemic impact.

Approach 3: Advocacy and influence through the wider church

While this might be changing in a secular state, the church still has some influence as a non-government institution in South Africa. Ecumenical unity in matters of justice is powerful. According to Common Good (Lundie et al. 2018:46), the church (locally and collectively) should stand against the failure of political, societal and cultural systems beyond its own community in support of ECD. The church can contribute to a national movement of people who live in active awareness of this critical phase of life. Theologically the church is driven by God's redemptive and restoring grace for us when we are in difficult and different life circumstances – both individually and as societies. Churches should seek and be helped to provide non-judgemental, inclusive parental support to all – for example, single parents, young mothers, grandmothers, divorcees, children born out of wedlock, and those facing unplanned and difficult pregnancies whilst continuing to hold to what it believes to be God's best design for family and little children (Lundie et al. 2018:140).

Conclusion: These three possibilities are of great value to the DRC to refine its role in the value chain of social actors and develop its practice theory. It is especially valuable insofar as all three approaches protect the non-negotiable nature and calling of the Christian church and promote a diaconal spirituality that builds on a firm theology (see Chapter 2). It gives the first few steps considering organisational set-ups, ranging from independent ministry to collaborative considerations. In many ways, the Common Good directives predict the necessity of a cultural shift in the DRC's traditional charity approach, but this transformation has already been distinguished as inevitable within the DRC.

The DRC in the Northern Cape in 2019 reported on a collaborative approach to ECD where local congregations (and the DRC in synod), according to the Common Good approach options, chose a programmatic response to ECD together with Caritas, the social welfare organisation affiliated to the DRC in the Northern Cape.

3.5.2 ECD as 'hub-and-spill' development – the church as a social actor

The ECD involvement of the DRC in the Northern Cape commenced in 2014. Caritas

played a leading strategic role, and the church joined the movement. Van der Westhuizen, et al. (2019:2) open their argument about the role of the congregation as a social agent in the local community with a strong theological conviction and conclude that ECD offers an exceptional missional opportunity for the DRC in the 21st century:

> …an exceptionally meaningful opportunity to participate in the missio Dei and, through such participation, to contribute towards the creation of a comprehensive condition of shalom.

In line with the theological motive, the church in the Northern Cape opts for a long-term, outcome-based strategy that depends on the positive interaction between a congregation and being community. Note the shift from a charity paradigm. Here the church follows an asset-based community development approach in which the congregation stands alongside those who would traditionally be marginalised through a charity approach. Collaboration between church and welfare organisations is pivotal in this approach.

ECD offers an entry point toward sustainable development (Van der Westhuizen et al. 2019:3). A registered ECD-centre model was followed, and congregations made buildings available, often on church premises. For the local congregation, this means that to engage in ECD services, they become part of the social realities of their communities as they literally share a space. This is a new level of relevance.

The ECD centre now becomes a 'hub' on church premises where different members of the community potentially meet. Caritas borrowed the concept of a 'hub' from Ball (2015) who describes ECD centres as 'hub-and-spill' points. The image does not only inform a developmental practice model but also indicates the exploration of outcomes that can be expected. The ECD centre creates the space where further development 'spills' from.

To clarify the 'hub-and-spill' model, the explanation by Van der Westhuizen et al. (2019:4) can be summarised as follows:

ECD as 'hub'

- The ECD centre becomes a community centre where different role players meet and together develop the potential of young children.
- A network of resources grows within this space.
- Integration of services related to the needs of children emerges in this space.
- The community is mobilised from this space to join the network.

ECD as 'spill'

- Further development becomes possible, e.g., youth care training, parental support, spiritual programmes, healthcare, pastoral care, and whatever the community discovers to flow naturally from the organic growth of this community hub experience.

The congregation wishes to contribute to finding solutions to problems in their communities. Depending on government subsidies alone is no longer ideal. Independent living with enabled people is desired for communities. This starts with a focus on young children. But this all requires the involvement of different systems, stakeholders, and role players, including that of service providers, community volunteers, congregations, and parents.

The outcome of the study identified the unique contributions a local congregation can make. This includes:

- A key role in awareness and moving people to active participation;
- Provision of infrastructure (e.g., buildings);
- Volunteer support (e.g., running soup kitchens for children and their parents; sharing of knowledge and expertise; other types of support);
- Management support (e.g., administrative support, maintenance of facilities, financial support, services to children and staff).

The original experience of congregations was that getting the community involved is a gradual process and that ownership and responsibility rely on the commitment of the

congregation. Therefore, the congregation continuously spreads the message of the benefits of the 'hub-and-spill' role the ECD centre has to play. Often the awareness role is very informal and, through simple conversation, gaps between groupings in the community are bridged – those who need help and those who are keen to help meet in the space created at the ECD centre.

The researchers (Van der Westhuizen et al. 2019:3) report that the success of the congregation's ECD involvement requires a shift from external motivation to internal motivation within the congregation and its members. Furthermore:

- Projects should start small, be manageable, and evolve naturally.
- The congregation is ideally positioned to build supportive networks in the community and move those supporters to internal motivation as well. Participation in the social realities of communities is not the responsibility of one party only but requires a community that values integration and collaboration. Someone needs to facilitate this coming together of a community, and the congregation seems to be in the ideal position to do just this.
- The ECD initiative in a community offers a safe space for interrelation healing between groups in a community, but it takes time, persistence, and tolerance.
- The ECD 'hub-and-spill' has the potential to be the platform and bear other community development projects.

The DRC in the Northern Cape was the first in the General Synod of the DRC to attempt a prototype for collaboration between church and church-affiliated social welfare organisation with ECD as a focus. The Northern Cape experience is convincing of the missional opportunity offered through ECD involvement and rethinking diaconal praxis in this regard. It offers a good comparison to the Little Seeds prototype that can be further explored.

3.6 Summary

The Little Seeds narrative starts with the context of poverty, inequality, and

unemployment in South Africa, and the significance for high-risk children growing up in these conditions. The circumstances of children in South Africa are convincingly critical, and their exposure to poverty is multifaceted. The science of human development confirms the importance of optimal care in the first five years of life with reachable goals. Also, the link between human development and the economy of a country is clear. Numerous opportunities for diaconal praxis emerge with the focus on ECD, mainly because it departs from relationship-based involvement in the local context and the fact that missional theology feeds from a relationship basis (see the theological framework for diaconal ministry in Chapter 2). The church has options on how to approach the missional opportunity and how to structure its ministry. Research and practice experience, although limited, spell out the options and pave the way for the further development of prototypes that can lead to practice theory and practice models.

An essential focus of this chapter was the biographical construction of the development of Little Seeds. The report captures the rationale for ECD as a chosen intervention that led to the becoming of a consolidated service offer in the DRC network in the Western Cape. The biographical review captures most elements in developing Little Seeds as a collaborative-integrated model. It highlights challenges as well as possibilities that keep on escalating. The chapter ends with an illustration of why ECD is such an exciting missional opportunity for the DRC by noting insights shared by Common Good and the DRC in the Northern Cape region.

ECD is a relational intervention with too many possibilities even to imagine, considering the unique attributes of a Christian community. The relational element should be one of the many clear drivers for the DRC to opt for this ministry opportunity. The next chapter recounts the outcome of the empirical study of Little Seeds as a prototype.

CHAPTER 4

A FAST-CYCLED LEARNING EXPERIENCE – PROCESSING FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the context within which the development of Little Seeds took place. Both influences from the church and the external environment are shown in the biographical reconstruction of the development of the prototype. The account deals with the importance of the question why ECD is such a relevant and exciting missional opportunity for the DRC. The Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (Niemandt et al. 2018:6) mentions that the design of innovative practices is traditionally not part of theological research. The value this study adds is to record the design process of the prototype thoroughly and disclose the pragmatics as clearly as possible. It has been acknowledged many times during the first phase of Little Seeds that there are many uncertainties, but we will embark on the journey and design the process while managing challenges concurrently. The approach is, therefore, a deliberate choice realising the tentativeness at hand. Progression, despite uncertainty, is typical of prototyping. Scharmer (2009:203) gives a concise description of prototyping with a quote from David Kelley, founder and long-time CEO of the design firm IDEO, who said: '*Fail often to succeed sooner'.* This connects to the research question and aim of this study, namely, to learn from Little Seeds, which aims to serve as a prototype for collaborative-integration between theology and social work to increase the potential of collective impact.

Several objectives serve to reach the aim. Chapter 2 reviewed the third objective. The third objective sought to analyse the underlying theological framework, regulatory policies, and other official documents that direct and inform the DRC's diaconate development. Chapter 3 recorded the prototype development in the period between 2018–2022. In recording this process, particular notice was taken of initial uncertainties and eventual outcomes. Chapter 4 will now deal with the first and second objectives when an extensive examination of the findings of the empirical study is undertaken, thereby not only developing the narrative but also discovering the challenges and opportunities that

the prototype offers.

The experience of the first adopters of the prototype is of exceptional value to accomplish the aim and answer the research question, that is, to learn more about the contribution Little Seeds can make to the development of a collaborative-integrated model for missional diaconate. Four from the strategic development team and four from the operational team of Little Seeds partook in semi-structured interviews. Although part of the strategic development team, the researcher did not partake directly as a respondent in the research.

The structure of Chapter 4 is as follows: Following the introduction, the first section describes the approach to the study and processing of the empirical data. This is followed by three sections that each deals with two aspects of the respondents' experiences of interdisciplinary collaboration.

4.2 Approach to the study and processing of the empirical data

A deliberate choice of techniques and instruments was made to ensure the outcome was as objective as possible.

4.2.1 Open coding and analysis

Open coding was done with a qualitative research tool Atlas.ti. Analysing qualitative data poses many challenges. Historically, data were coded manually using various techniques such as cut and paste and note cards (Basit 2003:145). However, numerous computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) are available today. The main benefits of CAQDAS can be seen as "adding intellectual sophistication to the process through good data management, the closeness of data, speed of searches, rigour and an audit trail" (Smit 2005:110). However, no matter what computer package is used, it does not take away logical contemplation. Subsequently, as Corbin and Strauss (2008:163) indicate: 'Thinking is the heart and soul of doing qualitative analysis. It is the engine that drives the process and brings the researcher into the analytical process'.

The CAQDAS was used as follows:

- The researcher translated (Afrikaans to English) the eight interviews that were first recorded and then transcribed these verbatim. An example of a transcribed and translated interview is attached in Appendix B.
- The translation gave an initial impression of the data.
- The translated transcripts were handed to a research assistant experienced in using Atlas.ti.
- The research assistant executed an open coding process through Atlas.ti.
- It could be expected that the three questions sent to the respondents beforehand predicted concepts that came to the fore.
- Renaming of codes developed as the process progressed.
- The last phase was to organise 129 codes that emerged into the six categories predicted by the semi-structured interview schedule.
- The research assistant presented each theme with its sub-themes in a written report, also presented in six figures. An example of these figures is attached in Appendix C.
- At this point, the research assistant handed over a 55-page report generated by Atlas.ti that included themes, sub-themes, and quotations.
- Further analysis was done manually by the researcher.

The six themes with their related sub-categories were used as a frame for the discussion to follow in this chapter.

4.2.2 A two-fold model for interdisciplinary collaboration

Bonstein (2003:297–306) developed a model for interdisciplinary collaboration between social work and other disciplines. According to Bonstein (2003:297), the social work profession works in different settings and therefore needs to know what constitutes and influences collaboration. Outlines of the model are presented in Figure 4.1. In this two-fold model for collaboration, Bonstein (2003) first identifies five generically visible components where optimal interdisciplinary collaboration is achieved. These include

interdependence, newly created activities, flexibility, collective ownership of goals and continuous reflection. Secondly, she identifies four influences that either aid or present barriers to the collaboration effort. These are the professional roles of the different partners, their personal characteristics, structural characteristics, and the history of collaboration between both parties. Bonstein's (2003) two-fold model influenced the questions that were asked.

COMPONENTS

Interdepenence

New created activities

Flexibility

Collective ownership of goals

Reflection on process

INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

Professional role

Personal characteristics

Structural characteristics

History of collaboration

INFLUENCES
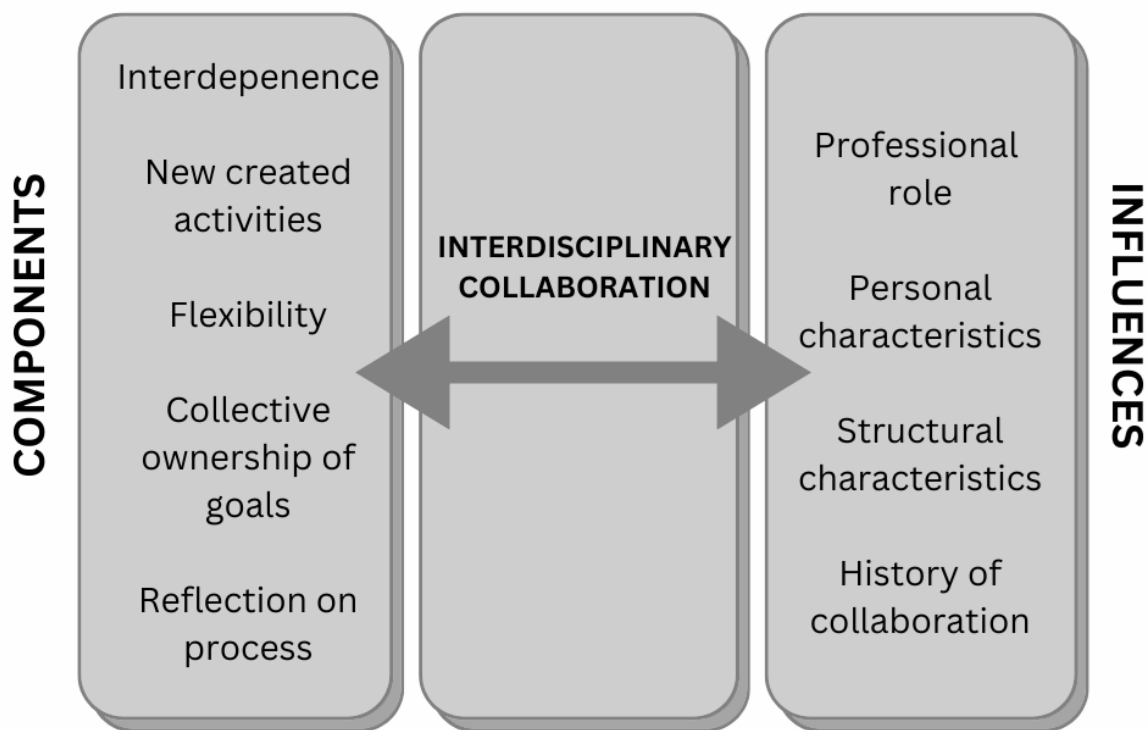
Figure 4.1: A two-fold model for interdisciplinary collaboration (Bonstein 2003)

Three questions, as mentioned in Chapter 1, inquire about:
- The experience of the respondents regarding relationships during the design and first phases of Little Seeds;
- The experience of the respondents regarding operational effectiveness during the design and first phases of Little Seeds;

- Respondents' impressions about the unique contribution that the church (Diaconia) makes;
- Respondents' impressions about the unique contribution that the organisation (Badisa) makes;
- Expected challenges for the way forward;
- Opportunities that the respondents see for the way forward.

With the initial coding done and the six categories set, the researcher had to test the emerging understandings. This was done by searching through the data, sorting the sub-themes, and taking care that emerging themes are central to the unfolding narrative and that no other themes are emerging. While analysing the sub-themes, interpretation became crucial to lending shape and form to vast data sets and gaining the required learning experience desired in studying the prototype (De Vos 2006:338–339).

The research question remains: How can Little Seeds, focusing on ECD, be a prototype of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that can be applied to other areas in the context of ministry and social welfare interventions? The experience of first adopters in the Little Seeds integrated model will guide the answers to this question.

The results will be dealt with under the three headings and questions that structured the interviews.

4.2.3 Processing of results

The six categories relating to the collaborative praxis have been mentioned, and the results of the eight interviews are now presented below. Bonstein's (2003) model was used to confirm or deny the importance of specific components and influences that direct interdisciplinary collaboration.

4.3 Section 1: When two worlds meet

Section one of the semi-structured interviews requires a response to two themes, namely:

relational aspects, and the experience of operational adaptability. The question was:

> *Question 1: When two worlds meet*
>
> The idea of a collaborative-integrated approach is to work together towards a shared vision with a shared strategy. What was your experience in the coming together of Diaconia and Badisa as partners in ECD in this regard? (Distinguish between the emotional/relational and functional/operational experiences).

4.3.1 Relational matters when two worlds meet

Bonstein (2003:304) accentuates the relevance of good relationships to interdisciplinary collaboration. Personal characteristics include trust, respect, understanding, and informal communication between collaborators. Of these, trust[20] is a critical base for successful collaboration. The most significant number of responses were acquired on relationships during the interviews. To sort the data, the researcher distinguished reports between what was experienced as positive and uplifting and what appears to have been challenging. Once the data were sorted this way, it was grouped into corresponding sub-themes.

4.3.1.1 Inspiring relational experiences

- **Deliberate focus on relationship building**

Some individuals in the respective teams deliberately dedicated themselves to getting to know colleagues from the other team. Past friendships contributed to this. Respondent 1 reported that she and a colleague from the other team worked together before (for another employer). They were, therefore, excited about the collaboration, and mutually agreed to exert a positive influence. Apart from their previous contact, another motivation is offered:

> *"My colleague and I have decided to work on mutual relations. It can't be otherwise. We work in the same building. Both parties work for the Lord. After all, we work for*

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[20] Bonstein (2003:304) bases the issue of trust on the humanist perspective of Maslow (1965) that undergirds service integration efforts. It is Maslow (1965) that also argued that trust is also a critical base for successful collaboration.

the same goal. We told ourselves that we were the bridge builders between Diaconia and Badisa, and we put much effort into it" (Respondent 1).

Office space played a role. There were renovations to the building during the collaboration process. The parties used to occupy different levels of offices in the same building (Badisa on the ground floor and Diaconia on level one). During the revamping of the building, Diaconia had to share a space with Badisa. Respondent 1 perceived this as an opportunity that was utilised to get to know each other.

Respondent 2 comments on the positive experience ('eye opener') when colleagues from the different groups get to know each other and each other's worlds.

- **Excitement about new possibilities**

Respondent 2 uses words like 'excitement', 'potential', 'energy', and 'fantastic opportunity'. The respondent reports this to be the emotions experienced when confronted with the reality that something new is about to happen.

- **Resolution of the previous conflict**

Respondent 7 refers to the period between 2015 – 2017 when discussions about possible cooperation were characterised by conflict. The experience is now reversed. The respondent believes that personalities and approaches are to blame for the initial distress and failed negotiations.

- **Value of communication**

Respondent 2 reports on advancements in communication. According to this respondent, communication breaks down walls, expressed as follows:

It breaks down barriers. It is almost as if individuals say to each other: I've always thought

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you were great; we just did not actually talk to each other yet (Respondent 2).

In quantity, many more uncertainties were reported, and some contradicted positive experiences reported.

4.3.1.2 Challenging relational experiences

A positive attitude towards collaboration is just as decisive as an operational plan (Bonstein 2003:304). Respondents' reflections on relational aspects and, specifically, the challenges experienced in this regard will add to recommendations for redesigning the prototype.

- **A history of troubled relationships**

Resolution of prior conflict in the discussions between 2015–2017 on ECD collaboration has been mentioned. Respondent 8 reflects on the challenge of cooperation in a larger context. A history of conflict initially caused the respondent to be wary and hesitant. In the past, the respondent has experienced that the two parties did not listen to each other properly, that the equal contributions of the respective parties were questioned, and that the one was just looking at how they could negate the other. A history of troubled relationships slowed down collaboration efforts for ECD.

> "*All the time, one feels the tension. And you hold back because you don't want to add to the pressure. It took time to get to the point where your contribution was appreciated. One can sometimes make a few more controversial comments, and it does not overturn the apple cart*" (Respondent 8).

- **Culture differences**

Three respondents commented on cultural differences between the church and the organisation and the challenging influence on relationships. Table 4.1 below summarises the perceptions of Respondents 1, 2 and 6 following a culture-related theme.

Table 4.1: Culture-related experience (Empirical study, Q1)

Res-pon-dent	Theme	Organisation (Badisa) culture	Church (Diaconia) culture
2	Working environment	A highly regulated way of working.	A free-flowing environment.
1			A much more relaxed environment.
1			An informal environment.
2	Decision-making processes	The wheels turn slower, but the decisions are well thought through.	Decisions can be made faster and implemented more swiftly.
3		Frustration because of slow decision-making processes.	A smaller team with less control from the top down.
		Creates delays and uncertainties.	
1	Management structures	Too many bosses (slows down processes).	Shorter way to get a mandate.
6	Participation	Feels like a number only. 'If you are a number three you are not allowed to speak to a number one. You speak to number two, and number two speaks to number one'. This causes uncertainty and tension. 'You never know what happens next. Information is not shared. You are not important enough to know everything'.	Participatory approach 'Everyone works with everyone'.
			Warm and open in their approach.

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- **Sacrifices required**

Respondent 2 reports that sacrifices were made on both sides. The respondent distinguishes between personal sacrifices and sacrifices regarding the approach to operational matters. Personal sacrifices involve the willingness to get to know new team members and accommodate diverse partners in a team. Sometimes it was also a sacrifice of existing approaches and content to newly composed services.

"*This was a nostalgic experience, on the one hand. You realise this is like a child you have raised, and now you must give it up or sacrifice it. You need to start and develop again*" (Respondent 2).

- **Ignorance between partners**

Respondent 2 mentions a lack of mutual understanding of the respective parties' working methods. It was not a given, as one would expect the church and the organisation to be familiar with each other's approach. There was an apparent ignorance between the two parties. The respondent expected it would be a straightforward process, but this was not the case.

- **Exclusive process – did not feel valued**

Respondent 3 is critical of the exclusion experienced by the operational team in the strategic development of Little Seeds. In this respondent's opinion, the new development was one-sided. Furthermore, the respondent experienced no personal recognition for expertise and years of operational involvement. In this respondent's experience, the management team did not ask for her opinion or input. The respondent experiences this extremely emotionally and as rejection.

A similar experience is reported by Respondent 6. The experience is that the management team did not value input and opinions. Resentment is evident in the response of this operational team member.

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"*If they had listened to my question and allowed me to speak, it [the specific challenge] could have been resolved a year ago. Nobody takes you seriously. Why would I warn them of trouble if my opinion is not asked?*" (Respondent 6).

- **Negative perceptions and trust issue**

Respondent 7 points to the risk of misperceptions of each other. According to this respondent, it is given that the two parties had perceptions of each other that were not conducive to mutual trust. If this base is not there, cooperation will not succeed, even if both parties wholeheartedly believe in the importance of ECD.

- **Power and control**

Respondent 4 identifies various power and control issues as challenging collaboration efforts. This includes holding on to own interests. The assumption seems to be that there is security in the familiar and seemingly an unwillingness to change. The individual is historically committed to a specific aspect of the work and does not want to let go.

> "*Each wants to cling to its own because it supposedly secures the position of that team member in the team*" (Respondent 4).

Respondent 4 adds the perceived fear of losing power over resources, access to communities, and access to people. Overall, according to this respondent, role players resist giving up what they consider to be theirs.

- **Underlying tension**

Respondent 1 refers to an underlying tension when the process commenced in 2017. The division was also physically visible for as long as Badisa offices were on one level of the building and Diaconia offices on another level. Both teams remained on their side of the building at first. The tension remained for a considerable period throughout the BMC

process (facilitated change management, as discussed in Chapter 3).

- **False expectations**

For Respondent 3, the integration process was highly unpleasant, but for personal reasons. The respondent claims that expectations were raised that did not materialise. Overall, the respondent believes that consultation with team members regarding the transition was insufficient and misleading, as in her case. The respondent expresses a negative attitude towards Little Seeds, even after four years of development.

