

Decision Making in Faith Based Organizations (FBO's)

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Abstract

Spiritual and religious values are often incorporated by Faith-based organizations (FBOs) into their decision-making processes. These values influence many aspects of the organization, that include organizational behaviour, governance, mission, strategic management, development, selection of partners and beneficiaries, staff, organizational culture and decision-making. For FBO's having a connection with a God of their understanding is often a source of support, guidance, and inspiration in decision-making. The influence of faith on decision-making varies among different organizations and even among different individuals within the same organization. The beliefs and practices of a faith tradition, as well as the personal beliefs of individuals, can play a role. This article seeks to present a Christian viewpoint on decision making in faith-based organization. It seeks to emphasize that spirituality/religiosity become an integral part of the decision-making process in organizations as it could in the long-term positive effect on the organization.

Key words: Decision-making, Faith, Values, Virtues

Introduction

Faith Based Organization (FBO) is one of the terms used in the literature to define an organization founded and affiliated with a particular church, denomination or faith community. Studies have been done on FBO's within the Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic faith traditions (Askeland, Espedal, Sirris, 2019). Another term used is faith-based service provider, but the term faith-based organization is more easily recognized in the literature (Bielefeld, Suhs Cleveland, 2013). Like any secular service provider, faith-based organizations have their identity and mission, derived from one or more spiritual traditions or determined by a religious organization or religious community. They also include organizations established by philanthropists or nobility which take their inspiration from, and identify with particular religious teachings or traditions (Noor, Nawi, 2016). Most of the literature on FBO's defines them as organizations which provide services, whether having an explicit faith orientation or not. The term faith-based organization typically suggests a religious congregation with primary missions of worship and religious education...By definition, congregations are faith-based regardless of how they may differ in theology, structure,



size, location or types of ministries provided to congregants...discussion of faith-based organizations has begun to expand beyond congregations and include a wide array of entities, which may or may not be linked to congregations. Ebaugh, Chafetz, Pipes, 2006.

Decision making by a Christian leader in a faith-based organization or even one who is not in a faith-based organization would necessarily be different from those organizations that do not have faith bases better known as for-profit organizations; where economic performance and output is the basis of evaluation or appraisal. Leaders have different personalities and styles of functioning and therefore operationalize their decisions in different ways. Some dimensions of Christian leaders would include acts of stewardship, servant leadership roles, the importance of values or character strengths, kingdom-oriented action and discipleship.

These dimensions are drawn by finding points of interaction or difference between secular and Christian leadership drawn from scripture and theology. Also, leaders from different faith traditions may operationalize the development of their organizations or institutions and decisions from their faith traditions perspective. Ethical Decision Making (EDM) could help leaders make decisions within the frameworks in which they operate. It includes character strengths or values. Thus, persons working in FBO's would necessarily have virtue-based orientations (Crossan, Seijts, 2013).

Frameworks and Models

In order to understand the workings of FBOs, it is important to know and accept that religion or spirituality is an essential component of the vision and mission of the organization, although religion might not be important for those who work for that organization. Some FBO's have explicit stances where all employees have to belong to their or any faith tradition while other FBO's define their service through a faith tradition, while not interfering with the beliefs of its employees. Therefore, the organizational culture is important. This is because interactions with religious influences in relation to secular influences such as professional associations because these would shape the worldview assumptions governing the services the organization provides (Sider, Unruh, March 2004).

Models and frameworks help bring focus to understanding how a system works. It also helps in developing a working system. What needs to be remembered is that what works for one system,



might not work for another. Therefore, understanding organizational culture is important, and also, the leadership in the organization.

One of the ways in which an organization can be understood, is through three major categories shared by typologies: organizational control (funding, power, and decision-making), expression of religion (self-identity and participants' religiosity), and program implementation (services rendered, religious elements in services, and participation in religious activities). Askeland, Espedal, Sirris, 2019.

An organization is assessed in its output, its performance and how it functions. According to Bielefeld, & Suhs Cleveland (2013) there are “three major assessment categories: organizational control, expression of religion, and program implementation. Organizational control is examined through funding resources, power exercised within the organization, and decision-making processes” (p.446). Control leading to decision making is usually exercised by the leadership of an organization. For faith-based organizations, it is important that decision making processes be facilitated with their vision and mission in mind, with faith always being the underlying principle. Faith-Based Facilitation is one such process.

Faith-Based Facilitation [is] a process and set of tools which helps, encourages, and enables people to speak and, in the light of Biblical truths, make more faithful decisions and enjoy deeper relationships. An intentional searching for spiritual insight (called ‘Kairos Experience’) is central to Faith-Based Facilitation. A facilitator does not only have skills and tools, s/he seeks a Christ-like character. Knecht, 2021.

