

# **The Organizational Health of a Catholic College**

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**Abstract** - This investigation recorded the impressions of 123 school administrators, supervisors, and members who perceived a moderate organizational health level for a Catholic higher education institution. Utilizing Laub's Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA), the strongest and weakest points of the organization were underscored along with the disclosure of a perception gap between leaders and members of the organization. The assessment portrayed the shape of the school organization as it posed challenges for further improvements.

*Keywords* – servant leadership, organizational health, school management

## **INTRODUCTION**

A healthy organization is a group of individuals in which the characteristics of servant leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and are valued and practiced by the leadership and workforce (Laub, 1998).

The query if a school organization can reach its potential has always been a question for the researcher. The observations that low levels of productivity among

his co-workers are presumably brought about by the failure of the organization to achieve its full potential.

Bodies of research are replete with overwhelming consensus that the creation of healthy, servant-minded organizations requires the understanding and practice of servant leadership (Braye, 2002; Freitas, 2003; Herbert, 2003; Ledbetter, 2003; Drury, 2004; Irving, 2005; Arfsten, 2006; and Waddel, 2006). School leadership and organizations are advocated to adhere to their tenets and principles should they aspire for authentic optimal organizational health (Thompson, 2002; Herbst, 2003; Lambert, 2004; Iken, 2005, and Woods, 2010;). These literatures evince that there are organizations that have become great and have discovered the secret of developing a healthy culture. These organizations are said to maximize the best of their staff and leadership.

Now, it is a question if this could be achieved by the researcher's own organization, La Consolacion College Bacolod, or by any organization whose thrust and commitment are for Christian and Nationalist education.

Servant leadership, as most of the aforementioned studies contend, promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led and the sharing of power and status for common good of each individual, the total organization and those served by the organization. These are what Laub (1998) refers to as the key areas of a healthy organization that are basically anchored on the theoretical works of servant leadership advanced by Robert Greenleaf in the mid 1970s.

The researcher believes that it is virtually significant that the school organizations should be assessed of their organizational health from the

viewpoints of not only the individual leader, but also of the entire school community. The perceptions of the different members about leadership and organization in an academic community can be an informative basis for the discovery of the leadership practices the school espouses.

The main purpose of this study is to describe the organizational health of La Consolacion College Bacolod through the perception of its top administrators, supervisors, and members. In the light of the research findings, organizational action plans may be recommended for the school organization on how to make necessary organizational change to reach its excellent or optimal health level.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study is to assess the perceived organizational health level of La Consolacion College Bacolod (LCCB) based on the six key areas of effective organizational leadership.

Specifically, this study sought to determine and describe the organizational health level of the school, underscore its highest and lowest key areas, and compare the perceived assessment of the top administrators, supervisors, and members about its organizational health.

### **FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on the theoretical works of James Laub (1998) whose research works and studies have focused on the critical topic of organizational effectiveness. Laub has developed organizational models and leadership paradigms that are critical to the understanding and practice of leadership for healthy organizations. He developed organizational leadership

assessments to assess organizational health based on six key areas of effective organizational leadership including *the display of authenticity, valuing of people, developing people, building community, providing leadership, and sharing leadership*.

Utilizing the aforementioned six key indicators as assessment instrument, the organizational health level of LCCB is measured from the viewpoints of the top leaders or administrators, the supervisory level administrators, and the general organizational members including all the teaching and non-teaching staff. From the general assessment of the members of the institution, the overall organizational health level of LCCB was determined.

The descriptions of the organization's health level is built around the presence or absence of the six key areas of organizational effectiveness as they relate to organizational issues such as leadership, team, organizational growth and change, and culture. These descriptions were adapted from the scholarly discourse of Laub about organizational effectiveness.

The result of the organizational assessment leads to the generation of baseline information that will assist LCCB in reviewing organizational issues and concerns that once addressed, may facilitate the achievement of optimal organizational health level, through the adoption of efficient organizational change strategies.

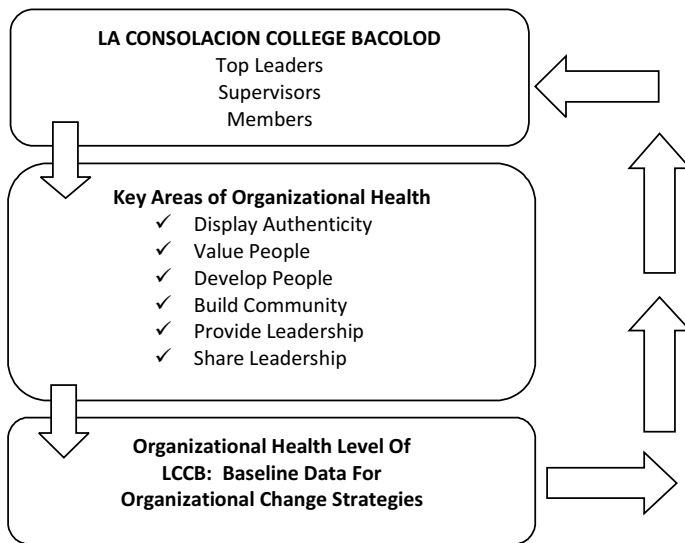


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the framework.

