

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:
A REVIEW OF THE RECENT LITERATURE WITH
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CLIMATE LINKAGES

by

Stephen B. Knouse

Department of Management
The University of Southwestern Louisiana
Lafayette, Louisiana

for

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
Patrick Air Force Base, Florida

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Abstract

The recent literature on organizational effectiveness was examined and summarized. Current models of organizational effectiveness include the goal model, system resource model, internal process maintenance model, decision process model, and legitimacy model. Each model is seen to have its own set of problems.

New considerations in the literature that might be useful include dichotomizing public versus private sector approaches, attending to the type of stakeholder in the organization, emphasizing longitudinal changes, attending to the perceptions of newcomers and managers, viewing organizations as value systems, viewing effectiveness as paradox, and defining organizational effectiveness as the absence of ineffectiveness. The conclusion is that, unfortunately, there is still no globally accepted conceptualization of organizational effectiveness. Managers are advised to take an eclectic approach and choose those aspects of various theories that best fit their situation.

Recommendations for applying these recent ideas to equal opportunity climate include measuring the extent to which the unit has gained the confidence of its stakeholder groups, defining effectiveness in part as the degree to which the well-being of its members operating in an equal opportunity climate is met, measuring the perceptions of junior enlisted and officer personnel who have the unique perspective on organizational socialization as a primary indicator of effectiveness, measuring perceptions of key persons in the unit, and viewing the military unit as a traditional-functional value system with equal opportunity as one of its core values.

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Organizational effectiveness is an obviously important yet highly varied, complex, and even confusing area of study. One of the many problems concerns the definition of the construct. There is little agreement on how to define organizational effectiveness. Indeed, each theory or model appears to generate its own definition.

Related to the definitional problem is the problem of what constitutes organizational effectiveness; that is, what is the domain of the construct. Again, various perspectives point to organizational effectiveness as synonymous with "performance, success, ability, efficiency, improvement, productivity, or accountability" (Cameron & Whetton, 1983a, p. 2). And still others view organizational effectiveness as "organizational excellence" (Lewin & Minton, 1986), "organizational synergy" (Phillips, Blair, & Schmitt, 1987), "capability of the organization to locate and respond to elements in the external environment" (Cunningham, 1978), "meeting goals" (Dean, Harvey, Pugh, & Gunderson, 1980), "continued viability" (Schneider, 1983), "long term growth and survival" (Reimann, 1982), "the aggregate of opportunities provided to the members of the unit" (Cummings, 1983), and "client satisfaction" (Gutek, 1978).

In addition, current approaches posit that organizational effectiveness is related to agreement on organizational norms (Argote, 1989), innovativeness (Hughes, Rosenbach, & Clover, 1983), feedback (Nadler, Mirvis, & Cammann, 1976), and role innovation (West, 1987).

Part of the difficulty arises from the historical development of the concept. Organizational effectiveness has been largely a problem-driven rather than a theory-driven construct (Cameron, 1986).

In fact, the topic has become so complex and confusing that some have called for a halt to research in organizational effectiveness and even an abandonment of the concept (Goodman, Atkin, & Schoorman, 1983). Others, however, have stressed that the concept of organizational effectiveness is central to organizational research and theory. In effect, organizational effectiveness is generally the ultimate dependent variable in organizational research (Cameron, 1986).

A very appropriate summary of the situation is put forth by Cameron and Whetton (1983a, p. 20), "As a construct organizational effectiveness is similar to an unmapped terrain...There are multiple landmarks, but no one overall viewpoint can be reached where the whole terrain is visible at

once. The task is to determine the relationships of the more limited views of the terrain to one another as the observers move from one perspective to another."

Current Models of Organizational Effectiveness

There are several current models that attempt to define the domain of the construct of organizational effectiveness. Unfortunately, there is no one accepted model; each has its set of problems.

