

METHODS

A rhetorical analysis of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart as operations management case study

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The purpose of this report is to interpret processes that transpired at the Unitarian Universalist 2023 General Assembly using the lens of historical polity and to do so as an operations management case study. I believe a fundamental venue for addressing such phenomena is to focus on the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart as it serves as a foundation for what transpired at the June 21–25, 2023 Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly. The Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart provides context for much of what transpired in that it frames the manner of approach that is practiced.

Keywords: rhetorical analysis, Unitarian Universalist, operations management

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to interpret processes that transpired at the Unitarian Universalist 2023 General Assembly using the lens of historical polity. I believe a fundamental venue for addressing such phenomena is to focus on the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart as it serves as a foundation for what transpired at the June 21–25, 2023 Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly. The Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart provides context for much of what transpired in that it frames the manner of approach that is practiced.

1.1. Literature review

My treatment of this process will be based on Aristotle's Forms of Proof addressing logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos is most commonly recognized as pertaining to emphasis on logic. Ethos is most commonly recognized as pertaining to emphasis on matters having to do with credibility. Pathos is most commonly recognized as pertaining to emphasis on matters having to do

with emotion.¹ These forms of proof provide ample foundation for engaging in fundamental degrees of rhetorical analysis in that they are indicative of the rhetoric of Western thought that is employed in proceedings such as the June 21–25, 2023 Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly.

The Unitarian Universalist Congregations are designated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart as being at the foundation of Unitarian Universalist governance. As such, elections are held to decide upon General Assembly delegates. From these General Assembly Delegates, the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart clarifies how the Nominating Committee, Commission on Social Witness, General Assembly Planning Committee, Board of Review, and Commission on Appraisal are designated via election under the auspices of being the "Committees of the Association."

On a commensurate plane, in accord with the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart, it is stipulated that General Assembly Delegates elect the President and

¹ James L. Golden, George F. McHendry Jr., M. Elizabeth Thorpe, Jessica A. Kurr, Goodwin Berquist, William Coleman, and James M Sproule, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt Publishers, 2020) Ch. 2.

from the President the Unitarian Universalist Staff is designated. Such staff includes the Executive Vice-President and Treasure and supporting staff. They are recognized via the category of membership coalesced as “Other”—and addressing matters having to do with determination of rates, benefits, and eligibility.

In a related domain the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart clarifies how the Board of Trustees is elected by the General Assembly Delegates. The Board of Trustees enjoy association with the President, Unitarian Universalist Staff, Commission on Social Witness, General Assembly Planning Committee, Health Plan Trustees, Investments Committee, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Executive Committee, Religious Education Credentialing Committee, Ministerial Fellowship Committee, Financial Advisor, and Moderator. Hence, one can see in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart that the Board of Trustees exercises considerable authority within the formal functions of the organization.

2. Methodology

The structure of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart evidences a format that best serves the unique needs of the Unitarian Universalist Association. One can deduce how such a structure would evolve and continue to be modified per the needs of the Unitarian Universalist Association. I speculate that minutes of the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assemblies would convey contextual processes that resulted in the original layout of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart and the evolution that has occurred over time.

3. Findings

The Board of Trustees has direct authority over Commission on Social Witness, General Assembly Planning Committee, Health Plan Trustees, Investments Committee, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Executive Committee, Religious Education Credentialing Committee, and Ministerial Fellowship Committee. This direct authority exists via the designation of appointment that is stipulated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

A particularly unique feature of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart has to do with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and the direct relationship it has with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. This direct relationship is stressed via appointment. Otherwise, the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart stresses no relationship of the Unitarian Universalist Minister’s Association with any other entity within the Unitarian Universalist

Association Organizational Chart structure. One can see that this is a formal stipulation but there can be informal considerations, although such informal considerations are not recognized within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

The role of Moderator is directly linked from the General Assembly Delegates via election. It is then stipulated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart that the Moderator is linked with the Finance Committee and Executive Committee via membership. This clarification allows for understanding how the Moderator exercises authority and function in relation to the designated relationships as delineated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

The Unitarian Universalist Association Staff linkage as formally mandated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart evidences the degrees of control exercised by the Unitarian Universalist Association Staff. It maintains association with the Investments Committee, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Executive Committee, Religious Education Credentialing Committee, and Ministerial Fellowship Committee. These direct relationships exist via the designation of membership and “other” relationship that is stipulated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

The role of the Financial Advisor evidences a limited scope within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart. One can see that it is associated via membership with the Board of Trustees and also connected with the Health Plan Trustees, Audit Committee, Finance Committee and Executive Committee. This illustrates how the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart can reflect a fairly broad span of control or a fairly limited span of control depending on the function of form of the entities under review.

