PROFITS AND PROPHETS: A STUDY OF THE TRADITIONAL BUSINESS PRACTICES OF THREE RELIGIOUS CULTS

by

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Abstract

Existing research suggests that there are instances of cult-like behavior in the corporate realm, specifically in high-performing teams. Notable occurrences of this can be found in organizations such as Enron and Madoff Investment Securities, which exhibited traits aligning with characteristics of religious cults. These characteristics include the manipulation of employees, a strong organizational culture, various tools to enhance competition and recruiting abilities, manipulative hierarchal relationships, and the overcommunication of deceptive messages. While facets of the corporate realm mimic religious cults, there are also notable behaviors exhibited by religious cults which mirror traditional businesses. Three religious cults (specifically the People's Temple, Heaven's Gate, and Rajneeshpuram) demonstrated characteristics of traditional businesses including the offering of a product, internal networks and infrastructure, product movement, revenue generation, and an implementable marketing and recruiting plan. While the goods offered by each religious cult were not tangible, they were valuable services marketed to a pliable audience which resulted in the exchange of money, possessions, and in some instances, lives.

Profits and Prophets: A Study of the Traditional Business Practices of Three Religious Cults

There are infinite ambiguous interpretations and definitions of a business with none being concise. In an investigation into the elements of an entrepreneurial business it is noteworthy that, "the most consistently emphasized components concern the value proposition, the customer, internal processes and competencies, and how the firm makes money," (Morris et al., 2003, p. 729) which summarily describes the key areas of focus of a business. In addition to this, businesses are comprised of multiple levels to ensure success: economic, operational, and strategic (Morris et al., 2003). According to Morris and colleagues (2003), conceptual and theoretical elements are present in the framework of building a successful business. These elements are visible in many of today's successful enterprises and include practices centered around supply chain, competitive advantage, transaction cost economics, innovation, and the bundling of resources and capabilities to accomplish established goals. *Starting a Business: Quickstart Guide* (Colwell, 2019) summarizes the necessary elements required to build a business. Dr. Ken Colwell (2019) suggests that a successful business is made up of operations, marketing, a sales strategy, a growth plan, management and staff, as well as sources and uses of funds. Lastly, in a discussion of consistent entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviors relative to building a successful business, Morris and colleagues (2003) discuss self-efficacy theory and its prominence in entrepreneurs as they exert control over their own motivation, behaviors, and environments in their quest for success.

To aid in building a fledgling enterprise Colwell (2019) provides a template for an inexperienced entrepreneur which includes deciding on a product to sell, selecting the

appropriate market, determining a value proposition, establishing the operations and marketing models, building an effective team, and planning for growth. Similarly, Morris and colleagues (2003) summarize business as a firm's ability to establish a value offering, an economic model, customer interface and relationships, partner and network roles, internal infrastructure, and a target market. Notably, these elements which are prominently found in successful businesses are also found in three religious cults which were analyzed in this study. In assessing the three religious cults and their business practices, patterns became apparent. At a foundational level, similarities exist between the definitions of a business provided by Colwell (2019) and Morris and colleagues (2003), most notably the need for a value offering, establishing internal networks and infrastructure, product movement, revenue generation, and an implementable marketing plan. Although limited research exists to support a hypothesis that religious cults are businesses, substantial research has been conducted to suggest that high-performance business teams are cult-like. I will establish that religious cults operate as traditional businesses and will examine not only the business practices and companies established by religious cults to generate revenue but will also focus on how these cults persuade followers to remain committed to the organization.

Literature Review

To conduct this research, it is critical to maintain a focus on a limited number of religious cults as well as establish guidelines to define a business as a baseline for comparison. I will begin by discussing cult-like traits which exist in businesses, then transition to exploring the foundational elements of three religious cults, explain how these organizations operated in terms of business, examine how cults and businesses operate similarly, and finally describe how these previous factors impact the persuasion of members

and followers.

Businesses as Cults

There are strong similarities between a high performing team in the corporate world and a religious cult (Spector & Lane, 2007). According to Spector and Lane (2007), the five characteristics of a cult include persuasion, isolation, elitism, charismatic leadership, and the idea that wealth does not benefit group members. When compared to high performing teams in business, analyzing companies such as Tyco, Enron, Sunbeam, and Madoff Investment Securities builds a case for the idea that manipulative businesses and secular business cults tend to mirror characteristics of religious cults (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016). Kulik and Alarcon (2016) define a secular business cult as a business which operates unethically, in a destructive manner, and ultimately collapses. Manipulative businesses, however, are byproducts of failed secular business cults, as it is suggested that they are "reorganized, well-established and legally-complying revisions" (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016, p. 248) of the business, which then manipulate their industry and society. Research also supports the idea that secular business cults have similar components to religious cults when considering their "ultrastrong culture, formalized manipulation, manipulative hierarchal relationships, competition, and operations efficiency tools, and the frequent overcommunication of deceptive messages" (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016, p. 247), all of which are facets of the organization present in the three cults being analyzed. In addition to the traits present in these organizations, Spector and Lane (2017) assess the traits present in the individuals recruited to both businesses and cults: intelligent, curious, idealistic, and well-educated. Spector and Lane (2017) also suggest that while the characteristics of high performing businesses can lead to success, the decisions made and executed on in manipulative teams

and cults is not sustainable for the long-term but does traditionally allow for immediate results. This coincides with the inability of the aforementioned religious cult to maintain their presence and either disband or meet their demise.

In considering the business-like qualities of a religious cult, many of these qualities are present in businesses started by entrepreneurs including an economic model, a product offering, a relationship with customers, internal infrastructure, and a target market (Morris et al., 2003). In an exploratory study by Thomaz Wood Jr. and Ana Paula Paulino da Costa, similarities are drawn between entrepreneurial personalities, organizational image, and persuasive traits of cult leaders (Wood & da Costa, 2015). These similarities are exhibited through the actions of, for example, Bernie Madoff, who projected himself as "an expert, genius, and sophisticated…with good relationships," (Wood & da Costa, 2015, p. 59) traits which are commonly seen in the leaders of religious cults as well. These traits become problematic as they convince subordinates of not only expertise, but also good intentions, both of which are used as a means of securing obedience.

In introducing the concept of high-performance business teams being cult-like, research by Spector and Lane (2007) suggests that "the characteristics of high-performance organizational cultures and those of cults bear a disquieting resemblance" (p. 18). In addition to this, while there are striking differences, noteworthy similarities such as "the creation and maintenance of a strong, shared belief system," (Spector & Lane, 2007, p. 18) raise alarm. The Spector and Lane (2007) study also draws direct correlations between a cult and the high performing team now infamously known as Enron, as they outline characteristics of a cult as persuasion, isolation, elitism, charismatic (and dogmatic) leadership, and the fact that wealth does not benefit group members outside of a select few. In another key parallel between

businesses and religious cults, Spector and Lane (2007) suggest that organizational dysfunctions are also an indicator of cult-like behavior, most notably the inability to adapt an engrained business to a rapidly evolving social environment.

