

OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES RELATING TO THE PCA COMMITTEES AND AGENCIES

by Charles Dunahoo

Reasons for the following thoughts:

1. I am presently involved, as a board member of an institution that is dealing with difficulties and even some transition. As a member of the governance committee and also the search committee for a president, I have had to become even more involved in that situation.
2. A second reason relates to my role in the PCA and especially as an advisory member of the Strategic Planning Committee, one of the organizers of the PCA and Coordinator of CE/P.

You can't be a part of an organizing group from prior to day one, and then work within that organization for 26 years, and not have some thoughts about the present and future.

BACKGROUND

As one of the organizing members of the PCA, I was serving as pastor of one of the 30 churches calling for such an organization. I was also a member of the executive committee of the Presbyterian Churchmen United, one of the four organizing organizations. I was appointed to chair the Constitutional Documents Committee, a responsibility that lasted five years. I was also a member of the first Committee on Administration. I have served as Coordinator of CE/P since January of 1977 and am the longest standing PCA employee. This is the background from which I speak.

When the PCA was organized, a typical thing occurred. It did so in a reactionary manner to things that were judged not to be right in the mother denomination, the PCUS. As the youngest participant, I frequently urged the others that we not throw out the baby with the bath water by assuming all the organizing principles of the mother church were at fault. However, growing out of that context, there was such a feeling of distrust and betrayal, along with a lack of biblical and theological integrity within the PCUS, that the PCA, first the National Presbyterian Church, came into existence in a very definite but disjointed fashion. This was demonstrated by the vote to place the committees in separate locations, even though there were some practical reasons for such an action. The original locations were chosen because of the first coordinators and where they were located at the time.

Though the work of the church was defined in the BCO as "one work," expressed in its committees and agencies (C&As), many saw the new church's mission in less than a wholistic light. Churches were to have the freedom to support the parts and not the whole, if they so chose. No churches were required or obligated to support the committees. Committees were responsible to raise their own funds from the beginning and as a member of the first Administration Committee, as we attempted to balance the parts with the whole, we realized committee budgets were looked on as "hunting licenses."

The structure was such that committees were not required nor organized to work together. For the first five years, the coordinators of those committees did not nor were

they encouraged to meet together. It was not until Dr. G. Aiken Taylor was elected moderator of the GA that coordinators began to come together for “information and prayer,” only.

In reality, the PCA was not organizationally designed to be a team. However, as one of the authors of the church’s organizing principles in the BCO our attempt was to create a theologically ecclesiastical unity. The work of the church was defined as “one work;” however, connection between the committees was arbitrary. There was no assembly-given structural mandate set in place to facilitate that purpose. Actually, the organizing assembly voted to approve duplicating, and even competitive, functions. This was particularly clear with the role of the Administration Committee. While it was given administrative functions for the whole of the church, each committee was allowed to develop its own administrative functions which focused on the part and not the whole. As an original member of the COA, now AC, much resistance was encountered when the Administration Committee attempted to “review and control” the operation and budgets of the other committees and especially when allowing committees to do duplicate functions. Another example would be the Christian Education Committee formed to be the CE/Publications committee to do all the denominational publishing but the other committees were also allowed to do publications.

Initially, in an attempt to downplay the role of the Stated Clerk, again a reaction to the powerful office in the mother church, that role was to be a part time position and preferably filled by a “layman,” and it was placed under the Administration Committee. This created some tension from the beginning because while the stated clerk was to serve the entire denomination, he was subjected to the Administration Committee. Dr. Dan Moore was the first Coordinator of the Administration Committee and Dr. Morton Smith was the part-time stated clerk. How the stated clerk’s budget impacted COA was often a cause for tension. After joining and receiving with the RPCES, the Stated Clerk was placed in a juxtaposition with the Coordinator of COA, or AC, Earl Whitmer. This too created tension and a confusion of line and authority; therefore, it was later determined that such an arrangement did not function well; hence, a restructure was put in place where the Stated Clerk became responsible for the Administration Committee. At that time Paul Gilchrist became the Stated Clerk and he hired Ross Cook to be the Business Manager of AC. This was awkward in many ways because the Stated Clerk had the responsibility of raising funds for one of the committees and agencies. (As an aside, when I was asked to consider succeeding Morton Smith as Stated Clerk, I commented to the committee representatives that while I was not interested and would not be under the present arrangement and structure, I encouraged a separation of Stated Clerk from the AC).