> *"Excuse me if I say that I am extremely pessimistic about this process. I still feel negative about Little Seeds to this day"* (Respondent 3).

4.3.2 Operational matters when two worlds meet

4.3.2.1 Positive outcomes

The empirical investigation shows that some of the original intentions with Little Seeds are visible in the prototype. Respondent 4 is convinced that the COVID-19 pandemic played a decisive role in the early successes of the prototype. COVID-19 gave the unforeseen momentum to achieve high-level outcomes:

> *"COVID-19 consolidated us. It gave us one vision. We had one enemy. We had only one way to deal with it: consolidated and integrated. COVID-19 gave us an amazing opportunity"* (Respondent 4).

Despite the complex history between Badisa and Diaconia, early indicators of successful cooperation are reported. Synergy has been achieved, and capacity (availability and skill) has been expanded. Certain unique contributions are identifiable and recognised early on.

- **Problematic history conquered**

The development of Little Seeds as a prototype of an integrated approach is not the

church and organisation's first attempt at collaboration in the field of ECD. The previous chapter gave a historical account of this matter. Both Respondent 5 and Respondent 8 refer to this past and say it took time to overcome the mistrust.

> *'No, but as I said at the beginning, there is also a history to it, so I only understand it in the light of that. It took longer than it would normally take to build trust.* (Respondent 8).

History has put pressure on the process. Still, both respondents could see progress in the early phase of the prototype.

● **Synergy that brings about progress**

Respondent 4 describes the collaboration as a *"no brainer",* and adds:

> *"The two interventions were intended to be synchronised. As it was, we were working against each other, and both would stagnate without proper cooperation"* (Respondent 4).

Cooperation contributes to synergy and progress.

● **Build capacity and strengthens sustainability**

Capacity and sustainability go hand in hand. Bringing Badisa and Diaconia together in Little Seeds resulted in immediate benefits in terms of capacity and sustainability. Respondent 1 emphasises this and explains that outcomes are limited if the teams are too small and cannot progress alone.

> *An extended team, yes. They have social workers, they have nurses. Also, other support services, like someone who does marketing and so on. Many who strengthen our team when we joined forces. The support networks are much bigger since we are one unit. So, it's reassuring to me that we know we're on the right track* (Respondent 1).

Respondent 4 adds that sustainability is only ensured with thorough training, continuous

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development, monitoring of persons in implemented programmes, and a support team that can continuously help with troubleshooting. To perform all these roles and functions, the capacity of an extended team is essential.

- **Unique contributions become clear**

It became clear early in the development of the prototype that Badisa's established systems and processes have great value for the intended outcomes. Especially the ECD field in which the church hopes to work can be full of legislation and risk management pitfalls. In this regard, Badisa has a proven track record and benefits both parties (Respondent 4).

> *I think the Badisa contribution is a no brainer. Badisa offers order and rhythm, logic and systems. I realise it caused frustration which could very easily be mistaken as 'control', but it was nothing like that. It was about the context of the land that we live in which is a context of legislation, the need to comply, and good governance. Ethics in good governance as well. And with that I do not say that Diaconia did not comply or whatever. But all these balls had to be balanced all the time, in whatever we do* (Respondent 4).

Participants in the empirical investigation point out many operational challenges.

4.3.2.2 Early challenges

There are as many challenges as a positive assessment of collaboration in the early phase. These challenges include systemic realities and management style. It also highlights underlying passive aggression that potentially hinders operational development.

- **Systemic contrasts**

Five respondents elaborate on the enormous systemic differences between Badisa and Diaconia.

Respondent 5 explains the dynamics experienced working with either Badisa

programmes or congregations. Respondent 5's experience is that there is not the same continuity between Badisa programmes as between congregations. The respondent's experience is that Badisa programmes function in isolation.

> *"Each programme is isolated, works within its boundaries and budgets and sticks to its territory. I do not get the same support from Badisa offices from different congregations"* (Respondent 5).

The respondent explains that congregations are part of a presbytery and a synod (local and national) and are more uniform in the shared vision and support provided.

Respondent 2 elaborates on the adjustment to get to know different systems. The respondent refers to various elements to explain the problem. Details include management styles, human resource management, the development of new branding, and role clarification (especially about the place of congregations within this new strategy). The overall experience of the respondent is that it *"caused much confusion on the ground"* (Respondent 2).

Respondent 7, as noted below, highlights the organisation's highly regulated way of working in contrast to the congregations' approach, which is less rigid.

> *"There are similarities in how the two parties work, but in reality, there is a big difference".*

The respondent then explains the role that funding plays as an example. With government subsidies, the organisation must carefully negotiate and execute goals. The respondent's experience is that since the church's decision in 2015 to embrace ECD as a focus, much money has flowed without comparable systems to manage applications and outcomes. This causes tension and friction between the church and the organisation. Respondent 8 is concerned about the flexibility of both parties to find a middle ground that both are comfortable with.

In their responses, it becomes clear that the intent of collaboration is shared and pure. It's not resisted.

> "*The reality is that the church has a way of working, and so does the organisation*"(Respondent 6).

Both are faith-based and agree that ECD is the most effective strategy to address poverty and inequality. Respondent 6 feels there must be an understanding of past expectations to work together. Close collaboration is a new experience, and adapting requires time. Differences in management style are considered part of systemic differences with resulting challenges.

- **Differentiated management style**

Respondent 3, Respondent 5, and Respondent 1 articulate the differences in management style between Badisa and Diaconia and their effect, especially on the operational team.

> *The organisation bears heavily on all those obligations that they have. The different expectations made us struggle to find a joint vision for a long time. And then the way of working to get there. You do it this way and I do it that way. It was just a big struggle. For good reasons. No one was reluctant, but they are two different organisations, and they work differently. They are set up differently and have different outcomes in mind. Also, different responsibilities.* (Respondent 5).

According to Respondent 3, there is a layering to Badisa's management style, while Diaconia, according to Respondent 5, has a more participatory approach. The biggest frustration with the hierarchical style of Badisa is that it leads to misinterpretation, slow processes, and frustration. Respondent 3 highlights the potential for misunderstandings and conflict when there are too many communication layers.

- **Joined vision is not straightforward**

Respondent 5, as indicated below, expresses that a joint vision is not easily obtainable:

"*At first, it sounds like we are doing the same thing, but the church has its reality, and so does the organisation*".

Partners and end users play a determining role in the feasibility of a vision. The organisation is heavily burdened by the obligations imposed by the partnership with the DSD. Now contrast this with the vision, goals, and outcomes set by a local congregation. According to Respondent 5, this is one of the biggest challenges in the process, namely, finding a joint vision that fits within the framework of the respective parties.

- **Tendency to professionalise**

Respondent 7 is concerned that history will repeat itself with this prototype. Diaconal work was professionalised in the past, and congregations and volunteers simply withdrew. The responsibilities are outsourced to the organisation.

> "*Rolls must be cleared, but when the baton is passed, the process should sill include the interest and input of all parties, otherwise you professionalise the project and the church and the volunteers just stand back, leave it over to the organisation. That also happened in the past. We don't want a repeat of that*" (Respondent 7).

4.4 Section 2: An appreciative inquiry

Question 2: Appreciative but honest reflection

If you now look back, what is the unique contribution each party (Diaconia and Badisa) brings to a partnership in ECD?

Bonstein (2003:299) emphasises that interdisciplinary collaboration is an interpersonal process that facilitates the achievement of goals that cannot be reached when individual professionals act on their own. Different subject disciplines add diverse experiences and mutually enriching interpretations (Büsher and Solon 2021:111). It requires a professional and personal mutual appreciation for the contribution of the other. This section of the empirical study inquiries about and explores the unique contributions of the respective parties as perceived by the respondents. Bonstein (2003:304) reiterates the value of honest reflection on unique contributions from a professional perspective, personal characteristics, structural characteristics, and the history of collaboration.

4.4.1 The unique Diaconia influence

A large amount of data were collected on the question of the unique role of Diaconia as a service group of the church in the functioning of Little Seeds. Thirteen sub-themes initially emerged. The researcher combined two sub-themes, awareness-raising and communication, which leaves twelve sub-headings in the discussion. The sub-themes are presented in Figure 4.2, after which a report on each sub-theme follows.

Figure 4.2: Unique Diaconia (church) contributions (Empirical study, Q2)

4.4.1.1 Pulpits for communication and awareness raising

Influence of the church lies in the access to large groups/numbers of people. This access to people can be used to raise awareness around ECD and mobilise people to get involved. There is a variety of practical help that parishioners can provide. The respondent refers to the period during COVID-19 and examples that were seen during that time, e.g., extra support provided around feeding children and their families. The church is a well-positioned role player to communicate desired messages in local communities.

> *"We have thought from the beginning that our pulpits are a good platform for the message to go out"* (Respondent 8).

4.4.1.2 A nature of servanthood

A respondent refers to the motive for involvement by distinguishing between volunteer and occupational involvement. The respondent values the unique motivation of servitude versus the obligation that may accompany occupation. There is a commitment to servitude.

"People do what they do as a service or a ministry rather than as a job. It is their calling. They want to do it and give their best" (Respondent 5).

4.4.1.3 Innovative culture

Respondent 2 emphasised an innovative culture in Diaconia and elaborated on the willingness to seize opportunities and its creative nature.

"But what was the biggest advantage for me at that point, is that what both of them brought to the table. The stability that Badisa brought; and the will to seize opportunities, innovation, creativity - that culture that Diaconia brought to the table. And I think it was, and still is, for us to establish a new culture in which both of those things can work well integrated" (Respondent 2).

4.4.1.4 Flexibility

Respondent 2 contradicts the approach of Diaconia and Badisa in general by saying that the church (Diaconia) has a more fluid approach in its operational endeavours. Respondent 2 considers flexibility as an asset.

"…the church has a more fluid approach. With more fluidity you can get very far" (Respondent 2).

4.4.1.5 Affluent in resources

Respondent 8 remarks about the church's numerous assets. Specific mention is made of the availability of physical space (infrastructure for logistical use). The respondent admits that not all congregations are committed to offering what they have available, but that a movement in this direction is noticeable.

"And on the church's side, we can really say we have many assets and resources

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to offer. And I think if those assets are unlocked wonderful things can happen. We have already seen this in Diaconia. Just to be able to have a space to be able to hold an event is already very valuable. And yes, unfortunately there are some of our congregations who do not see it that way. But I think we're getting there. People see more and more and are willing to sacrifice" (Respondent 8).

4.4.1.6 Relations-oriented

Respondent 2 contradicts the ability between Diaconia and Badisa to *"truly establish partnerships and relationships that take us forward and work together with others".* The respondent argues that operational processes can always be adjusted and perfected, but your relationships and ability to network and position yourself alongside others make your endeavours strong. In this regard, the church has a unique influence, according to Respondent 2.

> *"If I think of Diaconia, I think of bridge-builders, facilitators, taking hands, and interpreting contexts. And that all comes back to relationships"* (Respondent 2).

4.4.1.7 Sustain local work

Respondent 5 considers the maintenance of local projects (sustainment) as hard work.

> "*I can be enthusiastic, go to the congregation, and do the training, but someone must sustain the work done there when I leave. And that is what the congregations do. That is hard work*" (Respondent 5).

4.4.1.8 Theological grounding

Respondent 8 points out that a firm (and clear) theological basis distinguishes Little Seeds from other humanitarian organisations. The church should take this responsibility seriously. The respondent then mentions the implications of integration. If the church and the organisation collaborate as an integrated system, it implies that Badisa should also embrace the theological point of departure, even though being a social work practitioner. The respondent says: "*We all have to sing from one page*" (Respondent 8).

4.4.1.9 Values and moral support

In connection with the theological foundation, Respondent 7 also refers to the influence

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of values and morality exercised by the church. The respondent refers to congregants who play a role in this regard ("*eyes on the community aunts*").

4.4.1.10 Understanding of local needs and assets

Respondent 4 considers the church to be familiar with local contexts and, therefore, aware of needs and available resources.

4.4.1.11 Human capital/volunteers

Respondent 2 observes that the church's (Diaconia) intervention resulted in many volunteers for local programmes. The respondent further believes it is ideal when ownership and responsibility are taken up locally and by volunteers. The respondent mentions that the organisation (Badisa) also has volunteers, but Diaconia made access to volunteers much more effortless. Respondent 4 agrees with this and refers to the church's influence on people and encouraging people to become involved.

> "*You have the influence to convince people to willingly become part...of a more excellent vision*" (Respondent 4).

4.4.1.12 Extended footprint

Respondent 1 mentions the fact that "*there is a congregation in every town*"*.* There is a DRC and a URC congregation throughout the provinces where Little Seeds works. Not all are equally active in ECD, but a movement can be noted. The church footprint immediately gives access to Badisa as well. Respondent 4 points out that Badisa's geographical reach is limited compared to the church. Even within a specific community, Badisa has demarcated areas where they can work, but the footprint is extended dramatically in collaboration with the church. Respondent 8 concurs with the church having "*a more extensive network".*

Respondent 8 defines the larger church network regarding the sanction that comes with the church's infrastructure.

> "*Diaconia brings all its congregations and the sanctions of its synods. Both synods*

approved ECD as a strategy to combat poverty" (Respondent 8).

Observation to conclude

Looking at the codes quantitatively for a moment, some sub-themes prompt more responses than the rest. Figure 4.3 illustrates the observation. It is feasible to conclude that the extensive geographical footprint of the church (4) is a unique contribution the church brings to the partnership. Also, with a higher count is the serviceability of the church (3), the availability of resources (3), the relationship-oriented way that the church usually works (2), the number of volunteers (congregants) available through the church (2), and the well-positioned setting for communication (2).
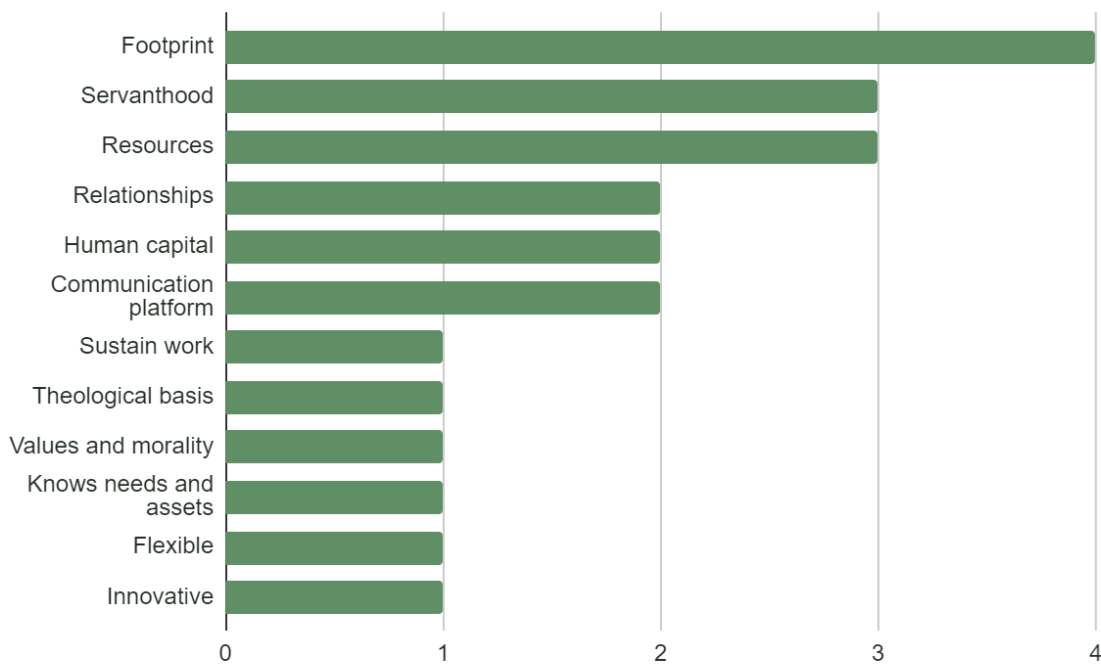
Figure 4.3: Outstanding Diaconia uniqueness (Empirical study, Q2)

Against the unique contribution of the church (Diaconia), respondents also reflect on the unique contribution of the organisation (Badisa) in the collaboration.

4.4.2 The unique Badisa contribution

Ten codes were identified with the CAQDAS tool in the first round of data processing.

After receiving the report, the data went through a second round. Some of the codes were combined to present seven unique contributions, as shown in Figure 4.4. The report elaborates on these results.
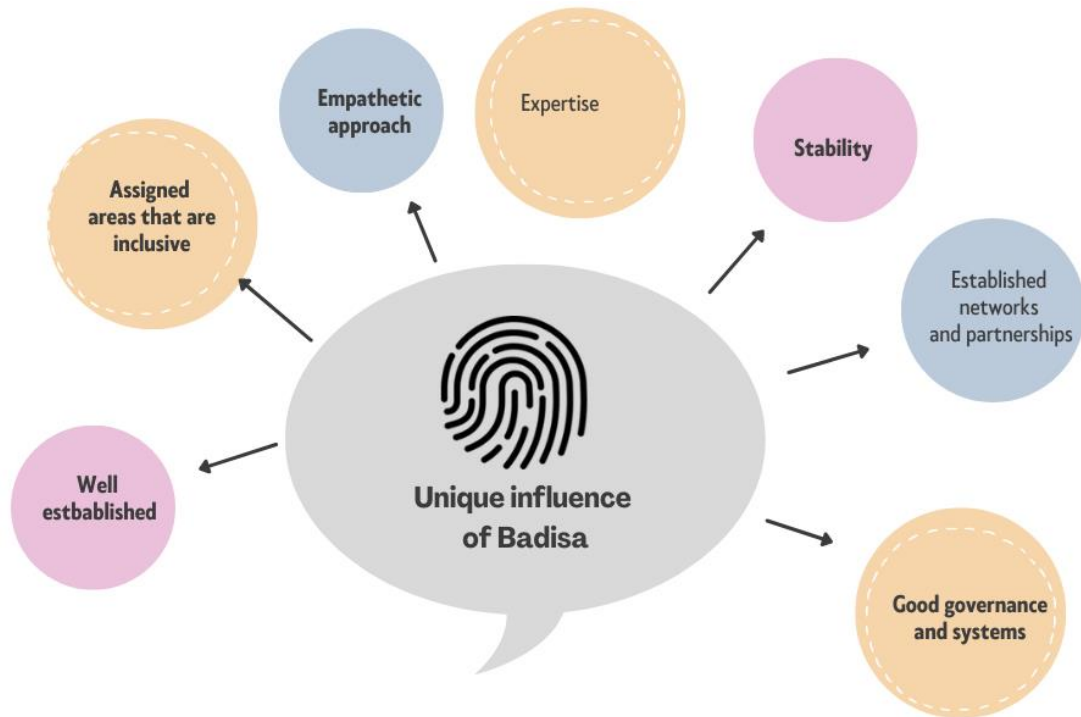
Figure 4.4: Unique Badisa (organisation) contributions (Empirical study, Q2)

4.4.2.1 A well-established organisation

Respondent 1 refers to the fact that Badisa is a well-established organisation with previous experience with ECD, familiar with the Children's Law and protocols in place, compared to Diaconia, which was new to ECD.

4.4.2.2 Good governance and systems

Respondent 4 believe that the Badisa contribution is unique:

> *"Badisa offers order, rhythm, logic, and systems. The context of the land we live in is a context of legislation, the importance of compliance, and good governance"* (Respondent 4).

Several respondents strongly echo this opinion. Respondents 2, 7, and 8 concur that Badisa has systems to guarantee good governance.

Respondent 7 further says that Badisa's good governance and systems equal a "*professional role and responsibility*". Respondent 7 mentions the organisational framework Badisa provides that can host Little Seeds and contribute to its success.

Respondent 4 mentions the tension the established systems brought in the early phases of collaboration within Little Seeds and that it could be mistaken for control. Good governance is about compliance and not about control. Ethics is also part of good governance. Without comparing the ethics of Diaconia and Badisa, Respondent 4 wishes to emphasise that Badisa is known for its ethical conduct.

4.4.2.3 Assigned areas

Respondent 8 reports Badisa's assigned areas in communities as an asset to the partnership with the church. The respondent says that with an honest reflection, the church must admit that they often work in isolation. Furthermore, the relationship between local DRC and URC congregations only sometimes promotes cooperation. There is often the 'threat' of one congregation coming to work within another congregation's borders. With this, Badisa creates neutral ground, and both churches are invited to get involved through collaboration. Badisa thus promotes the territory for church involvement in its unique way.

4.4.2.4 Empathetic approach

Respondent 8 mentions the degree of trust the community experiences with Badisa social workers compared to other service providers. Although this is a very subjective comment, the respondent's impression is that both the church and Badisa still own a significant degree of community trust.

"Badisa workers are interested in people and not just watching the clock. Their empathetic approach is better than other organisations" (Respondent 8).

4.4.2.5 Experienced professionals

Respondent 8 mentions the expertise of the professional service delivery found within Badisa.

4.5.2.6 Stability

In the experience of Respondent 2, Badisa brought stability to the integration of the two parties within Little Seeds, which, according to this subject, was one of the most significant advantages Badisa had to offer.

4.5.2.7 Established networks and partnerships

Respondent 1 and Respondent 2 mention the Badisa networks of social work programmes and specifically indicate those aimed at ECD.

Observation to conclude

It is clear from the results that the good governance and systems secured by Badisa are an immense asset to the partnership. It could even combine other codes with this factor, such as 'stability' and 'well-established organisation'. Figure 4.5 gives a quantitative indication of the number of comments next to the different codes.
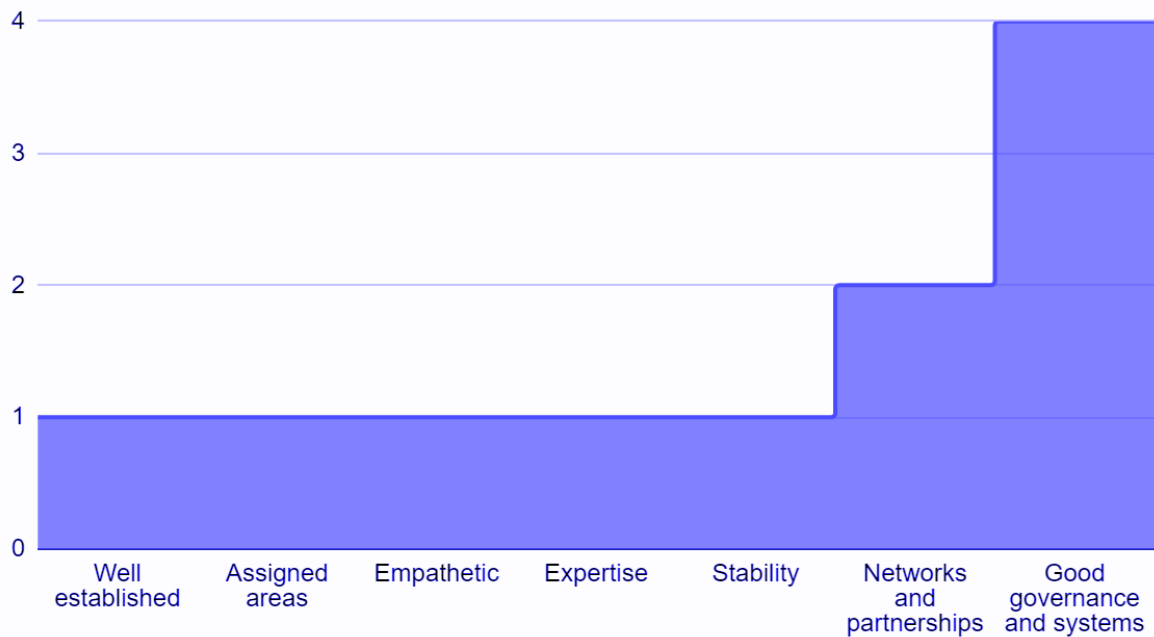
Figure 4.5: Outstanding Badisa uniqueness (Empirical study, Q2)

4.5 Section 3: Considering the way forward

Question 3: Crystallising a new future

What would you consider the main challenges and opportunities of a joint venture between Diaconia and Badisa?

