

TEE for the 21st Century

*Tools to Equip and Empower God's
People for His Mission*

Chapter 14 Excerpt

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The Increase Association

A Theological Education Movement and Collaborative Network Strengthening TEE across Asia and Beyond

Richard Brown, Tim Green, and Graham Aylett

Introduction

The Increase Association,¹ also known as Increase, exists to connect and strengthen church-based training in Asia and among its diaspora peoples worldwide. Increase’s vision is “to see churches equipping all Christ’s followers in their contexts so that many millions are discipled and empowered for mission, ministry and leadership.”² Among theological educators, Increase also contributes to discourse on church-based training in general and TEE in particular, as evidenced in this present book.

This chapter tells the story of Increase’s development with reflections from a sociological perspective, so it has alternating sections of narrative and analysis. Some readers may prefer to focus on the former. To include a sociological perspective in a book on theological education is unusual and somewhat experimental, but this cross-disciplinary approach helps in understanding an organization that is social, human, and fallible – while also led by God. As

1. <https://www.increaseassociation.org>.

2. Both statements are in <https://www.increaseassociation.org/about/vision-purpose>.

authors who are also actors³ in Increase's story, we face the embarrassment of having to write about ourselves among others. Above all we want God to have the credit, and we will give evidences of his work even where this steps beyond sociological explanations.

The chapter begins by introducing relevant sociological theory, then continues with the story of Increase's development in three periods: 2006 to 2008, 2009 to 2014, and 2015 to 2020.

A Sociological Lens: Social Movements and Networks

Social movements

Scholarly interest in social movements has grown particularly since the 1990s.⁴ Social movements often start as a small group of friends gathering together around a common cause which may then develop into a full-blown movement. Contemporary social movements are often a response to social issues, concerns, and grievances.⁵ Social movements produce collective action and mobilization for bringing about desired change. Social movement research on "value-oriented" religious movements is important but less well established. However, some studies have been made in relation to Islamic activism:⁶ Wiktorowicz evaluates factors affecting mobilization of individuals including religious seeking, religious authority, commitment, and solidarity between members of the movement.⁷

Snow and colleagues explain that when social movements grow over time "the activities with which they are associated . . . become an increasingly

3. The word "actor" is used in its sociological sense, meaning participant. Tim Green was Increase Association General Secretary until March 2021 when Graham Aylett assumed that role. Richard Brown is an Increase Equipper. The narrative sections of this chapter are written by Green and Aylett, and analysis by Brown and Green.

4. della Porta, *Social Movements*; Diani and McAdam, *Social Movements and Networks*; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *Blackwell Companion*; Diani, "Social Movements and Collective Action."

5. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, "Mapping the Terrain," 3. Large-scale movements attract media attention on such issues as human rights, abortion, and environmental movements. Small-scale movements typically develop around less newsworthy local issues, such as protests against building plans or public amenity closure.

6. Bekele, "Islamist Activism"; Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*; Vertigans, *Militant Islam*; Sutton and Vertigans, "Militant Islam."

7. Wiktorowicz, "Introduction: Islamic Activism."

conspicuous feature of the social landscape.”⁸ In the landscape of theological education, Increase began as a small inconspicuous group of like-minded theological educators with a shared vision, which in time developed into a large transnational movement.

Development of social movements depends on characteristics including organizational form, collective identity, leadership, tactics, innovation, participant mobilization, diffusion, and framing.⁹ Social movements may experience divisions and factions. Benford observed for nuclear disarmament movements that “while a movement’s organizations typically share an overarching goal, disagreements frequently erupt . . . regarding specific objectives, strategies and tactics.”¹⁰ These intra-movement divisions can be both detrimental and facilitative,¹¹ as confirmed by other studies.¹² The analysis sections of this chapter discuss Increase as a social movement including a positive outcome that resulted despite an early divergence of vision.

Social networks

A second sociological lens providing valuable insights into Increase’s emergence and development is social network theory. Whereas social movements provide a framework for understanding Increase’s progressive growth, social networks focus on the characteristics and dynamics of relationships within the movement. Social network research has continued to grow prolifically since it emerged in 1970s.¹³ There are four concepts integral to social networks and useful for analysis of Increase.

8. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, “Mapping the Terrain,” 4.

9. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, 12.

10. Benford, “Frame Disputes,” 678.

11. Benford, 677.

12. Other social movements with intra-movement frame disputes include the American labour movement (Clemens, “Organizational Form as Frame”), the US anti-death penalty movement (Haines, *Against Capital Punishment*), and a study of a Black feminist movement (White, “Talking Feminist, Talking Black”).

13. Burt, *Structural Holes*; Burt, “Contingent Value”; Granovetter, “Strength of Weak Ties”; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, “Birds of a Feather”; Borgatti and Lopez-Kidwell, “Network Theory”; Lin, *Social Capital*; Everton, “Networks and Religion”; Wood and Gray, “Toward a Comprehensive Theory.”

1. Strength of “Weak Ties”

In his Strength of Weak Ties concept, Granovetter showed that a local community can mobilize and coordinate resources and action when it has a broad structure of weak ties (relationships with acquaintances) rather than a smaller dense network of strong ties (with close friends and colleagues).¹⁴ In other words, if many weak ties exist in a network they represent rich untapped resources with potential to be activated to achieve its aims and goals. The analysis below will highlight Increase’s intentional strategy to build a broad network of weak ties to serve its purposes.

2. Homophily

The building of a diverse transnational network such as Increase does not come naturally. The concept of homophily helps in understanding the dynamics. Borgatti and Lopez-Kidwell argue that “people tend to be *homophilous*, meaning that they naturally gravitate to people similar to themselves.”¹⁵ Lin explains that in a network, homophily tends to result in strong ties between actors with similar social positions, locations, and resources.¹⁶ McPherson and colleagues argue that “contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people. The pervasiveness of homophily means that cultural, behavioural, genetic, or material information that flows through networks will tend to be localized.”¹⁷

For Increase as a transnational network, homophily helps to forge relationships between similar people from a wide range of contexts. However, there is also a risk of cliques forming within the network along educational, cultural, linguistic, age, and gender lines. Potential negative impacts of homophily are counteracted through strong cross-cultural communication skills and investment in relationships between people from different backgrounds. The benefits of these efforts are evident from Increase’s rapid growth and diverse nature.

