

# ORGANIZATIONS

Anthony O. Putman

---

## ABSTRACT

Organizations are among the most important and complex phenomena of the twentieth century. This paper takes a fresh look at organizations both conceptually and pragmatically, using the perspective and conceptual resources of Descriptive Psychology. A detailed paradigm is developed which is rooted in the view of organizations as a particular type of human community. Within this paradigm a number of issues are discussed, ranging from ethical concerns of power and authority to means of distinguishing different worlds within the organization. In a second section of the paper a number of pragmatic concerns of organizations are addressed, including methods for improving productivity, increasing job satisfaction and on-the-job growth, and effectively managing the organization's mission.

When the social histories of the twentieth century are written, the explosive proliferation of organizations and organizational forms seems certain to be a major chapter. One noted sociologist calls twentieth century America "a society of organizations" (Perrow, 1986), while Peter Drucker flatly asserts that "Our children will have to learn organizations in the same way our fathers had to learn farming." Like that other

---

*Advances in Descriptive Psychology*, Volume 5, pages 11-46.

Editors: Anthony O. Putman and Keith E. Davis.

Copyright © 1990 Descriptive Psychology Press.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

ISBN: 0-9625661-0-1.

explosive phenomenon of the twentieth century, the growth of technology, organizations have been the subject of both intense study and a good deal of cautionary consideration. An uneasy feeling surfaces periodically in both academic and popular discourse that, like technology, our organizations have grown well beyond our capacities to understand and control them. There is a good deal to be said for that point of view.

To say that our understanding falls short is certainly not to imply that we know nothing at all. Literally tens of thousands of scholarly and practical works have addressed issues of understanding organizations; merely listing the landmark works would overload any reasonable bibliography. (See Drucker, 1974; Mintzberg, 1979; and Scott, 1981 for examples.) Nor should we take this shortfall as implying failure of some sort. After all, the serious study of organizations only began in the late 1940s; prior to World War II, only a handful of scattered seminal works (e.g., Taylor, 1947; Weber, 1947) addressed the topic of organizations per se. Considering the fact that since the 1940s the scope and complexity of the phenomenon has, if anything, grown more rapidly than have our efforts to grasp it, one is inclined to see organizational theorists and practitioners as having accomplished a great deal in a short time.

Nonetheless, there are substantial gaps which need filling, basic and important questions about organizations which have been at most partially answered. Some instances are: On what important dimensions do organizations differ from other forms of social arrangement—and from each other? What relations exist between organizations and the behavior of persons who are its members? What constitutes ethical behavior in an organizational context, and how does this relate to ethics in the broader societal arena? What is an organization's "culture", and how does the use of this term for organizations relate to other, more familiar, usages? What can we do to positively effect the direction and functioning of an existing organization? to facilitate the establishment of a new one? What exactly are we committing ourselves to in calling something an "organization", anyway? The list of questions could extend considerably, but let these suffice to indicate the type and scope of issues about which we need insight, but about which our current understanding falls at least somewhat short of the mark.

This paper intends to take a fresh look at foundational questions such as these. A fresh look is just that: a thorough-going examination of the topic from the ground up, with no commitment to continuity with previous analyses of the same topic. The impetus for taking a fresh look comes from doubting the utility of building on existing foundations. In this paper I do not intend to review or criticize the existing literature;

that ground has been well covered by others. (See, for two excellent examples, Scott, 1981 and Perrow, 1986.) Suffice it to say that reviews of the literature point to the diversity of theoretical viewpoints and underpinnings in the field, and make no claim that a consensus view has emerged; thus there is no canonical body of theory which one need either accept nor effectively challenge. What commonality does exist among most current views is contained in the observation that an organization is a "system" rather than, say, a hierarchy or bureaucracy—but even on this tenet there is considerable diversity of viewpoint. That an organization must be viewed as some sort of system seems unarguable; exactly what sort of system it is and what difference this question makes in actual practice are open to examination. The "systems" view of organizations will be both critically and substantively examined later in this paper.

But the most compelling reason for a fresh look is to avoid conceptual fragmentation. The domain of facts for which one must account when considering organizations is uncommonly large and diverse. One must provide an account of facts ranging from the particular activities and goals of individual persons to the concerns and values of the society at large—and much in between. While current theories of organizations do well with one set of facts or another, none even attempts to do justice both conceptually and pragmatically to the entire domain. This paper explicitly does intend to do justice to the entire domain of facts about organizations, by drawing on the resources of one of the most extensive and deep conceptual systems yet devised for the doing of behavioral and social science: Descriptive Psychology.

This paper has two primary objectives: (a) to examine organizations conceptually, utilizing the concepts, methods and perspective of Descriptive Psychology and (b) to present certain methods and procedures of organization description which lead to effective interventions. These two objectives will be addressed in two separate parts of the paper. Along the way, a number of connections will be made between the present paper, on the one hand, and the literature of both Descriptive Psychology and organizational theory, on the other.

## **PART I: THE CONCEPT OF THE ORGANIZATION**

What exactly is an organization? Consider the following definition from a widely-used textbook (which the author himself admits is a "static", old-fashioned view but which he nonetheless uses for many chapters to good effect):

An organization is the planned coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common, explicit purpose or goal, through division of labor and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility. (Schein, 1980, p. 15.)

This is a good starting place. It reminds us of a number of central facts about any organization, and points to certain characteristic features. What it does not do is give us a sense of perspective. Common sense tells us that an organization is not just the sum of its important features; an organization is a thing, in and of itself, and we might appropriately be inclined to ask, what kind of thing is it?

The modern, or at least current, answer to that question is, "It's a system, of course" (see Scott, 1961; Schein, 1980, p. 228). This answer is rooted in one of the more powerful intellectual trends of the twentieth century: the tendency to conceive of all complex phenomena as instances of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1956; Boulding, 1953). While earlier theorists pointed to some systematic (e.g. Parsons, 1951) and environmental (Homans, 1950) aspects of organizations, the work of systems theory pioneers such as von Bertalanffy and Boulding made the systems view pervasive and self-evident. Over time the terms and referential metaphors have evolved from "open systems" (Scott, 1981) to "social systems" (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Likert, 1967) to "systems of flows" (Mintzberg, 1979) to biological systems (McKelvey, 1982). But all these have in common the general systems view that the fundamental conceptual anchoring point for understanding an organization is to see it as an entity/organism interacting with its environment(s) and modifying itself on the basis of feedback. All that remains for discussion is the fleshing out of the details.