Many of the tensions that I have experienced and observed over the years have been a result of a twofold situation: 1. The structure does not mandate, require, or organizationally require a working together. 2. Tensions and pinched relationships that have often developed for many reasons over the years have often done so because we are not in an organizational structure that encourages nor has procedures in place to encourage otherwise. While some of the problems experienced have definitely been sinful; it would be simplistic to blame all the tensions on interpersonal relationships. (Another aside, during my doctoral program, especially the organizational dynamics part at Georgia State University, I used the PCA’s organization as a case study for class

assignment. The entire class concluded that we were an organizational disaster going somewhere to happen.)

One of the things I researched and defined in my studies both at Westminster Theological Seminary and Georgia State University in the area of organizational psychology and team function, including conflict management, was that to have an effective team, several things have to be in place—a people (team), a purpose (plan) and procedures to manage the people and the plan. The PCA has not had these things in place structurally, thus it has never been determined at what level the committees and agencies, and especially their “executives,” should or are expected to work together.

When all of this is measured against the characteristics of an effective team, the PCA comes up wanting because the structure for teamwork is not in place; the plan is not in place; and whatever happens is really a matter choice of the persons involved. As a result, we coordinators have often been frustrated, as well as some of our staffs, because there are perceptions and expectations of differing degrees of wanting to see ourselves as a team but lacking the ingredients for such. This means that given our present organizational structure and method of funding, we lack the clarity of knowing how to think wholistically and how to think “team” or connectedness from a C&A perspective. Decisions that might ultimately impact each C&A are made without input from the whole and some of the RAO’s facilitate this tension. We dealt with this recently regarding a cost overrun at GA and legal expenses.

Because of the lack of organizational structure, C&As are allowed to do things that either conflict or could do so with assignments of other C&As and without an accountable means of dealing with these areas, tensions and confusions can and do result, plus individuals are often judged or misjudged for doing or not doing certain things.

It has been said, especially in connection with the SPC, that the C&As often experience relational problems, which may in fact be the case, however, many of these situations arise because the PCA structure is not such that it contributes to the avoidance of, but rather tends to feed, these problems. Therefore, if there are relational problems among the leaders, we need to deal with these for the honor of Christ but also the example to the Church and world. However, we need to be realistic and know what we are dealing with and that we are in a structure that does not encourage teamwork. That does not mean that we cannot be creative and do so, but it does mean that we need to clearly define the situation in which we find ourselves and not beat up on ourselves, so to speak, for being in this quasi-connected configuration. Can we or should we attempt to fix the situation or should we simply acknowledge it and go on from here? The answer lies somewhere in remembering that it is not about us, but about Him, the King and Head of the Church and what He would have us do.

I think the SPC has an opportunity to do something constructive at this time and believe that it might take another ten years for another such an opportunity. This could be a strategic moment, if we do not “blow it;” therefore I do not say these things lightly.

Funding has and always will be an issue of struggle in the PCA for some of us because of who we are and how we view the church. That is especially true today when you add

to the independency of church giving the question as to the role of “denomination” (the affinity movement concept). You will see below a comment regarding the frustration of the initial COA(AC) committee in dealing with funding, only early on to capitulate *to a quasi parachurch model*. I believe the *askings* or *partnership shares* or some form thereof is the best way to continue to address this issue because of the way things are funded in the PCA. You cannot coerce giving and obviously ownership. The reality is that we cannot afford to stop the present method used by our MTW, RUM, and some of MNA. It would be too devastating to the missions programs of the PCA. The rest of us [other C&As] cannot have that success because of the lack of manpower for one thing and that is why most of us, some more than others, constantly struggle with funding.

We can raise the question of **merging certain agencies and committees**, as though that might offer some solution to the funding, but such will not solve that funding problem. While we should be good stewards in our overall ministry and not allow unnecessary duplication of ministries, resources, and maybe personnel, it is now the the PCA’s process to raise budgets by whatever means. This is so presently ingrained in our denomination that to believe we can change that is an effort in futility, even if we should. This is especially true if we only do so in a piece meal fashion.

