

Quality characteristic 4: Functional structures

*"Wherever God
breathes His
Spirit into form-
less clay, both
life and form
spring forth."*

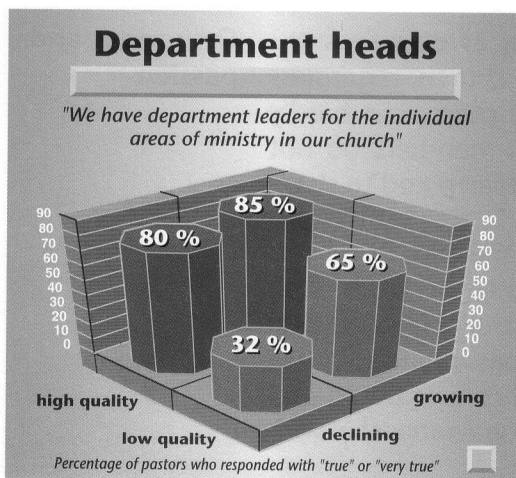
Interestingly enough, "functional structures" proved to be by far the most controversial of the eight quality characteristics. The false paradigms which consciously or unconsciously influence most Christians are especially harmful in this area.

Spiritualists tend to be skeptical of structures, deeming them unspiritual, while those from the technocratic camp mistake certain structures for the very essence of the church of Jesus Christ. The traditionalists among them are more threatened by the adjective "functional" than by the noun "structures." "Functional" is to them an untheological, pragmatic, and unspiritual criterion.

Our research confirmed for the first time an extremely negative relationship between traditionalism and both growth and quality within the church (see diagram top right).

The real difference

The evaluation of the data from over 1000 churches on all continents was particularly interesting with regard to this quality characteristic. Despite the vast differences in structures from church to church within various denominations and cultures, those with a high quality index have certain basic elements in common. One of the 15 sub-principles comprising the quality characteristic "functional structures" is the "department head principle" (see diagram below left).

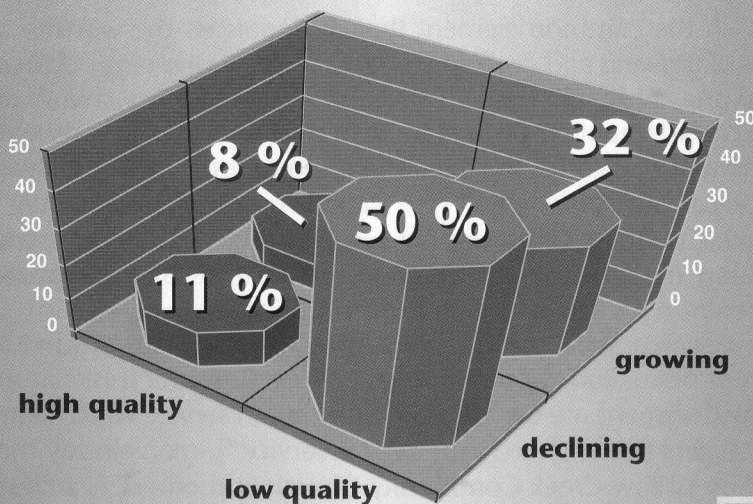


I have chosen this sub-principle because it typifies the core of this quality characteristic: the development of structures which promote an ongoing multiplication of the ministry. Leaders are not simply to lead, but also to develop other leaders.

Anyone who accepts this perspective will continually evaluate to what extent church structures improve the self-organization of the church. Elements not meeting this standard (such as discouraging leadership structures, inconvenient worship service times, demotivating financial concepts) will be changed or eliminated. Through this

Traditionalism

"I consider our church to be tradition-bound"



Percentage of church members who responded with "true" or "very true"

Part 1: 8 quality characteristics

Traditionalism as a polar opposite to the quality characteristic "functional structures": While only one in ten qualitatively above-average churches struggles with traditionalism, every other declining church of lower quality is plagued by this problem.

process of continual structural self-renewal, traditionalistic ruts can, to a large extent, be avoided.

One of the biggest barriers to recognizing the significance of structures for church development is the widespread view that "structure" and "life" are opposites. Interestingly enough, biological research reveals that dead matter and living organisms are not distinguished by their substance, as some people might think, but by the specific *structure* of the relationship of the individual parts to each other. In other words, in God's creation the living and nonliving, the biotic and abiotic are formed from identical material substances and are distinguished only by their structure.

This intimate connection between structure and life was first expressed at creation. The act of creation was an act of forming and shaping. The opposite of "form" is the unformed earth, the amorphous mass, the lump of clay. Wherever God breathes His Spirit into formless clay, both life and form spring forth. A comparative creative act occurs wherever God pours out His Spirit within the church today—and thus giving it structure and form.

Structures and life