Kulik and Alarcon (2016) further elaborate on the conditions in which a secular business cult can originate, aligning with the inception conditions of a religious cult: societal, business, and individual characteristics, thus forming the "toxic triangle" for emergence and continuance of a cult's operations. Aligning with cult-like conditions, societal factors within business include destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments, as Kulik and Alarcon (2016) suggest that these aspects of a group are simple to manipulate. The business factors contributing to the organization of cult-like behavior include business culture, work climate, and competition, and are closely associated with the overarching ethics of the group (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016). Notably, while all three aspects are present in both business environments and religious cults, there are variations in the behaviors exhibited by members. The final element of this toxic triangle is individual characteristics, and according to Kulik and Alarcon (2016) this is specifically antisocial behavior demonstrated by not only the leader of the group, but any member who is allowed to exhibit the conduct. This antisocial behavior can include narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, psychopaths, sociopaths, and bullies (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016).

According to Kulik and Alarcon (2016), Margaret Singer suggests in *Cults in Our Midst: The Continuing Fight Against Their Hidden Menace* that cults have moved out of the religious realm and into the world of business. This transition is best demonstrated through "religious-cult-run and religious-cult-affiliated secular businesses, and religious cult member infiltration into the ranks of secular management" (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016, p. 262). Singer

(2003) states that there are two types of cults in today's society: "cults and cultlike groups who expose their recruits and members to organized psychological and social persuasion processes," (p. 4) and "commercially sold large group awareness training programs" that use "coordinated persuasion processes" (p. 4). Ultimately, both types of cults are manipulative entities which use coercion techniques to alter attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Singer, 2003). Singer (2003) also proposes that cults appearing in today's business arena tend to be led by a master manipulator who recruits, changes, and exploits followers through prepackaged "self-improvement" courses which, when successful, attract additional customers. To better understand the master manipulators behind the three cults being examined, an overview of the three cults provides insight into the history of the leader, origin of the group, and business processes established to sustain the organization.

Methods

In assessing these three religious cults and their underlying business practices, it is imperative to compare the data using an approach of theoretical replication. While the three cults have many similarities relative to their marketing tactics, recruiting methods, money generation, and even organizational structure, they did not all originate or end in the same fashion. Much like a business, a religious cult can be categorized as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or corporation based on the number of leaders who band together to offer a product and generate a sustainable revenue. Additionally, each cult exhibited similar behavior in requiring members to contribute monetary and physical donations to be allocated throughout the group as needed in a behavior reminiscent of a public company offering shares to stakeholders. As indicated in Appendix A, through researching The People's Temple, Heaven's Gate, and Rajneeshpuram it became apparent that while the business

elements of the groups varied in both sustainability and lucrativeness, each were critical components in allowing the cults to thrive and continue recruiting measures.

Using the criteria outlined by Spector and Lane (2007) defining the five characteristics of high-performance cultures and the five characteristics of a cult, along with research on business entities and practices exhibited by the three cults I am comparing, as well as extensive investigation into remaining cult members through media, I have compiled research to support my hypothesis that cults operate as traditional businesses. Extensive research conducted by Kulik and Alarcon (2016) demonstrates the existence of manipulative businesses and secular business cults, and closely associates the idea that businesses and cults are not so different from one another. In likely the closest association, the suggestion that "…individual behavior is more or less programmable according to the social constructs in one's immediate surroundings," (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016, p. 258) aligns with research which states that in a religious cult, "…members are described as students, which suggests being dedicated to a systematic course of thoughtful improvement" (Brigham et al., 2017, p. 79). Correlations exist between high performance corporate cultures and religious cults, many of which are apparent in recent media interviews with former members of these cults.

In beginning my study, I primarily focused on research performed by others which has been compiled into consumable media. There have been podcasts published which are dedicated to informing the public about the Heaven's Gate and The People's Temple cults from their inception until their demise. These podcasts include interviews with former members of both groups, as well as statements from their friends and relatives about the activities of the cults. Accounts by former members define the money generating activities which allowed the group to continue marketing and recruiting in an attempt to further

increase their number of followers. Additionally, the perspective provided by affected friends and relatives recounts the recruiting strategies which intrigued their loved ones, and attests to the isolation behaviors exhibited as they were slowly absorbed into the folds of the cult. Throughout her podcast, host Shannon Howard (2017), features portions of the infamous People's Temple "death tape" which recorded audio before, during, and after the tragic mass suicide in Guyana. Finally, Washington (2017) provides perspective from former Heaven's Gate members on the evolution of the group after the death of Bonnie Lu Nettles, one of the group's founders, and also features interviews with Benjamin Zeller, an expert on the cult.

In addition to these podcasts, a recent Netflix docuseries by Duplass and Duplass (2018) called *Wild Wild Country*, dedicates six episodes to the creation, evolution, and ultimate collapse of the Rajneeshees. The episodes feature interviews with former high-ranking officials in the Rajneeshpuram hierarchy, including Rajneesh's personal secretary and personal attorney, Ma Anand Sheela and Swami Prem Niren, as well as citizens of Antelope, Oregon, the location of the Rajneesh compound. These former officials offer insight into the origin of the group, the daily operations, their money management practices, and their failed plot to assume power in the Oregon state government. Extensive notes were taken on both the aforementioned podcast series as well as the docuseries, and information was referenced with existing academic journals where available. Using an instructional book by Dr. Ken Colwell (2019), all business elements of these groups were assessed by outlining necessary steps to start a business, as well as the entrepreneurial framework outlined in an academic journal by Morris and colleagues (2003).

To conduct this research, it was first necessary to define a business and a cult, and to

understand the various types of entity classifications as well as tactics to build a successful enterprise. It was then important to trace the origins of the religious cults to an individual, partnership, or a small group who began constructing the framework of the business and marketing and recruiting to gain followers. By applying the aforementioned definition of a business to the individual cases of each cult, varying business elements became more prevalent at the root of the group. The comparison between high-performing business cultures, or secular business cults, and religious cults provided opportunity to investigate the business elements and practices which sustained these three religious cults.

Individual accounts presented throughout the Duplass and Duplass (2018) documentary series and Washington's (2017) podcast, indicate the framework of the Rajneeshees and Heaven's Gate, and includes the supervisory organization as well as the failed ventures and poor decision-making which led to their collapse. Investigating each cult also included delving into their means of revenue accumulation and their value proposition. Extensive research conducted by Moore and McGehee (2013), indicates the net worth of the Jonestown compound of the People's Temple, and public records maintained by the Online Archive of California includes dozens of corporations held by the group. Each religious cult was analyzed to assess facets of their organization which correlated with the previously outlined definition of a business, including business entity, organizational structure, recruiting, marketing, and revenue generation. Relevant aspects of their businesses are included below, and can be found in Appendix A.