I do think the PCA as a denomination needs to know, if in fact such is the case, that we committees and agencies are being **good stewards of the resources**. That is supposed to be one of the reasons why there is some review of budgets from the permanent committees, including the cursory evaluation process of AC, and the Committee of Commissioners, before they reach the floor of the Assembly. The original design was for a more substantial budget review process and the failure to do that more effectively has now been characterized as “relational problems among the coordinators”. The reality is that it is a structure and strategy problem which may foster less than desirable relations, but also, vice versa. That evaluation process is too simplistic and superficial a judgment.

While I think it proper to continue to challenge the Assembly not to vote for budgets they will not support in their churches, such efforts have not experienced much success. For example: A former business manager of AC would annually make that speech on the floor of the Assembly before the budgets were approved, but SO what?

The problem with the present budget review process is that it is too superficial and short circuited because without an overall denominational plan or strategy of ministry, there is really no benchmark against which to measure those budgets, except each C&A’s own plan. For example: In reality could an evaluation/review committee say to CE/P, “You should not spend that much on women’s ministry, or you should do thus and so,” when the budget reflects the Committee’s plan?

I do think that it would be good stewardship for the **C&As to be evaluated** from time to time, as to whether they are using resources wisely. However, we simply have a structure that does not lend itself to that assessment. (That’s not a relational matter except where the level of trust is not present in the system.) That would involve having an overall Assembly plan, knowing where the C&As fit into that plan, and then judging whether or not they are working within that overall plan.

When we organized the PCA, our first design was for the stated clerk to be a part-time position and to be filled preferably by a layman. (See Asheville convention minutes and the minutes of the first GA 1973). The rationale was because, in the mainline churches (PCUS and UPCUSA), the stated clerk's role was very political and powerful. (It remains that way today in those churches. I heard some of the political speeches by the candidates nominated at this past year's mainline assembly. He was referred to as the most powerful person in those denominations.) The PCA attempted to guard against that as it did with any **centralization of power and control**.

Addendum

THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF TEAM, Patrick Lencioni, Jossey-Bass

Five dysfunctions

Absence of Trust---(invulnerability) lack of openness and willing to be vulnerable

Fear of Conflict---(artificial harmony) veiled discussions and guarded comments

Lack of Commitment (ambiguity) often pretend commitment such as Abilene, group think

Avoidance of accountability---(low standards) hesitant to call their peers on actions and counterproductive behaviors

Inattention to results---(status and ego) individual needs placed above the team

A functional team

1. They trust one another.
2. They engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.
3. They commit to decisions and plans of action.
4. They hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
5. They focus on the achievement of collective results.

1.

With the absence of trust—people conceal weaknesses and mistakes, hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback, hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility, jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them, fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences, waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect, hold grudges, dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

With Trust—admit weaknesses, ask for help, accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility, give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at the negative conclusion, take risks in offering feedback and assistance, appreciate and tap into one another's skill and experiences, focus time and energy on important issues, not politics, offer and accept apologies without hesitation, look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

2.

Fear Conflict—have boring meetings, create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive, ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success,

fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members, waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management.

Engage in conflict—having lively interesting meetings, extract and exploit the ideas of all team members, solve real problems quickly, minimize politics, put critical topics on the table for discussion.

3.

Fail to commit—creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities, watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay, breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure, revisits discussions and decisions again and again, encourages second-guessing among team members.

Teams that commit—creates clarity around direction and priorities, aligns the entire team around common objectives, develops an ability to learn from mistakes, takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do, moves forward without hesitation, changes direction without hesitation or guilt.

4.

Avoid accountability—creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance, encourages mediocrity, misses deadlines and key deliverables, places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline.

Holds one another accountable—ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve, identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation, establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards, avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

5.

Not focused on results—stagnates, fails to grow, rarely defeats competitors, loses achievement-oriented employees, encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals, is easily distracted

Focuses on collective results—retains achievement-oriented employees, minimizes individualistic behavior, enjoys success and suffers failure acutely, benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team, avoids distraction.