14. Granovetter also showed that people with a wide network of “weak ties” were more effective in finding jobs than those with a small network of “strong ties.”

15. Borgatti and Lopez-Kidwell, “Network Theory,” 40.

16. Lin, *Social Capital*, 39.

17. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, “Birds of a Feather,” 416.

3. Social capital

A third relevant concept is social capital.¹⁸ Burt explains that

the player has social capital: relationships with other players. You have friends, colleagues, and more general contacts through whom you receive opportunities to use your financial capital and human capital . . . The social capital of people aggregates into the social capital of organizations.¹⁹

A network's success is related more to social capital than individual capital, bringing access and timing of information, innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness.²⁰ Lin describes social capital in a network context as “resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions.”²¹ Increase's network structure is wide and diverse, and the aggregate social capital forms a rich structure of social resources that can be mobilized towards achieving the goals.

4. Collaboration

Definitions of collaboration vary widely, and Wood and Gray describe it as “an interactive process between autonomous stakeholders who bring action and decisions to a problem domain.”²² In the Increase network the stakeholders are individuals and organizations, and the problem domain is the task of promoting and strengthening church-based training across Asia and beyond. The stakeholders are autonomous in their individual decision-making powers but abide by a common commitment to the goals of Increase and to Christ's Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.”²³

18. Lin, *Social Capital*; Burt, *Structural Holes*; Burt, “Contingent Value”; Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital”; Coleman, “Social Capital,” 95–120; Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” 65–78; Fukuyama, “Social Capital,” 89–103.

19. Burt, *Structural Holes*, 8–9.

20. Burt, 13–25.

21. Lin, *Social Capital*, 40.

22. Wood and Gray, “Toward a Comprehensive Theory,” 146. See also Nooteboom, “Collaboration, Trust, and the Structure of Relationships”; Schilling and Phelps, “Interfirm Collaboration Networks”; Wellman et al., “Networking Scholars”; Uzzi and Spiro, “Collaboration and Creativity”

23. Matt 28:18–20.

However, for collaboration to yield collective benefit, stakeholders must also “derive some benefit” argue Wood and Gray.²⁴ Moreover, they comment that a convener plays an important role in establishing, legitimizing and guiding a collaborative network²⁵ and should have four key attributes. First, a convener’s legitimacy comes from being considered open-minded and fair. Second, the person must be seen as trustworthy since no formal authority exists to enforce shared rules. Third, a convener uses resources to proactively encourage actors to collaborate. Fourth, they draw on their own credibility, knowledge, relational ties, influence, and charisma to persuade stakeholders to participate.²⁶ In Increase, the executive team and other leaders have an influential convener role that fosters collaboration.

Increase Association – Period One (2006–2008): Forming and Storming

Narrative

Because Increase is a transnational movement and network where members generally keep in touch through electronic communication, they treasure rare opportunities to meet face to face. These occasions have generated vision, direction, energy, and relational warmth to sustain the movement. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Increase’s gatherings have triggered pivotal moments in its story, and they feature prominently in the narrative. For ease of reference, the main gatherings are listed in Table 14.1.

In February 2006, Entrust²⁷ board member Graham Hibbert brought together in Atlanta, USA, some twenty people active in nonformal education in different regions of the world. Entrust’s concern was the millions of untrained Christian leaders, thus discussion centred on how to increase access to leadership training globally. The name Increase was agreed for a network to further this aim.²⁸

24. Wood and Gray, “Toward a Comprehensive Theory,” 160–61.

25. Wood and Gray, 149–50.

26. Wood and Gray, 152–53.

27. Formerly Biblical Education by Extension, International, or BEE International.

28. The name “Increase” was suggested by conference participant Johan Boekhout of Entrust.

Table 14.1. Main Increase gatherings until 2020

Month/Year	Location	Event
January 2006	Atlanta	Initial consultation
February 2008	London	Conference
October 2010	Kathmandu	Conference “Twenty-First Century TEE in Asia: Challenges and Opportunities”
October 2012	Central Asia	Training conference (jointly with GZB ²⁹ and Central Asia Vision Group) “Laying a Good Foundation”
March 2013	Seoul	Consultation “New Directions: TEE Curricula for the Twenty-First Century”
May 2013	Oxford	Committee gathering, planning next steps
April 2015	Kuala Lumpur	Consultation “Exploring New Horizons – Working Together for Church-Based Training in Asia”
April 2016	Kuala Lumpur	Increase Teams Gathering “Moving Forward Together”
November 2017	Chiang Mai	Conference “Empowering Churches and Equipping Disciples: Church-Based Training in Asia”
November 2019	Istanbul	Increase Teams Gathering “Reflect and Envision”

Attendees at Atlanta 2006 had differing though related interests. Michael Huggins had a passion “that God could still raise up, disciple and multiply the Peters, James, Johns, Simons and Matthews and change society through humble, ordinary, working people.”³⁰ Quaiser Julius³¹ was excited that, while campus-based institutions already had a place to discuss their concerns, now in Atlanta providers of church-based and extension education could have their own

29. GZB, Gereformeerde Zending Bond, or Reformed Mission League is a church-based mission organization based in the Netherlands. See www.gzb.nl.

30. Michael Huggins to Graham Aylett, email correspondence, 22 September 2020. Huggins is a former sheep farmer, SEAN course writer and illustrator, and TEE pioneer in Russia. He was inspired by Tony Barratt, Anglican minister and missionary who with others founded SEAN (Study by Extension for All Nations). <https://www.seaninternational.org/courses#foundation>.

31. Then and now Director of the Open Theological Seminary, Pakistan.

forum.³² Richard Morris³³ was highly motivated by the theme of access³⁴ and a desire to see more transformative practice in theological education. Anneta Vysotskaya³⁵ was excited to see “like-minded people from different countries with the same passion of helping all God’s people to grow in their knowledge of the word of God.”³⁶ Another key participant was Zafar Ismail,³⁷ a TEE veteran since its earliest days in Asia, who later became Increase’s chairperson.

