



Made to Flourish: Beyond Quick Fixes to a Thriving Organization
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"Organizations are made to flourish, yet too many languish due to a lack of understanding. Shelley Trebesch gives us of years of wisdom by introducing us to a dynamic, holistic, practical and time-tested tool that she calls the ECO model. She makes the complex comprehensible. I'll be using this tool in my work with church planters."

—JR Woodward, author of *Creating a Missional Culture*

The Problems of Leadership Assumptions

Africa Future, a community development organization working in ten African countries, advertised for a new chief financial officer. When discussing the position, job description and potential candidates with the search committee, the founder lamented,

We cannot trust Africans with money. Last year one of the African managers "borrowed" organizational money for a family member in the hospital. The year before, another manager falsified receipts and stole money. Therefore, we instituted strict policies regarding how managers handle petty cash and expense reimbursement. That solved some of our missing cash issues, but then earlier this year, we found another manager receiving kickbacks from several vendors, so we created more rules. Yet the policies do not prevent infractions. These people just cannot be in charge of money, and we need someone from the outside to exercise more stringent control over our finances.

Based on the founder's wishes, the search committee began looking for a non-African, someone from either Europe or North America.

We may be shocked at the evident racism of the Africa Future founder, but further analysis may reveal other important factors regarding his faith assumptions about human beings and organizations. Here are a few to consider. First, in the founder's mind, some cultures are more trustworthy than others—perhaps because of their wealth, education, the societies from which they originate (i.e., "corrupt" vs. "not corrupt") or just due to the founder's own ethnocentrism. Second, he is apparently working on the assumption that workers must be controlled with strict regulations and policies. Otherwise, when given the opportunity, they will take advantage of the organization. Third, the founder sees rules and regulations, rather than environments of transformation and processes for equipping, as the means to ensure control of behavior in organizations.

Here's a situation from another organization. Adam and his team were having lunch with Max, the company CEO, and the senior leadership team. The previous week Max had interrupted the work of Adam's team on a new line of furniture. Max gathered the team and asked for innovative ideas for how their work environment and operations could improve. At the time, the team was so surprised to see the CEO on the factory floor, they could not offer any new ideas. They mostly expressed gratitude to Max and the other leaders for creating a company that welcomed their contributions and enabled them to share in the profits each year. They knew that their work was significant.

The team talked after Max left, however, and realized that if they restructured the production line, it would enable more collaborative work and thus further increase quality,

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which was already the industry standard. They also sensed that their results would increase if the designers and engineers were more a part of the collaboration. They scheduled a meeting with Max and the senior leaders to discuss restructuring the factory layout so that the designers' and engineers' offices would be on the factory floor together.

As Adam's team proposed the new layout at the lunch with Max, the energy in the room was palpable. One idea sparked another and then built on another, until all the leaders and team members arrived at solutions that really could change the way they worked and release more creativity. Knowing that the team and leaders were only a small part of the company, however, Max decided to have them present their collaborative ideas to the other teams and collect more data before the redesign took place.

What were the faith assumptions, the theological underpinnings, in this situation? What did the leaders believe about human beings and their participation in organizations? In my interviews with Max De Pree, he stated that at Herman Miller they view each person as someone who contributes to the mission and success of the company and as someone who wants to grow. Each person, because we are all made in the image of God, offers creativity and knowledge for how things can be better. That is why the company has a policy of profit sharing from which every person in the company benefits.

The different assumptions at Africa Future and Herman Miller radically affected how and if people flourished and whether each organization fulfilled its mission. If leaders assume they need to control and design a machine-like organization (like the founder of Africa Future), those in the organization will feel like "cogs" – lifeless and replaceable parts – and therefore lack a sense of real purpose and contribution. On the other hand, people in life-oriented organizations – flourishing organizations – know they contribute to the overall mission and that their work makes a difference. At the same time they experience their own growth and transformation into the image of Christ.

– Taken from Chapter Four, "Flourishing People"