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ABSTRACT

Because organizational effectiveness of schools is difficult to define, a model is needed to explain the complexities of the concept. Two models offer some promise. One is the goal model, which defines effectiveness as the degree to which organizations meet or surpass their goals (either official or operational). The other is the system resource model, which measures effectiveness in terms of the organization's ability to secure advantageous bargaining positions and thereby acquire scarce and valued resources. Criticisms can be made of each model, but integration of the two models can increase their utility. However, four additional factors need to be considered, including the dimension of time, the organizational level under consideration, multiple constituencies (each with different ideas about effectiveness), and multiple criteria of effectiveness. To specify dimensions of effectiveness in the integrated model, Talcott Parsons' four functions of social systems should be added, involving adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency, or value system maintenance. For each function, the model includes multiple indicators (or criteria) of effectiveness, and for each indicator, the model adds time, level, and constituency factors.
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Institute for School Executives

The University of Iowa

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOLS

Cecil Miskel

Accountability, student achievement levels, competency tests, dropout rates, teacher and administrator performance, and staff morale become popular topics of discussion when professional educators, school district patrons, and elected officials gather. The current interest in effectiveness is neither a new phenomenon nor unique to education. For the past century, writers representing both the private and public sectors have expressed concern about the effective and efficient operation of virtually all types of organizations. The controversy surrounding school effectiveness shows no signs of abating and may intensify, since politicians, educators, and members of the public remain concerned with the concept.¹

The discussions, arguments, or debates about school effectiveness produce few mutually satisfactory answers. Many times they conclude with the generalization that school effectiveness cannot be defined and measured. Yet, education is not without indicators of effectiveness. Schools do report results to the public that administrators and teachers believe represent their accomplishments. Student achievements for a variety of academic and extracurricular activities, new programs to meet the special needs of children, and accomplishments by school employees are touted in district publications and in the public media. Patrons are invited to attend assemblies to acknowledge student scholarship, art shows, music performances, and athletic events, because these activities illustrate school productivity. As a matter of practice, educators clearly know and use a number of school effectiveness indicators.

When interested groups attempt to define school performance, they frequently pose a global question that only asks whether a school is effective or ineffective. In responding to a general question, it is too easy to conclude that the best indicators of school effectiveness are scores on standardized tests. This narrow perspective can be partially explained by the accessibility of test scores and by the political interest in reading and mathematical skills for compensatory programs started in the mid-1960s.² Organizational effectiveness of schools, however, represents a much broader concept that involves the ultimate survivability of schools.

Organizational effectiveness of schools is not *one thing*. Rather, a school can range from effective to ineffective on a large number of different and, in many cases, independent criteria. Without a model that explains the complexities and nuances of the concept both systematically and logically, it is impossible to determine whether one school performs better than another, or whether a given indicator is even a measure of organizational effectiveness.

Two theoretical formulations—goal and system resource—offer some promise for integrating and focusing efforts to define and measure organizational effectiveness of schools.

Goal Model of Organizational Effectiveness

The traditional and, until recently, most frequent use of the concept of organizational effectiveness refers to the degree of goal attainment. A goal, as defined by Etzioni, is a desired state of affairs that the organization attempts to realize.³ A school is effective if it meets or surpasses its goals. A number of scholars maintain that goals and their relative accomplishment constitute essential characteristics defining organizational effectiveness.⁴

Official and *operative* are the most common types of organizational goals.⁵ Official goals represent formal statements of purpose by the board of education concerning the nature of the school's mission. These statements typically appear in the board of education publications and faculty and staff handbooks. Generally, official goals are abstract and aspirational in nature—for example, the students will achieve their full potential. They are also usually timeless and serve to secure support and legitimacy from the public rather than guide administrator and teacher behaviors.

In contrast, operative goals reflect the true intentions of schools. Operative goals mirror the actual tasks and activities performed in the school irrespective of what educators claim to be doing. For instance, goals and objectives written by teachers are operative if the teachers use them to guide their classroom behavior, but they are official goals if the teachers pay no attention to the statements. Hence, official school goals may be operative or inoperative to the extent that the goals reflect actual educational practices accurately. Some operative goals, such as recent efforts to mainstream learning disabled students, are widely published. Others, such as custodial care of students for six to eight hours per day, are not. In fact, some districts use attractive official goals to cover less attractive operative goals.