With the implementation of a new practice, certain realities begin to play out that can indicate the emerging future. Scharmer (2009:195) refers to this as crystallising.

The first practical aspect of this journey is to clarify what wants to emerge. Crystallising facilitates the surfacing of a living image of the future whole. It clarifies the vision and intent of the emerging future (Scharmer 2009:195).

The experience of the first adopters of the integrated Little Seeds approach is invaluable to consolidating priorly fragmented partners. The feedback does not necessarily have to be positive. As Scharmer (2009:197) states, the prototype might also prove that things did not turn out the way we anticipated. He explains the principle of 'letting come' when

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you are willing to learn and deeply listen to what is emerging. The context needs to be welcoming and willing to accommodate the dormant potential that emerges from the process.

In this section of the semi-structured interview, respondents were asked to share what came to them in the past five years while being in this process; what challenges and possibilities they observed that could influence the future. Table 4.2 gives and overview of the possibilities and challenges that emerged, after which a discussion follows.

Table 4.2: Perceived possibilities and challenges (Empirical study, Q3)

POSSIBILITIES	CHALLENGES
1. Collaboration, cooperation, and integration prove beneficial.	1. Developing a new culture requires deliberate transformation.
2. A shared vision is possible and consolidates teams.	2. Without a clear vision efforts will be in vain.
3. Capacity can expand and expertise can be shared.	3. Different management styles obstructs progress.
4. More constructive preparation of congregations and communities possible.	4. Diversity and creativity needs to be embraced.
5. Scaling and expansion advanced through collaboration.	5. Clear roles and responsibilities needed for effective collaboration.
6. Collaboration strengthened by mutual understanding and prior exposure to each other.	6. Continuous collaboration monitoring in order not to return to silos.
	7. Momentum could decline.
	8. Financial sustainability.
	9. Donor compatibility.
	10. Excellence in communication.
	11. Collective consciousness.
	12. Retention of social workers.
	13. Attitudes of individuals could be destructive.

4.5.1 Possibilities that emerge

Opportunities observed and reported by team members confirm and strengthen much of the original intent of the prototype.

4.5.1.1 Collaboration, cooperation, and integration prove beneficial

Respondents put forward the possibilities that arise from collaboration.

- Better support and mentoring of volunteers (Respondent 5).
- Strength in numbers with the extended team (Respondent 3).
- Resources can be shared (Respondent 5).
- More comprehensive logistical support (Respondent 5).
- Expanded networks (Respondent 3), even outside of the church and the organisation (Respondent 2).

A joint vision and strategy between role players make collaboration possible.

4.5.1.2 A shared vision is possible and consolidates teams

A shared vision unites different role players. Respondent 7 points out that although a jockey is needed to put forward a vision, all levels of participants should be involved in the development and sustaining of this vision. Respondent 6 affirms this and criticises the exclusion of the operational team in further developing the vision of Little Seeds.

4.5.1.3 Capacity can expand and expertise can be shared

After laying the foundation for an integrated team, it is possible to identify and fill gaps in the team. One such gap is identified by Respondent 8, who suggests that an education specialist should complement the interdisciplinary team of Little Seeds. The respondent further substantiates her argument that legislators in 2022 moved the ECD sector from the DSD to the Department of Education (DoE). Therefore, reliable and comprehensive service offers should include educational specialities.

4.5.1.4 More constructive preparation of congregations and communities possible

The respondents believe that the development of Little Seeds has added to both the Badisa and Diaconia offer to communities. With shared capacity, Little Seeds can conduct a preparation phase in which congregations and communities can discern their motives and exercise choices in terms of the envisaged intervention or supportive involvement. Projects have a better chance of sustainability if the groundwork is done more efficiently beforehand.

4.5.1.5 Scaling and expansion advanced through collaboration

Respondent 3 sees the potential that more at-risk children will be reached through collaboration. Respondent 8 confirms that the merger of Badisa and Little Seeds recently gave access for service delivery and ministry to the Eastern Cape region. The respondent concludes that "*the Eastern Cape is a fallow land and there is a lot to be done there*" (Respondent 8).

The product needs to be scalable though. Because of long distances and limited resources, training and support should be of such a nature that local operators can catch on easily (Respondent 8). Respondent 5 sees this as possible when different disciplines work together in Little Seeds to develop scalable products. Respondent 3 considers a well-developed 'train-the-trainer' programme to be part of this success.

4.5.1.6 Collaboration strengthened by mutual understanding and prior exposure to each other

The unique environment of Badisa and Diaconia requires mutual understanding to guarantee success when merging these two worlds. Good exposure to each other before the merger should be acknowledged. Mutual representation on committees and governing boards provided a reasonable basis for insight into the working methods and values of the respective parties (Respondent 2).

4.5.2 Challenges that emerge

To realise the original intent of collaboration and integration, attention must be paid to the challenges respondents experienced in the first development and implementation phase.

4.5.2.1 Developing a new culture requires deliberate transformation

Moving from isolation to integration requires continuous development of a new culture (Respondent 2). Collaboration, as such, implicates specific cultural features. Respondent 8 predicts that congregations will significantly shift to embrace merger networking and partnerships instead of approaching ministry in isolation. To ensure that the living conditions of young children in South Africa improve, a new culture of collective action and collaboration is a prerequisite. Just as Little Seeds embraced collaborative efforts, so should congregations and communities adopt this approach.

4.5.2.2 Without a clear vision efforts will be in vain

For Respondent 7 it is important to know that Little Seeds is not just another professional organisation, but that it is part of a movement in the church to get involved in addressing systemic poverty in a precise way. This requires a clear vision. The inkling while developing the prototype was that collaboration between church and organisation is essential for this, and that we must find a way to work together so that the usual obstacles will not sabotage good intentions.

4.5.2.3 Different management styles obstructs progress

Different management styles have been identified as hindering the process. Respondent 2 thinks that a bureaucratic management style brings much red tape and makes decision-making difficult. It slows down processes to such an extent that opportunities may be lost. The respondent uses the word *"clumsy"* to describe the uncertainty and frustration brought about by the layering of decision-making mandates. Respondent 1 adds to this the frustration of *"exclusion"* when the operational team feels that they do not have decision-making powers and the control lies elsewhere.

4.5.2.4 Diversity and creativity needs to be embraced

Respondent 2 brings diversity and creativity together in a fascinating way.

> *"I strongly agree with this: You can only be creative if you are willing to embrace diversity"* (Respondent 2).

Embracing diversity requires listening and respecting another's opinion and input. Recognition and openness to each contribution is crucial. There should always be a sensitivity to inclusiveness and diversity to ensure healthy collaboration.

4.5.2.5 Clear roles and responsibilities needed for effective collaboration

According to Respondent 3, roles and responsibilities should be prominent and specific. Not only should a participant be clear about his or her role, but also that of the other team members.

4.5.2.6 Continuous collaboration monitoring in order not to return to silos

Respondent 3 is concerned that collaboration only exists in theory when looking at current activities. The respondent distinguishes between different activities and says that the respective parties still focus on their way of working, hence silos. The respondent then observes that these roles connect, and that the sophistication of collaboration should receive more attention. Otherwise, falling back into silos will be a reality.

4.5.2.7 Momentum could decline

Respondent 1 commented on how easily obstacles and challenges can lead to negativity and how easily this results in losing momentum.

4.5.2.8 Financial sustainability

Four respondents express their concern about the financial sustainability of Little Seeds. Respondent 4 emphasises the importance of formal agreements with partners. The welfare sector is under tremendous pressure; therefore, risk can only be managed if you have formal agreements and can rely on your partners.

Concerns about this challenge are both institutional and personal. Respondents 1 and 3 are concerned about the continuation of their jobs. One reason for this concern is the transfer of ECD from the DSD to the DoE. Respondent 3 is critical of the management team's forward projections and management of risks in this regard.

> *"I am at a dead end. Is there a plan with me [if government subsidies do not continue]? Will Badisa keep me on? Or is this the end of my career? I do not know. Is the management team paying attention to this? Do they think about this?"* (Respondent 3)

In addition, Respondent 3 experiences funding management in Little Seeds as needing to be more transparent. Ambiguity and uncertainty about available funds cause respondents to feel powerless and excluded. Respondent 1 supports this concern.

Respondent 8 considers financial sustainability as one of the main challenges going forward. This respondent recognises both the importance of collateral for the staff as well as the sustainability of the operations.

4.5.2.9 Donor compatibility

Respondent 4 highlights that in a context of scarcity, Little Seeds will have to guard against compromises with donors. Respondent 4 is sceptical towards donors with political motives. Potential donors must have the same values as Little Seeds. Integrity and ethical conduct are part of this. All parties involved should have the same motives and desire shared outcomes in the best interest of young children. Respondent 4 adds that donors should not be in a power position to dictate the operations of a programme just because they provide the funding.

4.5.2.10 Excellence in communication

A lack of effective communication between parties poses a significant threat to the desired outcomes. Various references to the potential challenges around communication are made.

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Respondent 8 emphasises the importance of good communication on all levels. Little Seeds does not exist in isolation. On a higher level, church leadership needs to be well-informed and supportive of the work being done.

> *"It always comes back to effective communication. Some of our leadership in the church are confusing the Little Seeds project with the vegetable garden project"* (Respondent 8).

Communication between management and operations could pose a threat if not well managed. Respondent 3 feels excluded and uninformed. This results in this respondent having a negative attitude towards the process as a whole.

Respondent 4 believes that the biggest threat to good communication is distrust in each other. Although progress has been made, a relationship of trust should remain a priority.

4.5.2.11 Collective consciousness

Respondent 8 explains the challenge of a lack of collective consciousness for the success of the ECD movement. To truly achieve impact, the movement relies on collective action. Little Seeds must therefore succeed in protecting this momentum at all costs.

4.5.2.12 Retention of social workers

Respondent 8 refers to the inability of Badisa to retain social workers in the field. For many, Badisa is a job entry market, and workers move on quickly. The challenge is that workers in the field need to be more experienced, and continuity in the interest of interventions in local communities cannot be achieved. Social workers are essential congregational partners, but this collaboration needs to improve due to low retention rates.

4.5.2.13 Attitudes of individuals could be destructive

The observations in this regard are based on an assessment of several respondents' reactions to the process of collaboration and changes as a whole. A clear distinction is detectable between individuals who seek to promote the collaboration process and those

who are frustrated and even irritated by it. While Respondent 4 emphasises the importance of patience with the process, Respondent 3 says that the process is frustrating. The respondent wants to focus on existing core performance areas and considers any deviation an *"interruption of my work"* (Respondent 3).

4.6 Summary

Chapter 4 deals exclusively with data obtained from eight semi-structured interviews as part of an empirical investigation of the prototype Little Seeds. The technique used for processing the data is described. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of six themes from three questions that served as a framework for the interviews. Respondents reflect on relationships and operational experiences over the past four years (since 2017) in the development of Little Seeds. An appreciative investigation highlights the unique contributions of the church (Diaconia) and the organisation (Badisa). What crystallises from this is explored as opportunities and possibilities. Data analysis from the empirical investigation and the extensive literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 prepare the way for conclusions specific to the Little Seeds prototype and the documentation of learning experiences. In the next chapter, the empirical data are analysed to identify trends and to reach conclusions that can influence the further development of diaconal praxis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION – THE CRYSTALLISATION OF A DIACONAL PRAXIS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 reports on the findings of the empirical study. It documents the outcome of the qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the strategic and operational team members within Little Seeds. From Chapter 1 onwards, Little Seeds is described as a prototype that deliberately seeks collaboration and integration between the DRC and church-affiliated social welfare organisations. The research question remains whether Little Seeds can contribute to the DRC's search for mechanisms to support a collaborative-integrated approach for the church's diaconate. It is not only the church that expresses this interest but also the body of social welfare organisations with a historical connection to the DRC. A MOI, brought to the General Synod of the DRC by the CCSS in 2019, reinforces the shared interest in the need for a pragmatic approach to direct collaborative diaconal ministries.

Chapter 5 arrives at three main conclusions. Conclusions are the outcome of the simultaneous treatment of data from the literature review and the biographical case study. Data from the literature review support conclusions drawn on missional theological development in the DRC, emphasising theological direction for the church's diaconate and insights on organisational management. The other set of data concludes findings from the biographical case study of Little Seeds as a prototype for collaborative-integration that comprises the empirical part of the study. Both data sets are crucial for the conclusions that form the basis for recommendations in the last chapter.

The structure of Chapter 5 is as follows: The first two key conclusions deal with (i) theological matters, mainly from the study of literature; and (ii) organisational findings made from the case study of Little Seeds. The third and final conclusion in this chapter crystallises from the whole research process. The third conclusion is an innovative

realisation that significantly influences practice model development. Table 5.1 summarises the main conclusions under the three sub-headings.

Table 5.1: Main conclusions from the empirical study and literature review

Theological conclusions	i. Diaconal praxis is relational, appreciative, and inviting. ii. There is clear biblical justification for collaboration. iii. The DRC is convinced of its identity and calling for diaconal ministry.
Theoretical conclusions	i. Collaboration can be considered a theological principle. ii. A clear definition of the diaconate is required. iii. A clear understanding of an interdisciplinary approach is needed. iv. A supporting ethos is required. v. The role of leaders needs to be clear. vi. Prototype development in different contexts needs to be encouraged. vii. Collaboration should grow and deepen as an organic ecosystem.
Pragmatic-operational conclusions	i. Good relationships are of critical importance. ii. Relational matters are burdened by cultural differences. iii. Communication is essential in teams. iv. Differences in management approach requires deliberate facilitation. v. The interest of both parties needs to be served with a willingness and with flexibility. vi. A consolidated will and conviction of the cause is necessary.

	vii.	Expect surprises. Not everything can be managed.
	viii.	The logic of synergy can be expected.
	ix.	Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined.
	x.	The footprint of the church and other resources is beneficial to partnerships.
	xi.	Soft skills, such as its relational nature, are what make the church excel over others.
	xii.	Technical skills are what make Badisa excel over others.
	xiii.	Badisa is known for its empathetic approach.
	xiv.	Collaboration should not be over-complicated.
	xv.	Guard against rigidity – grow organically.

A discussion of these conclusions with applications follows.

5.2 Main theological conclusions

The literature review confirms and supports the influence of the missional theology movement on the DRC's understanding of God and the church. Arising from ecclesiological development, the influence of missional theology is visible in the development of the diaconate. The study finds that progress in the development and application of principles to the diaconate of the DRC has been noticeable since the publication of the Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013). General Synod agendas and reports witness the focus on the diaconate, the vocation experienced regarding the diaconate, and especially the mandate to expand and deepen the diaconal ministry of the DRC and partners.

The research confirms that:

(i) A missional ecclesiology framework has officially been accepted that mandates development and application to practical activities of the diaconate;

(ii) Official church policy on the diaconate is outdated, but some research and other action

to update and align it with the missional paradigm is on the agenda of the DRC and in the process;

(iii) The church order has started an ongoing renewal process with the addition of Article 2, which is indistinctively missional;

(iv) Recent practice-oriented research for the diaconate of the DRC is limited, although it is requested in the meetings of the General Synod.

This finding speaks to Objectives 2 and 3 of this study:

> Objective 2: Review the underlying theological framework, regulatory policy, and other official documentation that directs and informs development in the diaconate of the DRC.

> Objective 3: Review and compare ecumenical trends, including interdisciplinary perspectives between theology and social work.

Clear markers for the diaconate emerged during a comprehensive literature review of official documentation, reports, and processes in the DRC parallel with ecumenical trends. The development of missional theology and missional ecclesiology in the DRC provides a paradigm for developing diaconal praxis with distinctive characteristics. To follow are intermediate findings, elaborating on this main theological theme.

5.2.1 Diaconal praxis is relational, inviting, empowering, appreciative, holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive

The theological framework for missional diaconate originates in the God Triune, the *missio Dei*, and conceptualising the Kingdom of God.

- *Theocentric – relational in nature*

One of the most significant shifts brought about by the missional theology paradigm is the shift from an ecclesiocentric frame of reference to trinitarian or theocentric discernment. The Divine Trinity becomes a structural framework for theological reflection that lays a foundation for network thinking. According to Benadé and Niemandt (2019), this is the

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so-called fifth wave in the history of a missional movement in the DRC. The church is rethinking its theology and engagement with a society characterised by severe socio-economic and forthcoming challenges.

Theocentric contemplation anchors *diakonia* in the person of God Triune, unlocking the richness of His *being* and *doing* and allowing it to inform the church's faithfulness to His calling and sending. God is love, mercy, justice, reconciliation, and peace all in one.

> The church's service is not only grounded in God's mission but is actually grounded in God Himself: God's love, His mercy, His justice, His reconciliation, and His peace. The kenotic existence of Christ and the sacrifice of the Son by the Father form the basis of the church's service. For this reason, the diaconate of the church is multi-faceted, with different types of diaconate discernable – including but not limited to mercy ministries, eco-justice issues, and participation in peace and reconciliation and justice ministries (DRC 2013:10).

Van der Merwe (2014:217) pitches the life of God Triune as a community of perfect love. Therefore, the nature of the diaconate is essentially relational; it is basically love and fellowship. Elements of love and fellowship are also found in Louw and Nida's (1989:562) treatment of the word *koinonia*. They define *koinonia:*

> … as an association involving close mutual relations and involvement. It refers to partners or associates who participate with one another in some enterprise or matter of mutual concern.

A collaborative-integrated model relies on the relational nature of diakonia with the richness of its implications for effective partnerships and collective impact. A community of perfect love speaks of equality and mutual appreciation and contributes to synergy.

- *Following the missio Dei – inviting, empowering, and appreciative*

The DRC's 1994 policy for the ministry of compassion places the diaconal vocation primarily in an office and structures it into commissions and institutions. Institutionalisation is typical of a modernist approach, with the implication for the church, intentionally or

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unintentionally, that parts of the diaconal vocation are delegated (abdicated) to other professions. Placing the diaconate in offices also resembles an ecclesiocentric approach and is considered, based on a missional theological paradigm, outdated for the diaconate. Principles of the *missio Dei* transform this practice. God is a God in mission. Ministry and mission are gifts from God. The church is invited to participate in God's mission – in the work of the *missio Dei.* This invitation is not exclusive but rather inviting, empowering, and appreciative of every believer's willingness, unique contribution, and obedient following. An appreciative approach is of specific value for the design of collaborative-integrated partnerships.

- *A Kingdom perspective – holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive*

Diakonia is a critical activity in the proclamation of God's rule and the re-creation of a world in which the harmony and peace of God's original purpose with creation have been disturbed. Diakonia cannot ignore systems that uphold injustice, such as poverty, inequality, and the preposterous situation of South African unemployment. Believers live within the reign of God and are called to show signs of His Kingdom in all aspects of life, not only in the church. This calls for serious reflection on the diaconate of the DRC. The diaconal strategy of the church cannot be acts of kindness alone. It cannot be charity and short-term relief alone. Also, it cannot be directed at church members alone but should be directed at society in general. It should be holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive. This kind of involvement calls for knowledgeable praxis of an interdisciplinary nature.

5.2.2 There is a clear biblical justification for collaboration in an interdisciplinary context

Celesti and Bowers du Toit (2019) predict that partnership should easily translate into the Christian community: biblical images and applicable principles satisfactorily root both concepts (integration and collaboration) firmly in biblical roots. A clear image is the body of Christ. This image rests as firmly on the theme of unity as on diversity. Unity is enriched and strengthened by diversity.

Concluding from the description of Louw and Nida (1989) earlier, koinonia implies close, mutual relationships. The same authors also describe koinonia as the best word to describe the gift of unity. There are sufficient grounds to conclude that God desires relational and functional unity in the church. Jesus prays that His followers will be one, as He and the Father are one (John 17).

To integrate means to '*make whole*'. Collaboration means '*to work with*'. Even semantically, one recognises the prayer of Jesus for unity (to make whole) and the arguments Paul uses when explaining the critical contribution of all body members (to work with). The DRC embraces a clear goal for partnership and collaboration that embodies these biblical principles.

5.2.3 The DRC is fixed on its goal towards collaboration and aligns with ecumenical trends in this regard

After two decades of the journey with missional transformation, the General Synod of the DRC in 2019 formulated a clear commitment to serve the community and to do it from within inclusive networks. The 2030 vision declares: "We dream of a network of inclusive congregations at the grassroots level, driven by God's love, serving our communities" (DRC 2020:5)[21]. The DRC's diaconate constantly needs to move from declaration to praxis. The MOI (DRC 2019a:500) between the DRC and the CCSS is one of the clear signs of intent. Prototypes such as Little Seeds are other examples of development to this extent.

The literature review confirms an era of partnerships, networks, and collaboration in a global context (Eurich 2020; Kok and Van den Heuvel 2019; WCC 2013). At the WCC in Busan (2013), this matter and its implications for diaconal ministry are central in presentations and discussions. It speaks of clear advocacy for partnerships, network

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[21] The dream scenario was presented in a separate power point presentation on the agenda of the Moderamen meeting in September 2020 (agenda point 4.1.1, p.5)

functioning, collaboration, and interdisciplinary approaches for the diaconate. Deliberations include theological perspectives, general principles, and pragmatic aspects that support network functioning in ministry. From a Western European perspective, Eurich (2020) refers to the formation of 'social space networks' and underlines the role the church can play as an initiator of such innovation. One of the church's unique contributions is that it still has influence and public trust and can bring together relevant role players. The church's relational nature and communicative skill strengthen this particular role the church can play as convenor and facilitator.

Locally in the DRC and, more specifically, in the Northern Cape Synod, Caritas, the professional social work service organisation of the DRC and the Hugenote College, undertook research to investigate the dynamics of collaboration. The research question directed the exploration of the congregation's role as a social actor in close collaboration between church and organisation. The congregation is an influencer and supports the execution of programmes on different levels. ECD was confirmed as a compelling entry point for sustainable development. Other local ecumenical research, such as the Common Good research report, confirms relational and pastoral attributes to be significant.

It did become very clear from the investigation that a more nuanced understanding of collaboration and network functioning is needed. The conversation can also be vague, and people can have different expectations, necessitating clarifying collaboration's structural and organisational aspects. To this extent, the outcome of the empirical study with the prototype Little Seeds, is substantially important.

5.3 Findings from the Little Seeds prototype The literature review, and especially the biographical case study of Little Seeds, revealed essential elements to be considered in designing a collaborative-integrated, diaconal praxis. Praxis development for the DRC's diaconate requires a straightforward, pragmatic approach that resonates with the very nature of being a church. Little Seeds is a prototype with clear indicators that can assist the development of collaborative-integrated praxis for the diaconate resembling a

missional theological foundation.

Collaborative integration creates space for innovation and creativity, especially in how a traditional approach of institutionalisation transforms to keep up with a contemporary climate. Findings in this section speak to Objectives 1 and 4 of this study:

Objective 1: Record and reflects on the Little Seeds development process. In the reflection, identify the challenges that had to be overcome and the gains it accomplished. Note the distinctive influence of both parties and gather lessons learned from operational and relational matters in the process.

Objective 4: Explore relevant organisational elements that will support the development of a collaborative-integrated model between congregations and church-affiliated social service organisations.

This section is approached in two parts. The first sub-section concludes with theoretical cornerstones for network functioning as they emerged throughout the literature review. The more comprehensive second sub-section will then reveal findings from the empirical investigation. Both of these are of particular importance for the recommendations in Chapter 7.