Overview of the Three Cults

The People's Temple

Jim Jones was born May 13, 1931 in rural Indiana, and throughout his teenage years

he struggled to find work and was unsure of which path to take in life (Moore & McGehee, 2013). Jones had an entrepreneurial spirit, and by the early 1950's had a few failed business ventures under his belt, including the door-to-door sale of live monkeys (Howard, 2017). According to Moore and McGehee (2013), in 1952 Jones decided to pursue a career in ministry when he became the student pastor at Somerset Methodist Church. This church was in an impoverished section of Indianapolis and had a primarily Caucasian congregation, which Jones hoped to begin integrating with the local African American community. Somerset Methodist Church was uninterested in integrating races, so Jones left the church to start his own congregation known as The Wings of Deliverance in 1955 (Moore & McGehee, 2013). Later, this group would become known as the People's Temple. In the mid-1960's Jim Jones elected to move his church from Indiana to California and was followed by many from his congregation (Howard, 2017). Within a few years, Jones realized the potential in the area and quickly expanded his recruiting efforts as he opened new churches across the state.

In 1977, nearly 1,000 members from his California-based church followed Jones to Guyana at the promise of a socialist utopia. Ultimately, the utopia was nonexistent, and congregants were forced to dedicate long hours to physical labor, promised only small amounts of food, and were coaxed into completing suicide drills to prove loyalty to Jim Jones (Howard, 2017). Upon arriving in Guyana, and in the spirit of a true socialist utopia, members of the People's Temple were required to relinquish their passports and prescription medications to be used as part of the community supply (Howard, 2017). Howard (2017) states in her podcast that members were subjected to beatings and punishment for questioning Jones' authority and had all methods of communication with the outside world

monitored by more loyal members of the group. Additionally, as Jim Jones gave into declining health and addiction to various drugs, he required constant armed security patrols at the border of the compound and encouraged congregants to notify appropriate members of suspected disloyal behaviors (Howard, 2017).

After only one year in Guyana, the members of the People's Temple at Jonestown met the demise they had been practicing. Following a routine wellness visit by U.S. Representative Leo Ryan of California, the Jonestown Security Officers known as the Red Brigade ambushed Congressman Ryan, his congressional aide, nine journalists, nearly a dozen Jonestown defectors, and members of their families on the Port Kaituma airstrip near the Jonestown agricultural project (Howard, 2017). The raid killed five, including Congressman Ryan, and seriously injured many others (Howard, 2017). After the ambush, Jones demanded the balance of the congregation ingest a mixture of cyanide, Flavor-Aid, and Kool-Aid (Howard, 2017). In total, 909 members of the People's Temple lost their lives in the massacre from either ingesting or injection of the cyanide mixture. In her podcast, Howard (2017) states that Jim Jones was later found dead from a single gunshot wound to the head, and only 33 members of the group survived the massacre due to escaping into the jungle or having been away from the compound during the event. From this mass suicide, a history of events has been pieced together with the help of the "death tape" which began recording as Jones shouted that the time had finally come for the "revolutionary suicide" his congregation had practiced (Howard, 2017).

Heaven's Gate

Bonnie Lu Nettles was a nurse in a Houston, TX area hospital in the 1960's and early 1970's, as well as a mother of four children (Zeller, 2014). In 1972, overwhelmed both by

her ongoing divorce and medical issues with her children, Nettles discovered the Theosophical Society in America, which Zeller (2014) defines as "an eclectic religious body emphasizing a variety of spiritual practices," (p.19) and immersed herself in their unconventional teachings. Nettles was fascinated with the "subculture of disincarnated spirits, ascended masters, and telepathic powers," (Zeller, p.19), and was proficient in astrology as she frequently read and drew astrological charts for friends and family, and predicted their futures with the help of spirits she believed she could access beyond the grave. During this time, Nettles was writing the astrological sign column for the local newspaper and became convinced she had been given her abilities by God (Zellers, 2014). After an evening stargazing with her oldest daughter in 1972, Nettles noticed an unidentified flying object in the Houston night sky and found herself speculating on what life would be like if she left Earth and relocated to Outer Space (Washington, 2017).

Simultaneously, Marshall Herff Applewhite was failing in nearly every facet of his life: he was unemployed, recently divorced, estranged from his two children, and had an unsuccessful business he had recently closed (Zeller, 2014). By the early 1970's, Applewhite began having increasingly frightening spiritual experiences wherein God foretold of a mission that ultimately defined the meaning of his life (Washington, 2017). According to Washington (2017), in 1972 Applewhite traveled to Houston to visit a friend in the hospital which resulted in his chance encounter with Bonnie Lu Nettles. Nettles offered to read Applewhite's astrological chart and conclusively determined that their paths were meant to cross, as their fates were intertwined (Zeller, 2014). Washington (2017) speculates that had this spontaneous meeting never occurred, Heaven's Gate would have likely never formed, as Nettles and Applewhite truly believed they were brought together in this chance encounter

through divinity.

In an interview with Terrie Nettles, Bonnie Lu's oldest daughter, Washington (2017) learns that on January 1, 1973, Nettles and Applewhite elected to leave their worldly lives behind and left Houston to travel the country in search of not only themselves but also followers. During this journey of self-exploration, the pair crisscrossed the United States as they met with various guru's, visited other New Age religious retreats, and ultimately took odd jobs, such as ditch digging, to earn money for their odyssey (Washington, 2017). Benjamin Zeller recounts in an interview with Washington (2017) that because the pair truly believed they had been sent on a mission by God, they were unrestricted by social norms and rules, often electing to leave before paying checks at restaurants and bills for hotel rooms. Later in 1973, Nettles and Applewhite found the purpose they had been seeking as they camped alongside the Rogue River in southwest Oregon (Washington, 2017). According to Washington (2017) many religious cults are founded based on analysis of Revelation in the Bible, and Heaven's Gate was no different. Throughout the eleventh chapter of Revelation, great mention is made of the two witnesses who "will prophesy for 1,260 days," and after much ridicule will meet an untimely death, only to rise again after three and a half days and ascend into heaven (Revelation 11, The New International Version). Washington (2017) states that this passage allows for interpretation of the two witnesses, who are undefined in the scripture, and alternative-Christian leaders find similarities which exist between themselves and the religious beings. Following their epiphany at the Oregon campsite, Bonnie Lu Nettles and Marshall Herff Applewhite determined they were "the Two" witnesses who would face mockery and scorn, live in poverty and humiliation, and be murdered but rise again, and began referring to themselves by this moniker (Washington,

2017). According to Zeller (2014) unlike the prediction in Revelation of the two witnesses ascending into Heaven, Nettles and Applewhite believed they were extraterrestrial prophets from Outer Space who were responsible for bringing a message to Earth about the end of days. Nettles and Applewhite began referring to themselves as "the Two," and were convinced that their resurrection would be possible through extraterrestrial technology; a technology that would ultimately change all human bodies into alien beings so long as humanity accepted their lessons and rejected their worldly possessions (Zeller, 2014).

