



Organizational Structure

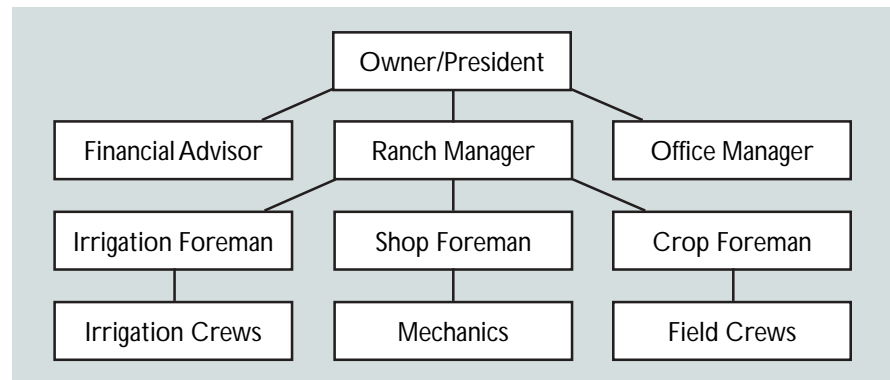
All business organizations have a “structure” of relatively enduring roles, relationships among them, and rules that facilitate the division and coordination of work. It would be personally uncomfortable, as well as organizationally inefficient, to start from scratch every day deciding who is responsible for doing what. In many firms, particularly smaller ones, the structure evolves from such decisions appropriately made at startup, personal interests and abilities, and interactions over time. The legacy of patterns developed this way, however, does not always make sense. People might be doing jobs that could be done better by others, that may not need to be done anymore, or that would be cheaper to contract out or eliminate through some technological change.

Any organizational structure can benefit from review and adjustment from time to time, preferably before a crisis demands it. Answering a few questions can clarify an existing organizational structure and sometimes reveal areas of ambiguity or misfits that interfere with smooth operation. Who is the overall boss? Which people normally work together? Who reports to whom throughout the business? What other communications and working relations does the business depend on? What can each manager and other employee decide on his or her own? These questions are especially important in a family operation, where anybody with a certain last name might claim to have or be feared as having instant authority over any nonfamily employee. Having to meet the requirements of two or more bosses is very difficult, and it is a major impetus to employees’ leaving for better organized pastures.

All businesses, even small ones in which relationships may be informal and fluid, can benefit from having a shared sense of structure. “Mapping” personnel groupings and reporting relationships on an organizational chart promotes this kind of understanding. Figure 2.1, for example, indicates that mechanics are all within a single unit supervised by the shop foreman, that the office manager and financial advisor are staff who report only to the owner and have no direct supervisory responsibility, and that the three foremen all report to the ranch manager. Note that the following organizational chart carries no information about the duties associated with respective jobs, other than lines of supervisory responsibility.

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Figure 2.1. An example organizational chart.



A business is as good as its employees, and the quality of the employees speaks volumes about the management.

Agricultural Jobs

A job is a collection of tasks performed and responsibilities carried by a single person. Determination of a job's normal duties, like the rest of organizational structure, is a matter of managerial choice, and it naturally affects attractiveness of and performance in the job. Agricultural work and the lifestyle around it offer features that many people simply love but that also are accompanied by hardships.

Because of seasonal variation in the volume and nature of tasks to produce most agricultural commodities, half or more of the jobs in western agriculture are filled on a short-term basis. Most operational level work in labor-intensive commodities is divided into narrow jobs with repetitive tasks. Some workers enjoy a series of temporary jobs or a pattern of alternating employment and unemployment. Probably most, however, would prefer a more steady earning opportunity, and they swallow the instability of employment along with the inevitable physical stresses of field work, until better options appear.

To attract and retain good employees, a working environment has to be a place where prospective staff might want to work, or at least where they feel a fair balance between pay and intrinsic rewards, on the one hand, and demands and discomforts on the other. Although most farm jobs involve some routine tasks and unpleasant conditions (heat, dust, etc.), deliberate effort can create an environment where people see they are likely to be respected, safeguarded, even well-treated and appreciated. Employees leave agricultural operations both during and between production years. Especially in mid-season, turnover imposes administrative and supervisory costs, and it requires coworkers to adjust, so workforce stability is generally desirable. Turnover is both expensive and often a symptom of other problems.