The systems view is tempting. Its appeal is straightforward: After all, what is more characteristic of organizations than systems of all sorts? But the systems view says more than that. The claim is that "system" provides the fundamental context for understanding organizations; further (and this is where the real trouble starts) we are advised to study organizations *as* systems, taking as fundamental the conceptual units of systems theory—boundaries, environment, feedback and the like. (Students of Ossorio will recognize this as a particularly adept instance of "bait and switch"; Ossorio, 1985.) Soon we are talking about "interacting subsystems with flexible boundaries" and we would not know we were talking about an organization unless someone told us.

What's wrong with that? Isn't that a common move in science—creating an abstracted representation of the object of study, so that underlying structure and regularities are more easily seen? It is a common move, but a dangerous one; as Ossorio (1966, 1971/1978)

persuasively points out in a similar context, once we have made it there is no turning back. The statements and formulations we make about organizations per se are constrained by our knowledge and experience of actual organizations; we thereby are substantially protected against making things up that have little basis in reality. Regarding "systems" we have no such protection. Once we have formulated some type of system, the primary constraint on our statements and elaborations is the internal logic of that type of system itself—which may or may not have much to do with how organizations actually work.

The problem here seems a classic case of putting the cart before the horse: We are creating a theory about a domain before we have conceptually delineated and elaborated the domain itself. I propose to put aside for now any consideration of organizations as systems, on the grounds that such views are not a good choice for fundamental context. Later in this paper the "systems" view of organizations will be reintroduced in what I believe is a substantially more appropriate and sophisticated role.

### An Alternative Formulation

What, then, *is* an organization? Let us begin with one of Descriptive Psychology's favorite moves—belaboring and elaborating the obvious—and see how far it takes us.

An organization is straightforwardly a human community. It differs from other sorts of communities in certain characteristic respects, which we shall delineate soon, but to start with let us examine exactly what we have said by calling it a community.

#### *Organization As Community*

As it happens, we have actually said a great deal. Drawing on the delineation of the concept of "community" found in the Descriptive Psychology literature (Putman, 1981; Ossorio, 1981/1983) we see that, having identified an organization as a community, we have said that it is fundamentally characterized by the values of the following parameters: members, practices, statuses, concepts, locutions, choice principles, world.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, these are:

*Members.* Every organization is composed of some number of persons who are its members. Determining membership in organizations is rarely problematic; as the saying goes, "You are either on the bus or off the bus". In the paradigm case, members of organizations know themselves to be members and are recognized by their fellow members as such, that is, as "one of us". Membership is both enabling and constraining, in that

it both provides opportunities and implies certain commitments which are part of membership.

*Practices.* As Ossorio once put it, an organization's social practices are "a repertoire of behavior patterns which constitute what there is for its members to do" (Ossorio, 1981/1983, p. 31.). These patterns of behavior not only incorporate how things are done, they incorporate the significance of what is being done as well. For instance, in one organization with which I am familiar, to be told to "stop by my office after work" by your boss is to be invited to join in the informal planning and relationship-building activities of the firm—a mark of real acceptance. In another firm, when your boss tells you to "stop by my office after work", you are either about to be transferred or fired. The "same" behavior, but it initiates entirely different social practices, and therefore the significance of the two behaviors is entirely different. An organization is meaningfully characterized by its social practices (for simplicity, "practices").

*Statuses.* To have a status is to have a particular place in the social practices of an organization. Some statuses are important enough to be identified by specific locutions (president, personnel clerk, field sales representative, shift supervisor, lathe operator, etc.); typically there are specific practices relating to how one treats, and acts as, someone filling such places. Other statuses are less central or more ephemeral, and so are not singled out by common locution (e.g., the person who holds the "open" button in the self-service elevator while others exit.) Among the important practices of any organization are those relating to the filling of a status by a specific individual ("accreditation"), and the removal of an individual from a given status ("degradation"). A status need not be the sort of thing that a person could fill; for example, the place of "word processing machine" in my organization is currently filled by an IBM PC/AT. The status will certainly endure; the individual filling the status may not.

*Concepts.* To engage successfully in the practices of any organization requires the ability to draw the necessary distinctions. Concepts form the basis for these distinctions.

*Locutions.* Nothing is so clearly distinctive of an organization as its locutions. Listen to the on-the-job discussions of a group of Bechtel equipment operators, and then eavesdrop on the annual conference of the Aristotelian Society. One is tempted to say that they are speaking different languages; the differences are almost sufficiently profound to

warrant the conclusion. What is certainly warranted is the observation that the practices of the organizations are very different, the concepts required to make the needed distinctions are quite different, and therefore the locutions used in these organizations are different. Sometimes, of course, only the locutions vary: What banks call a workshop, school systems call an in-service. A small difference, to be sure, but a difference nonetheless, which effectively serves to characterize and distinguish the organizations.

*Choice Principles.* Life in any community is, moment to moment, a matter of options and choice. It is true that our behavior choices are bounded by what there is to do—the social practices—and what we are both expected and eligible to do—our statuses. But at any given time these boundaries define an arena within which we typically have substantial choice regarding what to do, and how and when to do it. Such choices are not made at random; indeed, the degree to which such optional choices reflect coherent patterns can be taken as a good indication of the strength and coherence of the community's culture. Choice principles refer to this coherence. They codify in some readily available manner the shared bases for choosing among alternative actions. Some of the ways in which choice principles can be expressed include policy statements (e.g., "Always put customer satisfaction first"; "All company services will yield at least a 20% margin"); slogans (e.g., "The customer is always right"; "Quality is job #1"); values (e.g., "Duty, honor, country"; "Veritas"); and "culture heroes" (e.g., Joe Hill for the IWW; Tom Watson, Sr. for IBM). For a more extended discussion of choice principles and their representation, see Ossorio (1981/1983).

*World.* Descriptive Psychology makes an important distinction between two related concepts: "reality" and the "real world". Reality in this conception is content-free; it consists of a set of boundary conditions which constrain what we are in fact able to do and say. The real world has as its content all the objects, processes, events and states of affairs within which and with which our behavior takes place. Reality is one; real worlds are many, and are constrained only by reality. A real world (for simplicity, "world") corresponds to a community rather than to, for example, an individual person. (See Putman, 1981; and Ossorio, 1969/1978; 1981/1983; for extended development of these points.) What distinguishes one world from another is the community's choice of ultimate objects, processes, etc. "Ultimate" in this case does not imply some sort of universal or revealed truth, but rather a very pragmatic approach, namely: to say that an object, for example, is "ultimate" for a given community is to say that it has no object constituents which

themselves have a place in the practices of the community. Consider, for example, the worlds of chess and physics. To say that a pawn is an ultimate object of the world of chess is not to pretend that any actual pawn cannot be analyzed into molecules and atoms; rather, it is straightforwardly to observe that atoms and molecules as such have no place in the practices of chess. (Molecule to QB-4? Guard your quark?) As we shall see later in this paper, the choice of ultimates (and therefore of worlds) in viewing organizations makes a critical difference.

