Life Cycles of Organizations and Their Subsystems

Organizations, just like people, must progress through various life stages in order to develop into mature and healthy organizations. If they do not, then they can experience continued problems, including increasing conflicts, turnover, stagnation or decline. All systems have life cycles, including products, programs, teams and people. Without a systematic view of the stages, leaders and consultants often focus primarily on one part of the system when there are many recurring problems. For example, they focus especially on promotions or raising more funds or blaming certain employees. They do not realize that the recurring problems are really just symptoms of the overall organization's needing attention to all of its subsystems, so that it can go to the next stage of development. Knowing the life stages and their differences can help organizations to implement plans to evolve through the stages in a productive and sustainable manner. There are many views on the stages in the life cycles. Here is a basic view.

Infancy Phase – Features	Growth Phase – Priorities	Maturity Phase – Priorities
▪ Compelling, exciting vision and purpose	▪ Focus is on strengthening internal systems to support growth, while expanding services and markets	▪ Focus in on sustaining momentum and renewal, especially to avoid entrenching in bureaucracy
▪ People motivated by excitement, charismatic leaders	▪ Begin to develop internal systems to regularly obtain ongoing resources (people, money, facilities, etc.) consistently	▪ Focus is also on creativity and innovation – sometimes to start new ventures, that start new life stages themselves
▪ People are recruited because they're excited and want to chip in		
▪ People chip in wherever they feel they're needed	▪ Regular and routine activities become proceduralized	▪ Management priorities are especially on succession planning and risk management
▪ Decisions are often reactive and spontaneous	▪ Focus is on plans and policies, more than personalities, as before	▪ More learning is shared with other people and organizations
▪ Planning, if at all, is very short-range	▪ People motivated by plans and policies, and the discipline to get things done	▪ Leaders seek to successfully duplicate business model elsewhere
▪ Priority is on remaining active, getting along with others, and sustaining excitement for momentum	▪ Planning is somewhat systematic, focused on goals, roles and deadlines	▪ Attend to even longer-range planning
▪ Resources (money, facilities, etc.) are obtained as possible and available	▪ People are recruited based on their expertise	▪ Priority is also on managing change and transformation
▪ Occasional confusion, frustration and conflicts exist about who's doing what, how and when	▪ Attend to longer-range planning	▪ Some organizations consider terminating the organization, group or system if its vision is achieved
▪ People begin to talk about the need for more planning and procedures	▪ Progress is regularly monitored for status, learning and continuous improvement	