Organizational Success Factors in Selected Buddhist Groups

by

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ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS IN SELECTED BUDDHIST GROUPS

INTRODUCTION

We do not usually focus on organizational factors when encountering Buddhist practice organizations in the United States. It often seems enough to try to understand the theory and practices being taught, while noting that the immediate origin and history of these practices is likely to stem from Japan, Thailand, China, Korea, Nepal or Tibet, i.e. somewhere else. Regardless of the cultural distance traversed by these practice lineages, many of them have successfully taken root in America. Some Buddhist groups, however, are struggling to maintain financial viability, acquire infrastructure, and develop programs which attract students in a country where they represent a minority religion.

This research project seeks to discover what organizational factors (singly or in clusters) seem to promote success, viability and survival in selected American Buddhist organizations. Those proposed for study are specifically non-monastic organizations which do not have their original founding teacher with them fulltime, and whose “congregation” is not primarily composed of Asians who have been familiar with Buddhism for generations and for whom it is a source of cultural identity. Rather, the focus is on Buddhist organizations which are primarily organized and attended by Caucasian Americans who have lay status. These organizations are cultural transplants.

Further, research emphasis in this case is on organizations which have evolved somewhat independently of an original Asian teacher or tradition—i.e. those which rely on older and more experienced students or on home-grown or U.S. teachers who visit
or are in residence part-time; and which have changed their original organization to some extent in response to multiple influences beyond that of their originating teacher.

This selection is made in order to focus on newer organizational elements which have evolved in an American context, rather than on elements which are mainly aspects of monastic hierarchy or are more reflective of Asian than American culture.

The criteria for selection of “successful” organizations to be studied are some simple, baseline measures of organizational success—the organization has survived for over fifteen years and in terms of participation and financial health, looks as though it is likely to survive another fifteen; it offers teachings and practices that are commonly accepted to be connected to the historical Buddhist tradition (coherence of vision and mission); it has coped with change and a variety of challenges; it has a variety of lay participants who assume different roles, including those of volunteers in various capacities; it has grown in size since its beginning and continues to do so; and it is producing its own teachers.

To avoid confusion, we must note that what constitutes “organizational success” and what constitutes “real success” related to the core Buddhist mission, may be very different. Is success the survival of the Buddhist teachings, and which ones and how? Is it student satisfaction—over what range and frequency of factors? Is it production of realization among students and how is this measured? Is it all of the above and more?

In a Buddhist practice organization, we are dealing with a “product” that is inner and subjective, which is “produced” or “manifested” within an organizationally-created “outer” environment conducive to directed inner work. The organization is an empirically-determined aid for arriving at an admittedly difficult-to-attain and difficult-to-
describe end, which is subjective. It could be argued by Buddhists that if any organization assisted even only one person to Enlightenment, that is success—and, of course, measuring Enlightenment, (the stated goal of Buddhist practice) is also difficult.

It is very important to make the distinction between being "organizationally successful" vs. being "spiritually successful" in this kind of organization, though they may be related. This project is not designed to collect data on “spiritual success.”

Our choice of successful outcomes as defined above is being utilized somewhat objectively to select the organizations to be investigated. Identification of “successful organizational elements” is being undertaken primarily from a subjective stance—as reported by participants in relation to their experience. The focus on organizational elements is expected to be a “consciousness-raising” exercise for the participants, in the sense that they may not hitherto have focused their attention on this topic.

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

An investigation into self-reported “best practices” in Buddhist organizations could assist Buddhist groups which are chronically struggling or simply not surviving; could help to improve those which are maintaining their status quo with some effort; and could shed some light on what kinds of organizational factors are helpful for promoting Buddhist practice. The growing number of practitioners in America may have arrived at a stage where such self-reflection will be useful. And the long-term fate of Buddhism in the West is of considerable interest, considering that many American Buddhist Sangha members are not producing a “new generation” from among their offspring, as might have been more typical in Asia. Is this movement a hangover from the ‘60’s, or might
the values of Buddhism, awareness and compassion, have a stronger role to play in our society in the future?

The members of Buddhist groups are self-selected. Prospective members have a variety of groups to choose from. It may be somewhat serendipitous whether a given group will end up with members who have organizational knowledge or skills. It also may be that most people attracted to Buddhism are not particularly interested in organization per se. If a group in America has somehow discovered experientially which organizational factors work for them, however, and maintains and communicates those factors through various “changes of the guard,” then they might be headed for longer-term survival. They also have knowledge, which is potentially valuable to other Buddhist groups, but does not appear in the literature, and is not frequently shared outside their own halls.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant literature falls into a number of categories: early Buddhist organization; historical Buddhism and Buddhism coming to the West; in-depth investigations of American Buddhist organizations; descriptions of important organizational factors in spiritual organizations, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist; descriptions of successful non-profit management that include churches and charitable groups; and methodological references. Currently, it seems that most of the literature that touches on Buddhist organization is in book form, rather than in journals.

Early Buddhist Organization—Core Organizational Values: Early Buddhism has influenced attitudes toward organization among Buddhists, and provides a context for considering the organizational integrity of this long-lived tradition. The origin of Buddhism in India 500 years B.C.E. represents a very different condition from today. According to Stephen Batchelor (1994), the Buddha did not form an intentional community, rather he sent his monks out by themselves, with no two going on the same path, and with only the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) for guidance. The Buddha apparently “had no intention that anyone should lead the community after his death . . . Each practitioner should be independent, ‘like an island.’” (Batchelor, 2004, p. 157).

“Buddha compared the ideas and practices he taught to a raft made of ‘grass, twigs, branches, and leaves’ tied together ‘for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping.”’ (pp. 157 – 158) The implication is that the raft should be discarded once one has crossed to the farther shore of Enlightenment. Batchelor comments, “Otherwise it risks crystallizing into a sanctified version of the repetitive, restrictive, and frustrating behavior one seeks to overcome. One settles into
comfortable spiritual routines, becomes fixated with correct interpretations of doctrine, and judges with self-righteous indignation anyone who corrupts the purity of the tradition.” (p. 158).

This glimpse of early Buddhism suggests that an organization, special identity, or even a body of belief and practice, are unnecessary for those who have succeeded in having full realization—these are provisional measures only. Expected is that those who are serious students, many of whom will follow a strict monastic code of conduct, will apply the various practices given by the Buddha in an empirical manner and seek Enlightenment. They can be wandering alone or clustered in retreat at various times of year. At that time there was a surrounding society which gave alms to the wandering practitioners. Two-thousand and five-hundred years later, we do not have prevalent social conditions which provide support to wandering monks or lay practitioners in the West. And, of course, we do not have the Buddha with us in person.

We are in a situation where Buddhist practice for most people requires the support of an organization.

How can the practitioners be supported without falling into the negative “spiritual materialism” that may accrue to conduct in an organization—i.e. how can they adhere to the original intent of the teachings? This challenge is a source of tension for any Buddhist group, and may be reflected in the types of structures and processes seen in Buddhist organizations.

**Buddhism Arrives in the West—Cultural Conflicts and Maintaining Integrity:** There is some indication that the movement of Buddhism from Asia to Europe and America may be giving rise to a renewed focus on meditation practice, in
contradistinction to ritual, or cultural celebrations, particularly in the “non-ethnic,” primarily white organizations which have formed since the 1960’s. (Lopez, 2002).

Some organizations, such as CIMC in Massachusetts, Spirit Rock in California, Dharmadhatu’s Shambhala Training, and the Dzogchen Community worldwide, have moved somewhat away from emphasizing the designation “religious” and even “Buddhist,” toward an emphasis on meditation practice by lay practitioners and observation of the empirical results of that practice in oneself. Yet an effort has been made in most cases to focus primarily on the practices of a particular lineage inherited from Asia, even if the organization is somewhat eclectic (Cadge, 2005).

It is likely that when the cultural trappings of monks doing rituals for the public and institutional religion were scrapped, the “new” lay-dominated form might be closer to “original Buddhism” which lacked ritual or institutions. (Horsley, 2003; Numrich, 2000; Spuler, 2000). One of the more striking differences in practitioner expectation and practice noted by Cadge, while contrasting a predominantly Thai, monk-led congregation with the predominantly white, lay-led congregation of CIMC, both stemming from similar Theravadin (teachings from Southeast Asia drawn from the earliest records of Buddhist teachings) roots, was that the lay practitioners at CIMC expected to apply and reap the results of meditation practice, possibly even Enlightenment, in this lifetime. Meanwhile, while the lay Asian practitioners from the Thai temple focused on making offerings to monks who they felt would be more capable of making meditation breakthroughs in this life than they, themselves would. Meanwhile, they were amassing merit themselves in order to assure a better rebirth and closer approach to Enlightenment, perhaps as a monk, in a future lifetime. (p. 93).
Donald Lopez, Jr. comments,

“Modern Buddhists have sought to liberate the teachings of the Buddha from centuries of cultural and clerical ossification to reveal a Buddhism that was neither Theravada nor Mahayana, neither Sri Lankan, Japanese, Chinese nor Thai. This was a Buddhism whose essential teachings could be codified . . . many of the leaders of Modern Buddhism were laypeople . . . it blurred the boundary between the monk and the layperson, with laypeople taking on the traditional vocations of elite monks: the study and interpretation of scriptures and the practice of meditation.” (Fall 2002, pp. 113 – 114).

The literature, nevertheless, cites general worries about whether some newer groups in Europe and America are “truly Buddhist” or are propagating a sort of misleading ‘popular Buddhism’, with students having only a hazy notion of the core of Buddhist teachings, and possibly emphasizing authoritarian and sectarian elements. (Cohen, 2002).

Recent history in Thailand suggests that “Thai Buddhism” may be refreshingly free of government interference in its new European and American setting, in contrast to conditions in its homeland.

In “Keeping the Faith: Thai Buddhism at the Crossroads,” the author, Sanitsuda Ekachai (2001) comments that Theravada Buddhism in Thailand was in good shape up until the beginning of the 20th Century because there was no centralized control of the religion. “A century ago, the Thai clergy was actually pluralistic. Monks were accountable to their communities and their practices varied with the local cultures and their masters’ training.” (p. 242). The military government began to assume control in the early 1960’s, at which point the Sangha Bill “concentrated power in a small group of senior monks.” (p. 314). The Supreme Council had sole power to allocate monastic positions and power, and this led to a monopolistic, authoritarian structure, and no
dissent and no adaptation to local practice. This resulted in a proliferation of independent sects and religious movements and a loss of respect for mainstream Buddhism.

Harvey Aronson (2004), a Buddhist psychotherapist, has posed some interesting questions in his book, “Buddhist Practice on Western Ground” about the psychological challenges faced by non-Asians who practice an Asian-based spiritual tradition, such as Buddhism, in America.

This trans-cultural adaptation is very challenging for the formation of a “successful” Buddhist organization. He queries, “How do we adopt spiritual insights from another time and place in a way that is sensitive, respectful and effective? (p. 34). The traditional processes utilized may be culturally very different from those of our society, where we question authority, value romance, individuality, free choice, relationships, etc. Further, “Buddhist insight meditation is ultimately a radical reevaluation of subjective experience.” (p. 67) This may be very unsettling from the therapeutic point of view in a society where a strong ego is considered a plus, i.e. such an endeavor, might not be for everyone.

The goal of therapy is to return to ordinary suffering and cope with everyday life, whereas the goal of Buddhism is to dispense with suffering altogether by revamping one’s viewpoint about reality in a very deep way. It is important to be aware of the psychological impacts of Buddhist practice as experienced by practitioners when looking at how American Buddhist organizations have evolved and what is working.

James Coleman (2001) surveyed seven Buddhist Centers which he felt represented a wide range of “new” American Buddhism and obtained 353 responses to
a 4-page survey. His demographic results were as follows: as with other American religions, more females (58%) than males (42%) participated overall. Participants were primarily white, with only one-tenth being other ethnicities. In family background 8.6% were nonreligious, 16.5% were Jewish, 25.6% were Catholic, 42.2% were Protestant, and 1.9% were Buddhist. Catholics appeared in the same proportion as they are in the overall population; 10% less Protestants participated than are found in the overall population, but Jews far outnumbered their representation in the general population, where they are only 3%.

About 70% of participants had a family income of over $30,000 annually. “My data clearly indicate that American Buddhism appeals most strongly to the middle and upper middle classes.” (p. 192) The educational level was even more skewed: only one of 353 respondents did not finish high school. Less than one out of twenty were only high school graduates; 11% had attended some college; and 32% were college graduates. Over half of college grads had advanced degrees. “Thus it may be that the participants in new Buddhism represent the most highly educated religious group in the West today.” (p. 193)

Sixty-percent of respondents voted Democrat and close to 10% voted for the Green Party. Though all ages were represented, the mean age was 46, and most fell in the 30 to early 50’s age range. Buddhism, he surmises, appeals to less-conforming people—bohemians intellectuals, artists, celebrities; 62% had tried drugs. Geographically they overwhelmingly populated cosmopolitan urban areas.
He found that the stated primary motivation of most respondents for participating was to find spiritual fulfillment, as opposed to solving personal problems or improving their social life.

Coleman (2001) also comments on organizational structure briefly, “A more promising development lies in the changing structure of power, and the trend to separate the spiritual authority of the teachers from the administrative authority of the board of directors. Even more important is the increasing popularity of various styles of group leadership shared among several different teachers . . . “ (p. 225). In terms of what differs from the surrounding social milieu, he mentions that the teachings of Buddhism differ from the theism of most American religions and also undermine a dedication to materialism and all that goes with it in a wealthy, free-enterprise society, such as ours. He hypothesizes that a psychological and philosophical involvement with the meaning of the self is a primary motivator of those who engage—“Much of the new Buddhism’s appeal in the postmodern era can be attributed to the unique multilevel response it offers to this crisis of self.” (p. 212).

**An In-depth Look at American Buddhist Organization-- What Seems to be Working:** Clues regarding what might be success factors in Buddhist organizations in the U.S. can be found in the very few in-depth studies made on these organizations. In “Heartwood” Wendy Cadge (2005) describes an American lay *Theravada* (*Vipassana*) organization, the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center (CIMC) and compares it with Wat Phila, a predominantly Thai monastic and lay temple outside of Philadelphia. She participated in both, analyzed their demography, observed their activities and organization and conducted interviews.
David Preston (1988) did the same for the Los Angeles Zen Center and its affiliated San Diego Zen Center in “The Social Organization of Zen Practice,” though he also did an analysis of the way in which zazen (Zen meditative practice) changes the practitioner’s state of consciousness. The Zen organization, however, is described as run by its Japanese teacher, hence, has a more cultural and hierarchical flavor than CIMC. It would be a stretch, however, to call it monastic, since most participants were lay practitioners and the teacher was in residence at only one of the centers.

Downing (2001) conducts an extensive investigation of the San Francisco Zen Center in “Shoes Outside the Door” over the decades since its founding, which is highly revelatory of the influence of leadership and work projects (as organizational factors) on the morale of students, and also chronicles in detail the transition from the personal leadership of the original teacher to the authorizing of genuine American teachers. In its depiction of “boom and bust” this reference is a classic for understanding the selective deep appeal of Zen Buddhism when it first entered the American scene and the organizational evolutionary phases of one of the most prominent Zen Buddhist organizations in America.

The Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, like its sister organization Spirit Rock, and also the Insight Meditation Society (IMS), is a Buddhist organization based on Thai lineages, begun by lay teachers who had been trained by Thai teachers and other Buddhist teachers, but were not themselves monks. They were joined and assisted by lay students. The three major teachers, including the founder, have remained strong and consistent leaders, living locally and not traveling extensively, but they are non-hierarchical in status compared to the ordained monks in the predominantly Thai
temple. Rather than a temple, CIMC was created as a non-monastic place of lay practice without distractions, where there would be a core of people doing silent sitting meditation every day or every other day who were also committed to living their lives in the world. It is located in an ordinary neighborhood in town, and incorporated as a religious nonprofit.

The lay teachers and a Board of Directors lead the Center. The lay teachers are financially dependent on the lay practitioners. Not only did the participants have a clear focus of activity—meditation—but the Center was very clearly identified as teaching within one lineage, Theravada Buddhism, the Thai forest tradition. Other lineage teachings were also welcome, but by and large, the identifier, Buddhism or Buddhist, was not emphasized. There are three staff members, plus volunteers. There has been no particular emphasis on promoting growth.

Throughout the week there are a structured series of classes and smaller gatherings and a weekly Dharma talk. Lay people provide the support for the Center which offers memberships and charges for classes. Most of those who attend are white, in their 40’s and 50’s, middle class, well-educated, and two-thirds are female. The very early students, however, were described by the founding teacher, Larry Rosenberg, as misfits, eccentrics, hippies, ex-psychadelics, ex-political radicals, with romantic ideas, many of whom traveled to the east. The Center clearly moved to a more mainstream kind of membership.

There are no prerequisites to attend, and little or no history or context to contend with. Gradually some rituals, ceremonies and social events have been added.
Practices are empirical—the idea is to do them and see what happens. Most do believe that they could make spiritual breakthroughs—it is an optimistic atmosphere.

The core group of practitioners seeks first to learn about or practice Buddhism, broadly defined; secondly to interact socially or communally with others of like mind; and thirdly, to deal with a compelling personal situation which may be stressful or challenging. The non-core practitioners have a variety of motivations for attending focusing around dealing with stress reduction or other physical or emotional issues. The challenge is to make sure the practice doesn’t just become another form of stress relief.

The Center continues to grow, but doesn’t have its own teacher training or shared models to draw upon. There are many volunteers, 25 of whom lead meditations, 50-60 core practitioners, around 400 formal members, and an average participation time of 8 years.

Cadge (2005) states, “Both Wat Phila and CIMC were successful, by which I mean they continue to exist in the locations where they were started and have continued to attract practitioners over the years, for a number of reasons common to new religious and secular nonprofit organizations.” (p. 80). These included strong leadership, clear purposes and goals, agreement on goals, lack of power struggles, and access to lay people who provided experience and support.

David Preston (1998) describes the urban Los Angeles and San Diego Zen Centers and indicates some similarities to CIMC, though the daily practice more or less required that serious students live near the centers, and many gave up professional jobs for lesser jobs so that they could immerse themselves in practice and center work.
There was a strong sense that “. . . other interests and activities tend to take on secondary importance.” (p. 21). The activities described are those of historical Zen—sitting meditation (4 hours per day), chanting, interviews with a teacher, attending talks by the teacher, attending intensive retreats (3, 7 or 10-day intensives each month), and endeavoring to maintain mindful awareness all day long, whatever one is doing. Activities could be summed up as being work and practice, and though the practitioners were lay, the routine resembled that of a monastery. As in CIMC, belief and philosophy were not stressed, and practical experience of meditation was stressed. Further, as at CIMC, there was an attitude of optimism in the process, since Zen students were taught that they were inherently Enlightened already.

Rather than having a goal of understanding Buddhism, socializing, or relieving stress (motivations found among core CIMC students), Preston postulates that the demanding Zen routine encouraged adherents to develop as their goal a shared sense of “transrational reality” which is a heightened awareness known as realization. Beginners, particularly, did not engage frequently in social activities. Those attending were, as in the case of CIMC, usually over 25, highly educated, but with slightly more males than females. Anyone could join, as with CIMC, but the seriousness of daily practice and level of realization became signs of true membership.

In terms of organization, these Soto Zen Centers differ somewhat from the Centers to be chosen for this study, in that the teacher, the Roshi, was in residence, and chose the members who elected the Board. The Board made policy and elected officers. The staff constituted 40 of the 125 residents. They received room and board and free retreats, and paid only a token sum for residence. There were over 200
members. Members were requested to work and to donate their wages. Ritual duties were rotated. There was a sense of contact with Japan, and a senior student might be in Japan, participating in a ceremony.

Unlike at CIMC, Preston (1998) notes that ritual practices provided the organizational glue needed for this intensive practice—offering solidarity, warmth, enthusiasm, calm and concentration.

The goal was to have “. . . a daily practice that extends into everyday life.” (pp. 28-29). Students were encouraged to strive for “an embodied quality of mind and being.” (p. 29). The practice emphasized ordinariness and returning to the workplace upon actualizing Enlightenment.

It appears that these Zen Centers were very successful in drawing students and persuading them to engage wholeheartedly in Buddhist practice. Success factors appear to have included: relationship with the teacher; routine which promoted focused individual and collective effort in meditation each day and month; lack of distractions from outside work, and socializing; minimal emphasis on philosophy and major emphasis on gaining personal experience; regular rituals which aroused enthusiasm and engagement; volunteerism—requiring rather extensive work and/or financial contributions of all participants; sense of group unity and “belonging” or “identification” as a result of participating fully, everyday in regular group practice sessions; expectation that “higher states” could and would be achieved; reduced sense of “self” or “I” identification.

**Important Organizational Factors in Spiritual Organizations—Clues About Common Problems and Solutions:** The literature has few articles and books on
Buddhist organization. Harris (1998) asks “Why has there been so little scholarly interest up to now in the work and organization of congregations?” (p. 18) Winter (1968) wryly comments, “The term organized is usually applied to churches in a pejorative way, particularly with reference to activities peripheral to “religious” matters.” (p. 12).

Harris (1998) studied a Roman Catholic parish church in the inner city; a Pentecostal church espousing fundamentalist Christianity; an Anglican church, and a Reform synagogue, all located in Great Britain. Winter (1968) reviewed Protestant, Catholic and Jewish development in the U.S. Both authors identified common problems which all denominations faced. Both commented that the “stricter” churches in their sample exhibited less inner conflict and potential disorder, and gave rise to a stronger sense of “identity.” Winter noted “the common concern to penetrate the structures of power in this secular world,” (p. 110)—a concern which at this point does not seem to be shared by Buddhist practice groups.

Harris (1998), on the other hand, looked in-depth at her organizations and identified common organizational challenges, some of which are very relevant for current Buddhist groups. These include, change—she noted that change was often unwelcome and frequently internal strategies focused on how to prevent change. Many types of challenges stimulated change—problems with internal interest groups and informal networks of decision-making; the relationship between ministers or teachers and lay people; the difficulty of recruiting senior volunteers; and the enormous amount of time and tact expended on recruiting and motivating less senior volunteers,
sometimes leading to the recourse of simply not doing various important activities, since there was no one to do them.

Though "strictness" might not seem to be a relevant "success factor" for the Buddhist demography identified above, Harris’ comments cannot be overlooked,

"Why was Congregation B apparently able to avoid so many of the problems faced by the other three case congregations? Interview data suggested that the key explanatory factor was the strict religious values which were consciously used as a guide to all matters to do with running the congregation, we as well as to individual lifestyles. These values were widely shared by all members of the congregation and constantly reinforced through worship and bible study. Key elements in the religious principles guiding behavior in Congregation B were total respect for the authority of the pastor as the interpreter of God’s will and therefore as a key decision-maker; an assumption that decisions could be reached by consensus and that, once reached, decisions would not be questioned; an understanding that voluntary donation of time and money was an honour; and an assumption that church commitments were a way of life with high priority relative to other possible ‘free time’ activities.” (p. 175).

Also “the systems of ‘apprenticeship’ to key voluntary posts meant that people were eased into the more onerous positions and that there was little danger of important activities being abandoned for lack of people able or willing to do them.” (p. 176). There was considerable face-to-face communication, with informal monitoring and guidance provided unobtrusively by the pastor and senior lay leaders. The congregation was relatively homogeneous with a strong work ethic and tendency to take direction.

