

## Developing a Theology of Organizational Leadership for Christian Ministry Post COVID 19

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### Abstract

The development of a proper theology of organizational behavior must be based on God's principle of order. Christian leaders have been tasked with providing followers with the principles of organizational behavior that will enhance the success of the ministry team as they strive to achieve missional goals. The COVID 19 pandemic era has brought to the forefront the multiple challenges that leaders need to address in order to face the new reality of working in the midst of a deadly virus (King & Carberry, 2020). Organizational behavior principles provide ample guidance to a ministry leadership team that seeks to establish ground rules to operate at a high level of performance. This article will seek to provide the proper parameters to develop a healthy theology of leadership based on organizational behavior theory.

**Keywords:** organizational behavior, organizational theory, organizational leadership, post COVID 19 church leadership, theology of leadership.

### 1. Introduction

Developing a proper theology of leadership based on organizational theory will impact Christian ministry leadership under the new normal circumstances post COVID 19. One of the most important aspects of organizational theory is the application of the theory to help improve the organizational culture of a work group. Under the new circumstances experienced by many organizations due to the pandemic, it has become impossible to manage a work group face-to-face. This article will explore the foundational aspects of organizational theory and its applications to Christian ministry leadership by providing a clear definition of organizational theory. In order to develop a proper theology of leadership it is important to realize that leadership follows a divine inspiration.

Organizational leadership is viewed through the theological lenses in order to understand the basis for such leadership style. The article will also explore the formation of a healthy organizational leadership theology for the Christian ministry organization. Finally, the applications of organizational theory to the church organization post COVID 19 will be looked at in hopes of resolving the struggles encountered by leaders through these trying times.

### 2. Organizational Theory

Classical organizational theory is represented by Frederick Taylor's work on scientific management (Chance, 2013). Taylor's concept included a hierarchical chain of command with various levels of authority and an established division of labor. This structure provides the organization with the most effective operational structure (Chance, p. 3). Taylor also proposed that every individual within the organization was to be prescribed a clearly defined task (Chance, p. 3). In addition, his principles called for rules of behavior and a system of punishment for the efficient and effective management of the organization. Lastly, Taylor suggested that individuals should be hired based on their skills and expertise for standardized tasks and procedures (Chance, p. 3).

Henry Fayol expanded on the work of Taylor to indicate that organizational efficiency would result if issues related to planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling were used by those in management positions (Chance, p. 4). Classical organizational theorists viewed workers as part of "machinery" or "technology" of the organization (Chance, p. 5).

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The consideration of human dynamics on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization launched a period of change from organizational structure to social and psychological factors within organizations (Chance, p. 5). It would be the interest in group dynamics that changed leadership from a mere structural component of an organization to an agent of change capable of improving the wellbeing of individuals within organizations.

Defining organizations and organizational theory enhances its significance for leading during times of crisis. One of the first aspects of this study is to define and understand what an organization encompasses. Organizations are defined as “collections of people, material assets, financial resources, and information, whose members have common goals that they cooperate to pursue” (Haveman & Wetts, 2019). Organizations are always seeking to be effective and efficient in their performance. Leaders in charge of organizations are responsible for changing strategies and structure to improve performance (Haveman & Wetts, p. 2).

It is necessary to understand that organizations work like machines, they are tools (Morgan, 2007). However, this argument from Morgan is debatable. While individuals may be seen as parts of a complex machine, their humanity is exposed and in need of acknowledgment from leadership. Organizations need to be empowered, for this is the way to develop successfully in order to achieve its goals (Francescato & Aber, 2015, p. 719). According to Qiu *et al.*, “organizations are complex systems” (Qiu *et al.*, 2016, p. 18). Much like Morgan, Qiu addresses the organization as a complex “machine-like” system that exists for the purpose of advancing a goal.

Today, with the advent of a global health crisis, organizations have to adapt quickly to the changing work environment to continue on their path to efficient performance. Organizations can be caught up in a contentious environment brought about by a crisis (King & Carberry, 2020). The COVID 19 pandemic has affected the way organizations work by pushing workers to the remote environment, including church organizations. Ministry leaders need to adapt in order to continue the work of the kingdom through the challenges of remote working conditions. For this reason, it becomes necessary to develop a proper theology of organizational behavior based on the leadership principles of organizational theory.

### 3. Developing a Proper Theology of Leadership

With the advent of a crisis, it becomes necessary to examine the foundations of leadership that provide support for the development of a healthy theology of leadership in response to global changes that may affect the church. According to Ruffner & Huizing, “Leadership, from a biblical perspective makes us realize that the very essence of God’s being creates the rationale for all human behavior and enterprise” (2016). Becoming a practical theologian helps one understand and influence theology as practiced in everyday life in specific social settings (Miller, 2015). Organizations are influenced in their daily practices by leadership who is capable of developing a proper theology.

Actions from leaders, good or bad, have the potential of impacting our daily lives (Eberly *et al.*, 2013). Leadership impacts not only the individual follower but also teams/groups, departments, and whole organizations (Hiller *et al.*, 2011). Effective leaders influence shared beliefs and values to create a complete and comprehensive level of change (Litz & Scott, 2017, p. 569). It is for those reasons that leadership needs to embrace a theology of change and influence in a positive manner as it seeks to conform to organizational theory.

