

Summary

Inhabited Memory: A Learning History of the 'Samen-op-Weg-proces'

The Samen-op-Weg-proces (1961-2004), in which the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands came together to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, is history. The Samen-op-Weg-proces started with the call of eighteen theologians, pastors and a wika (a church worker), all of whom worked in evangelization and student pastoral care. The ambition for change was expressed by a call that mentioned 'being moved by the expectation of the Kingdom of God and the mission of the church in the world and a joint conviction that unity must be sought'. To many Dutch Protestants, it was a particularly 'tough change process'. This process is history but active in memory. The merger also includes the eventual formation of a national central office and the formation of the Protestant Theological University.

According to change management research, a merger is difficult to implement because it requires a cultural change. The way in which the organizational culture relates to change is a cultural issue. I call organizational culture 'remembrance culture', because a church is more than an organization. The culture of remembrance is embedded in tradition, symbols, language and music. The ritual aspects of religious identity influence the identity of the ecclesiastical community: the forms and structure of the liturgy, the method of preaching and the way of celebrating. The way in which one deals with the past, what one remembers and what meaning one assigns to it, all influence the way in which one can develop new ways of acting. It is the implicit, the touch, the emotion that makes a permanent memory, an 'inhabited memory'. As Assmann (2015) said: 'What we remember, forget or repress determines who we are – or want to be. Our actions today are partly determined by what we remembered and what we have forgotten'.

Relevance

What is the meaning of inhabited memory of the Samen-op-Weg-proces as a complex change process?

The key terms in this dissertation are 'inhabited memory' and 'complex change process'.

The roles of remembrance culture, remembrance bearers and remembrance managers in an ecclesiastical change process has not yet been investigated. Little is known about them within ecclesiastical practice. On the one hand, this dissertation contributes to the development of practical knowledge that will guide complex ecclesiastical change practices. On the other hand, it adds to the academic literature on change management through the use of 'inhabited memory' in a complex change process in a religious or idealistic environment.

Inhabited Memory

The term 'inhabited memory' is derived from the theory about the role of memory in change and the way in which it is visible and recognizable. There is a relationship between change and time and generations as a force for change. At the same time, remembering is a force that actually blocks change. Remembering and forgetting, remembering and changing influence each other. Traditions and beliefs are transferred from one generation to another and these traditions form a path of remembrance that has both an individual and a collective track. There is a constant and mutually reinforcing influence. This influence has its roots in social psychology, which states that there is a dependency between individual memory and social context. The social context is influenced by crucial events in life history, religious history, group history and national history as anchors of memory. These anchors are both sources of renewal and places in which the past is cherished and where reminder documents and people are positioned and presented. Inhabited remembrance is therefore physically tangible and visible in remembrance cultures, fed by remembrance bearers and directed by remembrance managers. Reminder managers in the Samen-op-Weg-proces are public figures with a function and role, such as members of the Council of Deputies, chairmen of working groups and representatives of the media. Remembrance managers operate in a political environment where interests are at stake. Which memory elements come to the fore and which disappear? Interaction dynamics is emergent, it arises. It is also contingent: sensitive to coincidences. Power and conflict are part of an interaction dynamic. Power perspectives are internalized in patterns of acting and remembering. Deciphering the patterns of interaction dynamics is part of getting to know a culture of remembrance.

Sub-questions associated with this keyword:

- What is the meaning of the time in which the Samen-op-Weg-proces takes place?
- In what way are anchors and remembrance cultures significant in the Samen-op-Weg-proces?

Complex change process

A merger such as the Samen-op-Weg-proces is messy and complex. A merger is about continued existence, encompassing issues such as identity, the core of the views or mission, mutual trust and practical agreements. The added value can be defined in three ways: by the legal fact as such, therefore by scaling up; by transferring values, so that each can learn from the other; and through joint renewal or transformation. Messy environments are characterized by strong remembrance cultures that become dominant, especially with change efforts in an organization. Willingness to change cannot be taken for granted, because culture is associated with power. In every culture, power has an ideological dimension. Assumptions such as the (in)equality of men and women, legitimize positions of power and are part of the culture of remembrance. There is systemic cohesion and interdependence. It is characterized as an issue that cannot be isolated, with dependency relationships occurring at the content, social, contextual, and psychological levels. In this process the following issues play a role:

- structural: searching for a new organizational form;
- cultural: asking for mental change;
- innovation: innovating in the performance of the church;

- financial: efficiency and better handling of money;
- religious: substantiating religious choices and the foundation of the church.