Furthermore, the Committees of the Board of Trustees are recognized as the Investments Committee, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Executive Committee, Religious Education Credentialing Committee, and Ministerial Fellowship Committee. This body is formally clarified in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart as is the case with the other structural entities.

4. Discussion

Much of what has been conveyed thus far with the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart reflects the Aristotelian form of proof recognized as logos—which connotes a focus on logic. The logos assertions typically work well with formal designations as conveyed in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart. These entities of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart and their relationships are easily laid out in ways

that formalize their existence and are predicated on formal functioning that is commensurate with litigious thinking.

It should be noted that all of the committees described thus far and similar groupings are specified in the bylaws or granted authority via the bylaws or by the Board of Trustees. Conversely, there are committees associated with the Board of Trustees that provide advice to the board and offer assistance with the work it does. Relationships are clearly designated as being governed via election, appointment, membership, or “other.” As such, the “other” designation is correspondingly limited insofar as what it represents.

These formal designations that are conveyed in this Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart work very well when defining the formal constructs of an organization. They lay out concrete clarity regarding what entities have certain kinds of authority and how these varied constituencies function in relation to one another. The Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart is complex with regard to the associations that exist but the formal relationships are clear.

Such formal organizational constructs are well and good until you get human beings involved. With the introduction of human beings comes variables associated with the human condition. Relationships that are formally clarified in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart can exist but not necessarily be practiced in the manner intended. Similarly, relationships that do not formally exist with the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart can evolve based on the relationships that exist among the people who occupy the varied titled roles that are represented.

Personalities become involved and informal linkages that evolve over time can take on prominent functions even though they are not constitutionally mandated within the organization. Behaviors that flow from such scenarios are not always rational. Such behaviors can be grounded in illogical frames of reference. Such illogical frames of reference can become part of the normative structures within the organization. Over time such illogical frames of reference can become part of the norms within the organization.

Much of what has been conveyed about the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart in the preceding paragraphs reflects the Aristotelian form of proof recognized as *pathos*—which connotes a focus on emotion. The *pathos* assertions can typically exist within informal designations that are not depicted in clear terms within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart. These entities of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart and their relationships are easily laid out in ways that formalize their existence but far less so with regard to how they actually function in informal scenarios. It should be noted that the informal tracts can override what is formally stipulated in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

When dealing with these kinds of considerations that exist in formal and informal orientations manifested in

the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart, one can see how the formal (*logos*) oriented concerns can conflict with the informal (*pathos*) oriented concerns. It can pit logic against emotion with decision-making and organizational processes. Frustrations can flow when the clarity for what should be transpiring does not readily exist but instead is dependent on variables that are at play in a given circumstance.

5. Results

It is at this juncture that norms of the larger society can come into play regarding the role of common sense. One can see over time how what is thought to be common sense is not all that common. Rather, there are differing versions of “sense” at play depending on the individuals involved and the issues that are being addressed. Much of what goes on is circumstantial in nature. This is where fundamental principles can be especially relevant.

It is at this point that the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart can benefit via emphasis on the Aristotelian form of proof that is denoted as *ethos*—which stresses focus on ethics. The ethics assertions are typically relevant when one is seeking to understand the fundamental principles at play in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart. These entities of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart and their relationships should acknowledge to some degree forms of logic and fairness that exist in the larger social order. When these forms of logic and fairness of the larger society can be recognized within the processes of an organization, then there is a fundamental coherence that benefits the organization in subtle ways.

A basic benefit flows from familiarity and the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart corresponds with aspects of the larger American society regarding distinct features that represent the Unitarian Universalist mindset. For instance, the Board of Trustees are subordinate to the Unitarian Universalist Congregations. A Board of Trustees in U.S. organizations is typically at the top of the organization chart and serve a primary purpose in setting the agenda for the organization. From this agenda often flows goals, objectives, and mechanisms for assessment.

The Board of Trustees as depicted in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart still serves the aforementioned Board of Trustees functions common to American organizations, but they do so within the larger governance structure that emphasizes the Unitarian Universalist Congregations at the top of the chart. This clarification is helpful in recognizing the relevance for the Unitarian Universalist Congregations as primary shapers and maintainers of the organization. This certainly manifests itself in the organizational culture of Unitarian Universalism.

Notions associated with organizational culture are reflective of the rhetorical principles stressed thus far in this report. That is, organizational cultures often have structures that parallel national cultures. As such, these organizational culture structures reinforce ways of thinking and functioning within said organizations. They can very much manifest themselves in the subtle nature of daily routines but they reinforce essence and sense of purpose. So normative structures that exist within organizational cultures are both formative with meaning and functions that exist. Hence, when the principles at play in an organizational culture correspond with the principles at play within the larger society, then there is a cohesive mindset that is mutually reinforcing.

