DO THE STRUCTURES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS REFLECT THEIR STATEMENTS OF FAITH? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Research has been silent regarding a core question that is of interest for a variety of literatures: Do the beliefs espoused by religious organizations have an effect on their organizational structures and practices? In this exploratory study we begin to address this research question by drawing from one of the most fundamental concepts within organizational theory, namely the mechanistic-organic continuum. We examine four questions: (1) Are the basic elements of this continuum (centralization, formalization, adherence-to-the-status-quo) evident in religious statements of faith? (2) If so, do these three elements correlate with each other in the same way as predicted by organization theory? (3) Does the mechanistic-organic continuum, developed in studying secular organizations, also help us to describe the structures and practices of religious organizations? (4) Finally, do the espoused religious beliefs about centralization, formalization and adherence-to-the-status-quo have an effect on the actual practices of religious organizations? Empirical data are presented and analyzed, encompassing 17 different religious groups and 74 different religious organizations. Our findings suggest that there is a relationship between the content of religious statements-of-faith and the structure and practice of religious organizations. Unexpected findings regarding formalization provide an occasion for theory-building; specifically, it appears that the opportunity for centralized leadership in religious organizations is negatively related to the emphasis that their religion places on formalized documents (e.g., scriptures, creeds). Implications for future research are discussed.