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Christian early childhood leaders: Management challenges and responses

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Abstract

This study investigated the management challenges that Christian early childhood leaders, from four different Christian denominations, encountered in their responsibilities, and in particular, the approaches they used in resolving them. A research design of grounded theory using data collected from survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis enabled themes to emerge. A Christian worldview underpinned and framed the leaders' thoughts, actions, communication, and relationships with students, staff, parents, and the community. For these leaders, their close, reciprocal connection with God sustained, guided and even at times impelled their approach to their daily practice and especially in managing challenges.

Keywords

early childhood, Christian leadership, management challenges and responses

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Introduction

Leadership is a concept that has grown and developed over thousands of years, as it adapted to meet needs and contexts. Manning and Curtis (2012: 1) comment that "the

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leadership process has been central to human interaction since the dawn of society." In recent times, awareness of its pivotal role within organizations has emerged, as leaders strive to satisfy stakeholders as well as trying to accommodate societal requirements and expectations. The leader's relationships with employees are also critical to successful outcomes and this has led towards a more collaborative and shared approach (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014).

This modern leadership approach, where leaders and staff work together in teams, is evident within education and particularly early childhood education (Waniganayake et al., 2012). Research has demonstrated the close link between effective leadership and quality outcomes (Rodd, 2013; Sims et al., 2018) as leaders guide pedagogy and practice. However, managing challenges and dilemmas is also an essential part of the leadership role, and, according to Duignan (2012), these tensions and challenges are often complex. Duignan (2012) also goes on to remind all that efficiency and accountability are now being challenged to include greater authenticity, moral and ethical principles and practices.

The newly emerging Christian approach within the early childhood education sector is not exempt from challenges for its leaders. These challenges stem from various sources including parents and children, staff, and the broader community. These stakeholders hold higher expectations from leaders who purport to be Christian. Including the word "Christian" signifies an approach to everything that the Christian engages in and with following the example of Jesus Christ as outlined in the Bible. The collective combination of these challenges can indeed become a serious difficulty for the Christian early childhood leader. In this paper we investigate what are the management challenges encountered by Christian early childhood leaders in the workplace and how do they respond to them?

Literature review

Early childhood education is a unique area of education, given that it is the foundation for what will follow. Additionally, very young children are particularly vulnerable—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually (Saracho and Spodek, 2012); therefore, the leader of a Christian early childhood center needs to provide a balanced, holistic approach addressing all aspects of the young child's development. However, balance alone is not enough, for quality is closely linked to outcomes and is essential (McCoy et al., 2017; Nutbrown, 2012). The quality of young children's education is critical to producing quality outcomes which in turn are tightly linked to the quality of leadership. Research evidence has established the long-lasting effects of early childhood education and the need for strong leadership that ensures excellent programs and outcomes for the child within this sector (Sims et al., 2018; Sylva et al., 2010).

Prior to 2010, early childhood education and care provisions in Australia had been fragmented and inconsistent as reported in the *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* Report (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2006). To address this issue and improve the quality of early childhood provisions, the Australian Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and the

associated National Regulations came into force in 2011, which standardized early childhood education and care provisions and led to the development and enforcement of the National Quality Framework (NQF). However, the frequent changes (Rodd, 2013), increased accountability and regulations over the last decade (Waniganayake, 2014), poor staff remuneration within the sector (Ang, 2011), together with administrative and management responsibilities, such as increased business competition, have combined to create a complex and demanding leadership role in the early childhood education sector (Alchin et al., 2019).

As noted in the introduction, leadership has moved towards a more collaborative approach in recent times with Ancona (2012) describing this as shifting from a "command and control" approach towards a team ethos and collaboration. Successful leaders are able to engender a culture of teamwork. Wassenaar and Pearce (2012) describe this as a "dynamic social process" (2012: 363). In order for team work to succeed, collaborative relationships and effective communication are essential. The way that leaders relate to staff members and communicate with them has considerable bearing on how successful that interaction will be.