The more faith-based an organization, the greater its reliance on religious authority for legitimacy (Ebaugh, Chafetz, Pipes, 2006). Models and Frameworks only give a template for working in an organization or institution. There are two factors that leaders in faith-based organizations need to understand in the application of their vision and mission or goal setting. The first is an understanding of ethical frameworks in the workspace and the second is the application of values to the world of work.

Using Ethical Frameworks in Decision Making

The decision-making process in an organization is determined by its leadership. This includes team leaders and others above the team leader which could be management and governing bodies.



As such, decisions are usually in line with laws and regulations of corporate governance. There are four components to ethical decision making (EDM) — awareness, judgement, intent and behavior. For these components to be effective internal controls are important, and these internal controls modeled on an ethical framework, determined by values of the organization and its employees. In ethical models in particular context plays in exerting pressure for better or worse (Crossan, Seijts, 2013).

Ethical Decision Making (EDM) utilizes virtue ethical perspectives along with corporate management techniques. It teaches that character strengths and motivational values need necessarily be used in organizations. It calls for a Virtue Based Orientation (VBO) in organizational culture and decision making. Thus, EDM and VGO would help individuals in an organization understand and work better in the organization as the frameworks are determined, and therefore an individual cannot go against the organization. Therefore, the internal control of an organization directs and determines its functioning.

Internal controls are processes designed and affected by those charged with governance, management, and other personnel to provide reasonable assurance about the achievement of an entity's objectives. As such internal control plays a direct role in influencing management performance as they are charged to provide a reasonable assurance of the reliability of financial reporting, the compliance with laws and regulations and to uphold good corporate governance. Abdulkadir, 2014.

Internal controls are needed to reduce risks to acceptable levels. Also, accountability, and managerial competence is also needed along with traditional welfare or development values. FBO's make contributions and continue to provide human services and religiously based services provide a number of benefits over secularly run programs (Bielefeld, Suhs Cleveland, 2013). The internal controls of FBO's are determined by values.

Values in the World of Work

There are intrinsic qualities that make an individual virtuous. These are often termed virtues, also called character strengths. They are acquired, and enable a person to live a good life. Some them like wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, transcendence and humanity have emerged as universally accepted components of good character. Virtues attributable to an individual can also be destroyed by actions that are in some way deficient or excessive (Crossan, Seijts, 2013). A



person's virtue or character strength can be deepened through a process of self-reflection. This leads to the avoiding of vices or deficiency. Reflection should be understood as reflection-in-action not simply reflection on or after action. Reflection-in-action is embedded in practice and embodied in action, and is not simply a cognitive function.

Values play an important part in ethical models. They are intentional expressions of moral convictions, established and maintained in the interaction between individuals and their society. Values in everyday practice orient people about right and wrong attitudes and behaviors. They are embedded in practices informed by the past, oriented toward the future, and exposed in the present, in and through the work they do (Askeland, Espedal, Sirris, 2019).

There are ten distinct and universally applicable motivational values that can be distinguished along two competing dimensions: openness to change (stimulation, self-direction) versus conservation (tradition, conformity, security) and self-enhancement (power, achievement, hedonism) versus self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence). These ten values and their uniqueness are supported by cross-cultural research... Each of these 10 motivational values contains two or more different single values which represent a motivational value (e.g., single values such as forgiving and loyal are reflective of benevolence). Interestingly, research on values and EDM has focused almost entirely on just two of these dimensions— self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values. Crossan, Seijts, 2013.

An individual's virtue and identity within an organization is important. In organizations that set a high premium on virtue, the organizations ethical model should be evident to individuals who work there, so that they do not lose sight of who they are especially when difficulties or situational forces arise and decisions are to be made. Therefore, it is important to emphasize not just organizational but specific individual-level determinants of ethical behavior in organizations.

Decision Making

Leaders made decisions in any organization. The procedure of decision making in faith-based organizations, necessarily needs to be different than that of only for-profit organizations. Faith-based organizations could be religiously-affiliated non-profits (NGO's) or national faith-based service organizations (churches, masjids, temples). The leaders within such organizations work with their teams in reaching decisions with regard to targets; to produce outcomes that are favourable for the development of the organization/ institution. This includes practices of



recruitment, selection, orientation, training and self-assessment. Ultimately a person or an organization is assessed with regard to performance and output which involve making decisions. Building capacity and confidence is a key principle in decision making process. In FOB's, faith is an important component because faith facilitates each stage of the decision-making process. Along with faith, trust and credibility are also important as they inspire confidence (Betts, 2009). Importantly are knowing the distinctions between decisions with and without ethical implications which can be difficult to discern. Therefore, employing persons with demonstrated values in an organization is important, as the values of the person would come into decision making. In value-based decision making a person's character strengths and its continuous cultivation would be necessary to avoid ethical dilemmas (Crossan, Seijts, 2013). This becomes intuitive through processes of tacit knowledge and implicit processes of faith. Faith as a value therefore fits into intuitive decision making.