In this first phase of Increase, its mission was defined as providing “increasing access to church training through distance learning in order to help meet the global need of untrained leaders.” Its purpose would be to promote cooperation and mutual support and to encourage fresh thinking globally in “contextual theological education.”³⁸ So in those early days Increase focused on the *global* issue of *leadership training*, and on *distance learning*³⁹ for *contextual* theological education. At this stage, the network included organizations using a wide range of training delivery methods. Aiming for fresh thinking they launched five groups to explore different areas, though only the group tasked with innovation⁴⁰ continued.

At Increase’s next gathering in London in February 2008, thirty-four participants gathered from all continents. Participants shared a vision for contextual learning,⁴¹ but were deeply polarized between the TEE advocates

32. Qaiser Julius to Graham Aylett, WhatsApp voicemail, 8 October 2020.

33. Then with MAF Learning Technologies, now serving as part of WITH International Community. <https://withcommunity.org/about-with/>.

34. MAF Learning Technologies aimed to use technology to provide access to training for “the least of the least, and the remotest of the remote.” Richard Morris, personal communication.

35. Then International Director of ORTA in Russia, now General Director of ORTA and Chair of the Increase Committee.

36. Anneta Vysotskaya to Graham Aylett, email correspondence, 22 September 2020.

37. Former Director of the Open Theological Seminary (a national TEE movement in Pakistan), and later Director of Deir Mar Thoma.

38. These statements, reached in January 2007 meetings, are quoted from Graham Hibbert’s email correspondence with Anneta Vysotskaya, 16 February 2007.

39. TEE practitioners would now not usually describe TEE methodology as “distance learning,” in recognition that it is better regarded as a locally located and church-based form of training where distance largely collapses.

40. Zafar Ismail, Richard Morris and Johan Boekhout, concerned to develop and promote more transformative pedagogies.

41. Including TEE pioneers Fred and Grace Holland, and Terry Barratt.

(more than half the total) and those who saw the future in Action – Reflection – Action models and competency-based training.

TEE practitioner Tim Green writes: “It took a deliberate peace-building and consensus-seeking initiative. I invited Richard Morris to meet up . . . we talked and talked and got to know each other better. As we did so, we found we had more in common . . . than we had realized.”⁴² As a result Morris stayed with Increase even though the active majority were now TEE practitioners, so they continued to benefit from his drive towards innovation and renewal. In this reconciliation there was a sense of God’s guiding hand.

Analysis

Invitees to the initial Atlanta gathering were selected not through any systematic survey or nomination process, but through informal use of social networks. Hibbert reached beyond his strong ties within Entrust, to use weak ties of acquaintance with individuals in other organizations. They in turn drew on their own connections beyond Hibbert’s circle.⁴³ This leverage of weak ties brought together in Atlanta people who had never met each other before, thus facilitating a wider network and a stronger base of social capital and social resources than if Hibbert had attempted to work through his own organization alone. That relational process perhaps overlooked some important contributors, but overall proved sufficient to launch the new movement. The Atlanta participants had the homophily of a shared general vision and the shared language of English. Most were Westerners but there was some ethnic diversity, which was to grow greatly in Increase’s later membership.

As with other social movements, initially the actors came together with a generally shared vision for change. But as actual collaboration began, two things happened. First, they uncovered differences of approach that were further exposed in the London conference. Second, London 2008 expanded the circle to new actors who had their own ideas of what Increase should do.

As a social movement gets underway, differing approaches and factions (known as dispute frames) are not uncommon; they can be detrimental or

42. Tim Green to Graham Aylett and Richie Brown, email correspondence, 9 October 2020.

43. For instance, Michael Huggins had already developed a weak ties network of TEE practitioners sharing news and prayer needs by email.

facilitative. Thankfully, the divisions unveiled in the 2008 London conference were ultimately facilitative for the Increase movement. By listening to each other, the main actors⁴⁴ could identify sufficient common ground for Increase to move forward without a radical split. Their God-guided decision to work together bore fruit in many ways, including the later programme to develop a new generation of transformative TEE courses.⁴⁵

Increase Association – Period Two (2009–2014): A New Focus

Narrative

After London 2008, Increase’s leadership changed to reflect its active membership. The new committee invited Increase-connected individuals to advise on where it should focus. Guided by this discussion and fuelled by their own background and ministry vision,⁴⁶ the committee decided to focus on Asia and on TEE within church-based training approaches. However, the scope was also broadened: “Our vision is not just restricted to pastors and missionaries, but to equipping all Christ’s followers for active growth and service . . . ordinary working people in all walks of life.”⁴⁷

The committee planned for relationship, reform, and renewal in the TEE movement. Relationship was needed first to build confidence and capacity for subsequent reform and renewal. With these aims, planning began for a pan-Asia conference built around three training tracks. But who could lead this

44. Richard Morris and Tim Green were not officially commissioned to start this mutual listening process, it was their own initiative.

45. Green’s background in TEE and Morris’s in transformative learning were combined in this programme. See chapter 7: Ivins and Do, “New TEE Courses.”

46. The new Committee to lead the Increase Association intentionally comprised a greater proportion of non-Westerners. Several were Asian and all except one had personal involvement with TEE in Asia. The members were Richard Morris, Michael Huggins, Anneta Vysotskaya, Sungrae (Stephen) Cho, Tim Green, and Zafar Ismail. After the May 2009 meeting, Richard Morris took over as chair from Graham Hibbert, and in turn stepped down in 2015 to make way for Zafar Ismail.

47. Because Increase holds together *both* leadership training *and* equipping all God’s people, and sees them as organically connected under the general head of discipleship, integrated learning pathways are significant for Increase. Leaders (in church and society) emerge from churches focused on being and making disciples, and tracks are needed to facilitate this natural process.

training? Instead of relying on outside experts, thirteen people were selected within Increase’s own circles,⁴⁸ all of them having significant TEE experience in their own countries. Equipping themselves through a structured combination of three face-to-face gatherings in 2010–2011⁴⁹ and assignments between each gathering, they became a vanguard of reflective practitioners to equip others. They forged strong interpersonal relationships, acquired a collective identity as “TEE Equippers” and developed capacity to lead the three training tracks of the upcoming pan-Asia conference.