The Goal Model

The goal model proposes that organizational effectiveness is the extent to which an organization meets its goals (Bluedorn, 1980). There are several problems with the goal model. First, it is intuitively obvious that some otherwise effective organizations do not reach their goals, while some organizations that reach their goals are not perceived to be effective. Second, goals can change in priority, and goals can be internally incompatible within the organization (Seashore, 1983). Third, organizational goals are typically management's goals and do not necessarily reflect the goals of other important parties linked to the organization (Zammuto, 1982). Fourth, goals may connote objectivity, but evaluation of whether goals have been met is a largely subjective process (Keeley, 1984).

The System Resource Model

The system resource model defines effectiveness as the extent to which the organization acquires needed resources (Seashore & Yuchtman, 1967). Again, the problem with this approach is that some organizations acquire substantial resources but do not succeed, while others succeed with minimal resources.

The Internal Process Maintenance Model

The internal process maintenance model states that organizational effectiveness is the extent to which internal processes are operating smoothly (Bennis, 1966). A variation of this approach is to define effectiveness as a high degree of fit or congruence among the organization's components (Lewin & Minton, 1986). But organizations can be effective when processes are not operating smoothly or components do not fit closely. Indeed, others have defined organizations as "loosely coupled systems" whose components are operating largely independent of one another and therefore necessarily fit together only very tangentially (Daft & Weick, 1984).

The Decision Process Model

One variation of the internal processes model is the decision process model which focuses upon information processing. The effective organization optimizes information management or getting, storing, retrieving, allocating, manipulating,

interpreting, and discarding information (Seashore, 1983).

The Legitimacy Model

The legitimacy model posits that organizational effectiveness is the extent to which the organization achieves legitimacy with the public (Zammuto, 1982). Organizations gain legitimacy by creating valued outcomes that satisfy the wants and needs of the public. Consequently, an effective organization is one that gains the confidence of the public. Specifically, an effective organization becomes increasingly adaptable to a changing society, while at the same time meeting current preferences of the public. But, again, some highly effective organizations are not perceived as producing what the public values.

Problems with Current Models

The basic problem is that these models each represent part of the construct of organizational effectiveness, but not the whole. Further, each model is put forth as if it were an independent view of effectiveness. Relationships among the models also are not clear (Cameron & Whetton, 1983a). New approaches to mapping the construct of organizational effectiveness are necessary.

Measures of Organizational Effectiveness

Objective versus Perceptual Measures

There is a controversy in the literature about what type of measure is appropriate for organizational effectiveness. Some theorists opt for an objective type of measure, such as productivity or financial viability (Price & Mueller, 1986). Others believe that perceptual measures are most appropriate. One of the proponents of this latter view is Cummings (1983) who argues that most major managerially controllable determinants of effectiveness operate on productive behavior through perceptions and cognitions.

Another consideration is the relative validity of objective versus perceptual measures. Objective measures are obviously less subjective and open to bias than perceptual measures. Objective measures, however, many times only represent the "official" organizational position on what is effective, which has been designed to influence public opinion. Perceptual measures, on the other hand, are capable of representing a larger set of criteria on effectiveness from a greater variety of perspectives (Cameron & Whetton, 1983b).

Therefore, perceptual measures, such as surveys and interviews, which are capable of tapping a larger part of the construct of effectiveness, may be the more "effective" measure of organizational effectiveness.

Focus of Measurement

Organizational effectiveness can be measured in terms of process, response, or impact. Process pertains to the internal workings of the organization measured by productivity, financial efficiency, and indicators of managerial accountability. Response involves the organization's reactions to its surrounding environment measured by resources allocated to problems in the environment. Impact assesses the environment's reactions to the organization's activities, such as the economic tradeoff of jobs generated by the organization compared to environmental damage produced by the organization's activities (Brewer, 1983).

New Considerations in Organizational Effectiveness

Public versus Private Sector Dichotomy

Traditional thought on organizational effectiveness has treated all organizations as basically the same, regardless of the sector in which they reside. Newer thinking differentiates organizations, and hence the meaning of organizational effectiveness, into public sector versus the private sector (Molnar & Rogers, 1976). For example, private sector organizations may emphasize economic measures of effectiveness, while public sector organizations may stress client outreach and satisfaction as indicators of effectiveness.