### *Organization vs. Community*

All of the preceding applies to communities of all sorts. Let us now use this analysis to consider what distinguishes an organization from other sorts of communities.

Again, let us start with the obvious. An organization is a community that exists for the accomplishment of a specific, desired thing—the "common, explicit purpose or goal" referred to in Schein's definition. That thing may be the manufacture and distribution of industrial tools, improving the mental health and social welfare of the population of the Volusia county catchment area, the moral and spiritual upliftment of the Ann Arbor First Presbyterian congregation, the advancement of the viewpoint and knowledge of transformational linguistics, fellowship with like-minded entrepreneurs, or, indeed, any imaginable desirable state of affairs.

This overriding purpose—what the French call the "raison d'être"—distinguishes an organization from other communities. A family, for example, exists purely for its own sake; its entire reason for being is simply to sustain itself as a social unit, and thereby make available to its members the rewards and satisfactions of family life. This is not to deny that participation in a family enables us to accomplish "specific, desired things"; obviously, it does. But these desirable things are simply aspects of family life, not the overriding purpose for which we became a family. Indeed, one common way in which family life goes wrong is when one of the family members treats the family like an organization—an efficient means of ensuring comfort and hot meals, or frequent sex, or social prestige, or whatever.

For the purposes of this paper we shall adopt the commonly-used term "mission" to refer to that overriding purpose for the accomplishment of which an organization comes into being and sustains itself.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of mission in organizations. The mission serves as the primary anchor for the choice principles of an organization. As a purely pragmatic matter, the members of an organization must consistently choose those behaviors that most further



the accomplishment of the organization's mission; otherwise there is little of the "planned coordination of the activities of a number of people" which Schein (see above) correctly identified as definitive of organizations. (Perhaps "purposive" or "intentional" might be better than "planned" here, an admittedly small point.) As we shall see, there are a number of fundamental practices of any organization which underlie its successful functioning and which have to do with mission.

But concern with mission is not only a matter of pragmatics. I submit that an organization's mission is the foundation of its ethics. Among the choice principles of any community are those which guide members in deciding what is the ethically right thing to do. Members of an organization typically face a dilemma: While the choice principles of their society or religion give guidance regarding some ethical matters, these principles often are little help in deciding day-to-day issues in organizations. Of course, you don't lie, cheat or steal; but how about using company time to further your own education? Do you put your people to work on your own pet project, or on cooperating with another department? Which lines of research shall our company pursue? In each of these, the answer is easy if one only considers self-interest, but it is precisely such purely self-interested choice that is illegitimate in an organization. As an organization member who is attempting to act ethically, the fundamental reference point for ethical choice is: "Does this make the greatest contribution to accomplishing our mission?" In extreme cases, the ethical choice from the organization's viewpoint may violate the ethics of society at large, but we should not take this as in some way diminishing the ethical force of concern for mission; this is a familiar kind of dilemma, much like the conflict between concern for family and concern for country in times of war, and should serve to remind us that even the highest ethical principles lead us to the need, finally, to choose.

Taking "mission" to be the distinguishing aspect of organizations, we can quickly move to some further, related aspects which distinguish organizations per se.

*Practices.* From among the social practices of any organization, two sets stand out as especially important (Putman, 1980). The first have been termed the "fundamental" practices. These are the practices which are necessary for there to be any organization at all. The fundamental practices include accreditation—the assignment of individuals to statuses; degradation—the removal of an individual from a given status; negotiation—the resolution of differences; adjudication—the third-party resolution of disputes; and management. (Many theorists, e.g., Drucker, 1974, subsume the first four fundamental practices under management.

I choose to list them separately because the first four are fundamental to any community while management, as is asserted below, is uniquely distinctive of organizations.) The concept and practices of management will be discussed further below.

The second important set are the "core" practices. These are the heart and soul of the organization, if you will: the practices which are uniquely definitive of this specific organization. Core practices are intrinsic practices, that is, they are engaged in by members with no further end in mind and no need for further explanation as to why they are being done. But core practices are more than just intrinsic; they are mandatory, in the sense that every organization member is expected to participate without significant reserve in the core practices. (Professors may or may not attend faculty meetings. They may serve as advisors to student organizations, write grant proposals, organize symposia—or not. But they *must* contribute to the advancement of knowledge, through research and scholarship, and its dissemination, through teaching and writing, or else they are failing to participate in the core practices of the university.)

Obviously, there is a close relation between an organization's mission and its core practices. Let us state it explicitly: The core practices of an organization are those which comprise the accomplishment of its mission. (Note carefully that this is not the same as "contributing to" the mission—a fundamental point for managers.) Mission is embodied in core practices; to put it less cryptically, mission is an outcome brought about by successful participation in the core practices of the organization. This basic conceptual point has significant practical implications for building, managing and revitalizing organizations, as we shall see below.

*Statuses.* The existence of mission as the central legitimizing choice principle in organizations creates logically and pragmatically the need for a special organizational status: what in more florid times might have been called "the keeper of the mission". This special status takes as its legitimate and primary concern ensuring that the mission is accomplished, and that the resources of the organization are appropriately utilized in that effort. Many terms exist for this status (administrator, executive, director, superintendent, president, boss, etc.) but following the overwhelming modern consensus we shall adopt for this status the term "manager". The practices in which a manager engages as manager will be termed "management practices", or "management" for short.

A small reminder seems in order here. "Manager" refers fundamentally to a status—a place in the practices of an organization—not to a person.

The individuals assigned the status of manager do not somehow disappear into it, although this is the impression one would get from reading most management literature. In understanding the tasks and behavior of managers, we must not forget that we are dealing with actual persons, with their entire array of person characteristics (see Ossorio, 1970/1981), who are filling a particular place in the specific practices of an actual organization. Further, it is useful to remember that "manager" may be (in fact, usually is) only one of many statuses filled in this organization by this same individual. This multiplicity of statuses, with their potentially competing claims on the individual, is one of the inevitable, irreducible tensions one encounters in organizational life. To speak of "management practices" is one thing; to expect purely "management" behavior from any actual individual is quite another, and certainly misguided.