Communication in the early childhood workplace is influenced by the close proximity of staff members, often within small centers, and with collaborative procedures. Thus, clear, unambiguous communication by the leader is essential. Nielson (2007) describes this type of leadership: "In healthy Christian educational communities, leaders lead biblically—with servant hearts, open and effective communication, and the willingness to be accountable for outcomes" (Nielson, 2007: 136). The importance of clear communication based on Christian values cannot be underestimated, given that misunderstandings can often lead to conflict. While describing Christian leadership Stott (2014: 50) notes "the basis for good relationships is respect, and respect is based on worth; not that this value relates to money, appearance or personal importance, but rather 'intrinsic human worth.'" Stott (2014) also describes this as the difference between Christian and secular leadership, that humans are perceived to be of value because of God's creation, rather than evolution.

Challenges are frequently part of the normal course of leadership, and effective leadership lies in the ability to manage, or even resolve, these challenges. When asked about the most challenging aspect of their leadership role, the early childhood leaders in research by Alchin et al. (2019) found that "managing staff" was selected three times more frequently than other options and was also found to be the most time consuming. Duignan (2012: 38) notes "Often, however, educational leaders face the problem of dealing with unprofessional behaviour while balancing their professional responsibility for ensuring the smooth operation of their organization, with their personal feelings for those staff acting unprofessionally." Duignan (2012: 41) goes on to say: "The issue of dealing with poor performance in a responsible and professional manner that considers the interests of all concerned emerged as one of the most significant accountability challenges for educational leaders." It is interesting that Cafferky (2007) notes there is scant research on challenges within Christian leadership and that it is the theological dimension from which most of the tensions emerge. Therefore, within Christian early childhood leadership challenges take on an additional dimension, for in addition to performance issues,

philosophical issues may come to the fore when managing non-Christian staff. These issues might include a dissonance with the Christian values of forgiveness, social justice, and compassion (Peck et al., 2014), or even undertaking practices such as prayer, Christian songs or Bible stories as practiced in Christian early learning centers. An essential part of quality holistic education and care includes emotional aspects of a child's development. The most conducive environment for this to occur is a calm, caring, and harmonious situation (Education Review Office, 2010). However, this may be difficult to achieve if there are challenges between the leader and staff.

Often another major challenge for leaders within early childhood centers is workload (de Schipper et al., 2007). As noted earlier the early childhood leader's role has been described as demanding; Klevering and McNae (2018) described the workload as "diverse but immense"; further noting the "tension and complexity" in a role that involved managing a center while also leading the education in it.

In addition to managing staff and overall workload, early childhood leaders sometimes find themselves in the position of having to advocate for the importance of early childhood education, both within the community as well as with educators from other sectors (Shpancer et al., 2008). Early childhood education has long struggled against perceptions of child minding which have been compounded by lower remuneration, longer hours, fewer holidays, and lower qualifications (O'Connor et al., 2014). Although challenges to leaders are common, good leaders need to recognize them and respond positively, professionally; and for Christian leaders those responses are based on Christian values, with the Christian worldview at the core.

Christian values are the foundation for Christian practice, based on biblical texts. Brown (2007: 86) attests to the importance of Christian values: "The embodiment of values and purpose within leaders is the basic biblical criterion for leading others." In the book of Galatians 5: 22 and 23 these Christian values known as the Fruits of the Spirit are listed: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These are the espoused values of Christian leaders. A Christian worldview pulls together these values for the individual and provides a lens through which the world around them is assessed. Further than that, it also provides an approach guiding the interaction that may follow. A Christian worldview is holistic and dynamic, developing over time, with background, culture, and experiences shaping a perspective that is biblically based. Smallbones (2015: 83) writes "the primary purpose of the Bible…is to make God in Christ Jesus so known that we experience a personal loving relationship with God that transforms us into the image of Christ." Authentic Christianity is about a genuine relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and reflection that enables individuals to have a Christian worldview which guides and sustains their values-based practices. In order to investigate the challenges and responses by Christian early childhood leaders we needed to ask them how they did this and so implemented a qualitative research design.