Criticisms of the Goals Approach

The alleged shortcomings of using goals to assess organizational effectiveness of schools include the following criticisms:⁶

1. Too often the focus is on administrative goals rather than on those set by teachers, students, and school patrons.
2. In many instances, the multiple and contradictory nature of school goals is neglected. The stated goals of a school tend to be logical and internally consistent, but, in reality, the operative goals often conflict with each other.

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3. School goals are retrospective; they serve to justify school policy and educator action, not to direct it.
4. School goals are dynamic while the model is static. Goals change as environment and behavior vary, but the model remains the same.
5. The official goals of a school may not be its operative goals. Since the analysis of actual operations is complex and difficult, interested constituents (for example, parents and researchers) may be unable to identify the operative goals accurately. They must rely instead on personal judgments about what ends are implied by the operational practices. This results in official goals receiving greater emphasis than important operative goals.

Yuchtman and Seashore, using similar criticisms, also argue that the goal model of organizational effectiveness is inadequate. They propose a system resource model instead.

System Resource Model of Organizational Effectiveness

In the systems resource model, effectiveness is defined as the school's ability to secure an advantageous bargaining position in its environment and to capitalize on that position to acquire scarce and valued resources. The concept of bargaining position implies the exclusion of specific goals as ultimate effectiveness criteria. Rather, the system resource model directs attention toward the more general capacity of the school to procure assets. Consequently, this definition of effectiveness focuses on the continuous behavioral processes of exchange and competition over scarce and valued resources. A highly visible example for schools occurs each time a state legislature meets to appropriate tax monies. To acquire the valued commodity of state aid to education, schools compete with other agencies such as transportation, corrections, and social welfare in a highly political environment.

At a somewhat more subtle level, a growing competition exists between public and private schools. As the number of school-age youngsters and the prospects of continued employment in the public schools decline, competition for students will intensify. According to the system resource model, effective schools will sustain growth or minimize decline. That is, the behavioral processes of the winners have secured an advantageous bargaining position with parents and students or legislators and have capitalized on it. The levels of organizational effectiveness, therefore, become the amounts of resources that a school acquires.

The system resource perspective emphasizes the need for adequate resources and avoidance of undue strain. Educational administrators place great importance on maintaining harmony, because low levels of conflict enhance school effectiveness by using only small amounts of valuable resources. In addition, a strong dependency on the environment makes it essential for schools to concentrate on adaptive functions.

Effective organizations have sensitive monitoring mechanisms that provide information about new behaviors that lead to the acquisition of assets and continued survival. An illustration of adaptive behaviors and environmental dependence of school organizations can be clearly observed in the move to consolidate small schools or, more recently, in the closing of attendance centers in districts of all sizes because of the decline in the numbers of school-age children. Literally thousands of school organizations have died. Consequently, in schools that have histories of declining enrollments, maintaining and acquiring new students becomes a primary resource need. When it is sensed that a reduction in staff or a school closing is threatened, a number of coping behaviors can emerge. Educators may attempt to lower the dropout rates by practices such as introducing "relevant" courses and generally reducing the school's academic rigor. Parents may

lobby vigorously to save the neighborhood school. Educators and parents may join each other in subtle or not so subtle efforts to recruit additional students from other schools or districts.

Criticisms of the System Resource Approach

When the system resource approach is used as a model of organizational effectiveness, alleged defects become evident for educational organizations.⁸ There are two main criticisms:

1. Placing too much emphasis on inputs may have damaging effects on outcomes. When a school becomes consumed by the acquisition of resources, such as students and money, other aspects may be neglected.
2. Increasing inputs or acquiring resources is an operative goal for a school. In other words, the system resource model is actually a goal model.

The differences between the goal and system resource approaches may be only an argument over semantics. As Hall observes, "The acquisition of resources does not just happen. It is based on what the organization is trying to achieve—its goal—but is accomplished through the operative goals."⁹ In the example of schools facing enrollment declines, critics of the system resource approach maintain that the acquisition of additional students is an operative goal. Thus, the Yuchtman and Seashore model represents a verification of the operative goal concept. In fact, the two approaches are complementary and can be synthesized to form an integral model of organizational effectiveness.¹⁰

An Integrated Model of Organizational Effectiveness

Both goal and system approaches share a crucial assumption: "It is possible, and desirable, to arrive at the single set of evaluative criteria, and thus at a single statement of organizational effectiveness."¹¹ The theories also make additional assumptions. In the goal model, effectiveness deals with the relative attainment of feasible objectives (for example, physical facilities and equipment, human energy of students and employees, curricular technologies) and some commodity (for example, money) that can be exchanged for other resources. In the system resource model, effectiveness focuses on the internal congruence among the school's components, on the ability to adapt, and on the optimization of the leadership, communication, and decision making. These two additional assertions complement each other because the goals become assets for the system resource model. Similarly, the foci of the system resource approach contribute to the accomplishment of school goals.