After returning to Houston, the Two recruited their first follower, Sharon, in May 1974 (Zeller, 2014). Zeller (2014) recounts that Sharon was required to forfeit her earthly life, leave her home and belongings, and abandon her husband and daughter to travel the country and announce the upcoming arrival of the Two and their gospel. Sharon only survived four months with Nettles and Applewhite before returning home to her husband and child, although within one year over twenty new recruits would take her place (Zeller, 2014). The New York Times reported on October 7, 1975 that one month earlier, September 14, 1975, between twenty and thirty people were reported missing after attending a Heaven's Gate recruiting event held at a hotel in Waldport, Oregon (Zeller, 2014). Zeller (2014) writes that for the next ten years, the group gained and lost members as it roamed the United States preaching the extraterrestrial gospel taught by Nettles and Applewhite. It was reported that at their peak, Heaven's Gate consisted of anywhere between 300 and 1,000 members, although due to their nomadic lifestyle and limited organizational leadership by the Two, there is no confirmation on this figure (Zeller, 2014).

In 1985, Bonnie Lu Nettles died of liver cancer which laid the groundwork for Marshall Herff Applewhite to restructure the group, establish new rules, and amend the

teachings and beliefs (Washington, 2017). While Heaven's Gate was initially founded in 1975, the mass suicide which claimed the lives of 39 members did not occur until 1997 (Urban, 2000). These members intentionally timed their suicide with the passing of the Hale-Bopp comet, as one of the core beliefs of Heaven's Gate members was that their earthly bodies were mere vehicles hosting them until they died and re-emerged on a spacecraft trailing the comet (Brigham et. al, 2017, p. 79). Between March 22-23, 1997, the 39 members and Marshall Applewhite dressed in their "Heaven's Gate Away Team" track suits, laced up the now infamous black Nike shoes, and ingested a mixture of barbiturates and alcohol in their Rancho Santa Fe, California mansion as they graduated from Earth to the awaiting spacecraft (Zeller, 2014). Each member was guided into their afterlife by a fellow follower, and as their least breath was taken, a single purple shroud was placed over their face (Zeller, 2014). Zeller (2014) writes that the suicides were reported on March 26, 1997 when a former Heaven's Gate member received a letter from the group and ventured to their home in Rancho Santa Fe, already knowing what he would find inside. Upon arrival, he called 911 to report the deaths and left the mansion.

Rajneeshpuram

Mohan Chandra Rajneesh, later known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was born December 11, 1931 in Kuchwada, India (Melton, 2020). After studying Philosophy at Saugar University and teaching at various universities, Rajneesh began traveling India educating potential followers on the power of his four-part meditation sequence (Carter, 1987). Eventually, Rajneesh established a religious retreat known as an ashram in Poona, India which offered the opportunity for followers worldwide to participate in meditation sequences in his presence. These followers flocked to Poona from across the globe seeking

the heightened sense of spirituality, harmony, awareness, and respect that Bhagwan advertised as the idea of "the new man" (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Lewis F. Carter (1987) suggests that due to the Western popularity of The Human Potential movement, the idea that all people have untapped potential simply awaiting cultivation, many young professionals and intellectuals were seeking spiritual enlightenment and made the pilgrimage to Poona in hopes of offering themselves and their talents to Bhagwan. In the Netflix documentary, *Wild Wild Country*, Duplass and Duplass (2018), state that within five years, the ashram touted over 30,000 visitors from around the world who sought the opportunity to sit at the feet of Rajneesh as he lectured on the idea of "the awakened being."

In the early 1980's, Bhagwan's personal secretary, Ma Anand Sheela, procured a visa to enter the United States from the consulate in Bombay, and located the site of their next ashram. On June 1, 1981 it was announced that Bhagwan had committed to a vow of silence, likely strategically planned to prevent conflicts with the Indian government and had delegated his power of attorney to Sheela, and within two months, Bhagwan, Sheela, and a small group of wealthy followers were in the United States (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). As recounted by Duplass and Duplass (2018), attempting to leave India undetected, Bhagwan's followers within the Poona ashram were not alerted of their departure, as they left in the middle of the night with plans to summon the group once the new ashram was established. Carter (1987) reports that Rajneesh initially entered the U.S. using a 90-day medical visa, but extended his stay indefinitely by claiming sanctuary as a religious leader. By August 1981 Sheela had arranged the purchase of the Big Muddy Ranch, a property in Antelope, Oregon which spanned 64,229 acres, and began the settling of their new city (Oregonian, 1985a). Duplass and Duplass (2018) detail the methods of fundraising for Sheela to amass the

resources to purchase the Big Muddy Ranch, and suggest a combination of efforts ranging from the sale of handmade goods in Poona to beginning their own banking operation at the ashram supported the endeavor. According to The Oregonian (1985a), this ranch settlement was intended to serve as the empire of the Rajneesh religion which would operate as a theocratic society. Local farmers and townspeople were appalled, as the ranch had been sold under the guise of a simple farming commune, therefore friction with the local town and county governments was imminent (Oregonian, 1985a). Beginning immediately thereafter, disciples of Rajneesh who had been abandoned in Poona began arriving in Antelope. Duplass and Duplass (2018) report in *Wild Wild Country* that Antelope townspeople recall the first days of the arriving disciples: the Rajneeshees were dressed head-to-toe in hues of orange and red, wearing a traditional mala necklace which, aside from the 108 wooden beads, also featured a pendant with a photograph of Rajneesh imprinted on it.

According to Duplass and Duplass (2018), serious conflicts arose between the Rajneeshees and the Antelope townsfolk in late 1981, wherein concerned citizens sought assistance from the environmental organization 1,000 Friends of Oregon in hopes of both preventing further construction in the city of Rajneeshpuram as well as forcing the demolition of existing buildings (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Duplass and Duplass (2018) feature interviews throughout *Wild Wild Country* which describe the downward spiral of Rajneeshpuram throughout 1982-1983 as construction of their city grinded to a halt with their properties tied up in court proceedings. To counteract this, Ma Anand Sheela demanded the purchase of available Antelope properties, and by election day in 1982, Rajneeshees outnumbered Antelope citizens. Residents were fearful of the future of Antelope and staged an election to disincorporate the area in hopes of dissuading Rajneeshee interest in their

assets but were unable to pass the measure after a vote of 42 to 55, with the Rajneeshees preventing the disincorporation (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Duplass and Duplass (2018) report that following the election, the Rajneeshees officially controlled the Antelope City Council, started the Peace Force after members received law enforcement training from the Oregon Police Academy, and eventually renamed the town of Antelope to Rajneesh. The Peace Force of Rajneeshpuram played an important role in the safety and security of the commune, particularly after the Hotel Portland, which was owned and operated by the Rajneeshee group was bombed in 1983. While there were sixty disciples in the building, no one was harmed, but this event became the impetus for the stockpiling of weapons in Rajneeshpuram (Oregonian, 1985b).