With the above warning in mind, let us consider a few fundamental practices of management which relate to mission. The organization's mission must be created, clarified, communicated to the members of the organization, and committed to by them. Members must be encouraged and assisted in creating plans and goals which lead to positive action in pursuit of the mission. Jobs, roles and activities within the organization must be defined and refined subject to critique of their contribution to mission. Everyone must be held accountable in some manner for his or her utilization of organizational resources: Was this a good and responsible use of resources in the light of pursuit of mission? Finally, the mission must be renewed, revised and revitalized in the organization lest it become merely a slogan that has little impact on day-to-day functioning. All of these are fundamental practices, in that they are necessary for there to be any organization at all, and they are clearly the responsibility of managers.<sup>2</sup>

This is a somewhat daunting list. If it serves to remind us that the status of manager is no easy one to fill successfully, it can also serve to point up the vital role authority plays in management. Among the hottest topics for organizational theorists in the 1980s has been power: its accumulation, use, distribution, etc. One can easily get the impression from current literature that "authority" is an outmoded concept; in fact, I believe we have simply lost track of certain basic and classic distinctions. "Power" refers simply to the ability to get things done, in particular to the ability to get others to participate in getting your thing done; "authority" refers to power which accrues to an individual by virtue of the position the individual occupies—in a word, by virtue of his or her status. The key point here is that authority legitimately belongs to a status; the individual exercising that authority does so legitimately only so long as he or she occupies that status and is functioning *as* someone

in that status. (Merely occupying the status of parent, to give a pointed example, is no guarantee that one will act *as* a parent, as child abuse statistics attest.) Using management authority while acting as someone other than a manager (in self-interest, say, or to promote the viewpoint of one's profession within the organization) is an illegitimate use of authority, albeit a common one. Organizations cannot function without the appropriate use of authority any more than automobiles can function without the appropriate use of steering wheels—but authority, like any power, can be abused.

One final status distinction should be drawn here: line vs. staff. This distinction, rooted in military organization, is important but widely misconstrued. Not all activities in an organization are part of a core practice; many activities contribute to, but are not directly part of, the accomplishment of mission, and some have no discernible connection to mission at all. Practices and activities which are directly part of mission accomplishment are "line"; all others are "staff", and the individuals carrying out these activities are known as line and staff, respectively.

Line by its very definition is at the core of any organization. Staff, by contrast, is less central; in a very real sense, staff exists solely to enable the line to do its job. Note, however, that there is no implication that line is somehow more important than staff. Fundraising, for example, a staff activity in any arts group, is arguably the single most important function in the organization—try running an opera company without it. Nonetheless, there are real differences between line and staff which must be appreciated and managed if each is to thrive.

*Members.* The central membership issues for organizations stem, not surprisingly, from consideration of mission and management. As previously noted, membership in most communities is relatively non-problematic: You either are a member or you are not, and rarely do such questions as "Is he really one of us?" arise. One is born into many communities (family, nation, church) or else goes through a type of "re-birth" to join (adoption, naturalization, baptism); in others, one becomes a member by virtue of recognizing in oneself and being recognized by others as having the salient characteristics of a member. (Traditionally, when one received a Ph.D., part of the graduation ceremony was a welcome into the "community of scholars"—under the traditionally reasonable assumption that anyone receiving this degree had demonstrated the salient characteristics of a scholar.) In either case, the rule is: Once a member, always a member. One can leave or be thrown out, but either takes some doing and is the exception rather than the rule.

Membership in organizations, on the other hand, is a somewhat different matter. An organization member must make a substantial commitment to the organization's mission; otherwise, no matter how hard he may work or "involved" he may seem, the "member" is only using this setting to advance his own personal objectives. In a community there is nothing wrong with that; within usually very broad limits of appropriateness, that is what communities are for. But organizations fundamentally do not exist merely to provide a context for individuals to advance their personal objectives; they exist to accomplish a mission, and the mission takes precedence.

This fundamental connection between membership and mission has several important implications for the relations between member and management. (a) In practice, commitment to the mission implies commitment to the authority of management. One commits oneself to subordinate one's own judgement and goals to those of the organization's management so long as one is acting as an organizational member—hence the commonly used term "subordinate" to refer to individuals in many hierarchical organizations. (It may be useful to note explicitly that a person is subordinate to management authority, not to the individual embodying that authority at any given time.) (b) Management must concern itself with obtaining and maintaining that commitment from members through the mission-related practices mentioned above. (c) In particular, managers must strive to maintain a clear awareness on the part of members of the connection between the member's activities and accomplishment of the mission. (d) Both managers and other members have a stake in the organization's mission, but those stakes are somewhat different.

Let us examine some of these implications further. A man from Mars (or some close analogue, such as a teenager) might well ask: Why would anybody choose to join an organization and subordinate themselves to someone else? There are two possible answers, of course: Either you believe the mission is important and you want to be involved in accomplishing it, or else you see organizational membership as a means of advancing your own personal objectives—or some combination of the two. The "purely personal" type member poses a fairly straightforward challenge to management: Give him enough opportunity to get what he wants, while making it necessary to contribute to mission to get it. When the return is not seen as worth the effort, or when he sees a better place to fry his fish, the "purely personal" type member will leave—a clean, basically self-interested transaction with no messy ethical residue so long as, while a member, he kept his commitments.

The "believer" member is not quite so simple. A more-or-less explicit contract exists between such members and management: One agrees to

submit to management authority in exchange for management's commitment to see to accomplishment of the mission. Management's actions are at least ethically, and to some degree practically, constrained by this contract. A "believer" (it goes almost without saying that actual individuals rarely are either completely self-interested or believer types, but rather have both motives to some degree) will expect to perform tasks which contribute to mission, and will expect to see the connection between tasks and mission clearly; it is management's job to ensure both the reality and the perception. But the constraint is both deeper and more subtle than that. "Believers" by the very nature of organizations have an ethical standing to call management to account for their actions (in actual organizations, of course, this may be risky or impossible—but that in itself is diagnostic of predictable problems with the organization's motivation of its members.) Authority has to do with action, not with critique. (In terms familiar to Descriptive Psychologists, authority is an aspect of the relationship between two Actors and has no legitimate place in the relationship between Critics, since the latter explicitly assumes appeal to shared standards which both parties are competent to apply.) Thus, management theorists commonly observe that excellent managers encourage outspoken discussion and even disagreement during planning and debriefing, while demanding whole-hearted teamwork and commitment once the action decision is made.

Since in actual organizations both members and managers are actual individuals rather than archetypes, the relation between "believers" and managers lead to some of those "irreducible tensions of organizational life" mentioned above. "Believers" can be difficult to manage, particularly in volunteer organizations where the personal interests of career and livelihood are not at stake. Care must be taken to provide context and ample opportunity for members to question management and its actions, but care must also be taken to distinguish such times from the day-to-day activities of the organization in which subordination and commitment are required.