Attempts to integrate the two approaches have been made, and although the ideas differ slightly, there is agreement that the use of operative goals cannot be avoided.¹² Behavior is explicitly or implicitly goal-directed, and behavior in schools is no exception. However, from a system resource framework, goals become more diverse and dynamic. They are not static, ultimate states; they are subject to change over time. Moreover, the attainment of some short-term goals can represent new resources to achieve subsequent goals. Thus, a cyclic nature characterizes school goals when a system resource framework is used.

Making the integrated model of organizational effectiveness applicable to schools requires that other dimensions be added and specified. Four factors—a time dimension, different organizational levels, multiple constituencies, and multiple criteria—are proposed as being particularly important for understanding the subtle nuances of effectiveness.

Elaboration of the Integrated Model

Dimension of Time

A factor producing divergence in the assessment of organizational effectiveness levels is time. Noting the rhythm of seasons, Burlingame observes that certain times of the school year hold greater potential for crises, disruption of the system, and reduced goal attainment.¹³ For example, the opening days of the

fall semester may expose some weaknesses in planning student schedules and projecting enrollments, while the last few days of the school year provide conditions for chaos. Knowing this, educators develop coping mechanisms to handle these short-term performance problems. In comparison, declining enrollments and consolidating small schools symbolize long-term problems of survival.

Recognizing the influence of time on organizational effectiveness caused Gibson, Ivancevich, and Donnelly to advance a continuum of success ranging from short-term, through intermediate, to long-term.¹⁴ For schools, representative indicators of short-term effectiveness include student achievement, funding levels, morale, absenteeism and dropout levels of students, job satisfaction, and loyalty. Criteria for intermediate success encompass adaptiveness and development of the school programs, career advancement of the educators, and success of former students. The ultimate long-term criterion is survival. Hence, when discussing school effectiveness, it is necessary to include the dimension of time.

Different Organizational Levels

The choice of criteria for organizational effectiveness also depends upon which level of the school is being considered. In other words, different criteria may apply to individual educators, classrooms, school buildings, district divisions, such as instruction, business, and transportation, and the overall school district. If a management by objectives evaluation system is used to assess teacher performance, the relative achievement of specific goals defines short-term effectiveness at the level of the individual. After allowing for differences in the curricula, student characteristics, and other factors, the average of the student achievement scores becomes one indicator of effectiveness for a school attendance center. The level or part of the school must be specified before the specific criteria defining effectiveness can be defined.

Multiple Constituencies

Effectiveness criteria always reflect the values and biases of the individuals and groups that are interested in education. For schools with multiple constituencies or interest groups, the effectiveness criteria are drawn typically from a number of perspectives. This means that the constituencies play critical roles that define the goals and also provide information for their assessment. For the educational setting, the debate regarding the definitions of a good school has been joined by scholars, parents, students, teachers, politicians, taxpayers, and employers. To say the least, the list depicts a diverse set of constituencies.

As a further complicating factor, constituent groups prefer different criteria. Administrators and board of education members emphasize structural or bureaucratic measures of effectiveness, in part, because these represent factors under their control.¹⁵ Administrators have some influence over facilities, budgets, and personnel practices. In contrast, teachers emphasize process indicators of effectiveness. They maintain that the various instructional methods used to implement the curriculum form the essence of effectiveness. Students, taxpayers, and politicians, however, focus primarily on the school's product or outcome measures. They evaluate schools in terms of academic achievement and affective orientations. Therefore, the integrated model requires the inclusion of multiple constituencies who define and evaluate the organizational effectiveness of schools on a variety of criteria.