In complex changes there is a talk of change paradigms and working mechanisms.

Change paradigms

When people face change, they must decide if they want to, have to and are able to change. Changes disrupt the balance that people are used to. Their attitude to change is based on reason and emotion. The balance depends on a rational assessment that someone makes of the consequences of the change will have for oneself and one's group. The emotional responses that a certain change evokes in a person revolve around the question of whether the change is an opportunity or a threat. Some 'change beliefs' can be translated into opportunity ('opportunity') rather than threat ('danger') and positive ('support') mechanisms rather than negative ('resistance') mechanisms. This dissertation will describe the change paradigms as a specific orientation to the vision of change.

This results in four change paradigms:

1. Change is a necessity: Change is experienced as an opportunity to be meaningful and the group supports it. The culture of remembrance is fully open to change.
2. Change is adjustment: Change is experienced as an opportunity to be meaningful, but the group resists giving up important anchors and reminder documents. The remembrance culture is somewhat open to change.
3. Change is not better: Change is threatening, but the group is willing to think about what is indispensable and where change is necessary to win support. The remembrance culture is somewhat open to change.
4. Change is to return: Change is threatening and there is resistance in the group when others determine what is or is not to be said. The memory culture is not open to change.

Working mechanisms

Mechanisms of action can fix, release or renew. Working mechanisms can take the form of working mechanisms that support change, such as initiative and conversation, movement and innovation. Some mechanisms of action can stop change, such as slowing down and paralyzing, preserving and disqualifying. Research shows that the influence of working mechanisms depends on the legitimacy of power and authority (sources of power); in other words, the position that remembrance managers occupy in the change process. This influences the interaction dynamics in a remembrance culture and between remembrance cultures. The negative mechanisms of action can be traced to:

- Voice of Justice = rational judgment;
- Voice of Cynicism = this does not work, this does not yield any benefits;
- Voice of Fear = fear of change.

Sub-questions:

- What is the meaning of change paradigms and working mechanisms in the Samen-op-Weg-proces?
- In what ways have the working mechanisms in the Samen-op-Weg-proces been broken, or kept intact?

Research method

A learning history has been chosen, a summary based on 15,000 pages of documentation. The term was developed and applied by Roth and Kleiner (1996). Their premise is that many change processes are at work in organizations, but over time the view of the failures and successes that result from trial and error learning during the change process disappears. The learning history expresses the process of change, the memory of reminders who have experienced the change themselves. The learning history has the following steps. (Steps a and b are carried out simultaneously.)

a) Literature study of church history and change management

b) Drafting the summary.

The documents on which the learning history is based are from 1961-1973 and the reporting of all joint meetings from 1973-2003 and 2004. These documents have been edited in Atlas.ti.

c) Member check: submit summary to respondents.

All responses, both prioritization and all additions (questions, missing content; feedback; anecdotes) have been put in Atlas.ti. There are 756 responses. All the additions and priorities of the respondents have been taken literally and are recorded by period.

d) Data reduction and definition of heat points.

The prioritization of text fragments makes it possible to create graphs. The highest-priority fragments are defined as the most important events. These provide insight into crucial moments in the Samen-op-Weg-proces. By prioritizing text fragments from all periods, focus is created. Dividing the texts into smaller units makes it possible to analyze patterns and regularities and to give them meaning based on the two keywords.

The choice described in this thesis (crucial moments) is dictated by the interest of the respondents and the interest I have assigned. Below is an overview of the points that are central to this study.

