

Taking Stock

DO YOU HAVE A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION?

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For a body to be healthy, a myriad of bodily functions must operate in perfect harmony. Likewise, for an organization to be healthy, a complex array of interpersonal and administrative functions must be addressed simultaneously. A serious deficiency in any one function can throw the others out of balance and undermine the organization's overall ability to perform.

In recent years, organizational psychologists have begun developing instruments for giving organizational checkups. Their diagnoses pinpoint areas of stress and malfunctioning. *Child Care Information Exchange* has analyzed several dozen of these instruments in terms of their applicability to the child care setting.

The following "Organizational Health Checklist" incorporates 40 criteria for an effective child care organization selected from these instruments. This battery is by no means complete—some instruments include several thousand factors to be assessed—but, in the author's opinion, it includes the major factors an administrator in this labor intensive, resource poor field should be concerned with. Anyone wishing to explore these

criteria in more detail should refer to the resources listed below.

In rating your organization against these criteria, several cautions should be kept in mind. First, the criteria as stated represent the optimum level of functioning for a healthy organization. It is unlikely that any organization could perfectly satisfy every criteria at one time.

The criteria should be viewed as goals to strive toward, not as minimal standards. The purposes of the criteria are to help you identify your organizations strengths and weaknesses and to enable you to develop strategies for improving the performance of your organization.

Second, you should keep in mind that as administrator of your organization your perspective on these criteria will be far from objective. So, in addition to rating the center yourself, you should seek to have members from different vantage points within the organization, as well as knowledgeable outside parties, perform the rating. By comparing ratings from these various perspectives, you will probably get a more accurate reading on your organization's health.

Resources

Beckhard, Richard. *Organizational Development: Strategies and Models*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.

Drucker, Peter F. *Management*. London: Pan Books, 1977.

"Financial Management Assessment Guide." *Child Care Information Exchange*, November 1980.

Handy, Charles B. *Understanding Organizations*. London: Penguin Books, 1976.

Levinson, Harry. *Organizational Diagnosis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Likert, Rensis. *New Patterns of Management*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961.

Schein, Edgar H. *Process Consultation: Its Role in Organizational Development*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.

Weisbord, Marvin R. *Organizational Diagnosis: A Workbook of Theory and Practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

Instructions: Rate the organization's performance on each of the criteria below on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 defined as "organization satisfies the criteria to a high degree," and 1 defined as "organization does not satisfy this criteria at all."

Planning and Evaluation

- ___ 1. The organization has identified what it is in business for—it has developed a manageable list of specific goals for the curriculum and for the organization as a whole.
- ___ 2. Members of the organization helped shape these goals, are well aware of them, and are motivated to achieve them.
- ___ 3. Strategies for accomplishing these goals have been implemented. The organization pays more than lip service to the goals—its daily activities are directed toward achieving them.
- ___ 4. The organization has developed an ongoing process for evaluating progress toward achieving its goals.
- ___ 5. The evaluation process is taken seriously at all levels in the organization. Staff members are continuously searching for ways to monitor the organization's performance.
- ___ 6. Evaluation findings are acted upon—strengths identified are supported and weaknesses are remedied. The organization does not shy away from abandoning low performing activities and unachievable goals.

Motivation and Control

- ___ 7. All staff members take the quality of the organization's services seriously.
- ___ 8. All staff members know their roles in the organization as well as the specific tasks they are to perform.
- ___ 9. Staff members exercise self-control over their own performance—they are motivated to perform well out of their commitment to achieving the organization's goals, not out of fear of punishment or desire for financial rewards.
- ___ 10. Staff burnout is minimized by giving staff members considerable responsibility for managing their own work, by providing variety in their work assignments and training opportunities, and by offering whatever support they need to perform well.
- ___ 11. Staff members accept the value of constructive conformity to necessary organizational rules and procedures.
- ___ 12. Staff members perceive salaries and fringe benefits as being administered equitably and fairly.

Group Functioning

- ___ 13. Staff members feel they are a part of a group and have a sense of loyalty to the organization.
- ___ 14. Staff members freely cooperate. They share resources, ideas, and experiences.
- ___ 15. Conflict over ideas—goals, philosophies, methods, or results—is fostered by the organization.
- ___ 16. Staff members feel comfortable enough in the group to openly express their feelings. The exchange of negative, as well as positive, feedback is accepted and encouraged.
- ___ 17. Conflict over personal issues is dealt with directly through confrontation or negotiation rather than by smoothing it over or ignoring it.
- ___ 18. Communication flows freely and accurately in all directions—plans, problems, decisions, and developments are shared freely by the director; and problems, suggestions, and criticisms are routinely brought to the director's attention by all employees.

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Staff Development

- ___ 19. The organization assigns high priority to the staff recruitment and selection process so as to assure that the staff has sufficient skills to accomplish the organization's goals.
- ___ 20. The organization's leadership has complete confidence in the skills of staff members and makes every effort to tap these skills to the fullest extent.
- ___ 21. Staff members help set their own training objectives and strategies and assume responsibility for carrying them out. The organization's leadership supports their efforts by providing, whenever possible, the resources they require for self-development.
- ___ 22. Staff members assume responsibility for supporting each other in their efforts to develop to their full potential.
- ___ 23. Staff members continually provide each other with objective feedback on the effects of their performance and behavior. Performance appraisal is a daily, not yearly, occurrence.
- ___ 24. Staff creativity is encouraged by providing an idea-rich environment and by fostering a permissive atmosphere for brainstorming and experimentation.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

- ___ 25. Problems are identified and addressed early—before they get out of hand.
- ___ 26. Problems are solved and decisions are made in a timely, effective manner.
- ___ 27. Staff members most directly affected by, or involved with, a decision either have responsibility for making the decision on their own or have major input before a decision is made.
- ___ 28. Parents' opinions are solicited regarding decisions affecting their children.
- ___ 29. Decisions, once made, are communicated to all affected members of the organization and are implemented in full.

Financial Management

- ___ 30. The organization develops a formal annual budget. The budget is viewed as a means of accomplishing the organization's goals for the year. It is based on a realistic projection of the expenditures required to achieve the goals and the revenues likely to be generated.
- ___ 31. The organization has a sound accounting system which incorporates adequate safeguards against mismanagement and theft and which generates required reports on a timely basis.

- ___ 32. Monthly financial status reports are utilized to monitor the actual implementation of the budget.
- ___ 33. Cash flow is projected at least 12 months in advance.
- ___ 34. The organization carries out a routine schedule for property and equipment inspection and maintenance.

Environmental Interaction

- ___ 35. The organization is effective in collecting information on new ideas and new resources, as well as in processing this information for use in developing the organization.
- ___ 36. The organization has an ongoing plan for marketing its services throughout the community.
- ___ 37. Members of the organization actively participate in efforts to influence public policy decisions which impact on the organization.
- ___ 38. The organization is effective in securing adequate financial and in-kind resources from public and/or private sources.
- ___ 39. The organization maintains its autonomy by drawing resources from a wide range of external sources, thus not becoming overly dependent on any one source.
- ___ 40. The organization is alert to changes in consumer needs, political moods, and economic conditions so that strategies can be developed in time for reacting to these changes.

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