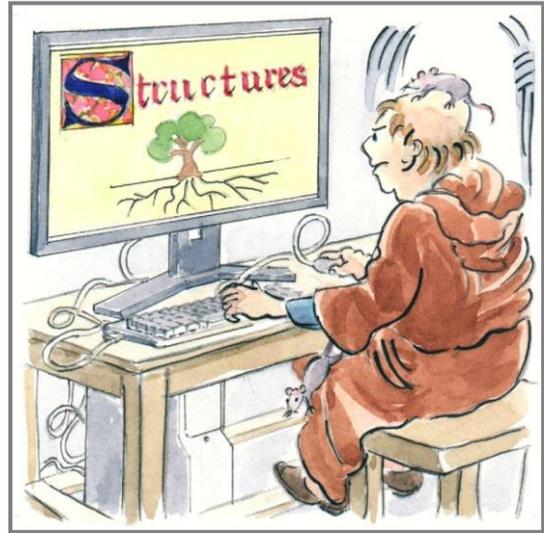


Line management in a church staff team

TN20 Training Notes series: Structures



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Many churches now have a staff 'team' in some form. Often this is a mix of ordained and lay people. Some will be full-time employees, others may be part-time, others may function in a voluntary capacity but be regarded as staff.

Who is responsible for line management within such a staff? This is not a straightforward question as few churches have an established management structure. And many Ministers do not regard themselves as managers.

This set of notes suggests some possible ways forward.

There are three related, overlapping yet distinct, functions that need to be considered for even a staff of two. These are:

1 **The responsibilities of employment**

This is an area sadly neglected by many churches. Yet there is a huge body of legislation to consider covering issues such as contract, health and safety, discrimination, payment.

The Church Trustees (whether PCC, Diaconate or whatever) have legal and moral responsibilities for those they employ to undertake their work. Sometimes they simply assume the Minister has it all in hand. Often the responsibility, being a corporate one, is ignored. Few churches can run to an HR (human resources) department, but someone needs to have an HR brief, whether a Trustee or member of staff.

2 **The practice of management**

This relates to helping each employee undertake their work and develop in it to their capacity, so offering satisfaction for everyone. Churches should be in the business of developing people, and so should be good at this. Sadly, this is rarely the case.

The common areas that a manager should be giving time to include the definition of role (job description), the concept of direction (personal aims and targets), day-by-day encouragement (through regular meetings, praise where appropriate), development (training, new responsibilities, reprimand where necessary), and review (appraisal).

This calls for skills in areas such as delegation and communication, appreciation of how people work and react, and self-awareness. This is covered in much greater detail in Article A32, *Be creative as a line manager*, on this website.

3 **The dynamics of teamwork**

Whether the staff body is a technical 'team' or not is a matter for some debate (and hence the inverted commas round the word 'team'). See Training Notes TN41, *What makes a group a team*, for background to this point. How they work in co-operation with each other so that they offer an effective ministry together, though, is important.

There needs to be a clear team leader. Although this will normally be the Minister, there is no reason why it has to be, especially if the Minister has little skill or experience in teamwork. For detail on this, see Article A45, *How to lead a team at church*, on this website.

These three, though related, are distinct. The rest of these notes deal with the second one, but any church or mission would be wise to consider all three as essential lines for study and putting into practice. All three need to be held together with about equal importance.

Possible management structures

In a charity (a more appropriate comparison for a church than a commercial business) the Trustees or Board are responsible for the overall direction of the work, leaving the day-to-day outworking of that to the Chief Executive they have appointed, and to his or her staff.

The Chief Executive will line-manage perhaps four or five key staff, who in turn, depending on the size of the enterprise, will line-manage or supervise others.

Sorting line-management on the staff of any church, however, is not so straightforward. Consider the following.

- In Anglican churches, clergy (including the incumbent) are not normally employed by the PCC because they are regarded as 'office-holders'.
- In all denominations, managing a staff team is not what many Ministers have been prepared for. Their ordination was for a ministry of word and sacrament. Most would see their primary tasks in terms of preaching, pastoring and spiritual leadership rather than being part of a management structure.
- Many clergy are self-starters, used to working on their own initiative, unused to a reporting structure. They may well fail to understand that most other staff need considerably more support than this.
- A gift of teaching or pastoring does not imply a gift of managing. Many (but not all!) clergy find it hard to review another's work or to reprimand where necessary. Some are simply insecure in their own role.
- Staff management takes time. The responsibility for even one Assistant Minister should, if done properly, take up a significant part of the Minister's time, at least in the early stages. A team of three or four diverse staff will be a major commitment.