Method

The researchers hold a Christian worldview and have chosen to investigate using a constructivist approach, implementing what Mertens, Sullivan, and Stace (2011: 231)

note as "multiple social constructed realities wherein the researcher and researched co-construct meaning." Due to the lack of research in this area, qualitative constructive grounded theory (Charmaz, 2011) was chosen in order to uncover participants' experiences and views through initial coding, constant comparing, memoing, multiple member checking opportunities, and further questioning to uncover the encountered management challenges and how these were resolved by these Christian leader participants. As part of the research design, data was collected through a survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Twenty-three early childhood education and care center leaders in New South Wales, Australia, that had the word "Christian" in the name of their centers or in their description of service, were contacted via phone and invited to participate in this study. Nineteen of these leaders were willing to have the survey questionnaire mailed to them and fourteen completed and returned the survey questionnaire. The plan was from the returned survey questionnaires to select case study center leaders who met a number of predetermined criteria. These predetermined criteria included a willingness to participate in the follow-up interviews; being part of the research and having a strong support for Christian leadership and excellence in early childhood education; the center having "met" or "exceeded" the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACEAQA) accreditation standard; and a diversity of Christian affiliations. Four participants were selected for the in-depth case studies, representing Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Uniting Church, and Seventh-day Adventist denominations. In order to preserve anonymity, the four participants have been given pseudonyms: Fran, Darlene, Denise, and Maree. Ethical clearance was granted by the Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee.

The survey questionnaire was used to first approach a wide range of leaders within Christian early childhood education and care centers regarding their Christian leadership beliefs and practices. Questions on the survey questionnaire were designed to explore leaders' attitudes towards their work, their sense of self-efficacy and their level of enjoyment in their leadership role. These included: "I feel confident about communicating effectively with my staff" (using a four point Likert scale); "Can you explain how to recognize "Christian Leadership" in an Early Childhood Center?" (using an open space for responding).

The next phase of data collection involved three rounds of semi-structured interviews and observations conducted individually at the four case study workplaces. The focus during these data gathering exercises was to obtain information regarding the participants' beliefs, values, and practices as Christian early childhood education leaders. In addition, document analysis was done for each case study using their early childhood education and care center website, photos, and artefacts displayed around the center. Analysis commenced by conducting multiple intensive readings of the data; as concepts and issues emerged and were repeated, they were clustered and refined into the identified themes as presented below.

Findings

This research project explored some of the highlighted challenges which Christian early childhood leaders have to manage. The results from the survey questionnaire show that these Christian early childhood leaders were all female and aged over 36. Thirteen of the 14 participants had a degree qualification and had worked for more than 16 years in early childhood education and care (ECEC). All of these participants were also experienced ECEC leaders and the survey questionnaire shows that seven had more than 16 years in leadership, while five had more than 11 years and two had more than 6 years; thus indicating that this was a very experienced group of participants. Ninety-three percent indicated that they felt personally competent and enjoyed their role "always" or "most of the time." Direct quotes, provided in italics taken from the survey questionnaires and interviews, will be used in this section to illustrate the themes that emerged from the data. The themes present the ultimate solution as well as the challenges facing these Christian early childhood leaders together with their responses. In all the challenges identified by these Christian leaders their response always centered first and foremost on their connection with God as their solution to the challenges faced. As this relationship was so prevalent across the responses in the data it is being presented as theme number one.

Relationship with God

The strongest, common theme to emerge from this research was the underpinning relationship between the leader and God. *Faith-based, God centred in the middle. You have to have a personal relationship with Christ, as a leader, in order to live, breathe and express that* (Darlene). This dependence on God through prayer and reflection coupled with a sense of God's guidance and support governed the attitudes and actions of these leaders. This was especially so in the area of the challenges which had to be managed on a daily basis. *I have many discussions with God. We're on good terms! (Much laughter). It's in the difficult times where you have the deepest most authentic talks with God…and call on His help. Christianity doesn't get pushed to the back when dealing with management issues; it enhances management. My practices of management reflect my Christian leadership* (Maree). This two-way relationship with God was pivotal in enabling the leaders to maintain their Christian values when dealing with challenges. During the interviews, each leader was asked to draw a diagram of how they perceived Christian early childhood education. It was extremely revealing that each leader began with God as the beginning and center of the diagram; to them, God was the overwhelming source of motivation, guidance, and support.