Harris (1998) also correctly identifies “voluntariness” as a major feature of most church organization, for better or for worse.

“In short, a key organizational feature of associations is their essentially voluntary nature. Members come and go as they wish, they value social interaction, and whatever work is done is mostly done without pay. Growth of associations can give rise to pressures towards formalization and professionalization which conflict with drives to remain small, informal and member focused. . . They (lay members) do not generally expect to be told what to do and how to do it in ‘their’ organization and they expect their
relationships with other members of the association to be informal and fulfilling. Their attitudes to any paid staff, including ministers of religion, maybe ambivalent and they may be uncertain about the role of such staff. . ." (p. 179).

Iannaccone (1994) contends that “strict churches are strong” because they reduce free riding and social loafing, screening out members who lack commitment, and stimulating participation among those who remain. These churches can offer more benefits to their members. Their “success” is a result predicted by rational choice theory. The author reduces the descriptions of strictness to the following “. . . the degree to which a group limits and thereby increases the cost of nongroup activities, such as socializing with members of other churches of pursuing “secular” pastimes.” (p. 1182). Seemingly unproductive practices such as social stigma, special diet, dress, grooming, social customs, self-sacrifice, and strange behavioral standards screen out the non-participating, but still seem to allow the group to include rational members. A humorous observation—“Lacking a way to identify and exclude free riders, highly committed people end up saddled with anemic, resource-poor congregations.” (p. 1185).

“In reality, the aspects of religious participation that confer the greatest external benefits (effort, enthusiasm, solidarity, etc.) are intrinsically difficult to monitor and reward. The willingness to pay membership dues is a poor proxy for these qualities because income correlates weakly with most dimensions of religious commitment, and any attempt to directly subsidize the observable aspects of religious participation (such as church attendance) will almost certainly backfire . . . In practice, therefore, few churches reward attendance, sell their services, charge for memberships or compensate any but a few full-time workers.” (pp. 1186 – 1187).

Another striking conclusion, “The character of the group—its distinctiveness, costliness, or strictness—does more to explain individual rates of religious participation than does any standard, individual-level characteristic, such as age, sex, race, region,
income, education, or marital status. The impact appears across both Christian and Jewish denominations, and it remains strong even after controlling for personal beliefs.” (p. 1200). Those most likely to join such a group are those who have less to lose—fewer extensive social ties, not engaged in demanding careers, having fewer outside opportunities overall. Further, there is optimal strictness for a group—unsuccessful groups are those “that are so strict and sectarian that they simply wither and die.” (p. 1202).

Many sects never become churches. When encountering social change, churches must remain distinctive, but also adapt to some extent. The Amish are cited as an example—they maintain their ethnic identity, but have adapted to economic pressures by utilizing machines only in certain limited circumstances, etc. Selection of what to be strict about is key—for the group must replace what it is rejecting from the outside. The author comments, “the Catholic church may have managed to arrive at a remarkable, ‘worst of both worlds’ position—discarding cherished distinctiveness in the areas of liturgy, theology, and lifestyle, while at the same time maintaining the very demands that its members and clergy are least willing to accept (birth control and priestly celibacy—addition mine).” (p. 1204). The author notes that the model of church is different from “strict sect,” and though strictness and strength may correlate, there needs to be clarification about whether and how strength and growth are correlated.

In summary, a review of current literature on the organization of Buddhist and other religious groups reveals basic areas of focus—a capitulation of historic forms to the needs of modern congregations; the importance of volunteerism in basic
organizational structure; ambivalence regarding the role of leadership and hierarchy in spiritual experience; and surprising support for strict and demanding spiritual practices. These themes are also reflected in the subjective comments of participants in Buddhist organizations in their attempts to describe what organizational elements have met their needs and forwarded their practice.
METHOD

Selection of Organizations for Study: This project investigated three American Buddhist organizations which appear to meet the criteria of this research project: they have the external outcomes and characteristics of “success” listed above (30-year history; financial viability; growth; change; integrity of teachings; and production of teachers). They are not primarily monastic, and do not have their original, founding teacher in residence. Data is organized by theme in the “Results” section of this paper. Brief organizational background information was collected by the investigator on each group from their websites. A detailed, more quantitative, profile was surprisingly difficult to get from participants and organizers, so the group website was substituted. Most important questions about these organizations, however, were answered in the course of the interviews. The identities of participating organizations are kept confidential in the body of the paper, as are individual participant identities, and their codes are identified at the beginning of the “Results” section.

Questions to be Addressed: A total of nine longer-term and shorter term students, and also teachers, were interviewed to identify what aspects of the group’s organization seem to be most helpful to individuals like themselves as well as to the group, and in what ways. The point of discussion was to explore what aspects of the group’s organization have most affected and encouraged those who participate, according to their reporting of their own experience. A sample of questions utilized can be found in Appendix C.

Research Method: The research approach applied is grounded theory, a qualitative method, employing a semi-structured interview technique combined with
open-ended questions—this is applicable to a situation where we are primarily observing organizational elements through the subjective experiences of those who participate in that organization. Those selected in each organization were requested to answer pre-defined questions and allowed to expand on their own experience. Each interview was completed within a time period of one-to-two hours. One interview was conducted by phone.

**Participant Selection (Sample):** Data collection consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour, with 3 individuals of varying lengths of tenure at each of three, local Buddhist meditation centers. Three long-term subjects were teachers who are a product of their organization and have taught there for ten to thirty years.

**Interview Method and Analysis:** Interviews were made individually, in-person, and recorded, with participant permission, except for one phone interview, and were transcribed by a commercial service. Interviews, except for the phone interview, and two interviews hosted in private homes, were conducted at the respective Buddhist centers in a room providing quiet and privacy. They were held at a time convenient for the interviewee when there was ample time for the interview. The researcher reviewed and organized the resulting data and identified emerging themes and categories. Data has been compared and contrasted across organizations, which leads to some suggestions about what constitute organizational success factors in these particular organizations according to participant reports.

In the interviews, participants were asked what has been their experience with aspects of the group's organization—such as the structure and hierarchy, schedule,
communication, leadership, meetings, jobs, volunteering, social and other gatherings, rules, work sessions, supervising, meeting individual needs, general group outlook and philosophy, handling of complaints and conflicts, outreach to new people and the surroundings, financial aspects. These organizational elements were mentioned to the interviewees mainly to stimulate remembrance of their experiences and discussion within the organizational theme. Often, in a religious organization, participants may be thinking mainly about their spiritual experience, rather than about the organization which hosts spiritual practice. The topic of organization and its effects may be something they have not thought about very much, thus discussion of this aspect was prompted during the interviews.

They were asked which aspects of the organization have been most helpful to them and to the group, in their opinion, and in what ways? Also, has this changed over time or remained the same, since they have been at the center. They were asked whether they expect the organization to continue into the future and why as well as do they expect to continue themselves with the organization and why. No specific reference was made by the interviewer to “good” organizational elements or to random non-organizational elements, such as friendliness of co-students, or charismatic qualities of teachers or special qualities of the teachings themselves. Nor did the interviews focus on “poor” organizational elements. The entire stated focus of this inquiry has been appreciative, allowing participants the freedom to express their own critical as well as positive views.

Questions were open-ended and posed neutrally as much as possible, without indication of a particular desired answer. (See Appendix C for questions.)
**Corroborative Method:** Before or after interviews were completed, an adjunct tool, the Competing Values Framework of Cameron and Quinn (1999) was applied to increase understanding and add information regarding the types of organizational culture being investigated. This tool is easy to apply, consisting of 6 structured questions with 4 possible answers which are weighted numerically by the respondent. The answers allow a graph to be formed showing the amount of each organizational quadrant (clan, hierarchy, adhocracy and market) occupied by this particular organization—according to respondent ratings. (A pre-test of this tool with a Buddhist organization by a long-term student and an external observer, the researcher, resulted in practically identical diagrams, therefore it appears reliable). This introduces a helpful picture of the way in which participants view their overall organization structure and culture, providing a sense of context (and possibly understanding) of the interview data. Though this tool is structured, it also relies on the experiential judgement of the respondents. Eight of the nine participants provided this information.

It cannot be assumed that all Buddhist organizations have the same culture, are culturally static over time, or that their organizational structures can be easily predicted. The Cameron and Quinn Competing Values Framework allows a look at the overall kind of organization being investigated and also the amount of congruity of perception of selected participants in the organization about their organization. It may also stimulate further comments from the participants regarding their organizational experiences.

**Access and Respondent Selection:** I am in contact with long-term and senior members of a number of Buddhist centers in the Bay Area. I received encouragement from senior staff at each site to do this study. I relied on the senior center members
whom I am in contact with to recommend potential participants for the study and supplied my phone and e-mail and a brief invitation (Appendix A) and a background questionnaire for potential respondents regarding contact information, the length of time they have been participating at the center, a brief description of their participation, and times they might be available for an interview. We had a brief discussion on the phone or in person before commencing this study.

**Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Information obtained in this study is confidential; and individuals and organizations participating are anonymous. All data is stored in a secure, confidential location, accessible to only to me and my research director, and each participant is identified on the recording by first name and participant code only, and organizations are identified by a letter. Data from digital interviews and the organization and individual background forms is kept on the researcher’s home computer accessible only with private password or in a locked file. Data will be destroyed on completion of the final paper unless the researcher decides to publish a paper on the topic, in which case the data will be preserved until publication is completed and permission will be obtained from all participants and organizations to utilize the data to be published in a way that all identities are kept anonymous. Transcription of the interviews was done by a third-party. Each participant filled out and signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) before the commencement of interviewing. Participants in this study will receive a copy of the final thesis if they desire.

**Voluntary Participation:** This participation was completely voluntary, and participants could discontinue their participation in the process at any time.
Debriefing Procedure: At the end of information-gathering, each participant was able to ask any questions or present any concerns they may have had. No one asked questions beyond those discussed at the time of the interview. As mentioned above, if they wish to have a summary of findings, I will make those available to them.

Participants were invited to contact the JFK University Project Advisor if they have questions or requests for additional information regarding this study and the interview process: Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. - Organizational Psychology Project Advisor/JFK University, e-mail, SAMulgrew@aol.com, telephone: 510-450-0378.

Biases of the Researcher: The researcher has been working and practicing in Buddhist organizations since 1975, including one organization from its inception to its full-blown growth into an international organization. The researcher's bias is that knowledge about organizations and “best practices” is a good thing, but there is generally little published knowledge about how longer-lived American Buddhist organizations function and what their best practices might be and whether these would be considered “typical” organizational best practices. Consequently, this researcher has observed, many Buddhist meditation centers which rely heavily on volunteer staffing, undergo a painful process of trial-and-error in trying to evolve an organizational structure that works for their community. This may mean a rather long period spent utilizing less-than-optimal methods of organization or it may mean outright failure. The researcher is functioning in a neutral manner to gain a broad understanding of respondents consider to be helpful organizational elements, regardless of what they are.
**Limits of Findings:** This is a small qualitative study with a number of variables: 3 different organizations with possibly different structures and cultures and different phases of evolution; and students of different tenures and experience in those organizations as well as teachers. One can expect that the data analysis will reveal a lot of information about appreciated organizational elements, and the Cameron and Quinn instrument may be helpful in indicating whether in the respondents’ opinions, the cultures and structures of these three Buddhist organizations are more similar or more different from one another.

Mainly, this data will hopefully indicate where further research could be fruitful—what organizational elements are likely candidates for “best practices” in this kind of organization.

**Data Analysis:** In this exploratory study, interviews have been transcribed, and data has been organized in themes. Each site’s interviews were organized separately under themed headings, an overall organizational profile was derived, charts of organizational elements were created, and all sites have been compared with each other in terms of basic organizational elements. Similarities, differences, patterns and common themes have been identified. Each participant was described and quoted to illustrate common responses and topics.
RESULTS

The purpose of this research project is to identify organizational success factors in three flourishing Buddhist centers in the San Francisco Bay area. This investigation was conducted by interviewing three participants from each center utilizing a semi-structured, grounded theory technique. The focus in the interviews was on the participants’ experience of various organizational elements in their center.

The participants’ characteristics are described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender/Approx. Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1V</td>
<td>Female--58</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Vipassana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2V</td>
<td>Male--62</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Vipassana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3V</td>
<td>Male--40</td>
<td>Student volunteer</td>
<td>Vipassana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4Z2</td>
<td>Female--60</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Zen site 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5Z1</td>
<td>Male--38</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Zen site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6Z1</td>
<td>Male--68</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Zen site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7T</td>
<td>Male--55</td>
<td>Student teacher</td>
<td>Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8T</td>
<td>Male--42</td>
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<td>Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9T</td>
<td>Female--29</td>
<td>Student volunteer</td>
<td>Tibetan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This whole-organization-focused analysis features responses from nine individuals (three per Center) who either teach and/or study at one of three Buddhist Centers founded thirty-plus years ago in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Three responses were from ordained teachers with 30 or more years of experience in their Center. The other students spanned between 4 and 12 years of participation. All respondents were white—six males, and three females. Though they were not requested to give their age, the age range was approximately late 20’s to late 60’s, averaging about 50 years old. All had participated long enough in their respective
Centers to be aware of how the Center was organized or to be part of the organization itself.

The “V” Center (for Vipassana, a Buddhist tradition stemming from Southeast Asia) is located in a wealthy, rural/suburban area within commute distance of San Francisco; the “Z” Center (for Zen, a Buddhist tradition stemming from Japan) had two participating sites, Z-1 and Z-2, the first located in downtown San Francisco proper, the second in a rural area near wealthy suburbs and within commute distance of San Francisco; the “T” Center (for Tibetan) is located in downtown Berkeley, also urban, within commute distance of San Francisco and near a large university.

Participants were prompted by a series of general questions, but described their own experiences and their opinions based on their experiences at these Centers, all within the central interview theme of “organizational success factors.”

Themes and sub-themes related to “organizational success factors” which surfaced in the participants’ responses are listed below with illustrative quotes from those interviewed. Themes are separated “by Center” into three sections. At the beginning of each Center’s theme and quote description there is a summary of each organization’s basic organizational profile drawn from the interviews.

At the end of all of the summaries and themes drawn from quotes is a chart of Organizational Elements which identifies organizational elements mentioned for each Center, indicating commonalities and differences in organization.

Results of interviewees’ responses to Cameron and Quinn’s (1999) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument questionnaire are mentioned at the end of the Results Section to illustrate whether participants of the same organization were
experiencing a similar perception of organizational culture; and whether participants
from different organizations were perceiving similar or very different organizational
cultures.

In the Discussion Section which follows, there is a cross-comparison of these
Centers, illustrating commonalities and differences, the operant question being, are
there similar organizational factors across these kinds of organizations with a relatively
successful track record, or is there no discernable pattern? Do they differ among
themselves in organizational model and positive organizational features? What
organizational aspects appear to indicate an adaptation of these Asian traditions to
modern American culture?

**BRIEF ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY OF “V”:**

**A. BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE:** This has evolved over
time creating conditions enabling many people to rapidly and safely have genuine and
intensive experiences of an open mindfulness style of meditation in silence—without
having to sign on to a belief system, or series of prerequisites, or ritual practices. This
group offers a series of opportunities to continue, intensify and integrate that initial
meditation experience. The value and purpose of the meditation is to be discovered by
the practitioner for themselves. There is a small number of resident maintenance staff.
There are non-resident administrative staff who are paid average wages. On staff and
in training are large number of non-resident teachers. Volunteers, such as Treasurer
and Board members, occupy various positions, depending on their availability and skills.
The group has developed a variety of committees, meeting and interaction guidelines,
and group support measures. A wide variety of public programs, with emphasis on short-to-long residential retreats, are primary support. They are developing satellite programs in the community which may meet for two years or longer.

B. TEACHERS: “V” has many house-produced teachers, including several well-known and charismatic original founders, who have a variety of other Buddhist backgrounds as well as the two main Theravadin (Southeast Asian) source lineages. Most teachers are psychologically trained and teach in teams at retreats. Students have frequent interviews with more than one teacher at retreats. There is little focus on identification with a particular teacher or exclusive focus on a particular form of Buddhism. The teacher’s purpose is to support, validate and guide student’s own meditation experience. The teacher acts as a sort of highly experienced psychological/spiritual mentor, not as a savior, Guru, or example of perfect enlightenment. An increasing number of students each year are invited to attend comprehensive training and become teachers.

C. VALUE-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION: “V” has made a serious effort to integrate throughout the organization principles of Buddhism such as mindfulness; making teachings available to all; cultivating generosity by giving dana (generosity) offerings to teachers and scholarships to students; equality of staff, teachers and students; defusing conflict; utilization of meditation before meetings; plus requiring a consensus process (inclusivity of all viewpoints) in decision-making.

D. SCALE AND VARIETY OF PROGRAMS: Many retreats and group meditations, study sessions, and related programs are offered on a regular basis. There are
extensive support activities offered for all ages, as well as for teachers and facilitators on-site and off-site. This Center serves hundreds of people every month. Workshops are offered in related areas such as yoga and psychology. Many of the teachers and workshop leaders are well-known. Only maintenance staff reside on site.

E. ORGANIZATIONAL CONCERNS:

• There is a pressure to grow, to expand, to meet increasing demand and to mount a capital campaign, vs. keeping status quo.

• The group values broad accessibility of the practice vs. narrowing the scope of their programs.

• They are training an adequate number of new teachers rather than continuing exclusive reliance on the charismatic and well-known founding teachers.

• They are expanding the number of community-based programs rather than only focusing on programs at “V”.

• They provide adequate teaching mentorship in retreats without cultivating a dependent relationship on a particular teacher seen as an external locus of control.

• The Center maintains organizational glue and integrity of the spiritual tradition without pervasive use of ritual, religious language, symbols and customs.

• They ensure that organizational activities, such as meetings and conflict resolution, are consonant with espoused spiritual values, such as mindfulness and generosity, even if more time, effort and expense is involved.

RESULT: There is pressure to expand and grow in order to meet the demand. A low level of conflict is reported. Peer, teacher, and expert psychological, group, and mentoring support is provided throughout the organization. The Center has a
reputation as a supportive host for many teachers and programs. The organization is able to cover its expenses each year and yet offer a sliding scale for all retreats as well as many scholarships.

“V” Center Major Themes

P1V: Student  P2V: Teacher  P3V: Student Volunteer

“V” THEME #1—TEACHERS

Sub-themes:

*Teachers are carefully selected and trained.*
P2V: “ ... there’s a really good teacher training ... 95% of them are really, with the exception of one or two, ... with J ... he’s done a number of teacher trainings--four to five year teacher training cycles. ... It’s tremendous support and that’s one of J’s many gifts. He’s a fabulous trainer, he’s extraordinary because he’s also very sophisticated psychologically and—he’s brilliant. And, he really knows how to train.”

P2V: “You can’t apply. No ... this one that they’ve just started this year is ... twenty—they usually were five to seven people. This one there’s ... twenty-three and a lot of them are young ... there’s a few teachers who are doing it along with J., and there’s some East Coast teachers who’re doing it in conjunction. To be selected, one of the teachers or one of the East Coast teachers says, this person should be trained.”

P2V: “One is called the Community Dharma Leaders Training ... there’ve been about two-hundred people that have gone through that. Right now there’s ninety of those two-hundred, where it’s a two and a half year training, where teachers, senior teachers, not only from Spirit Rock but from East Coast, a little over thirty or thirty-five teachers or so in this group have nominated senior students from around the country, who are both very experienced, very mature, very good, into serving and communication, and they are trained as Dharma leaders in their community ... So, that they are developing community in places that aren’t “V” or “meditation society”.

*There is support for teachers.*
P2V: “ ... there’s twenty teachers on the Teachers Council and many of them have been teaching for quite some time ... we keep each other on our toes and very inspired. ... and we have very honest, authentic, transparent, high-level feelings of connection and camaraderie. ... we’ve been trying ... in recent times to pare down our business end and responsibility of things, so that we have time for our really stimulating conversations. ... overseeing programs are a big part of what the teachers ... focus on .
what we want to focus on. . . we’ve gone through periods where . . . we meet formally . . . four times a year for a full day . . . and we go through periods where we would meet in dyads, we meet with every other teacher and say what you appreciate about them and what your challenges are with them.”

P2V: “. . . we are all constantly practicing ourselves and growing. You know if somebody hasn’t sat for a few years then it’s like, ‘Hey, you have not sat for a while, you know, yeah, you might need to do that’. . . “or try something, so we keep on growing. Otherwise you get stale if you think you know everything.”

P2V: “. . . we have teacher conferences every few years with greater Vipassana teachers. . . about 75 or 80 or so, we meet for three or four days and go into various teaching topics and stuff like that.”

P2V: “. . . one of the things we do at . . . our teachings, our retreats, is team teaching. So, it’s very rare that it’s one person teaching all by himself.”

P2V: “. . . all the teaching is done on a Dana basis . . . the teachers and staff only get what is put in the envelope . . . whether you are teaching there for a month . . . there is no guarantee of anything . . . But everything is done in that spirit of generosity, and we don’t want anyone to be turned away.”

P1V: “The teachers, I understand, are having a hard time making it, just finding Dana because . . . the price of gas has gone up, because they’re getting older and health care and kids in college . . . all the money that I pay (for retreat) goes for food, room and board, the maintenance of it; it does not go to the teachers.”

**Teachers have broad spiritual backgrounds.**

P1 V: “. . . actually, it’s really interesting. There are a number of the “V” teachers who started in Tibetan or started with Zen, and came to Vipassana. And then, there are a whole bunch of them who started with Vipassana, were doing the Dzogchen or Tibetan . . . my way of understanding is that everyone one of those is culturally based, and that’s not our culture, and so, we’re looking for . . . the pieces that work for us as westerners.”

P2V: “. . . I’d say all the teachers . . . have been exposed to other styles of practice. Almost everyone has sat at a Dzogchen (type of Tibetan teaching) retreat. Almost everybody has had some exposure to some Advaita (type of Hindu teaching) . . . Most of them have had teachings that have given a broader dimension to the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) than just, you know, one little band. So, that also influences the spirit of the teachings. Sometimes it’s been said that it’s Theravadan (Southeast Asian fundamental Buddhist teaching) practice with a Mahayana (later Buddhist teaching emphasizing compassion) heart.”

**Teachers have psychological training.**

P2 V: “. . . translating the teachings and the practices from the monastic traditions to very accessible lay terms, most of the teachers at “V” are psychologically sophisticated.
Many of them are therapists or have degrees in psychology or have gone through somatic experience training or other kinds of modalities and . . . we're all pretty aware of other ways of waking up . . . so there is that accessibility and psychological sophistication . . .”

P2 V: “We have a whole protocol for . . . spiritual emergencies. And what to do if somebody is really starting to lose it, which can happen because it’s (retreat) . . . a very intensive process.”

There is a favorable teacher/student ratio and relationship.
P2 V: “We have about a 20:1 ratio (of students to teachers). . . on the retreats we talk a lot about what’s coming up and working with people and stuff like that.”

P2V: “So, a student has a scheduled interview every other day on a retreat, with the teacher. Often . . . they see two teachers and they go back and forth. But sometimes they’ll stay with one teacher . . . But we’re tracking people and any time other than the scheduled interviews they can write a note saying ‘I want to check in about something’ . . . we are tracking them very carefully.”