Finding the commune unable to grow due to pending lawsuits, Ma Anand Sheela launched a full-scale attack against Wasco County, Oregon preceding the 1984 election. Duplass and Duplass (2018) report that in the months leading to the general election, Rajneeshees traveled the United States to find pockets of homeless individuals and offered them free bus tickets in exchange for relocating to Rajneeshpuram. The Oregonian (1985b) reports that over the course of 39 days, the population of Rajneeshpuram more than doubled, as over 3,000 homeless were bused in from across the country. Historically, Oregon has had lenient voter registration laws, which led Ma Anand Sheela to believe she could swing the county vote in favor of Rajneeshpuram by adding citizens to their compound (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Because of these lenient voter laws, Duplass and Duplass (2018) note that forty-two days prior to the general election, a busload of newly relocated Rajneeshees were driven from Rajneeshpuram to The Dalles, Oregon where they planned to register to vote, but were quickly turned away with the news that Wasco County, Oregon had temporarily

suspended the right of any new residents to register. Duplass and Duplass (2018) investigate the series of events following this act, which ultimately incited the collapse of the compound. In an attempt by Ma Anand Sheela and the Rajneesh Medical Corporation to prevent Wasco County residents from casting ballots, the food buffets of popular local restaurants were poisoned with salmonella, which resulted in 750 residents falling ill (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Following the election, a seemingly defeated Rajneeshee population prepared to fight back against the city and county. A mysterious fire engulfed the city planning office, boxes of "dark secrets" chocolates were injected with poison and mailed to residents, assassinations of local government officials and journalists were planned, and the homeless population which had been bused in by the thousands were drugged with Haldol and forcibly removed from the compound only to appear in neighboring cities (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Throughout *Wild Wild Country*, Duplass and Duplass (2018) also detail the implosion occurring within the city limits of Rajneeshpuram, as Sheela ordered the murder of Bhagwan's personal physician, but fled to Germany with her closest comrades when the murder plot went awry.

In the end, Bhagwan was arrested in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 28, 1985 after an attempt to flee the country and was indicted on charges of conspiracy to defraud the United States and making false statements regarding harboring aliens (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). In an interview with Robert Weaver, the Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon, Duplass and Duplass (2018) report that Bhagwan accepted a plea deal, plead guilty to immigration fraud, and left the United States. Ma Anand Sheela, however, was extradited from Germany to the United States, where she was sentenced to 4-1/2 years in prison, repayment of $469,000 in fines, and a mandate that she depart the U.S. immediately

following her release from prison (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). It is reported by Duplass and Duplass (2018) that those in Sheela's inner circle were also extradited, with some settling plea deals and others serving up to ten years in a federal penitentiary. At the time the FBI raided the Rajneeshpuram compound they discovered a weapons stockpile significantly larger than that of all Oregon law enforcement agencies combined, and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh claimed to have been blissfully unaware of Sheela's devious actions (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). According to Duplass and Duplass (2018), at its height, Rajneeshism boasted over 30,000 working sannyasins, who were individuals that pledged loyalty to the commune and renounced their material possessions, as well as 500,000 total followers in their global community, but is now infamously remembered as the largest cases of wiretapping, poison, and immigration fraud in United States history.

Building a Business

The People's Temple

The People's Temple was a sole proprietorship initially begun by Reverend Jim Jones. According to Moore and McGehee (2013) the People's Temple was much more than simply a religious organization, as it was also a social welfare advocacy group, a political organization, and later a communal utopian experiment. While Jim Jones was the key principal of the firm, he was assisted in its daily operations through ten departments within the Jonestown community: Agriculture and Livestock, Business and Industry, Construction, Power and Transportation, Education, Housing and Population, Entertainment and Guests, Foods and Central Supply, Health Services, Public Utilities, Security, and Small Shops (Moore & McGehee, 2013). Moore and McGehee (2013) provide a visual representation of available positions within Jonestown which includes each People's Temple member's name,

age, job activity, job title and classification, and which department employed them. Importantly, each department had a person in a manager or supervisory role overseeing individual workers. Before the relocation to Guyana, Jim Jones had operated small churches in California, but he sought the opportunity to expand his church services and grow his brand. Realizing he should gain positive favor from the local community, Jones made hefty donations to local charity organizations and supported local area politicians (Howard, 2017). He funded social and medical programs for the impoverished within the community and provided legal and rehabilitation services to those in need (Howard, 2017). Jones quickly recognized the potential recruiting opportunity within offering these services and found himself with thousands of congregants (Howard, 2017). Additionally, in an effort to advertise People's Temple and interest potential newcomers, Jones purchased airtime on a local radio station to broadcast his sermons (Blakemore, 2018).

Many of the individuals Jones focused on recruiting were those who had been all too frequently overlooked by society. He concentrated on the African American population, those in the throes of poverty, individuals in need of rehabilitation or medical treatment, and the disenfranchised (Howard, 2017). He tricked them into paying for phony spiritual healings, as many of his followers believed he possessed Biblical powers and could heal ailing members of the group. Howard (2017) states in her podcast that once the churchgoers had been conned by Jones' staged cancer "healings," these members often surrendered earthly possessions to Jones in hopes of him using the resources and his talents for the greater good. These donations included not only personal belongings, but also their homes and even the custody of their children (Howard, 2017). With the small fortune from his congregation amassed in his bank accounts, Jones leased land in Guyana, South America in 1974 (Howard,

2017).

According to Moore and McGehee (2013), Jim Jones elected to move People's Temple to Guyana after much deliberation and planning had excluded other potential options. Jones outlined necessary criteria for a country which would provide a safe haven for himself and his followers, and while Cuba was ideal, the language barrier, Communist government, and anticipated issues with Fidel Castro quickly eliminated the possibility (Moore & McGehee, 2013). In considering options, Jones sought the following attributes for a new country: a socialist government, a significant black population, suitable climate, close proximity to the United States to reduce moving costs for his congregation, and a population which primarily spoke English (Moore & McGehee, 2013). Moore and McGehee (2013) note that Jones was constantly in search of the next utopia for his followers, and even after establishing Jonestown in Guyana, there were plans being made, and actions being taken, to ultimately relocate the group to the Soviet Union. Moore and McGehee (2013) report that Jones was so focused on the Soviet Union as a final location for People's Temple that he required many members of Jonestown to take Russian language classes, and even invited Soviet diplomats from the nearby Guyana capital to visit his agricultural project. Jones had determined the Soviet Union would be heaven on Earth for his followers because the country was governed in direct opposition to the United States, eliminated many of his tax woes, and provided the highest likelihood of his group surviving a nuclear holocaust, which he obsessively preached was an inevitable event (Moore & McGehee, 2013).