Type of Stakeholder in the Organization

The organization has a number of different stakeholders or constituencies (e.g., customers, community, government, suppliers, employees, and creditors) who demand different outcomes of the organization. Effectiveness is then the extent to which the organization satisfies the interests of its various participants (Cameron, 1986; Connolly, Conlon, & Deutsch, 1980; Keeley, 1984).

Research shows that these different stakeholders rate the effectiveness of organizations differently because they have different criteria for effectiveness (e.g., good price for customers, safety for the community, compliance with regulations for the government, and sound financial management for creditors) (Miles & Cameron, 1982; Salancik, 1984). Indeed, contradictory criteria are held by various constituencies and pursued by the organization simultaneously (Cameron, 1986). At the same time, consensus among constituencies on an indicator of effectiveness may demonstrate the relative importance of that factor (Seashore, 1983).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) believe that constituency power is an additional variable to consider. Some constituencies have greater power over organizational resources and thus their interests should be weighted more highly in evaluating how effectively organizations meet constituency interests. The ultimate justification is that the power of these select constituencies works to everyone's interest in the organization

in bringing about mutually advantageous outcomes--a kind of "trickle down" theory of organizational effectiveness.

Still another variation of the constituency approach is the perspective that organizational effectiveness is the extent to which the organization effectively accounts for its actions to its various constituencies (Gaertner & Ramnarayan, 1973). The effective organization produces accounts of its operations, which satisfy all important constituencies both inside of and outside of the organization.

The other side of the constituency interest continuum is the social justice approach which states that effectiveness is the degree to which the organization gives equal consideration to the basic well-being of each participant (Keeley, 1984). This does not imply equal treatment but rather the idea that each organizational participant has a right to equal well-being, apart from the differential use of and rewarding of individual resources or talents he/she possesses. The ordering of participant interest is according to the urgency with which these basic rights have to be met; that is, some interests are more fundamental to participant well-being than others (e.g., access to employment opportunities, freedom from abuse from others).

The social justice approach, of course, is conceptually similar to the idea of an equal opportunity climate where each participant has equal rights to well-being in the work environment, such as access to employment opportunity and freedom from sexual harassment.

Longitudinal Changes in Organizational Effectiveness

Much of the traditional perspective on organizational effectiveness treats the organization as existing in a given point in time. When the organization is viewed from a temporal perspective, however, a new dimension is available that can influence measures of effectiveness.

For example, an action in a given point in time may be seen as ineffective, such as diverting profit away from stockholder dividends and toward reinvestment. But, in the long-run, reinvestment can be an effective growth strategy (Connolly et al., 1980). As other examples, customer preference and satisfaction with the organization can change as the organization's life cycle progresses (Cameron & Whetton, 1981; Quinn & Cameron, 1983) and as the organization's constituent customer base changes over time (Zammuto, 1982).

As organizations develop over time, the focus on effectiveness changes. Younger organizations tend to emphasize effectiveness in terms of individual members acquiring inputs, while more mature organizations stress the effectiveness of the organization as a whole in producing outputs (Cameron & Whetton, 1981).

Perceptions of Newcomers

In line with his view that organizational effectiveness is the continued viability of the organization, Schneider (1983) believes that this viability is directly related to attracting and keeping newcomers in the organization. Therefore, he believes that organizational effectiveness surveys should focus upon newcomers rather than current employees. His reasoning is that the socialization process of newcomers best mirrors the organization's goals, direction, and practices. If you want the best feedback on the organization's directionality and activity, ask a newcomer.

Perceptions of Managers

Weick and Daft see the effective organization as providing meaning to the organization members (Weick & Daft, 1983; Daft & Weick, 1984). Thus the role of management is to interpret; i.e., to be aware of events and cues and translate them into meaning for organizational participants--"to wade into the ocean of events that surround the organization and actively try to make sense of them" (Daft & Weick, p.286). In essence, the job of management is to interpret, not do the operational work of the organization.