P1V: “. . . and I went (to a one-day retreat) and J.B. was one of the teachers . . . And, I thought, ‘That man is happy and he’s in Berkeley. I’m going to see about him being my teacher and start sitting in his Sangha (group of practitioners) and see . . . that’s how I got into Vipassana, was because it was the teacher . . . I went on another long retreat with him and then another . . .”

Many well-known and charismatic teachers including guest teachers, monastic and non-monastic teach at the Center.
P1V: “. . . the first time I ever went to “V” Thich Nhat Hanh was doing a day-long, and so that got me there . . . we sat in the blazing sun all day getting the teachings . . . that were . . . so powerful. . . I think it was ’96 or ’97.”

P3V: “. . . one of the things that made a huge difference for us is that “V” has Monday night meditation and talks for adults, mostly by J., but a lot of other teachers as well and teachers from all over the world . . .but they also have a kids program.”

P2 V: “. . . Ajahn Amaro, who has a center up near Ukiah . . . He’s British, very funny, very hip, extremely brilliant and wise, and kids just love him. Reverend Heng Sure, who’s from the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery . . . he’s a mainstay at the family retreats. He’s not Theravadan . . . We have Fred Wahpepah doing Native American. We have a sweat lodge on the land.”

There is consistency among teachings at retreats with guest teachers.
P2V: “. . . when Tsoknyi (Tibetan teacher) comes, there’s some Theravadan teacher with him, or when a day-long happens . . . and it’s something completely . . . out there, there’s got to be a teacher, a Theravadan, a “V” teacher who anchors it to the Theravadan tradition.”
There is a clear link to teaching lineage.
P2V: “There are the teachings themselves which have been translated from the culture, the trappings, for instance, of very strict, formal, more narrow Asian culture, Theravadin. There are two streams that are Theravadin influences on “V” . . . one is Burmese Mahasi Sayadaw very meticulous, mental noting . . . what someone thinks of when they think of Hinayana (early Buddhism). But then there is the whole stream of Ajahn Chah and Forest monastery . . . Thai Forest tradition . . . although it’s a monastic tradition . . . it’s a whole other way of being . . . that’s about how one conducts oneself in one’s life . . . seeing about how we can live the Dharma . . . it’s about bringing the Dharma into your life.”

Teacher forums are offered.
P2V: “. . . one of the things “V” has done, we have been . . . probably as much a gatherer of different traditions in the Buddhist world than anyone. We’ve had the conferences . . . with two-hundred and twenty Western Buddhist teachers, Western and Asian Buddhist teachers. The Dalai Lama comes and there is Theravadin . . . there’s the Zen masters. . . We have been the place where that happens. So, all those different traditions see “V” as not . . . something foreign, but as a place where we can all meet and hear each other.”

The group has concerns about teacher succession and outreach
P3V: “. . . the teachers at “V” in general, they’re aging. That’s natural. But . . . one of the concerns I have is . . . what’s the next generation and the next generation after that look like . . . there was that time in history when in the sixties and seventies, when it was . . . head East. You know, go to India, go to Thailand, things like that. The Peace Corps was big. And then a lot of those people came back and brought things with them, people like J. and such . . . is the next generation doing that . . . and then the next generation after that, I don’t know . . . Both in terms of making sure that there is some sort of lineage developed here that continues to grow and expand, and also in terms of our ability to do outreach.”

P3V: “. . . where are the twenty year olds . . . Who’s going to be the next wave to keep this going? And so, things like the Teacher Training Program that “V” has, and Community Dharma Leaders, things like that, I think are critical.”

P3V: “Because that’s (teachers) where a lot of outreach is going to come from. It’s from people who are younger . . . and living in different communities and spreading out more.”

Teachers have an organizational role and their own group.
P3V: “. . . the Board . . . It’s a mix of teachers and other volunteers . . .”

P2V: “. . . the Board, which used to have two or three teachers on the Board, but about five years ago we decided to have almost half of the Board made up of teachers . . . then there’s . . . the Teacher Representative Group . . . which does a lot of the ongoing
business stuff and when there’s questions, they’ll send that out to all the teachers, so we don’t have to get bogged down.”

P2V: “... overseeing programs are a big part of what the teachers . . . focus on . . . But then, there is fundraising, designs, all that other stuff. So, that’s not nearly as fun, but you know, we’re part of that.”

A teacher’s code of ethics is in place.
P2V: “‘V’ has a teachers’ code of ethics, which is a model for a lot of other places . . . And if it doesn’t work . . . people can bring grievances . . . it is at the end of “A Path With Heart.”

“V” THEME #2—ORGANIZATION-WIDE NORMS AND VALUES

Sub-themes:

The Center offers cultural accessibility to meditation instruction.
P2V: “So, there’s that pretty good psychological sophistication, where a westerner is not just speaking to some Rinpoche who doesn’t know the ins and outs of . . . paying the bills and being a householder and . . . raising three kids . . . and what do I do when I’m feeling like . . . laying into my co-worker . . . So there is that accessibility and psychological sophistication . . . there’s so many ways we integrate practice and see how this is applied in various ways . . . to . . . relationships and other stuff like that. So, there’s an ongoing program of applying the teachings.”

P2V: “... people have been touched by the Dharma in some way and . . . use the practices for themselves and say, oh mindfulness is a good thing, loving kindness is a good thing. It works and it’s spoken in very accessible terms. As far as people . . . coming through retreats, what their primary motivation is, I think we vary . . . for some . . . they are going for enlightenment, whatever that is. Some . . . it’s to express their compassion and engagement as fully as we can . . . I’ve had different motivations . . . enlightenment or bust . . . it’s all here right now . . . where else could I wake up then in the here and now, there’s nothing I need to do.”

P2V: “... on a family retreat definitely . . . light a stick of incense and bow to the Buddha . . . actually the kids like the ritual . . . you get a kid bowing or doing something different and reverential and right away something magical comes alive in them . . . so there’s a lot of ritual in the family days, in the family retreats.”

P3V: “We take that group of twelve to fifteen teens up and live with the monks (at the Abhayagiri Monastery) for forty-eight hours, on their schedule . . . and the kids get to see what the monastic life is like, and what goes on in that, learn that sense of community.”
P3V: “. . . I think there’s different schools of thought at “V.” Some are . . . that ritual’s important and it’s important to do some of those things. Some is . . . we’ll leave that to the monasteries. . . for the most part “V” . . . does ground its teachings in . . . how to take the teachings of the Buddha and make them applicable to our lives . . . as opposed to something words just talking . . . so entirely in theory and not giving it a grounding somewhere that it’s accessible . . . I think that if we err on any side, we err on the side of making . . . it less religious and just more accessible in terms of the message.”

P1V: “. . . that was very conscious on the part of J. and S. and J . . . to leave a lot of the trappings in the Southwest (ASIA), so it would be palatable to westerners . . . so, the teachers don’t wear robes, and there isn’t in the protocol that you never put your feet towards the teacher, never heard that . . . you go to a Vipassana retreat, people are sprawled, listening . . . it’s very relaxed in that way . . . the teachers finish the Dharma talk and people stand up and leave. They don’t wait for the teachers to leave the room.”

P3V: “. . . how do we achieve true happiness? How do we achieve true mindfulness? And the value of that . . . the religious aspect becomes in a way . . . hey, what is the carbon effect . . . things like that . . . it’s definitely different than the religions that most of us were brought up with, in the West . . . it’s a whole different approach.”

Self-sufficiency in meditation is nurtured.

P1V: “. . . the first time I ever went to “V”, was doing a day-long, and so that got me there . . . my second time at “V” was a ten-day retreat . . . there was a one-day retreat . . . I went . . . on some retreats there . . . I don’t go to day- longs very much any more . . . and I went on a month-long and as I rolled my suitcase out of the residence hall the last day to leave, the Beatles started singing in my head, ‘She’s Leaving Home’ . . . I just did a 10-day personal retreat at the Forest Refuge in Barre, where you don’t have to do anything . . . except your one-hour work meditation . . . and my sense when I left was, I’m now a grown-up. I didn’t need anybody telling me what to do when. But I’m sure I could not have done that (before), I would have run screaming from the place, without the . . . structure of the day.”

The group values integrating the teachings of mindfulness and non-hypocrisy, in programs, behavior, and everyday life across the organization—“walking your talk.”

P2 V: “A lot of thought, lots of meetings . . . I mean it is a lot of thought about how we do things here and what is the result for people . . . if it is not done aligned . . . in a Dharmic way, it not only doesn’t work, but people will raise their eyebrows and say, wait, what are we doing here . . . wait a second guys, you know, let’s walk our talk.”

P2V: “So, for an organization it is probably as good as you can get.”

P2V: “. . . there is no hiding in this place. But there is also tremendous respect . . . we are all here to serve the Dharma and realize how incredibly blessed we are. So, we
know we got a good thing. It helps a lot not having one person run the show who everybody is differential to.”

P3V: “So, when every meeting starts, we sit. We just are able to sit and contemplate and you know, settle. But really, in that meditative mode, where we’re more contemplative than we are just racing forward with any specific agenda, or you have to get to the task at hand. It’s like, okay, let’s start the meeting. Let’s arrive where we are. And that . . . makes a big difference . . . It’s nice to be sitting with a group of people who are . . . going after the same general goals . . . and are there for the same reasons.”

P3V: “. . . on the Board . . . in all the groups . . . we tend to talk it through . . . We have a gatekeeper, who is watching the process, who gives gentle reminders to remain mindful, take a backward-look, breathe.”

There is financial accessibility of the teachings and cultivation of generosity.
P2 V: “We gave $200,000 worth of scholarships last year . . . for people to come on retreats . . . about 70% of our expenses are covered by programs . . . 30% is from donations . . . operational fundraising letters . . . Because if it was all done . . . by program fees, it would be prohibitive for a lot of people . . . there are no guarantees that we’re going to meet our annual budget, but we always do.”

P3V: “. . . it’s an ongoing discussion we have and I’m not a hundred percent convinced in one way or another . . . In an ideal world, would I love to see us be able to just live on Dana, that is, just the donations? . . . We offer things as Dana; even some retreats, just strictly as Dana . . . we do a lot to raise money for scholarships and to offer . . . classes . . . everything is offered at a sliding scale . . . people tend to pay toward the low end and that’s just the reality.”

P1V: “. . . they invite you at the end of the retreat to be generous to teachers and to staff . . . not everybody is able to do that.”

The group focuses on inclusivity of people at different stages of life, with different interests.
P3V: “. . . we had taken the kids to a family day and we heard about the Monday nights, so the parents can drop off their kids and they do kids’ activities . . . and that made my wife and I able to go to the talks . . . and the kids were in a place where they were . . . having a good time, they were making friends, they were exposed to the Dharma in ways they could relate to, and that was huge.”

P1V: “. . . mindfulness based stress reduction has been an incredible doorway for people . . . to meditate and practices and what’s Buddhism . . . then they go through that into Buddhist practice.”

P1V: “a lot of their day- longs are CEU—for therapists.”
P1V: “... there are a few teachers who have brought in the twelve-step... how the twelve-step and Buddhism relate to each other.”

P1V: “... there are people-of-color retreats or diversity retreats.”

P1V: “... in the Dedicated Practitioner Program We do dyads and triads and have study groups where we talk about questions and then have to go into silence, but you’ve been so stimulated... So you build relationships and caring... it’s a two-year program... you have five retreats... but then there are small groups, study groups that meet every month, where you get homework and you’re dealing with the homework. And then you have a study partner that you’re also supposed to meet with once a month. And you have a mentoring teacher that you meet with once a month... that’s why it’s called dedicated... we started with about a hundred and ended up with eighty or so.”

P2V: “... in Theravada, the teacher isn’t so much a guru as a spiritual friend... we have these spiritual friends groups, Kalyana Mitta groups... besides the big settings, we support the development of small Dharma support groups of like 6 to 10 people... and there are hundreds of them... some of them are peer groups... some of them with less experienced students and have more experienced facilitators, usually there are pairs. So it’s not a big identification trip or projection trip... we thought... we can have small Dharma support groups where all the groups feel connected to the center... then there is a feeling of community that doesn’t... overwhelm the system or the staff... Each group... has its own organic life... ways to develop that so that anybody can start a group, and we just facilitate and coordinate them. We support the facilitators.”

P3V: “... there are places we have gaps. And we’ve actually been talking about it as a Board, of how do we fill in those gaps... I’m a big believer in progressive programming where all the way along the age spectrum, you have offerings that are appropriate at that time... there’s a lot more than can be done... with those twelve year olds through thirty year olds... how do we offer the Dharma to people who are in the late stages of their life and are really looking at what lies ahead after death... are we helping people prepare for a mindful death...”

There are personal support systems throughout, for teachers, staff, and students.

P3V: “... the main impression was very quickly that they had it together. They had their systems down. They made us feel very welcome. They seemed to anticipate a number of the questions that I thought I would need to ask... in their orientation... they covered all the things that I had thought about...”

P2V: “... we have gotten a lot better in recent years appreciating and supporting our staff. We have a whole staff Dharma program where there is a teacher... every month
there is a set of teachings and we rotate going in and meeting with all the staff we have. And the staff can check in interviews with the teachers . . . the staff life is a lot healthier . . . ten years ago . . . it was too hierarchical.”

P1V: “. . . there is an application for retreats . . . they . . . get an assessment of your vulnerabilities, your stability. And, the teachers get a copy of what you say your issues are . . . they ask about physical and psychological things and . . . major traumatic situations that might have been . . . they’re very aware . . . in “V” there may have been one or two instances where somebody really lost it . . . “

There is provision of conflict management training and practice.

P2V: “. . . so there is very little conflict these days . . . there have been periods where in the Teacher’s Council . . . things have come up . . . the teachers and the management, and the Board versus the staff or the teachers . . . Whenever there is conflict . . . we use council process . . . “This Process, Way of the Council” by Jack Zimmerman . . . We have had experts come in and teach us about using the council process . . . So, everybody gets heard . . . we are pretty sophisticated when it comes to dealing with interpersonal relations. That is what a lot of the training is that we are into . . . And we get the best you know . . . we get the top people coming in, because it is worth . . . the expense . . . and people want to support us. Okay, we got to focus on being as conscious as we can around this. So . . . a lot of our growth has been dealing with conflicts when they have arisen and seeing in this practice.”

P2V: “. . . I was going to say shadow, but so much that needs to be developed around being conscious . . . the lofty teachings can hide the just being kind and respectful and honest with each other. And if that is happening, the organization is not going to be healthy in the long run.”

P2V: “. . . what I always come back to as the key when we have had differences of opinion or other kinds of conflict . . . if everybody remembers that the reason they are in this is to serve the Dharma, then with that common intention, whatever is getting in the way of the full flowering of inspirational Dharma, needs to be addressed . . . so when you have that bigger vision and bigger shared purpose, the egos have to fly out the window . . . or have to be addressed.”

Work is seen as practice—creating positive morale.

P2 V: “. . . there is work meditation for everybody (in retreat) . . . Whether it is chopping vegetables, or cleaning a bathroom . . . everybody has a job, a real job.”

P3V: “I just find time. It takes a fair amount of time (to volunteer). Between the . . . Board meetings, the Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Family Council . . . and the Teen Retreat—I co-teach that now . . . So I make the time and my family is gracious and generous enough to ‘spare’ me for that time . . . it’s part of my growth and development as well . . . How do we as an organization work within the context of our mission and the context of the path that we purport to follow . . . it’s really a wonderful learning experience that I can use with my family, that I can take into the workplace, that
I can take into my other volunteer work . . . it never feels like a burden . . . I definitely want to be there . . . it’s that they’re nice people . . . it’s . . . always a delight to get together with them even if we don’t agree on everything. . . It’s still fun to be in their presence.”

P1V: “. . . the staff getting ready for a retreat . . . a hundred people . . . you’ve got to get them all in rooms that are going to work for them, and some people have fragrance . . . chemical sensitivities or physical disabilities . . . it’s a massive juggling . . . it often happens there’s an immediate turnaround; that one retreat ends by noon and the next retreat registration starts at 3:00 . . . and they’re assigning jobs and they’re dealing with people like me who have incredible food intolerances . . . the cooking staff especially, they’re radiant people. They just love to feed you, or at least that’s what’s conveyed . . . there’s a lot that goes on in the kitchen . . . I’ve taken veggie chopping jobs several times and every one of them tells you to hold the knife differently . . . But, pretty much they’re all students and . . . on some level they really respect and honor what the students are doing . . . all of us are practicing at the same time here.”

P3V: “With the Family Council, we only meet 4-5 times a year, and we do a check-in, what’s going on in your life? And it gives us that sense of connection and . . . we know about each other . . . and all of this helps set the tone . . . we’re talking to a person with feelings and stresses in their life, and happiness, just like we do . . . there’s not the sense of ‘I have to win’.”

*Consensus and representation are integral to decision-making.*

P2V: “. . . we changed it to what is called modified consensus. But hardly any time has there been . . . somebody . . . they are drawing the line and saying, I am not crossing it; it is very, very rare. And even then, if it is a modified consensus, if it is one or two people out of 20 that don’t . . . we sort out until we come to an agreement.”

P3V: “On the Board level we do things by consensus generally. That’s our goal is to do as much as we can by consensus, so people have the opportunity to stop the process and state their disagreement . . . like with anything, decisions have to be made; we can’t be paralyzed.”

P3V: “It’s (the Board) a mix of teachers and other volunteers . . . ranging anywhere from . . . people who have been involved in “V” for a long time, or people who have . . . been involved in the Dharma . . . trying to be representative, trying to be diverse . . . and cover . . . broad areas to bring . . . that experience to “V” in an advice/consent sort of way.”

**“V” THEME #3--RETREATS**

*Sub-theme:*

*There is profound meaning in the retreat experience.*
P2V: “If you’re sitting on a retreat . . . even a daylong, you can have a powerful experience . . . if you’re sitting in a retreat five days a week, two weeks, a month . . . you don’t realize the shoreline has dropped and in no time at all you’re in deep water . . . it’s a powerful experience. Especially, since in “V”, when it’s a silent retreat, it’s really silent . . . if you’re sitting for a month in silence with guidance and you go in with a sincere intention . . . it’s transforming . . . it’s automatically serious because it’s silent . . . We’re here to wake up and not only for ourselves, but for all beings. But, we are here to make every moment count.”

P1V: “. . . the month-long since that’s my most . . . intense experience . . . there’s an initial group meeting with the teacher . . . and then you have two teachers that you see, maybe three times a week . . . you have 15-minute interviews . . . alternating which teacher you’re with . . . but you have two guiding teachers for the month . . . and the way the day is structured . . . there was Chi Gong and then a sit and then breakfast . . . an hour and a half for work . . . and then a sit and then a 15-minute question and answer and then walking and sitting (alternating) . . . and then lunch. And then another hour and a half of work or nap or whatever . . . and then sitting and walking (alternating) . . . and Chi Gong, until dinner . . . and then another period after dinner for work and then sitting and walking and the Dharma talk and sitting and walking and chanting . . . you don’t need to show up for everything (on the month-long) . . . you’re there for yourself and how do you maximize the time for yourself.”

P3V: “The silence just allowed other things to happen or me to notice other things because I wasn’t busy talking or busy trying to formulate what I was going to say next or things like that . . . the silence was great, and now I look forward to silent retreats . . . it’s just that the noise in the mind . . . the mind will fill up the available space until it starts to calm down . . . and then it opens up.”

P1V: “. . . I have a friend who just went from not knowing what meditation was right to a ten-day retreat.”

“V” THEME #4--THE PLACE

Sub-themes:

Setting and buildings are helpful containers.

P1V: “. . . I have a very strong draw to natural settings and natural beauty . . . so that door opened . . . I would be . . . primed to consider it would be a great place to go. And that was before the upper meditation hall was built and the residencies.”

P1V: “I think it is very hard to separate out . . . the magnanimous holding space, that meditation hall, and that valley, because it’s such a container . . . I work at that ‘felt level’; I’m a kinesthetic person primarily.”

P3V: “Peaceful setting, idyllic.”
P2 V: “. . . we looked for a few years and basically nothing quite fit . . . and, then in ’86 somebody called and said, would like some land that’s close to the city but in the country and owned by the Nature Conservancy. And, they’re looking for a steward who’ll promise not to develop it, over-develop it . . . and it happens to be Native American sacred land and the money that gets . . . paid for it . . . is specifically earmarked to preserve South American Rain Forests. Are you interested? . . . 412 acres . . . for $1,000,000.”

P2 V: “. . . you walk on the land and . . . oh this is wonderful and this is different than walking down the streets of Berkeley. So, that’s very compelling.”

P2V: “. . . you take one step in the meditation hall, and you can see, oh a lot of thought went into this. ’Cause it is, it is truly good.”

*The adjacent population is responsive.*

P2V: “. . . on a Monday night . . . there’s usually three or four hundred people that come to hear J. I would guess . . . 80% of them are from Marin . . . if not more. But that’s different than the retreats and the daylongs . . . clearly for the weekly things . . . it’s predominantly Marin.”

**“V” THEME #5—THERE IS EFFECTIVE OUTREACH**

P1V: “. . . I got on the “V” mailing list and kept looking at all their materials . . .”

P3 V: “. . . I Googled ‘meditation’ on the Internet and there was “V” and it was only twenty miles away.”

P3V: “Most people who have gotten into meditation one way or another, in the area, have heard of “V”. Some have been there; some haven’t . . . especially since so many of the well-known teachers in the West either are teachers at “V” or come through “V” . . . it becomes better known that way.”

P3V: “. . . I think that we need to do more outreach . . . I would like to see us offer things in more places than just “V.”

P3V: “. . . I wanted us to continue to grow and develop and to be aware of what the community is really looking for and how we can serve those within the context of who we are. Not how do we change our mission to meet that . . . but what people are needing and how do we make offerings to people.”

P1V: “. . . the “V” mailing list is huge and extensive outside of Marin.”
P1V: “Oh, you should see the . . . newsletter . . . in that there is what the family program is doing . . . what the varsity program is doing . . .”

“V” THEME #6—THERE ARE ADEQUATE FUNDS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

P3V: “. . . M. is very good and he’s got a good solid team that tracks that (finances), and we have a solid development effort with T. where they’re growing and continually testing and trying new ideas . . . as opposed to someone who just . . . sits back and waits for the money to come in . . . They’re coming back with some alternatives and solutions. Looking forward, more than just a month or two . . . and bringing options to us . . . issues and potential solutions.”

P3V “. . . it’s the public programs. It’s classes, daylongs, retreats, family days, all those things, the Monday nights . . . that’s our biggest source of income . . . we have . . . a revenue stream that’s not just donation dependent.”

P3V “I would think so, certainly (that Marin was a good location for financial survival).

P3V: “We don’t overpay our staff by any means . . . we just wouldn’t allow it to be (paying staff children’s college educations, etc.) because then we’d be moving away from what we’re really supposed to be about.”

“V” THEME #7—THE CENTER IS EXPERIENCING INCREASING GROWTH AND SCALE

P2V: “. . . but it is an organization . . . and in all honesty from 20 years ago to now . . . when we used to have board meetings . . . in this communal house, and we used to meet there and have check-ins and a process and stuff like that . . . just a few of us. The one thing over time, which is to be expected is, I miss those days. It . . . has become an organization. It is so big that . . . I used to know almost every thing that was going on. Now . . . I will read those minutes of the Executive Committee. Oh that is interesting. They just decided that or whatever . . . So it . . . is not nearly as hands-on . . . for me or for the teachers . . . there is not as much of an intimate feeling like I know everybody. . . But that is part of growing.”

