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SURVEYING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: A CASE STUDY FROM THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the underlying factors guiding participant responses on a 39-item organizational effectiveness questionnaire administered in an institution of higher education in the United Arab Emirates. The purpose of the study was to identify the primary dimensions shaping employee perceptions of the institution's organizational effectiveness. The study was conducted and the dimensions were identified in support of the organization's continuous quality improvement process with the intent to implement strategies for the improvement of the institution and guide individual component improvement plans. The study employed quantitative dimension reduction commonly known as factor analysis after compilation of response descriptives. The analysis identified 6 underlying factors guiding employee responses to the survey of organizational effectiveness. Efforts to enhance perceptions of an organization's effectiveness were encouraged to look beyond the view that responses simply constitute a holistic opinion and recognize the many other issues shaping employee perceptions.

Key Words: organizational effectiveness, United Arab Emirates, leadership evaluation, underlying factors, impression management

INTRODUCTION

The change and improvement process within an organization is influenced by multiple factors. Organizational change has traditionally been considered to be part of a specific change imitative or a continuous quality improvement process (Hay, Busby & Kaufman, 2014; Gage, 2013). Change processes are time and effort intensive, as well as costly. Most organizations eventually run into the question of which costs can provide the biggest return on investments. Sadly, organizational effectiveness has traditionally not been associated with a maximum return on effort and investment. The failure of organizations to view their effectiveness within the holistic context of the overall organizational framework is all too often an acknowledgement of the failure of the organization to directly address the realities of capitalism.

The university utilized in the study is a public institution of higher learning offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees in the fields of engineering, business and social sciences. The university is located in the northern portion of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Education in the UAE has undergone significant transition since the establishment of the nation over 43 years ago. These changes have been greatly influenced by many factors associated with the impact of colonialism and the desire to

develop the tools to independently shape the national identity (Alhebsi, A., Pettaway, L., Waller, L., 2015).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For the purpose of this paper, systems thinking was considered in the tradition of organizational effectiveness established by Argyis, Schon, and Senge (Argyis, 1999; Bertalanffy, 1950; Jackson, 1995; Rosenblueth et al., 1943). Senge (1990) defines systems thinking as "a discipline for seeing wholes. Systems thinking is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots.' It is a set of general principles" (p. 68). Due to the dynamic nature of systems theory, ontological implications can be derived based on certain theoretical applications of systems theory in the real world (Jackson, 1995). However, theoretical systems models can also be used as epistemological devices to explain and explore current real world perspectives (Jackson, 1995).

Due to the nature of quantitative research, the epistemological position of this study is rooted in rationalism. Rationalism implies that knowledge is a result of the human mind's desire to know the truth. This perspective supports the belief that human reasoning alone can ascertain the truth. However, the nature of some of the quantitative tools involved in this study (such as the survey of organizational effectiveness) might also be viewed as empiricist in nature (Jackson, 1995).

A 39-item organizational effectiveness questionnaire was utilized to identify primary dimensions shaping employee perception of the organization's levels of institutional effectiveness. Upon completion of this study six dimensions were identified as critical underlying dimensions (factors). Data from this study were collected with the intent of developing and implementing strategies in support of the organization's continuous improvement processes within critical function areas. Findings are also intended to guide individual components in implementing plans for organizational improvement (Rashidi, 2015). Thus, these efforts culminate in the development of a service improvement methodology, which is directly used to support the organization's performance management systems. This methodology for improvement is consistent with the literature and has been designed in alignment with the organization's overall vision, mission, goals and objectives.

Although many informational sources may be employed in these improvement plans, the institution and individual components may effectively utilize information provided by organizational effectiveness questionnaires, such as the one used for this study (Rashidi, 2015). Performance management systems, address change, by first identifying and evaluating critical performance areas. For the purpose of this study critical performance areas included areas that were deemed to have significant impact on organizational effectiveness such as upper administration along with internal and external customer interface areas such as human resources, information technology, and logistics.