Organizational environments are seen as either analyzable, where the events are determinant, measurable, and discoverable through rational interpretation means, or unanalyzable, where events are unpredictable and interpretation consists of ad hoc improvisation (e.g., trial and error tests). The effective organization, then, is that which uses the appropriate interpretation techniques for its environment. Moreover, Weick and Daft recommend that managers measure the success of their interpretations by closely monitoring the perceptions of organizational members, who run the organization according to management's interpretations.

Organizational Value Systems

One of the newest approaches to organizational effectiveness taps into the concept of organizational value systems (Wiener, 1988). Values are defined as internalized normative beliefs that act as built-in guides for appropriate member behaviors in organizations.

Four types of organizational value systems are envisioned based upon the two dimensions of focus of values and sources of values. Value focus refers to the objective of the value system and is characterized as functional (organizational functions and style of operations), which produces specific guides to behavior, or as elitist (status and importance of the organization), which produces strong feelings of pride. Source of values refers to either organizational tradition, where relatively permanent stable values are transmitted among organizational members, who internalize these values largely free of the arbitrary influence

of people or situations, or to charismatic leadership, where members acquire less stable and permanent values through personal identification with an organizational leader.

The most effective of the four value systems is the functional-traditional, because its values are stable, goal-directed, internalized, and directly linked to functional behaviors. The two charismatic systems (functional-charismatic and elitist charismatic) tend to be linked too closely to vagaries of personal leader traits. While not specifically mentioned, the military would seem to fall within the functional-traditional system. It is true that the military manifests certain elitist value characteristics, such as organizational pride, but the elitist system is ultimately defined by an aura of exclusivity of its members and clients (e.g., an elite law firm or university), which the military does not project.

If the military is then an example of a functional-traditional system, its central value structure (including the constellation of values around equal opportunity) and hence its effectiveness can be measured by two indices. The intensity index is defined by a two-step calculation. First, the mean level of all members' agreement with each separate value is calculated. Then the agreement means are averaged, adjusted by the values' importance weights. The breadth index is a ratio of the number of key values held by members divided by the maximum number of values that could be held by members. Through these calculations, the intensity and breadth of agreement of military unit members for equal opportunity values could be assessed.

Effectiveness is Paradox

One novel approach is to view the effective organization as paradoxical (Cameron, 1986). In this approach, criteria of successful organizational are seen as simultaneously contradictory. For example, effective organizations simultaneously emphasize several paradoxical criteria: specialized roles focused upon expertise as well as generalized roles focused upon flexibility, continuity of leadership for stability as well as infusion of new leadership for innovation, and disengagement from old strategies as well as reinforcement of tradition.

This approach implies that lists of criteria of effectiveness should include simultaneous opposites, such as those illustrated above. Another interesting implication is that hypotheses on organizational effectiveness should not be rejected automatically if the null hypothesis is supported by research. Contradictory hypotheses (i.e., antitheses), which test for paradoxical criteria, may be substantiated, if data support mutually exclusive viewpoints.

Effectiveness is the Absence of Ineffectiveness

A novel approach to the whole situation is presented by Cameron (1984) who believes that the focus should be upon measuring ineffectiveness. The logic is that organizational members can identify organizational problems and faults much more easily than organizational competencies and successes. Thus the construct of ineffectiveness can be more easily mapped than the larger, more ambiguous construct of effectiveness. In essence, organizational effectiveness then becomes the lack of ineffectiveness.

The basic technique is a Fault Tree Analysis which shows how to increase the likelihood of success in a system by analyzing the most likely causes of failure and how these failures relate to various parts of the system. Specifically, the analysis consists of a series of critical questions on the perspective, level, time frame, and type of data on ineffectiveness. The result is a logic tree that indicates strategic paths to strengthen in order to reduce the ineffectiveness.

Military Equal Opportunity Climate

Military equal opportunity (EO) climate is here defined as "the expectation by individuals that they will have equal access to opportunities, responsibilities, and rewards within an organization. It is also the expectation that these opportunities, responsibilities, and rewards will be accorded on the basis of a person's abilities, efforts, and contributions; and not on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin (Landis, 1990, p. 29). This conceptualization assumes that past activities that individuals experience in an organization along with these individuals' own past history together create expectations that tend to influence these individuals' judgment of and reactions to equal opportunity situations in the organization (Landis, 1990).