P2V: “It is just like a monastic you know, the monks don’t know if they are going to have their food in their bowl... but if they do a good enough job, they do. And, it kind of keeps . . . impeccability aligned with our values and we are expanding . . . We are going to do a capital campaign. We are going to be expanding . . . considerably because we are kind of bursting at the seams . . . although when you look at a capital campaign, then we say, oh my God . . . what are we heading into.”

BRIEF ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY OF “Z”:
A. BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: “Z” has three main sites, a Director for each site, and a Board for all sites which has both lay people and teachers on it. All sites are owned by “Z” plus a variety of nearby residences in San Francisco. Formerly, “Z” also ran several businesses in San Francisco. It was founded over 30 years ago by a teacher from Japan of the Soto tradition, Z. Roshi, who taught for 10 years, and was succeeded by an American teacher, Y. Roshi. Now the baton has passed to a series of American male and female teachers trained at “Z” who act as the Abbots and priests-in-residence of the three sites.

Residential students receive a brief work training and are given stipends and earn practice periods as they progress. Z3 is the site which provides intensive semi-monastic senior student and teacher training; it is also the site providing a large portion of “Z’s” revenue as a result of its summer guest season, open to the public. All everyday work at “Z” except for outside consultation is performed by students and teachers who are paid, given room and board, and health benefits.

The Center receives applications from students throughout the world who wish to undergo its discipline, including often living in very modest living spaces, working long hours, and showing up for daily required meditation sessions and meeting with their Practice Leader and/or teacher. Structurally it looks like a hierarchy, but in terms of the value of each person, it strives not to be a psychological hierarchy.
Of each cohort of 60 students arriving at “Z,” approximately 25 go on to become serious, residenti\textit{al} students and the other 35 take several retreats. Many practitioners may also show up for Sunday meditation only or for various workshops. “Z” is also well-known for presenting public programs and offering its summer guest season at “Z3.”

Students expressing a serious interest in studying Zen Buddhism of the Soto tradition which originated in Japan, are accepted as working residents for up to two years and offered room and board and a small stipend and are assigned a variety of jobs to do. They have an assigned daily schedule which basically immerses them in the spiritual practice and community, and which includes sessions of meditation morning and night as well as set mealtimes, work assignments, and optional additional events and teachings, plus time off. Through working they can also earn practice periods. They reach a point within two years, when they go to the Z3 wilderness site for a somewhat more monastic type training (often with shaved heads and robes) in the winter and they work the guest season service in the summer. Their stipends increase. They choose a teacher with whom they will presumably study if the relationship proves productive, until receiving “transmission” which empowers them to act as teachers themselves. During this time they progress and assume more responsibility for the various organizational functions possibly working fulltime. They may remain for many years or a whole lifetime and become teachers after extensive training, or they may leave.

All staff work is essentially residential, done by student practitioners, paid by stipend, and is expected to be integrated as “practice.” People work six hours to fulltime each day and get up early each morning to meditate. Each student has a Practice Leader,
with whom they consult regularly on personal and practice matters, and also has a Supervisor in the unit they are working in, kitchen, garden, office, etc. The focus of practice is not only on intensive retreats or Sesshins, but on integrating the teachings each and every day, during work as well as during meditation.

Some non-residential students attend particular Sesshins or day, evening or weekend events; some guest students work less but pay for their lodging; and some residential students work fulltime outside of the Center.

B.TEACHERS: originally “Z” was founded by a Soto Zen teacher from Japan. He taught for 10 years and gave transmission to only two students, one of whom became the head teacher. This second teacher promoted strong growth of the Center, but had to resign in a scandal, leaving the group almost leaderless, since the permission to teach is given by each teacher to the next though a formal “transmission” ceremony. This was a very traumatic period for the organization according to those interviewed who were there when it occurred. Partially in reaction to this period of difficulty, the group now has multiple teachers, men and women, who have trained in its ranks, and rotates Abbots of each site regularly. Some teachers have shaved heads and robes and appear as priests, though they may be married, and some teachers prefer lay dress and a more casual demeanor. Business functions of the Centers are no longer just run by “a teacher” but rather by the Board of Directors.

A delicate negotiation process between student and prospective teacher results in the student undertaking their training with their teacher usually for years, and it is within this important relationship that the student matures spiritually, though during a student’s
training they are recipients of close attention from a wide variety of people with more experience than themselves.

C. TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS TEACHING AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

This Center with three sites derives its teaching tradition and transmission lineage from the Soto Zen school in Japan, whose most famous teacher is Dogen. It was flourishing in the 12th Century and many of the job titles and roles still in place at this and other Zen centers are identical to those used at that time. Japanese teachers were priests but were allowed to be married, and are not considered formally monastic. At this Center the same is true, and those who are teachers do not necessarily have to wear robes and have shaved heads—thus it is “semi-monastic.” This, plus having a Board of Directors to conduct business, paying stipends, and having a convivial social atmosphere with a mixed group of young people including women, as well as female teachers and Abbots, all American, are concessions to Western culture.

The actual meditation training is traditional, with chants of *Sutras*, such as the Heart Sutra, bowing, interviews with the teacher, eating *oryoki* in place during *Sesshins*, sitting “tongario” at the gate to be admitted, observing special days, and facing the wall while meditating in silence. Decoration in the *Zendo* resembles that of Japanese temples in Japan, as do monastic robes and roles related to practice, such as assistant to the Abbot. The relationship with the teacher is also formal and traditional. The day is very structured and work-oriented.

D. VALUES
A high premium is placed on students’ “working out”—i.e. being able to adapt to the spiritual discipline and pull their weight in terms of doing their assigned jobs in the structure. All jobs are held to be equal, and working well with one’s “crew” in the garden or kitchen and doing so within the practice (chants are often done before working) are major goals. Various levels of conflict management are available, though interpersonal conflict may simmer for long periods before being dealt with. One site apparently has a reputation of not being that welcoming, and though the organization is very well known, and has a long history in the area, it is not strongly focused on marketing or outreach.

“Z” is concerned with organizational improvement and has hired consultants to help revitalize the vision and finances of the sites, though there is also some ambivalence about that approach and whether concepts like “vision” relate to the immediacy of Zen training.

Living on site and participating consistently day in and day out, inside and outside formal meditation sessions, is the preferred way to be a part of this community and fully benefit from what it has to offer, as well as making one’s own offering. This Community is devoted to offering a traditional discipline overseen by American teachers who are trained in the Center and due to its difficult past experience with one teacher, has made an effort not to focus on hierarchy of teachers or charisma of teachers. Overall values are tradition, long-term participation, discipline, and equality.

E: ORGANIZATIONAL CONCERNS:
• Maintaining a long-term traditional teaching, transmission and training process in a modern setting—particularly in terms of elements of monasticism, hierarchy and up-to-date measures of organizational effectiveness—is a major challenge.
• Managing to succeed financially without proselytizing or communicating in a non-authentic way is another.
• Keeping the awareness of work-as-practice, rather than as a mundane activity requires ongoing reminders.
• Maintaining adequate teacher and older peer support for incoming students is critical.
• Supporting a long-term, residential teaching and study process while still remaining financially viable creates a high bar for this organization.
• Maintaining the training schedule and routine while accommodating changing students and staff assignments at each site requires extensive scheduling.

RESULT: “Z” is possibly best-known Zen center in America with many sponsors and participants in the S.F. Bay Area. It is popular with young people who seek to be accepted as workers and trainees. The guest summer vacation program at Z3 helps to support all three sites and is also very popular. The financial support burden for maintaining long-term participants is worrisome. “Z” is trying to develop more outreach and variety of programs as well as more steady income and less long-term staff expense utilizing outside consultants.
“Z” Center (Sites 1 & 2 & indirectly, 3) Major Themes

P4Z2: Teacher  P5Z1: Student  P6Z1: Teacher

“Z” THEME #1— COMPREHENSIVE RESIDENTIAL STUDENT-TO-COMMUNITY-MEMBER PROCESS

Sub-themes:

New residential students are tested, then given training and support.
P4Z2: “. . . After two weeks at that level as a guest-student, which is an entry level, people pay for those two weeks, and we view that as their paying for training. They are getting initiated, we are spending time with them, they don’t know anything, they don’t know where the sponges are, they don’t know where the brooms are. So, we train them and they pay, I think it is $20 a day. And they get room and board. All of the classes that are being offered and lectures and so on are included in the tuition. And then, at the end of two weeks, that is the longest anyone pays for residential practice, and if things have gone well, and they have applied and been accepted as a work-practice apprentice, then they are basically on a scholarship; they are on a work-practice exchange. So, from that point on, we consider them initiated to work. Then they are assigned to a crew . . . They are not volunteers; they are apprentices.”

P4Z2: “The farm apprentices, for six months of their labor they get a work exchange, room and board scholarship. At the seventh month . . . we call them seventh-month apprentices, they get a $75 stipend from that point on and they also get two practice periods.”

There is a demanding and structured daily schedule.
P4Z2: “And they (apprentices) are also on a set schedule, which includes five mornings a week of meditation . . . So, at 4:15, 4:20, they get out of bed, they go to the Zendo, (meditation hall) they sit through periods of Zazen, (sitting meditation) they go to service. They go to do Zoji, cleaning, temple cleaning. They go to breakfast. They go to work meeting, if they are working that day.”

P6Z1: “. . . if . . . you are a resident at “Z,” you could have one thing or maybe two other things, but you can’t have three other things. Maybe you could have a relationship and maybe you could have some hobby which doesn’t take too much time . . . you could have a job outside . . . but then you can’t have a hobby . . . and when you are pressured in that way you have to prioritize what is the most important thing for you, which is very important.”

Students must qualify for and earn intensive meditation practice periods.
P4Z2: “They get permission to apply (for Practice Periods) basically . . . people need to be accepted in the practice periods based on their stability, their harmonizing with the community, and their various factors that they have actually complied with the various requests we make of people, guidelines for practicing here, like not starting
relationships before you are here for six months. There are various things, drugs and alcohol. There are various reasons that people might be asked to come back later and try it again some other time when you are ready to stay within the guidelines of the community. So, given that none of that happened, then they can apply to do a practice period . . . for six months of their apprenticeship, which is the summer, then they have these two Practice Periods that they have in a sense earned, and there is no charge for them. And they continue to get that $75 through the Practice Periods. So that takes them through the holidays and then a round through January, and then the second Practice Period is in the spring. So, basically by the time they have done all that, they have been here for a year."

_Serious students become staff with training and support._
P4Z2: “. . . so we have pretty trained staff. They’ve done practice periods, they’ve done _Sesshins_, (longer retreats) they’ve done one-day sittings . . . worked. So, if and when they apply for staff, then we consider those applications carefully, and if all has gone well, then we welcome them to staff. They sit _Tongario_ (sitting for three days at the gate) so they have now entered the Temple and they are given $300 a month stipend at that point and one year. If they stay on staff one year, then they receive health insurance, too. So at that point by the second year, they are pretty stable economically. (If) They didn’t have debts when they came in here, most people can do pretty well on that stipend level.”

_Resident families receiving support are composed of long-term students._
P4Z2: “We don’t accept families, unfortunately . . . the way families have come to live here is that the people came as single people and then they met and they married, then they had a child . . . they had to have been here long enough to have not only been on staff, but to be taking serious responsibility. They had to have already gone to Z3 (3rd “Z” site) and done their monastic training.

P4Z2: “. . . they would be welcome to raise their child . . . paying back the huge expense of having the mother not working for six months to a year, the father having a quarter of his time as child care . . . basically we support the family very generously in terms of our acknowledging the needs of the child. And this is a tremendous offering from the community to a family . . .”

_Students progress to semi-monastic training, a step-up in dedication._
P4Z2: “The people who come here, usually by the end of the first or second year at most, the feeling here is that it is time for them to go to Z3 and do monastic practice . . . really confirm your interest in the practice as the primary basis for your continuing in the community . . . everybody (at Z3) is working like (it’s) a resort . . . in that six months of their year it is a summer guest season, all the folks who were there have now earned those practice periods for the winter months . . . start to get into the rhythm of Z3, stay two or three years if it is all to their liking . . . maybe by then they have gotten a partner and they are settled in . . . there is an understanding that if they bring a child into the community that they will stay longer.”
Students receive ordination as a priest or teacher in training after many years.
P4Z2: “So may you ordain as a priest at ‘Z?’ Yes. How do you do that? Well, you need a teacher, you need to go through monastic training, and you need to spend many years at Z3. I think we require four practice periods at Z3. You need to work with your teacher for some number of years. Your teacher needs to get permission from other teachers who interview the person and agree that this person may be ordained. And then, we do the ordination ceremony with the support of two other teachers... and then everyone is responsible for... how this person is doing... you start to hear about the practice of the person and it is very intimate. And no, no stones are unturned in terms of our involvement with each other as people in training. So, the people you see with robes and shaved heads are in training, and they are in a sense novitiates. They have not been given independent status as teachers.”

There is a non-hierarchical teacher status and training.
P4Z2: “The people who have independent status as teachers, you might have a harder time to spot... I have independent status as a teacher. And... for years I had a shaved head and I wore robes. And I chose not to do that... and yet, I'm going to ask my person I'm ordaining to shave her head and wear robes for a number of years.”

P4Z2: “... I have studied and trained and come to a point in my community where I’ve been given permission to teach Dharma.”

P5Z1: “It is part of the vision, is that people will... train there and then be able to bring the practice out in various ways... either... starting centers... or participating in other ways... with time... the number of teachers just expanded... naturally there were just more and more people who had been practicing for a long time, but also some awareness of the pitfalls of having... a concentration of authority... now, the Abbotship rotates quite regularly. I think it’s a 4-year thing and they have two Abbots at any one time, and... just the... number of senior teachers as well... the position of Abbot isn’t quite as revered as it was and it’s not as special as it was...”

P5Z1: “‘Z’ itself did undergo a big shift after Z. Roshi and Y. Roshi were there... previously, maybe more like other Buddhist traditions... there (was) one or there’s a small number of... main high-powered teachers.”

P5Z1: “... this other dynamic... dialectic. It’s between... here are these people who’ve been practicing for a long time and they do have this knowledge and authority. But balancing that with well... no one’s better than anyone else... anyone can potentially become a teacher. And maybe, even everyone is... we can all teach each other... there is a hierarchy, but there also is no hierarchy. So that’s another... tension possibly being negotiated in the organization.”

P6Z1: “... I think if you were here in 1972 and you saw me and you saw everyone else, you never would have picked me to be the person that would be here (as a teacher)... But it is obvious that... if a person persists through this practice, they
could evolve into being a teacher... that might not have been their ambition, but they could."

P6Z1: "... after a while my teacher said, be the kind of priest that you want to be, not the kind of priest you don’t like."

_The group provides spiritual and personal support which is essential._

P47Z2 "... I don’t think in all the years I’ve been here, I have felt this emotionally safe, or harmonious as I do in this particular generation of people. There’s enough elders now... a whole generation of our elders was wiped out when our former abbot left and there was just... just this decimation of spirit and enthusiasm and confidence and idealizations... I mean, the whole world turned upside down. We went from being the best Zen center in the universe to being the worst... in the universe."

P5Z1: "... one thing that’s quite helpful is everyone who’s there has a Practice Leader, who you visit regularly... so, I think that helps to continue to relate to what you are doing there as practice. And, that can be really helpful... relating to challenges that come up in a positive way... spiritual, meaningful issues that there is a way to approach, to work with them."

_Work is considered practice, and everyone’s contribution is valued._

P4Z2: "Well, I was a Director here fourteen years ago... when I was in training... at that time, I really thought I was the Director. For real... I was really unsure of myself in a lot of ways... and not so trusting of the people here in terms of if I couldn’t see them and what they were doing... (Now as Director) I really feel a deep trust of the people who are working here... they’re just smart, they’re capable, they’re doing their best, they’re overworking. Mostly I need to tell them to relax or slow down or it’s okay... they’ll just... give it all... I feel very privileged to have this crew of people that I know are... getting their homework done."

P4Z2: "... we’re basically staffed by students... we don’t hire people, except for plumbers. We don’t hire cleaners, housekeepers... that idea comes up every once in a while. Well, why don’t we just have some people come in and do the housekeeping of the guesthouse? And I just go like... You know you’re going down the devil’s road there... Once you start that... we’ll have people come in and cook for us, too... And then we can all have a whole day to study the Dharma... to keep holding back that temptation to hire out the labor, the so-called menial labor, and to see that’s our value as a community, is that washing dishes, making beds, doing the garden, cleaning the rooms, is the practice of a Zen person. That is what a Zen person does... no work is... below any other work... It’s all... important work."

P5Z1: "There’s this kind of... complexity there... there can be a feeling... particularly among people who are working in... more menial kind of positions with less responsibility that... they’re being exploited... That varies... depending on... the whole environment of the center and also in terms of personal relationship between
who’s your supervisor and how they are relating to you . . . are they putting a lot of pressure on you? Are they very stressed out . . . And . . . are they just . . . oriented toward what you’re getting done as opposed to how you are doing it? So . . . the psychological, spiritual context of the work is a fluid thing . . . there is a strong emphasis on work as practice, all work. And that . . . there is no . . . low and high when it comes to a particular job. That’s a real strong message that is sent.”

P5Z1: “. . . at . . . actually all of the centers, it’s possible to work for the organization, earn your room and board . . . earn a stipend. . . It was possible to continue there.”

P5Z1: “. . . so, there was kind of a work element . . . “Z” makes an effort to have people change their jobs regularly. For most positions, you change yearly . . . as you move up the hierarchy, you may stay longer, but there is that kind of variability . . . which I think helps keep it interesting. And it’s all . . . framed within an attempt to give people jobs that will be “good for them” . . . so that your job is considered part of your spiritual practice. And, ideally, you’re kind of relating to it in that way. You’re given a job that will be challenging, but also, hopefully, beneficial for spiritual growth.”

P5Z1: “typically (work) about six hours a day . . . that’s sort of an average. I was working more like fulltime when I was at Z1.”

P5Z1: “I think that at Z1 it was actually a bit difficult because I was working full time and on top of that there were a number of hours each day then doing practice, formal practice that was required . . . it was just on a level of . . . physical energy and resources, it was challenging. And I think a certain number of people who live in “Z” . . . they would work outside full time . . . there were very few people who could pull that off because it was very demanding . . . I think that it’s a little more doable working for “Z” . . . because . . . It cuts out commuting time.”

P5Z1: “Anyone who stays for any length of time, who is not just paying to stay there as a guest . . . will be working at least . . . six hours a day . . . Although even if you do a retreat you work at least a couple of hours a day.”

P5Z1: “. . . this is a good practice opportunity . . . relating to issues that come up, but as you know, relating to them internally. Okay, how am I practicing with this? How can I be mindful in a way that is . . . the default mode of practice within “Z”? . . . to . . . ‘sit with it’ . . . really instinctively. But I think another one of the challenges in “Z” is to really deal directly with interpersonal and organizational issues that affect people in very real ways beyond just . . . sitting with it . . . people definitely have choice . . . you can always say no to a particular position . . . up to a point . . . I think if people don’t show flexibility in being able to . . . be willing to do what’s needed for the organization . . . beyond what they prefer . . . in the extreme, people may be asked to leave . . . if they’re really rigid.”

*Students find spiritual guidance, not necessarily therapy, in their relationship to a teacher and to peers.*
P4Z2: “. . . I think . . . one of our best offerings . . . to the students here is that they can’t figure out who the teacher is . . . and everybody figures out who their teacher is eventually . . . they get some time to decide who they want to work with . . . they’ve got, all the new Abbots. So there’s a choice and the old abbots are choices. . . there’s others of us who have received our transmission . . . and then there’s also young priests in training . . .”

P6Z1: “When I first came to “Z” it was mostly that your relationship with the abbot was the main teaching relationship, and that is one of the things that didn’t work. . . it’s true that there were Tantos, (Practice Leaders) which were also practice relationships . . . so there were maybe two people you could have a practice relationships with . . . Then when Y. Roshi left and there were many more models and many more people that you could have relationships with . . . I think that was . . . is crucial . . . particularly if you are going to have a kind of rather formal training, you need a personal connection.”

P6Z1: “I believe that (in) a Zen temple the student-teacher relationship is very important, but it’s almost as important as the peer relationship. When people come they learn from either their peers or from people that were there slightly before them and so the transition from Z. Roshi was pretty good because there was that. The transition from Y. Roshi was there too because there was that a little bit. But there weren’t that many people that came after Y. Roshi left. There was a king of 5 or 10-year period when there weren’t very many newer students. And this new generation has that also, has that deficit . . . all the teachers that have been made have been basically people who were there at the Y. Roshi time . . . Soto Zen takes a long time.”

P4Z2: “So it’s a risky moment and it’s a very tender moment (asking someone to be your teacher) . . . there’s also the heartbreak of people deciding you’re not the teacher of their dreams . . . there’s their waking up from the idealization that happens . . . then you can actually, maybe really work with somebody.”

P4Z2: “I’m pretty clear that what I teach is Buddhism . . . I’m in therapy, but . . . I don’t teach therapy . . . I might use something I heard from my therapist as an element of my teaching. But really, I want to help people orient to what the Buddha said . . . and what it says in the Sutras . . . and if they’re interested in that . . . we’re on. And if not, and they’re really into the whole transference around me, and me as a person, then I’ll say, ‘Okay, I think you need to be in therapy . . . And when you want to talk about Buddhism . . . then we’ll do the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path . . . because that’s what I love, that’s what I came here and fell in love with . . . that’s really what I’m qualified to teach.”

P4Z2: “You might be able to trust me, or you grow to trust me, but if you can’t, then maybe you need to be in some place where . . . you feel safe. And that the big issues . . . aren’t blindsiding you from just being able to talk to me.”

_transmission is the formal process and hallmark of becoming a teacher as a result of intensive training._
P4Z2: “... transmission is ... it’s a lineage. You’ve become a lineage holder ... there is some sense of ... not about language, not about words, but about a direct ... meeting ... that’s confidence that you have with someone that you’ve worked with for many years.”

P4Z2: “... there’s a ritual involved with it. It’s fabulous ... and we transform that room over there into a ritual chamber and there are special altars and all kinds of things and it’s done completely in private with your teacher ... the whole thing is ... numinous ... They pull all the stops in creating a really numinous ritual.”

Students are free to leave the Center and “re-enter” the world.

P5Z1: “The longer I was at “Z” ... the wider my view of the practice became ... I did become less interested in the specific Zen ... Soto Zen Buddhist form of my own practice ... I think my experience to some extent is, kind of parallel to the Buddhist analogy of the raft ... the Dharma and the form and content of Dharma being, kind of, a raft that’s the particular ... form of “Z.” And it’s not by any means meant to be ... this is it, this is what, where it’s at, this is what practice is.”

P5Z1: “... one reason I felt good about it (leaving “Z” as a senior student) ... was just ... life circumstances not so related to “Z” ... I did experience some sense of living, not being ... fully engaged in the world ... because “Z” did feel like it created a certain kind of barrier—and I was attracted to bringing my practice more into the mainstream culture, being able to ... operate outside of any defined religious context ... a sense of feeling somewhat limited by that ... a little bit just personally wanted to feel like I have ... participated and excelled within the mainstream culture as opposed to just within “Z.”