Upper administration is traditionally one of the first constituencies addressed within the organizational effectiveness and improvement process. Upper management is asked to acknowledge and buy into the effectiveness process and required to articulate and model desired change. Performance management systems likewise recognize the importance of training and mentorship for senior leadership and all areas of management (Lumadue & Waller, 2013a). Moderate to extensive training can be required depending

on multiple factors such as experience, length of time with the institution, professional background, social political environment of the organization, economic environment, and a host of similar factors.

Data provided through organizational effectiveness surveys allow for the further tailoring and modification of performance management systems. For performance management systems to be successful specific goals and objectives must be identified. The evaluation of effectiveness must be supportive of the goals and objectives of the organization. Findings demonstrating significant changes in the economic, political and social environments may guide modification of existing organizational strategies. The level of buy-in throughout the organization is also central to the success of a performance management plan. Buy-in can be viewed as the willingness of the members of the organization to accept the proposed change(s). This acceptance can be viewed as a matter that is specific to the proposed change or can be seen as a symptom overarching the organization's culture and effectiveness (Rashidi, 2015).

Methods utilized to support the change management process within organizations are numerous; however, most managerial change processes include the follow key features. Leadership must identify the key stakeholders. Depending on the culture of thee organization, key stakeholders may not include upper management (Rashidi, 2015). Traditionally upper management is invested in the change process undertaken by an organization. However, depending on the goals, nature and design of the organization the key stakeholders may be derived from any number of constituents. For this reason leaders must identify key stakeholders and remain cognizant of their role in the change process.

The scope of the recommended organizational change needs to be clearly defined and measured. Accurate evaluation of the organization's current standing is of paramount importance for the establishment of realistic future goals. The distance of change to be transversed by the organization and/or the individuals working within the organization must be measurable and fixed. This is not to say that these factors can and will not change. Instead, careful consideration must be given to the change process and the manner in which the change process is modified in relationship to the organization's current circumstances. Hence, the process or the level of change necessary to reach the desired outcomes must be recognized not as a point, but as part of greater ongoing and complex change process. This awareness of *tertium quid* (an unidentified third element understood in light of two known elements*)* more accurately reflects the direct and indirect nature of the change process within the organization (Rashidi, 2015).

Similarly, the plan and design for the recommended organizational change needs to be comprehensive and realistic. The plan also needs to be piloted to evaluate the effectiveness of the recommended change plan on a small scale before rolling the plan out to the larger organization. Once the recommended changes have been implemented, the outcomes need to be shared and disseminated throughout the organization (Gage, 2013).

In the final stages of implementing the new change process the driving factors behind perception of the organization's effectiveness must be considered as well as strategies and methodologies for implementing the change. Changing economic factors have resulted in the need for change management professionals to consider performance management systems with respect to the overall organization's fiscal bottom line. New

management techniques such as burst learning have been designed to address these more comprehensive and efficient management styles.

Burst learning is concerned with the simultaneous development of organizational capacity and profitability (Hay, Busby & Kaufman, 2014). Burst learning utilizes action-learning techniques that save time and provide organizations the opportunity to implement corrective actions on the spot. One of the other characteristics of burst learning relates to multiple learning formats utilized to guide the learning and support stages as outline by Kirkpatrick's four levels of evolution model (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Hay, Busby & Kaufman, 2014). These processes are examples of support methods and models often utilized to guide the development, planning, and implementation of organizational improvement and effectiveness strategies.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to identify the primary dimensions shaping employee perceptions of the institution's organizational effectiveness. The study was conducted and the dimensions were identified in support of the organization's continuous quality improvement process with the intent to implement strategies for the improvement of the institution and guide individual component improvement plans. Additionally, the findings hold the potential to guide future practice and research to enhance understanding in the broad field of organizational culture and effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative methodology to conduct a dimension reduction on a data set collected via the digital administration of a 39-item organizational effectiveness questionnaire for the purpose of determine the underlying factors driving participant responses.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two research questions were utilized to drive the study. These two questions related to the extent of the participant responses and examined potential relationships between or among the various responses. As outlined by Creswell (2009) the research questions obtain the responses of the participants then guide the statistical methodology. The research questions follow.