The conference, “Twenty-First Century TEE in Asia: Challenges and Opportunities,” took place in Kathmandu in October 2010, hosted by the Nepali TEE organization, ITEEN.⁵⁰ Conference preparation was bathed in prayer; it proved to be a pivotal event, marking a “second birth” for Increase. Of the seventy-five participants, sixty came from over twenty countries in Asia.⁵¹ Most had never met before, and new friendships led to new initiatives. Previously isolated TEE practitioners found much in common and much to celebrate, share, and learn together. The conference modelled a highly participative style and an emphasis on capacity building which would characterize all subsequent Increase gatherings.

The energy and excitement in this conference came from a sense that God was at work in and through the Increase movement. On arrival participants were greeted by the question “What excites you about TEE?” Their written answers, pasted up on a huge banner in the hall, were afterwards summarized in the conference statement. A similarly participative process led to this vision statement:

that in the [twenty-first century], the Lord would use the TEE movement in Asia powerfully to strengthen churches, helping

48. These were Qaiser Julius, David Samuel, Jackson and Janeffer Lee, Sungrae (Stephen) Cho, Graham Aylett, Siebe Meindertsma, Rick Weymouth, Anneta Vysotskaya, Tim Green, Lyn Pearson, and Matthew Jeong.

49. In different Asian countries with help from educationalists Robert Ferris, Patricia Harrison, Richard Hart, and Perry Shaw.

50. The first such conference in more than twenty-five years, for almost all participants their first international TEE gathering. Thomas Schirrmacher (Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance as from March 2021) addressed the conference.

51. “News: Kathmandu 2010 Press Release,” Increase, <https://www.increaseassociation.org/news-archive/32-kathmandu-2010-press-release>.

them to multiply, equipping all believers to bring transformation in all areas of society for the growth of His kingdom and the glory of His Name.⁵²

From this conference, we may highlight the focus on church, equipping for all believers, transformation of believers and society, kingdom orientation and growth, and God's glory. These values were woven into Increase's DNA, along with discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus, local ownership, indigenous leadership, attention to the context, relationship, reform, renewal, prayer, learning from one another, sharing, mutual service, becoming reflective practitioners, giving time free of charge, and decentralized networking across Asia.

For the next four years Increase developed as an informal network based on these values. Starting in 2011, the Equippers made country visits either to strengthen existing TEE programmes (at their invitation) or to help catalyze the formation of new ones. For example, they helped in Central Asia, where steady groundwork over the years led to a dramatically fruitful training conference in 2012. From all five “-stan” countries and Russia, indigenous leaders with a vision for discipleship came together for a week's training, “Laying a Good Foundation.”⁵³ This aptly named event sought both to raise vision and to offer practical tools towards fulfilling that vision. Within that one week, four new TEE national teams were born. All of them continue to this day.⁵⁴

A 2013 workshop in Turkey guided these Central Asian programmes in effective translation and contextualization of the SEAN courses,⁵⁵ which formed the backbone of their curricula and are widely effective across Asia. However,

52. For both statements see Increase, “News: Kathmandu 2010 Conference Statement,” Increase <https://www.increaseassociation.org/news-archive/31-kathmandu-2010-conference-statement>, and in the Introduction to TEE in this present book. The idea originated from Zafar Ismail's proposal for a “TEE Manifesto,” made at a conference planning session in Oxford in June 2010.

53. The Increase Association, GZB, and the Central Asia Vision Group jointly organized it. TEE Equippers led the training, helped by leaders from the national TEE programmes ITEEN, ORTA, and KuCH.

54. Chapter 13 analyzes their subsequent growth over time in relation to sociological theory of religious markets; one additional TEE programme in the region had started back in 2006.

55. SEAN is a major global provider of TEE courses. The name SEAN is derived from “Study by Extension for All Nations” and pronounced “say-an.” See further in <https://www.seaninternational.org>.

every TEE national body decides its own curriculum for its own context, whether by adapting courses from other providers or by creating its own.⁵⁶ To help twelve of these national programmes learn from each other, Increase ran a 2013 consultation on curriculum planning, hosted as so often by a member body, this time TEE Korea led by Sungrae (Stephen) Cho. It exemplified the value Increase places on collaboration, as a space for TEE educators to learn from each other, sharing expertise within the movement while also receiving input from others where appropriate.⁵⁷

Except for occasional gatherings, participants in the Increase network were mostly separated by thousands of miles and many time zones. It is somewhat surprising that the movement could survive and grow despite having no bank account, no employed staff, no office, no vehicle, not even a single computer or mobile phone. Yet Increase did survive and even flourished. Morris comments: “We did much out of love for the Lord and our love for each other that grew over time.”⁵⁸

This working model required only lightweight administrative processes and modest funding. Most income could therefore be invested directly in airfares for Increase leadership and Equippers to visit countries, since maintaining warm relationships (strong ties) and developing strategic new relationships (through weak ties) remained a top priority. An era of cheap air fares and wide visa availability helped in sustaining connection. In the long gaps between face-to-face meetings technology helped hugely, not just email but especially videoconferencing⁵⁹ which did much to foster the relational warmth important in Asian cultures. Also, Increase began to produce occasional newsletters to keep network members informed and attract the interest of potential new

56. External TEE course providers include SEAN and to a lesser extent TEXT-AFRICA. Courses within Asia were written by the long-established TEE programmes in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, and the Arab world. Newer TEE organizations have been equipped by Increase to write their own courses, as described in Chapter 7: Ivins and Do, “New TEE Courses.”

57. Participating organizations shared their experience in curriculum development; invited expert Patricia Harrison provided focused presentations and wise comment.

58. Personal communication, December 2020.

59. Teleconferencing was just becoming available in the early days of the Increase Association; the internet was making it ever more accessible as Increase was growing after 2010.

stakeholders. Strategic connections started to develop, especially with the Asia Theological Association.