The leaders' personal workload

The most multi-faceted group of challenges emerging related to administration and workload. As mentioned earlier, workload is a major issue in educational leadership and within it lies a multiplicity of roles for the leader: budgeting and running a small business; all aspects of staffing; pedagogy and educational leadership; public relations, family, and

community interaction; compliance with national guidelines and standards; and ethos and team leadership. Maree shared some of the extra support she received from staff members: *I've got another one in there who took some of my work. She came in this morning and said "Ohhh my goodness, look at your desk. I'm taking some of this" I said N-n-n-no you don't have to take that. She goes: "you've got too much work to do" I'll take it in and I'll do it for you.* With a chuckle Denise commented several times throughout the interviews, *It's not ...you know…a 'start at 8 o'clock and finish at 4' job. I spend a lot of extra hours; it doesn't fit into an 8 hour day.* It must be remembered that these leaders also combined all of their leadership and administrative responsibilities with actual part-time teaching.

Financial

A challenge for many of the participants was ensuring that enrollments were maintained, allowing the centers to remain viable: *I said to* [names secretary]*, we're full for next year, praise the Lord!* (Denise)*,* and managing to stay within the budget: *We make our financial decisions on a Christian basis. Not so much in terms of a profit, but in pastoral care for our families. Before we make any decisions, we are prayerful about it, and we think, OK how are we representing Jesus in this community?* (Denise). In addition to the professional actions of advertising, communication, and advocacy, prayer was perceived as an essential for enrollments as well as careful financial management and planning for budget success. This aligns with the Christian worldview and practice of daily prayer following Biblical instruction. Included in this careful administrative management and planning for success is that of compliance.

Compliance with national guidelines and standards

These leaders mentioned the challenge of dealing with frequent government policy changes as well as compliance with the detailed regulations of the National Quality Framework (NQF) and the accompanying Standards. However, because adherence to these guidelines is mandated, and regularly assessed by a representative from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACEACQA), noncompliance was not an option. Leaders managed the workload of this requirement through collaborative teamwork and delegation. At the same time, Darlene put the NQF in its correct context when she said: *For me, it has to be compliance first and foremost. It "has" to be in terms of our legal responsibilities to ensure that what we are providing is lawful and to the most excellent outcomes.* Darlene went on to explain that she believed doing what was "right" was more important than just "keeping parents happy." This links in directly with a Christian leadership approach where authentic values and behavior are foundational and integrity is central.

Ethos and team leadership

Maintaining the Christian character of a center, its ethos, is critical. Youlden (2008: 25) writes: "It (Christian ethos) can only be fostered and preserved by an intentional and

ongoing commitment to integrate it through the entire operation of the school. It will not occur automatically. Rather, success is dependent upon thoughtful effort and careful planning." *I think communication is key. It's key for our staff, our philosophy, for what we do and for having good relationships. For spreading our philosophy to our community. But you can't just talk. You must live what comes out of your mouth* (Maree). It is upon the Director/Leader that this responsibility rests.

Further, working together—leader and staff—as an effective team, does not happen by chance. As Wassenaar and Pearce (2012) noted, the dynamic social process of facilitating communication, enjoying successes and learning from difficulties is a critical leadership skill. "The leader is modeling openness and supportiveness and encouraging team members to display these behaviors in their interactions" (Kerns, 2019: 45). *They're a collaborative team and we're at a stage where everyone's entitled to their opinion, no-one has to have the same opinion and we can talk about anything. So everyone doesn't agree* (Fran). Reflecting together also builds the team ethos, *we often have a debrief after a meeting. So that none of us have walked away without that debrief bit of reflection. I think it's important for them, because you're in a heightened state, whether it's a positive meeting or a negative meeting, so they need either some wind-down time or rebuilding time* (Fran). This supportive approach from the leader enabled the team ethos to remain strong.

The leaders noted that trust between staff and leader is vital and this is based on mutual respect. Visitors to Fran's center commented, *"wow, your staff respect each other, and wow, your staff respect the children.* While Maree said, *People see that you mean what you say, say what you do, and you lead it truthfully. That's where the respect comes from to you, living it truthfully. If you're not living it truthfully it's very apparent to all and sundry and you quickly lose respect.* The leaders also made their personal care for their staff very clear. As Fran noted when describing her relationship with staff: *To Mentor/educate/nurture and reflect the love of Jesus for them so they know with every fibre of their being they are loved and valued.* And so, a Christian leader builds the team ethos and values each member.