In the chaos preceding the mass suicide in Jonestown, three high-ranking People's Temple officials fled into the jungle with suitcases containing $500,000 in cash which was intended to be a donation to the Soviet Union, but the cash was abandoned in the brush and

later found by the Guyanese government (Moore & McGehee, 2013). In the end, the People's Temple was valued at over $10 million dollars due to their ownership and operation of many subsidiary corporations which are listed by the California Historical Society. These subsidiaries include, but are not limited to, publishing companies, credit unions, and youth and senior care facilities, as well as sites which printed money order vouchers and blank checks for their various corporations (Larson et al., 1985). Larson and colleagues (1985) also note the existence of records for the Apostolic Corporation, the People's Temple life care retirement plan, and provide detailed information about the complicated network of bank accounts which were intertwined with the operations of the People's Temple. Following the tragedy in Guyana, Robert H. Fabian was granted control as the court receiver in California to settle matters and assets for the People's Temple. Larson and colleagues (1985) note that Fabian and his staff traveled to six countries in hopes of uncovering the assets owned by Jim Jones' organization and ultimately located accounts in Panama, Venezuela, Grenada, and Switzerland. Moore and McGehee (2013) suggest that following the mass suicide in Jonestown, $931,367 was discovered in U.S. dollars in the compound, $22,400 was discovered in Guyanese dollars, over $2M was located in the Swiss Bank Corporation, $5.2M was found in the Union Bank of Switzerland, and $295,000 was handed over in California by People's Temple members to their attorney.

As previously mentioned, Jim Jones allegedly intended on proving Jonestown to be a socialist utopia "that offered sanctuary from racial discrimination, [and offered] opportunity for education and employment, and the promise of lifelong economic security," (Shearer, 2018, p. 66) but during this venture, managed instead to build a massive corporation. As indicated by the various occupational departments within Jonestown, it is apparent that a

classical management construct was present with siloed working conditions, divisions of labor, and a regimented hierarchy. Even with this ever-present management approach, Shearer (2018) mentions journal entries and notes by People's Temple followers, found after the tragedy, which recount pleasant encounters with Jim Jones wherein he acknowledged them, recognized them for a job well done, and rewarded them with praise in front of others. Strangely, followers living in Jonestown had already turned over all personal assets to Jim Jones prior to their arrival at the agricultural project, and many of those assets had been liquidated to generate revenue (Howard, 2017). At the same time, the followers then agreed to faithfully work for Jones at the commune to sustain the group, all while living from a shared accounting purse. To further elaborate on followers' roles within the commune, Shearer (2018) notes that a questionnaire was provided to each People's Temple member prior to their move to Jonestown which asked that they select the role they would prefer to have upon their arrival at the agricultural project. Following the identification of that role, congregants were required to apply for the position, with the most highly qualified candidate being chosen, much like the process of applying for employment in the private and public sectors.

In the case of the People's Temple and Jonestown, the product offered was the idea of a socialist utopia with all races living equally and sustainably which was easily marketed to the disenfranchised communities targeted by Jones. Social scientists suggest there are seven elements of indoctrination into a cult with the first being the idea that the individual or individuals being recruited are at a crossroads in life (Ernst, 2019). While a socialist utopia is an unconventional product, Jim Jones recognized the fragile emotional state of many prospective followers and capitalized on the opportunity to sell them the concept of a safe

space within his congregation. Similar to the strategy used by a multi-level marketing corporation, the People's Temple primarily focused on word-of-mouth to recruit new followers, as well as their community involvement, and advertisements on local radio stations. While the operations of Jonestown were divided up across an organizational hierarchy including ten specific departments, Jim Jones also had a close-knit circle of supporters known as The Planning Committee, which included his lieutenants and trusted allies (Howard, 2017). Lastly, the generation of revenue came easily for Jones, as his followers willingly donated their personal assets for the success of the church, which Jones immediately liquidated and used for group gain. Moore and McGehee (2013) have also reported that revenue was generated through followers living in People's Temple subsidiary properties who turned over their wages and Social Security checks.

Heaven's Gate

Heaven's Gate was a partnership, as the foundation of the group was laid by Marshall Herff Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles. In 1972 a New Age bookstore called "The Christian Arts Center" was opened by the pair in Houston, but failed almost immediately (Zeller, 2014). After another unsuccessful business venture, a second New Age bookstore and retreat center, Nettles decided that the pair should live the life they have attempted to teach others: reading and writing New Age lore and living nomadically on a constant retreat of self-reflection and self-actualization (Washington, 2017). According to Ken Colwell (2019), in a partnership, both parties should contribute and participate in the management of the business equally, and Benjamin Zeller (2014), states that the Two shared responsibility for their followers as they tirelessly worked together to fortify the group until Nettles' death in 1985.

In the early days of Heaven's Gate, there was little organization, and the few recruits present lived by vague rules established by Nettles and Applewhite. In a 1977 academic journal, Robert W. Balch and David Taylor describe the recruiting tactics of the Heaven's Gate leaders (Balch & Taylor, 1977). While many believe the group members were brainwashed, recruiting tactics included the requirement that potential members abandon their traditional lives and live as nomads with the balance of the group as they sought Human Individual Metamorphosis (Balch & Taylor, 1977). Brainwashing is an unlikely explanation, as Balch and Taylor (1977) suggest that the average length of exposure by recruits to the Two was less than six hours. Regardless, as the group expanded, Nettles and Applewhite demonstrated less interest in participating in recruiting meetings, seldom traveled with the group, and encouraged existing members to recruit new ones in an organizational structure reminiscent of multi-level marketing, or a pyramid scheme (Zeller, 2014).

Through 1975, the group struggled with lack of top-down communication, and all members cited communication deficiencies throughout the formative years. Zeller (2014) notes that most followers felt abandoned by Nettles and Applewhite and were forced to rely on one another for religious teachings, general information, and recruiting guidelines. Balch and Taylor (1977) provide further insight into the organizational structure of Heaven's Gate by noting that the larger congregation was divided into "families" of 14 members who were responsible for traveling the country and recruiting followers. Each "family" had two spokespeople who had been selected by Nettles and Applewhite, but the role within each group was often vacant. This breakdown of communication nearly caused the collapse of the group, as many members defected and some sought interviews with the media in hopes that publishing or airing the encounter would reestablish contact with the balance of the group

(Zeller, 2014). Recognizing these areas of weakness, Nettles and Applewhite elected to institute a "rigid hierarchal social structure predicated on their absolute control over the social and religious lives of their adherents," (Zeller, 2014, p. 41) which evidences their shift into a management role rather than that of religious leaders.