Above all there was a sense of God's provision, guidance, empowerment, and blessing of relationships. Increase committee members experienced this when they met face-to-face in 2013, their only such opportunity in nearly five years though they met regularly online.⁶⁰ With the incisive help of an organizational consultant, Denise Pavey,⁶¹ they decided that Increase should maintain its focus on Asia while also having a global voice. It should foster fresh thinking for twenty-first century TEE and expand gradually from its TEE core to engage also with other forms of church-based training. Furthermore, Increase would shift to a more structured network while retaining an organic style, and register a supporting UK charity while keeping Increase's "heart and head" in Asia.⁶²

To implement these decisions the committee authorized Tim and Rachel Green, and Graham and Nicola Aylett, to establish in Asia a serving base for the work. Their October 2014 move to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia set the stage for Increase's next period of development.

Analysis

Restarting in early 2009 as a group of like-minded friends with a vision for TEE in Asia, Increase emerged into a growing social movement galvanized by its 2010 conference. Social movements theory points to actors coming together either from a shared sense of exclusion or from a shared vision. Both were evident in Increase's relaunch. The sense of exclusion from mainstream theological education, and the polarized tone of London 2008, were quickly forgotten in the confidence created in Kathmandu 2010. The question, "What excites you about TEE?," united and motivated participants. It assured them that this was *their* safe space with others who understood them. Moreover, as with other value-oriented social movements, the participants expressed

60. The members of the Committee at this time were Richard Morris (chair), Zafar Ismail, Michael Huggins, Anneta Vysotskaya, Sungrae (Stephen) Cho, Tim Green, and Graham Aylett.

61. A business professional with long experience as a consultant, programme manager and business manager, and a good friend to Increase.

62. "Increase Network News June 2013," Increase Committee, <https://www.increaseassociation.org/news-archive/55-increase-network-news-june-2013>.

commitment and solidarity around their shared vision. They used the same theological training methodology and mostly the same SEAN courses. This gave them a common meeting point and language and helped to build social capital between them.

Kathmandu 2010 also demonstrated that Increase could draw on its own social resources through a strong sense of collaboration. Everyone working for the conference did so at their own expense and on their own computers. Most participants covered their own travel expenses and fees, ITEEN took care of the logistics, the Equippers ran the training tracks. Stakeholders' commitment to collaboration and the voluntary contribution of skills, time, and resources still persist as important values of Increase.⁶³ Increase members share not only a sense of God-given vision for TEE but also a strong trust in the leadership and a belief that involvement would also benefit their own vision, goals, and interests.⁶⁴

After Atlanta 2006 it had proved hard to sustain Increase's forward movement. By contrast it did not slump after Kathmandu 2010. What sustained the commitment by busy volunteers who seldom met face-to-face? Here the twin factors of leadership and participant mobilization proved important in Increase as in other social movements.

Leadership was initially exercised by the committee, better described as a working group since there was no organizational structure requiring a governing body. All members played an active part, with capacity extended through the Equippers as a second circle of volunteer leaders.⁶⁵ Since these trainer-consultants were also leaders in their national TEE organizations as their prime responsibility, they kept close to the issues on the ground. Leadership was also provided by Green and Aylett, seconded part-time by a mission organization, Interserve, which covered their salaries without seeking any control over Increase.

63. The volunteer principle in TEE at a local level, where weekly TEE learning groups are nearly all led by unpaid group leaders, finds transnational expression in the Increase Association.

64. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Wood and Gray point out various aspects of collaboration and the convener role which are characteristic in collaborative networks.

65. Note that nearly all of the committee were also Equippers and formed about half of their total number.

Participants in Kathmandu 2010 were from a wide range of national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds but found a homophilous identity as fellow marginals in the theological scene in Asia who had something to celebrate with a shared vision. But when participant numbers doubled in Increase's next major conference in 2017, there was some tendency in such a large event for culturally and linguistically homophilous groups of participants to spend a lot of time together, especially if they could not easily communicate in English with other groups. This reduced the development of strong or even weak ties beyond their own cliques. Increase leadership is aware of these risks and conference programmes are intentionally designed to encourage healthy intermingling and interaction across cultural, language, and interest domains.

At local and national levels, TEE in Asia is almost entirely run by Asians. This is reflected in Increase with majority Asian membership. The committee and Equippers have a balance of Asians and of Westerners with long experience in Asia. However, Increase's reliance on individuals with discretionary time to give to the work, while proving successful for financial sustainability and participant mobilization, also brought an unintended consequence. Those with more time available, fluency in English and a love of computer work, often tended to be Westerners. So, by default and not by intention, over the next decade an undue proportion of Increase's work was being led by Westerners despite the membership being majority Asian. Increase is currently seeking to address this imbalance.

Increase Association – Period Three (2015–2020): Expanding Work, Evolving Structures

Narrative

As soon as Increase's small serving base was established in Malaysia with the arrival of the Ayletts and Greens, preparation began for Increase's next gathering. By now the TEE movement in Asia had its own space and voice, giving it confidence to start looking outwards and forwards. Relationships were established, and the movement was ready to move forward into reform and renewal. Hence the title, "Exploring New Horizons," which was held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2015, proved highly significant for Increase's growth.

Kuala Lumpur 2015 was significant in four respects. First, Increase took the decision to move from being a loose network to a constituted association with a structure and membership. The following core statements (Figure 14.1) were reached by a consultative process before and during the gathering:

The **vision** of Increase is to see Churches equipping all Christ's followers in their contexts, so that many millions are disciplined and empowered for mission, ministry and leadership.

The **purpose** of Increase is to connect and strengthen church-based training movements across Asia and beyond. It does this in the following ways:

- build a network of good relationships
- encourage collaborative projects and partnerships
- initiate and catalyze innovative approaches
- identify and share fruitful practice
- provide support, resources, advice and training
- make a global contribution to theological education and adult learning
- connect with other church-based training associations and accrediting associations
- communicate widely the news and stories from Increase members.