## OPERATIONAL TERMS

*Areas of a Healthy Organization.* These are six key indicators that characterize the healthy organization: Display Authenticity; Build Community; Develop People; Value People; Share Leadership; and Provide Leadership.

The extent of their presence or absence in an organization being assessed determines the latter's health level: Org<sup>6</sup>, Org<sup>5</sup>, Org<sup>4</sup>, Org<sup>3</sup>, Org<sup>2</sup>, and Org<sup>1</sup>.

*Healthy Organization.* Laub (1998) describes a healthy organization as an organization in which the characteristic of servant leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and are valued and practice by leadership and workforce. In this study, the term is operationally used to mean a school organization, which has achieved excellent and optimal organizational health and where the key areas and

indicators of an effective organizational leadership are present.

*Organizational Health.* This refers to the well-being of an organization assessed through six key areas of a healthy organization. Based on score breaks after assessment, organizational health may be Toxic, Poor, Limited, Moderate, Excellent, and Optimal.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This investigation was conducted at La Consolacion College Bacolod, a co-ed higher institution of learning run by the Augustinian Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation, and the first private, Catholic educational institution in Negros Occidental.

As this study basically aimed to assess the organizational health of La Consolacion College Bacolod from the perceptions of its members, the descriptive research design is deemed appropriate.

The respondents of the study were 123 members of the organization: teachers across all levels, the non-teaching personnel including general maintenance staff, academic non-teaching personnel, middle administrators who do supervisory functions, and top administrators both lay and religious.

The study used a standardized research instrument known as Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) developed by James Laub (1998), which has been administered to various organizations and sub-units in organizations throughout the world. The universality of the concepts and notions of leadership, management and organizational effectiveness justifies the non-modification of the instrument as its contents and constructs are perceptibly applicable across cultures.

Mean, rank and one-way analysis of variance were utilized to statistically analyze the data gathered.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

La Consolacion College Bacolod has a moderate level of organizational health when perceived by its entire organization.

Basing from Laub's discussions about organizations having a moderate organizational health level, the following descriptions draw allusions to LCC Bacolod as an organization.

### ***General Characteristics***

Members experience this organization as positively paternalistic (parental) organization characterized by a moderate level of trust and trustworthiness along with occasional uncertainty and fear. Creativity is encouraged in the College as long as it doesn't move the organization too far beyond the status quo. Risks are taken, but failure is sometimes feared in the organization. Goals are mostly clear, though the overall direction of the organization is sometimes confused. Leaders are regarded as often taking the role of nurturing parent while the members assume the role of the cared-for child (Exceptional Veterinary Team, 2010).

### ***The Leadership***

Leadership in LCCB is positively paternalistic in style and mostly comes from the top of the organization. Top administrators often take the role of nurturing parent while the members assume the role of the cared-for child. Power is delegated for specific tasks and for specific positions within the organization. The members of the organization are encouraged to share ideas for improving the organization.

### ***The Team***

Some levels of cooperative work exist, and some true collaboration is evident in the school organization.

Teams are utilized but often it may be observed that they compete against one another especially when resources are scarce.

### ***The Culture***

The members of the school are sometimes unsure of where they stand and how open they can be with one another and especially with those in leadership over them. The school is deemed to be an environment where some risks can be taken but failure is sometimes feared. People feel trusted but know that trust can be lost very easily. Members are motivated to serve the organization because it is their job to do so and they are committed to doing good work (Silvers, 2010). The school organization is characterized by openness between select groups of people.

### ***The Outlook***

LCCB has a positive outlook. It is considered as a positively paternalistic organization that attracts good motivated workers but may find that the “best and brightest” will seek professional challenges elsewhere. Change in LCCB is ongoing but often forced by outside circumstances. Improvement here is desired but difficult to maintain over time. LCCB can be said to be in a good position to move towards optimal health in the future.

### ***Growth and Change***

There is gradual or incremental change in LCCB and the kind of growth in the organization requires a steady, measured energy. The organization can and will improve, but it will begin to rest on a plateau of “good enough”... dulled by its own achievement and success with an ever growing contentment to be just a little better than the rest.



