

# oqm

## The ABC's of Organic Quality Management

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*Organic quality management (oqm<sup>®</sup>) measures and develops the health and quality of an organization – and is the “biotic brother” of Natural Church Development, designed for Christian not-for-profit organizations. What makes oqm<sup>®</sup> unique is its holistic assessment of an organization according to the following three dimensions: structural (“Organization”), human (“Organism”) and spiritual (“Spirit”).*

The goal of oqm<sup>®</sup> is to help an organization develop an environment which is more satisfying for its workers and do greater justice to its commission. To achieve this, oqm<sup>®</sup> begins by taking bearings of the organization's current position from an holistic perspective. The areas of leadership, co-workers, personal spirituality, structures, values, company culture, authenticity, team-work and relationships are all assessed. Use is made of a survey involving a questionnaire which has been developed according to scientifically verifiable criteria. During this process, information on “external factors” such as the professionalism of teams and inner convictions (eg. faith) is compiled and interlinked.

oqm<sup>®</sup> supports executives to

- .. accurately measure the health and quality of their organizations
- .. refine vision, goals and strategies
- .. revisit essential values
- .. focus resources appropriately
- .. produce lasting health and fruit
- .. lead their organization holistically using the three dimensions

### Three important words

"Organic quality management" (or "oqm" for short) may seem familiar to you. This is probably because each of the words on their own are not uncommon. However, what if you put the words together into the phrase "organic quality management"? What does it mean? This booklet is designed to give a brief, easy explanation of "oqm" and how you will benefit from it.

Each of the three words have equal importance to the overall meaning.

“Management“ often sounds very bombastic or diffuse, but all it really means is the leadership, direction and development of organizations such as companies, social institutions or churches.

“Quality“ is about ensuring that an organization operates at the highest possible level of excellence throughout its life. It challenges the notion that an organization is alright if it survives by just managing to scrape through any old how. It also challenges the notion that health and success is measured purely by putting the spotlight on quantity, that is size and unlimited growth.

"Organic“ means “being part of living nature“. Although we frequently talk about abstract terms such as structures and strategies when discussing organizations, nature offers a wealth of excellent ideas and solutions which achieve great success for organizations when applied in a variety of different situations. You would be surprised how many lessons from nature can be transferred to areas which are not normally considered to be part of the “natural“ domain!

Putting this together, we might begin with a basic definition: "organic quality management - oqm - is about leadership which manages the quality of an organization's growth by drawing on principles from nature as foundations for organizational evaluation and development."

This is a starting point, but it is not the full oqm story. It sits on a unique foundation which we must now explain.

## **Why the Goose is more important than the Egg**

Remember the story of the goose that laid the golden eggs? Its owner was thrilled about the eggs and was impatient to make the greatest possible profit. So he killed the goose to get all the golden eggs immediately. The result was a dead goose and no more golden eggs.

Could there have been a happy ending for the owner.....and the goose? If the owner had used his goose for breeding purposes, he would have ended up with many generations of geese, a high multiplication potential (more and more geese) and a high level of quality (the best golden eggs refined through the breeding program). He could have led a carefree life as a goose breeder or gold trader. Instead, his enterprise finished with one meal of roast goose.

Some years ago the elephants in an African country were on the point of extinction. A nature reserve was established and a decree issued forbidding the shooting of elephants. It seemed like a sensible solution: the elephants were able to reproduce in peace and it was not long before the population reached a stable size again. In fact there was every reason to be content – the goal had been achieved.

That was not the end of the story. More elephants need more food to eat and before long

all the trees had been gnawed bare. The elephants continued to multiply, the number of trees dwindled, and the elephants started dying of hunger. The total ban on shooting, which had originally seemed the right solution, proved to be too short-sighted and finally had fatal consequences: The elephants were more or less wiped out. Nature is not capable of dealing with unlimited growth and actually takes action against it.