The work of Increase is guided by the following core **values**:

- Sharing – through relationships and networking
- Inclusive – of all people, cultures and denominations
- Servant-hearted – in leadership and with each other
- Learning and changing – together and from each other
- Relevant – to local cultures and contexts
- Biblical – in how we work and act.

Figure 14.1. Increase vision, purpose, and values adopted in Kuala Lumpur 2015

Second, participants discussed categories of membership in the new association. Should core membership be only for TEE organizations, or extended to other church-based training programmes that fulfilled relevant criteria? The latter was agreed,⁶⁶ a mark of the TEE movement's newfound confidence, and this was important for positioning it to enrich and be enriched

66. See the Increase Association website for these criteria for core membership: <https://increaseassociation.org>.

by other forms of church-based theological education.⁶⁷ Crucially, core membership was restricted to national church-based training organizations within the countries of “greater Asia,” a loose term allowing for spill-over to some countries bordering the region. Western organizations could affiliate as fellowship members but would not have a vote. This positioned Increase as a self-governing association of Asian organizations, which were also themselves self-governing within their own countries, accountable to their own national boards, and deciding their own curricula.⁶⁸ The voice of these national organizations had hitherto been overlooked but now, joined as an association, their corporate voice would be heard better. Thus, Increase as a transnational movement and network had coalesced and matured into something to be taken seriously.

A third significant feature of “Exploring New Horizons” is revealed by its title. How could Increase stakeholders explore new horizons, such as the ever-expanding Asian diaspora, intentionally transformative courses, digital possibilities, and interactive ways to train local TEE group leaders? Task groups were launched to work on these topics.⁶⁹

Fourth, this gathering of Increase members from so many countries gave an opportunity to present the vision to Malaysian church leaders at a celebration dinner. At that event, Tanka Subedi, director of Nepal’s TEE movement, met local Christians Martin Victor and his spouse Rina Robinson. They were already seeking a regular, reproducible, mother-tongue way to disciple Nepali migrant believers in Malaysia. This weak tie connection, meeting once at a dinner, catalyzed the rapid expansion of Nepali diaspora TEE in Malaysia which in three years grew to 380 students in sixty-three groups led by their own trained facilitators.⁷⁰ Diaspora TEE experience gained in Malaysia and

67. As of November 2020, twenty-five of Increase’s twenty-eight core members are TEE organizations, but the association anticipates growing membership of other kinds of church-based training providers.

68. For other categories of membership, see the Increase website.

69. See Aylett, *Exploring New Horizons*, for the full conference proceedings.

70. Remarkable, as both TEE students and group leaders work up to twelve hours a day, seven days a week in factories or as security guards. See also Green and van Wingerden, “Diaspora,” 113–14, and chapter 11 of this book: Ball and Robinson, “TEE for Discipleship of People on the Move.”

elsewhere⁷¹ was used by Equippers in Australasia, and the Diaspora TEE Task Group created guidelines now available for worldwide use.⁷² This example shows how a servant network can link organizations and individuals towards achieving far-reaching goals for God's kingdom.

Thus, Kuala Lumpur 2015 was significant for Increase in moving from a network to an association. But how would the work be sustained? Increase adopted a flat organizational model with different volunteer teams empowered to carry out much of the needed work themselves but remaining accountable to the committee. An organizational diagram (Figure 14.2), deliberately non-hierarchical,⁷³ was approved in December 2015 and enacted in a teams' gathering the following year: "Moving Forward Together."

The teams-based structure has served the association well. The committee gives oversight and a steering hand to the ministry.⁷⁴ The Increase Equippers function as the hands and feet of Increase,⁷⁵ volunteering some time each year to help train and advise existing member organizations and also visiting new countries to encourage formation of national programmes.⁷⁶ In parallel,

71. For example, Increase Equippers Annetta Vysotskaya and Maria Vdovina, together with Central Asian and other Russian TEE workers, have helped Russian-speakers in South Korea to begin using TEE.

72. See Increase Association, *Discipling the Nations*, and chapter 11: Ball and Robinson, "TEE for Discipleship of People on the Move." The Diaspora Task Group consists of Annetta Vysotskaya, Lyn Pearson, Rina Robinson, Rachel Green, and David Ball. They found solutions to problems such as course book supply and group leader training in different countries and developed this resource to encourage TEE initiatives among diaspora.

73. This representation of Increase's structure grew out of Sungrae (Stephen) Cho's seminal suggestion in Oxford, 2013.

74. Currently (2021) the committee comprises Annetta Vysotskaya (chair, Russia), Jiries Habash (Jordan), Qaiser Julius (Pakistan), and Tanka Subedi (Nepal), with Graham Aylett and Miyung Do as coopted members.

75. The Equippers Team was renewed and expanded during the "Moving Forward Together" gathering. The Team then comprised Graham Aylett, David Ball, Richard Brown, Freda Carey, Sungrae (Stephen) Cho, Miyung Do, Tim Green, Jiries Habash, Qaiser Julius, Jackson and Janeffer Lee, Siebe Meindersma, Lyn Pearson, Tanka Subedi, Annetta Vysotskaya, and Rick Weymouth. Since 2016, Rachel Green, Nicholas Ivins, N. D. Lama, Rosana Longgat, Wailies Rangsa, Lewis Varley, Maria Vdovina, and Rina Robinson have joined the Team, and Sungrae (Stephen) Cho, Jiries Habash, and Jackson and Janeffer Lee have left. Ewen Kitto, while not formally an Equipper, has given invaluable service. The acronym, PAGES (suggested by Rick Weymouth), summarizes Equippers' attitudes and values: Prayerful preparation; Appropriate expertise; Good listening; Encouraging; Servant heart.