The primary tension for managers lies in the normal human tendency to identify with one's status. It is a very short step indeed from "I am a manager" to "Le Management, c'est moi". That short step occurs when a manager fails to distinguish those occasions when she is functioning *as* a manager from those occasions when the status she is acting *as* is something else—member, say, or financial analyst, or technician. Failing such distinction, a manager sees everything she does as the actions of management, and increasingly will fail to distinguish between advancing the organization's mission and achieving her own goals. Indeed, in the final stage of this breakdown (which, in reality, is where many managers start) the manager sees her personal goals and the organization's mission

as inherently one and the same. There are both ethical and pragmatic problems with this sort of preemption. Ethically, it is simply illegitimate; the manager is using authority that was meant for accomplishing mission to pursue ends that have nothing inherently to do with that mission. Pragmatically, this stance leads to chronic conflict with "believers", who have a personal investment in the mission and will see its preemption as both a threat to something they value and a violation of their basic contract with management. They will struggle, resist and eventually, if all else fails, leave—leaving the field to those for whom self-interest is the primary motive. To say that this robs the organization of its vital core is to understate the reality.

What are managers to do, then? Let us again acknowledge explicitly that many individuals who manage organizations do so purely for the self-interested rewards: they want the power, prestige, money or else they just like to run things, and that's that. Such individuals would view the notion of being constrained by mission or the membership or ethics as unacceptable, hopelessly naive, or fuzzy-headed: "That's not how the real world works". In an era in which corporations are being publicly looted by financial pirates who are hailed in the press as folk-heroes, there is something to be said for that point of view. Fortunately, it appears that the thieves and psychopaths in management are more visible than numerous; I believe that the vast majority of managers want to do what is best for the organization. Managers must begin by recognizing that they have been entrusted with the mission; it is not theirs to do with and change as they see fit. In particular, managers must take care to involve members—especially "believers"—in periodic review, affirmation and, as needed, change of the mission. Any change of the mission must be done with the involvement and consent of the members, or else management should count on a great deal of turmoil and turnover in the membership—with some of the most committed people leaving. In the second part of this paper we will examine some specific methods for affirming and revising mission.

*World.* If the social practices represent a repertoire of what there is to do in an organization, its world represents a repertoire of what there is to do with, to and within. Everything one encounters in an organization—the people, the products, services, tools, furniture, procedures, deadlines, rituals, celebrations, structures, legends, policies, *everything*—is part of the organization's world.

How can we characterize an organization's world? A simple catalogue of constituents is one approach, but it is not a very informative one. Any world has a kind of coherence that is not captured by a list of components. Things fit together systematically; the existence of one

object logically demands the existence of certain other objects and certain processes, which stand in certain relations one to the other. (The existence of a lathe *as part* of an organization implies the existence of metal to be worked, lathe operators and their procedures, and metal fabrication as in some way connected to the accomplishment or support of the mission.) The various "systems" views of organizations, as previously mentioned, are responsive to this basic coherence; while one must be careful to avoid reductionist traps, it seems appropriate to characterize an organization's world as a system.

But what kind of system? Here we must proceed with caution. It is clear that more than one type of system is involved; the terms and logic that make sense of lathes/lathe operators/metal fabrication do very little for making sense of employees/supervisors/attitudes/motivation—and vice versa. It has become common to speak of several different systems (e.g., the technological system, the administrative system, the human system) as "interfacing" parts which together comprise the whole. But there are chronic problems created by this "system of subsystems" view. The most glaring one is that of assigning various objects to the subsystems—they won't stay put. Jim Wozniak obviously is part of the human system. But he is part of the technological system as a lathe operator, and part of the administrative system as a union officer. Which subsystem does he rightly belong in? Further, it is clear that a change in the technological system—the computer is down—has an impact on the human system—customer service representatives are increasingly frustrated and demotivated. But how exactly does a change in one subsystem bring about a change in another—what exactly are the "interface mechanisms?" Note how easy it would be to take that last question seriously and begin investigating interface mechanisms. We are in the position of the old woman who swallowed a fly, then a spider to catch the fly, then a bird to catch the spider which she swallowed to catch the fly, then . . . until she swallowed a horse and died. Taking the lesson of the old woman to heart, I propose that we not swallow the fly.

Instead, consider this alternative formulation. Each organization is in reality a unified whole, within which exist many different worlds. These separate worlds are not related to one another the way pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are related; they are related in the same way different engineering drawings of the same camshaft are related, or different eyewitness accounts of the same event are related. That is, the worlds of an organization represent the whole organization as seen from different perspectives. As previously noted, different worlds stem primarily from different choices of ultimate object, process and so forth; what these (sometimes strikingly) different views have in common is that they are views of the same organization.



This formulation has some immediate implications. To begin with, it makes explicit both the remarkable diversity of different systematic views of organizations—we are literally talking about different worlds—as well as their inextricable interconnectedness, since each is a view of the same organization. Further, it helps us to make sense of the commonly-observed fact that a change in the organization which seems positive from one perspective may be invisible from another and seem quite negative from yet a third (this point will be elaborated below). In each case, what is changed is the organization—but how the change appears is different depending on which world we are looking at.

This leads to an important point: We have no access to the organization other than through some view of it, that is, via one of its worlds. Just as there is no engineering projection which is *really* the camshaft by contrast to the others which are merely views of it; just as there is no eyewitness who can claim to tell us what *really* happened, by contrast to the others who are only giving their version; just so, there is no world, no systematic view of an organization which can be taken to be the *real* organization by contrast to the others which are merely alternate ways of looking at it. This is an important point because, as we shall see, the organization as seen from certain statuses appears to be *really* one of its worlds—but which world appears to be the real one depends on which status one is occupying. A strong implication of this insight: Managers and theorists will be well advised to master each of the worlds elaborated below if they hope to grasp what they have in common—the organization itself.

Every organization is comprised of at least three important and distinct worlds: the world of people, the world of machines and the world of numbers, to name them by their ultimate objects. Each of these worlds has its own "logic"; it makes sense in the ways that its ultimate objects, processes, etc. make sense. Each represents a view of the entire organization; in effect, in shifting from one to the other we put on a set of lenses through which we see the entire organization with the logic of that world.

Table 1 summarizes some of the basic constituents of these three worlds. Let us look at each in more detail.

*The World of People.* When we look at the organization with the logic of people, we see persons acting and interacting. The ultimate "object" in this world is the person per se; the ultimate process is the behavioral process of action.