The solution should have considered all the environmental factors to ensure the long term sustainability of a healthy herd, not just the short-term reversal in the decline of the elephant population. Factors such as the food or water supply in the region, restricting shooting quotas or imposing closed seasons for the elephants, should all have been on the table.

Here is another example. A picturesque holiday beauty spot wants to offer its guests something special so it organizes entertainment features such as folk festivals, stunt shows, travelling circuses, etc, throughout the high season. In the short term this program proves attractive to the guests, but it also incurs considerable noise and an increase in traffic. In the course of time, the holidaymakers decide in favour of other, more peaceful holiday destinations, because the resort has become too busy and overcrowded.

All three illustrations seem so different and yet it is not hard to see the connection between them. They alert us to organic principles which can be learned from nature and applied to the way we run organizations. It is these that oqm takes into account.

A number of situations may now be springing to your mind where solutions which appeared to be a good idea in the first place did not always bring about the desired result in the end, since they were contrary to the nature of the issue or people concerned. oqm helps to avoid these rash decisions which are ill-suited to the given situation.

## **What makes oqm unique?**

oqm is unique because it offers an holistic solution to these issues.

oqm begins by assuming that human organizations are not static organizations but dynamic living organisms. They are more than an organization chart, job descriptions and things to do. They are made up of people. Sometimes we talk about 'building' organizations but just as often we talk about 'growing' them, implying that they have a life of their own, which is true.

oqm addresses what it means for an organization not only to be alive and growing but be healthy as it grows. It encourages the healthy growth of organizations by applying natural principles through three key dimensions of organizational life: the structural ("Organization"), the human ("Organism") and the spiritual ("Spirit"). All these dimensions make a vital contribution to the health of the organization and its people.

One of the things oqm does is explore the balance between the organic and organizational. On the one hand, organizational structures can be archaic. They no

longer fulfil their original purpose and exist just for their own sake. Even so they are maintained at all costs. In some cases the structures even directly attack the organic nature of the organization. They restrict the life which is trying to unfold and develop. On the other hand, organizations may have structures which supposedly promote organizational development but actually produce similar problems because they fail to impose any restrictions on growth. An analogy would be cancer cells – unstructured life – producing vigorous growth but ending in the death of the whole organism.

Oqm goes further. The structural and human dimensions are regular subjects of discussion about the nature of organizations (though there are new things to learn about them with oqm). But why the spiritual dimension? oqm maintains that the picture is not an holistic one until spirituality is included. Whoever recognizes that organizations are dynamic living organisms made up of people, cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that God is the Creator of all life if they want to encourage sustainable living structures within those organizations. God is the author of the natural principles that sustain life and health – the life in nature, the life of organizations and the life of the people in those organizations. For this reason, seeking God's perspective on, and will for, all parts of an organization's development is essential.

***oqm can thus be summed up as holistic management on the foundation of spiritual values, where life and people are centre-stage and account is taken of the whole “system“ with all its interconnections.***

oqm has its roots in Natural Church Development (NCD). NCD is an ongoing international research project by theologian Christian A. Schwarz and the organizational psychologist Christoph Schalk into what stimulates long term, sustainable, healthy growth in churches. The research (status as of Spring 2006) has examined over 40,000 churches in over 60 countries to discover the reasons for their strengths and weaknesses. The research has uncovered essential principles and quality characteristics which countless churches all over the world are addressing to improve their quality.

What has become clear is that the principles for healthy growth uncovered in this research have a wider application than just churches themselves. Many leaders of organizations, such as those engaged in charitable and social work, and parachurch activities, have seen the importance of applying these principles. This has resulted in the commencement of a series of projects under the name oqm.

## **How can you participate?**

OQM International just completed the scientific testing of the approach and the questionnaire being used, and is working on national norms right now. If your organization is interested in using oqm, you are invited to participate in the norming process. Please contact Christoph Schalk at [intercoach@oqmnet.org](mailto:intercoach@oqmnet.org).