76. Examples include visits to Myanmar (initially Qaiser Julius and Graham Aylett, and later Sungrae (Stephen) Cho and Siebe Meindersma separately); Vietnam (Lyn Pearson, Graham

the Task Groups work to discern trends and create practical resources for contemporary issues such as training TEE group leaders, serving diaspora TEE, and writing transformative TEE courses. Their focus on specific projects in specific timeframes has led to tangible outputs to serve member organizations. Other teams include the Increase Trust UK, providing a registered charity and financial support, and the Intercessors team,⁷⁷ which has been of inestimable importance in providing weekly prayer updates and undergirding the whole work in prayer. God has used this team at particularly key moments to push through spiritual obstacles.⁷⁸ Increase Advisers are wise individuals who advise on matters of organizational development or educational expertise. They have also played an unplanned but pivotal role as advocates for Increase in senior circles of theological education.

Increase's next major milestone came with its 2017 Chiang Mai conference, "Empowering Churches, Equipping Disciples." With 168 participants from nearly forty countries, including a large Russian-speaking contingent, this was by far the largest conference Increase had organized. Most participants were from national TEE programmes. Non-TEE partners were also well represented but functioned on the margin as visitors or observers. Teaching in the plenaries and workshops came from Increase's own members. The sense of shared purpose and unity was strengthened by a tangible sense of the Lord's presence, especially at the closing communion service.

Aylett, and Rosana Longgat); Laos (Lyn Pearson); Japan, where Sungrae (Stephen) Cho worked hard to launch TEE; then in 2019 Graham Aylett brought different users together for a TEE consultation. Sungrae (Stephen) Cho also re-ignited TEE ministry in Indonesia after it had fallen into disuse. All visits were valuable – formation of national teams is a continuing goal.

77. As of November 2020, two teams of intercessors meet monthly by Zoom, praying in English and Korean. Jolyon Trickey has been a great encouragement as coordinator.

78. For example, prayer changed the approach to seeking a new General Secretary; and when a key Equipper was about to miss the Increase Teams' Gathering in November 2019 with crippling back pain, the Lord answered prayers. He came, with many fruitful results.

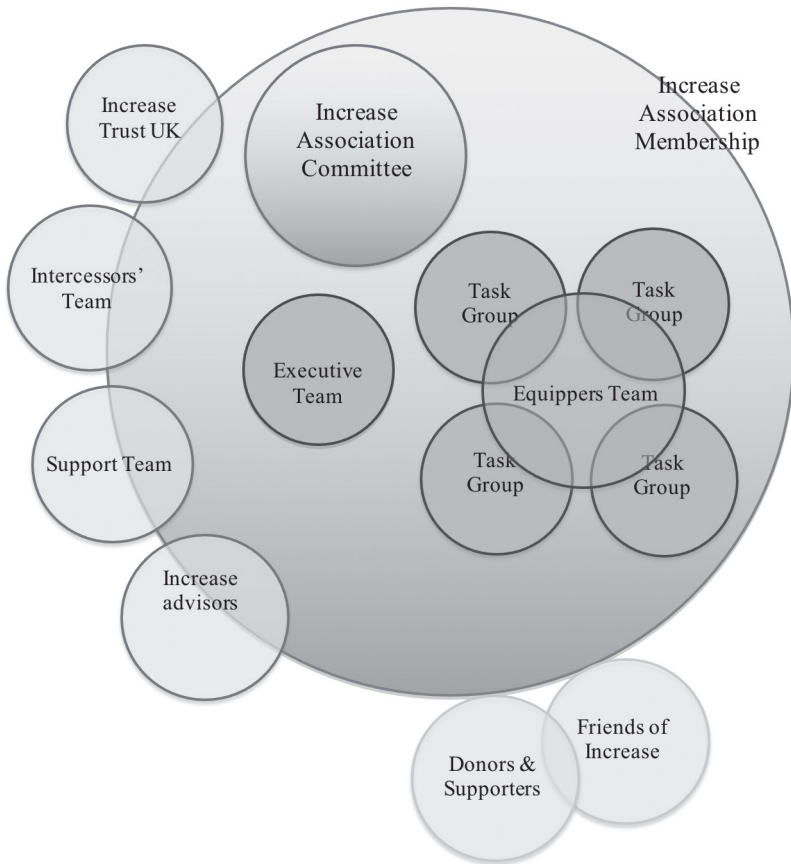


Figure 14.2. Structure of Increase teams adopted in 2016

At the conference, a writing team interviewed participants about what God was doing through TEE in Asia. Written up afterwards with further material, and published in 2018 as *TEE in Asia: Empowering Churches, Equipping Disciples*, this book attracted attention from theological educators around the world. It serves Increase's aims to "communicate widely the news and stories from Increase members" and "make a global contribution to theological education and adult learning."

In November 2019, the various Increase teams met in Istanbul and sought God's direction for the next steps. Following several years of rapid expansion, Increase needed time for consolidation. New leadership would also be

needed to take over from Green and to build an executive team with a greater proportion of Asians.⁷⁹ The year 2020, with a global pandemic shutting down travel and conferences, allowed time for Increase to appoint a new executive team to be headed by Graham Aylett. It was a challenging year for Increase member organizations, but the pandemic forced experiments in online group learning both for TEE groups and for training group leaders.

Analysis

No social movement can emerge and grow without leadership. Historically, social movements have typically started in one geographical location before spreading transnationally. They owed much to a leader's personal charisma, influence, and persuasiveness. Increase was unusual in being a transnational movement from the start. It had no geographical power base and the leaders had no authority, so a hierarchical approach was implausible. The movement could only happen through wide networking and generating a sense of shared vision. What kind of leadership style was needed to expand the network and make wider connections while still serving the needs of core members?

As discussed above, Wood and Gray found that collaborative networks commonly require leaders who are open-minded, fair, and trustworthy convenors, who draw on resources to promote collaboration and use their credibility, knowledge, and communication skills to persuade stakeholders to participate.⁸⁰ Increase leadership has aspired to these qualities, along with a pastoral concern for members and dependence on God. Others must evaluate to what extent these aspirations have been realized.

Increase's executive leadership and other teams drew on their relational ties and social capital in existing networks to serve the movement. For example, Vysotskaya expanded the influence of Increase beyond Russia, drawing on her network of weak ties across the ex-Soviet bloc in an entrepreneurial way and building these into the strong ties that underlie the TEE work in Central Asia.⁸¹ Lyn Pearson did similarly in South East Asia. Equippers used their

79. By the end of 2020, the four team members included two Asians and one more of Asian heritage. The fourth was British with years of ministry experience in Asia.