Crucial moments, 1961-1973	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The call of De Achttien and youth 2. We-they-think 3. Church feeling 4. The organization of Samen-op-Weg-proces without De Achttien 5. Truth, unity and renewal
Crucial moments, 1973-1986	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interdenominational movement as the basis of Samen-op-Weg-proces 2. Management model 3. Control agreements and step-by-step 4. Difference in thinking 5. Confusion about urgency and timeline
Crucial moments, 1986-1990	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consultation Observership Evangelical Lutheran Church 2. Sketches and the end of the Working Group on Future Design 3. Remonstrants as observers 4. 'Classic reclassification' report 5. Full Lutheran participation
Crucial moments, 1990-1998	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church order 2. Exit of Remonstrants 3. Naming, the baptism, the wedding sacrament 4. Work organization
Crucial moments, 1998-2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The name and the Groep van Acht 2. The work organization 3. Concentration Universities 4. Reports 'Hideout in the wilderness' and 'Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior' 5. The final phase 6. Association decision

Selected stories

Story 1: Ambition

1961-1973: The call and the youth

This story starts in 1961 with the call for change from De Achttien and ends in the spring of 1973 with the joint synod of Reformed Churches. The call is followed by publications and large meetings. Young people join and continue the call for change. There is a need for change because, with greater economic prosperity and new academic findings, the old principles and their meanings no longer fit. New forms must be sought to keep the church meaningful and relevant for a new generation. The scope of the ambition of this call for unity is itself complex and multiple: it is not only a religious issue, but also a financial, cultural, structural and innovation issue.

Story 2: Dilemma

1973-1986: Different thinking

This story starts with the first joint synod in 1973 and ends in 1986 with the Declaration of Conformity and the Declaration of Intent. The first joint synod meeting is an anchor, 'an historic day.' Gradually it becomes clear that the themes of remembrance cultures influence discussions about discipline, confession, scriptural authority and political action. These differences are visible in the language and their reproduction in the culture of remembrance, as a result of which inclusion (belonging) or exclusion (not belonging) naturally occur. Past issues, such as the Secession and its influence on families, become visible in the stories.

Story 3: Conflict

1986-1990: Sketches and the end of the Group on Future Design

This story starts in 1986 with feedback on the progress of *Samen-op-Weg-proces*, in conjunction with the sketch Future Design (starting with Sketch 1984, and followed by Sketch 1986, Sketch 1988, Sketch 1989) and ends with a conflict in 1989-1990. This story describes the dialogue about the future of the organization of the church in relation to the merger. However, there was no room for innovation; instead, there was incomprehension. At least three groups failed to come to an understanding. In short, the Reformed General Synod focused on perseverance, the Reformed General Synod was more concerned with keeping everyone on board, and the Council of Deputies mediated between them.

Story 4: Confrontation

1991-1998: Church order

This story begins with a new course to determine the order of merging via the church process and ends with the adoption of the second draft of the church order. One of the main questions in this phase is how to handle the differences in the 'confessing' tradition among the churches? What binds them together? These are both legal questions and questions about 'inhabited memory'. After the astonishment at the speed with which the concept of church order came about, one then supposed that if one agreed with the church order, one naturally agreed with the merger. The documents about the recitals are extremely difficult to interpret. There was a strong emotional undercurrent. The word 'pain' is often used and expresses something of the trouble of the process. There was also increasing indifference to and irritation with the merger being delayed. The contradictions, which were initially excluded from the discussion, returned. The subject of marriage and blessing or blessing of other life commitments is regularly on the agenda between 1993 and 1997.

Story 5: Acceptance

1998-2004: The name and the Groep van Acht.

This story begins in 1998 with, among other things, the 'name synod' which was not an incident but an expression of intense embarrassment, and ends in 2003/2004 with the reunification and association of the three churches. The objective—how to proceed with the *Samen-op-Weg-proces*?—was to break through the impasse and to nurture mutual trust and dedication to good relationships. They asked a number of questions during a dedicated synod meeting. Central are the different interpretations of Bible texts and the ways of reading. Behind this lay different human views and world views that determine the actions and the memories. Remembering stands for the way in which the past and faith dogmas are defined and commemorated. The Groep van Acht managed to get the interaction going and managed to regain trust, although the issue of naming was parked.

Conclusions

What is the meaning of inhabited memory in Samen-op-Weg-proces as a complex change process?

The research into the meaning of inhabited memory in *Samen-op-Weg-proces* explains why it takes so long and why only part of the ambition has been realized. The process led to a legal

merger and not to a mental change, a transformation. Inhabited memory gives meaning to at least three factors that evoke emotion, namely:

- a) A physical place of worship that people frequently visit, gives remembrance a fixed reminder path. It provides clarity about rules, insights and traditions. It is an anchor and confers a sense of safety and power.
- b) The Word, the words, the documents of remembrance, the conviction and witnesses of the history of faith give the remembrance culture certainty and a fixed remembrance path.
- c) The music, the sounds, are accompanied in the mind by melodies. This gives remembrance a soundtrack.