5.3 Theoretical cornerstones for collaborative praxis

The kenotic existence of the DRC as a servant to the community needs a rethinking and a redesign of its diaconal praxis. It calls for discernment and creative innovation. The literature review informs theoretical cornerstones to assist the DRC in going forward with a network strategy as a faith practice of a missional ecclesiology for the diaconate. The main finding in this section is that clear pragmatics is needed for diaconal praxis.

From the literature review, seven cornerstones could be gathered to serve the purpose of a theoretical framework for consideration by the DRC:

i. Endorse the principle of collaboration as a missional theological practice.

ii. Customise a working definition for the diaconate.

iii. Develop a clear understanding of interdisciplinary functioning.

iv. Work out a good ethos.

v. Understand the role of leaders.

vi. Experiment and encourage prototype development in different contexts.

vii. Allow ecosystems to develop organically.

What follows is a conclusive commentary on each of these mechanisms.

5.3.1 Endorsing the principle

In principle, the DRC (2015:190) encourages adopting a collaborative approach to the diaconate as a primary strategic point of departure.

> (6.1.2) The General Synod reaffirms…to research the relationship and cooperation between congregations and church social service organisations concerning the fight against poverty, unemployment and injustice.

Nevertheless, collaboration is a broad principle. Within this principle, various agreements and organisation structural options or models can be determined depending on the specific context, role players, and social issues.

5.3.2 Customise a working definition

Collaboration is a general term widely used in other disciplines. The DRC needs to value collaboration for the significance it can add to theology. As Tankler (2022) rightly notes, the choice for collaboration should be driven by a deep theological conviction. "Partnership in mission is not a matter of efficiency so much as a matter of theology" (Tankler 2022:74-75).

Furthermore, the DRC should not be vague in its understanding and approach to networks, collaboration, integration, and formal partnerships. Collaboration is a model of professions working closely together but not subsumed into a single organisational

framework. In contrast, integration usually means merging an organisational structure into one entity. Integration requires collaboration, but collaboration does not require integration. A network approach is often less structured but collective as role players broadly share an intention, vision, and goals.

The collaborative-integration paradigm suggested by IGI Global[22] (n.d.), and supported by El Sawy (2003), is the recommended preference of the current study. It will be discussed in terms of a proposed model in Chapter 6. The collaborative-integrated paradigm directs tightly coupled collaborative relationships –

- with a shared interest (vision and goal);
- with a diversity of individual, organisational, and disciplinary partners;
- with deep visibility of interdependent relationships;
- embracing different degrees of integration;
- sharing of knowledge, capabilities, and capacities;
- with near-real-time sharing of information;
- achieving collective impact.

It remains the prerogative of those partners involved to determine the nature and terms of partnership agreements. It allows for contextual discernment and community preferences. The point of departure is still the principle of collaboration, and the desired outcome is collective impact where the sum of the whole is greater than that of its parts, motivated by theological credence.

5.3.3 The interdisciplinary nature of collaboration

Bonstein's (2003) model provides a workable framework for interdisciplinary collaboration between theology and social work. The model suggests certain decisive components, as well as specific influences that affect the effectiveness of cooperation.

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[22] IGI Global (formerly Idea Group Inc.), an innovative international disseminator of knowledge, currently specialising in information science, technology, and management books, journals, teaching cases, and conference proceedings.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is greatly influenced by what Eurich (2020) calls the different logics of respective professions. Add to this the influence of different organisation structures and accompanying organisation culture. It polarises diaconal response by theology and social work as a discipline. According to Van der Merwe (2014), the professionalisation of the diaconate in the DRC has contributed significantly to the estrangement between the church and social service organisations to a point where it seems that the rift is unbridgeable. Furthermore, personalities and the attitude of individuals in an interdisciplinary relationship can have a decisive influence. This is particularly evident in the historical narrative of the development of the Little Seeds prototype. Historical efforts and collaboration experiences can positively or negatively impact current efforts at collaboration.

A clear joint vision is an important component to consider for effective interdisciplinary collaboration. A defining component is the consensus of an agreed-upon vision and shared goals. This grounds interdisciplinary collaboration more than anything else. Recognising and respecting the interdependence of the different disciplines is a different component that contributes to success. There are unique contributions to be made by respective role players, and the system should appreciate these. Collaboration should bring forth new activities precisely because of the creative environment created by diverse professions. Interdisciplinary collaboration requires a great deal of adaptability and a willingness to make these adjustments. Continuous joint reflection increases the effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaboration.

5.3.4 Working out a respectable ethos

All Christian ethics originate in the example of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. The theological framework used in this thesis also implies ethical guidelines such as inclusiveness, mutuality, trust, justice, and respect. Ross (2010) proposes three conditions in Chapter 2 that support ethical collaboration:

- Involvement

The process for joint diaconal action should speak of inclusiveness. This applies to the

service providers as well as to those to whom it is issued. For this, mutual trust is of crucial importance.

- Responsibility

Responsibility should be shared, and no single partner should have or abuse power to dominate the total effort. Mutual respect and appreciation also apply here.

- Liability

No one partner should carry the responsibilities, the burdens, or the risks on their own. It is a joint effort. All those involved are liable to secure the process.

5.3.5 Understand the role of leaders

As Niemandt (2007:124) pointed out, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and authority-dominated leadership will not support missional transformation to flourish. In networks, the focus of leadership is on teams and equality. The life of the Trinity is a perfect example.

With the biographical study and the empirical investigation of the prototype Little Seeds, it is clear that leadership and leadership styles are relevant and vital aspects of the process. Findings indicate that a hierarchical style elicits resistance and inhibits creativity and progress. Nevertheless, there are certain areas where strong leadership has been welcomed and seen as essential to success.

5.3.6 Experiment and encourage prototype development in different contexts

Research and prototype development enjoy high priority in the DRC. Prototype development is essential in the DRC's strategy for systemic transformation. The missional ecclesiology endorsed by the DRC in 2013 calls for practice-oriented applications to all the ministry areas of the church, and therefore also the diaconate.

In 2014 Van der Merwe recommended a purposeful study on the collaboration between

the church and its social welfare organisations. A research gap exists on practice models and recent diaconal praxis in the DRC. The time has come to experiment with different models, evaluate these developments scientifically, and place them in the subsequent movements of the research strategy (2018) of the DRC.

5.3.7 Allow ecosystems to develop and thrive organically

Studying the prototype, Little Seeds, and organisational aspects of a collaborative-integrated model, it became clear that this type of organisation management creates a new ecosystem in which it is not always possible to predict all its dynamics. It is a living relationship, and like any other one, it must grow, deepen, and take shape organically. How it grows and develops can only be prescribed if it becomes another highly regulated and structured institution.

5.4 Pragmatic-operational conclusions from the Little Seeds prototype

A full report of the outcomes of the empirical investigation of the prototype, Little Seeds, was provided in Chapter 4. Here it is crucial to identify those findings that will be helpful in the design of a praxis model.

The Little Seeds prototype emphasises the importance of relationships when collaborative practices are followed. A history of troubled relations and distrust between the church (Diaconia) and the organisation (Badisa) is frequently mentioned by more than one respondent in the case study. This is part of the narrative of collaboration between Badisa and Diaconia and confirms Bonstein's (2003) identification of significant influences on interdisciplinary collaboration. A history of unfortunate attempts at collaboration initially disrupted the Little Seeds design and development process. In the group of respondents, there is unanimity that most of these obstacles have largely been overcome.

5.4.1 Unresolved relational issues burden efforts for collaboration

For collaboration to succeed, high priority and focused attention should be given to

building good relationships. Relationship issues elicit by far the most feedback in the interviews. More challenges are experienced than there are positive experiences. The following unfortunate experiences are reported:

- People not listening to each other;
- Inequality – some people's opinions, roles, and input are more critical than that of others;
- Exclusion and disregard;
- Disrespect – individuals from different disciplines are disrespectful towards each other;
- Lack of trust – related to perceived ignorance and preconceptions;
- Tension – due to perceived power and control issues.

The aspects mentioned above regarding relationships could guide future endeavours to strengthen relationships. Regarding power and control issues, there is a particular reference to the experience of the management style during the design and early development phases of the Little Seeds process. A power play is experienced between the strategic leaders and the operational staff. Poor communication contributes to this. The experience has to do with organisational structure and cultural differences.

5.4.2 Cultural differences intensify relational matters and conformity in a new team

Various references to cultural differences were made during interviews. Respondents' qualifications of cultural differences include:

- The tension between a regulatory space and a more informal way of working;
- Protocol around decision-making, which is experienced as burdened, causing frustration, delays, and uncertainty;
- Too hierarchical compared to a leadership style that is more empowering and participative (too many bosses slows down progress).

5.4.3 Constructive interaction and good communication

The Little Seeds team initially worked in different offices in different locations within the building. This slowed down team building and had a detrimental effect on relationships. Progress was made when the relocation of office space took place so that the team became more visible to each other.

Transparency counters uncertainty and results in participants feeling included and empowered. One of the aspects influenced by transparency is the approach to organisation management. Transparency is undoubtedly one of the most prominent challenges in change management. Five respondents refer to systemic contrasts between the church (Diaconia) and the organisation (Badisa).

5.4.4 Clarity on structure and management approach

Respondents raise valuable remarks in this regard:
- Differences were noted regarding management style and human resource management. A uniform approach must be found.
  Time for adjustment should be allowed. The process must be smooth and cannot be rushed.

5.4.5 There must be willingness and flexibility on both sides to find a middle ground that serves the interest of the new initiative

Respondent 8 considers the goal of finding an acceptable and comfortable middle ground that suits both parties of great importance. Bonstein (2003) lists flexibility as a critical component for successful collaboration. Sometimes it means sacrificing a professional opinion or just a pause to consider the input of others.

5.4.6 Both parties should be consolidated in a shared intention and belief in the cause being served

In this case the shared cause is ECD. Bonstein (2003) mentions a shared goal as one of the necessary components of collaboration. A shared vision goes without saying, although the case study revealed that it sounds clear in theory but challenges reality. A deliberate process needs to drive the development of a clear vision and objectives.

5.4.7 The unintended influence of external factors can work for the good of the process

After almost two years of development (2017–2019) in which, at times, it felt the process was stuck, COVID-19 as an external event brought the team together and almost forced them to discover the gift of diversity and strength in numbers. Respondent 4 testifies to this experience:

> *"COVID-19 consolidated us. It gave us one vision. We had one enemy. We had only one way to deal with it: consolidated and integrated. COVID-19 gave us a fantastic opportunity"* (Respondent 4).

This proves that the adaptability of the newly formed team contributed to the fact that the impact of unforeseen external factors strengthened the development of the collaboration.

5.4.8 Collaboration brings about synergy and progress through shared knowledge, resources, and capacities

This finding has a definite logic, but it still needs to be mentioned since respondents confirmed experiencing this in Little Seeds. Some are still cynical and choose to isolate themselves within the team, but the majority are convinced that collaboration offers a better chance of managing sustainability. This is especially true as roles and responsibilities become clear.

5.4.9 Roles and responsibilities should be clarified to gain the most from the effort

An appreciative investigation into the unique role of the church (Diaconia) and the organisation (Badisa), i.e., theology and social work as a subject discipline, yield valuable findings. Clear roles are distinguishable, while significant data also emerges in the process to reveal uniformity about the ethos of both parties.

5.4.10 The church is geographically well-positioned and equipped with resources

The extensive geographical footprint of the church is the unique contribution the church brings to the partnership. The church is present in almost every community. The presence of the local congregation brings along a variety of resources. Many of these resources are financial or brick-and-mortar and include people (human capital) and benevolent intent.

5.4.11 The church is relational and excels in soft skills

In reflection on the theological foundation for the diaconate reviewed in Chapter 2, it is encouraging that the relational nature of the church is highlighted as a uniqueness. There is a cluster of soft skills that support this, including servanthood, the potential for good communication, flexibility, innovation, sound ethics, and moral fibre. The Common Good report (Lundie et al. 2018) in the literature review mentioned exceptional relational qualities that adds to the unique role of the church to: accompany, convene, connect, frame and tell stories, give sanctuary, bless, and pray for people.

5.4.12 The organisation excels in hard or technical skills

The organisation (Badisa) has concrete and measurable abilities. The organisation has management practices and systems in place that secure good governance. It is well established with a good reputation. Special mention should be made of experience in the complex social context of legislation and partnership with government.

5.4.13 The church-affiliated organisation differentiates itself from professional peers regarding its empathic mindset and approach

The organisation (Badisa) and the church (Diaconia) strongly bond regarding their shared values and ethics. Like-mindedness might be one of the vital attributes that help the DRC and member organisations of the CCSS to give effect to the MOI (2019) with its intention of collaboration. However, specific mention is made in the case study of the church-affiliated organisation's outstanding work ethic and mindset compared to the sector within which it operates. Compared to others, a comparison is made on the empathic approach of the church-affiliated organisation.

5.4.14 Overcome obstacles to collaboration with simple measures

Straightforward actions unlock possibilities. The following action steps turn challenges into opportunities:

- *Raise awareness of the desirability of networks and partnerships*

A team approach is better than diaconal ministry in isolation. It is an obstacle if the church or one of its key partners does not embrace the idea of working in collaboration. There is ample evidence that partnerships have immense value and that the benefits they unlock are at different levels. A congregation with no vision for partnerships, isolating itself, will not reap these benefits. Collaboration contributes to uniformity in the approach of the community and prevents overlap. In an economy of scarcity, it also assists in resource management. It is easier to identify the gaps in a partnership, for example, the skills still missing in the team, and how to address gaps. Networks expand as respective partners join and bring their networks to the partnership. This is an organic process built on relationships.

- *Consolidate partnerships on a clear vision and goals*

A clear cause and a shared vision unite people. Buy-in to the vision must be confirmed and supported at all levels of the partnership. Although this sounds straightforward, the case study shows that it can be challenging to consolidate people from different work

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environments (ministry environments) into one vision. Even consolidation on different levels within and between different structures is challenging. Distance between management or leadership figures and persons involved in operational activities does not serve progress. The same is true in a congregation. A ministry team must align with the vision and strategy of the church council as much as an operational team must be clear on an organisation's vision and strategy. When two partners come together in a merger, it becomes even more complicated. Consensus and alignment at all levels are crucial for success. New possibilities arise when partners consolidate on a shared vision.

- *Treat transparency and good communication as one of the most crucial aspects of the process.*

Good communication is crucial in all relationships and, therefore, partnerships, especially when new. It can prove to be decisive for the success of the desired outcome and could sabotage the cause in general if not treated well. Effective communication is empowering. Quality communication is about the flow of information and creates an atmosphere where participants feel noticed and valued. To be informed is to be empowered. Transparency and being informed increase the levels of trust, which is crucial for partnerships.

- *Establish, unlock, and use the unique contribution of diverse partners and identify precise transition moments in this relationship.*

Diversity needs to be celebrated. The unique contribution of partners produces a combined effect more significant than their individual efforts. Therefore, diversity should be complemented by interdependence. Interdependence is one of the decisive components for effective collaboration mentioned by Bonstein (2003). Respondents in the case study confirmed that it is sometimes just easier to proceed individually but that this is to the detriment of impact. Clear roles and responsibilities support interdependence. Unclear roles and responsibilities can lead to participants falling back into their silos with disregard for interdependence.

- *Diversity and creativity are mutually empowering.*

One of the respondents made a fascinating connection between diversity and creativity

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relevant to this specific notion:

> *"I feel very strongly about this: You can only be creative if you are willing to embrace diversity"* (Respondent 2).

Embracing diversity requires listening and respecting another's opinion and input. Recognition and openness to each contribution is crucial. Diversity fosters a creative environment where differences can be challenging and complementary. To ensure healthy collaboration, sensitivity to inclusiveness and diversity is fundamental.

5.4.15 Consider the partnership a living relationship and develop it organically

Guard against rigidity in the forming of heavy institutionalised structures. This conclusion must be clarified. Continuous reflection discussions were conducted with the problem owner as the research progressed. Little Seeds, as a prototype, may look like an institutionalised merger, although that was not the intent and should never be the understanding. Therefore, in evaluating the prototype, principles of the collaborative-integrated paradigm are kept in mind. The collaborative-integrated paradigm is not about existing structures dissolving into each other. Lessons learned from the prototype are used as guidelines for designing innovative diaconal praxis where congregations and communities embrace the idea of network functioning rather than establishing traditional programmes.

With that said, three aspects emerged from the data that must be taken into account for the continuous development of a living collaborative-integrated relationship:

> a) *Personal relationships are essential*

The better team members know each other personally, the more tolerant they are of differences and the more consolidated they work. Relational matters are a golden thread throughout this thesis and can therefore be considered key to the essence and nature of

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a proposed diaconal model.

b) A new culture is established

The empirical investigation and the literature review confirmed what the research problem claimed, namely that there is fragmentation between the diaconal involvement of the DRC and its affiliated professional social welfare organisations. Cultural differences do exist and stimulate distance if not managed. Rigidity will not benefit the process. True to the nature of relationships, the basic principles of relationship building stand true to the nature of relationships, after which the relationship grows organically.

c) Bureaucratic leadership kills the cause

A bureaucratic leadership style favours rigid structure and hierarchical reporting. Bureaucratic leaders are rule enforcers. This leadership style runs a process like a machine in which role players must know their roles and responsibilities and deliver accordingly. Empirical data confirm the effect on team members in the case study. It leads to apathy and silent rebellion. At the same time, the literature review highlighted significant aspects of leadership in transformation processes that call for innovation and creativity. The empirical data confirm that there was initial uncertainty about the role and style of leadership. However, this is to be expected in change management. The value of the Paul Durrant leadership workshop was that it highlighted the preference for a clan type of leadership. A clan is a close-knit group, almost like an extended family. The basic assumption of the clan culture type is a friendly environment best managed through teamwork and employee development. Personal relationships are intact, and elevated levels of commitment, loyalty, and upholding of tradition are evident. Emphasis is on teamwork, participation, and consensus.

5.5 Was it a constructive design process?

The research aimed not to evaluate Little Seeds' design process but to capture it as a narrative and gather information to recommend a praxis model for the DRC diaconate grounded in collaboration. Nevertheless, the prototype meets all the requirements suggested by the literature and can contribute to answering the research question. The

literature review highlighted seven characteristics that prototypes should meet. Little Seeds met all of the criteria.

1) Relevance

Little Seeds is relevant to the General Synod and the CCSS as it attempts to develop a collaborative-integrated praxis model.

2) Revolutionary

The prototype is revolutionary in addressing the current reality of fragmentation and attempting integration. It should be a game changer for the impact the DRC wishes to make in the socio-economic realities of South Africa.

3) Rapid

The environment in which the prototype was designed necessarily led to a protracted process. The rapidness needs to be secured when the proposed model is designed and implemented.

4) Rough

It is feasible to implement the prototype in a local context for meaningful experimentation. The guiding principle of being organic guarantees applicability in different contexts.

5) Right

The prototype gave a microcosm view of what the DRC hopes to accomplish. The DRC sees itself operating in networks of inclusive congregations, which at the grassroots level, out of God's love, are serviceable in communities.

6) Relational

The prototype is inherently relational and relies on a community of loving and respectful interaction. It leverages the existing networks and communities' unique contributions, strengths, competencies, and possibilities.

7) Replicable

The fundamental principles of collaboration and integration, partnership and network functioning, and mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of these relationships, are replicable and scalable. It is possible to secure local participation and ownership with knowledge and resources.

A point of critique hides in the subtext of some of the interviews. As a participant-researcher, this critique is supported: The development of Little Seeds was a long, uncertain, and protracted process. At times it felt too much like an implosion of two structures into one new structure. This contributed to process overlap, mistrust, apathy, resentment, and experiences of loss.

At this point, the third and main conclusion in this chapter could only be reached once the research process had been completed and this insight gradually emerged or crystallised. From the outset, fragmentation is considered a problem that needs to be solved. However, is this the only option?

5.6 Directional conclusion: Theology and social work are not in competition but complement each other

This study aimed to establish how Little Seeds, focusing on ECD, can be a prototype of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that can be widely duplicated. Little Seeds is a learning experience and does not claim perfection. Over the last decade, the DRC, with its rich history of compassion and service delivery, has noted that, for impact, the collaboration between congregations and social service organisations requires a tried and tested pragmatic approach. Little Seeds shows that polarity management is an alternative to problem-solving. The DRC and its affiliated social welfare partners will excel by managing polarisation rather than attempting to solve fragmentation as an unsolvable problem. Theology will always have a logic of its own. The social work discipline will always remain within its professional frame.

A directional conclusion corresponds with elements of the hypothesis claiming that an

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effective diaconal praxis appreciates diversity and knows how to manage interdisciplinary relationships. Theology and social work are not in competition but complement each other. As theology and social work complement each other, fragmentation is not a problem to solve but a paradox to manage.

Principles of polarity management should be indicative of the design of a collaborative-integrated praxis model. The work of Johnson (1992), *Polarity management: Identifying and managing unsolvable problems,* is suggested. Johnson (1992:82) explains the difference between a problem and a paradox. Problems have a solvable solution, implying there is a problem-solving process with a definitive endpoint. Polarities, on the other hand, are ongoing and need to be managed. There is a never-ending shift from one pole to the other and back. The two poles are interdependent. Neither can stand alone. Both have positive and negative outcomes, of which neither can be ignored. To manage the different poles, you need to take the whole picture into account. For example, when Eurich (2020) describes the different logics of ministry and that of welfare organisations in Chapter 2 (section 2.7.2), Johnson (1992:82) suggests that one should manage the possibilities and challenges of both worlds to the benefit of the outcome. When Paul Durrant (2019) introduces the contribution of different culture types and leadership styles to the Little Seeds team in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.3), polarity management assumes that 'competitive values' are managed complementary.

The thesis concludes that the polarisation management theory and a collaborative-integrated paradigm form a workable combination for developing a praxis to help the DRC and its partners in the social service environment pursue collective impact. The theory and the paradigm work with the benefits and strengths of diversity.

- Both seek to manage diversity to realise the value-added benefits of collaborative action.
- Both presuppose good mutual knowledge and understanding of the unique contributions of different poles.
- Both works appreciatively with the differences.

Johnson (1992:82) emphasises movement between the poles and describes it as a dynamic and ongoing loop. There is no endpoint. There is no fix. Organisational, structural, and cultural differences between the church and the organisation supplement and deepen the diaconate. There need not be competition or a power struggle over whose culture or leadership style is the most acceptable. It is a living relationship. The most critical realisation is that interdependency between the church and the welfare organisation bears the potential for something new. Managing polarities in dynamic relationships retains the best of both worlds but requires skilled management and an exact model.

The researcher uses the investigation and findings to propose a model for the diaconate of the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare partners that trumps the one-sidedness of fragmented involvement and service in the South African community by managing polarities within different levels of intervention.

5.7 Summary

The DRC not only accepts the theological premises of a missional theology but allows it to transform the understanding of God and the church's ecclesiology. The DRC's search for practice models to deepen its diaconal involvement in South Africa gives rise to a commitment to work with others, such as the CCSS, to develop praxis. This commitment is also characterised by an openness to receive interdisciplinary input and remains to converse with the ecumene in discerning God's will in the larger church. Clear theological reasoning guides the process of praxis development. Little Seeds significantly contributes to moving from theory and theology to practice. It is mainly the discovery that polarities should be managed that is indicative of proposals for developing a collaborative-integrated model for the church and church-affiliated social welfare partners that works in the creative field of diversity rather than trying to solve fragmentation as a problem. Chapter 6 presents a model that crystallises from the findings of this study. The model is deduced from the work as a whole.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION – THE SCALING DIACONATE MODEL

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 elaborates on the conclusions of Chapter 5. Chapter 5 arrived at three main conclusions on theology, theory, and practice. Chapter 6 brings this together in the proposed framework of a praxis model. Chapter 6 introduces the Scaling Diaconate Model with its collaborative-integrated approach and the theory of polarisation management. The framework finds its origin in the unfolding narrative of Little Seeds throughout the case study and literature review. The framework proposal includes the following that can be redirected to the objectives of this study, as shown in Chapter 5 (5.2 and 5.3):

- A missional theological grounding applied to the diaconate of the DRC.
- Strategically directional to ensure collective impact.
- Practice-oriented to give effect to General Synodal decisions and ministry development in collaboration between the DRC and its body of church-affiliated welfare organisations.