“Z” THEME #2—CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Sub-themes:

The lineage is clearly Soto Zen.
P6Z1: “Z” is a context and an age and a lineage, where there are many great teachers and teachings that are just in the halls.”

Zen in America is slowly changing in its new cultural surroundings.
P6Z1: “... I was drawn to “Z” because of its American openness and when I came, Z. Roshi had just died. ... So it wasn’t that I was attracted to the teachers so much, but to the community, the intelligence of the community.”

P6Z1: “... the new people that are coming and still a large part of them are people from the 50’s and 60’s. ... there are new people coming who are younger ... maybe a third or half of who is coming. ... it’s something about the culture of after World War II that people are drawn who were born from that time.”
most of the Zen teachers came here, empowered their students, but they changed slowly. The Zen groups are slowly becoming less Asian. The Vipassana groups have gone cold turkey and become American, which is fraught with peril. The Tibetans are very precious and people love them, but I don’t know if it’s going to catch.

It’s a kind of conformism which is met with because there is conformism underneath; there is individualism on the top. In Japan, we think of them as conformists, but they are the most individualistic people I have ever met, but they know how to do the group thing.

Belaz pointed out in Asia, Zen is a way out of the society because your way was pretty much mapped out. You had very little choice except that you could always choose to be a monk which is a way out of that very structured situation. While in America, he felt like joining a Zen center actually links you to institutions, and was a way to bring you in the same thing in different situations has different meanings.

Monasticism and hierarchy are apparent but not the essence of the practice.

We don’t so much say monastic as priest. For us, that’s what you are seeing here as an ordained priest, shaved head, robes. One of the ways we have come to understand it is that you are monastic when you are practicing in a monastery. It is your function that determines how you’re seen, what kind of activities you do. So, the monastics really do spend a lot of time in meditation, not talking so much, maybe carrying some responsibility for the temple functions. You can look them up in the old text, and you will see (in) Dogen, (a famous Japanese Soto Zen teacher) there was a director at the temple and treasurer and a guest manager. These are really old forms of monastic offices. What we have created here is a result of as much as anything, Japanese priests marrying. There is some variation on that in Tibet of married Lamas.

The thing is the Japanese tradition is not a monastic tradition. They present themselves as a monastic tradition and it is a monastic tradition for your first five or eight years of practice, but then they get married and they go to their temples. So in some ways “Z” has continued that maybe moving a little less monastic than there, and I think that is what has made “Z” attractive too. If it had been totally monastic, I don’t think it would have been so. But there is some ambiguity about it.

I think when Z. Roshi came over, it was the fact that they have one foot in monasticism, but one foot out, it was what was so attractive.

A religious atmosphere, ritual, and formal practice are aids to realization but not the substance.
P5Z1: “I think that the rituals are formed as specific practices that are a gate into what you’d call . . . a Dharma Gate. And, I think what’s in a way a challenge is that any form, any phenomenon can feel, just theoretically, (like) a Dharma Gate. Each moment has its form and that is the Dharma Gate of the moment.”

P5Z1: “The specific forms . . . there’s a lot of Japanese culture . . . but there’s also . . . certain things that go beyond that such as sitting still, sitting upright, bowing, certain practices that . . . have a kind of meaning for us just as human organisms that we are and the way that we are built. They are helpful and supportive and they help us to be able to actually experience this thing called practice . . . but I think the challenge is always between being able to use those forms . . . but hold them in the right way and not as something special . . . you’re not better, you’re not automatically spiritual through sitting in the Zendo . . . it’s helpful to have this kind of specific training . . . But then the challenge is not to let those things become routine, not to limit your understanding of practice to those forms of Buddhism . . . these specific forms became a little bit less important to me in some ways, although I think I do still really have a lot of respect for them.”

P5Z1: “. . . by having this thing (ritual) . . . we know we’re not just going right to work, we’re going to . . . do this chant and . . . praying, it helps . . . us reorient toward doing things from this place of deeper intention and spiritual practice as opposed to, maybe, a more habitual way of doing things.”

P6Z1: “I think ritual is important for every community because it is a thing that they do together, (in) which you don’t have to worry about your individuality. You just do it together. It is a kind of surrender, which is very important . . . And it’s something that Americans don’t like, but actually they like it, which is the problem . . . they like it and they dislike it.”

Modesty is encouraged regarding spiritual attainment.

P4Z2: “. . . I think “Z” has wisely side-stepped the spiritual attainment issue, and Soto Zen in particular . . . doesn’t focus on ‘Did you get it? You got it?’ You know, it’s not a conversational topic . . . it would be really rude to get into that kind of conversation at “Z.”

Traditional and new work roles as well as teaching roles are all valued and often co-exist in a single individual.

P4Z2: “They didn’t just make me Director and say, ‘Now, you’re the all-empowered one’ . . . Because . . . I have many layers over me . . . sideways layers that hold me accountable . . . one of my weekly meetings is to attend a meeting of the Officers and Directors of “Z,” the President of “Z,” the Treasurer of “Z,” the Vice-President and the Secretary of “Z” . . . the Corporate Officers. They account to the Board of Directors of “Z” . . . I need permission from them to spend certain kinds of monies . . . I need to make my case for the budget, and they have authority over the budget and over the policies . . . and it’s good that way because I feel like it’s very collaborative . . . I don’t hold the stick by myself.”
P5Z1: “... this other dynamic... dialectic. It’s between... here are these people who’ve been practicing for a long time and they do have this knowledge and authority. But balancing that with well... no one’s better than anyone else... anyone can potentially become a teacher. And maybe, even everyone is... we can all teach each other... there is a hierarchy, but there also is no hierarchy. So that’s another... tension possibly being negotiated in the organization.”

P5Z1: “... when I was working on the senior staff at Z1... it included regular meetings with the other senior staff, which really did... take those skills to another level... all the jobs I was working for other people to varying degrees... At Z1 I started as coordinator of the Outreach program and my next job was as the Shika, which is Guest Program Manager... my last job was... in the accounting office as... payroll, human resources.”

P6Z1: “The abbots are members of the Board. And they have an important role. But I think G. is right and it is becoming more corporate and part of the reason it is becoming corporate is the fear that we were too insular, and part of it is a kind of illusion about an objectification of “Z” which... I am very concerned about.”

P6Z1: “Also I am on the elders group... It is a group of people who have been at “Z” for 20 years or more. There are 16... And we nominate, we suggest the abbots to the Board.”

P6Z1: “I have given two people Dharma transmission. And so that is kind of the network that fans out... the creative things I do and the teaching things I do are the things that sustain me most... I still have 5 or 6 different jobs... one time I had 10... I am in charge of the everyday board, which oversees G. (restaurant). I am in charge of publications. And I have been keen on Buddhist studies, but I don’t do much with that right now. I was in charge of the Z. Roshi archives.”

*External cultural values are dealt with in a context of practice.*

“P4Z2: “... I kept thinking, well, everyone should have learnt a lot of lessons from watching “Z.” And yet I could see the same mistakes happening with these other communities... But the delusional power of the charismatic... singular teacher is a really amazing thing.”

P4Z2: “I can see us really courting the efficiencies of top-down leadership. You know... it’s quick. Just ask the Roshi... Do we really want to ask the Roshi? Do we want to do that again... Now what have we done? We’ve kind of infantilized ourselves away from our own decision-making. And now I struggle with decision-making... The main thing is we are trying.”

P5Z1: “... as far as what keeps this organization functioning well is its ability to balance those tensions... both sides represent something important, but it does seem
that when the balance gets tipped too far, to either side, things don’t seem to be as good . . . People . . . they’re suffering when that happens . . . because tipping to one side the organization might say, it ran really well as a business . . . and say . . . it’s thriving. But, actually is it thriving? “I mean, I think what the problem there is that actually the people on some level, people aren’t thriving and people aren’t just . . . needing the material . . . they need their spiritual side.”

P6Z1: “. . . at “Z” there is too much about looking good . . . there is not enough understanding about how vulnerability is the most important aspect . . . the institution sets it up so that everybody feels vulnerable . . . but . . . they don’t get that that is actually a good thing . . . we are taught to sit down and shut up.”

P6Z1: “. . . social interaction is part of being human. It is not emphasized (for its own sake) . . . That is not conducive to practice. But, no social interaction is not conducive to practice either . . . for every practice period . . . there is a practice period of celebration where people do skits and stuff like that . . . I don’t think people would say we emphasize social interaction. But to de-emphasize it isn’t right either.”

P6Z1: “. . . this is where the Bela books are important. . . the fear of institutions where you can be right and the institution is wrong. But . . . you can be fine at being right, but you have no power and the institution is left with people who are fine with things not being okay . . . Well, staying within an institution and being part is very important.”

P6Z1: “. . . I think . . . that when you are in an institution or a Zen institution, you learn what it is like to be anyone. And then when you learn what it is like to be anyone, you have to then learn . . . what it is like to be you, because learning what it is like to be everyone gives you a strong base, and then you can grow your individuality. . . I think it helps to go back and forth . . . “

P6Z1: “So, the near enemy of the Zen institution is the kind of conformity where people don’t learn what it is like or who they are in particular . . . Here is the universal and then and without lying, here is how it is for you, which is also without all the good and bad attached . . . that this is how you are.”

P6Z1: “There is a part of Zen, which is, each thing is perfect the way it is, if it doesn’t try to wobble. It is perfect just as it is and each thing has absolute value. Comparative value is what we usually think of . . . and . . . there’s a place for it, but absolute value is the basis of everything. That is what Buddha is.”

The Center has grown from major changes and difficulties over time.

P6Z1: “When I first came it was a kind of transition for me . . . Y. Roshi was very different (from Z. Roshi), and for some people, it was a time of change. And then the thing with Y. Roshi . . . that was a very big thing. Everybody was in pain. But it was also an opportunity for many people to step forward. And now it seems like a third transition, which is kind of a generational transition . . . this is a generation that hadn’t
been at “Z” at the time of Y. Roshi. . . it is a change of people and I am concerned about it. But it could be a good corrective or it could be a disaster.”

“Z” THEME #3—RETREATS AND PROGRAMS ARE WELL ATTENDED.

P4Z2: “. . . our guests now come every year, it’s how they refresh. . . ‘This is how I refresh my soul’ or ‘This is my connection to practice’ . . . And the same thing with UCSF . . . brings their training doctors here . . . and they really understand what this quiet, peaceful ‘space’ is that we’re holding for everybody. They understand the value of that.”

P5Z1: “. . . for a number of years now it has been quite well populated, pretty full as far as residents. And a lot of events . . . in terms of the meditation . . . lectures, etc. are required for the residents to attend. And, then there are a lot of people who, in the community, who practice at “Z” and are involved to varying degrees but don’t live there. Many of them come . . . just on Saturdays to lecture . . . and it’s almost more like a traditional church model . . . Others come and meditate in the evening after work.”

P6Z1: “I came out here to sit a seven-day Sesshin and I knew that I might stay and I did . . . it was captivating.”

“Z” THEME #4—The Center has adopted more focus on outreach, but not on proselytizing.

P4Z2 “I’m the President of the Marin Interfaith Council . . . I really thought we’re not being fully utilized by this County, and we’re all certainly not being fully utilized as an opportunity for interfaith work, for childrens’ programs, for agriculture, for the environmental program.”

P4Z2: “. . . a part of our new task is to make that (peaceful space) accessible to more people . . . and not to flood ourselves out of existence, because we could also overdo it.”

P4Z2: “. . . basically anything that spins off . . . in this vein is good . . . The more the better.”

P4Z2: “We don’t have a segregated dining room. So they (guests) get a chance to talk to these young people and find out that they’re really wonderful and what they’re up to and real values.”

P5Z1: “I would say it’s mainly brochures and website . . . They do . . . lecture series sometimes . . . they will put ads in Buddhist magazines . . . and actually . . . when I was in the Outreach Department . . . we were making efforts to become more visible to minorities . . . we did put some ads in local papers that were mainly distributed to minorities . . . but . . . it’s sort of this culture . . . definitely in “Z” that it’s not really a
culture for . . . actively trying to recruit people in. . . It’s somewhat known for . . . they
can just come and no one’s . . . bugging them, asking them to come back more. You
can just . . . show up for meditation and really to move more into the community
generally takes a person’s own initiative . . . And Z1, in particular, has been criticized for
being . . . unfriendly and not welcoming . . . but in general, “Z” . . . does try to be visible . . .
being on the web.

P5Z1: “But “Z” has been around for so long that it is . . . just through . . . word of mouth
and . . . natural processes . . . it’s come to be known and it’s by far the biggest Zen thing
happening in San Francisco . . . they’re curious about Zen and they get on the web and
they’re probably going to end up at the San Francisco “Z.”

P6Z1: “It (“Z”) does not proselytize . . . Except there is a movement to make it more
proselytized now . . . the trend about the objectification of “Z” and fund-raising . . . I like
the fact that “Z” doesn’t proselytize. I like it that people come in and you don’t smile at
them, and just try to hit them up. But on the other hand there is a kind of coldness and
kind of averting which is maybe a little too much . . . it could be better . . . “

“Z” THEME #5— THERE IS A NEW FOCUS ON FINANCES AND
ORGANIZATION/VISION

Sub-themes:

A vision and strategic plan have been created to help ensure financial health.
P5Z1: “. . . “Z” . . . did this whole strategic plan thing . . . they brought in outside
consultants to interview lots of different people and . . . they wanted to come up with a
plan that reflected what people wanted for “Z” . . . about five years ago . . . that spurred
lots of discussion . . . A lot of it seemed to be revolving around financial issues relating
to retirement . . . “Z” supporting families as opposed to . . . benefits for children . . .
probably some small issues did change . . . ”

P4Z2: “So, our hope is that we would be embedding ourselves in the psyches of all the
people that we live with, which is Marin County, California. They are the wealthiest
community in the universe.”

P4Z2: “We have tremendous potential to provide service from our hearts, and then, as
a result, I think to receive appropriate compensation for that service. So, I think that’s
where we’re going and start visioning processes . . . around those potentials . . . our new
building projects . . . more classroom spaces.”

P4Z2: “Most of my life at “Z” we’ve been understaffed, particularly at “Z2.” And I think
part of the vision process has helped me to understand . . . we have our staff; our
staffing chart is wrong. We have too few people here for the task . . . Now I know that . . .
So what that also leads us to know is that we don’t have enough student housing to
accommodate the actual number of staff that we need to do the work . . . So my big
push as Director here is to have the next building project. . . and we’ve got to stop using sub-standard spaces that we’re using to house people. We’ve got to get everybody out of the basement.”

P4Z2: “Because if we try to grow our economy without adequate staffing, we’re going to hurt ourselves.”

P4Z2: “Because you don’t want to have a large population of old, aging . . . hippies who basically forgot to save any money and . . . just worked for a room and board and living on the beach. So it’s a really important question for us and we’re looking at it all the time. We have something called Thousand Gates (document) . . . your weight-bearers are going to be invited to have ten year positions, and you’re going to be saying to them, ‘All right, we do want you staying on, and as a result we’ve got your health insurance figured out, we’ve got your retirements figured out, we know that when you retire, you’re going to be living in rural cottages over here, and we will provide you with room and board and health insurance’. . . you have to really look at—forty years. It might take a life cycle.”

P6Z1: “. . . we went through a whole envisioning process, which was important because we had been around long enough that we needed to refresh it. But now people think that it is all about a vision. And it’s not, it’s not. Meditation practice is not about a vision. It is about the backward step. It is about struggling in the dark. It is not about boldly going to some Christian heaven. . . now there are goals and there are benchmarks. That’s how these goals were made, and there is either a surge or a redeployment. I mean . . . it’s all a king of language of modernity. . . I am concerned.”

P6Z1: “. . . people can live a sort of lower middle class life very easily at “Z.” If you have an upper middle class attitude, with lower middle class needs, it actually is very good. I’m a little concerned about finances now, because with this new vision of raising millions of dollars, or we are hiring more people, which means we are going into deficit. . . I am suspicious of that.”

The group manages the tension between spirituality and being business-like.

P5Z1: “You know, it is very much a business. And . . . they have outside financial . . . volunteer consultant folks . . . there are . . . numerous committees and decision-making bodies within “Z” there’s almost . . . a spiritual hierarchy, but there’s also, a kind of parallel, inner penetrating, what you might call, just business or organizational hierarchy.”

P5Z1: “You know, CFO . . . there’s a Board of Directors, . . . there’s kind of the Corporate President, Vice President, Officers and Directors . . . it’s interesting the way those elements . . . interact and people have . . . in a way dual roles often. You know, senior people will be the Practice Leaders, but . . . they’re helping around in business.
P5Z1: “. . . something that people are always considering in making decisions for the organization . . . as a financial entity, but also as a practice center. . . to survive, it has to balance the two.”

P6Z1: “The abbots are members of the Board. And they have an important role. But I think G. is right and it is becoming more corporate and part of the reason it is becoming corporate is the fear that we were too insular, and part of it is a kind of illusion about an objectification of “Z” which . . . I am very concerned about.”

*The Center has a Finance Committee to help establish solvency and a lucrative Guest Season.*

P4Z2: “There are people who think about it (finances) all the time . . . there’s a Treasurer, and there’s . . . quite a professional accounting system. We have accountants. We have investments and we have restricted funds and we have a balance sheet. . . we own property . . . rather large holdings . . . So our Board of Directors . . . also has a Finance Committee that looks at the finances, and if the red lights start flashin. . . we start reducing expenses. . . We run about $800,000 in and $800,000 out. . . However we don’t cover our depreciation. . . So we’re basically tagged at minus a hundred and twenty thousand. Because we’re not accumulating enough funds to pay for repairs . . . we do not have the ability yet to cover our own costs . . . So there is an aspiration that Z2 change and it be more financially solvent . . . Z3 has been able to do that from the beginning, as the guest season is incredibly lucrative.”

P4Z2: “. . . from the guest season, they pay for Z3’s expenses for the rest of the year and they also pay for our expenses for the rest of the year . . . so they contribute to the rest of “Z” (other sites). . . we’ve got the poor states and the rich states . . . helping each other.”

P4Z2: “So, our guest program is probably our most important . . . it is our most important cash flow factor. We are looking at our educational programs as being the next wave of important programs . . . Children’s programs . . . our Coming-of-Age Program and the parents, we’re thinking of family memberships . . .”

“Z” THEME # 6—CONFLICT IS MANAGED AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.

P5Z1: “Z” does have an Ethics And Reconciliation (EAR) committee which is available to help people . . . deal with conflict . . . either arranging for mediation or . . . even formal grievance processes between people or between an individual and . . . “Z” itself.”

P5Z1: “. . . most conflicts were dealt with at . . . the level of . . . Practice Leaders . . . through coaching individuals or meeting with people in conflict . . . really relying on the spiritual . . . organization, the whole structure that’s there to . . . deal with things . . . when that failed . . . when people became for whatever reasons alienated from years of doing that . . . The Ear Council . . . was . . . something to fall back on in those cases . . . because sometimes you might have a problem with the Practice Leader . . .”
P5Z1: “I think it (EAR Council) really came out of a sense that . . . there were long-standing conflicts between even senior members of the community . . . hoping to avoid that and to really proactively help “Z” have a culture where conflict is dealt with . . . I think there was some recognition that within Zen as a very . . . introverted practice . . . that was maybe not a strong suit of . . . the structure as it was—it wasn’t really so well suited for helping people deal with interpersonal conflict . . . it is better now than in the past, is my sense.”

BRIEF ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY OF “T”

A. BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: “T” is part of an international organization with roots primarily in the Kagyu school (one of four major sects) of Tibetan Buddhism, which has many other centers. It has the son of the original Tibetan teacher as the head of the organization. He and other well-known teachers (including Tibetan and non-Tibetan monks and nuns) in this organization are not resident at “T” but do visit it, plus “T” hosts other visiting teachers. The Center is affiliated with this network and responsive to it, but also somewhat autonomous and self-reliant.

A regional level of organization in Northern California has developed which includes “T” and other centers. These centers share the same pot of funds. A renowned visiting teacher (American nun in the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism) is the head of this region; there is a paid fulltime Regional Director, and a paid part-time Director at “T”.

Throughout the organization worldwide, almost all organizational roles are performed by volunteers. Programs with visiting teachers are the main source of funds, and “T” has had the same generously-sized, central location with an inexpensive rent for 30 years.

Students at “T” often assume important volunteer roles and may carry them on for a period of years. They also move into student-teacher roles after having sufficient meditation and retreat experience. Expressed is a strong sense of camaraderie, love
and caring among those in the center community, as well as a sense of its often being “chaotic.” This is a non-residential center serving an urban area, with a street-front interface and bookstore to accommodate passersby.

B. TEACHERS: “T” has traditional robed-Sangha teachers, other Dharma teachers, and the son of the very charismatic founding teacher as the head—all of whom visit, but none of whom reside at the center. The head of this region, who visits frequently, is a very charismatic, well-known monastic. A number of student volunteers also serve as student-teachers in various capacities, depending on their experience. The larger organization is reportedly focusing on attracting and training more young students, with an eye to training teachers. Theoretically, it appears that anyone could become a teacher, but there did not seem to be any home-grown, full-blown teachers—rather a reliance on the sect’s monastic system for that.

There is a series of programs through which students are progressively trained, some of which take place at the center, and many of which take place centrally, elsewhere. This includes a somewhat abbreviated traditional seminary system as well as a secularly-adapted parallel training sequence with many levels. There does not seem to be an emphasis on encouraging students to take robes and become monastics, though students are offered the traditional Refuge ceremony. Students are nurtured so that they can arrive at a decision about who their “teacher” or “Guru” is. This could be one of the visiting teachers, or the head of this organization, or even a different qualified teacher. All students at some point have a “teacher” as well as one or more student-teacher mentors.
C.VALUES: A major value of “T” and of the worldwide organization of which is it is a part, from the beginning, was to translate traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice into a multi-level training which was couched in modern terms and did not require traditional ceremonies, detailed Tibetan meditation practices, or ordination as a monk or nun, of practitioners. This training persists to the current day, though apparently, the founder’s son is in the process of re-translating it back to the more traditional Tibetan language and form.

Having to adapt repeatedly to multiple changes in organization, teachers, and spiritual teaching forms is a common experience of the long-term members of this center, and these changes appear to emanate from the non-resident teachers and various sites of this network, not just from the Center, though the Center has fostered innovations, such as regionalization. Flexibility as well as creativity are necessary. The spiritual approach is to provide support, and information, and ample programs and opportunity to practice, but not to have mandatory requirements or set goals—i.e. offer opportunities but not force individual spiritual growth. At retreats and at the center, practitioners report of strong sense of community, as well as a broad diversity of participants. It is standard to have jobs done by volunteers, and to become a volunteer and take responsibility—and if those who volunteer cannot afford programs, accommodations are made so that they can advance in their spiritual training, even if they cannot pay.

This is very much a self-selected Sangha, and though there is outreach, there is ambivalence about how much outreach, and there is not an attempt to gauge the results of program offerings. The Center offers a number of informal opportunities for interaction, such as open-houses and the bookstore, as well as introductory classes,
and since there is no teacher in residence, there is a focus on the student’s own choice and individual development.