Taken together, these three give inhabited memory a conscious and unconscious influence on change. It evokes emotion and—as this dissertation shows—makes it extra difficult to shape a process of change in religious communities. The touched emotions and ingrained patterns of ‘being and views’, the tension between internal and external orientation, the historically grown remembrance cultures, the impact of working together, which in itself forms a complex whole, creates tension.

Three areas of tension are related to the inhabited memory in the complex change process, which causes it to last so long and to some extent succeed:

1. Between remembering and acting
2. Between changing as an opportunity and changing as a threat
3. Between development and design

The generations grew up during the Second World War and there is a realization that the churches have a responsibility to show moral leadership, to take a public stance against injustice. Both inside and outside the church there is a sense of urgency among part of the population that unity and cooperation must be sought both within and outside the church. More young people than ever now have access to higher education. There are also scientific advancements in, for example, technology (the moon landing), medicine (the birth control pill) and biology (the theory of evolution). These developments ensure that many young people will ask questions about the separation of churches. Some merger partners are convinced that ‘remembering’ in the sense of controlling and repeating is necessary. The origin of the remembrance anchors and preserves the remembrance culture.

Four remembrance cultures collide in every culture of remembrance. These collisions are both opportunities and threats. Remembrance cultures do not seem to tolerate each other.

1. The opportunity of the culture of remembrance culture, ‘a Word for the World’ is that the gospel is experienced in practice and is visible in the world. The church is flexible and agile. This gives the church a good chance of survival in a changing world. The threat is that the church falls into activism and does not maintain a sufficient connection with tradition.
2. The opportunity of the culture of remembrance ‘the Word of personal faith’ is ‘the confession of the fathers and the memory of what has been transmitted.’ A threat is that there are

questions below the surface that should be avoided. This can result in too much one-sided attention to 'personal well-being' and too little attention to collective issues.

3. The opportunity of the culture of remembrance 'preserving the Word' is that it offers certainty at times of uncertainty. It provides peace of mind to 'let go of the world' and to turn inwards. It can work as a testimony to live 'free of time'. The threat is that people cannot connect with the questions of today. This can lead to a negative testimony that harms the collective.
4. The opportunity of the culture of remembrance 'the Word in order' is that it responds to the importance of a collective, ritual dimension. Scripture and Table call for action in society in the presence of mercy and diaconate. It is an opportunity to create places to 'burn a candle' in society. You don't have to invent the faith yourself. The threat is that rituals are performed without substantive renewal and that the call to repentance degenerates into incantations and formulas.

Recommendations

Space

Listening to someone else sincerely takes personal courage: is there a question of 'opening up' and releasing any prejudices that stand in the way of dialogue? The learning history shows that listening was difficult. Theological language—according to one respondent—is arrogant and disqualifying. Perhaps it is difficult in a church to be transparent about your motives, because this is not a theological language. The word 'sin' can be given an abstract dogmatic interpretation and not a call for 'change.' Change requires reflection and openness about your own behavior, assumptions and motives, and that is a language other than 'theological language'. 'Cross-border visitors' are needed to bring in expertise and a different reality.

Follow-up research: from system to intention

How transparent and simple are current ecclesiastical rules? What is the place of the laity? What are the conditions for good management: how free are the choices when internal stakeholders steer the process? In other words, does the system of classis and delegation to the synod and the decision-making process work properly? These questions cannot be answered here; they require follow-up research. The system itself don't change.

Inclusive and future-proof

It is essential that new generations have access to decision making in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Access to influence at the strategic level—where decisions are made—is now often closed to new generations, just as it was during Samen-op-Weg-proces. In my view, there must be a network with rights and obligations for these generations. This network is independent, offers solicited and unsolicited advice, and can bring proposals to the synod for a vote. The Network for Generations is present at the synod and has an important form of voting rights.

According to change management scholars, many issues in the church are not only issues of religious meaning but also issues of inhabited memory. This makes it a challenge to open up the church to different views, and to understand and use the knowledge of change management.