The members of Heaven's Gate used multiple methods to advertise and market in attempts to gain followers. Existing members held frequent town-hall style meetings where they would "put up posters announcing the meeting, usually in "head shops," in health food stores, and around college campuses," (Balch & Taylor, 1997, p. 844) speak for up to twenty minutes, and then offer an opportunity for audience questions. Zeller (2014) suggests that much of the appeal of Heaven's Gate was the fact that Nettles and Applewhite were "offering a product that claimed exclusivity," (p. 48) as they "situated their movement within the American religious marketplace in a place where they could appeal to spiritual seekers looking to escape from a cycle," (p. 49) indicating an effective marketing strategy. During these meetings, Nettles and Applewhite carefully crafted their verbiage as they typically "couched the absolutism of their message in language designed to appeal to the open-minded tolerance of the seeker," (Balch & Taylor, 1997, p. 853) again demonstrating the importance of audience as they marketed their group. Additional marketing strategies attempted by Heaven's Gate include a booklet created about their religion that they printed and mailed to New Age bookstores in 1988, a television series aired on satellite stations in 1991 and 1992, and a national newspaper advertisement published in 1993 and 1994 (Zeller, 2014).

Between 1994 and 1997, Heaven's Gate migrated both their marketing strategy and revenue generation to the Internet. Their website, HeavensGate.com is still in existence today, and suggests visitors should request reference materials as well as purchase their book,

which is an anthology of all Heaven's Gate reference materials. Additionally, two videos filmed in 1996 are available for purchase, appropriately titled "*Last Chance to Evacuate Earth Before It's Recycled*" and "*Planet Earth About To Be Recycled – Your Only Chance to Survive – Leave With Us*". Both the book and videos are available in English as well as German, and the opportunity is available to simply purchase transcripts of the videos. The website also includes hyperlinks to Marshall Applewhite's purpose and belief statements, a link titled "How a Member of the Kingdom of Heaven might appear" which opens a photograph of an extraterrestrial being, and ironically, the group's position against suicide. Lastly, the Heaven's Gate organization offered a technology-based business in the form of a Web-design company called "Higher Source" which touted cost effective Web solutions and a high level of customer service (Urban, 2000).

The members of Heaven's Gate were expected to dedicate the majority of their time to overcoming their human bonds and seeking a higher level of understanding. To accomplish this, Nettles and Applewhite insisted on a shared purse for group expenses, which would guarantee adequate food, housing, and transportation for all members (Zeller, 2014). At times, the purse would reach an alarmingly low level, and members of the group were instructed to secure temporary employment in an effort to refill the shared account. Zeller (2014) states that the Two were worried permanent employment would result in the reattachment to humanness, which Nettles and Applewhite had spent years attempting to sever. Nevertheless, the total control of finances by Applewhite appropriately demonstrates the money management technique of the cult as a business. Followers, like employees, worked to sustain the organization, as they were assigned tasks, chores, and jobs to ensure the success of the group, or company, as a whole. According to Zeller (2014), members

wanting to spend money, regardless of the amount, were required to ask Applewhite for permission to withdraw the funds, and risked being rejected, similar in nature to an employee asking a supervisor to approve a business expense. In considering the traits of the Heaven's Gate's business, there is a definitive economic model, relationship with customers, internal infrastructure, as well as a target market (Morris et al., 2013). Relative to the group's product offering, Zeller (2014) states that "the founders of Heaven's Gate made an ironic religious offer: they appealed to spiritually individualistic seekers, but they also declared that they offered the single best religious system and that one no longer needed to continue one's search," (p. 45) an offer which appealed to those considered to be spiritual deviants who seemed incapable of finding the community of believers they had been seeking. According to Zeller (2014), Bonnie Lu Nettles and Marshall Applewhite promised to take their followers to the Next Level, which they vaguely defined as the kingdoms of Heaven and science, and stated it was only accessible once a follower had completed an on-Earth metamorphosis which effectively prepared them for a physical transformation prior to leaving the planet. Nettles and Applewhite prophesized that this opportunity only presented itself every two thousand years, and guaranteed that through their methods and processes, a follower could enter the Next Level in bodily form without having to perish beforehand.

Rajneeshpuram

Unlike the People's Temple and Heaven's Gate, Rajneeshpuram is organized in a fashion most similar to a corporation. Early in his career, during Rajneesh's travels through India, he was writing and publishing books on religion, yoga, and philosophy, as well as recording stream-of-consciousness sermon-like discourses to sell to his followers via cassette tape (Carter, 1987). By 1974, he had amassed thousands of followers in his recently created

ashram in Poona, India. While Bhagwan was a charismatic individual with easily marketable messages and beliefs, he required assistance in running such a large operation. His personal assistant, Ma Anand Sheela became his spokesperson and power of attorney in 1981 prior to his relocation to the United States. As the commune grew, classes within the organization became more apparent. These classes included the personal faculty dedicated to Rajneesh, various sannyasins, and newer followers who were working through the ranks of the community.

Within months of the Rajneeshees migrating to the United States, the city of Rajneeshpuram had been incorporated and construction had begun on a shopping center, banking operation, pizza parlor, clothing boutique, airport, dozens of A-frame homes, electric power plant, and a meditation hall, all of which were intended to be the shrine to Bhagwan while he was alive (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Following this relocation of the group, a more distinct organizational structure became apparent. Duplass and Duplass (2018) highlight the social divides within the commune, as Ma Anand Sheela and Bhagwan resided in sprawling homes surrounded by their closest assistants, and the balance of the followers within the community occupied much smaller A-frame residences. These close assistants were selected based on demonstrated loyalty to Sheela and Bhagwan and were critical in the decision-making process within the commune. In addition to these individuals, Bhagwan also had a personal attorney, physician, and President of his corporation (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Rajneeshpuram, as a community, also was host to an internal organization which included a mayor, shop "owners," janitors, food service workers, meditation leaders, etc.

Prior to the commune's relocation to Antelope, revenue generation was necessary to both sustain the ashram in Poona as well as plan for the future move to the United States. To

accomplish these goals, Ma Anand Sheela implemented a system similar to that of shareholders purchasing stock in a large corporation. While in Poona, the ashram borrowed money from the followers to fund projects and issued them a bank card in return which allowed them to shop in the small stores within the commune (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). This arrangement resulted in significant cash flow for the ashram, which Sheela recounts exceeded several hundred thousand dollars. After loaning their money, the followers were asked to work for the commune to prove dedication to Bhagwan. Ma Shanti B, who relocated to Poona from Perth, Australia to follow Bhagwan recalls arriving at the commune, registering in the home office, and immediately being assigned restroom cleaning duty which she loyally performed for over one year (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Throughout the documentary, Duplass and Duplass (2018) also reveal the initial community marketplace in Poona where sannyasins sold clothing and wares to the local residents. In an interview with Ma Anand Sheela during the documentary, she suggests that the product the Rajneeshees were selling was meditation, and she explains that the sale of the good generated American dollars rather than Indian rupees. Sheela also discloses that Bhagwan's goal was to create a capitalistic working community, which she presided over (Duplass & Duplass, 2018).

