Five Questions to Ask About Your Organizational Philosophies

Whether you are new to your organization or have been there many years, it is important to step back periodically and examine existing organizational philosophies to determine whether they are helping or hindering your ministry's leadership and objectives.

In doing so, you're able to determine if your practices are in line with your stated philosophies or if they're out of line and driven by accepted norms. A lack of alignment often can signal potential vulnerabilities in your church's financial management.

To determine the effectiveness of the philosophical practices at your church, start by asking yourself the following five questions.

1. What is the tone at the top?

Do your board and management members clearly and frequently communicate their commitment to organizational integrity and high ethical values? Is their behavior unfailingly consistent with those values?

Adherence to established standards, in fact and appearance, should be actively monitored and any deviations quickly addressed and resolved. If you don't see this commitment in all workers, it may be because they don't see it in their leadership or know that it is considered to be paramount. It is not enough to talk about it. It must be lived out in day-to-day decisions and actions.

2. Is leadership development encouraged?

Often, leadership development is the responsibility of the individuals interested in developing their skills. This effort, and the growth from it, is recognized through salary increases and bonuses based on demonstrated leadership skills that are appropriate to the employee's responsibilities. For the best results, leadership development training should be available to all employees. Make sure this training is appropriately allocated to the correct budget numbers.

Ministry employees typically have an organizational commitment that goes far beyond what is found in secular settings. When employees are invested in and their competencies are enhanced, they feel valued. Employees who feel valued will go to great lengths to serve an organization better and are more likely to do so for a longer time. Ministry leaders can empower their employees by giving them opportunities to develop new skills and have interactions with peers from outside their respective ministries.

The responsibility for this does not rest solely on your ministry. The individuals involved need to take initiative as well. Attendance at training or seminars should be included in development plans and performance evaluations as a criterion or requirement for promotion. You may also want to position it as a new skill set from which employees can benefit.

3. Are your behind-the-scenes employees appreciated?

The "behind-the-scenes" employees are often not considered by others to be actively engaged in ministry. Yet without functions like accounting, information technology, or human resources, ministry programs would be significantly hindered (if not stopped altogether). Even music in church today requires the support of technology staff, whether it involves advanced A/V skills or just making sure the lyrics show up on a screen.

The front-line leaders of your support functions should fully participate in strategic and operational planning. They may be able to save the organization time and money by using their expertise to provide options for effectively reaching specific ministry goals. You also need to provide your support functions with sufficient resources to achieve their objectives. Asking them to do what is needed without providing appropriate staffing, training, or salaries will not only limit their effectiveness, but it may lead to burnout and a negative view of leadership. The resources committed to these functions should be viewed as investments and not necessarily expenses.

It is also important to include support personnel when sharing program updates and success stories. If ten

young people accepted Christ as a result of a youth event, share that news with everyone on staff, not just the ministry leaders.

The functions of accounting, information technology, and human resources look nearly identical in a church setting as they do in a local business; however, it is the *purpose* behind the function that is significantly different. Support personnel need to be encouraged by this as much as those on the front lines do. You can also look for ways to encourage cross-functional involvement so that support members get a taste of the challenges of direct ministry, and vice versa. Just working directly together can build relationships and a better understanding of the difficulties each position encounters.

4. Is there transparency and accountability?

Lack of trust can bring effective ministry to a halt very quickly. That is why the areas of transparency and accountability are so critical. Team members need to hold each other accountable for broken promises, poor performance, and behaviors that negatively affect the organization or are inconsistent with its stated values. There should also be appropriate policies, such as whistleblower protection, misconduct write-ups, and conflict-of-interest policies in place. They must be consistently enforced. As with the tone at the top, this culture needs to be modeled first and foremost by leadership.

5. Do you encourage open dialogue?

It is important to maintain an environment of open dialogue that acts as a reliable, confidential way for employees to submit comments and feedback. All comments should be reviewed by an appropriate member of management. Employees should be made aware that while not all suggestions can be implemented, every comment will be received, reviewed, and appreciated.

There are several different employee comment processes that may be implemented, and the one that is best for your organization may differ from those of other ministries. The important thing is that you are proactive in involving employees and seeking their input and recommendations.

Make These Reviews a Habit

There are many other organizational philosophies and realities you may want to examine, including alignment with your vision and mission statements, stated values, hiring philosophies, how to evaluate and respond to challenges and opportunities, accountability to donors, and others you may have thought of while reading this. As with other leadership challenges, it is important to intentionally set aside time to evaluate which areas are of

key importance to your ministry and how effectively they are working. As you look into the future, the question is, how can you help your ministry be the best it can be?

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