D. SCALE AND VARIETY OF PROGRAMS: There are Center-based trainings and trainings offered elsewhere, such as the month-long retreat and the seminaries. The Center offers the secularized “S.” training, and also has regular meditation sessions almost every day of the week, plus programs with visiting teachers. Open-houses and the bookstore provide opportunities for new people to explore what the center has to offer. There are regular unstructured social gatherings.

E. MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CONCERNS:

• Is there enough outreach to the public, should we do more and what should it be? Proselytizing is not part of this tradition.

• Is this Center programmatically and financially “safe” in its present location, or should we begin to look to the future and possible loss of this site, and try to purchase something of our own in a different location?

• Can our students adjust to having had a secular training as well as a traditional Buddhist training, and now blend the two as our head is now attempting to do?

• How do these two trainings relate now?

• What is the influence of the founding teacher vs. that of his son or other prominent teachers?

• The Center has alternated between organizational chaos (no Center director) and having a director, who is not well enough paid and appreciated—are we going backwards or forwards?
• Some Center students have as their Guru a teacher other than the “head” of this worldwide network; it may be a teacher in this network, however-- and is that O.K.?

RESULT: This all-volunteer, non-residential Center has survived for 30 years in an urban environment, and is using its space to capacity and expanding within its building. A movement is afoot to locate a country property within the local region, but there is no particular financial plan for that effort or for moving the site should they lose their lease. It is supported and augmented by the larger network of which it is a part both for training programs and provision of visiting teachers, though many local students become student-teachers and guides. The original teacher’s charisma and secularized training, as well as intensive month-long retreats, and the more traditional seminaries, continue to attract old and new students, as do the tolerance of diversity, lack of coercion, and appreciation of the sense of community. The organization, local and worldwide, under the leadership of the original teacher’s son, appears to be moving toward more traditional Tibetan Buddhist training with less emphasis on the secularized version.

“T” Center Major Themes

P7T—student teacher  P8T—student teacher  P9T--student

“T” THEME #1: Outreach/Participation

Sub-themes:

Initial contact is low key-- personal and casual or accidental, or by website.  
P7T: “. . . I just heard through the grapevine that somebody had gone here . . . I think there was something about it being exotic that helped. And, also, I happened to go on a week night . . . an open house there . . . that turned into . . . a weekly class. And the lady running it was very nice, there was an interest and her husband was there a lot and just made it seem very straightforward and pragmatic.”
P8T: “... I started coming here just by accident. I was actually a member of... The Bay Area Friends of Tibet, upstairs on the third floor, and I literally stumbled down here. I said, ’What is this place?’ And they said, ’It’s a meditation center. Come by on Wednesday night for free meditation instruction.’ That was 1998 and I’ve been coming ever since. I’ve been coming for... 10 years next year.”

P9T: “... I went to see the Dalai Lama speak... and I went to see Daniel Goldman speak... So I did a Google search for Tibetan Buddhism, Berkeley came up. So, I just came here... I couldn’t find it the first time... I’m calling and leaving a message and nobody called me back until... three weeks later which is how this place runs... And then someone called me back and I found it... I walked in here and I knew I was a Buddhist. And that’s not really like me.”

There are multiple informal opportunities to get to know the Center and outreach is a popular topic of discussion for the staff.

P9T: “... the meditation instructions... regular... where you can just walk in and meditate, that’s been really important to me and really supportive to me.”

P7T: “... we have open house every Sunday... people can just walk on in. We opened a bookstore downstairs which is open three days a week. So that there’s a little bit more... people can walk by and drop in and see what’s going on. We’re making efforts. I have... just met a number of people who were just on... our website— they’ve showed up... given our financial limitations... we can’t afford a billboard.”

P7T: “Somebody knows how many dues-paying members we have... the number of people who have volunteered to a certain degree, plus the people who take classes from time to time. I don’t really have that information. It kind of ebbs and flows, but I think our open houses are much larger than they used to be... I feel like there might be a bit fewer of people you see all the time. We have many more groups (centers) in the area, though... P.C. (famous teacher), the number of people she brings out... we used to be able to hold her city retreats in the drawing room... and (now) she just sold out immediately.”

P8T: “... we have these Saturday night socials that apparently are very popular... They’re... really just a gathering and social talking and no agenda around it... this is yet another opportunity for people to connect at the level that they’re at... So, if they feel comfortable to come to sitting practice right away that’s great. If they don’t, they have somewhere to go to... it’s another doorway.”

P9T: “Our Director is really trying to focus on that... the Saturday socials are focused on that and Sunday Open House... Opening the bookstore downstairs...”

P8T: “It’s a constant dialogue that we have organizationally... how do we engage more people? How do we get our name out there more... we have a display case downstairs. You would not imagine the effort and energy and... concern that caused... what do we put in it... what if it fades... what if it outdates... we’ve got this huge
university across the street . . . where are the students and . . . where are the young people . . . would an investment in advertising make sense . . . how do the churches do it . . . they draw in a lot of people . . . my mom’s church which is just up the street, they have people that give a million dollars . . . So these kinds of questions are constantly on our minds, constantly . . . “

**The outreach philosophy is welcoming but not proselytizing.**
P8T: “We want to welcome everyone in a non-coercive way, in an anonymous way . . . but it is hard to do it in a way that doesn’t seem like you’re selling encyclopedias . . . there’s a tendency in all of us at the organizational level to be aware of our . . . natural inclination to bring people in and recruit them . . . our wisdom mind says, that’s not really what it’s about . . . so . . . it’s this interplay.”

**Student mentors help those attending retreats to become active at the Center.**
P8T: “I can point to one organizational thing that we did . . . we had a system of meditation instruction that relied on the student to make a . . . grassroots connection with a personal meditation instructor . . . we have . . . a system of peers . . . that are trained, that are groomed, that are qualified, that go through training to act and serve as meditation instructors and to relate to students in a relationship that’s free of ego . . . we have these big programs with P.C. (famous teacher) . . . there are meditation instructors there and there are discussion groups that meet . . . the problem with that system is . . . we discovered that . . . meditation instructors were . . . waiting to . . . hear from students . . . so again (is) this interplay of do we outreach to people or do we just wait for them . . . So we created this role called S. Guide . . . a junior meditation instructor who relates to the students at the very beginning . . . and helps them with the initial instruction . . . and serves as . . . an intermediary before that student reaches the level where they can . . . confidently say, ‘I want you to become my meditation instructor . . . So we . . . created . . . a student-facing role that’s . . . closer to the student . . . people were saying, it’s much warmer here.”

**There is awareness that modern culture distracts people from becoming involved in meditation.**
P8T: “The other thing I think about . . . back to time and the pace of life . . . I am picking up a lot of things in the last couple of years that are very different from the past. The sense that our world is really much more rapid-paced and I don’t know if it’s cell phones or Blackberries or . . . information technology . . . And the effect that . . . has on cultivating a meditation community. I think that is an enormous challenge . . . we are sure people are aware of . . . meditation, but . . . our culture is moving so quickly . . . I have mixed feelings about it because again we are not here to . . . reject anything in the world . . . We are not saying . . . Cell phones are not Dharmic . . . That is not it at all. But . . . at the same time I really wonder about the impact that this has on the cultivation of mindfulness. And the level of distraction is so extreme and so pronounced and so acute . . . how can we cultivate . . . how can we promote realization?”

“T” THEME #2: Organization
Sub-Themes:

The Center has very gradually become more organized.
P7T: “. . . in their early days I didn’t really know what the organization was about, didn’t really understand it. You know, they had a Guru somewhere in the works who—I read one of his books and it knocked my socks off--but they were having problems with authority figures.”

P9T: “. . . at that time this center (when I first came) this center was in a lot of chaos . . . it comes and it goes . . . there was no Center Director, we had no membership person. . . you know I just totally love this place, but it has a lot of dysfunction . . . This center is one of the oldest . . .”

P7T: “. . . it’s taken some getting used to that C.T. (original teacher) died 20 years ago and his son is now the head, and he’s a good teacher. I don’t think he’s on the same level as C.T., but that’s my opinion . . . we have all these teachers that go through here, many of them are not directly connected, but they’re Tibetan Buddhist . . . They’re quite knowledgeable, and they’re important to this place . . . So, it’s kind of open-ended, what is “T” and what isn’t.”

P7T: “. . . especially in the last few years it’s been like AA to a certain extent of being a benign anarchy. Last year we got a Director again. And for years we were just . . . a lot of volunteer people trying to work together. . . there’s some things that fell through the cracks and I think trying to make decisions by group consensus awkward at times . . . We have a Director now, and he’s about building consensus . . . I think he’s doing a pretty good job.”

P8T: “Having a Director has been very good . . . we used to be centers that were . . . on our own . . . and in some respects in competition with each other. That happened . . . about 4 years ago. So we joined and we created this Northern California . . . Region. . . we did that . . . and other regions . . . They are all organizing themselves around similar . . . It was P.C. (famous teacher) who did it. Also a lot of financial well being for the whole region . . . it’s much better for us to treat as one big pot . . . let’s just consider ourselves all one . . . we proposed to P. that she would be the regional Acharya and she accepted. And we created this Director position that she funded and it’s been wonderful.”

P7T: “. . . my first few years . . . the umbrella organization was called “VA” and the masters in “VA” were pretty good teachers . . . we had one here. He disappeared probably around the 1990s . . . the place seemed a little more organized when he was here.”

P7T: “. . . (the original teacher) invented this . . . enlightened military . . . which really sounds nuts . . . how do you instill some discipline in these crazy hippies as it was when he was doing it, and so he built this thing.”
P7T: “The number of centers (worldwide) has mushroomed in the last 20 years. This one is doing fine.”

P8T: “Other folks like C. and A. they’re much more involved in the planning and the organization and the programs that we have here. I do a little bit of that, but not a lot.”

An organizational culture which is not judgement or control oriented and which fosters community has developed.

P8T: “I’m cautious as a westerner, knowing the neurosis of us as westerners, the tendency to want to control . . . The administration and organizational systems . . . it’s all about control. It’s all about minimizing error, minimizing rejects . . . and maximizing output. And that’s not quite the point with the Dharma, you know . . . you never know who’s going to come in the door. It could be another Buddha . . . there could be another Bodhisattva just weighing the balance, saying, I’m here for meditation.”

PT8: “I guess it’s non-attachment to results . . . if you’re in the organizations slot, you tend to think, ‘Well I need to find out what was the result of these sessions we just had . . . How many of the people are going to continue on studying this, how many are going to continue on here . . . But actually we can’t really do it in that form with a meditation course or with a transmission like we give at our center. The best we can do is say, ‘Here’s what you can follow up on . . . But that’s almost as far as we can go.”

P8T: “. . . we’re not trying to make people like us. We’re actually here to help each other deepen their experience of their own mind. And we have to be careful that everything we do is actually about that. Otherwise we’re just going to feed the distractions that we all have . . .”

P8T: “. . . I traveled and I went to Montreal and I connected with Sangha people there, “T” people, and I felt totally at home . . . It is almost like you are a member of Club Med or something.”

P9T: “. . . a space . . . where there’s just a group of people who were all . . . just as neurotic and crazy as everywhere else in the world, but yet are committed to . . . working with it . . . where you are allowed to . . . be exactly who you are . . . and not . . . ostracized or just that everything is workable. That way too, you see everything grow and change and move—there’s space and there’s openness and . . . you can participate at whatever level, always a place for . . . everybody, which makes me both comfortable and uncomfortable. But then that’s also something to work with . . . just to feel this sense of that community that I’ve never felt before in my life, including with my family.”

Volunteer participation, serving others, and seeing work as practice are values.

P8T: “. . . nobody is paid except the Director and he is only part-time. The Executive Director of Northern California . . . actually is paid and she is full time. She is one of the only full time employees (in our community) in the whole world. I mean 99% of what we do . . . as a community is volunteer . . . what we are doing is using service, using work, using volunteering, not as some kind of credit system, but as virtuous spiritual,
spiritually accomplishing work, merit producing work. That the path of meditation is also
a path of serving one another and uplifting the environment. And a lot of what our
volunteers do is kind of help sustain the whole process . . . they clean, they prepare,
they set up, they take down. It’s humble work . . . there is . . . what we call work-study,
which is people can come and they can serve and then also obtain credits . . . for
programs. So, people on fixed incomes . . . people who can’t necessarily afford the
teachings but want to participate, it’s a great way to do that . . . the bookstore . . . is
volunteer run and the downstairs is volunteer run.”

P8T: “. . . it is very important to help these volunteers with the view of what they are
doing, because it’s always the case that suddenly they are working, working, working
and it just feels like they are just working and that is really all they are doing and they
are not really practicing. They are not really connecting to anything, anything spiritual it
seems . . . the person in charge of the volunteers is a big key person. What we call the
work-study coordinator.”

P8T: “You know you actually have the experience of serving . . . the distinction between
meditation and non-meditation . . . sitting and the activities carried out in our normal
lives, it starts to become one.”

P7T: “. . . somehow I just got involved . . . just to try something different . . . think of
others. And I didn’t strictly want to but it was different so I thought I’d try it. And,
beginning by sitting down at the door at open house so the people didn’t have to ring
the doorbell and it was a huge shift. When I got to know people and people got to know
me . . . and we care about each other. We drive each other a little nuts but . . . I think I
just had to grow up . . . I heard that Datum said, ‘there’s going to be a time when you’ve
got to bail, don’t, just means that your ego is being squeezed.”

P7T: “. . . it’s . . . forced me to relate to people differently and take responsibility . . .
and I have a shy streak . . . and I had to . . . walk through that and do it anyway . . . and
pushed me to do things I wouldn’t have otherwise.”

P7T: “I have a lot of respect for other Buddhist groups, but I don’t think any of them fit
me better.

P7T: “I’m the Ryu-san which C.T. (founding teacher) invented . . . this kind of
enlightened military . . . just protect and to serve and how to be compassionate at the
same time. Now, I am, kind of, the titular local head for what it’s worth . . . I kind of
arrange things . . . I just . . . show up. Something happens as a result, I’m not sure what
but something happens . . .”

P8T: “I’m a member of the Council. I . . . help sustain the organization. I’m also a
meditation instructor and I work with students one-on-one. And I’m also a host for
meditation practice. A lot of what I do is . . . support the practice that’s going on here . . .
this summer, I’m going to be hosting or coordinating the Refuge Vows with Tibetan
children. So, I'm taking their applications and . . . ensuring that the students are ready and that they've contemplated this vow fully."

P8T: “. . . it's been my role to make sure that we have the practice on weeknights . . . even though it’s not about the number of people that we have . . . the fact that the practice is occurring here every night, Monday through Friday, regularly, that has a big impact on the container . . .”

P9T: “. . . we have a membership coordinator, me . . . I love being the membership coordinator . . . it's the most important thing in my life.”

P9T: “. . . I really, really love being involved, and I love being able to try to help the organization. I've discovered something that I'm really good at that I hadn't realized before like, being able to hire people. On the other hand, how easily with just one person volunteering . . . too much work . . .”

P9T: “. . . H. is not treated very well. He doesn't get . . . recognized and appreciated. And so he's going to get burned out like all these other . . . people . . . don't appreciate really what the center does for them and they're not really willing to (support it) they way they could.”

P9T: “. . . I want the people to appreciate how difficult the job of the Director is. I'd want to . . . double his salary . . . it bugs me that people . . . take that (for granted) . . .”

P8T: “If we have the view that we are here to help ourselves, that is actually a lie; there is no self.”

“T” THEME #3: Finances

Sub-Themes:

*The organization supports dedicated students so that they can attend retreats.*
P7T: “I'm still disabled and I can't afford programs, generally . . . but I've been serious . . . it's just available, if you're serious. I'm about to go to Seminary and . . . because I'm serious, people make it possible . . . I have to pay something, but (it's) workable . . . it makes life worth living really.”

*The organization pools the finances of all the affiliated groups in a region.*
P8T: “Having a Director has been very good. . . we used to be centers that were . . . on our own . . . and in some respects in competition with each other. That happened . . . about 4 years ago. So we joined and we created this Northern California . . . Region. . . we did that . . . and other regions . . . They are all organizing themselves around similar . . . It was P.C. (famous teacher) who did it. Also a lot of financial well being for the whole region . . . it’s much better for us to treat as one big pot . . . let’s just consider ourselves all one . . . we proposed to P. that she would be the regional Acharya and she accepted. And we created this Director position that she funded and it’s been wonderful.”

P8T: “. . . it has felt more harmonious. It has felt more prosperous. It has felt more . . . streamlined and more efficient. Our differences are less and our commonalities are greater. I don’t know if everyone would agree. There are certainly still people out there in our community that . . . are adamant about their center . . . looking out for the interests of their center and feeling somewhat like Berkeley is getting the good stuff and we are not.”

Money is seen as a concern, but also as a creative opportunity.
P8T: “I’m afraid our neurosis of money will always be with us, whatever our balance sheet says. We’ve been working a lot with money from the point of view of abundance. . . Instead of looking at a dollar and saying it is only a dollar . . . it is about sustaining a system that is going to grow, then it becomes a very different situation. . . the Dharma isn’t . . . a high yield investment. Building a land center or building a retreat center is not going to be like building a . . . shopping mall.”

There is an ongoing tension between the need to expand, and gratitude for what is already in place.
P8T: “. . . Berkeley is doing okay. We recently expanded. We have a space downstairs. There is concern that the rent on that is . . . beyond our means . . . Yet we are packed to the gunnels here . . . in terms of events and our use of facilities . . .”

P9T: “Membership doesn’t raise as much as we’d like it to . . . I don’t now that much about finances . . . it comes from visiting (teachers), it mostly goes . . . to rent.”

P8T: “Facilities here that are unlike anywhere else in the world. I mean the New York Center is half the size of ours and they are paying three times the rent . . . we are living in a palace here.

P8T: “. . . we have begun looking for a land center and we saw something that is really beautiful. . . And we went and we saw it and it looks perfect . . . It is two and a half million dollars. I mean we don’t have the money, it is just like we are, I mean who is kidding whom. . . meanwhile. . . the retreat centers that we have . . . Are we really using them to the fullest potential?”

P8T: “. . . I reflect on that a lot. Like where are we headed . . . and what would be good for our community . . . because we are in this building. And we are actually here for 31
years. We're the oldest tenant in the building and we are getting like a really wonderful deal from our building managers. And in a way it has held us back because we are not planning for the future. We are not putting away money because someday this building may be sold. Or that the Odd Fellows organization is actually a dying organization and they could be around for another five years, they might. I mean the university would pay three times the asking price for this building. They would gobble this up in a second if we ever lost our lease here, basically we would be homeless. And we would be like refugees. We could never afford this kind of space. I mean the cost of gas for people to drive and parking. And I warn you about these things because it is actually preventing people from engaging in the things that are real quality because they need to worry about the cost of them and the first thing that people cut back are things like coming to a Dharma Center.

P8T: “... maybe the better thinking or the strategic thinking is to locate our center closer to where people a) live and b) can get to easily. You know we talk a lot about that and maybe Berkeley isn't the most accessible place. We do have good public transit, but nobody can use it really because you know our programs are at night.

P9T: “I think that I feel so lucky and I think how much access we have to this and these (teachers) they're very devoted for our center that's how we earn a lot of money.

“T” THEME #4: Meditation Practice

Sub-themes:

Meditation is appreciated as a profound activity, to be engaged in voluntarily without attachment to results.
P7T: “... meditation... I'm opinionated because it undermines me... it's like having the rug slipping out from you all the time... having a body of pragmatic information about what the pitfalls are and how to avoid them and how not to take yourself seriously... how to operate as a human being.”
P7T: “... meditation is supposed to be a big panacea... the huge difference... amplified by P. C. (well-known teacher)... we have lots of emotional stuff to work with. This is what it is like down in the trenches... this is nothing to be ashamed of... there's been a real emphasis on Tonglen, which is about compassion, which is great.”
P7T: “... I think most of the people they're just kind of window-shopping. Our meditation is challenging...”
P8T: “Again, there's nothing in the teachings that are about compulsory... when you look at what the teachings are about and consider how to train a student, it's never about you should, you know. It's always an invitation. So what we're really doing, as a
center, is not so much proactively telling people what to do. It’s more like a gentle, continuous, ongoing invitation. You might try this, you might consider this. How a student responds to that is entirely individual . . . One of the things that we concern ourselves about a lot, as a community, is the fact that we probably have given maybe 500 or more people meditation instruction, in one form or another . . . in the last, maybe less than a year . . . what happens to them . . . we can only gauge our own practice . . . So, it’s not like going back to them and saying, ‘Well . . . did you like your meditation instruction? Rate your meditation instruction on a scale 1 to 5 . . .’"

P8T: “ . . . the view and practice of meditation which is essentially to avail in our mind gratefulfulness and openness and emptiness and compassion and wisdom; the wisdom that we already have . . . meditation actually avails ourselves to the deeper meanings of these teachings . . . it’s experiential . . . it’s know as the ‘three trainings’ . . . hearing, contemplating and meditating . . . you have to have all three.”

P8T: “I cannot name one part of our life that’s not appropriate to bring these teachings to whether it’s our personal life or our sexual life or our work life or our family life or our life with none of these things . . . You could being anything you want to the cushion. There’s nothing excluded.”

Long, intensive retreats offer opportunity for realization and building community.
P8T: “ . . . I did a 30-day Dathun . . . talk about container, when you’re in a group with people who are intensely practicing meditation, day in and day out, everyday, 12 hours a day . . . everything becomes heightened and potent, all the good and all the difficulties. And I to this day, I was totally inspired, and I often think of my practice as before Dathun and after Dathun . . . it . . . inspired me to do many other things that I’m doing here, to help other students get to that point. And whenever they go to Dathun . . . that to me is like the criteria for success . . .”

P8T: “ (in Dathun) . . . we ate all our meals oryoki-style from the Zen tradition . . . we chanted the precepts . . . every morning. We did practice like the Heart Sutra; we did protector practice every evening. There was a standard routine . . . we all have work period or Roda in the afternoon . . . And we would also . . . spend time in . . . small Sangha . . . buildings . . . each participant occupied together with 5 or 6, or even 10 other people. So you got to really know your little group . . . often into the night . . . discussions about life and what this all means . . . laughing and crying . . . every emotion was just shared . . . it was a closeness and an intimacy that transcends . . . it felt so deep and rich and life-affirming and all the qualities that I was really looking for. And community . . . is a big important thing and this seems like just such a natural community . . . we are just practicing together and that actually created a connection that was so powerful . . . to this day I still talk to and wrote to my friends from Dathun and it’s been . . . more than 7 years.

P8T: “ . . . what is the Buddhist view of community. . . Sangha . . . it’s not like . . . we’re joining . . . in an inner circle . . . It’s more like we’re committing to working with each
other in a compassionate way . . . we’re also coming with a view that each of us is a Buddha . . . we’re experiencing meditation and emptiness together.”

“T” THEME #5: The programs offered include traditional Tibetan Buddhist training and a more modern version.

P7T: “I think it would be lovely if we had a lot more of practice, add the bodies . . . for a relatively small organization . . . we have meditation in the evening, Monday through Friday. . . programs of practice we do on the full and new moon. We have classes.”

P9T: “. . . the meditation instructions . . . regular . . . where you can just walk in and meditate, that’s been really important to me and really supportive to me.”

