

Abstract

The Organizational Dynamics of the Catholic Church in the field of social care.

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Objectives:

To present questions for reflection on the identities of charitable Organizations taking into consideration the relationship between values and principles of its complex nature and the models and management process such as the impact of introducing professional practices in a field staked out by charity.

Taking as the main theoretical reference the Theory of Structuration of Anthony Giddens (2000), the concept of agency was used, through qualitative research methodologies, to try to characterize and to understand the models and their organizational dynamics and the ways of action of Social Workers operating in the scope of the Parish Social Centers in Lisbon.

Based on the principle that “*Agent*” and “*Structure*” have a dialectic relation (Giddens, 2000), the objective was to understand the way the organizational dynamics of Parish Social Centers are processed as Organizations of great relevance in the field of Catholic social care in Portugal. Here, action is in accordance with the following values and underlying principles: Social Justice, Charity towards the Person considered as the “beginning, individual and aim” of the action, universality and subsidiarity (Conferência Episcopal Portuguesa, 1997:22; Encíclica "Centesimus Annus" in Stilwell, 2002).

To this end, the type of leader, the power structure, the decision and evaluation process, organizational projects, the existence of opportunities for training and reflection and the impact of the more dynamics individuals on the action of the different agents nominated Social Workers were all subject to analysis.

In this approach to organizational dynamics, the main reference point was the work of Jean Afchain who basically considers Organizations to be fundamentally constituted by three systems: the Organizational System, the Institutional and Political System and the

System of Values, proposing a notion of Social Action Organization (Jean Afchain, 2001).

The geographic scope of this investigation was the Dioceses of Lisbon and the selected methodology was fundamentally a qualitative methodology. Data collection was fundamentally carried out by a case study methodology, selected for its importance to the context through recourse to techniques such as interview and observation.

As final conclusions or considerations, a range of aspects were identified:

- tension and dissonance relative to the design and Mission of this type of Organization, which extends from charitable action as a reflection of the nature and values of the Catholic Church through to a conception that defines this organisational type as lenders of services from a market logic acting in response to the self-financing requirements,
- tension and poorly defined relationship with the Government,
- some kind of ambiguity in relating the definition of the Mission and organisational objectives,
- low rotation and alternation levels and poor democratic participation in the election process as well in the internal decision process, of course delimited, in general, by a vertical organizational structure as much in form as in content,
- a moral vision of social problems by leaders incompatible with the professional implementation vision,
- management models, in which planning and evaluation are not greatly valued to those increasing a logic of exercising power that generates non propitious spaces to reflective and participative decision making processes,
- a low level of innovation and low levels of internal and external participation.

Considering the above, this study may prove highly relevant as it contributes to increasing knowledge and understanding on a relatively unstudied field (at least in

Portugal) but experiencing great growth, which is Social Care Organizations of the Catholic Church.

Through presentation of the questions studied in a context historically marked by catholic and philanthropic philosophy, it intends to contribute to the discussion on the data gathered by other similar research projects to contribute to the construction of solutions where the values and principles of philanthropy and charity can be made compatible with the new forms of management and organization

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