Staffing: Selection, recruitment, and management issues

Several aspects of staffing were critical to the effective functioning of the centers. Judicious selection and recruitment were fundamental, and several leaders mentioned the care with which this was done as a Christian leader. *HR management: for every director/leader, it is our number one expense, it is our number one issue, it's the make or break of your philosophy, your field, your way of being* (Maree). Fran echoed this approach: *We as a staff team collectively watch, and the whole team has to OK that person, before I let them in this space. And I tell that person outright, that this is a really collaborative team, I am really proud of them, they have really good, high expectations. I mean, the poor casual, they have got to jump to it, but they all know, those that have made it to the casual list [i.e., those available to cover for absent teachers], know that they have actually achieved something* (Fran). Similarly, Maree commented: *I'm very careful with employing people. When new staff tend to come on board, I will have them as a casual or for*

a probationary period for a good while. Even finding suitable staff can be difficult: *I think one of the biggest challenges for us in a Christian based service is attracting committed Christian people; and I know sometimes I have talked to recruitment agencies in regard to what is the definition of a committed Christian, and I know for some recruitment agencies that has been a very difficult concept* (Darlene). This careful approach based on Christian values and careful selection prevented many difficulties from arising.

As mentioned earlier, staffing was found to be significantly more problematic than other issues faced by leaders of early childhood centers (Alchin et al., 2019). Jillian Rodd's (2013) comment is very relevant: "Where a workplace depends on harmonious social interaction, conflict is inevitable." Rodd (2013) further notes that many early childhood education leaders mistakenly believe that disharmony would not arise if people would try to get on with each other, instead of recognizing that disagreement is a normal part of the working life. Confronting disagreements in a Christian manner often leads to better outcomes, rather than ignoring the issue and allowing disgruntlement to fester. In fact, Lencioni (2002: 207) writes of "engaging in productive conflict" which enables relationships to grow, issues to be addressed and healthy debate to occur. A Christian worldview provides a healthy, positive lens through which to view this dynamic approach to staff interactions and discussion.

Philosophical differences

Although this section could be placed within the staffing category, it has been selected for particular attention, as this is a challenge unique to Christian settings. Most of the leaders in this study had experienced a staff member, who, although choosing to work in a Christian early childhood center, was not supportive of a Christian approach. Some were passively uncooperative with Christian activities, while others constantly challenged and were actively opposed to the Christian activities of the Christian Early Learning Centers such as Christian songs, Bible stories and prayer. Careful selection of staff, modeling, and frequent articulation of Christian values and expectations, together with prayer were essential in addressing this challenge. As Maree said: *You can't just say you do it and don't do it. You must live what comes out of your mouth. That's the way I lead. If I'm asking them to do it…I'd better be able to do it ten times better!* The leaders commented that their approach was to clearly state what was unacceptable, and reiterate the Christian values and ethos on which the center was based.

Interactions with parents

A number of the leaders mentioned that at times they had to deal with some parents who were discourteous, or hostile. Maree explained that she would remind parents of the Christian values of the center and then in a courteous, but firm manner: *I would actually ask the parent to not speak to my staff member again like that or really you need to reflect on whether this is the correct place for you to be* (Maree).

Some families are very wary of the "Christian" aspect of the center. Fran addressed this challenge with clear, open communication: *I talk to them quite openly at orientation:*

"We're not pretending we're anything else, Your children will hear about God. They will hear about Jesus. They will hear the Bible stories. If there's any problems, let me know. Right now. This is the time to sort that out." There is never any deceit or hesitation about expressing the fact that we are a Christian based service. Fran also explained that although these parents did not want the program labeled Christian, in fact those were the very values and practices they wanted for their children.

Community interaction and public relations

For these Christian leaders, their Christian worldview led them to a holistic approach that went beyond education of the children to acceptance, inclusion and care for the whole family. Many of the participants mentioned hospitality, accepting, and caring for families as a cornerstone of Christian values. *They feel they have a place to go and they can be whatever they are. There is no judgment, over a cuppa, having a chat, and it can go further, if they need that. And that is parents, grand-parents, and past parents come back. You saw that this morning, one of those parents does not have children here now, they come back to us—they feel safe* (Denise). For these leaders, modeling and articulating Christian values was critical to their leadership and managing the challenge of needy families. Some families struggled financially and Denise explained how they are supported: *We make our financial decisions on a Christian basis. Not so much in terms of a profit, but in pastoral care for our families … and before we make any decisions, we are prayerful about it, and we think, OK how are we representing Jesus in this community?* These leaders identified that this need went beyond the individual families and included the broader community.