P7T: “We’re called “T” now. We used to be called “D” and then there used to be . . . “S Training” . . . the “D” classes were strict Buddhism but the training was secular. They had hardly any . . . foreign vocabulary. It was just, this is meditation, and this is what it is about. You use the different vocabulary like being a warrior, basic goodness, great eastern sun, all the parallel things to what they were talking about in Sanskrit. But it’s . . . like Rabbis and Priests went through “S Training” . . . without having any kind of problem with their belief system. These days there’s a a dovetailing of the two (Buddhism and secular training).”

P8T: “. . . C.T. (original teacher) introduced the teachings . . . taught very traditional Buddhist teachings for a long time. And then he presented this material called the “S. Teachings” . . . and he created a curriculum called “S. Training.” And . . . he infused a lot of practices, which are in many respects, Tantric practices. They . . . point back to a lot of very powerful traditional practices in the Buddhist curriculum . . . which he felt, I think, like a a lot of Lamas that come . . . surely students get this stuff. But they don't, that they’re attached to the outer trappings only . . . It’s culturally very appealing . . . and it’s not my western tradition, so it’s got to be good . . . and that’s a trap . . . and what the S. teachings were communicating was, in a lot of respects, availing the same teachings in the Buddhist path, in a context that was free of that cultural veneer.”

P8T” “. . . the Seminary tradition teaches primarily the Buddhist, the traditional Kagyu, Nyingma Buddhist curriculum. And right now the two are kind of . . . blended. . . you know about the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Eightfold Path and the Precepts and taking Refuge and the Bodhisattva path and the Lo-chen teachings . . . back into . . . what does it mean to be a warrior . . . What’s fearlessness . . . What is bravery . . . what is Windhorse. . . the Seminary was once upon a time its own thing and it will is its own thing. But it used to be a three-month program . . . it took on this legendary quality . . . now . . . It’s three one-month programs . . . you could go from the Sutrayana seminary, which is one month . . . then you go to the Vajrayana Seminary, which is one month. And then the Warrior’s Assembly, which is I think two weeks long.”

PT9: “. . . once I walked in here, I knew I was Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist without a doubt . . . I knew that I was Vajrayana. I got really frustrated by the fact that there were
all these things I hat to do in order to be able to do that . . . having to do all of the levels, all these Buddhist studies, classes, Hinayana, Mahayana seminaries. It’s extremely expensive and I don’t have very much money at all . . . there’s . . . thirteen levels and . . . it’s years . . . before you even start with Vajrayana . . . well, I realized I needed to go to a Vajrayana seminary . . .”

“T” THEME #6: There has been a conscious effort to adapt the Tibetan teachings to the modern, western environment.

P7T: “. . . you have to . . . let your hair down and just be one of the folks . . . rather than having the whole focus on using a lot of Sanskrit texts.”

P7T: “. . . I think . . . we’re really not all that Tibetan in flavor because C.T. (original teacher) didn’t want to transplant . . . that culture here . . . we wouldn’t relate to it. You know, like what happened when Buddhism went to Tibet . . . there’s a change and the same for America.”

P7T: “We’re called “T” now. We used to be called “D” and then there used to be . . . “S Training” . . . the “D” classes were strict Buddhism but the training was secular. They had hardly any . . . foreign vocabulary. It was just, this is meditation, and this is what it is about. You use the different vocabulary like being a warrior, basic goodness, great eastern sun, all the parallel things to what they were talking about in Sanskrit. But it’s . . . like Rabbis and Priests went through “S Training” . . . without having any kind of problem with their belief system. These days there’s a a dovetailing of the two (Buddhism and secular training).”

P9T: “. . . I’m in love with the “S” view (secular version) but I knew that I was Tibetan Buddhist . . . I did all of this research . . . I didn’t even know what having a teacher was or wasn’t . . . But as soon as I saw her I knew she was (my teacher) . . . I knew I was Buddhist . . . People are often attracted to “S” because they feel it’s more secular and they can do . . . the “S” levels and they feel those are kind of secular. And maybe eventually they start doing the more Buddhist . . . that I’ve already taken the Bodhisattva Vow and I’m going to a Seminary are not very common.”

P8T: “. . . C.T. (original teacher) introduced the teachings . . . taught very traditional Buddhist teachings for a long time. And then he presented this material called the “S. Teachings” . . . and he created a curriculum called “S. Training.” And . . . he infused a lot of practices, which are in many respects, Tantric practices. They . . . point back to a lot of very powerful traditional practices in the Buddhist curriculum . . . which he felt, I think, like a a lot of Lamas that come . . . surely students get this stuff. But they don’t, that they’re attached to the outer trappings only . . . It’s culturally very appealing . . . and it’s not my western tradition, so it’s got to be good . . . and that’s a trap . . . and what the S. teachings were communicating was, in a lot of respects, availing the same teachings in the Buddhist path, in a context that was free of that cultural veneer.”
“... the Sakyong (original teacher’s son) is really putting in some major change. “T” was only founded 30 years ago... so... it’s pretty young. The whole S. path and the Buddhist path, he’s trying to eliminate that... and make it S. Buddhism... these S. levels... really trying to make them sound... he’s got a really hard job... a lot of these people... are freaking out...”

“I took, maybe, one or two (courses)... I had no idea what they were talking about... like you go through a chant and there’s just tons of Sanskrit and I still don’t understand it all. Well, in training all you had to do was meditate... it just is completely straightforward... for people who are willing... have some curiosity of what it’s like to meditate for a week.”

“I’m just reading that... first of all the group meditation doesn’t happen in Tibet, you... meditate individually and... you have all these practices... there’s all this devotional stuff which just wouldn’t cut it... a lot of the true practice had been lost in Tibet... he (original teacher) was bringing back the really good stuff.”

“... sometimes monks and nuns teach here.”

“... we have a lot of Tibetan teachers... the people who teach the levels are... senior students... But there’ll be periods of having Tibetan teachers come through... there’ll be a period of having a lot of American Acharyas, I think that’s what they call (them)... “

“T” THEME #7: Teaching & Teachers

Sub-themes:

Teacher Training is available (Graduated Programs)

“I don’t think everybody can become a teacher, but I went through this thing about being an “S Guide”... not everybody is going to be an “S Guide”... what your skills are and how... fits in with really becoming... a teacher of... a class. Generally you have to have gone to Seminary and to Vajrayana Seminary, taken some extra courses.”

“I’m going through the gradual levels now... pretty rich... it’s really been laid out well... the flavor is much less intimidating... plus you have the whole notion of emptiness. You know, that’s a really good one... because... does that mean I don’t exist... But, what do you mean by you?”

“I’d like to be a teacher... but that would be probably five years before I can yes, definitely.”

A number of volunteers have a rich experience of being teachers and mentors.

“I’m a member of the Council. I... help sustain the organization. I’m also a meditation instructor and I work with students one-on-one. And I’m also a host for meditation practice. A lot of what I do is... support the practice that’s going on here...
this summer, I’m going to be hosting or coordinating the Refuge Vows with Tibetan children. So, I’m taking their applications and ensuring that the students are ready and that they’ve contemplated this vow fully.”

P8T: “... in a careful, kind way, helping cultivate the students’ practice and that’s not about compulsory anything. It’s really just availing ourselves in a harmonious way for the student, as they are ready for these teachings and each student is different.”

P8T: “It (teaching) has been the most rewarding part of this as a guide and as a humble sort of instructor I’m the one who benefits, you know. It’s like my practice, actually. My ability to articulate and express and define, and help pass these teachings on only makes my own practice of them more sharp, more precise, more deep.”

P8T: “... sharing one’s experience that’s really what the student-teacher relationship is all about since the time of the Buddha this is how I learned to do it and I’m going to show you how did it. And then that student turns into a teacher and it carries on from there.”

P8T: “... there’s a tendency to kind of treat it (teaching) as an accomplishment to cut through that is always necessary when I’m with a student and when I have the sense that I’m in a role I notice that the quality of instruction diminishes a lot when I hold the view that I’m here to really care for that person to relate to them as they are the quality of the instruction just shifts and the quality of the listening the compassionate listening when we’re coming from a sense of empathy, then the whole conversation shifts.”

Teacher Succession

P8T: “Our senior students are in their sixties and do we have junior students ready to take on the senior students’ shoes. I don’t believe we do, and that is a big concern. You know we are not like the Mormons where there is like eight kids in the family. So, somebody leaves us and that’s we’ve done a lot on the global level. They have these, what they call “VA” retreat centers intended for young people, people in their teens and twenties, and they are intended to instill in young people the sense that they are going to be the life-blood of this community, and it’s great. It has just begun about two or three years ago, and the Sakyang, the head of our community believes in it strongly.

P7T: “... it’s taken some getting used to that C.T. (original teacher) died 20 years ago and his son is now the head, and he’s a good teacher. I don’t think he’s on the same level as C.T., but that’s my opinion we have all these teachers that go through here, many of them are not directly connected, but they’re Tibetan Buddhist. They’re quite knowledgeable, and they’re important to this place. So, it’s kind of open-ended, what is “T” and what isn’t.”
“T” Theme #8: Conflict Management is dealt with by utilizing awareness and transformation—i.e. meditation methods.

P8T: “After Dathun I . . . did seminary and other things . . . there’s a group practice that we call Warrior’s Assembly. And I served in this role called Dekyong. It’s a Tibetan word that means harmony protector. So it’s a role in an organization whose job it is to look after the well being of others, from a spiritual point of view . . . The role of the Dekyong is to draw out the wisdom that we have as Buddhists . . . It’s not about fixing problems or controlling the conflict at all . . . There’s something that occurs energetically when you’re practicing *Tonglen* . . . it’s the same way with *Dekyong* . . . It’s a kind of reminder of the spaciousness and openness that already exists. And that can transform the conflict into . . . do we consider this . . . Or how about that . . . It’s not . . . black and white . . . the *Dekyong* has that wonderful . . . neutral place . . . Another view of the *Dekyong* is that the solution to the problem already exists in the people . . . it’s only a matter of uncovering it . . . a large chunk of human conflict comes from the feeling that my suffering isn’t being heard or acknowledged.”

CAMERON AND QUINN QUESTIONNAIRE:

The results of the responses to the Cameron and Quinn (1999) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument Questionnaire confirm that all eight of the nine participants who filled it out, regardless of which Center they were from, perceived their organization to be primarily a combination of clan culture and hierarchical culture. The two females who answered this questionnaire indicated a stronger representation of clan than hierarchy. A clan culture organization is described as a friendly place to work, where the heads of the organization are mentors or parental figures, and the organization is held together by tradition and loyalty, valuing teamwork and consensus. A hierarchical organization is defined as formalized and structured, with leaders who strive to be organizers and coordinators, where smoothness, efficiency, security and stability are valued. So, although the Organizational Profiles presented above appear to describe rather different organizations, those participating in them who were interviewed, perceived them similarly in terms of their overall culture. They did not
describe them as entrepreneurial, creative, or results-oriented. The overall profile resembles that of the banking industry—indicating conservatism and stability.

ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS CHART: This chart is displayed below and allows a Center cross-comparison of organizational components mentioned by those interviewed. The implications of this chart are discussed below in the next section. The second chart shows those elements shared by all three Centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS</th>
<th>&quot;V&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Z&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;T&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CENTER NETWORK CONFIGURATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main center with satellites</td>
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<td>Several main centers</td>
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<td>Part of larger international network of centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loose association with other similar centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEACHERS AND TEACHING</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEACHER TRAINING</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train teachers at own site(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train teachers elsewhere in formal or informal network</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-level teacher-training (student, community, regular)</td>
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<td>Multi-year teacher training</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers-in-training selected by current teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-10 students per year training to become senior teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 - 30 students per year train to become senior teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordination as teacher requires years of study and permission of main teacher and other teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretically, anyone could become a teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEACHER SUPPORT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers meet several times per year, give feedback to</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each other</td>
<td>Host teacher conferences with similar tradition teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team teaching</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers donation supported only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers supported with salary, stipends, benefits and/or room &amp; board, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low student/teacher ratio</td>
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<td>Main teacher(s) has considerable personal interaction w/students</td>
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<td>Student-teachers have considerable interaction with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher forums for variety of Buddhist teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other groups in organization help handle business tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>The whole community is concerned with teacher training</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers/leader supported 360 degrees by peers and those to whom they report and who report to them</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher decides whether to accept a student for long term training</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS**

| Many have psychological training | X | |
| Have exposure to various spiritual schools | | X |
| Lengthy work with mainly one mentor/teacher (own tradition.) | | X X |
| Lengthy work with several mentor/teachers likely (own tradition) | | X |
| Scrutinized by those around them during training | | X X |
| Ordination as teacher requires years of study and permission of main teacher and other teachers | | X |
| Formal series of levels of training | | X X |
| Likely to be robed Sangha | | X |
| May or may not be robed Sangha | | X |
| Generally not robed Sangha | | X |
| Identified with a lineage | | X X X |
| Code of ethics for teachers | | X X ? |
| Teacher awareness of everyday life situation of students | | X X ? |
| Teacher focus on student psychological problems & needs | | X |
| May know therapeutic techniques but this is not the focus of teaching | | X X |
| Handling multiple roles | | X X X |

**GUEST TEACHERS, LOCAL TEACHERS**

| Programs featuring variety of guest teachers, some famous | X X X |
| Accompany guest teachers with own teachers | X some |
| Mainly non-local teachers of own tradition | X |
| Mainly local teachers of own tradition | X X |
| Mainly resident teachers of own tradition | X |
| Original teachers still present | | X |
| Charismatic and famous main teachers among others | X X |

**TEACHER SUCCESSION**

| Concerns about aging teachers and teacher "gap" | X X X |
Difficulty with succession after loss of original teacher
Explicit effort to avoid dependence on one or few teachers
Passing on lineage in transmission is a key moment
Succession by younger member of family

STUDENT TRAINING

RETREATS
Variety of retreats, long and short, annually
Pre-screening required to attend
Learn to manage own time in longer retreats
Silent retreats
Interview (s) with main teacher
Interviews with 2 teachers alternating
Interviews with student-teacher guide
Daily retreat schedule
Daily verbal interactions with other retreatants
Sense of community with other retreatants
Intensity increases with length of retreat
Longer retreats of 3-weeks - 2 months
Work periods included in retreat each day
Series of intensive seminars off-site
Formal sitting meditation
Walking meditation
Merging of secular and traditional teachings

DISCIPLINE
“V” “Z” “T”
Daily meditation and work
Focused on work/meditation/practice most of the day
Must meet guidelines to enroll in practice periods
Students are usually residents
Increase in seriousness and intensiveness of studies
over time
Daily rituals, such as silent meals, prayers, bowing, chants,
sitting meditation

SENSE OF SUPPORT
Exposure to community of elders
Exposure to supportive peers
Student teaching
Residential with stipend for serious students

RESPONSIBILITY
Student decides who their teacher is

VALUES
INTEGRATION OF VALUES IN ORGANIZATION
Meditation as part of meetings
Check-in as part of meetings
Teachers paid by donation
Avoidance of hierarchy--I.e. of having one person make all
the major decisions or be the only teacher
Avoid concentration of authority—rotate leadership
Decision-making by consensus  X
All jobs are valued  X  X
Dealing mindfully and directly with interpersonal/
and organizational issues  X  X

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
Specific use of a conflict management approach throughout
the organization, such as the Council approach  X
Employ professional training in conflict management  X  X
Cultivated conflict management skills and mechanisms
over time  X  X
Effort to deal with long-standing conflicts  X
Emphasis on bigger vision and shared purpose  X
Emphasis on basic behavior of kindness, honesty and
respect, not only exalted teachings  X
Emphasis on lack of attachment and rigidity  X

VALUE OF WORK
Work sessions as regular part of retreats  X  X  X
Work required of students-in-residence who are the staff  X
Work occupies 6 or more hours daily for residents  X
Volunteers are apprentices who can become staff  X
Accepted to community based on work performance  X
Volunteers on Boards, Committees, in Programs  X  X  X
Paid staff model values in their work—mindfulness, warmth,
service, etc.  X
Volunteers report spiritual, personal growth and satisfaction
as a result of their roles  X  X  X
Students receive stipends and earn practices and retreats  X
Work of all kinds considered practice  X  X

INCLUSIVITY
Regular family/children programs  X  X  ?
Simultaneous parent/child programs  X
Other focuses, like mindfulness-based stress reduction,
therapist programs, 12-step  X
Minority programs  X  X
Discussion about reaching more specific groups  X  X
Large week-night program  X
Regular Week-night meditation  X  X  X
Scholarships, reduced fees  X  X
Earn retreats with work  X  X
Range of involvement from occasional to intensive  X  X  X
Sense of acceptance, inclusiveness of all kinds of people,
and freedom to participate at own level  X  X

CULTURAL PRESENTATION
Use of accessible language—mindfulness, loving-kindness,
service, translation of Buddhist concepts into English

Programs for families and various ages

Introduction to monastic life

Teachings by monastics and non-monastics

Inclusion of and orientation to some ritual

Conscious effort to exclude ritual as a requirement

Conscious effort to translate formal teachings into modern language and concepts

Modern iteration of traditional teaching as training

A monastic phase in training

Teachers are often married

Teachers may or may not wear robes

Teachers tend to wear regular clothes

Female as well as male teachers

Meditation applicable to emotions and everyday life

Parallel secular training created without Tibetan cultural veneer

DECISION MAKING

Modified consensus for committees & Board as much as possible

Collaborative management

SUPPORT GROUPS IN COMMUNITY

Smaller satellite community programs

STAFFING

Specific meetings, teachings, teacher interviews for paid staff

Long period of work assignments and retreats precedes becoming a staff member

Staff are usually residents

Most work is done by volunteers

Volunteers are coordinated and coached to see work as practice and service

OUTREACH

Website

Mailing List

Newsletter

Ongoing discussion about outreach

Magazine ads

Visible, but not necessarily recruiting

Well-known teachers

Belief and experience that people discover the Center naturally

Regular meditations
Open house X
Bookstore X X
Walk-in X
Saturday night socials X
Display Case X X
Guide/mentor program for new students X
Classes and workshops X X X
Events and Guest Presentations X X X

**DIVERSITY**
Programs for families X X
Residence for some student families X

**PLACE**
Nature, away from city X X
Meditation Hall X X X
Central location downtown X X

**ORGANIZATIONAL TONE**

**CAPACITY OF ORGANIZATION**
Ample retreat orientation X
Managing lodging and cooking for large retreats X X
Holding back-to-back large retreats X ?
Utilization of consultants to build organizational capacity X X
Awareness of tensions between spiritual and typical organizational views and values X X X
Some people in both spiritual and business roles X X X
Tolerating a variety of views and tensions X X
Understaffed for task and staff under-housed X
Provides a practice environment X X X
Recurring ambivalence about leadership and sense of chaos X
Ambivalence about measuring success X
Feel welcome at related Centers worldwide X
Centers in regional network stopped competing X
Board of Directors or Governing Council X X X

**FINANCIAL HEALTH**
Financial team X X
Primary income from public programs X X X
Location near affluent population X
Frugality re: staff remuneration X X X
Issues of retirement support X
Financial consultants X
In-house financial professionals X
Financial pressures and analysis lead growth X
One site’s vacation guest program supports all sites X
Regional sharing of financial resources X X
Avoid seeing Dharma as an investment X
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have good location with inexpensive long-term lease</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**GROWTH**
- Changed a lot from beginning resulting from growth | X | X |
- Planning to expand | X | X |
- Creating new programs | X | X |
- Ambivalence about plans to grow and what will be required in fundraising and staffing | X | X |
- Recently expanded and facilities are crowded | X |
DISCUSSION

Organizational Elements Charts

The Organizational Elements Charts indicate aspects of the organization which those interviewed considered significant. These were taken from the quotes organized by themes above. The charts highlight similarities and differences among these organizations. While there was no elimination of organizational elements that were challenging or not working, these were in the minority because of the stated focus on what was working for people. A limitation of the charts is that if an element is omitted in an organization’s column, it means that it didn’t stand out to the respondents and wasn’t very clearly substantiated by their comments. It might still exist in an organization, but didn’t “show up” clearly in this investigation. Most elements provide possible answers to “how” and “why” questions regarding success and viability of these organizations, rather than just a description, since the Centers were already selected on the basis of some basic descriptors (length of existence; solvency; basis in tradition; producing teachers; non-monastic; not having original teacher in residence, etc.)

First, all Centers have different network configurations. None of these is a “stand-alone” Center, though “Z” may have originally been the only child of a teacher who came from Japan. “Z” seems to be in a process of organically creating and supporting a network in addition to its main three sites. “V” is also creating a community-based network, but in addition inherited a relationship with one or more Centers on the East Coast. “T” appears to have inherited an international and regional network that it did not consciously create, but its members take part in the specialized offerings of that network, such as seminary training, etc. Each Center benefits from the strengthening
context of other related practice groups, and this is an organizational element they all
share, though does so in their own unique way.

Similarities Across All Centers

Elements that appear from the Organizational Elements Charts to be
characteristic of all three Centers are shown in Organizational Elements Chart #2
below:

**SHARED ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS-CHART #2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>&quot;V&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Z&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;T&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER TRAINING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-year teacher training</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified with a lineage</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling multiple roles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUEST TEACHERS, LOCAL TEACHERS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs featuring variety of guest teachers, some famous</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER SUCCESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about aging teachers and teacher &quot;gap&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETREATS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of retreats, long and short, annually</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity increases with length of retreat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer retreats of 3-weeks - 2 months</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>Work periods included in retreat each day</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal sitting meditation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENSE OF SUPPORT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to supportive peers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONSIBILITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student decides who their teacher is</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE OF WORK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work sessions as regular part of retreats</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers on Boards, Committees, in Programs as a result of their roles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCLUSIVITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of involvement from occasional to intensive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"V" "Z" "T"
Use of accessible language—mindfulness, loving-kindness, 
service, translation of Buddhist concepts into English
Teachings by monastics and non-monastics
Inclusion of and orientation to some ritual
  language and concepts
Teachers are often married
Female as well as male teachers

OUTREACH
Website
Ongoing discussion about outreach
Visible, but not necessarily recruiting
Regular meditations
Classes and workshops
Events and Guest Presentations

PLACE
Meditation Hall

CAPACITY OF ORGANIZATION
Aware of tension between spiritual and organizational values
Some people in both spiritual and business roles
Provides a practice environment
Board of Directors or Governing Council

FINANCIAL HEALTH
Primary income from public programs
Frugality re: staff remuneration

The common organizational elements shown above exist in three organizations 
that have a different “feel” from one another and which stem from different Asian 
cultures. These organizational features appear to provide “a container” or baseline 
across-the-board, for providing the spiritual practice opportunities offered by all three 
Centers. As we analyze whether these organizations have made some “American” 
adaptations to enable them to survive, we immediately are struck by their similarities: 
training of American teachers is intensive and long-term; teachers have multiple roles in 
their organizations, including working on Boards (secular) and committees as well as 
teaching (spiritual); and students can choose their teacher(s) which fits with Aronson’s
(2004) depiction of Americans as preferring free choice. In addition, teachers are often female, married, or non-monastic—a different profile from teaching in Asia.