80. Wood and Gray, "Towards a Comprehensive Theory," 152–53.

81. See chapter 12: Vysotskaya and Subedi, "TEE as a Tool for Providing Theological Education to Churches Facing Persecution and Poverty," and chapter 13: Brown, "TEE in Central Asia."

influence and expertise to provide training and consultancy for national programmes, extending into pioneering contexts.⁸² All exercised leadership through influence, not control, serving without financial return.⁸³

Small locally based social movements attract little attention from other organizations or the media. As they grow in scope and influence this attracts more interest. Brokered connections can help in this, as described by Diani and others.⁸⁴ Increase as a social movement greatly benefitted from brokered connections. In 2012, when Increase leaders began attending conferences of the theological associations, ICETE and ATA,⁸⁵ they had no influence. But in those associations, they had pre-existing weak ties with several influential theological educators⁸⁶ who then brokered connections with other influential leaders, thus expanding the network of weak ties. This led to opportunities to give seminars, which Increase did at successive ICETE and ATA conferences.⁸⁷ Also through brokered invitations, three Increase leaders were included into ATA's accreditation commission, leading to strengthened trust and eventually to an opportunity to help make the accreditation system more relevant to TEE organizations.⁸⁸ In these ways respected educationalists⁸⁹ acted as informal patrons of Increase in extending wider connections.

However, such connections only lead to something significant if there is a sense of synergy and relevance for the concerns of both parties. As described

82. For example, Sungrae (Stephen) Cho in Japan, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, and the Philippines.

83. The Increase Association has received modest (but vital) grants; other income has come from membership fees. Increase operates on a relatively small budget, total expenditure was under US\$60,000 in 2019.

84. See Diani, "Leaders' or Brokers?" Also see Fleming, Mingo, and Chen, "Collaborative Brokerage"; Long, Cunningham, and Braithwaite, "Bridges, Brokers and Boundary Spanners."

85. ICETE (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) is a global umbrella body for the self-governing regional bodies such as the Asia Theological Association (ATA).

86. Richard Hart, Perry Shaw, and Paul Sanders. Tim Green had met them while working in Jordan.

87. Including the ICETE conferences of 2012, 2015, and 2018, and the ATA conferences of 2016 and 2019.

88. Rick Weymouth, Graham Aylett, and Qaiser Julius are members of ATA's Commission for Accreditation and Educational Development. They were introduced by Richard Hart who had represented the TEE movement in ATA since the 1980s.

89. Patricia Harrison, with forty years of experience in TEE, has helped in many ways, including connecting the Increase Association with the ICETE Academy.

above, collaboration requires both individual interests and collective interests to be met.⁹⁰ Theological educators had tended to see TEE as largely irrelevant, but Increase's growing connections and collaborative approach enabled it to make a case for church-based theological education for all, and for seminaries to equip pastors as equippers. This case was helped by a growing awareness among senior theological educators that changes were needed in global theological education. This greater sense of felt need has drawn their attention to the alternative forms of church-based theological education espoused by Increase, resulting for instance in their helpful contributions to chapters 15–21 of this book.

Looking Ahead

Any social movement that consolidates into an organization faces the risk of stagnation. Just because it was needed at an earlier stage, is its existence still justified? If Increase disbanded tomorrow, what difference would this make to its member bodies? By 2020 Increase had grown to a membership of thirty-nine organizations and eight additional individuals. They are much better interconnected than ten years ago, and this could continue at a bilateral level if Increase disbanded, but with a loss of multilateral connections and flow of news. They would continue to benefit from the reflective thinking and training resources developed through Increase in the previous decade, but without the interconnection would find it harder to keep moving ahead in new ways.⁹¹ Also their collective voice to the wider theological education world would be reduced were Increase to disband.

Looking forward in early 2021, and looking outwards beyond Increase's own circle, new opportunities are coming into view. First, the COVID-19 global pandemic has accelerated the self-questioning already underway in the world of theological education. This has led to growing interest in the work of Increase and new invitations to contribute to constructive discussion on the future of theological education.

90. Wood and Gray, "Toward a Comprehensive Theory," 160–61.

91. For instance, interconnections help members serve each other's diasporas effectively and share their learning from experimentation with TEE group facilitation and group leader training by Zoom following Corona virus restrictions.

Second, Increase's defined purpose is "to connect and strengthen church-based training movements across Asia and beyond." Non-TEE church-based training providers are welcome in Increase, whether by membership or by partnership. The need is becoming ever more apparent for different and disconnected providers of church-based training to work together. Together, they may offer a more effective and integrated way to equip God's people.

Third, the phrase "Asia and beyond" in Increase's purpose statement already includes diaspora TEE for Asians beyond Asia. In 2020 national TEE teams became established in Australia and New Zealand to serve both the diaspora and indigenous Christians, expanding Increase's already generous understanding of greater Asia to include the Asia-Pacific region. The 2020s could well see new national TEE teams established in Europe to serve both nationals and Asian diaspora. How should Increase relate to these? Should Increase shift to becoming a worldwide organization? Or should it remain Asia-focused but helping to foster similar church-based training associations in other continents? Exciting times!

Conclusion

Studies in relation to Christian movements often focus on theological, missiological, leadership, and organizational development dimensions. This chapter has chosen to draw on less well known yet valuable sociological lenses. It has presented the story of Increase from inception to early 2021 with analysis using concepts from social movement and social network theory.

However, a sociological lens can only describe actors on the visible stage of human activity. It cannot perceive the divine director behind the scenes. The authors of this chapter are convinced that God's hand has been evident in helping Increase to strengthen the body of Christ in Asia and beyond, through TEE and other forms of church-based discipling and leadership training. "Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness" (Ps 115:1 NIV).⁹²

92. Happily, this psalm includes (in the NRSV) the verses, "May the LORD give you increase, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth." The psalm is precious to us, and these verses are our prayer for you, the reader (Ps 115:14–15 NRSV).

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