Research Question 1: What are the participant responses to the 39-item 2015 Survey of Organizational Effectiveness for an institution of higher education in the northern portion of the United Arab Emirates?

Research Question 2: Do relationships exist between or among the participant responses to the 39-item 2015 Survey of Organizational Effectiveness for an institution of higher education in the northern portion of the United Arab Emirates?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Research Question 1 did not require research hypotheses, as the required findings were only descriptive in nature. Research Question 2 required null and alternate research hypotheses to examine potential relationships of the various responses. The research hypotheses supporting Research Question 2 follow.

Ho: No relationships exist between or among the participant responses to the 39-item 2015 Survey of Organizational Effectiveness for an institution of higher education in the northern portion of the United Arab Emirates.

Ha: Relationships exist between or among the participant responses to the 39-item 2015 Survey of Organizational Effectiveness for an institution of higher education in the northern portion of the United Arab Emirates.

LIMITATIONS, DELIMITATIONS, AND ASSUMPTIONS

Limitations, delimitations and assumptions of the study follow. This study was limited by the following factors.

1. Data from the Survey of Organizational Effectiveness were only available for the spring 2015 semester.
2. Data from the Survey of Organizational Effectiveness were available only for the institution under examination.

The researcher delimited the study as follows.

1. The study was restricted to data retrieved utilizing the survey instrument.
2. The collection of information was delimited to the spring 2015 semester for the institution under examination.

The following assumptions were made for this study.

1. The data were accurate and correctly recorded.
2. The data were usable and appropriate for this study.
3. Examination of the data held the potential to guide future practice and research.

RESULTS

Research Approach

The research utilized a 4-point Likert survey evaluation of organizational effectiveness. The survey was developed approximately 20 years prior to this implementation by a team of experts from the field. The reliability of the survey instrument has been assessed numerous times with all scores ranging from 0.89 and up. The survey instrument was slightly modified to accommodate the needs of the institution. A Chronbach alpha was utilized to evaluate the reliability of the data set due to the modification of the instrument. The score of 0.981 was deemed appropriate to satisfy the reliability requirements (Waller, L., & Lumadue, R., 2013b).

Descriptives of participant responses were collected in answer to Research Question 1. The descriptives included the number of participant responses along with the mean and standard deviation of the response items. Prior to the employment of analysis relating to Research Question 2, sample adequacy was established using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy that returned an acceptable score of 0.518. The requirements established by Waller and Lumadue (2013b) for conducting dimension reduction were then examined. No outliers were identified in the data. The presence of 39 variables was deemed sufficient to satisfy expectations required for dimension reduction (factor analysis). Following the determination that basic requirements had been satisfied, Research Question 2 was addressed through the examination of Bartlett's test of sphericity. The test was also utilized to establish the linear nature of the data. Dimension reduction was then employed to identify underlying factors guiding participant responses. Factors with Eigenvalues ≥ 1.0 were deemed significant. Factor loadings were then examined.

Research Question 1

Descriptives were collected in answer to Research Question 1. These descriptives are provided in Table 1 and include the number of participant responses along with the mean and standard deviation of the respondents.