Little Seeds, as a prototype, made a valuable contribution to the model proposal that follows. With that said, the significant gift will not lie in the exact duplication of the prototype (Little Seeds) but in the guidelines and principles that have become clear as a result. For the DRC, the most outstanding value of the prototype is

- The illustration of the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration it offers,
- The movement it creates to enable the development of practice-oriented models, and
- The cornerstones for missional transformation demonstrated in its strategy to make a collective systemic impact in addressing poverty, inequality, and unemployment in the long run.

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In this chapter, conclusions will be drawn on the rationale, philosophy, ethical grounding, and contribution of the proposed *Scaling Diaconate Model*. Implications for church order regulation will be suggested and key concepts clarified before, in the last section of the chapter, a comprehensive discussion of the model will be presented.

6.2 Rationale for the Scaling Diaconate Model

The DRC is repositioning itself as an active role player in society by purposefully promoting an integrated approach and thereby increasing its impact in the socio-economic context in South Africa. Poverty, inequality, and unemployment dominate South Africa, and systems are flawed. Many people suffer in terms of essential means of living. Statements of vocation arise from an ecclesiological understanding influenced and shaped by the missional theological movement over the past two decades. The model originates in a reflection on the theology, theory, and practice experience of a prototype. The model aims to scale comprehensive diaconal ministry through collaborative-integrated praxis continuously.

6.3 The philosophy of the Scaling Diaconate Model

The Scaling Diaconate Model is based on the cornerstones of a reformed theological tradition that finds its identity in the Bible alone, in Jesus alone, in grace alone, and in faith alone. The Scaling Diaconate Model endorses missional theological ecclesiology and imminent diaconal spirituality and ministry in its historical context.

The Scaling Diaconate Model finds the deepest motivation for its praxis in the relational nature and essence of the Triune God, in his active presence in all creation, his rule of his kingdom, and his commissioning of all believers. The dynamic communion of the Trinity, lovingly and gracefully through just practices, brings peace and abundance to all. Therefore, this model's traits are inviting, appreciative, and supportive of every believer's contribution to faithfully imitating Godly fellowship in the Trinity (*missio trinitatis Dei*). It equips and empowers believers. A distinctive new community arises in which all humanity

is equal and neighbourly. The relationships in which compassion manifests show reciprocity and interdependence.

This diaconal praxis understands God as a sending God (*missio Dei*) who includes those living according to His mission command. Obedience is not only about *doing* but also about *being*. When the Scaling Diaconate Model equips believers, it considers the *being* (spirituality) and the *doing* (action) of diaconal praxis.

The Scaling Diaconate Model grounds a diaconal praxis that recognises God as the Lord of all creation. His presence and rule should be visible. Diaconal praxis should be transformative because of His presence that always transforms. This diaconal praxis is not aimed at short-term outcomes. It instead strives to achieve systemic, meaningful change that is sustainable. Sustainable change means the breakthrough of his kingdom in which his rule is visible, and all prosper in his presence. Therefore, the Scaling Diaconate Model is inclusive and directed at society and all people in need.

6.4 Ethical grounding of the model

The Scaling Diaconate Model originates in the example of Jesus as a Prophet, Priest, and King. As the theological framework implies, ethical guidelines embrace inclusiveness, mutuality, trust, justice, and respect. Three conditions supporting this ethos are (i) involvement in which mutual trust is crucial; (ii) a responsibility shared and sustained by mutual respect and appreciation; and (iii) liability in which no partner should carry the responsibilities, burdens, or risks on their own.

6.5 Contribution of the Scaling Diaconate Model

The Scaling Diaconate Model is organic and can be applied in different contexts and diaconal issues. Its relationship-oriented nature presupposes partners that form a collaborated and integrated change agent system prepared to serve the needs of groups and individuals with adaptability and creativity. The model is asset-based, creating something impactful with what is available. It recognises and mobilises the potential for

synergy and interdependence. The model allows for the constructive management of polarities without the danger of fragmentation.

6.6 Church Order regulation for the Scaling Diaconate Model

The research affirms that the Church Order of the DRC requires amendment. The Scaling Diaconate Model is directed by a missional Church Order that finds expression in a missional ecclesiology and resulting diaconal ministry practice. A missional Church Order directs an ecclesiology focussed on the community in its whole and not only the local congregation. Diaconal regulation in a missional Church Order encourages collaboration (as opposed to a silo-approach) and works with a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the diaconate. Such a comprehensive conceptualisation includes, among other things, the love, mercy, justice, reconciling nature and peace of a just, Triune God.

6.7 Key concepts used in the Scaling Diaconate Model

The main concepts used in the Scaling Diaconate Model are "collaborative-integration" and "polarisation management". In addition, other concepts of importance are related to the nature of the former and its expected outcome.

Collaborative-integration is a model that does not require the formal merging of structures. Instead, it presupposes interdisciplinary collaboration, partnerships, network functioning, and all the skills and insights necessary to do this efficiently.

Polarisation management is an organisation management mechanism that escalates the combined strengths and neutralises the weaknesses of the involved role players or systems. It follows an appreciative approach, utilising unique strengths within each scenario and managing the best.

Living relationships are also known as organic relationships. Organic relationships are dynamic, and strengthened and enriched by a high priority allocated to and affinity to learning to know, trust, respect, and deal with conflict as it arises.

Scaling diaconate draws attention to the desired outcome of the living relationship between the DRC, including all its structures and systems and affiliated social welfare organisations.

Collective impact and scaling are complementary concepts in this model. Therefore, the partnership, also known as the change agent system in the Scaling Diaconate Model, organises itself uniquely and systematically to achieve a larger-scale impact.

The change agent system is also known as the corporate or administrative system. The change agent system integrates pragmatically by managing polarities between two key role players (the church and the organisation). It manages polarities from a position of strength, creates (and, to a specific extent, forces organically) synergy, and scales diaconal involvement. It counters a silo approach with interdependence by aligning activities in a joint mission with a shared goal.

Asset-based/strength-based builds on the theory of a development approach that appreciates distinctive assets/strengths of different collaborators in a change agent system. It applies these assets/strengths in an integrated and collaborative way (Nel 2018:34).

Praxis brings together theory and practice. "It is reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection-both rolled into one" (Bevans 2008:71). Diaconal praxis is a theology that goes beyond interpreting the world, doing more, striving to change it.

6.8 Strategic directions for the Scaling Diaconate Model

The Scaling Diaconate Model creates a collaborative-integrated change agent system that works together towards collective impact. The focus is on a diaconal ministry approach that includes advocacy and support, directed intervention, protective care, and contributing to a flourishing community. The approach adopts a network mindset and promotes fluid, organic collaboration among diverse teams with unique strengths. The

robust management of polarities is critical to ensure success. The strategy achieves the following objectives:

- The DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations consolidate in a joint vision within a specific location.
- The parties integrate without subsuming into a single organisational structure. Instead, collaboration is visible; relationships are tightly coupled; and there is active sharing of information, knowledge, and resources (IGI Global n.d.).
- The change agent system is initially formed by a specific stimulus/short-term/immediate problem which essentially works towards the initial "alienation" and discomfort. Correct and contextual management of this initial 'point of contact' can lead to the ideal of a collaborative-integrated praxis. The model facilitates a natural "fit", whatever the stimulus for collaboration is.
- The change agent system embraces interdependence (Bonstein 2003:297-306).
- The change agent system produces new activities through collaboration, valuing the unique contribution of each partner (Bonstein 2003:297-306).
- The change agent system is flexible and manages polarities for scaling diaconate within each zone and between zones (Bonstein 2003:297-306; Johnson 2014).
- The change agent system manages polarities (Johnson 2014:1-294), enabling intelligent action and fast responses to external variables (El Sawy 2003:119).
- The change agent system is instrumental in a transformation that aligns with the Kingdom of God and its mission.

The Little Seeds prototype and supporting literature review contribute significantly to the model's design.

6.9 The Scaling Diaconate Model design

The model design brings together the DRC in all its forms of church life (local congregation, presbyteries, synods) and affiliated social service organisations within each synod in an interdisciplinary team with the desire to enable and facilitate a greater

impact. The model results from two decades of rethinking a joint strategy for the DRC's diaconal activities between these entities. The aim is to transform the DRC's traditional charity, one-dimensional, short-term approach through collaborative and integrated praxis, and thereby, increase impact. The model breaks down silos and addresses the visible fragmentation of the diaconal involvement of the two entities. As a primary change agent system, the model design integrates congregations, presbyteries, synods, and church-affiliated social service organisations. The Little Seeds as a ECD prototype demonstrates collaborative-integrated, diaconal praxis in the Western Cape.

The Scaling Diaconate Model proposes the following basic framework:

- First, delineate diaconal engagement into four zones.
- Second, identify and map the unique contributions and logic of the role players within each zone, and recognise polarities.
- Third, scale diaconal involvement in and between zones through infinite and cross-migration of activities/ministries.
- Finally, maintain living relationships with supporting agreements.

The discussion of the framework in the remainder of the chapter serves as a recommendation for a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis.

6.9.1 Delineate diaconal engagement into four zones

Social realities in South Africa are wide-ranging and complex. The Scaling Diaconate Model borrows and adapts the four zones for diaconal engagement from the ISDM (DSD 2005). These zones are called 'levels' in the ISDM (DSD 2005:30). However, the Scaling Diaconate Model prefers 'zones', as the aforementioned evokes the idea of a linear process, which is not the case in the Scaling Diaconate Model. In the same way, the designation of each zone, although influenced by the identification of the ISDM (DSD 2005), is modified to show the ministry's character. The four zones proposed by the Scaling Diaconate Model are (1) advocate and support (zone one), (2) intervene (zone two), (3) protect (zone three), and (4) flourish (zone four). Collaboration originates with

the appropriate diaconal engagement in any given zone. Ministry happens in every zone, and collaboration can commence in any zone. Within the zone, diaconal ministry scales, but it can also scale between zones. This feature of the model will be discussed later in this section.

When the DRC and its church-affiliated welfare organisations address the problematic nature of fragmentation, it mirrors what seems to be an international challenge between the church and its historically affiliated social welfare organisations. Typically, the church gets caught up in one zone and delegates diaconal ministry in other zones to other relevant disciplines. For example, the critique from the church is that Badisa gets stuck in statutory and highly regulated work. It is predictable, given the professional nature and the agreements with which the organisation works. Government agreements expect specific outcomes, which often are of a statutory nature. At the same time, the church's diaconal ministry finds it hugely challenging to progress beyond short-term charity. Considering the discourse in the DRC over the last two decades, a purposeful decision for collaboration and an increased social impact was inevitable.

Each of the four zones characterises typical diaconal and social support activities that generate possibilities for ministry. Figure 6.1 introduces the four zones and suggests diaconal activities per zone, which is followed by a discussion of each zone. Examples of activities specifically come from the Little Seeds prototype.

4. FLOURISH

Re-integration of individuals in family or community
Reconciliation and restitution mediation
Community-based services

1. ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT

Acts of kindness & support
Access to information
Immediate aid
A prophetic ministry
Sensitysing
Lobbying
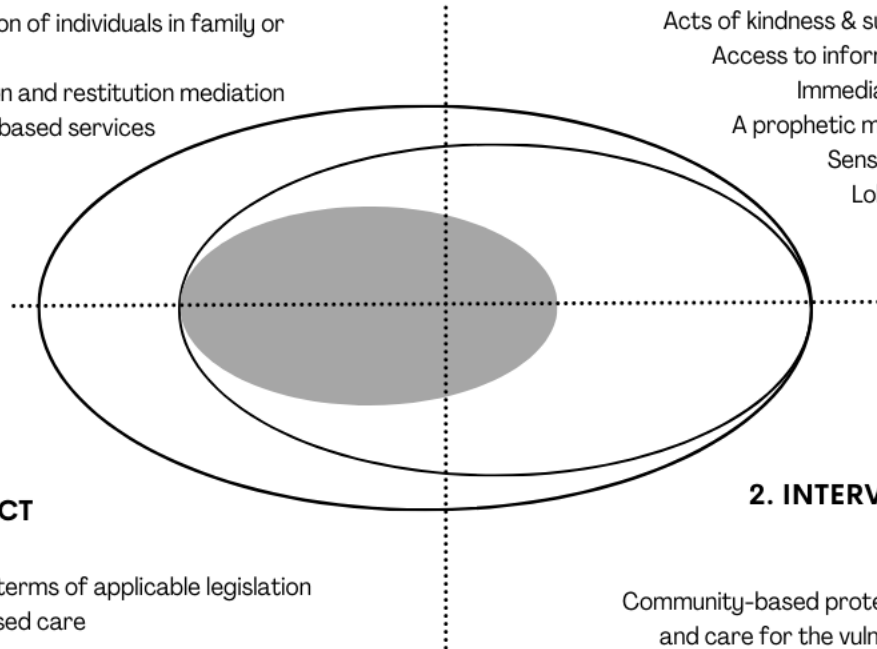
3. PROTECT

Execution in terms of applicable legislation
Institutionalised care

2. INTERVENE

Community-based protection
and care for the vulnerable
Self-help support
Skills training
Parental guidance and support
Mentoring

Figure 6.1 Delineating four zones for diaconal engagement with examples of activities

The numbering of the zones does not mean that activities in these zones happen in a consecutive manner/follows a consecutive logic. Also, the modality arrangement is random according to appropriate actions within each zone. The activities in each zone have mainly come from Van der Merwe's (2014:184-198; 2022:4) discussion of modalities, services listed by the ISDM (DSD 2005:34-43), activities noticed in the Little Seeds case study, and personal and professional experience.

6.9.1.1 Zone 1: Advocate and support

In the ISDM (2005), awareness raising and prevention are the dominant features of Zone

1. The church's inherent concern for people and their well-being motivates them to be involved in prevention when needed. Little Seeds is the direct result of this intent. Due to the reality of the multi-dimensional poverty of young children in South Africa, the DRC has commenced with an advocacy role to make parents and communities aware of the importance of ECD. The proclamation of the message is varied, including from the pulpit or during special occasions arranged in or outside of the worship service. Where there is a physical need, the church contributes to relief. During COVID-19, Little Seeds not only focused on young children but attempted to collaborate with local congregations to help young children and their parents with food packages and other necessities. Activities in the advocate and support zone (Zone 1) are often short-term interactions, like when the building of an ECD centre needs maintenance, and the congregation offers support.

The original ISDM (DSD 2005:30) considers prevention the most critical aspect of social service delivery. The best way to address social issues is still to prevent them from occurring. Therefore, activities in this zone aim to strengthen capacity and reduce the likelihood of undesirable conditions. Ministry in this zone can further delineate in:
- general action with minimum input aimed at a large community (for example, awareness raising);
- specific action over a short term in response to specific needs (for example, disaster relief as seen during COVID-19).

The Little Seeds prototype revealed that Diaconia's (church) involvement in ECD was caught up in Zone 1 and 2 before the collaboration with Badisa (organisation), after which it scaled. The benevolence of the DRC towards acts of kindness and charity is mentioned. However, immediate relief implies short-term involvement and does not necessarily lead to scaling (Van der Westhuizen 2013:110). The Caritas 'hub-and-spill' model in the Synod of the Northern Cape of the DRC is the same. The collaboration between the local congregation and Caritas (church-affiliated social welfare organisation) made the congregation's long-term commitment feasible (Van der Westhuizen, Smith and Beukes 2019).

Following is a list of unique activities in the prevention zone:
- Advocacy/prophetic: raising awareness and disseminating information. Pulpits create a platform, and the existing infrastructure of churches in communities provides a logical point for this activity.
- Engaging the voluntary will to become a change agent and provide access to information once the benevolent intent emerges.
- Support: provision of necessities and immediate needs, e.g., clothing, food, water, sanitiser, masks, toys, and books. Benevolence strengthens this role the church plays. Support also includes maintenance and improvement of facilities (buildings). Support tends to be short-term involvement if it is not followed up with building relationships. This activity can be enhanced further by appropriate direction to focus areas/existing services/ministries of greatest need and geographical areas of the highest priority.

Activities in the following zone (Zone 2), should the logic of the ISDM (DSD 2005) be followed, generates immense possibilities for long-term relationships and commitment to developmental outcomes.

6.9.1.2 Zone 2: Intervene

Advocacy in Zone 1 raises awareness of specific issues and offers support to relieve immediate needs. Therefore, activities in Zone 2 become more specified and structured. The focus of the ISDM (DSD 2005:30) on this level is the rendering of therapeutic programmes. Likewise, Little Seeds empowers congregations to intervene in more structured ways, with specific interventions, and to protect and prevent rather than cure. The Little Seeds strategy for congregations is identifying children at risk of multidimensional poverty and planning a context-specific ECD intervention (BMC 2020; Van der Westhuizen 2019; Durrant 2019). Lundie et al. (2018:1,55) explain the dimensions of child poverty in terms of the necessary building blocks in the development stage of a young child: love, nutrition, stimulation, health, and safety. The authors see the potential for diaconal involvement in these areas and believe the church is ideally equipped for such an intervention.

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Various Little Seeds programmes in Zone 2 aim to develop the potential of young children, their parents, childminders, and ECD educators. Included is the provision of parental guidance, training and equipping, building relationships, offering support, providing enrichment opportunities, protecting children by keeping them contained in a safe environment, and looking after the mental health and development of those who work with children. Abundant opportunities that coincide with the unique strengths of the church arise in this zone. Many of these opportunities are relational and have the potential for long-term involvement. Common Good (Lundie et al. 2018:50) describes the ability of the church to create webs of relationships among the complex lives of members and communities so that resources can be engaged, accessed, and aligned. This falls into the understanding of network functioning.

In addition to the examples mentioned, Zone 2 shows the following unique activities:
- Spiritual and emotional support of ECD workers.
- Mentoring.
- Quality assurance.
- Skills training and sustainable job creation.

6.9.1.3 Zone 3: Protect

Zone 3 requires professional accreditation, specialised knowledge, and expert skills. The ISDM (DSD 2005:33) considers this level the domain of statutory services, requiring a legislative response. In the Little Seeds service offer, this is the zone where ECD programmes are registered and governed according to standard operational processes prescribed by the legislation and government policies. It is also the zone where professional assistance is required when a child's safety comes at risk through a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress (Western Cape Government n.d.). Any behaviour indicating neglect, abuse, or trauma must be reported to a professional social worker, after which standard operational procedures follow to protect the child (Moore 2006). The church cannot play this role without collaboration with a dedicated child protection service provider, such as Badisa. This is where the

collaborative-integrated approach of Little Seeds guarantees a holistic approach with a comprehensive service offer to congregations.

Exploring collaboration between Badisa and Diaconia, a first realisation was that statutory work mainly contributes to fragmentation between the DRC and its affiliated social welfare organisations. At the same time, when the activities of the church and the organisation align, statutory abilities contribute meaningfully to scaling, as the church cannot fulfil this function within its congregational mandate and professional, dually registered skill sets. Little Seeds demonstrates that collaboration opens up new and innovative possibilities. In this zone, despite the regulated environment within which it operates, potential for collaboration exists in the form of specific and targeted assistance and activities, for example, foster care and holiday placements, volunteering experience at residential care facilities, and board membership.

Following is a list of recommended unique activities in Zone 3 (protect):
- Child protection services: managing individual children-at-risk caseloads following prescribed social work professional approaches.
- Complying with governance and legislation of ECD centres.
- Monitoring and quality assurance.
- Volunteering.

6.9.1.4 Zone 4: Flourish

Zone 4 suggests an ideal where there has been restoration, reconstruction, and equal rights and opportunities for everyone to flourish. In eschatological language, one could say it is a community where God's shalom is visibly manifested. There are signs of restoration of the individual's life, as well as restoration between people. There are equal opportunities for everyone. It is a community that actively looks out for the vulnerable and cares for the needy. The social profession (and the ISDM {DSD 2005}) refers here to the approach known as community-based care. In a sense, this is the ideal to which the system aspires.

Zone 4 is about a healthy and self-reliant society. Diaconal involvement mediates life-giving relationships between people, equal opportunities, and just systems representing the Kingdom of God and his shalom.

Typical and unique to the reconstruction zone are:
- The reintegration of children with their families.
- Reconciliation and restitution mediation.
- The treatment and care of individuals or groups outside residential care in a community-based setting.

Each zone and the connections between them hold the potential for scaling. The main power that unlocks scaling is the unique contributions of the church and the organisation, respectively, and in working close by.

6.9.2 Execute polarity management to scale the diaconate in and between zones

To scale the diaconate, the combined strengths of the church and the social welfare organisation align intentionally. Appreciation for unique strengths comes with an asset-based approach. The model navigates and manages tension revealed through empirical data, such as relational issues, personal issues, structural differences, cultural differences, and historical obstacles.

6.9.2.1 Navigate tensions

Empirical data from the Little Seeds study reveals the tension between the church and the organisation to originate in relational, personal, cultural, structural, and historical issues. The Scaling Diaconate Model recommends paying attention to each aspect before joint activities begin. Empirical data suggest a specific focus in each area (sub-sections 4.3.1.2 and 4.3.2.2).

- **Relational issues**

People only trust each other once they get to know each other well – even more when a new team originates from two different systems. Suspicion causes tension. Spaces must be created for the benevolent intent of people to become visible and for interdependence to grow from mutual trust.

- **Personal issues**

A certain amount of sacrifice is needed to become part of something new. Personal agendas, false expectations, and insecurities can sabotage the ideal of collaboration and integration. The success of collaboration begins with the will of each individual. The individual commits to something greater than him-/herself.

- **Structural differences**

Structural differences are expected, which can most probably be attributed to inherent differences between the two professions. In the organisation, efficiency is the guiding output, and actions are dominated by professional standards and managed accordingly (Eurich 2020:4). In the church, theological images guide the action of members and are much more organic. The grace and love of God are proclaimed freely and programmatically. As Eurich (2020:4) explains, (in the church) "Love is understood in an overflowing way, which must not be calculated: when you give, the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing". Elsewhere, Eurich's (2020) different logic is discussed. Bonstein (2003:303), who cites Billups (1987), says that in interdisciplinary praxis, partners should maximise the benefits and minimise the constraints of environmental and agency influences (structural differences). The Little Seeds study proves this is an uncertain process with obstacles to manage.

- **Cultural differences**

In the following section, tensions caused by cultural differences will illustrate polarity management. Tensions include polarities in leadership style and the working environment in general.

- **Historical obstacles**

Unresolved tension from the past can derail collaboration efforts. The Little Seeds narrative shows that initial attempts for collaboration (between 2015–2017) failed. The relationship was characterised by distrust. An agreement could not be reached due to real or perceived conflicting interests. Diaconia wanted to develop new initiatives with congregations as a primary change agent, while Badisa had established interests in ECD through existing programmes run by Badisa programmes. Attempts to develop a shared interest failed. When negotiations resumed in 2018, it paid to invest time in a proper desktop review, a visioning process, and building relationships.

The Little Seeds narrative and the empirical data reveal unique strengths and different logic, and illustrate the polarity management process highlighted in the next section. Focus falls on the unique strengths and logic of the church and the organisation.

6.9.2.2 Identify and map the unique contributions and logic of different role players within each zone

Agreement on a joint vision sets the process of polarity management in motion. The next step is to identify the unique competencies of the two entities in that specific location and issue. Empirical data obtained from the Little Seeds case study confirm the unique contribution of Diaconia and Badisa, respectively. Clear distinctions become visible when overlaying the different zones for diaconal ministry and the unique contributions of the respective parties as lenses on one other. Diaconia's (the church's) unique nature seems to come out spontaneously in the zones for advocacy, support, and specific interventions. At the same time, Badisa (the organisation) excels in the zone for protection service

delivery. Hence, the potential for fragmentation. Zone 4 requires more sophisticated services in which the organisation is expected to be better equipped than the church. Figure 6.2 demonstrates the apparent weight of the particular role players regarding the different zones. The literature review supports the findings of the empirical study, especially when Eurich's (2020:1-8) 'different logic' is added as a third lens.

