

Life Cycle Questionnaire

An Indicator of organizational effectiveness

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Please read these instructions before you answer the questionnaire:

Choose the 10 statements which best describe your organization (or other social system), marking them with a tick adjacent. Then from those 10 statements choose the 5 which are the most accurate description. Place an extra tick next to the first tick.

In other words, when you've answered the questions you should have two ticks next to the five that best describe your organization, and one tick next to another five.

_____ 1. There are minor problems. But they mostly arise on the few occasions when people don't follow normal procedures.

_____ 2. We know what we are trying to accomplish in the long run, though we often fall short of it. To achieve it we have to reorder our short term priorities, perhaps substantially.

_____ 3. We are still committed to the worth-while nature of our work. When it comes to achieving it, we seem of have lost our way.

_____ 4. We are doing very well, though a need to fine-tune our day-to-day operations is becoming more apparent.

_____ 5. We are doing very well, though there are some identifiable issues requiring a little "fine-tuning" to some of our day-by-day operations.

_____ 6. We usually manage to work our way through to our goals. It is hard to do so, however, because we are often distracted by issues that have little to do with our real goals.

_____ 7. We perform adequately. We often achieve our aims; we would achieve them more effectively and easily if we used better ways of doing so.

_____ 8. We are doing a worth while job, and doing it well. Our real aims are often achieved, but sometimes frustrated because we often go the wrong way about handling the details.

_____9. We are an effective system, functioning well. If we looked for something to improve we would probably find it, but there is not present need.

_____10. There are pockets where people still believe in this system and try to perform, but they are getting fewer.

_____11. There are no real problems. We are an exceptional system, operating at our peak.

_____12. We often do things very badly. But that doesn't matter, because the things we get right are usually futile anyway.

_____13. We are an effective system, doing well in almost all respects. There are some minor issues we could work on, but there is no urgency required.

_____14. A proportion of us are still in there, working away eagerly. But a lot of the time we seem to be pulling in different directions, and a large number of us seem to have given up entirely.

_____15. We have a reasonably good idea of what we're trying to accomplish. We have some idea of how to go about it, but don't give this enough attention.

_____16. System? What system? We are just an accidental collection of individuals waiting for an opportunity to leave.

_____17. We have lost direction entirely. Our results usually miss the mark completely. People are becoming demoralized.

_____18. WE have a fair idea of what we're trying to accomplish. But we have little notion of how to go about it.

_____19. Our pride in our system appears to have collapsed. Almost everyone has given up, and just goes through the motions.

_____20. We are a team, with clear and worthwhile goals, good procedures, and well-intentioned people who almost always do a superb job.

_____21. Most of us are enthusiastic people. But a lot of our effort goes into trifles which don't have a lot to do with our real aims.

When you have chosen the 10 items, and then the 5 items within those 10, transfer the ticks to the appropriately-numbered boxes below:

11 20 1 13 9 7 5 4 8 3 6 21 2 15 18 14 17 12 10 19 16

Practices and Procedures		Directions and Purposes		Identity and Unity
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Notice where along the continuum the ticks cluster, especially the double ticks. They may fit one of these five patterns...

Suspended Doubt

Choices cluster tightly at the left hand end of the scale: a high performing team

A cohesive group with high morale and common goals. It is not that the group is perfect. Rather, its members have agreed to withhold doubt and skepticism. Everyone assumes all is well. The system will probably continue to thrive in the short term, even without any change. Preparing for the long term may be warranted.

Operational Doubt

Top 5 choices mostly in practices and procedures.

Some doubt begins to be expressed. Some problems are identified. Some operational norms are questioned or challenged. The first and most typical response is denial. This is followed by attempts to return the system to normal, often by blaming someone. It is usually assumed the team would be fine if only people would do what they are supposed to do.

In fact there is a good chance that the “people problems” stems at least partly from the system. Some analysis of and modifications to tasks or roles or relationships is probably in order.

Ideological Doubt

Top 5 choices mostly in Directions and Purposes.

Questioning of goals and purposes begins. Doubts are expressed that fine-tuning can remedy the problem: in some quarters it may be acknowledged deeper surgery is required.

The typical response is to acknowledge the problems but to defend the underlying ideology. Re-examining the team’s vision and goals is likely to be

appropriate. Checking the fit between the team and its environment is probably warranted.

Ethical Doubt

Top 5 choices mostly in Identity and Unity.

The system is characterized by alienation. Employees no longer find meaning in their work, or in their membership of the system. There are increasing doubts that the situation can be recovered. Management becomes increasingly defensive, and often controlling and punitive. It is unlikely that productive change can occur unless you examine the culture of the organization and its style of management.

Absolute Doubt

Choice cluster tightly a the right hand en of the scale.

The system or team exists in name only. The workforce is completely alienated. If employment is easily obtained, absence and turnover reach epidemic proportions. Only increasing repression can keep the system functioning in any manner at all.

It may be that nothing can be done: better perhaps to start from scratch. If the system can be salvaged it will be because people respond to a crisis when invited to do so. But it will require a fundamentally new psychological contract between management and employees, a willingness to admit errors of the past on both sides, and a genuine wish to forge a new partnership with everyone.

The Decline of Organizations

Unless presenting problems are dealt with, it is usual for organizations to decline slowly through the various stages of doubt. It is also usual for those neared the workforce to have declined further than those further from it.

This life-cycle model of organizations is based on the work of John Sherwood (1977), *Leadership: the responsible exercise of power*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Management Design Inc.

Further elaboration of related theory can be found in Dalmau, T. (1994): *Archetypes, Life Cycles and Organizational Culture*. Paper Presented at Psyche as Work Symposium, Omaha, Nebraska. October 1994. Dalmau & Associates Pty Ltd. Brisbane

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