Table 1 ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES Number, Mean and Standard Deviation			
Question	N	μ	σ
1. The mission and vision of the organization are widely understood.	44	2.48	1.229
2. The mission and vision are widely communicated.	44	2.52	1.067
3. The organizational structure enables accomplishment of the mission.	44	2.55	1.229
4. Publications are well designed and represent the organization well.	44	2.57	1.301
5. The website meets the needs of the organization.	44	2.43	1.228
6. The public recognizes the organization for academic excellence.	44	2.34	1.238
7. The organizational structure facilitates consensus building.	44	2.30	1.374
8. Employees are informed about policies and procedures.	44	2.52	1.285
9. Employees are kept aware of special events and programs.	44	2.73	1.169
10. Employees are actively involved in decision-making processes.	44	1.98	1.338
11. Employees are encouraged to participate in leadership processes.	44	2.27	1.484
12. Supervisors evidence the skill sets required to facilitate participation.	44	2.18	1.352
13. Students are provided adequate opportunity to participate.	44	2.36	1.296
14. The institutional effectiveness process fosters a culture of improvement.	44	2.59	1.127
15. The institutional effectiveness process is systematic and broad based.	44	2.64	1.102
16. The institutional effectiveness office provides appropriate training.	44	2.34	1.380
17. The organization facilitates the employment of qualified personnel.	44	2.64	1.203
18. The workplace is conducive to the retention of qualified personnel.	44	2.20	1.488
19. HR policies are clearly communicated within the organization.	44	2.45	1.066
20. Appraisal procedures are fairly and systematically administered.	44	2.25	1.241
21. Employees are provided appropriate recognition for accomplishments.	44	2.14	1.456
22. Employees participate in the budgetary process.	44	2.14	1.407
23. The budgetary process is linked to institutional effectiveness.	44	1.95	1.293
24. Budgetary processes are adequate to support position requirements.	44	1.80	1.472
25. Budgetary processes are clearly communicated.	44	2.05	1.430
26. Technology is sufficient to support activities of the organization.	44	2.52	1.285
27. IT provides adequate training to support the organization's activities.	44	2.59	1.168
28. The IT helpdesk provides speedy resolution to difficulties encountered.	44	2.89	0.970
29. The organization's restaurant provides a quality dining experience.	44	2.50	1.110
30. The restaurant personnel are helpful and polite.	44	2.93	0.974

31. The restaurant facilities are clean and well maintained.	44	2.80	1.112
32. Purchasing processes are clearly communicated.	44	2.16	1.346
33. The logistics department fulfills request in a timely manner.	44	2.36	1.278
34. Employees are kept informed about pending purchase requests.	44	2.23	1.236
35. The organization's campus is a safe and secure.	44	2.82	1.244
36. The organization's facilities are clean and well maintained.	44	2.39	1.385
37. The classroom facilities are appropriate to facilitate learning.	44	2.11	1.262
38. Parking is appropriate to support the organization's need.	44	2.20	1.456
39. The organization is a quality institution.	44	2.57	1.189

Summary scores for the responses ranged from a high of 2.93 relating to the courtesy of the restaurant personnel to a low of 1.80 relating to adequacy of budgetary support for position assignments. The three highest scores were in the areas of the helpfulness of the IT desk, cleanliness of restaurant facilities, and the safety of the campus facilities. The three lowest scores were in the areas of linking the budgetary process to institutional effectiveness efforts, employee involvement in the decision-making process, and the adequacy of the facilities to support learning. Overall, the scores provided on the survey instrument exceeded expectations based on analysis of prior administrations of the instrument at other institutions.

Research Question 2

The null hypothesis associated with Research Question 2 was evaluated through utilization of the Bartlett's test of sphericity. Significance was identified at < 0.001 leading to the decision to reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternate hypothesis. Relationships were found to exist between or among the various response scores. Bartlett's test of sphericity also established the linear nature of the associated variables. Dimension reduction methodologies were then applied to the data set. Findings are provided in Table 2.

Table 2
DIMENSION REDUCTION
Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	23.132	59.312	59.312	23.132	59.312	59.312
2	2.691	6.900	66.212	2.691	6.900	66.212
3	2.135	5.474	71.685	2.135	5.474	71.685
4	1.648	4.226	75.912	1.648	4.226	75.912
5	1.246	3.195	79.107	1.246	3.195	79.107
6	1.055	2.704	81.811	1.055	2.704	81.811

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

The 6 factors (dimensions) explained at total of 81.811% of the variance within the data set. The associated factor loadings for the 6 identified factors are included in Table 3. Factor loadings with an absolute value ≥ 0.300 were deemed significant (Waller & Lumadue, 2013b). The first factor included all of the questions of the survey questionnaire. This factor was labeled as a holistic impression of the overall organizational effectiveness of the institution. The second factor included questions 28, 29, 30, 31 and 33 and was labeled as convenience services. This factor explained an additional 6.9% of the variance. The third factor included questions 5, 6, 11, 33 and 37 and focused on employee involvement. The fourth factor included questions 22, 23, 35

and 36. This factor was labeled the perception of the security and appearance of the campus. The fifth factor included questions 19 and 28. This factor was identified as opinion regarding the helpfulness of employee support services. The sixth and last factor included questions 5, 6, 14 and 15 and was associated with the organization's focus on continuous improvement.