Scaling Diaconate Model
Collaborative Integration & Polirisation Management for Collective Impact

4. FLOURISH   **1. ADVOCATE & SUPPORT**

Organisation / Non-profit culture

Good governance and systems
Professional expertise
Inter-sectoral networks and partnerships
Well established organisation
Empathetic approach
Entrance to communities outside of congregation boundaries

High visibility – footprint in every community
Inherently serviceable
Plentiful resources (including human capital)
Relationship driven
Accessible communication platform and audiences
Local and present to sustain work
Theological sound grounding
Prophetic voice for values and morality
Familiar with local needs
Flexible approach
Innovative

Church / Movement culture

3. PROTECT   **2. INTERVENE**

Figure 6.2 Unique contributions and distinctive logic (culture)

- **Dominant functions and specific roles**

The Little Seeds prototype and supporting literature reinforce dominant functions and specific roles based on particular strengths. The Scaling Diaconate Model predicts but does not prescribe that the church, following its unique strengths, will excel in Zones 1

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and 2 and support in Zones 3 and 4. Unique attributes of the church underlying the distinction include:

- A relationship-oriented attitude. Community engagement requires trust and personal involvement. Therefore, the nature of the diaconate is relationship-oriented, which leads to *koinonia*.
- Communication platforms. Awareness raising relies on accessible platforms for effective communication. Communication, in terms of both the message content and message carrier, is at the heart of ministry, and can be channelled to inform and empower people with knowledge and understanding of the importance of ECD. Although Little Seeds deals with ECD, this principle is, of course, universally applicable.
- The broad geographical reach of the church is ideal for scaling and reaching high-risk areas. The church is present in every South African community, although this reality is challenging. If the church has the advantage of access, it should use this advantage to make a meaningful impact.
- As God intends, the church has clear and guiding values and moral upstanding to build a prosperous society.

The church embodies a diaconal spirituality derived from the nature of God Triune. It carries a message that proclaims the value of every person, the equality of all people before God, justice before God, and justice in society. Furthermore, through servanthood, as demonstrated by Jesus Christ, who poured himself out for the needs of humankind and the world, the church lives out the principles of mutual support and care. It creates social spaces, receiving people with hospitality. The church convenes people, just as God gathers people in his kingdom.

The empirical study confirms that the social welfare organisation excels in Zone 3:

- Well-established and trusted professional practices and expertise.
- Protocols for monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality interventions.
- Execution of good governance and upholding of systems.
- Effective management of established networks and partnerships.

- The reputation of bringing stability to programmes and projects with overall management expertise.
- Modern management practices and approaches.

Empirical data revealed that Badisa excels in sincere connections and empathetic relationships. This is due to the nature of the social work profession, but frequent mention is made of the exceptional reputation of Badisa social workers in this regard.

The Scaling Diaconia Model suggests that the professional approach and social work skills will primarily guide diaconal involvement in Zone 4. Although the church has many unique attributes and resources to contribute to Zone 4, this is not traditionally the area where the church's involvement is as visible as that of the social welfare organisation.

In conclusion, the church primarily focuses on relationships and creating spaces for significant interaction, while the organisation excels in services that regulate legislation and protect children and others. Synergy between the church and the organisation leads to an enhanced and significant impact.

- **Paradox logic**

In line with the unique roles and contributions of the respective parties, the distance between church and organisation is also attributed to differences in logic underlying ministry and professional social services. With the same goal in mind, for example, to ensure access to quality ECD, the approach of the church and the organisation differs remarkably. Eurich (2020:4-5) attributes a movement logic to the church and a non-profit logic to the organisation. The empirical research of Little Seeds confirms these differences. If not managed, different logic leads to detachment between church and organisation.

Polarity in logic includes:

- Volunteers versus full-time workers: The church usually collaborates with members who offer their time voluntarily. The exact amount of time, input, and energy cannot be expected from volunteers as from employed staff. Also, managing the two resources differs significantly.
- Relational outcomes versus statistical and qualitative outcomes: The church cherishes the relationship more than empirical outcomes. Specific accountability is mandatory for the organisation.
- Innovative versus regulated: A ministry environment allows for more freedom, innovation and creativity, whilst the regulatory environment within which the organisation operates tends to determine the working environment.

The different logic creates cultural differences that cannot be solved but should be embraced and managed. With its diaconal nature and identity, the movement culture of the church allows for its serviceability to flourish. Without the structure and stability of the non-profit organisation's logic, the serviceability of the church is limited. At the same time, these inherent differences can be expected to cause tension. The latter is incredibly challenging when perceived as a problem rather than an opportunity. Chapter 2 (section 2.7.2) explains Johnson's (2014) polarisation management model. With the Scaling Diaconate Model, the DRC and the church social welfare organisation manage polarities of distinct aspects and contexts instead of perceiving it as a problem. This process starts with mapping the strengths and executing the polarity two-step (Johnson 2014).

In addition to the unique strengths and different logic, empirical data obtained from the Little Seeds case study reveal predictable tensions that must be navigated in managing polarities.

6.9.2.3 Prepare for and execute the polarity two-step

- **Setting the map**

The first phase in polarity management is to map the strengths of both parties. Following

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Johnson's (2014) polarity management theory, the process starts with drawing a polarity map consisting of four windows. As a first step, the strengths of the polarities in the two upside corners of the four windows of the map is listed. See the illustration in Figure 6.3. Data provided on this map comes from the Little Seeds prototype. The data reveal differences between Badisa and Diaconia in the (i) working environment, and (ii) decision-making processes. Both create a specific organisational and leadership culture. After listing the strengths in the two 'upside' windows, the collaborators conceptualise and list 'downsides' from empirical indicators.
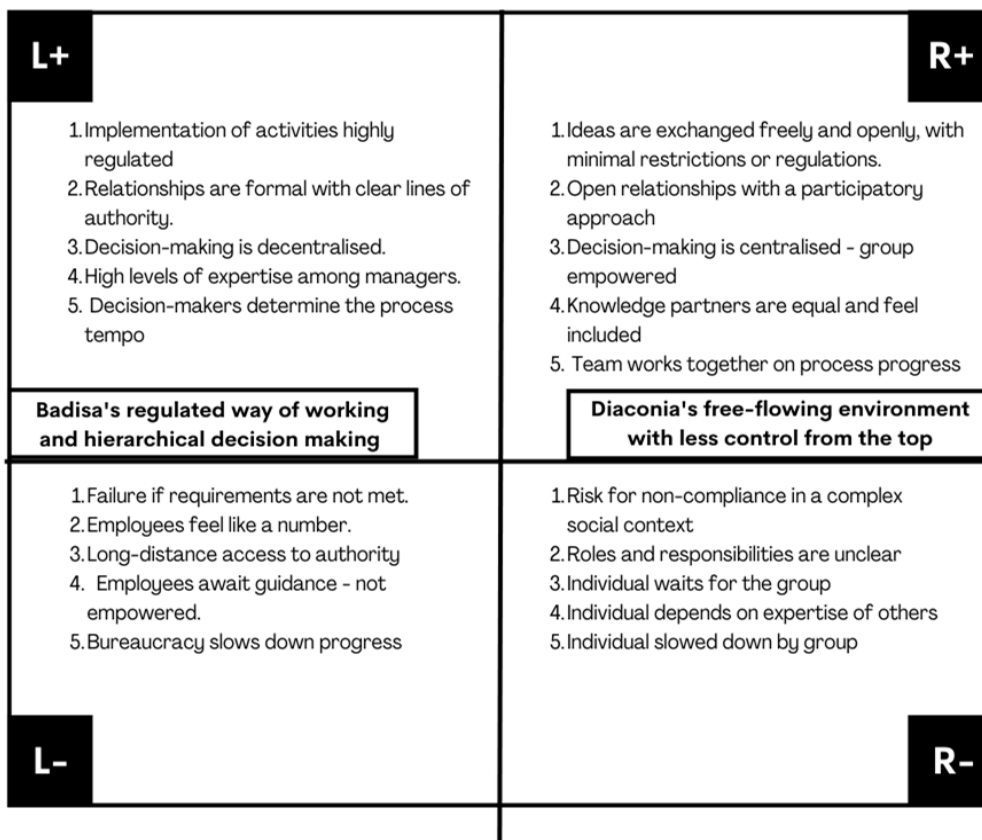
L+

1. Implementation of activities highly regulated
2. Relationships are formal with clear lines of authority.
3. Decision-making is decentralised.
4. High levels of expertise among managers.
5. Decision-makers determine the process tempo

Badisa's regulated way of working and hierarchical decision making

R+

1. Ideas are exchanged freely and openly, with minimal restrictions or regulations.
2. Open relationships with a participatory approach
3. Decision-making is centralised - group empowered
4. Knowledge partners are equal and feel included
5. Team works together on process progress

Diaconia's free-flowing environment with less control from the top

1. Failure if requirements are not met.
2. Employees feel like a number.
3. Long-distance access to authority
4. Employees await guidance - not empowered.
5. Bureaucracy slows down progress

1. Risk for non-compliance in a complex social context
2. Roles and responsibilities are unclear
3. Individual waits for the group
4. Individual depends on expertise of others
5. Individual slowed down by group

L−

R−

Figure 6.3 Building and managing the culture differences map between Badisa and Diaconia

The polarity map identifies and acknowledges opportunities (strengths) and challenges (weaknesses) within the different environments of the church and the organisation. These realities can now be managed within the collaborative-integrated praxis.

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● **Apply the polarity two-step to remain in the strength of both halves**

After listing the strengths of the church and the organisation on the specific issue, collaborative-integrated praxis deals with the polarities constructively. Managing polarities starts with anticipating a 'problem' in one of the downsides. Then, individuals/teams are drawn to the upside of the opposite pole, expecting it to be the 'solution'. Figure 6.4 illustrates the movement:
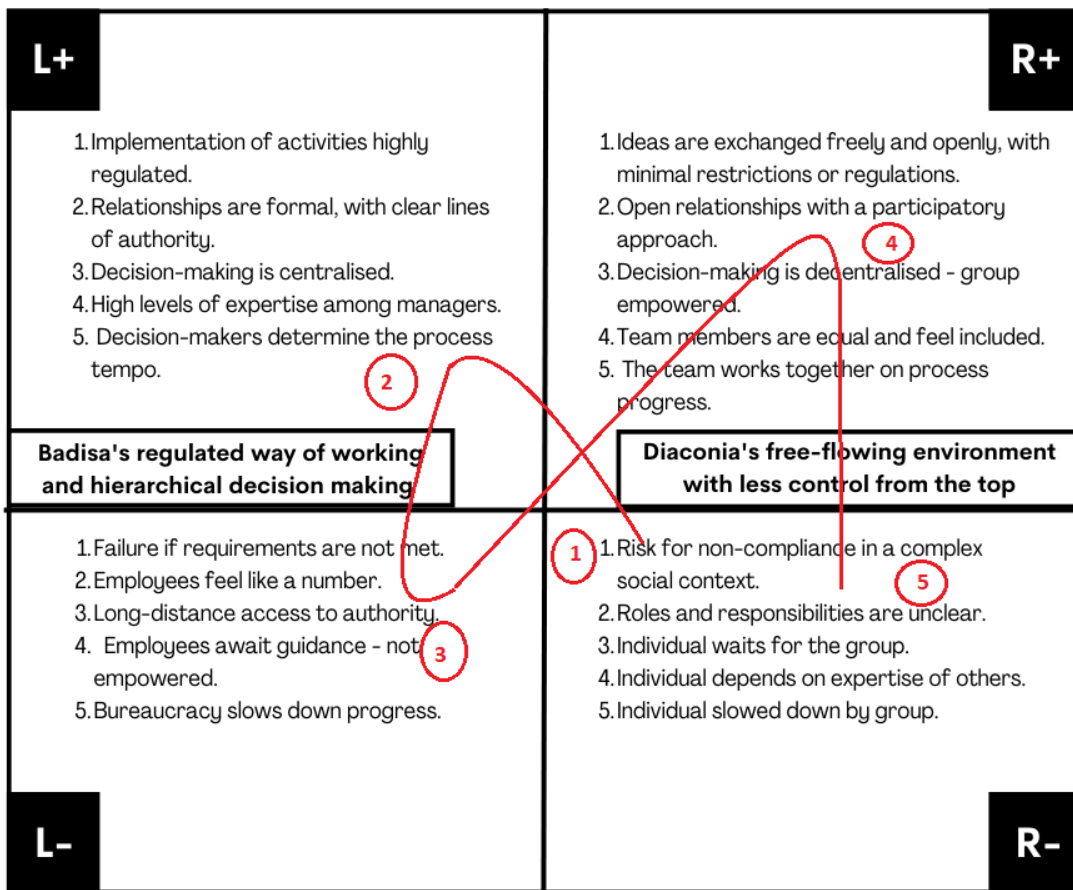

Figure 6.4 Moving across from the 'downside problem' to the 'upside solution'
Comments for clarity:

- Cultural differences between Badisa (organisation) and Diaconia (church) become evident. It involves differences in the working environment, decision-making

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processes, management structures, and the experience of empowered involvement (see sub-section 4.3.1.2).

- Notable trends are mapped. The newly formed team lists the positives, focusing on Badisa in the top left corner (marked L+). On the downside (marked L-), adverse outcomes are listed as opposed to positives. The exercise repeats for the positive outcomes (R+) of Diaconia and the negative adverse outcomes (R-) on the downside.

Interpretation of movement in Figure 6.4:

- The risk of non-compliance with legislation (R-): Non-compliance to welfare legislation places the diaconal involvement of the church at risk. Little Seeds, with its focus on ECD, works directly with children. The Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa 2005), regulates the protection of vulnerable children through the coordinated provision of care and protection services. Suppose Diaconia (the church) is not informed and does not act within the provisions of the legislation. In that case, it could unnecessarily put children at risk and even nullify the benevolent intent of the church. This, in turn, can cause immense reputational risks regarding the church's testimony. More importantly, regulation is there for a reason, and non-compliance is not in the best interest of children's safety and healthy development. Moving across and to the top addresses the 'problem'. Badisa (L+) excels in a regulated environment.

- Roles and responsibilities in Diaconia sometimes blur (R-): The participatory nature in which a small team sometimes collaborates distorts roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, clear lines of authority in Badisa (L+) bring stability in volatile times. On the downside of Badisa's strength in this regard (L-), empirical data show that team members do not experience appreciation for their contributions as expressed by comments like "*often only feel like a number*". When the upside of one pole becomes a 'problem' again (move to the downside), the upside of the opposite pole becomes attractive. When team members feel like a

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number only (L-), the participatory approach of the opposite pole (R+) looks like a likely 'solution'.

The ultimate goal is to remain in the upper quadrants. Well-managed polarities spend the most time in the upper two quadrants of both halves. Experiencing the downside of any of the poles requires action to move to the positive of the other pole. This is an ongoing cycle in which both parties commit to maintaining the synergy (Johnson 2014:106, 117). The institutional mechanism to support this practice is regular collective reflection and adjustment during the initial implementation phase, which further results in co-creation.

The Little Seeds case study provides various data that can demonstrate polarity management.

- **Apply the polarity two-step to training childminders for ECD**

The clear presence of the church in Zones 1 and 2, based on its strengths, is no reason for isolation. On the contrary, the impact might decrease when the church only performs limited functions independently. Figure 6.5 suggests a few impact areas in Zone 2, following unique church and organisation attributes. The application is on the training of childminders and ECD facilitators.

ZONE 2 (INTERVENTION) Training childminders for ECD – day mother project	
BADISA (the local social welfare programme)	**DIACONIA** (the local congregation)
L+ Includes training in legal aspects Support with standard operating procedures Existing relationships with the government sector unlock funding Professional support services are available. Manage risks – protection and care according Act 38/2005.	**R+** Familiar with local needs. Able to identify at-risk groups. Trusting relationships locally Logistical support, for example, buildings and volunteers. Positioned for continuous support – remain after trainers depart. Support for the whole person (not just training).
L–	**R–**

Figure 6.5 Impact in (L+) and (R+) based on unique attributes when training ECD-workers

The strengths of the church and the organisation are mapped in the two upsides. First, when entering a new community, Little Seeds mainly relies on the local congregation to identify high-risk and/or priority areas and plays a critical role to prepare the community for an initial engagement. The local congregation therefore creates the social space. The local congregation can, for example, make a training venue available and host trainers and trainees. The local congregation is not responsible for child protection risk management, training material, or any ECD-related knowledge. This comes with the

professional support of the Little Seeds team as part of Badisa. In addition, financial resources to facilitate this forms part of the enabling contribution Little Seeds as collaborative praxis can offer. After completion of training, the local congregation, having a sustained presence in the community, is ideally placed to support, sustain, and deepen relationships with trainees. These relationships therefore grow and become more than mere interest in the person as an ECD-trained facilitator.

The collaborates can now identify the 'downsides' of both halves, add them to the polarity map, and commence the polarity two-step by starting with the most pressing challenge.

● **Apply the polarity two-step to institutionalised care for the aged**

The model applies to any local social issue, not just ECD. For example, care for the aged in institutionalised care facilities is one of Badisa's service outputs. It is a Zone 3 (protection) activity. Figure 6.6 demonstrates an application in the local community in elderly care. The organisation's reliable systems and the church's visibility, servitude, and relationship-centred approach unlock the potential for scaling diaconate and creating collective impact.

ZONE 3 (STATUTORY) Institutionalised care for the aged	
BADISA (the local social welfare programme)	**DIACONIA** (the local congregation)
L+ Oversee compliance with all legal requirements. Ensure professional service delivery. Appoint and manage qualified personnel. Remain up to date with specialist knowledge on elderly care. Manage the sustainability of the service.	**R+** Familiar with local needs. Able to identify at-risk groups. Prioritise community needs with the program. Initiate support for emergent needs. Attend to the spiritual and emotional well-being of the elderly. Human resources - volunteers for specific tasks. Serve on the governing board of the program with knowledgeable members.
L-	**R+**

Figure 6.6 Impact following unique attributes

A congregation can only manage an old age facility with a professional context because of the specialised nature of the work. But it can, however, collaborate with Badisa to support and scale the institutionalised work. Scaling diaconal work among the elderly becomes possible when the congregation identifies high-risk individuals or groups and liaises with the organisation on how to serve these needs at best. The congregation adds capacity to the organisation, mainly with limited staff or restricted job descriptions (outcomes). The spiritual ministry of the elderly is a unique need, in addition to support

and comfort in general. On the other hand, the institutionalised facility, in collaboration with the local congregation, can offer the basis for comprehensive services in the community beyond the confines of the so-called 'brick and mortar'. There will be limitations to the strengths of both entities. These can be added to the polarity map to commence the polarity two-step process.

Little Seeds proved: Despite their diversity in logic, culture, and strengths, Badisa and Diaconia can benefit from the principles of polarity management to maximise the advantages of both and to scale and deepen diaconate.

6.9.3 Scaling within and between zones

The current recommendation is that the DRC diaconal involvement can be scaled with a collaborative-integrated praxis. It has been demonstrated that all social or diaconal involvement can be delineated into four zones. Within each zone, polarity management helps the church and the organisation bridge the distance caused by a different logic and related tensions and align and scale the mission. Optimising the potential of the Scaling Diaconate Model, movement, not only within zones but also between zones, remains to be discussed. The design is to extend ministry in a particular context and with a specific focus throughout all four zones in an infinite process of building a compassionate diaconal ecosystem in all areas of need and suffering. The following section deals with inter-zone scaling.

6.9.3.1 Scaling between zones with infinite cross-movement

The fact has already been stated that the numbering of four zones does not mean that development between the zones follows a predictable progression in a specific order. For example, starting from Zone 1 to scale does not necessarily mean progression to Zone 2 and, after that, to Zone 3. Also, the scaling diaconate design does not suggest a definite end. Inspired by the literature review on a network mindset in general and Andrea's (2009:62) term 'co-evolution', the Scaling Diaconate Model proposes an infinite cross-movement design. Networks, collaboration, and integrated approaches lead to eco-systems in which capacities and capabilities can be shared as those involved engage in

joint evolutionary development (hence "co-evolution"). Evolution is not a linear process. It is a dynamic, nonlinear process of change and adaptation over time. Applied to ministry, the Scaling Diaconate Model proposes that the evolution of serviceability in each context implies nothing but scaling diaconate and increasing impact. Therefore, an infinite cross-movement process is a continuous series of movements in which the direction is free-flowing. However, each movement is related to the next in a specific way. In a faith community, discernment is critical to determining direction. Discernment will be discussed in the next section. Figure 6.7 illustrates the recommended infinite cross-movement scaling between zones.
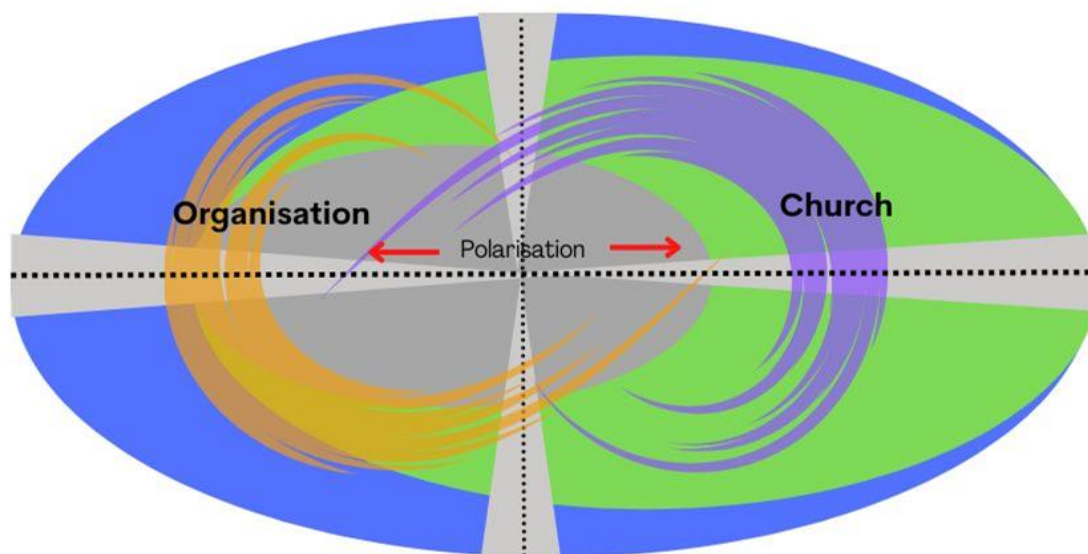
Figure 6.7 Inter-zone scaling and deepening as a free and infinite movement

Little Seeds' development practice examples can best illustrate the application of inter-zone scaling. This emanates from the Little Seeds narrative. Figure 6.7 makes visual the infinite cross-movement design.