Saying that persons are the ultimate object in this world is not to imply that somehow we have eliminated machines or turned them into people (no need to issue Social Security cards to the desks). Machines

Table 1  
Three Worlds of Organizations

Logic of:	MACHINES	PEOPLE	NUMBERS
BASIC:			
Object	machine	person	number
Process	operation	action	accounting
Outcome	production	achievement	bottom line
Relationship	causal	contributory	arithmetic
Strong suit	precision	significance	control

are part of this world, but their fundamental place here is within the activities of people—they are tools, mechanical means of extending the capabilities of people. Likewise, processes other than action and interaction are seen, but always in the light of their connection to the activities of people—a technical process for cracking petroleum, for example, might be seen as a complex step in the social practices of petroleum engineers. Everything is seen, and it is seen in the light of its connection to people and their activities.

To say that people and action are the ultimates here is explicitly to say that describing this world and managing it require the conceptual resources of behavioral science, especially Descriptive Psychology. Looking at the organization with the logic of people, we see persons and their characteristics: skills, knowledge, values, motivations, attitudes, interests, beliefs, etc., all of which are seen as directly relevant to the functioning of the organization. We see action and interaction, with its related concepts: status, communication, goals, leadership, information, eligibility, relationship, tools, teams, competition, cooperation, meetings, etc. Managing from the logic of people is essentially a matter of leadership; first attention is given to maintaining the commitment, connection and capabilities of people.

Two other "ultimates" of this world should be mentioned, since they are important conceptual anchors in Part II of this paper. The ultimate event, or outcome, in the world of people is achievement—the result of action. The ultimate relationship (of person to person, action to action, person to action, etc.) is contributory, that is, the one makes a contribution to the other. As we shall see, this contrasts in pragmatically important ways with the ultimate relationships of the other two worlds.

*The World of Machines.* Looking at the organization through these lenses, we see machines and mechanical systems operating to produce an end product. We see raw materials or parts as input into the initial stages of the process; some operation is performed on them and they are output, moved along to the next stage as input, where another operation is performed, etc., until the final product of the system is produced. The ultimate object is the machine; the ultimate process is operation resulting in the ultimate outcome, production.

People in this world are seen in the light of their relationships to machines—as operators, maintenance workers, etc.—or as a kind of (more or less unreliable) machine themselves. Their actions are treated as any other operation in the system, studied and programmed for maximum efficiency. People are fundamentally units of production in this world.

This is the world of the technician and the engineer. Relevant concepts include input, output, operation, logistics, production, feedback, methods, technology, procedure, measures, efficiency, maintenance, etc. Great value is placed on accuracy, information and precision. The ultimate relationship here is causal: Information about the input and the desired output determines absolutely the operation to be performed; a given input and a given operation will always produce a specifiable output (if not, an error has occurred). A manager viewing the world of machines functions fundamentally as a head technician or, as Fukuda put it, a "managerial engineer" (Fukuda, 1983). The fundamental task is getting the system of production working right, and keeping it that way.

*The World of Numbers.* Both the world of people and the world of machines have a certain intuitive appeal; after all, both people and machines are familiar objects in our everyday experience, and it is easy to see how one could take them as "ultimate". Numbers are a little different in that regard. Most of us are not accustomed to dealing with numbers as real-life objects, let alone as ultimates, but that is precisely what we encounter in the organizational world of numbers. It may be difficult at first to see an organization through these lenses—unless you are accustomed to it, in which case it may be difficult to see the organization in any other way. (This is not merely a flip comment; a quick look at the curricula of most prestigious business schools would persuade one that the world of numbers and the world of management are one and the same.)

What does one see when one looks at the organization through the lenses of numbers logic? Fundamentally, one sees numbers—quantities, ratios, measures, classifications, etc. This is not to imply that chairs are

somehow magically transformed into integers, but rather to say that the fundamental facts about the chairs are all numeric: How many do we have? How much did they cost? Depreciated at what rate? Expensed or capitalized on the books? How many of what kind go in the office of a GS-14? The production line does not disappear, it is seen as a flow of quantities: 1000 cases of raw materials input at \$125 cost per case, processed at a rate of 150 per hour with 2% error, requiring two initial machines and one finishing machine, producing forty units output per hour at a cost of per unit of \$376, which can be sold within ten days at a 20% margin. People are quantities: job classification, so much skill, a certain level of experience, salary, production quota, a specific place in the hierarchy, a designated amount of authority. The ultimate process in the world of numbers is counting (measuring, if you prefer); in this world, quite literally, if you can't measure it, it doesn't exist.

This is the world of the accountant and administrator. Relevant concepts include accounting, classification, allocation, reporting, investment, margin, ratios, hierarchy, delegation, resources, policy. Most managers with business-school backgrounds have been trained to see the organization primarily with this logic (managers with primarily machine-logic background often call them "bean-counters".) Its ultimate relationship is summative; things either add to or subtract from the ultimate outcome, which is known by one of the more familiar and overworked phrases in the modern vocabulary—the "bottom line". Managing from the logic of numbers is fundamentally a matter of making the numbers turn out right. (One prominent management theorist, Porter, 1985, goes so far as to assert that the single measure of management success is the production of "better-than-average" margins compared to competitors in the industry group.)

*When Worlds Collide . . .* By now certain facts about the world of organizations should be self-evident: (a) The organization looks very different depending on which world you are looking at. (b) What you can do well, or at all, within an organization depends largely on which of its worlds you are inhabiting. (c) Each world has its strong suits, enabling one to do certain things well. (d) Each world has its weak suits and blind spots. (e) The potential for collision between these different worlds is tremendous. (f) All the preceding notwithstanding, the organization itself is a single unified whole.

Perhaps the single most important implication of these facts is this: A manager or theorist who hopes to do justice to an organization must move competently within and between each of its worlds, as appropriate. The strong suit of people logic, for instance, is significance: seeing the important, the right thing to do. But do not try to design a gene-splicing

process using people logic; for that you need precision, the strong suit of the machine world. And, lest we waste time and other resources, we need numbers logic and its strong suit, control. Using the wrong logic to address an organizational concern is like using a hammer to open a paint can: while you may succeed, you are likely to create quite a mess in doing so.

### Summary

Let us summarize in broad strokes what has been presented in Part I. An organization is a human community, and therefore is characterized fundamentally by its members, practices, statuses, choice principles, concepts, locutions, and world. An organization exists for the accomplishment of its mission—a specific, valued state of affairs—and its core practices are directly related to mission. The mission provides both pragmatically and ethically an anchoring point for the choice principles of the organization. A special mission-related status, that of manager, exists to see to the effective and efficient pursuit of the mission; authority is invested in managers for the accomplishment of mission, and all other members agree to subordinate their independent agency to management authority. Members are either part of the line—directly involved in accomplishing the mission—or staff, involved in supporting the line. The world of the organization looks different depending on which systematic logic one uses: three important organizational worlds are those in which people, machines and numbers are the ultimate objects.