Conclusions

Despite several new ways of viewing organizational effectiveness, present theorists are no closer to achieving an overall conceptualization or theory of organizational effectiveness than before. Therefore, the best practical approach appears to be to take an eclectic stance and pick and choose those ideas that appear to be most appropriate for environment in which the organization exists. In this light, several recommendations for the military and equal opportunity climate are proposed.

Recommendations

1. One measure of effectiveness may be the extent to which the unit, particularly its EO climate, has gained the confidence of its constituent groups.

Zammuto (1982) indicates that an effective organization has established legitimacy by gaining the confidence of the public. The public can be defined as the stakeholders in the organization. In the case of the military and EO, the important stakeholders would be women and minorities. Therefore, an effective military EO climate would be that which possesses the confidence of women and minorities, both inside and outside of the unit (outside or external stakeholder EO groups are important because military EO is supposedly mirroring society's view of EEO, and the military recruits from these groups in society).

Surveys of these internal and external stakeholder groups could measure this confidence.

2. Consider the unit commander as a major stakeholder in unit effectiveness.

Management is one of the primary stakeholders in the organization (Cameron, 1986; Connolly, et al., 1980; Keeley, 1984). In the military, the unit commander is thus a primary stakeholder who as the top manager is concerned with many facets of unit effectiveness--mission accomplishment, efficient use of material resources, and efficient use of human resources. In turn, human resources should operate efficiently when everyone's ability is seen as being used efficiently. Therefore, an effective EO climate should be perceived to be linked to other facets of unit effectiveness.

To test this relationship, unit commanders should be surveyed about their perceptions of EO climate and its linkages to other facets of overall unit effectiveness. In addition, the EO perceptions of the unit commander could be compared to the perceptions of other stakeholders in the unit, such as other key persons and newcomers (see below).

3. Define one dimension of unit effectiveness as the degree to which the well-being of its members is met.

The social justice literature (Keeley, 1984) differentiates effectiveness in terms of individual and group performance based on ability and motivation from effectiveness in terms of individual well-being, which is seen as an equal right for all members. One means of viewing effective equal opportunity climate therefore is as an environment where the well-being of the individual military members (e.g., equal access to training and assignment opportunities, freedom from ethnic or sexual harassment) is of primary interest. When such a climate is in place, individual members may then concentrate on maximizing their ability- and motivation-based performance.

4. Pay particular attention to the responses of junior enlisted and junior officer respondents to organizational effectiveness surveys.

Schneider (1983) has pointed out that newcomers have a unique perspective on the effectiveness of the organization as seen through their socialization experiences. Moreover, in the military, junior enlisteds (E1 - E3) and junior officers (O1-03) are generally directly involved in the actual operational activities of the organization (as opposed to the different perspective of more senior NCOs and officers in supervisory positions). Thus the junior members encounter how EO climate affects the day-to-day basic activities of the unit. Further, junior enlisteds and officers generally do not have the additional variable of career commitment that may color their perspective on EO climate and effectiveness.

5. Interview key persons in the unit on their perceptions of its effectiveness. Then verify these perceptions with surveys of unit members.

Weick and Daft (1983) believe that effective organizations are run by managers who correctly interpret what is going on around them. Key NCOs and officers should be interviewed about the state of the EO climate and effectiveness in their units. Then other unit members can be surveyed to verify what these key people perceive, which would be a variation of stakeholder consensus on what is effectiveness (Seashore, 1983).

6. View the military organization as a functional-traditional value system whose core values include equal opportunity.

The functional-traditional organization is the most effective value system, because it possesses stable, permanent values passed on with little interference from arbitrary personal and situational influences (Wiener, 1988). Such values become highly internalized by organizational members and thus guide their behaviors in the organization.

The value components of equal opportunity climate (i.e., the internalized normative beliefs of unit members) can be viewed as core values in this functional-traditional system, which in turn guide equal opportunity behavior. Effectiveness can be assessed as the intensity and breadth of member agreement with equal opportunity.

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