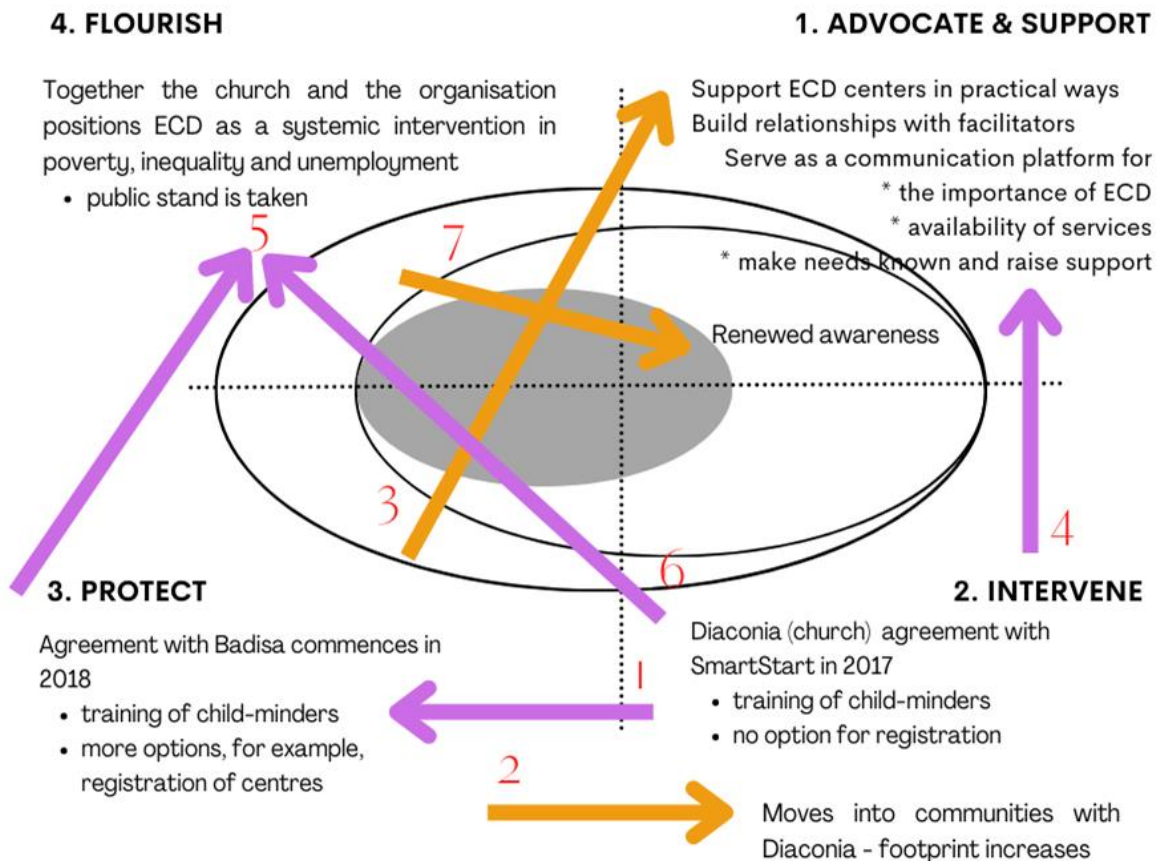Figure 6.8 illustrates application with specific examples.

Figure 6.8 Infinite cross-movement to inter-zone scaling of the diaconate

- **Movement 1: From Zone 2 (intervene) to Zone 3 (protect)**

In 2017, Diaconia approached Badisa after it became clear in 2015 that the church desired to make a systemic intervention into poverty, inequality, and unemployment in South Africa. ECD proved to be the most effective way to this end. Badisa had existing

ECD foci. When an agreement with Badisa could not be reached immediately, Diaconia concluded a memorandum of agreement with the secular social franchise programme, SmartStart, and became the only faith-based franchisor in this group. One of the limitations was that SmartStart only focused on day mothers as childminders at that time rather than alternative provisioning, for example, ECD centres. In order to comply with legislation for childminders, facilitators were trained and limited to six children only. The agreement with SmartStart flourished, and Diaconia reengaged with Badisa to commence with collaborative negotiations. An agreement was reached, and Little Seeds was formed.

● **Movement 2: From Zone 3 (protect) back to Zone 2 (intervene)**

Badisa is a Western Cape regional programme with extensions to the Eastern Cape and limited extension to the Northern Cape. Badisa's services are limited to specific geographic areas for historical reasons, which means that Badisa's visibility in communities is limited to certain towns and in a particular community. However, collaboration with Diaconia through Little Seeds implies that Badisa's footprint increases with immense potential for involvement. As part of Little Seeds, Badisa benefits from the access opportunities, resources, and modernised innovation offered by SmartStart and all other resources for ECD available within Diaconia. At the same time, Diaconia, as part of Little Seeds, can now register an ECD centre with the resources available within Badisa. A congregation can approach Little Seeds, now positioned as a one-stop ECD programme, for comprehensive support in all ECD matters.

● **Movement 3: From Zone 3 (protect) to Zone 1 (advocacy and support)**

Badisa's professional approach to awareness raising, expert knowledge on the complete spectrum of child protection, credibility, and capacity promote the awareness task around ECD. Volunteers already involved in Badisa's unique strengths in Zone 3 can play a decisive role within the model's potential in Zone 1. Due to the exposure and experience, these volunteers become 'equipped advocates', and ECD provides an ideal opportunity to play this role. The church has the will to respond to needs. Pulpits are communication platforms that can be made accessible for awareness purposes. Congregations become

aware of the importance of ECD, ministry opportunities, and the immediate needs of children, families, or centres (service providers). Little Seeds brings together trained ECD facilitators, childminders, and the local congregation. The relational strengths of the church bring about new and deeper connections between people in communities previously living estranged from each other. New faith communities can even develop. Specific ministry strengths mentioned by Common Good (Lundie et al. 2018:50) that can be very supportive come to mind. The church convenes, accompanies, connects, blesses, and prays for people. The church also gives sanctuary and lives through suffering with and as part of communities. Coming from a protection Zone 3, where relationships are often more formal, moving to Zone 1 increases *koinonia*.

- **Movement 4: From Zone 2 (intervene) to Zone 1 (advocacy and support)**

Inter-zone scaling can originate in Zone 2 and move to Zone 1. A specific intervention often has its origin in an awareness campaign. It is also true that once an intervention is established, the implementers can return to the advocacy zone. In the first phase of Little Seeds' development, when Diaconia was still operating independently, the focus was on getting as many congregations as possible interested in ECD. This was done as a Zone 1 activity. The case study tells the story of making seed money available for this purpose. Once this started to gain momentum (moving into subsequent zones), Diaconia could return to Zone 1 and testify to the life-giving outcomes. It is mainly the many opportunities that ECD creates for ministry that only later become part of the content of sensitisation with the 'return' to Zone 1.

- **Movement 5 and 6: From Zone 3 (protect) and Zone 2 (intervene) to Zone 4 (flourish)**

In this application, scaling commences in Zones 2 (intervene) and 3 (protect) with a movement to Zone 4 (flourish). In Zone 4, Little Seeds' vision is to promote access to quality ECD as a systemic intervention in poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The right of every child to access quality preschool development is upheld to the most robust degree possible. New social fabric will ensure this without intense external intervention.

A focus on high-risk children forms part of a restitution intervention. Resources and capacity are channelled to where they are most needed. Scaling diaconate implies offering the services in Zones 2 and 2 but also advocating for a just society in which this is a priority.

- **Movement 7: Zone 4 (flourish) to Zone 1 (advocacy and support)**

Little Seeds has developed a holistic approach to ECD as a ministry. The broader and more profound the involvement in the field, the more nuanced the ministry can speak of the importance of the service. Moving from Zone 4 back to Zone 1 and addressing awareness and sensitisation with new accents is also possible. The nature of advocacy is that it needs to be kept alive. Therefore, there should be an infinite movement between the other three zones and Zone 1 for advocacy in scaling the diaconate.

Just as relationships are dynamic, so is the movement between zones in the scope of scaling the diaconate. The Scaling Diaconate Model design does not specify processes to analyse communities or identify needs. The model works with principles instead. The church is explicitly encouraged to draw on its strengths in relationships and creating social spaces, bring various stakeholders to the table, enable, and support with its resources, and use the group's expertise to discern the next steps.

6.9.4 Maintain living relationships with supporting agreements and structures

In the image of God Triune, the relational nature of the diaconate is significant and directional for the ministry of the diaconate. The diaconate is primarily a relationship and not a service the church provides. Collaborative-integrated praxis, therefore, relies strongly on living (organic) relationships that keep on growing. Living relationships are not prescriptive but build on values, principles, and ethics. In the same way, the Scaling Diaconate Model does not prescribe the nature of agreements in a given relationship. Instead, the model suggests a robust relationship approach, predicted by the context, open for collaboration in mission, organic growth, and a general network mindset.

Context-specific agreements define the relationship. Most important are the agreed-upon vision, goals, and objectives of the local partnership, as well as the division of roles and responsibilities. This is what the Little Seeds case study taught. The new partnership stagnated until the vision, goals, objectives, and the division of roles and responsibilities became clear. Senge (1990:6) puts it straight: "It can truly be said that nothing happens until there is vision". He also says that real vision cannot be understood without purpose. Little Seeds was driven with a sense of purpose; therefore, this is also one of the inherent strengths the Scaling Diaconate Model encourages.

The Little Seeds case study shows that reaching collaborative-integrated agreements can be challenging. However, the principles of the collaborative-integrated paradigm have proved advantageous. Collaborative-integration encourages sharing ideas and resources between different entities, in this case, church and organisation, specifically between the local congregation and local social welfare organisations. It creates an environment where individuals are encouraged to work together to solve problems, develop solutions, and create innovative opportunities. Collaborative-integration is a model that does not require the formal merging of structures. Instead, it presupposes interdisciplinary collaboration, partnerships, network functioning, and all the skills and insights necessary to do this efficiently. Agreements develop by building on the foundation for collaboration ethics: involvement, responsibility, and liability (Ross 2010:145-146).

A network mindset prepares the way for context-specific agreements that are not necessarily legally binding contracts (Romero and Molina 2011:447-472). Networks and partnerships can be structured through various agreements, including memorandums of understanding (MOUs), joint venture agreements, partnership agreements, and service agreements. Networks can have formal or informal ties (Holzer 2010:34). Hybrid forms of networks can be formed. Although networks can accommodate high degrees of diversity, they necessitate high levels of involvement, responsibility, and shared liability (Ross 2010:145-147).

Leadership is an intrinsic part of the collaboration agreement. Indeed, for Little Seeds,

clarifying its agreement of collaboration, leadership roles, and a management approach was one of the more complicated challenges in the design process. The biography proves the time-consuming and sometimes cumbersome design process. However, prospective partnerships should note and accept that this is part of the standard design process of a local network.

The literature review reveals leadership as one of the faith practices of missional ecclesiology that develops alongside praxis in the DRC. Bureaucratic, hierarchical, and authority-dominated leadership is predictably unsuitable in a network mindset (Niemandt 2007:124). Situation management should be applied, especially time spent on strategic issues already discussed, honest reflection on progress, and implementing important lessons as they are learned. Nonetheless, the polarity management approach of the Scaling Diaconate Model predicts that even leadership styles can be managed by working with the strengths of a diversity of styles. The literature review does reveal a few guiding principles on leadership matters of networks and collaborative agreements:

- The success and power of teams lie in the effective organisation of networks and not in the individual dynamics of a single leader. This is fulfilling something of the loving relationship within the Trinity, here and now on earth. Community and mutual unity are images of God himself (Niemandt 2007:126, 130).
- Mutuality and understanding distinguish dynamic partnerships in mission. Therefore, no one partner should control the relationship. Instead, the network shares responsibility in all aspects of the joint course, including leadership (Ross 2010:145-147).
- Networks, collaboration, and integrated approaches lead to eco-systems in which capacities and capabilities are shared as those involved engage in joint activities. Therefore, a network mindset contributes to the development of an ecosystem rather than the development of single or specific entities and individual leaders (Andrea 2009:62).
- Trust, knowledge, skills, resources, and shared effort are core strengths of networks. This also goes for leadership (Andrea 2009:62).

The unique and context-specific collaborative-integrated agreement and leadership model of Little Seeds constitutes the following leadership approach. This was agreed upon during the Paul Durrant workshop (Chapter 3, Table 3.1) on organisational culture and leadership style:

- Firstly, the Little Seeds partnership requires solid visionary leaders.
- Secondly, the Little Seeds partnership requires leadership that succeeds in building and empowering teams and allows enough room for creativity and innovation.
- Thirdly, the Little Seeds partnership requires leadership to mentor and lead teams with precision in a complex legal work environment.
- Fourthly, good coordinating leadership is required. Leaders with special organisational skills are required.
- The fifth and final comment is that a decisive factor in many challenging situations in the early phases of the Little Seeds design was the shared intention/vision to which leaders were committed and still are.

The Scaling Diaconate Model recommends that a newly formed network or partnership spend ample time on a clear understanding of its vision (including goals and objectives), collaboration terms, leadership roles and responsibilities, and all others involved, and building an effective communication platform on different levels.

6.10 Summary

Chapter 6 brings together the findings of the entire study into a comprehensive framework for a diaconal praxis model. The model emerges from the research itself. In the rationale, philosophy, and ethos of the model, the development of a missional theology in the DRC is incorporated. Regarding church order regulation in the recommendation, the necessity of adjustments in a diaconal policy is highlighted. The design itself accommodates comprehensively the findings obtained in Chapter 5 from the empirical study. The core of the

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conclusion with which Chapter 6 works is contained in the collaborative-integrated para-digm and the theory of polarity management. Chapter 7 summarises the findings and conclusions into a set of recommendations based on the results of the study.

CHAPTER 7
RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 contains recommendations that have emerged from the conclusions drawn in Chapter 5 and throughout Chapter 6. The researcher presents these recommendations as proposals for implementation by the DRC. Chapter 7 is structured in the following manner: The researcher begins by providing an overview of the content covered in the preceding chapters. Subsequently, the recommendations are presented. The significance of the research is evaluated based on the research question. The limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are discussed. This is followed by a final conclusion that wraps up the study.

7.2 Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 introduced the context in which Little Seeds originates and the methodology to study it as prototype for collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis. Missional theology has transformed the DRC's ecclesiology, which requires a rethinking of its diaconal theology and practices.

Chapter 2 explored the DRC's readiness for interdisciplinary collaboration based on this theological paradigm, but particularly in terms of policies and existing diaconal practices.

Chapter 3 reviewed literature on the question why the church should consider ECD as a missional opportunity in the South African context of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

Findings from the empirical study were presented in Chapter 4.

Conclusions were drawn over two chapters: Chapter 5 analysed and reached the first set of conclusions from the previous chapter. The conclusions led to the proposed Scaling

Diaconate Model as presented in Chapter 6.

Suggestions for the application of the research findings are presented in this final chapter.

7.3 Recommendations

The recommendations put forward intend to serve as suggestions for the DRC to address the issue of a fragmented response to socio-economic challenges in the South African context. Overall, the proposed recommendations aim to mitigate the current fragmented response of the DRC to socio-economic challenges in South Africa. A collaborative and interdisciplinary approach between theology and social work is believed to enhance the efficiency of these recommendations.

The recommendations are organised in the following manner: firstly, the focus is drawn to the Church Order and its potential amendments. Secondly, theological and practical considerations are presented, which are rooted in the outcomes of the Little Seeds prototype study. The latter aspect is considered particularly significant as it offers practical solutions that can be implemented to address the identified challenges.

7.3.1 Church Order and policy amendment

The DRC found itself in a new society post-1994 with novel paradigms and constitutional regulation (Strauss 2019:8). Therefore, the 1994 policy framework for diaconal ministry requires revision. In reaction to the rise of missional theology in the DRC, amendments to the Church Order have already been made in 2013 to include Article 2, which grounds the ecclesiology of this church firmly in a missional theological paradigm. Emanating from the Framework document on the missional nature and calling of DRC (Niemandt & Meiring 2013), further revision of a missional Church Order is in process, for submission to the General Synod of the DRC in October 2023.

Flowing from the current research it is recommended that Article 54 on the 'Compassion ministry' of the DRC be revised. Currently, Article 54 (DRC 2015b:16, translation is mine)

reads:

> (54.1) The Church should look after the poor and other deprived people with priestly compassion by helping, comforting, and spiritually uplifting them.
>
> (54.2) Where the scope and other circumstances of the work require it, the congregations in church fellowship undertake ministries of mercy.

The following proposals for amendment to Article 54 are put forward. The researcher recommends that:

- The heading of Article 54, 'Compassion ministry' (diens van barmhartigheid), should be changed to 'Diaconal ministry'. Preference to 'diaconate' terminology achieves a much more nuanced understanding of such ministry and includes the DRC in the ecumenical discourse. Among others, it challenges the traditional 'charity approach' known to the DRC's interpretation of 'diens van barmhartigheid'.

- Article 54 should be adapted to ground the diaconate in God Triune, in God's love, mercy, justice, reconciliation, and peace. A new 54.1 should be considered, followed by the remaining two provisions of this article. The added 54.1 should read: 'The diaconal ministry of the church arises from the essence of God who desires love, justice, grace, healing, and peace for this world'.

- In terms of the current Article 54.2, revised policy guards against rigid demarcation that limits innovation such as interdisciplinary collaboration and the ability to respond to realities as they develop. A revised statement is recommended: 'Where the scope and other circumstances of the work require it, the congregation, in diaconal response, innovates and collaborate in church fellowship and interdisciplinary integration'. Congregations should not be bound by regulation to church fellowship, but be encouraged to innovative networked ministry.

Apart from Church Order recommendations, the research also offers certain recommendations regarding the underlying theological foundation and practical considerations. Recommendations include:

(i)   Continued development of a missional-diaconal theology.

(ii)   An appreciative approach to interdisciplinary collaboration.

(iii)   The continued development of collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal practices.

(iv)   Considering the Scaling Diaconate Model as a framework for collaborative-integrated praxis

(v)   The continued development of mechanisms to enhance the Scaling Diaconate Model.

7.3.2 Continue development of a missional-diaconal theology

The hypothesis of this research suggests that a clear and firm theological foundation grounds a diaconal praxis that wishes to address fragmentation between the DRC and its affiliated social welfare organisations. The study uncovered the dynamic influence of missional theological development in the DRC towards the end of the 20th century and into the new millennium. The missional theology paradigm significantly impacted this church's ecclesiology and the design and development of Little Seeds as the subject of this study. The research confirms that the DRC should not isolate itself from the ecumenical discourse on diaconate, which seems to be the position in the past, but should actively be part of continued theological thinking. Research on interdisciplinary praxis between theology and social work in the DRC is lacking, whilst in the rest of the world the topic does appear in research.

7.3.3 Maintain an appreciation for interdisciplinary diversity in order to maximise impact

The hypothesis of this research suggests that an integrated approach between church and organisation will add to the impact of diaconal ministry in the South African context. The biographical case study of Little Seeds captures the narrative that proves collaborative-integration to be an effective approach between the DRC in the Western Cape and Badisa, its affiliated social welfare organisation, that holds the potential for increased impact. The hypothesis supposes an appreciation for diversity and strong and healthy relationships that will contribute to highly effective and successful diaconal praxis.

7.3.4 Design and test more prototypes of diaconal praxis based on collaboration, integration, and network-thinking

A research gap for diaconal praxis models in a South African context exists. The Scaling Diaconate Model contributes in this regard. It originated from a prototype for a collaborative-integrated approach to ECD in Little Seeds. This specific prototype is between the DRC and a like-minded entity. Inter-sectoral partnerships and collaboration would be another example to be prototyped. Following the innovative cycle of the Research Strategy for Missional Transformation (see Figure 1.1) and, more specifically, the different phases and unfolding movements within the research spiral, it is recommended that:

   i.   More prototypes of collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis must be developed. Prototypes should be applied to different contexts, with a diversity of partners, and with different social issues as a focus.

  ii.   Curricula for diaconal training, which include accomplishing skills and capabilities, must be developed.

 iii.   Knowledge and skills must be aligned institutionally and contribute to the development of a new diaconal ministry culture that embraces collaborative-integration between church, organisation, and possibly other sectors in society.

 iv.   The diaconal learning community should be kept alive with constant reflection and continued research.

  v.   The DRC should expose itself constantly to the ecumenical discourse on diaconal ministry.

7.3.5 Consider the framework provided by the Scaling Diaconate Model

The framework that emerged in the development of the Scaling Diaconate Model provides a useful foundation for the further development of similar prototypes. The rationale of the model supports the calling for meaningful diaconal ministry. The philosophy of the model grounds this intent in a reformed, Christian tradition. The ethics of the model embraces inclusiveness, mutuality, trust, justice, and respect, as it originates in the life of the Trinity.

The model contributes pragmatically with the following directions for collaboration in interdisciplinary partnerships and ministry:

    i.   Begin with the shared vision of the church and the welfare organisation as like-minded partners within a specific area of social need.

    ii.   Follow network-thinking with context-specific and appropriate agreements for collaborative-integration.

    iii.   Practice polarity management to reach synergy.

    iv.   Focus on working broader and deeper together and embrace the infinite potential for innovation (new activities).

    v.   Uphold and embrace living relationships with shared responsibilities and clear communication.

    vi.   Expect the outcome of collective impact.

The final recommendation for further research includes the development of unique supporting instruments to supplement the Scaling Diaconate Model.

7.3.6 Develop tools that support the proposed model

By studying and interpreting empirical outcomes of the Little Seeds prototype, new knowledge has been generated that contributes to the interdisciplinary discussion of collaboration between the DRC and its church-affiliated social welfare organisations. The Scaling Diaconate Model is an original contribution, resulting from the outcomes of this study. Nonetheless, the recommended model will have to be supplemented with operational tools. The suggested model does not provide all the instruments needed for successful implementation. It is recommended that the model be supplemented, with a few aspects in mind:

i.   **Reach a joint vision and goals:** Use existing facilitating tools to bring local partners together and assist in entering a joint discernment process (analysing a community together and identify pressing needs).

ii.   **Partnership agreements:** Develop more specific guidelines and make it available to congregations and local organisations for context-specific network-agreements, cooperation, collaboration, and integration (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.2). The Little Seeds prototype resulted in an exclusive organisation structure that is specific to its context, and not necessarily duplicated exactly like that in other contexts.

iii. **Executing polarity management:** The execution of polarity management will require very specific leadership and facilitating skills. Guidelines and training must be developed to cultivate skills for such a process.

7.4 Significance of the study

The completion of the research was facilitated by the clear articulation and adherence to a well-defined research question: How can Little Seeds, focussing on ECD, be a prototype of a collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis that can be applied to other areas in the context of ministry (church) and social welfare intervention? The conclusion drawn from the research indicates that Little Seeds has made a noteworthy contribution towards the innovation of diaconal praxis and the adoption of network-thinking and collaborative approaches. The study has effectively addressed an existing research gap and offers promising prospects for future research projects in this area. Additionally, the research project presents a continuation of the rethinking of the DRC's missional nature and calling, with particular emphasis on its embodiment of diaconal principles. The literature review reveals the DRC's unwavering commitment to broadening its scope of diaconal activities, especially through meaningful practices that are geared towards effecting systemic change in socio-economic conditions.

7.5 Limitations of the study & suggestions for further research

The scope of this research project is confined to the biographical reconstruction of the evolution of Little Seeds and the experiences of its early adopters within a singular prototype. Little Seeds emerged within a specific context and with a distinct focus. While it is plausible to anticipate that the findings may have broader applicability, the variability of different contexts may necessitate tailored considerations. The aforementioned

limitations in the current study underscore the need for further research in this area. The scope of the supporting literature review is also limited, as it primarily concentrates on the theological paradigm in the DRC and its influence on diaconal praxis. Despite the review of ecumenical trends, the context of the DRC remains the primary determinant of whether external influences are embraced or rejected.

7.6 Conclusion

The DRC's embracement of a missional ecclesiology has far-reaching implications for the diaconal expression of the church's calling and nature. In addition to theological reflection, the DRC should also turn its attention to Church Order, particularly the regulation and direction of the practice of diaconal ministry it prescribes. Effective collaboration between the DRC and its affiliated social welfare organisations are likely to have a significant impact on socio-economic needs. The study of Little Seeds as a prototype has yielded a model that can serve as a 'landing strip' (Scharmer 2009) for the development of future prototypes aimed at facilitating the DRC's collaborative-integrated, missional-diaconal praxis.