The 6 identified factors underlying participant responses on the Survey of Organizational Effectiveness were (1) a holistic impression of the organizational effectiveness of the institution, (2) opinion of employee convenience services, (3) views concerning employee involvement, (4) perception of the security and appearance of the campus, (5) opinion regarding the helpfulness of employee support services, and (6) the organization's focus on continuous improvement. Together these dimensions accounted for 81.8% of the variance within the data set.

Table 3
DIMENSION REDUCTION FACTOR LOADINGS
Component Analysis

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. The mission and vision of the organization are widely understood.	.874	-.144	-.123	.191	.049	.040
2. The mission and vision are widely communicated.	.773	-.330	-.190	.232	-.138	-.017
3. The organizational structure enables accomplishment of the mission.	.778	-.174	-.191	.251	.184	-.002
4. Publications are well designed and represent the organization well.	.810	-.213	-.302	.208	.100	.067
5. The website meets the needs of the organization.	.701	-.068	-.405	.065	-.105	.424
6. The public recognizes the organization for academic excellence.	.829	-.036	-.313	.146	.015	.424
7. The organizational structure facilitates consensus building.	.892	-.143	.071	-.026	.030	-.107
8. Employees are informed about policies and procedures.	.775	-.337	.014	-.215	-.059	-.232
9. Employees are kept aware of special events and programs.	.725	-.216	.239	-.194	-.207	-.180
10. Employees are actively involved in decision-making processes.	.807	-.089	.298	-.072	-.171	.036
11. Employees are encouraged to participate in leadership processes.	.810	.049	.346	-.086	-.059	-.031
12. Supervisors evidence the skill sets required to facilitate participation.	.897	-.097	.156	-.067	-.177	.023
13. Students are provided adequate opportunity to participate.	.835	.059	.029	.122	-.200	.084
14. The institutional effectiveness process fosters a culture of improvement.	.838	.049	-.184	.022	.007	-.328
15. The institutional effectiveness process is systematic and broad based.	.732	.188	-.236	-.063	-.047	-.341
16. The institutional effectiveness office provides appropriate training.	.830	-.037	-.040	.180	-.170	-.090
17. The organization facilitates the employment of qualified personnel.	.775	.151	.109	-.130	.278	-.305
18. The workplace is conducive to the retention of qualified personnel.	.890	.130	-.116	.044	.048	.184
19. HR policies are clearly communicated within the organization.	.795	-.151	.014	-.021	.443	.027
20. Appraisal procedures are fairly and systematically administered.	.813	-.122	.179	.103	.259	-.148
21. Employees are provided appropriate recognition for accomplishments.	.832	-.018	.265	-.071	.172	.013
22. Employees participate in the budgetary process.	.813	-.250	.094	-.320	-.177	.042
23. The budgetary process is linked to institutional effectiveness.	.842	-.146	-.017	-.345	-.057	-.041
24. Budgetary processes are adequate to support position requirements.	.719	-.096	.284	-.234	-.119	.183
25. Budgetary processes are clearly communicated.	.767	-.342	.211	-.224	-.058	.276
26. Technology is sufficient to support activities of the organization.	.769	-.193	-.250	-.256	.190	.121
27. IT provides adequate training to support the organization's activities.	.726	.206	-.221	-.325	.179	.224
28. The IT helpdesk provides speedy resolution to difficulties encountered.	.573	.312	-.027	-.290	.494	-.055
29. The organization's restaurant provides a quality dining experience.	.660	.570	.126	-.048	-.191	.078
30. The restaurant personnel are helpful and polite.	.424	.746	.254	.035	-.041	.171
31. The restaurant facilities are clean and well maintained.	.506	.786	.226	.010	.022	.003
32. Purchasing processes are clearly communicated.	.851	.195	-.236	-.103	-,022	.200
33. The logistics department fulfills request in a timely manner.	.655	.379	-.501	-.086	-.049	-.046
34. Employees are kept informed about pending purchase requests.	.664	.275	-.228	.095	-.310	-.246
35. The organization's campus is a safe and secure.	.653	.010	.119	.541	.213	-.039
36. The organization's facilities are clean and well maintained.	.704	-.038	.33	.425	.073	.140
37. The classroom facilities are appropriate to facilitate learning.	.734	-.052	.437	.294	.039	.055
38. Parking is appropriate to support the organization's need.	.762	.115	-.220	.258	-.201	-.054
39. The organization is a quality institution	.921	-.009	.045	-.014	-.141	-.146