Building on these fundamental concepts, let us now turn to Part II of this paper, in which some methods for organizational intervention are derived and discussed.

## PART II: METHODS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

### Productivity Assessment and Improvement

Productivity is an important indicator of the overall effectiveness of an organization. Over the last ten years or so, the topic of productivity has attracted a great deal of attention in management circles, owing partly to the wide-spread perception that we could do better with the resources we have if only we knew how. It is also a clear example of the difficulties one encounters when a problem is approached using the wrong organizational logic.

Productivity is a term borrowed from economics, where it is defined as units of product output per unit of labor input. That is, productivity

refers to how much labor we have to put in to get out our final product (or service, of course). Produce more with the same amount of labor, productivity goes up; produce less with the same labor input, productivity goes down. As such, it seems clear that productivity is a reasonable indicator of how well we are doing in using our resources for their intended purpose, the accomplishment of mission.

Obviously productivity is not a perfect indicator, since it includes only labor and neglects all other resources; a business can spend itself into bankruptcy automating in pursuit of productivity gains. With a little common sense and a few other ratios (return on capital, for example) a good numbers manager can get a lot of mileage from careful attention to productivity.

But what to do when the numbers indicate that productivity needs improving? The numbers can tell us that attention is needed; that is their purpose and strong suit. But they cannot tell us what to do about it. For that we have to turn to another logic, and here is where the problem typically begins because, as thoughtful readers have no doubt already observed, the standard definition of productivity is a numbers world fact derived from a machine world systematization. The systematic model to which productivity numbers direct our attention is the mechanistic input-operation-output model, but the primary input into the system—that all-important denominator in the equation—is labor, the productive activities of people. To the extent that our productivity improvement efforts focus exclusively on mechanical matters, we can safely rely on the input-operation-output model—but this is seldom the case. Far more typically we find that productivity improvement is a matter of somehow getting people to be more productive, and for that we need the far more complex logic of people and achievement to see what to do. To nail this point down with a slogan, consider this choice principle for managers: "Machines produce; people achieve".

Improving human productivity, then, boils down to increasing human achievement. How can this be done? Fortunately, Descriptive Psychology provides a straightforward and powerful answer to just that question via the parameters of Intentional Action (Ossorio, 1970/1981). To change a person's achievement we can change one or more of the following parameters: know, know how, want, performance, eligibility.<sup>3</sup> Since one available form of behavior description is the achievement description, which identifies the action by reference to its achievement (Ossorio, 1969/1981), it seems not inappropriate for our purposes to refer to these five as the "parameters of achievement". It is by reference to these parameters of achievement that managers will find their most powerful means of improving productivity. Let us examine them each in detail.

*Achievement.* To know how to improve, we must first know what to improve. Our anchoring point, of course, is the final product or service, but this barely gets us started. We must give thoughtful attention to the following questions in order to specify achievements for improvement: Who contributes directly to the end product/service? Who contributes indirectly, but nonetheless necessarily? Who contributes important but if need be dispensable support to the end product/service? What, specifically, must each of these individuals achieve (and to what standard) as their contribution? Which of these contributions results in some tangible product, and which results in achieving some desired but not product-bound state-of-affairs? (Thoughtful analysts, e.g., Shostack, 1984, have observed that few of the really important contributions to an end product/service take the form of an interim product. Many productivity-improvement efforts, however, *begin* by specifying "outputs", which are all products. Not surprisingly, many productivity-improvement efforts fail.) What would we take as evidence that each of these contributions had been achieved to acceptable standard? Finally, what specific achievements among these do we want to target for improvement? We shall refer to these as the "targeted achievements" hereinafter.

*Know.* This parameter is a very familiar one to managers; it forms part of the stock-in-trade of their training departments. In brief, every achievement requires the successful making of certain specific distinctions. This is referred to in Descriptive Psychology as the "Know" parameter of the action. In practical terms, we need to examine three categories of knowledge to spot opportunities for improvement: facts, concepts, and perspectives.

For each targeted achievement, we need to ask: What facts does the individual need in order to achieve this? How does s/he get these facts? How are these facts updated, and how successful/reliable is the updating? What concepts are required to achieve this? (Consider both technical concepts, e.g., "variable-rate mortgage", and organization-specific concepts, e.g., "loan approval team".) How are these concepts acquired, and what evidence do you have that the individuals have actually acquired them? Is their mastery of the concepts sufficient for this achievement? What is the usual perspective an individual brings to the targeted achievement, and what perspective(s) is required to achieve this? (For example, bank tellers may view taking a customer's deposit from a purely technical, processing perspective—make sure the right forms are filled out, copy A to the customer, B to operations, etc.—whereas we need tellers to take a human-interaction perspective—greet the customer, watch for non-verbal signs of

impatience, etc.—in order to increase cross-selling of bank services.) Any of these may reveal opportunities for improving the targeted achievement.

*Know How.* Knowledge must be joined with skill—"know how"—to bring about achievement. Relevant questions are: What technical skills are required for this achievement? What "cultural" skills—political or organizational savvy—are required? Do the individuals have these skills in sufficient degree? How do we know they have them?

*Want.* Knowledge and skill are human capabilities. As such, they are very roughly analogous to the capacities of a machine, and it would not be surprising to find a machine-world manager noticing their importance. Machines, however, have nothing even remotely analogous to the "want" parameter; only people want a particular state of affairs and act on that motivation. Accordingly, this source of achievement improvement is less often skillfully utilized in most organizations.

There are four categories of "wants" to consider regarding the targeted achievements: intrinsic, extrinsic, competing and counter.

"Intrinsic" and "extrinsic" are classic distinctions in the literature of behavioral science. Intrinsic refers to an action that is engaged in for its own sake, for the intrinsic satisfaction of doing it, with no further end in view; extrinsic refers to an action engaged in simply as a means to obtaining some other, intrinsically valued thing. It is difficult to overstate the importance of intrinsic motivation in the functioning and maintenance of organizations. (This topic will be elaborated further in this paper in the section entitled "Work, Satisfaction and Growth".) Intrinsic motivations are essentially self-propelling; all that is required to initiate action is a perceived opportunity to act on them. Achievement occurs routinely to the extent that undertaking the targeted achievement is an opportunity to satisfy intrinsic wants.