Decision making and Leadership

Often 'leadership' is identified with hierarchy, administrative roles and such other sub-themes. In reality, however, leadership can be exercised without occupying an administrative role or a prominent place in a hierarchy. Administrative functions are only one role and not the only role in leadership. Leadership is responsibility and service rather than authority-differential (Cohick, 2012). Studies have shown that an effective leadership and not necessarily a mere efficient administration has positive consequences for the effectiveness of an organization (Puls, Ludden, Freemyer, 2014).

There are three major views on how leaders can be effective: the psychological view proposes that leaders develop effective motivation systems; the sociological view holds that leaders should pay attention to facilitative activity; and the mutual sharing view holds that influencing is a mutual exercise. The ministries of Christian leaders can be just about anything in the reign of God that involves care of the flock. Christian leaders are involved in teaching (instruction), preaching (discussion with follow-up) and healing (bringing to wholeness or building up) ministries (works), just like Jesus.

The focus of any leader or leadership role is the development of works globally and locally. The leader looks for the growth of the various works. A leader who looks at the Church in today's fast developing world would need to have shifting styles, discernment, and apostolic planning, to be effective. Therefore, planning in keeping with the times is needed in these fields. The choice and



continuation of works implies that they should be discerned according to Christian principles. Discernment is paramount in any process of planning and decision making. Also, it is expected that leaders grow personally, in keeping with the times.

Since the practice of religion in the workplace helps religiously motivated leader to seek the help of the ultimate, fostering religion-based workplace spirituality might actually improve decision-making. It could influence the behavior of members by further complementing the moral and ethical guidelines already in place in order to resolve ethical dilemmas that organizations face. This could happen if the leader uses faith-based frames of reference during decision-making. Leaders could reinforce faith-based guidelines that are in place, to resolve ethical dilemmas in organizations. Also, leaders who operate from religious principles are likely to be committed to the well-being of their staff members, as well as other organizational stakeholders. They could have an influence on those who come into personal contact with them.

However, forcing a specific religion-based spirituality—particularly the organizational leader’s religion—onto other organizational members could raise some potential concerns. Viewing workplace spirituality through the lens of a specific religious tradition as the only path to the ultimate is divisive because it excludes those who do not share in that tradition. Thus, adopting an inclusive approach should be a necessary goal of organizations practicing religion-based spirituality. Fernando, Jackson, 2006.

Workplace spirituality is pragmatic and desirable. It is pragmatic because it crosses over religious boundaries and cultural contexts. It is desirable because heightened levels of religiosity and spirituality leads to increased individual well-being.

Implications of Faith based Decision Making in the World of Work

A key aspect of decision making in organizational structures is that the leadership is skilled in management as well as in processes reflecting the religious belief or the faith traditions of those who work in the organization. Especially for FBO’s the language of faith, the religious idiom, should better reflects the option for the poor and marginalized (Noor, Nawi, 2016). At the center of any decision-making process is the individual decision-maker who experiences demands and pressures from a number of sources (Fernando, Jackson, 2006). A faith-based leaders decision-making could be associated with what is identified as intuitive decision-making which is a subconscious process of making decisions that includes subconscious mental programming,



values or ethics-based decisions, experience-based decisions, affect-initiated decisions and cognitive-based decisions.

Faith based leaders can draw from their religion or spirituality to find the right way to manage any situation, in order to determine the best outcome. Therefore, leaders in FBO's should consider the following to foster values in their organizations.

First, one can recognize the contributions that religiously- motivated leaders might be able to bring to the workplace. A stronger sense of values of what is right and wrong, and a concerted effort to recognize organizational members' roles and responsibilities could provide a useful framework for leaders' well-being. Second, organizations should consider creating an atmosphere of support and accommodation of diverse religious and spiritual beliefs by acknowledging the leader's reality. Third, organizations should question the desirability of putting in place procedures to assess the truth of the leader's belief systems. The exception would be when the belief system directly interferes with the leader's functioning or is likely to bring harm in the workplace or to society in general. Finally, organizations should recognize that the spiritual worldview of each member will differ from member to member and take steps not to demean or trivialize member's spiritual worldview. Fernando, Jackson, 2006.

For team development the regular practice of spiritual exercises would help. With regular practice, a certain competence can be achieved, so that when the group has to make decisions, it does so through a spiritual/religious lens (Knecht, 2021).

Conclusion

It is expected that leaders who are spiritually motivated, when making decisions would try to go beyond rational to spiritually-motivated decision-making processes in order to make right decisions. These include the intentional use of periods of reflection in prayer, meditation on biblical texts, and the development of the group's approach towards spirituality. These ways could change an organizations culture because there is a conscious process that is involved. It is, therefore, essential that importance be placed on the use of spiritual elements in a faith-based organizations day-to-day business and which would promote the group's spiritual competence. Thus, spirituality/religiosity would become an integral part of the decision-making process, which could in the long term have a positive effect on the organization.



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