IMPLICATIONS

The 6 underlying factors driving participant responses on the Survey of Organizational Effectiveness provide insight into numerous ramifications relating to employee perception of the organization's effectiveness. The first factor was a holistic impression that accounted for just under 60% of the variance in the data set. Though this amount may appear large at first consideration, just over 40% of the variance still remained to be explained. This leads to the conclusion that employee perception of the organization's effectiveness is contingent upon many more issues than simply a holistic overview. Other factors come into play.

The remaining 5 factors related to convenience services, employee involvement, the security and appearance of the facilities, the helpfulness of employee support services and the organization's focus on continuous improvement. The employee's commitment to the workplace appears to be enhanced by the availability of convenience services. Though the survey instrument focused on food services, convenience services such as break rooms, ATM machines, and a commissary likely serve to enhance the employee's impression of the organization's reciprocal commitment to the employee. This, in turn, possibly strengthens the employee's commitment to the organization and engenders positive perceptions of the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

Employee involvement has long been viewed as an essential element for employee buy-in to the vision and mission of the organization (Arogundade & Arogundade, 2015). As previously discussed, Gale (2013) emphasized the importance of shared decision making as a methodology to empower and ensure that implemented changes are sustained for the long-term. The presence of the third factor indicates that the perception of organizational effectiveness is impacted by the meaningful involvement of employees in the decision making process. Those who are involved in decisions are more likely to support those decisions. Employees who have bought into the organization's decisions are much more likely to perceive themselves as an important component of the organization's effectiveness.

The fourth factor illustrates the importance of the safety and appearance of the facilities and the role that these play in employee's perceptions. Implications of this finding reach beyond simple issues of safety and appearance to emphasize the importance of all personnel. Groundskeepers, building maintenance, security and all line staff must be viewed as an integral and essential component for maintaining the image of the organization. Simply put, organizational effectiveness is a team effort involving everyone from the CEO to entry-level employees engaged on any tasks relating to the operation of the organization. Every employee is important. Additionally, safety and the appearance of the facilities are central to employee perceptions of an organization's effectiveness.

Just as convenience services shaped perceptions, employee support services are also very important. The findings reveal that employees are likely to view the organization in light of the manner in which the organization supports and guides their development. Hence, the promotion of a positive vision of organization effectiveness

requires that the organization empower and support the needs and development of employees. Similarly, functions such as human resources, information technology, professional development and administrative support shape employee perception. An organization that invests in the development of its employees is likely to strengthen employee perception of its effectiveness. One could argue that perception and reality are synonymous.

The last identified factor related to the organization's commitment to continuous improvement. Many refer to an organization focused on continuous improvement as a learning organization. A learning organization embraces and practices quality enhancement. When employees perceive a positive organizational commitment to quality enhancement, this perception is transferred to a positive perception of the effectiveness of the organization.

In conclusion, a positive impression of the effectiveness of an organization requires (1) employee involvement and buy-in, (2) a reciprocal relationship between employees and the organization, (3) a secure and professional work environment, and (4) a strong organizational commitment to continuous improvement. The study clearly indicates that employee perception of a reciprocal relationship between themselves and the organization empowers their impression of the effectiveness of the organization.

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