Social justice is one of the cornerstones of Christian service, as Maree said: *I have, in the past, been given quite a hard time by some staff who don't have these values or don't live these values…compassion and understanding, those children from challenging backgrounds need us more. Those families need us more. That's how I live my Christian leadership, by saying to my staff "all families and particularly families in need, they're what we're here for" …. Here all families are valued, respected, and made to feel welcome. They belong to our community and that's how we treat them.*

In addition, several leaders mentioned that some of the parents have difficult natures or backgrounds. This was shown in the previous section by the quotation from Maree regarding interactions with parents. For these Christian leaders, courtesy, respect, and kindness characterized their interactions with community members whether the challenge related to values, finances, or interactions. They held firm to a Christian perspective in their relationships with community members even when those community members did not share the same values.

Discussion

Authentic Christian leadership is based on biblical values such as those found in Galatians chapter 5:22, 23: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These values are the foundation for a Christian worldview

which guides why and how the leaders in this study lead. These values show the trust and respect that these leaders worked to develop through demonstrating transparency and consistency.

In leadership, including Christian early childhood leadership, challenges surround the leader; and managing them effectively and within a Christian framework is essential. The leaders in this study acknowledged that workload and administration disproportionately occupied the director's time as well as providing a wide range of challenges as noted in the findings. For these Christian leaders, the center of their focus and the core of their strength and guidance, is their two-way relationship with God. This creates and nurtures the Christian worldview, which governs thought, language, and actions. For all these Christian early childhood educational leaders this core concept of communicating with God through prayer and praise, reading, and reflection (Smallbones, 2015), reciprocated by a sense of guidance, understanding, inspiration, and empowerment to work for God was the critical process underpinning their values, attitudes, and actions. They turned to God through prayer, not only on a regular daily basis and throughout the day, but also in times of extreme difficulty, stress, and decision-making.

Within workload and administration, by far the largest portion of time and emphasis related to staffing. The time factor covered recruitment, selection, induction, professional development, supervision, and support while Maree noted that staffing costs were also the major portion of the center's budget. Early childhood education involves staff working closely with very young children, frequently in small centers with limited staff and close interdependence on each other. Inevitably, some conflicts and challenges will arise. As explained in the findings, many of the challenges that occurred as part of the administrative responsibilities were addressed through good practice and a professional approach. This was particularly evident in the time taken with the selection of staff to ensure that the applicant's behaviors and communication aligned with their professed values and attitudes and with those of the center. Maree also commented on the intensity of HR Management: *it's our number one issue, it's the make or break of your philosophy*. These leaders perceived staffing, effective working relationships and authentic care for staff as critical to a successful Christian early learning center.

The community, in the experiences of the leaders in this study, occupied less time and was not always negative, for sometimes the challenges had very positive aspects or outcomes. Powerful themes of social justice and altruistic hospitality came through strongly from these leaders. This was particularly so where individuals were very needy such as Denise's providing hospitality, food, and support for those less fortunate. Maree sometimes had to challenge her staff's attitudes when they lacked compassion and a sense of fairness.

The philosophical issue presents both intensity and difficulty when it occurs. From time to time, a potential staff member might pay lip service to Christian values in order to gain employment; however, these leaders maintained a patient, caring approach, while requiring adherence to the Center's Christian values. At times, this was a source of considerable stress, as the situation needed time and a tactful, firm approach; again, prayer provided support and the strength to adhere to their Christian values.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have focused on the management challenges encountered by Christian early childhood leaders in the workplace and how they respond to them. This study shows that the management challenges encountered by these Christian early childhood leaders were managed on the basis of their Christian worldview and Christian values, all undergirded by their dynamic two-way relationship with God.

There are a number of limitations in this study. The data were only from the leader's perspective, and all the participating leaders and researchers were women. The research was also bound to New South Wales, Australia, and invitations to participate were only given to centers with "Christian" in their name. It is therefore recommended that future research in this area include male participants, other states and territories, the inclusion of affiliated faith-based centers who do not necessarily have "Christian" in their name, and other staff perspectives. In addition, existing problematic staff needs further investigation in order to provide Christian leaders with strategies to manage and address challenges that arise from this.

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