There are also cross-cultural factors to consider. American organizations are typically going to be representative of Western rhetorical traditions that are pivotal with content and formatting considerations. Other countries, such as China, are going to be representative of the Eastern rhetorical traditions. The Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart in China would be arranged in a manner that gives more attention to contextual considerations. China is a high context culture where much meaning is conveyed through contextual frames and this makes the format more integral to understanding the content being expressed. It requires continual monitoring.

Another cultural aspect centers on political dimensions of the social order. For the most part, any formal organization in China that has more than 50 people will have a Communist Party representative posted in the organizational chart. This is in relation to the political framework of the Chinese system. The Communist Party maintains a supreme place in the Chinese social order and this results in it being represented in ways that are not commensurate with processes in the United States.

For instance, Catholicism as it exists in China is not recognized as being fully legitimate by the Vatican. Catholic churches in China are regulated under the auspices of the Catholic Patriotic Association whereby control of their functioning is exercised by the Chinese government rather than the Vatican in Italy. This is because the Chinese government does not permit control of entities within China by entities outside of China. So, if the Unitarian Universalist Association had representation in China, then the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart would need to be organized in accordance with norms endorsed by the Chinese government and the Chinese culture overall. This illustration opens the door to varied types of considerations regarding possible Unitarian Universalist Association international outreach.

Consideration for east-west orientations offers insight into how meanings reflected in the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart are not inherently apparent. Rather much of the meaning of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart is more

likely assigned to it by the membership. I offer this view with regard to the Western perspective of it. That is, my understanding of it is very much dictated by the literal wording and framing of the chart.

From a Western mindset my understanding of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart would benefit by degrees of inversion. For instance, my understanding is that Unitarian Universalist Congregations are the primary source of control within the Unitarian Universalist Association. I think an argument could be made for having the Unitarian Universalist Congregations listed at the bottom of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart rather than at the top of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart in relation to the organizational processes growing up from the Unitarian Universalist Congregations rather than having the organizational processes flowing down from the Unitarian Universalist Congregations.

6. Conclusion

This kind of placement of Unitarian Universalist Congregations within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart is relevant from a Western mindset but it would be more relevant from an Eastern mindset due to the high context/low context dimensions that are at play. Within a low-context culture such as the United States meanings are typically conveyed in direct terms. This is representative of the Western mindset. However, high-context cultures such as what are typically found in Asia have meanings that are generally conveyed more via indirect terms. Hence, placement of the Unitarian Universalist Congregations within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart in Asia would be more relevant in that it frames the high-context expression.

I am not knowledgeable enough to offer restructuring guidance for the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart but will offer some grounded suggestions in this report. These suggestions are offered with the understanding that this is an academic course and this report involves the exercise of academic inquiry for the sake of learning. With that preface I offer the following suggestions for consideration. These inputs flow my search for logic and ethical applications within the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart.

A restructuring could focus on more accurate expression of degrees of authority that rest within the Unitarian Universalist Congregations, General Assembly Delegates, Board of Trustees, and the Presidency. Such a restructuring could benefit from a clearer depiction having to do with which entity has the supreme authority (I am assuming it would be the Unitarian Universalist Congregations) and how this authority is manifested throughout the organization. This would help clarify paths that can be taken to effect

change in meaningful ways. It would also convey a fundamental plane for recognizing how power is exercised.

Similarly, the relationship and roles that exist between the President and the Unitarian Universalist Association Staff and related entities can benefit from clarification. The relationships as noted via the table of four relationships are not altogether clear, especially with regard to the “other” designation. The Committees of the Association and Committees of the Board of Trustees are delineated in blue ink at the bottom of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart. The relationship among these committees, if any, is not expressed in clear terms.

A third category labeled “Other” having to do with the President and Unitarian Universalist Association Staff is noted as being on a par with the Committees of the Association and Committees of the Board of Trustees. This “Other” designation can benefit with some type of terminology that better represents the function it serves. Without such clarity the membership of the organization is left to function in ways that best serve their interests and motives. Such interests and motives can result in a range of interpretations that justify desired actions and subsequent outcomes.

Allowance for periodic review of the Unitarian Universalist Association Organizational Chart would be helpful insofar as making modifications that best reflect how organizational functioning is supposed to occur. This would involve paying close attention to possible nuances that evolve over time into being accepted as common practice and readily embraced organizational principles. If this does not happen, then it opens the door for unintended structures to evolve. Being able to identify what is intended or unintended and desirable or undesirable is key. Such

a review process would benefit from having representative constituencies involved.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author contributions

JS contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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