

## Governance Models: Do You Know Your Type?

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**W**hile our boards might look the same from a superficial level (each has Director representatives, committees, officers, regularly scheduled meetings, etc.), they may function quite differently. We have several types of governance models at work at our sponsored ministries. The question is: do you know your type?

These differences arise out of different relationships between Board members and staff members as well as the size, purpose and history of the ministry and the philosophy of the Board. Models of boards fall into five types. Before we look at the five models, it important to remember that:

- one governance model is not inherently better for all organizations than other models;
- a single organization may move from one model to another based on its own development or circumstances; and
- some organizations have more than one board and more than one model.

### Advisory Board Model

In this model the board's role is primarily that of helper/ advisor to the CEO. Members are recruited because they are trusted as advisors, have professional skills that are needed and can lend their stature to the organization (credibility by association). Board meetings tend to be informal, task-focused and driven by the agenda of the chief executive. The Advisory Board has little direct influence on the organization and is in danger of not providing the accountability framework required by law.

### Patron Model

The board in a Patron model has even less influence on the organization than an Advisory Board model. The members of the board, usually wealthy, influential persons with a commitment to the mission of the organization, serve primarily as figureheads for fund raising purposes. A Patron Board meets infrequently since most of its work takes place outside of a board meeting. This board's function does not usually include vision development, organizational planning or program monitoring.

### Cooperative Model

A Cooperative Board is a non-hierarchical structure in which a single managing/governing body is composed of official board members, staff members, volunteers and sometimes clients. All responsibility is shared; there is no chief executive; decision-making is done normally by consensus. The direct involvement of all constituencies in decision-making can create a powerful synergy. It is a difficult model to maintain, requiring a deep shared sense of purpose, exceptional level of commitment by all members, willingness to accept

### Is Time to Change Your Model?

- Are Board members dissatisfied with their roles or the way the Board operates?
- Are you experiencing problems that can be traced back to inadequacies in Board structure or process?
- Is your ministry entering a new phase in its life cycle?
- Is the chief executive leaving?
- Have you had a major turnover of Board members?
- Is there a crisis of confidence in the Board or the chief executive?

personal responsibility for the work of others and ability to compromise.

### Management Team Model

A Management Team Board looks like the structure of the organization's administration. Just as there are staff people responsible for finance, human resources, development, programs, etc., the board has committees in these same areas. Boards which operate under this model are characterized by a high degree of involvement in the operational and administrative activities of the organization. If there is some professional staff, the board is deeply involved in highly directive supervision of the chief executive and other staff. When there are no paid staff, the board's committee members become the managers and deliverers of programs and services. Board members take on all governance, management and operational tasks from A to Z. Decision-making extends to fine details about programs, services and administrative practices. The model can degenerate into micromanagement in which board members are unable to delegate authority to staff members.

### Policy Board Model

The need to differentiate between the board's role and management's role led to the Policy Board model. Here board members establish the guiding principles and policies for the organization, delegate responsibility and authority to senior managers, monitor implementation of the principles and policies and hold staff and themselves accountable for their performance. A Policy Board generally has a high-level of confidence in the chief executive, has few standing committees resulting in more meetings of the full board, gives high priority to board development and recruits new members continuously.

(Based on work of Nathan Garber)