Choice and integrity are combined by offering both very short retreats of one day up to very long and intensive retreats (some in silence) of two months. The amount of ritual which would normally be present in the same traditions in Asia has been reduced or is paralleled by a secular translation of the teachings. Meditation instruction and opportunity is the primary offering to the public, but advertisement of the Centers’ presence is not aggressive. These Centers have been in existence long enough to offer a community of elders as a practice support, i.e. they have formed a viable social base in America.

This basic set of organizational characteristics found in all three Centers supports the idea that these Buddhist Centers have adapted to American ways, and are doing what is expected of them and preferred by the surrounding population here-- the overall picture differs significantly from practice in Asia. In some ways these Centers conform well to practices seen in typical Christian churches, such as having volunteers as described by Harris (1998)—see above. All three gave evidence of ambivalence about “business values” (such as creating vision statements or having salaried teachers or assessing the results of retreats and following up on participants) and about what outreach measures were appropriate but not coercive or misleading—even if they had hired business consultants to assist them. They indicate awareness of the all-pervading financial, and achievement culture of the United States, but the response is one of partial integration, not a wholesale acceptance. As one respondent from “T” put it, “ . . .
the *Dharma* isn’t . . . a high yield investment. Building a land center or building a retreat center is not going to be like building a . . . shopping mall.”

Similarities Shared by Two of the Three Centers

Elements *shared by two Centers* constitute a much longer list and indicate an escalation in sophistication, probably reflecting Centers that have grown and changed considerably over time. Within the themes of teaching and teachers, in this selection of elements, there are cited more kinds of teachers, more selectivity of teachers, more detail about teacher conduct and about the interface of teacher and student, and more consideration regarding teacher pay, protecting teacher time, as well as allusion to efforts to protect the Center from dependence on one teacher.

As these Centers have taken on the non-trivial responsibility of training teachers, and have seen, since they were founded, the tragic circumstances created by some new American teachers, they have also become much more careful about protecting their teaching resources within the surrounding culture.

Conflict management, tolerance, and being mindful of interpersonal interactions are mentioned, as are efforts to utilize consultants, share resources, manage finances professionally, and create new programs.

Many of these topics suggest in-depth fine-tuning of the Center internal organizational environment in the face of growth and an admission of the need for assistance in a sophisticated western environment.

Several people mentioned phases of growth in their interviews, and it certainly appears that this more elaborated set of organizational components may have evolved
to cope with establishment, expansion and acceptance. As one person interviewed stated, “... in all honesty from 20 years ago to now... we used to have board meetings... in this communal house, and we used to meet there and have check-ins and a process and stuff like that... just a few of us... I miss those days. It... has become an organization.”

“V” and “Z” share a number of organizational elements. In the area of teaching and teacher training, we see the following shared elements: training teachers at their own sites; teachers in training are selected by current teachers; the student’s main teacher has considerable interaction with them; people other than the teachers help to handle business tasks; teachers enjoy 360 degree support in the organization; teachers-in-training are scrutinized by those around them; there is a code of ethics for teachers; teachers are aware of the everyday life of students; teachers are mainly those of the local tradition; and there is an explicit effort to avoid dependence on one or a few teachers. This is the profile of organizations which have a group of local teachers whom they have selected and trained. They are taking preventive measures against having a hierarchy of too few teachers or one teacher who does everything, and also protecting against ethical breaches which can occur and have occurred in the institution of the spiritual teacher/student relationship, which is very new for most western students.

Elements focused on students which are shared by “V” and “Z” include pre-screening of students attending retreats; offering an introduction to monastic life; and exposure of students to an established community of elders. This is a small overlap, probably reflecting the fact that “Z” is primarily residential for serious students, and “V” is
not. But both have been in existence long enough to have local teachers and older students who mentor new students, and they are both concerned about the readiness of new students, suggesting considerable experience in this area. “V” mainly offers an orientation to monastic life to families and children as an orientation, but “Z” offers a monastic “phase” in its student training.

Organizational elements held in common by “Z” and “V” are numerous--including valuing all jobs done by everyone in the organization, dealing directly with challenging issues whether personal or organizational; meditation as part of meetings; employment of professional help in conflict resolution; cultivation of conflict resolution skills; having regular programs for families; offering minority programs; having discussion about how to reach out to specific groups; having programs for families and various ages; offering an introduction to monastic life; employing collaborative management; having a mailing list and newsletter; having a site or sites in nature; managing lodging and cooking for large residential retreats; having primary income from a large number of public programs; coping with considerable change over time due to growth; creating new programs; and ambivalence about fundraising and staffing involved in growth. Clearly “Z” and “V” have progressed as organizations in America by reaching out to diverse groups; utilizing training in organizational skills; integrating meditation with business meetings; and creating many programs. They are competent to handle programs and events for large numbers of people. Yet both exhibit ambivalence about growth, while going forward to meet it. Despite their considerable differences related to training students-in-residence vs. students not-in-residence, they are using similar problem-solving strategies in this society.
This investigation produced 120 organizational elements for “V” and 122 elements for “Z” but only 86 for “T.” There could be a number of reasons for this—the selection of study participants with less longevity and experience at “T”; a lesser focus on organization at “T”, possibly due to being part of a larger network which is doing a lot of the organizing; less pressure to grow over time for whatever reasons; self-selection of students who are not organizationally inclined or trained; utilization of volunteers instead of paid staff and also not being residential; having a stable physical situation which does not present a challenge.

Noting the elements that “T” has in common with “Z” or “V” we find that though teachers are trained elsewhere than at the Center, there is multi-level training to be a teacher and/or a student-mentor as at “V”; that teachers who are a regular part of this network are supported with room, board and a salary as are those at “Z.” Student-teachers have considerable interaction with students. Once a student has a teacher, they study with that teacher (not exclusively) for years; there is a formal series of trainings (seminaries); and charismatic and famous teachers are featured at this center; they, like “Z” have experienced difficulty upon the loss of their original teacher. This profile reflects that “T,” unlike the other two Centers, mainly relies on teachers who visit from elsewhere; relies on an intensive training that takes place elsewhere; and relies extensively on older student-mentors. They do not appear to have the organizational burden of organizing long retreats or supporting teachers to a great extent.

Other elements that “T” has in common with one of the other two Centers include offering a sense of community during longer retreats; a central location downtown; toleration of a variety of views and tensions; a regional sharing of financial resources
(also seen in “Z”); a belief that people will naturally discover the Center; a bookstore; regular week-night meditations; scholarships and reduced fees; earning retreats with service; a sense of acceptance of all kinds of people and the freedom to participate at one’s own level; an effort to exclude ritual as a requirement; the teachers may or may not be robed Sangha (fellow practitioners); and a focus on meditation as applicable to everyday life. Most of these elements appear to be an accommodation to the needs of the surrounding population and an adaptation to the limitations of manpower (teacher and student) that is available.

Overall, from looking at organizational elements shared by two centers, which seem to be growth-accommodating elements, it appears that “Z” and “V” as relatively self-contained producers of all their services and are somewhat more complex and organizationally developed than “T.” They appear to be more materially secure, have a larger local base of students, have more local elders with experience in the practice, and have more clarity about their organizational functions.

Spiritual dedication, however, is high at all three Centers.

Uniqueness in the Centers

As we look further at the organizational elements chart, we find that 36 of 120 elements are totally unique to “V”; 39 of 122 elements are unique to “Z”; and 27 of 86 are unique to “T”.

The organizational elements being employed uniquely by specific Centers reflect a very different appeal and atmosphere to offer to participants. The mere fact that three such different, but conservatively-organized Centers might be so long-lived and popular,
suggests that the “market” for what they have to offer in America is very diverse and by no means exhausted.

V’s Uniqueness

Samples of uniqueness include “V’s” having satellite centers as well as a main center—i.e. moving its program into the community, for example, with the Dedicated Practitioner program. This is a two-year program of study, retreat, and interaction set in a neighborhood away from the main Center. It is still sustained by the central site. This is a model of expansion and community development which is similar to that of mega churches in the Evangelical tradition and which allows practitioners to more easily integrate their practice in everyday life with the support of other practitioners.

Another unique feature is that of having teachers meet together several times per year to give frank and caring feedback to one another, as well as discuss teaching in general.

“V” also hosts forums of all kinds of Buddhist teachers on a regular basis—clearly “V” is dedicated not only to training and supporting its own teachers but also to supporting a wide range of teachers. Further, “V’s” teachers nearly all have psychological background, which enables them to help not only each other, but also assist students in retreat and staff when there is a need—in addition to offering the teachings. This support may supplant a reliance on ritual, which is notably lacking at “V” except in family programs. These two features—psychological support and lack of ritual—are strikingly different from practice in Asia. The high prevalence of psychological knowledge and support and use of psychological feedback methods in the group provides another answer to Aronson’s (2004) skepticism about transplanting Asian-
based religious disciplines to America mentioned above. Further, the use of consensus-based decision-making by “V” is a nod to the democratic society in which it is working.

“V” also has special circumstances—its original, well-known teachers are still on staff, though all are American. It is also located in a very wealthy suburb surrounded by a Buddhist-friendly and highly-educated urban population. Though “V” requires a retreat application in order to alert teachers to the life-situation of retreatants they will be interacting with, it does not require prior experience or a special belief system for participation in silent meditation retreats, where the student may be encountering awareness of their own mind and psyche for the first time. There is no obligation to sign up for any given program. “V” has employed consultants to train its staff in conflict resolution techniques.

Overall, “V” appears more “modern” and “American” and “diverse and inclusive” than the other two Centers and also serves more students. It may have a larger budget, utilizes organizational consultants and tools on a regular basis, and has more pressure to expand its services. It customizes programs for more diverse kinds of students specifically, allows teachings to be given at its site by teachers from other Buddhist traditions, and offers a wide range of related workshops and programs.

Whereas the organizational methods utilized by “V” are clearly very successful, skepticism was expressed by a teacher at a different, more traditional center, that “The Vipassana groups have gone cold turkey and become American, which is fraught with peril.” The implication is that in the effort to adapt and meet the needs of the surrounding group, the important message has been lost. On the other side, the
argument could be made that the methods utilized to integrate in American culture are allowing many more people to contact and live the true meaning of the Buddhist teachings. At this point we can only appreciate the organizational/spiritual tension involved.

**Z’s Uniqueness**

The unique elements of “Z’s” organization include integration of daily work (approximately 6 hours per day), residential status, and proscribed daily routine for serious students. “Z” to some extent fits well the description by Iannaccone (1994) of a “strict church” where the members are limited in non-group activities, may have special dress, and exhibit self-sacrifice. And this may account for some of “Z’s” appeal as is the case with many modern Christian churches, and also may predispose participants to avoid some of the internal conflicts that Harris (1998) describes. One long-term student who participated in this study was asked why young students from all over the world come to “Z” in order to get up at 3:30am to meditate and work long and hard every day. The response was “Because it’s cool.”

“Z” has also evolved a business aspect which fits well with their needs for intensive practice—a popular summer guest season at its wilderness area site which produces revenue for all three of its major locations, while taking up the time and efforts of students/staff for only four months of the year.

“Z’s” teacher training was described in more detail than that of the other Centers, indicating the personal care, sensitivity, and length of time which this critical process requires in this tradition. It is a central value that the teacher must have developed realization and that the teacher is needed by most students in order for them to develop
realization. The implication, of course, is that students are there and remain there to develop realization, not just to relieve stress, avoid daily life, find a social life, or because they are curious.

The sense of centuries-old practice and tradition pervades this group in terms of tasks, names, dress, schedule, and practice—yet it employs financial and organizational consultants, conducts community service, runs a hospice, and used to run several businesses including a bakery and a restaurant. The group has a monastery-like model, but manages to provide programs and activities and sitting opportunities on a regular basis for the public. It is very tempting after listening to what those interviewed had to say to conclude that “Z” offers “the appeal of the dedicated religious life” while yet cautioning its practitioners not to become attached to anything. One teacher described his attraction as follows: “... I was drawn to “Z” because of its American openness ... it wasn’t that I was attracted to the teachers so much, but to the community, the intelligence of the community. So my enthusiasm was there for about 5 years or so, and then I hit a spot where I hated being at “Z”, but there was no other place I wanted to be ...”

Despite the provision of lodging and stipends, the sheer challenge of managing to live “the Zen life” at “Z” clearly weeds out those who are not very focused on their practice. The group cannot afford to support non-serious students forever. Thus, “Z” is offering a prescribed package in which a complex body of dedicated work is done by oneself in relationship to a teacher, rather than catering to the greater needs of those who arrive. But one is free to leave, however, at any time. A person entering “Z” steps on to an escalator of increasing depth and intensity of practice if they remain. Another
Center, not from the Zen tradition, which might wish to utilize various organizational elements drawn from the Centers in this study. However, upon encountering “Z”, it would have to realize that there is a traditional cohesion in its overall method which is harder to duplicate than simply choosing one or two specific items, such as a newsletter layout or work group meetings.

T’s Uniqueness

Unique aspects of “T” include being part of an international network which is presided over by the son of the founding famous (brilliant and sometimes notorious teacher), but he is not, however, the only teacher who comes to this Center, and he resides elsewhere.

“T” has offered a fully articulated “modern translation” of a traditional Tibetan spiritual training sequence and its head is now beginning to merge this sequence with the original Tibetan training. “T’s” students can attend intensive traditional seminary trainings offered off-site under the auspices of the network. “T” runs almost entirely through the efforts of volunteers and makes considerable use of student/teacher/mentors. Those interviewed referenced various phases of more and less organized structure, including a fair amount of reported chaos. Everyone seemed to tolerate these fluctuations. Among those interviewed there appeared to be less interest in the organization than in working with others, though they reported considerable time spent on organizational issues by the group.

One participant explained that the training sequence and meditative discipline is less than easy. With open houses and popular and famous visiting teachers, and a long-standing lease, the group has flourished, and those interviewed reported that they
had stayed longer than they expected and found a community where they feel they fit like no other.

Their location is also unique, being close to a very large university and in a bustling downtown. Unlike “Z” and “V”, they do not have teachers present as often—and their better-known teachers are likely to be monastic robed Sangha or Tibetan Lamas (teachers). “T” seems to function as a no-obligation, supportive gateway to a longstanding Asian spiritual tradition, presenting largely an “American” face in the form of student mentors and volunteers and a secular training program. There is a sense of the essence of the more intensive traditional teaching and training coming from and/or taking place elsewhere, though this is the major site in this region. Various locations of this group continue to develop in this region and elsewhere. It is a dynamic network.

With a part-time paid Director, “T” is surviving with minimal overhead. Volunteers report highly meaningful involvement with their work at the Center. “T” is not organized in the sense of having people paid for doing jobs, and even coping with an organizational question such as what to put in a display-case can take up a lot of time and energy. The focus seems more on having minimal organization, minimal expense, and minimizing involvement with more complex organizational issues—remaining grounded in tasks such as keeping the Center open in the evenings, and reserving energy for tutoring others.
CONCLUSION

There is a collection of basic organizational elements found in all three of the successful Buddhist Centers investigated—and many of these are adaptable to other Centers. In terms of elements found in two, but not all three of the Centers, it appears we are looking at additional forms, structures and activities needed to accommodate growth. As we investigate elements found only at one or another center, we can see the aspects which make these Centers look and feel very different from each other, and which undoubtedly cause them to appeal to different sets of individuals in the surrounding population. However, all of our interviewees fell within the typical Buddhist demography—white, average age mid-range, and well educated, with more men than women. It does appear that the Center with the least Asian cultural trappings which utilizes more modern organizational aids, and has more targeted outreach, is the “most popular.” It is difficult to ascribe cause-and-effect, since this Center is also located in a wealthy, highly-educated suburb and continues to have the outstanding services of its very well-known founding teachers, all of whom are American. It is very clear that many adaptations have been made by all three organizations to accommodate being in America. It also seems clear that anyone working with a struggling Buddhist Center could benefit from knowing more about their “peer” organizations, especially those as successful as these three.

Recommendations for further research:

Gather History: A more involved study could look at when various organizational innovations took place over the history of these groups and what might have been the
precipitating factors. We get some sense of this as we look at groups working hard to dodge the bullet of “one charismatic teacher who makes all the decisions.”

**Gather Stories:** The stories heard in the interviews are priceless, and more need to be collected and fully explored. One participant—a teacher/leader, compared how she felt ten and twenty years earlier in her role, and how she feels now, and what this has to do with her maturation and that of the group. Similarly, another teacher mused on the crises and stages the group had gone through, as well as his own, and where he thought they were now.

**Identify Necessary Congruencies in the Organizational Elements:** Many organizations would be assisted by realizing the differences and requirements of different phases of grow and the need to be prepared for change. The question of “best practices” has, of course, an attached question—“for whom?” Each group is different. Getting up at 3:30am might not be best for new retreatants. A complex of “best practices” for a specific group evolved in each of these Centers. Investigating which practices work best together or require each other or are “congruent” could be helpful.

**More Open and Consistent Mentoring and Sharing of Successful Groups:** This researcher’s wish is that these remarkable groups which nourish the revolutionary attempt to remove suffering through understanding the nature of consciousness and sentience, would share on a regular basis their organizational breakthroughs with other similar, up-and-coming groups—in forums, meetings, conferences, on the internet, by matching up those who are willing and need to communicate. Mentoring one another in this aspect would be a great service and produce more knowledge and data on this organizational expertise.
REFERENCES


Appendix A:

Invitation

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate in Study: Organizational Factors in Selected Buddhist Groups. I am a graduate student in Organizational Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my Master’s degree, I am conducting a research study on selected Buddhist organizations. Since you are a participant in one of these organizations, I am requesting that you consider participating in this study.

The proposed study will focus on your experience of the organizational practices at your spiritual Center. The study will be conducted through an individual interview with each selected participant; each interview is expected to be 45-60 minutes in duration and will be tape recorded. There may be a brief follow-up interview if more information seems needed. Study participants will be asked to describe their experiences with the organizational aspects of their Center, to describe how the experiences affected them, how this has changed over time, and what organizational aspects do they think are most helpful for themselves and for others. The interview data will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of investigating how organizational practices impact a small sample of people at the Center. This data may contribute information which is beneficial for Buddhist groups like this one.

Participants will also be asked to complete a 6-question structured interview with numerical ratings which has been standardized to indicate the operative culture of whole organizations based on participant subjective evaluation. The results take the form of a graph with four organizational quadrants. Each respondent’s graph will be somewhat unique.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time and choose not to continue. Should you choose to participate, all information you give during the interview process will be confidential, and your individual contributions will be anonymous. All data collected before and during the interview process will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and a transcriber. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name participant code only. I will also make a copy of the completed project report available to you at your request.

Thank you for considering this request. I truly hope that you will choose to participate! If you have any questions or would like to talk with me further prior to making a decision to participate, please feel free to call me at 510-524-0593.

Sincerely,

Carol Fields
carolmfields@aol.com
Appendix B:

Informed Consent Form

My name is Carol Fields. I am currently a graduate student in the Masters of Organizational Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, CA. The research project is a requirement for completion of my Master’s degree. This research project is being conducted under the advisement of Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H.—Organizational Psychology Project Advisor. She can be reached at SAMulgrew@aol.com or 510-450-0378.

Project Summary: The proposed study focuses on your experience with organizational practices at your Buddhist Center. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews with practitioners at the Center; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minutes in duration and will be tape recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their experience with the Center’s organization, to describe how this experience has affected them over time, how it has changed, and to identify organizational elements which they feel have been beneficial for themselves and the group as a whole. You may also be contacted at a later date for clarification or a brief follow-up interview if more information is needed. Each participant will also answer a 6-question, standardized questionnaire on organizational culture in which the answers are weighted on a numerical scale by the correspondent.

Data gathered in interviews and on the questionnaire will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of understanding how various organizational elements at the Center have impacted the participants and the group as a whole, and which organizational practices may be particularly beneficial in the opinion of the respondents. This may be information of use to this and other similar organizations.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing this consent form.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and one other designated person. Each participant will be identified on the recording by first name and participant code only.

Consent: I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind or refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but that my name will not be associated with this study.

Participant Signature: __________________________ Date: ______ Name: (Please Print) __________________________

Witness Signature: __________________________ Date: ______ Name (Please Print) __________________________
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Primary questions are highlighted. The others are follow-up questions to be asked if the respondent does not address them in his or her response to the primary question.

Additional questions may be asked, depending on the responses.

Introductions—Self and Participant

Summarize the participant’s background as it was gathered in the selection process.

1. How would you describe your experience of “X” Center as an organization—now and in the past?

   - How did you first find out about this Center?
   - What has caused you to continue to participate at this Center rather than somewhere else—what makes it user-friendly or productive for you?
   - What two or three aspects of the organization are most noticeable to you—such as the leadership structure, or schedule of activities, how people work together, social interactions, volunteers, training, reaching out to new people, general attitude, or other aspects.
   - Is organization (how things are set up and how they run at the Center) something you like to think about, sometimes think about, think about only if there is a problem, prefer not to think about, or simply don’t think about?
   - What areas of organization do you consider helpful to you in reaching your goals and how?
• Has your experience of the organization changed over time—are there things about the Center that you are less impressed with now? More impressed with now?
• Have new things been added or are some things done differently now?
• How are you personally involved with the organizational aspects of the Center?
• What is your experience of your personal involvement with aspects of the Center’s organization?
• How does this involvement in the organization affect you and your relationship to others and your practice?
• If applicable, what is your experience of being a volunteer at the center or of being involved with volunteers?
• What would you like to change about the way the Center conducts its business?
• What would you like to see more of in the way the Center conducts its business?

2. How long do you expect to continue participating at this Center?
• What form do you think your participation will take in the future? Why?

3. What organizational aspects of the Center do you think are most important for the entire group of practitioners who participate there?
• What is especially helpful about those areas of organization as a support for those who are the Sangha at the Center?
4. Do you feel that the Center is secure financially—how do you see its financial future?

- Is money and the Center’s financial status a major concern among those who participate there? Why?
- How is money managed at the Center?
- Where does money primarily come from and go to at the Center?
- Are activities at the Center affordable, in your opinion?

5. What is your experience of social interaction at the Center?

- Is social activity an integral part of the Center routine? How?
- Has social activity at the Center been a support for you?

6. What is your experience of being taught and of the teachers at the Center (or of teaching, if you are a teacher)?

- Do you feel that teachers are helping you, that you are learning and coming closer to your goals?
- Do you perceive a difference between teachers and students?
- Are teachers and students treated differently at the Center? How?
- Do you feel it is possible for you or anyone else at the Center to become a teacher?
- Do you want to become a teacher? (or continue to be a teacher) Why?
- Is there a process for becoming a teacher set up at the Center? What is it?
- How important do you feel it is to have teachers at the Center?
• How often do you interact with teachers (or students, if you are a teacher) at the Center? How?

7. What is your experience of the relationship of those who participate at the Center with those outside the Center?

• How often do you interact with people outside the Center? Inside the Center?
• Do you prefer to interact with people at the Center or with people outside, or have no particular preference?
• In your experience do you think most people outside the Center understand how it works and its mission?
• Is it fairly easy, in your experience, to become a part of the Center?
• What, in your experience has been most difficult for you in adapting to being a part of the Center? What helped you?
• What activities or roles are part of the Center’s organization specifically to assist people in learning about it and being part of it?
• Are you in residence at the Center? Fulltime? Part-time?
• Is there a difference between those who reside at the Center and those who commute to participate or visit?