According to Laub (1998), an organization cannot simply move from incremental change to quantum growth. Moving from one of these levels to the next requires a major shift in thinking and behaving. This is never easy, but must be done, or the organization will continue to merely perpetuate itself without the power, or energy, to move to the next level.

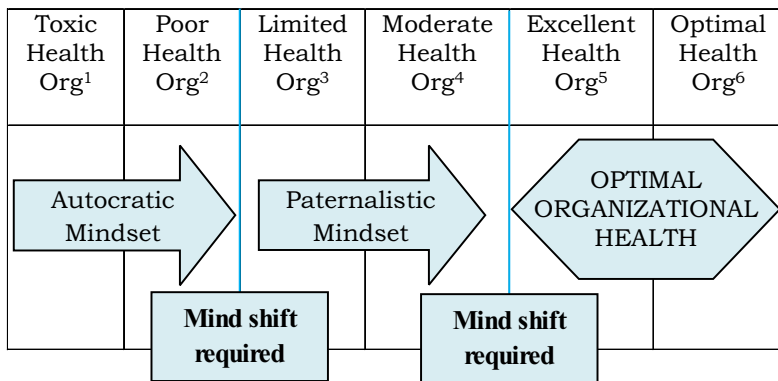


Figure 2. Organizational Paradigm Shift (Laub, 1998).

Meanwhile, based on overall assessment, the highest key areas of organizational health were Valuing People (M=3.83) and Building Community (M=3.47), while the lowest areas were on Displaying Authenticity (M=3.40), and Developing People (M=3.45).

Table 1. Highlight Areas of Organizational Health of LCCB

<b>Highest Key Areas of Organizational Health</b>		<b>Lowest Key Areas of Organizational Health</b>	
<b>Key Area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key Area</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Value People</b>	Serve others first Believe and trust other people Listen receptively	<b>Display Authenticity</b>	Open and accountable Willing to learn Honesty and integrity (refusing to cut corners on the truth-the actions fit the words)
<b>Build Community</b>	Build relationships Work collaboratively Value differences	<b>Develop People</b>	Provide for learning (where mistakes can lead to new insights) Model appropriate behavior Build up through affirmation (encourage and honor others)

The assessments made by the three groups of stakeholders of the school presented equally interesting results.

As perceived by its top leaders/school leadership, the school has an excellent level of organizational

health. Middle administrators with managerial and supervisory functions perceived it to have moderate level of organizational health, while members thought and felt that the school is characterized as an organization within the limited level of organizational health. The perceptions of the three groups of the organizational level vary significantly ( $p=0.008$ ). More often than not, there is a clear lack of perception match between the top leadership in an organization and the workforce in terms of how they view the organization (Horsman, 2001 & Beazley, 2002).

The assessment deduced by the top leaders may be insulated from the reality of the day-to-day functioning of the organization. According to Laub (1998), this lack of awareness is dangerous and tends to perpetuate an “us-and-them” mentality that works against true community. On the other hand, the members of the workforce felt that they are not understood by the leadership. An effective, healthy organization needs to share an accurate awareness so that they are all at the same starting point in terms of organizational improvement. Since there was the presence or perception gap between leaders and the workforce, the two critical issues of *shared awareness* and *open communication* need to be addressed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing findings, it is deduced that the leadership (top leaders) of the organization perceives the organizational well-being of the school more positively than the workers and the members do, just as the workers perceive it less positively than the leaders perceive it. Shared awareness and open communication are critical organizational issues that need to be addressed brought about the mismatch of perception between and among the members of the organization.

'Servant Leadership' may be a viable leadership model for LCC Bacolod considering its ethos and institutional culture as a church and faith-inspired institution of learning.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced. These recommendations are to be considered as the school's action plan in its organizational commitment to achieving optimal health level.

1. The school administration may initiate an open, facilitated discussion of the results of this investigation to all the members of the school organization as an initial step to close the perception gap which exists within the community and to increase eventually the perception match between the school's leaders and organizational members. This is also to address the low level of shared awareness among the stakeholders about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
2. Within a facilitated, safe environment, the school may identify priorities for action in each of the Six Key Areas of Organizational Health to bring improvement to the organization, increasing its health level from moderate to excellent or even optimal level.
3. The school organization should provide high training at all levels focusing on areas that address the school's greatest needs as well as its greatest strengths.
4. The organizational members of the school-after having identified the school's current status, having shared the needed awareness, and after the necessary training – should commit

themselves to organizational change strategies that move toward a healthier organizational culture.

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