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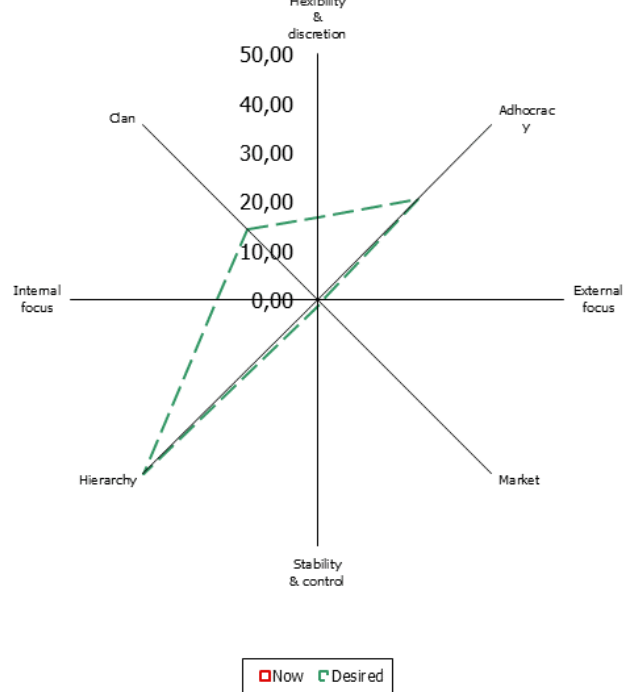
APPENDICES

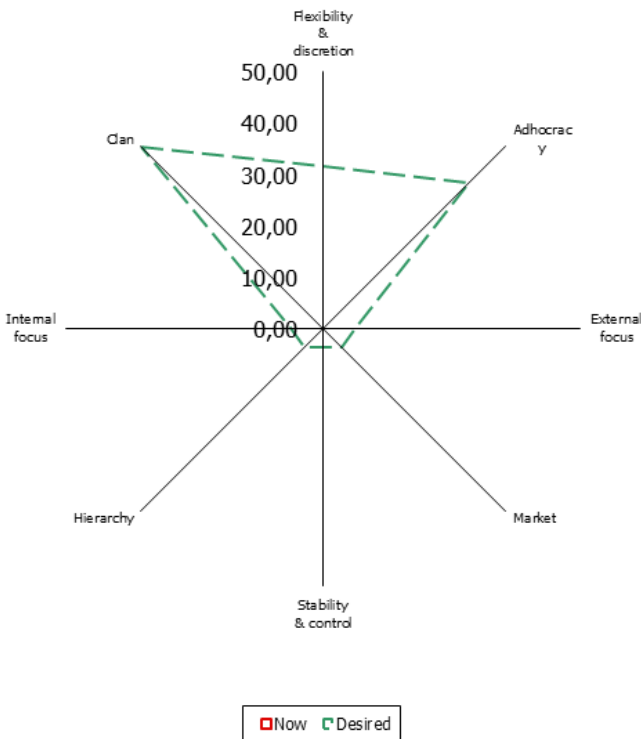## Appendix A: Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument – Elements of The Little Seeds Organisation Culture Measuring
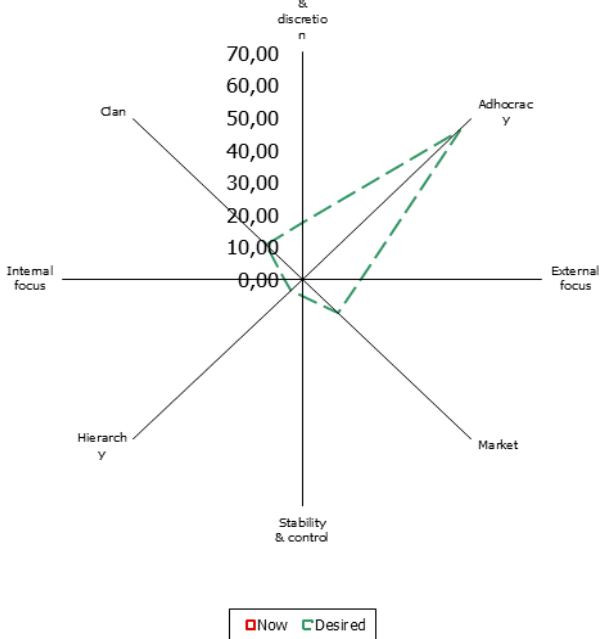
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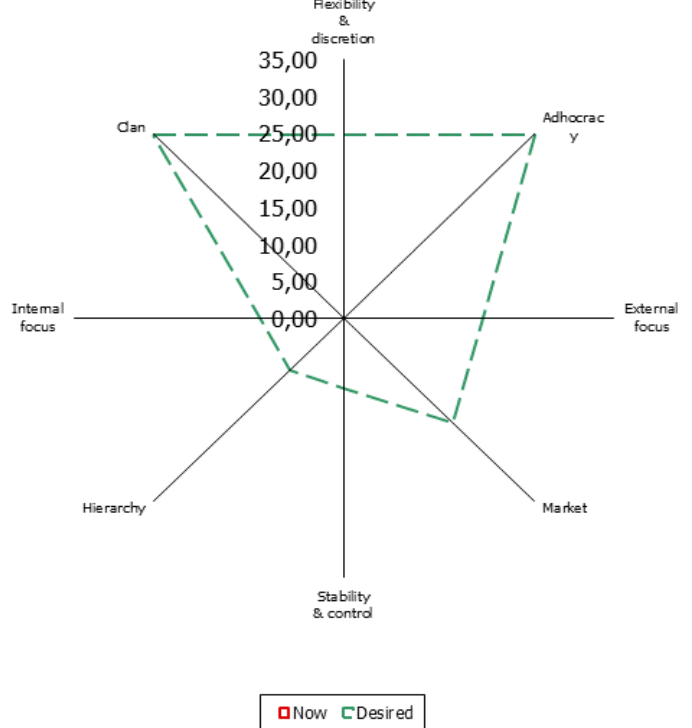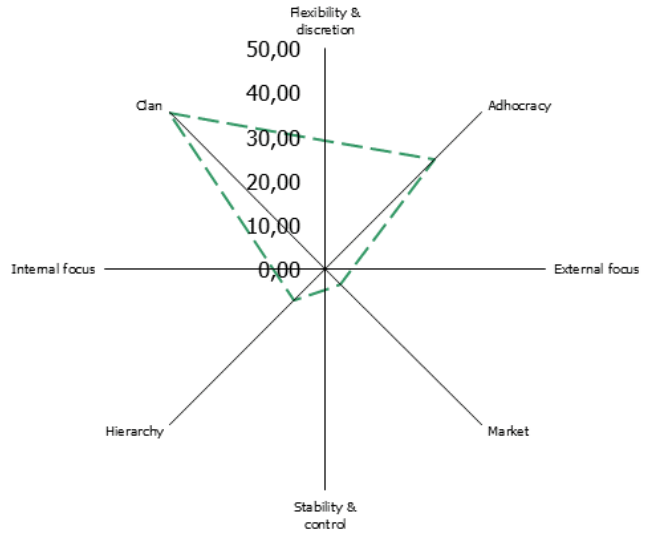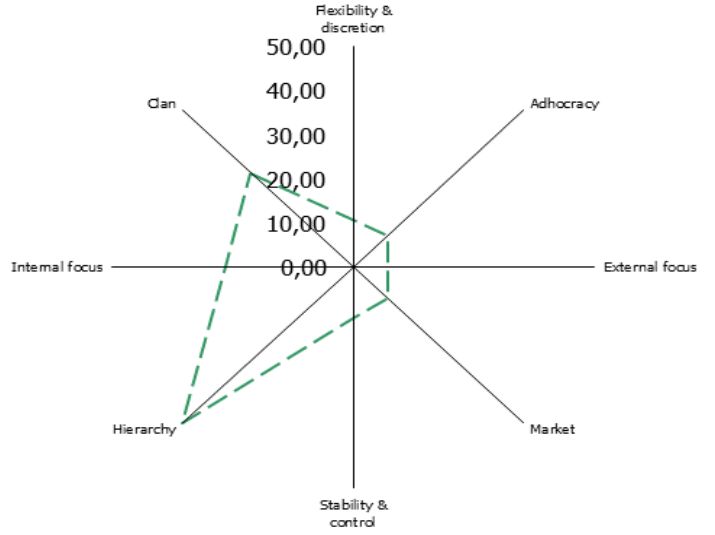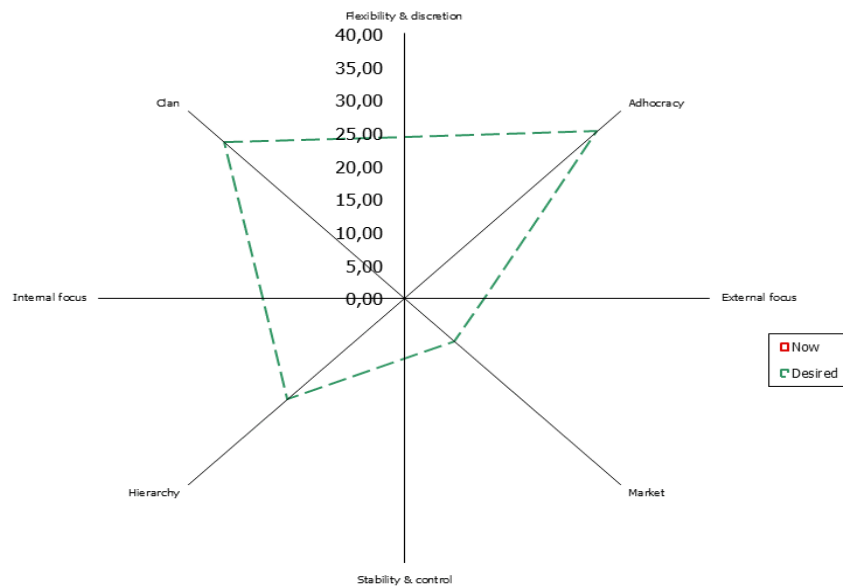

Now   Desired

6. Criteria of Success

Now   Desired

Organisational Total

Now
Desired

Appendix B: Example of a Transcribed Verbatim Report

Respondent 7 (R7)

Onderhoudvoerder: Nioma Venter (NV)

Tyd: 23:48

NV	Respondent 7, I am part of the strategic team of Little Seeds. Was involved with Badisa since 2003, until the collaboration with Diaconia around Little Seeds began in 2019. Okay so I sent you the three questions in advance, and we're going to talk within the framework of these three questions. The first question concerns the move we have made or are attempting to make, towards an integrated approach with a shared vision and a shared strategy. And we are now looking at four years, actually five years, we started the discussions about it in 2018. We look back five years and we have, in the process, gained experience on this effort between Badisa and Diaconia to work together as partners in ECD. So, your experience in the last five years. Let's reflect on the experience we had when these two worlds met.
R7	It was actually more than five years. The negotiations with Diaconia started in 2015 already, when it was still known as 'Armoede andSorg'.
NV	You are quite right!
R7	So, my experience is somewhat longer
NV	I understand

R7	Now, the 2015 part to probably 2017 was pretty awful. My experience from that time was high-high conflict situations. And the relations were, were very bad. I think it was the approaches and the personalities of the parties involved at that stage. And I think it was so bad that we actually left it after two years. And really only picked up again in 2018. There were no other people in the conversation. Those of us who were part of the long history came into the new conversation with a lot of mistrust. So the one big thing, which I think has only really gotten better for me in the last year, Is the trust in each other, and of each other's intent, the intention with this. That, and the understanding that there is room for us all to make a contribution.
NV	Let us reflect on that for a moment. Do I understand you correctly that in your experience the course suffered from the relationships that did not work?
R7	It was harmed, yes.
NV	More than harmed. It came to a dead end.
R7	Ja
NV	Nothing happened for two years.
R7	ja
NV	And even when the process was revived, distrust prevailed.
R7	Ja

NV	And then, in the last year, you experience that there has been an improvement. So, what you say is really, important. Because we are talking about a long time, big investment in terms of relationships that had to be made.
R7	There had been distrust in each other's motives and I think there had been perceptions.
NV	Of each other?
R7	Of each other and of the work. Just like they had perceptions about the organization. And I think it took quite a long time to change the perceptions. And then within changing perceptions, finally then also to see but one can only work together. And we can trust each other. And I think it's with a lot of processes and a lot of the stuff that we end up dealing with. If that….
NV	Basis?
R7	If that base is not there, and the relationships get hurt, then... You can with the best intentions in the world because we all know ECD is important. And one of us alone is not going to be able to get the big job done. But, and for me, it felt a lot like that, that we had to fight for the organization's existence in this…
NV	In the relationship
R7	In the relationship yes. And it had been bad. What made it different, and why do I think we have progressed? Well I think, I think the relationships changed then.

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NV	So that's an important point, I think, that you highlight. And it is very valuable that you get it articulated so well. These are also two systems that, if you now think in terms of, let's say the subject disciplines, theology and social work. That integration and your experience of it?
R7	These are two different worlds, with touching levels. I think what was difficult for both is the... the looser way from which the Church can do good. Here are the possibilities, let's mobilize the congregation, and you get the people, and they start doing the thing. On the other side, the organization's side, again the processes, but then the highly regulated context of the legislation. And the highly regulated, with which...yes, what the organization then has to work within this context. And I think our experience, and my own as well, we have become so used to, for example, government funding. Look, you have to report on the very last letter. And that stuff was very, very regulated. While in the church, and it was especially so for me in 2015, it looked like, you know, here money comes in and money goes out. There are not these things, these systems and…
NV	*Accountability*?
R7	*Accountability* and the systems we are forced to comply to, yes
NV	Ja

R7	So, the different way of working, it makes it more difficult to cooperate.
	Or that you don't know your... the project, you must clearly know in which phases who does what. And I think that's the stuff we started sorting out, to what it is now.
	Then the role that the Church, and... now plays in preparing communities.
	And to mobilize and get the readiness and the people to start with it.
	But when it has progressed far enough, where the children's law is kind of good…
	Or when the staff starts getting involved, or when money starts getting involved.
	That the organization can then bring in those systems and things.
	And in that respect, I think it's an incredible partnership or an incredible...
NV	Potential?
R7	Potential, opportunity to really bring the goods together and make an enormous difference.
NV	Which reminds me that the word integrate comes from a word that means 'to make whole'.
R7	*To make whole*

NV	So, when you say there is potential then it actually means there is something on both sides that, if it…
	..if it was not there
	When it comes together, then it creates a greater whole.
	This brings us to the second question.
	What is that specific contribution that you think the Church can make?
	And what do you think the….
	And you actually already touched on that, but let's think about it a little further.
	You talked about the, let's... almost say, the spontaneity with which the church works can innovate. On the other hand, you said Badisa has the governance, the structure and things in place that are needed.
NV	Can we go a little further on that?
R7	I think there is a lot if the things are now nicely put together and integrated.
	And you have synergy, then we know that one plus one equals more than two.
NV	Ja

	and then your one plus one will be five, or even more. So it is, the Church, that I think can influence the... so many people. Raise awareness and mobilise to be even more involved in diverse ways. I think like what we also saw in Covid, then started saying help us with extra food and stuff like that. So it's a lot of the practical stuff or the making of toys and the… It's for the whole message I think and raising awareness of the importance. In this case specifically ECD.
R7	But I think about the importance of our children, and how can we protect our children better…
NV	The moral issues
R7	The whole moral thing. Values and our morality. And also, all these aunts, and congregations, if you can get them to be, what we call, 'eyes on the community aunts'. And then from the organisation's side, the technical skills. We contribute professional roles and responsibilities. And then as the project develops, you need an organizational framework, that the organisation can then do that.
NV	You said it in so many words earlier in the interview and I hear you say again how important it is that roles are clarified.
R7	Rolls must be cleared, but when the baton is passed, the process should sill include the interest and input of all parties, otherwise, you professionalise the project and the church and the volunteers just stand back and leave it over to the organisation. That also happened in the past. We don't want a repeat of that.

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NV	Absoluut
R7	The latest Child gauge, from the Children's Institute, emphasizes the importance of ecosystems and also a whole community approach, you know. Because it's not just one system that can do this thing.
NV	Absoluut
R7	Caring for children cannot only be the school's responsibility. Or it is not only the Church's responsibility. Or just the organisations. So if... and the congregations and the organizations are again part of this larger ecosystem that must be built around children. So that there are enough opportunities for education. So that there are enough opportunities for nutrition. So that there can be enough safe places so that children can really grow and develop. And parents feel they are supported.
NV	I think you are now accentuating a very important base theory. Actually, for the process, we are engaged in. I mean, to say that integration is about developing an ecosystem. A whole community approach. It is unbelievably valuable.
R7	There is really great research, stuff they have recently done. This year's theme

|	was specifically about the mental health of children. And how things are actually going badly with our children's mental health. Because of Covid and natural disasters and all that stuff.
NV	Ja, absolut.
R7	The stuff that's happening now. And you need an entire system approach with your different systems. And within it, the Church and the organization are two, such great partners.
NV	Integration is inevitable in such an approach
R7	It must be done
NV	We can't do without integration
R7	We can't do without it
NV	Ja
R7	And I don't think we're getting it quite right. We have a few examples of places where we do get it right. I use our Stilbaai example, but there a quite a few.
NV	Where you can see integration

R7	Integration between your professionals, your volunteers, professional volunteers, and ordinary people who are just there to look after the children. And doing good things by looking after the children. While there are other people who give their time as a psychologist and that. But there you have a complete community system. And that's why I think they get it right that much more than places where we still try to one by one, and on our own try to start stuff.
NV	This leads to the third question. I am not sure if I hear hesitation from you? You are convinced it must happen, but there is a hesitation - if you say we might not get it quite right. And then you think of Stilbaai, and you say there is a pocket of excellence, where we see it happening. So, the third question in our conversation is about what we learn for the conversation going forward. You know, how can we learn from the experiences that have been difficult for us in the last seven years, from 2015? What do we get out of there, and what become pointers for us to go forward?
R7	I am not hesitant about the cooperation. I don't see that in practice, we get it right as we would like too often...
NV	Ok

	You know, I think the very first thing, it's about who is the jockey.
	What is the message and who is the message bearer?
	So, the message and the message carrier.
	And that there is someone, or someone, who must work very, very purposefully to get the parties together and just get the initial conversations and the relationship established. And the moment the relationship is established, and those people can sit around a table, in a congregation and start sharing the joint vision and have a dream, then...
	A dream for Stilbaai, or a dream for Citrusdal.
	And we can buy into that, then the other system starts well and so, can…
	Then half naturally starts to fall into place.
	But if we don't that, that first important thing…
	And that's the difference for me between a Stilbaai because they have jockeys there who drive the process...
	No matter what happens in between.
	These people have an absolute dream and a vision.
	And if you come in, then you are absorbed into it.
	But it is years of investment, and stability in who is the jockeys…
R7	what is this stuff…
NV	So, continuity?
	A continuity, there is the word, to keep it going.
	So, I think in Little Seeds once the leadership team has everything ready, it is terribly important that we identify who are the message bearers and what is the message.
R7	And that message must, without exception, be the same no matter who carries the message.
NV	So when we think of the way ahead, what comes to mind?

R7	People
NV	People?
R7	I think the biggest challenge is... Once Little Seeds has its own governing board or board of directors, or whatever they will be called, we will have to make sure that they understand the vision clearly. They have to understand that Little Seeds is not just another professional organisation, dealing with laws and stuff. Which comes back to having the right people around the table. I don't think we are doing nearly enough to spread the message of ECD and collaboration in this regard. So, I think we have to keep looking at the communication strategy. I can't imagine that something like money could be a problem. Maybe another virus but…
NV	I this project it is not (only) about money
R7	It is not about money
NV	Ja
R7	In the end, it's all about bringing people together and making them understand how important ECD is. And why is ECD important…
NV	And no one person or party can do this on its own
R7	No one can do it on his or her own
NV	Ja

R7	Nobody should want to do it on their own

Appendix C: Example of ATLAS.Ti Figures – Themes and Sub-Themes – Unique Diaconia Contributions
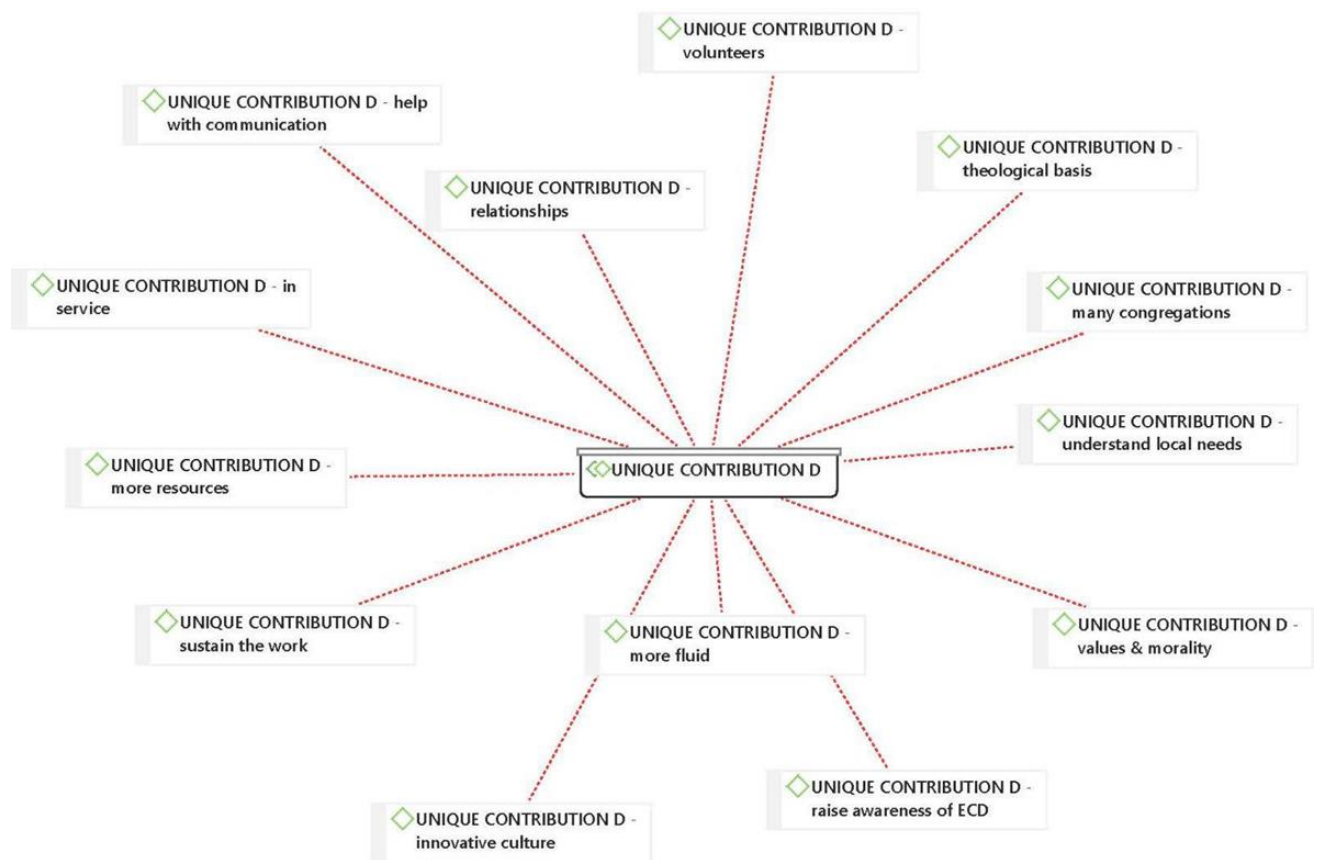
Appendix D: Editor's Letter

17 April 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: LANGUAGE EDITING

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis titled:

LITTLE SEEDS: A PROTOTYPE OF COLLABORATIVE-INTEGRATED, MISSIONAL-DIACONAL PRAXIS

By

Nioma Venter

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lee-Anne Roux