But management structure there needs to be if staff are to work well together, be encouraged to give of their best and develop in their roles. The way it works out, though, may differ from church to church. Here are five possibilities to consider.

1 **Senior Minister line-manages the staff**

If Ministers are prepared to see managing the staff as a key responsibility within their role, then it is right that they should be the senior 'manager' within the structure. This means that vision can be worked out in a coherent way within the staff, as well as within the leadership of the church.

In smaller teams, this might mean responsibility for everyone else (if no more than three or four). A traditional pattern would be that of a Vicar with a training Curate, or a Minister with an Assistant or Associate. These days it is more likely to be a Minister with a Youth Worker and/or an Administrator.

2 **Senior Minister heads a staffing structure**

In larger churches the same principle requires an extra tier in the structure. A simple example would be the Minister being responsible for two or three staff who themselves line-manage others.

The number of people reporting to the Minister should be kept as small as possible because the roles as leader/teacher/pastor must be given priority. The danger in a growing church is that the Senior Minister may start by line-managing all staff, but this structure is not changed as the number of staff grows.

If possible the line responsibilities should be for 'pastoral/teaching' staff rather than for 'administrative/support' staff. So one pattern might be direct responsibility for an Assistant Minister, a Community Worker and an Operations Manager, with the Ops Manager then responsible for other support staff such as Administrator, Caretaker and Pastoral Assistant.

3 **Another member of staff manages others**

But some Ministers have little skill in, or inclination towards, the management of others. In such cases it may be possible to arrange for another member of staff to line-manage others (such as an Associate Minister, or a Church 'Manager' in some form) – although in these cases the Minister must still technically be the manager of this person!

There is no need to be bound to a hierarchical structure in Christian work, so a solution such as this is perfectly feasible. It can be powerful in the message it gives as to the priority of the Senior Minister, and yet the need to take staff management seriously.

4 **Representatives of the Trustees manage staff**

Another solution is for a representative of the employing body (Trustees or PCC) to act as a manager. It might be (unusually) that one Trustee acts as line manager for several staff, or that different people fulfil this role (so the Youth Worker might be managed by a member of the Youth Committee).

There are two options. The first is an ex officio approach whereby, for example, the convener of the Youth Committee automatically manages the Youth Worker. The other is the manager to be chosen not so much by office as by skill and experience. It is after all just as possible for there to be an unsuitable lay manager as there is for there to be an unskilled clergy manager.

This can work provided it is one person with the responsibility and not a committee, and provided the person is very much in tune with the Minister's thinking and the church's values, as well as being a capable manager. But, it has to be said, it is not a completely satisfactory solution to the issue because the Trustee is unlikely to see the employee's day-to-day work closely enough and this structure divorces management from the staff team.

5 **A hybrid arrangement**

It is not uncommon for the Minister to manage his or her Assistant, for the Youth Committee to manage the Young People's Worker, and for the Administrator to manage two other staff. This usually comes about as a small church grows and builds up a staff team post by post. If this is working well there may be no need to change it, but there can be difficulties over co-ordination and coherence. What happens, for example, when the various managers are not keeping closely in touch with each other? There comes a time as a church staff grows when the management structure may need a complete rethink.

One practical application of the wider scenario mentioned earlier of employment, management and teamwork, is how the staff meeting is run. This is covered in Training Notes, TN128, *Effective staff meetings*.

What happens regarding staff management in your church? Please email me with your ideas and experiences.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes> and then TN20. They cover one aspect of a possible training event on managing staff in a church or mission agency context. See Article A32, *Be creative as a line manager*, for detailed advice about how to manage staff, and A45, *How to lead a team at church*, for the team aspect. Also Training Notes TN17, *Suggested questions for an annual review*, and TN128, *Effective staff meetings*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN20 under Structures (with a link to Management).

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