Organizational Structure: Challenges and Opportunities

Organizational silos hinder collaboration.

If you ask any association executive what the challenges are in being a successful, member-relevant organization, they will identify the economy, changing member needs, challenges to the profession/industry, and remaining market competitive. Within these challenges lies a threat nearly everyone can identify with, organizational silos.

Organizational silos create a mindset when certain sectors do not, or cannot, easily share information with others in the same organization. This type of mentality will reduce efficiency in the overall operation, reduce morale, and may contribute to the demise of a productive organizational culture. As described by Patrick Lencioni in his book *Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars*, “Silos – and the turf wars they enable – devastate organizations. They waste resources, kill productivity, and jeopardize the achievement of goals.”

As Jeffrey Cufaude identifies about the dangers of silos in organizations in his article, *Break Out of the Silo Mentality* (Associations Now), “Simple tools allow us to engage with people beyond their functional titles or geographical locations, yet much thinking and activity still occurs through traditional channels. Our environment and the opportunities it presents for innovation requires more integrated thinking and cross-functional solutions, but many efforts still occur independently, isolated from others’ insights and perspectives. We say that shared success and working for the greater good are meaningful and appealing to us, but individuals frequently act out of self-interest.”

Systems thinking can help to diminish silos.

Systems thinking is defined by Virginia Anderson and Lauren Johnson in their book *Systems Thinking Basics* as “a school of thought that focuses on recognizing the interconnections between the parts of the system and synthesizing them into a unified view of the whole.” Systems thinking takes a holistic and big-picture view, as opposed to one that is more simplistic and linear. It looks for solutions that acknowledge the dynamic, complex, and interconnected nature of relationships and activities. If we wish to better understand why silos occur in organizations, systems thinking asks us to look beyond isolated events and to consider the patterns of behavior, and even deeper, the structure, beliefs, or mental models that may be contributing to them.

As an organization filled with systems thinkers, AAMFT members are in a unique position to examine the current organizational structure, as well as the proposed option, with this heightened lens to determine how to best move the association into the future and diminish silos. Every association leader has to manage in the moment. But long-term change only occurs when we try to understand and address the organizational structures and practices that perpetuate silo thinking and behavior. The question now facing AAMFT is, “Does AAMFT continue with first order changes or make a second order change that will meet the future needs of members, the profession, and our association?”

AAMFT’s strategic plan serves as a blueprint to how organizational models should be considered and evaluated.

AAMFT’s strategic plan creates a framework for the current and future work and direction of the organization. It is developed through consideration of the member and professional need, with an eye towards association
and business best-practices. The strategic plan also identifies an “envisioned future,” the ten to fifteen year planning horizon goals which any organizational structure will need to serve.

### Envisioned Future Goals (2013 AAMFT Strategic Plan)

1. AAMFT will successfully advocate for the MFT profession resulting in no differences in privileges, payment, employment, or the ability to practice independently from other behavioral health care licenses.
2. AAMFT will be the primary and indispensable resource for those practicing systemic and relational therapies throughout the world.
3. AAMFT will be the primary source of information synthesizing and promoting evidence based research related to systemic and relational therapies.
4. AAMFT will set the standard among comparable associations involving social, ecological, and ethical responsibility.
5. AAMFT will be engaged in association management practices that place it at the leading edge of organizational excellence.

While these big goals are specific to AAMFT, they share commonalities with the visions of success in other associations. To accomplish these goals, and remain relevant to the members they serve, associations generally focus on four major operational strategies:

- **Protection of the right to work (practice):** This includes ensuring that the association is in a situation to defend against legal threats, such as the Texas Medical Association lawsuit, that have a potentially dangerous systemic ripple effect throughout the industry.
- **Increasing collaboration and growth:** In the converse, this also means decreasing silos and ensuring that connections and relationships are allowed to be built and thrive organically to advance the profession and its various nuances.
- **Strengthening member voice and engagement:** Creating vibrancy and opportunities for engagement and communication ensure that needs and desires of the field are easily understood. An additional consideration is that the organizational structure is flexible enough to allow for reaction and change to meet those needs.
- **Maintaining relevancy:** Ensuring that the organization remains a member-informed organization that provides relevancy to the member by creating an experience that can be tailored to meet their specific needs and career development goals without hindering them through factors like cost and lack of member engagement experiences.

**There is no “best” organizational model.**

Various organizational models exist because there is no one size fits all model that works for every association. Based upon the association’s strategic goals and member needs, organizations may adopt different structures over time to remain viable. And an organizational structure is only the foundation – it is the strategies and the vibrancy of the people within it who create success. However, models can be evaluated based upon what aspect of the model they structurally emphasize. These components include:

- **Board driven:** The emphasis the structure places on the Board of Directors and their policy and strategic impact on the direction of the organization.
- **Member informed:** The emphasis the structure places upon the relationship with members and their role in informing the direction of the organization.
- **Staff managed:** This is the emphasis the structure places on the role of staff in determining the direction of the organization.
Infographics illustrating the relationships and interconnectivity of various organizational parts for AAMFT’s current structure and the proposed restructure have been provided as attachments to this resource paper. The infographics are not intended to be complete representations of how each structure does or will definitively work within AAMFT. Rather they are intended to give you an overview of how the structures are intended to work within associations in general and the resulting relationships between the member, ancillary groups (such as divisions or special interest groups), the Board, and the staff. In addition, the infographics show how different individual members (the MFT in China, the Passionate Leader, the Millennial Interested in LGBTQ Issues, and the Budget Conscious Member) could function in each.

In addition, each of the infographics illustrates how the model places an emphasis on the components of being member informed, board driven, and staff managed.

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<th>Current Structure</th>
<th>Proposed Restructure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Board driven, Member informed, Staff managed</td>
<td>Board driven, Member informed, Staff managed</td>
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The information in this resource paper was excerpted from:

- *Break Out of the Silo Mentality;* Jeffrey Cufaude; ASSOCIATIONS NOW
- *The Silo Mentality: How to Break Down The Barriers;* Brent Gleeson & Megan Rozo; Forbes
Current

Board driven, Member informed, Staff managed

MEMBERSHIP

- Lives in China
- No Opportunity to Join
- Passionate Leader
  - Mandatory Geographic Division Membership
- Millennial Interested in LGBTQ Issues
- New Professional (Budget Conscious)

AAMFT Board

Staff

DIVISIONS

- Geographic focus (mandatory)
- State/provincial advocacy done through geographic segmentation
- Mandatory division membership

Dues (Clinical Fellow)
- Mandatory: $239 - $388
- National: $201
- Divisions: $38 - $187

INFORMS

- State/provincial advocacy efforts
- Benefits vary
Proposed Restructure

Board driven, Member informed, Staff managed

- Special interest groups (optional)
- Content generated / informed
- Advocacy/networking done via special interest group
- Knowledge-based policy governance

Dues (Clinical Fellow)
Mandatory: $201
Optional: ~$60 / SIG