Multiple Criteria

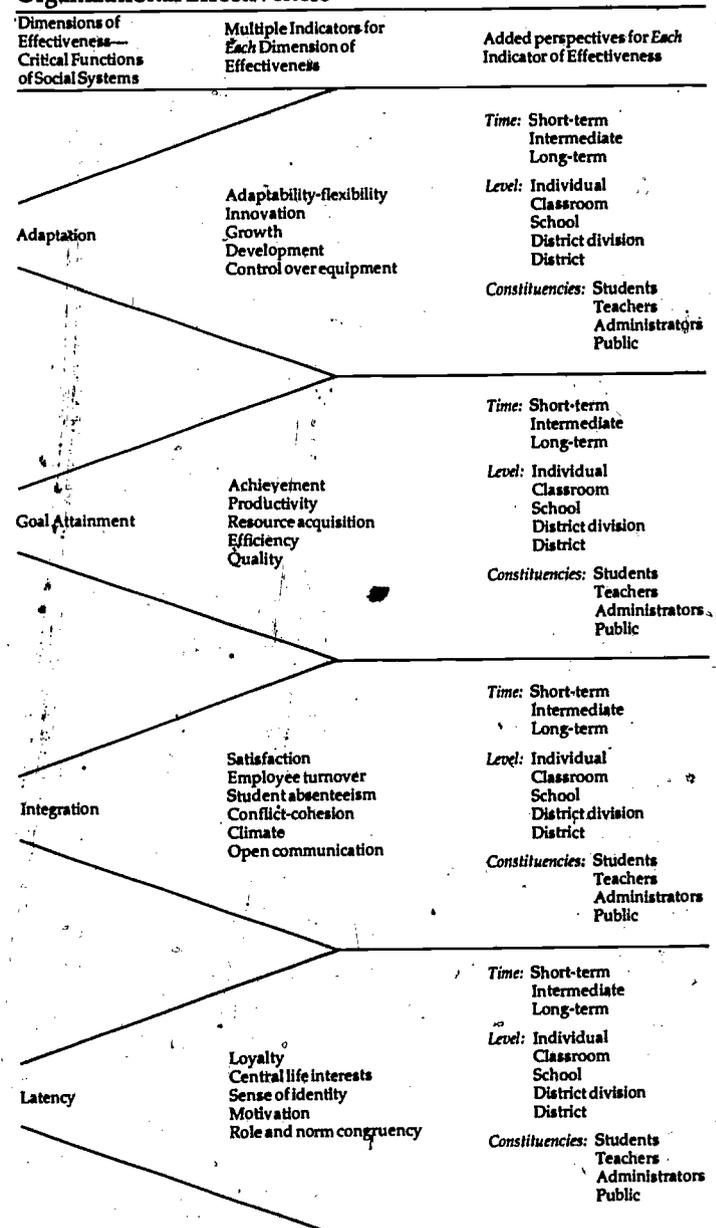
A basic assumption throughout this discussion has been that organizational effectiveness of schools is a multidimensional concept. No single, ultimate criterion, such as student achievement or overall performance, can capture the complex nature of school effectiveness. In the integrated goal-system resource ap-

proach, effectiveness indicators occur during each phase—input, transformation, output—of the educational cycle. Virtually every process and outcome variable can be and has been used as an indicator of effectiveness.

The development of a multiple dimensional index or composite measure of organizational effectiveness requires the selection of key concepts. Choosing the most appropriate and representative effectiveness variables can be an overwhelming task. Campbell used 30 categories to classify a comprehensive list of organizational effectiveness indicators.¹⁶ Steers found 15 different criteria in a sample of only 17 studies of effectiveness.¹⁷

To bring some order and direction to the study of school effectiveness, a model also is needed to specify the dimensions and indicators of the concept. A guide to assist in the categorization of specific criteria is provided by Talcott Parsons.¹⁸ He postulates that four critical functions are essential for a social system to survive. These imperative functions are fundamental to resource acquisition and can be considered organizational goals.

Figure 1. Dimension, Indicators, and Added Perspectives of Organizational Effectiveness



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Adaptation is concerned with the system's need to control its environment. Schools accommodate to the basic demands of the environment and constituencies by attempting to transform the external situation and by changing their internal programs to meet new conditions. Indicators of school adaptability include flexibility, innovation, growth, and development. *Goal achievement* is the gratification of system goals. The system defines its objectives and mobilizes its resources to achieve desired ends. Typical indicators of goal attainment for educational organizations are academic achievement, efficiency, productivity, resource acquisition, and quality of students and services. *Integration* refers to a social solidarity within the system. It is the process of organizing, coordinating, and unifying social relations into a single unity. Primary concerns of the school include employee job satisfaction, interpersonal conflict, employee turnover, student absenteeism, open communication, and morale. Finally, *latency* is the maintenance of the integrity of value system, that is, the system's motivational and cultural patterns. Effective schools require a high commitment and behavior levels from educators and students to reinforce the norms and values of the organization. Illustrative latency variables include loyalty, a central life interest in schoolwork, a sense of identity with the institution, individual motivation to work, and role-norm congruence.