In the end, Rajneeshpuram was a corporate community which consisted of multiple business entities generating revenue to sustain the commune in Oregon (Oregonian, 1985c). Reports made in the newspaper list thirteen business entities including Rajneesh Investment Corp., Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune., and the Rajneesh Foundation (Oregonian, 1985c). Noted within the same article, the Oregonian (1985c) states that "in 1983, the church spent $469,737 publishing books and producing videotapes, while the commune spent $961,000 on its boutiques and another $752,000 on its restaurants and

nightclubs" (paragraph 10). Additionally, Duplass and Duplass (2018) report that the commune hosted an annual World Festival which encouraged followers from the global community to convene in Rajneeshpuram for nearly a week-long meditation retreat which also generated revenue from boarding, food purchase, shopping, and personal care institutions such as hair and nail salons within the compound. Notably, at the time of the 1983 World Festival, the aforementioned business entities held over $65M in revenue (Duplass & Duplass, 2018). Finally, in an interview with the Oregonian (1985c) a former security guard for the ashram states, "money is definitely the underlying reason for the organization," (part 15, paragraph 30) which is further supported in meeting minutes from November 14, 1982 when Rajneesh "expressed a willingness to abandon his vow of silence," (part 15, paragraph 31) after a three year hiatus in an effort to attract more followers and increase the commune's cashflow. In analyzing the Rajneeshees and considering the characteristics of a business, it is apparent that Bhagwan and Sheela offered meditation and a communistic society as a product, targeted those seeking a higher purpose who were pliable on account of the Human Potential Movement, carefully crafted their organizational structure to maximize efficiencies, and generated a sustainable revenue.

Conclusion

Through researching the three religious cults, it became apparent that while qualities of business existed within their organization, the businesses had varying degrees of success. In analyzing interviews from *Wild Wild Country* and *Heaven's Gate*, as well as the information available regarding People's Temple, a hierarchy and managerial structure were evident. Rajneeshpuram seemingly established the most successful groundwork for a business in that similar to an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), or employee-owned

company, all members of the group lent their financial resources to the leader-run bank to fund the group's growth. Duplass and Duplass (2018) recount the degradation of the Rajneeshee organization on account of Ma Anand Sheela's greed and Bhagwan's poor business decisions. As previously mentioned, Sheela stated that the product being offered by Rajneeshpuram was meditation, which generated a sustainable revenue for the group (Duplass & Duplass, 2018).

Heaven's Gate established an adequate foundation for business success, which is likely a result of the failed enterprises attempted by Nettles and Applewhite early in their relationship. The group was operated by a shared purse where all members contributed to the organization's finances, and similar to a traditional business enterprise, expenses were required to be reviewed by the leader (Zeller, 2014). The recruiting, marketing, and product offering of Heaven's Gate were intertwined, as the group offered a community for those seeking a combination of religion and extraterrestrial life, many of whom had migrated between religious groups, and they heavily relied on town-hall events in New Age bookstores and college campuses to gain followers (Zeller, 2014). Zeller (2014) states that early in the formation of the group, an internal structure was established which relied on group accountability, but after an organizational collapse with many members defecting, Nettles and Applewhite stepped forward to manage the group.

While Jim Jones touted the idea of a socialist utopia, which ultimately became the value and product he offered to his followers, his agricultural project at Jonestown ended in disaster. Jones recognized that he could quickly and easily market his church, the People's Temple, and recruit disenfranchised members of the public. These followers ultimately gave personal property, money, and even the rights to their children willingly to Jones because of

the sense of community he instilled in them through his sermons and community involvement (Howard, 2017). The People's Temple had a formal organizational structure in Jonestown, Guyana, which was heavily focused on individual departments managed by supervisors who reported to Jones (Shearer, 2018). Additionally, Jones' obsession with avoiding a nuclear holocaust and relocating his group to the Soviet Union resulted in a global network of bank accounts rather than cash-on-hand to tend to the needs of his followers living in their socialist utopia, as food and medical supplies were scarce in Guyana (Howard, 2017).

The establishment of a definition of business and an explanation of the qualities and characteristics of a religious cult were used to analyze the relationship between the two. In combining the criteria outlined for a business by Colwell (2019) and Morris and colleagues (2003), a firm requires a value or product offering, an internal network and infrastructure, product movement, revenue generation, and a plan to recruit and market. Similarly, the religious cults researched demonstrate qualities aligning with a business. While the product of a religious cult may not be tangible, it is a product nonetheless, due to the fact that it is marketed and leaders of the group profit from the distribution of the good. Although each of the three religious cults analyzed exhibited dissimilar internal infrastructure, there was an established hierarchy which was recognized by the followers or members. When compared to the secular business cults outlined previously, religious cults aligned with the critical attributes present in the corporate realm. As demonstrated in Appendix A, each of the religious cults examined implemented a plan for recruiting and marketing as well as revenue generation, which was often accomplished through multi-level marketing schemes or word-of-mouth, both strategies frequently utilized in the business realm. Through this extensive

research, I have concluded that as initially hypothesized, religious cults are operated in a fashion similar to that of a traditional business.

Appendix

Table 1
Business elements of religious cults

Business Element	Peoples Temple	Heaven's Gate	Rajneeshpuram
Organization	Sole proprietorship	Partnership	Corporation
Recruiting & Marketing Strategy	Multi-level marketing Community involvement Radio commercials	Town-hall style events Religious booklet Satellite television series National newspaper advertisement HeavensGate.com	Bhagwan's books and recorded discourses Word-of-mouth
Targeted Customers	Disenfranchised people African Americans	Those seeking religious exclusivity	Those seeking a higher purpose Those interested in the Human Potential Movement
Revenue Generation	Followers willingly gave Jim Jones deeds to homes and cars, which he sold Multiple corporations were owned by People's Temple Members willingly liquidated bank accounts to donate cash Jones faked spiritual healings to inspire donations during church services	Web design service – Higher Source All members worked odd-jobs to sustain the group Sale of apocalyptic videos Sale of Heaven's Gate anthology book	Sale of Bhagwan's books and recorded discourses Banking operation in Poona Rajneesh Investment Corp., Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune., and the Rajneesh Foundation Rajneeshee businesses such as hotels and boutique shops Annual World Festival
Product Sold	Idea of socialist utopia Sense of community for disenfranchised members who felt shut out from society	Sense of community for those who felt ostracized from mainstream religion	Meditation

Resources

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