Organizations change in response to technological, political-economic, or cultural changes (Baum & Haveman, 2020). Effective leaders may use a transformational style of leadership in order to influence those processes utilized by “leaders to persuade followers to adopt certain behaviors in order to bring about what the leader considers as beneficial change” (Bush, 2018, p. 883). As one continues to explore the meaning of the different aspects of leadership and the implications of managing an organization effectively, it becomes extremely important to develop and practice a proper theology of organizational leadership in order to transform the organization and those individuals who work within it. The next section of the article will help the reader to understand the basis for organizational leadership theology.

### 4. Organizational Leadership Theology

Organizational leadership viewed through the theological lenses of the leader is an appropriate way to influence the individuals who belong to an organizational structure. One of the most important aspects of organizational theology is that “just as leaders need followers to fulfill their roles, they need organizations to get work done” (Brazner *et al.*, 2014). One needs to develop a theology of organization based on the practical aspects of problem solving in organizations due to the fact that, “organization theory and management practice are not theologically neutral” (Miller, 2015).

Christian leadership “as modeled by Jesus, is a reflection of who he was and what he does” (Niewold, 2006, p. 108). The purpose of leadership becomes then apparent from the Scriptures and the revelation of the will of the Father. Leaders function in a way similar to a servant. The relationship between a servant and his master has been paralleled to that of the servant and the divine. Today, in the normal sense of the word servant, humankind have become servants modeled after the heart and life example of the Lord Jesus Christ (Irizarry, 2021).

For the Christian leader, Jesus provides an example of transformational leadership to be followed and applied in today’s church environment (Irizarry, 2021). Huizing briefly summarizes Shaw to state that “Christian leaders work in an environment under the rule of God” (Huizing, 2011, p. 64). Jesus’s plan was a transformational one, the pattern of transformation of the individual was a requirement in order to transform the rest of the world (Thomas, 2018, p. 110). This transformational pattern has been called “*biblical mentorship*” by Thomas. Indeed, this is the kind of relationship that God intended as a way to develop and form effective leaders. This type of biblical mentorship required an investment of resources from Jesus himself, even to the point of giving his own life to perpetuate the kingdom truths through his disciples.

### **5. Applications of Organizational Leadership for Church Ministry**

The last section of this short article will place Christian leadership in the context of organizational leadership behavior to develop useful applications for ministry. It is important to note that, empowered organizations develop successfully, achieve its goals, and influence systems in which they are embedded (Francescato & Aber, 2015). The community where an organization is planted benefits from its effectiveness and performance. Ministry leadership needs to develop “an organizational theology shaped by the church’s primary core values and beliefs and by the active input of the congregation” (Calian, 1996). The proper development and use of organizational theory can help any ministry organization form a theology based on organizational leadership principles.

Leadership is a process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it (Yukl & Gardner, 2013). Church ministry requires the same process as it engages in taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who need it. Organizations are set apart, in organizational practice, hierarchy is a *technology* that separates matters and ensures that they remain apart (Sorensen *et al.*, 2012). One way to look at organizations is to visualize them in the context of secularized theology. For this reason, organizations like church tend to exhibit a secularized hierarchy that places obstacles for its proper functioning. While secular leadership may use principles found within the Scriptures as a guide to develop its core concepts, Christian leadership emphasizes the heart and actions of the leader (Thomas, 2018).

The COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted many facets of people’s lives and has necessitated profound changes in the way work is done (Irizarry, 2020). The scale of this particular crisis means that political leaders, healthcare leaders, and Christian ministry leaders are being tested and must adapt to the new normal (Irizarry, 2020). This means that the coronavirus crisis has also prompted a crisis of leadership (Irizarry, 2020). During times of crisis, the role of a leader and the impact of his or her decisions and actions tends to be magnified. During a crisis, even those organizations with highly effective teams know that their normal processes and practice of conducting business cannot meet the demands of the current situation and new reality.

Leaders must define their current situation and reality, both within their organization and externally (Keen *et al.*, 2020, p. 503). To succeed they must adapt before quickly making critical decisions (Keen *et al.*, 2020, p. 504). Crisis leadership requires quick adaptations to the situation faced in order to overcome challenges and obstacles that may arise to hinder the organization’s performance. Crisis leaders are to restore normality by organizing, directing, and implementing actions that minimize the impact of a threat (Boin and t’Hart, 2003; Boin *et al.*, 2013).

### **6. Conclusion**

The previous steps mentioned in this article will help church and ministry leaders develop a proper theology of organizational leadership applicable to the new normal of work brought by the COVID 19 pandemic. It is important to develop a working knowledge of Taylor’s organizational leadership theory where a hierarchical chain of command with levels of authority and an established division of labor provides the organization with the most effective operational structure. According to Henry Fayol, organizational efficiency results from the planning utilized by management. It is important to remember that workers within the organizational structure are considered part of the “machine” that is the organization. As complex systems, organizations are best suited to accomplish their mission during a time of crisis.

Christian ministry leaders must understand that leading from a biblical perspective makes us realize the very essence of God's being, for He is the rationale for all human enterprise and behavior. It is important to remember that leaders impact not only individual followers but also whole organizations. Christian leadership as modeled by Jesus demonstrates servant leadership, leaders today have become servants modeled after that example. Jesus's leadership plan was a transformational one, based on his mentorship to the disciples. This is the kind of leadership that is needed in times like these, where a pandemic has upended life as we knew it. Leaders must define the current situational status of their ministry in order to seek a quick way to adapt to the new changes brought about by the current global health crisis. By developing and practicing a sound theology of organizational leadership, the church will continue to thrive during uncertain times, guided by leaders who make a difference in the lives of others.

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