Implications and Conclusions

The integrated goal-system paradigm of organizational effectiveness can serve as a helpful guide in administering and studying schools. Using the model of school effectiveness requires three steps. First, the constituencies must be determined. What groups are going to define the important operative goals? The groups could be consultants, educators, students, or school patrons. Second, a time dimension must be specified. Is the focus on short-, medium-, or long-term goals? Third, multiple criterion variables must be identified. This step flows from the first two. To make a comprehensive evaluation of school effectiveness necessitates the inclusion of indicators from each of the four critical functions. For example, a comprehensive definition of short-term and intermediate-term school effectiveness from the perspective of the students could use innovativeness of the curriculum, scores of standardized achievement tests, student satisfaction with instruction, and the students' sense of identity with the school.

In sum, the observation made earlier in this paper that many discussions end with an agreement that effectiveness of schools cannot be defined and measured can be partially explained, at least, by the complexity of the concept and the different perspectives of the discussants. Effectiveness of a school clearly is not one thing; it is a complicated multidimensional phenomenon that is not well understood by either scholars or practitioners. However, organizational effectiveness of schools represents such a central theme in the theory and practice of school administration that the difficult questions regarding the concept no longer can be avoided.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a more comprehensive discussion of the concept, see Wayne K. Hoy and Cecil G. Miskel, "Organizational Effectiveness," *Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1982), pp. 319-352. The current paper relies heavily on the ideas presented in this work by Hoy and Miskel.
2. George F. Madaus, Peter W. Airasian, Thomas Kellaghan, *School Effectiveness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), p. 172.
3. Amitai Etzioni, *Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 6.
4. See, for example, Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, "Obstacles to Comparative Studies," in Paul S. Goodman and Johannes M. Pennings (eds.), *New Perspectives on Organizational Effectiveness* (San Fran-

cisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), pp. 106-131; Richard M. Steers, *Organizational Effectiveness: A Behavioral View* (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear, 1977).

5. Steers, *ibid.*, pp. 23-25.
6. Kim Cameron, "Measuring Organizational Effectiveness in Institutions of Higher Education," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23 (1978), 604-632.
7. Ephraim Yuchtman and Stanley E. Seashore, "A System Resource Approach to Organizational Effectiveness," *American Sociological Review*, 32 (1967), 891-903. In building the system resource model, Yuchtman and Seashore relied heavily on Amitai Etzioni.
8. Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 605; W. Richard Scott, "Effectiveness of Organizational Effectiveness Studies," in Paul S. Goodman and Johannes M. Pennings (eds.), *New Perspectives on Organizational Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), pp. 63-95; and Bruce A. Kirchoff, "Organization Effectiveness Measurement and Policy Research," *Academy of Management Review*, 2 (1977), 347-355.
9. Richard H. Hall, *Organizations: Structure and Process* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 100.
10. Steers, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
11. Terry Connolly, Edward J. Conlon, and Stuart Jay Deutsch, "Organizational Effectiveness: A Multiple-Constituency Approach," *Academy of Management Review*, 5 (1980), 211-217. The quotation is from page 212.
12. See, for example, Steers, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6, 48; and John P. Campbell, "On the Nature of Organizational Effectiveness," in Paul S. Goodman and Johannes M. Pennings (eds.), *New Perspectives on Organizational Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), pp. 13-55. See p. 50.
13. Martin Burlingame, "Some Neglected Dimensions in the Study of Educational Administration," *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 15 (1979), 1-18.
14. James L. Gibson, John M. Ivancevich, and James H. Donnelly, Jr., *Organizations: Behavior, Structure, and Processes*. Revised Edition (Dallas: Business Publications, 1976), p. 64.
15. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-89.
16. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-39.
17. Richard M. Steers, "Problems in the Measurement of Organizational Effectiveness," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 20 (1975), 546-58.
18. Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (New York: Free Press, 1960).



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