

## Practical Models of Church Governance

The following church governance structures may be effective at various stages of a church. Of course, theological reflection should precede these practical considerations.

Model of Governance	How the Structure Operates	Challenges
1. A small group of volunteers (usually elders or deacons) maybe with limited leadership experience and no ministry leadership involvement.	When a church is small, a group of volunteers take overall responsibility for the church. A small church has few options and needs to use everyone who is willing, gifted or not. They form a leadership team in which a few members (mainly the pastor) take most of the ministry roles and responsibilities. Decisions of the group involve both governance and operations with little separation of these issues.	Much of the responsibility falls on the pastor. All the leaders have a say in the decision-making (authority), but the pastor is often the one who has to implement the decisions (responsibility). The load on the pastor can be exacerbated by a governance team in which some are not gifted or experienced for this ministry and good decisions may not always be made. The challenge could be described as “too many chiefs and not enough Indians.”
2. Each member of the leadership team takes responsibility for an area of ministry.	The leaders are appointed to take responsibility for particular ministry roles with the pastor probably having a number of roles. The leaders may be appointed to roles (preferable) or the roles could be assigned once the leaders are appointed. This distributes the leadership workload among the leaders/elders and makes all leaders responsible. It can bring the most gifted leaders into church governance. Leadership in this model still involves both governance and operations.	While some leaders do an excellent job, others may be less effective in governance because their gifts are linked more to leading a team or running a ministry than making wise decisions. They may actually find their governance responsibilities frustrating. If the church grows, more and more demands are placed on these leaders who both lead the church and lead the ministries. This can be a demanding load and it becomes difficult to find volunteers to take on church leadership roles.
3. The leadership team or eldership expands with paid staff taking over some of the more demanding roles e.g. youth ministry or pastoral care.	Everyone on the leadership team still takes responsibility for a ministry area but the leadership group expands so that they are responsible for smaller, more manageable ministry areas, with lay people leading some (e.g. finance, maintenance, seniors’ ministry) and staff leading the more demanding ministries. The leadership group focuses more on governance but still has considerable say on operations.	As the leadership group increases (slowing decision-making) and the ministry load of the church enlarges (increasing issues), they find it more time consuming to cover the governance and operational issues. Frustration can increase and involvement in and commitment to leadership meetings can diminish. Many of the operational issues are covered by the staff who have more time to meet together and better access to information.
4. The leadership team is split into two – often called elders (more governance) and deacons (more operations).	One solution to a growing decision-making load is to split the leadership group into two – with the elders taking more spiritual and governance responsibility and the deacons taking more practical and operational responsibility. The senior pastor is usually part of both groups. This type of structure has biblical precedence. Sometimes a staff team forms a third group in the structure.	Having two (or three) leadership groups can produce problems with communication, overlap of responsibilities, and differing understandings of the vision. For example, is finance and budget the responsibility of an elders group, a deacons’ group or a pastoral team? Finance is both a practical and spiritual issue. Either one group needs to be chosen to make the significant decisions, or tensions and competition between the groups need to be handled well
5. The leadership group functions as a Board (focusing on governance) and the staff becomes responsible for operations.	In this model, the staff team led by the senior pastor becomes responsible for operations (the functioning of all ministries) and the elders or Board or Council takes responsibility for governance (policy, direction, review, key decisions). The Board members are chosen for their wisdom and ability to see the big picture and not for their involvement in ministry or popularity in the church.	The greatest challenges of a Board structure are making sure the Board is pursuing a vision (moving forward and not maintaining the status quo), keeping spirituality at the heart of the discussion (you really need spiritual people in leadership), and ensuring the Board does not unnecessarily interfere in the management and operation of the church ministries (but makes sure the pastor is accountable for this). This requires high trust and clear accountability.

- Questions:
1. Do we want our elders/leaders to be involved in church ministry or to focus on directing the church? How much ministry is appropriate?
  2. Who do we want to take responsibility for operations? Who will make sure that all our ministries are effective and supported and accountable?
  3. When multiple groups are involved in decision-making, are the responsibilities clear and the communication strong?
  4. Which governance model is best for our stage of church and the people we have? Which model should we be moving towards?