For each targeted achievement, ask: What does the individual find most satisfying about achieving this? What does s/he find most intrinsically satisfying about the task itself? the environment within which the task is accomplished? Does this task offer the individual good opportunities for achievement? problem-solving? teamwork? service? In sum, what (if any) intrinsic wants are actually satisfied by this achievement?

Extrinsic motivation is the classic "carrot and stick" model. The individual accomplishes the task as a means either of getting some desired reward or of avoiding some undesirable consequence. In either case, the impetus to action lasts only until the carrot is obtained or the stick avoided. (This should not be taken as campaigning against the use



of extrinsic motivation, but rather as merely pointing to one of its characteristic features. No organization can run purely on intrinsic motivation; I have yet to meet the person, for instance, who fills out time sheets or tax records for the sheer satisfaction of the task itself.) Consider these questions: What actual reward (if any) does the individual get for successful completion of the targeted achievement? What specific negative consequence does s/he avoid by the achievement? Are these rewards clearly and directly linked, in actual practice, to the targeted achievement? Or are they of the form, "Their reward is a paycheck and continued employment", which in almost all cases turns out to be little more than rhetoric?

"Competing wants" refers to the fact that, at any given time, an individual may have stronger reasons to do something else, instead of the targeted achievement. We may want assembly-line workers to pay careful attention to quality defects, but they may perceive stronger reasons to meet their production quotas and take chances with quality. For each targeted achievement, ask: What competing wants are there? How strong are they? How can we restructure the situation to change the relative strengths of these wants?

Finally consider "counter" motivations—resistance. Resistance refers to a motivation to *not* do what you are trying to get me to do; it is invariably the result of perceived coercion (Putman, 1985). Look at the targeted achievement for a moment strictly from the point of view of the individual undertaking it. In doing it the way we want it done, is s/he "giving in" in some way? To what, or whom, is s/he giving in? By doing it this way, is the individual acting as a kind or person or role s/he wants to avoid? (For instance, many department store clerks see themselves as primarily serving the customer's needs. To be required to try to sell "add-ons"—a second pair of glasses, a belt to match the pants—is often seen as "becoming a salesman", a lower-status role in their eyes.)

Taken together, careful consideration of motivations can often reveal avenues for improved achievement.

*Performance.* Performance improvement is the realm of the industrial or management engineer. This looks at the specific ways in which the task can be performed, and asks: Are there preferred ways of doing it? Is the preferred method known to the individual, and is it known to be preferred? What provision has been made for ensuring that the best methods are actually and consistently used? For ensuring that the best method is frequently reviewed, "recalibrated" and improved upon? What tools and technology are needed to accomplish the targeted achievement? Are they available to the individual when, where and as needed? Do the individuals have the needed skills in using these tools?

What job-aids are called for, and how are they provided? Fukuda (1983) brilliantly explicates this approach.

*Eligibility.* The final parameter of achievement is the most frequently overlooked. Eligibility refers to having the necessary permissions and endorsements—in one's own eyes as well as in the eyes of others—to act as needed to achieve. For instance, I may be strongly motivated to institute consensual decision-making in our organization. I may know everything I need to know to succeed; my skills may be first-rate, with well-practiced methods. But if I am a newly-hired supervisor whose superiors strongly believe in making decisions at the top and handing them down, I not be eligible in anyone's eyes to institute consensual decision-making—and so will fail if I try. Some seldom-asked but crucial questions are: Are the individuals eligible in their own eyes to achieve the targeted achievement? How do you know—what has been done explicitly to make them eligible? In what other eyes must they be eligible? Are they? And again, what has been done explicitly to make them eligible?

In summary, productivity improvement is an important and complex matter. The foundation of productivity is the achievements of the individual persons in the organization; accordingly, we must view productivity with the logic of people in order to see how to improve it.

### Work, Satisfaction and Growth

So far we have concerned ourselves almost exclusively with the organization itself—its mission, management, concerns and so on—as seen by an organizational theorist or a manager. Let us consider in this section a somewhat different view: the organization and its place in the lives of its members. In particular, we shall explore the topic of "job satisfaction", and some means of improving it.

In the twentieth century, Freud said it first and best: the two basic requirements for satisfaction in living are "Lieben und Arbeiten"—Love and Work. Considering the divorce and never-married statistics, Love seems in somewhat straitened circumstances these days; accordingly, individuals have a great deal riding on Work. And the plain fact is, for the large majority, work occurs within an organization.

It is not surprising, then, that for many people their work organization looms very large indeed. This fact has lead many theorists, from Maslow (1954) and McGregor (1960) onward, to explore the roots of job satisfaction. From their explorations have come a fairly commonly-accepted set of "needs" (such things as security, autonomy, recognition, achievement, power, self-actualization) the satisfaction of which, it is said, result in job satisfaction. (Conversely, the lack of satisfaction of

these needs is used to explain job dissatisfaction.) There is a certain commonsense appeal to this sort of thinking, but there are also some difficulties with it. I would like to suggest a somewhat different formulation that preserves the commonsense appeal while steering around the difficulties.

The primary problem with the need-satisfaction approach is its assumption that job satisfaction requires explanation by reference to some other sort of satisfaction. On the contrary, I would suggest that, as Freud implied, work is the sort of thing that ordinarily "produces" satisfaction on its own. To be more exact, consider this proposition: Satisfaction accompanies participation. Participation in a family ("Lieben") or participation in the practices of an organization ("Arbeiten"); in either case, it is accompanied by satisfaction unless something occurs to prevent it. In short, it is the *lack* of job satisfaction which calls for an explanation. Further, we can stipulate the form the explanation can take: Job dissatisfaction is the result of conditions which interfere with the individual's straightforward participation in the practices of the organization. We could, using the resources of Descriptive Psychology, construct an a priori categorization of conditions that interfere with participation. Long experience with helping organizations promote job satisfaction leads me to narrow the categories to two essential ones: problems of resistance and problems of significance. Problems of significance lead to people who *cannot* participate; problems of resistance lead to people who *will* not. In either case, job satisfaction is lacking. I have dealt extensively with methods of managing resistance elsewhere (Putman, 1985); in any case, problems of significance are substantially more common and important, so we shall examine them in detail.

*Significance.* Consider a worker who is attempting to participate in the production of a quality product, but who has no real standing to suggest ideas for improvement of the product or its manufacture. As indicated above, the worker lacks eligibility to participate in some important practices; s/he in effect is being told, "Do your part and leave the thinking to us". The result is a degradation of the significance of the worker's activities, and predictable job dissatisfaction.

Participation and significance are crucial and subtle concepts. A useful paradigm of participation is provided by games. Participation in any game—baseball, chess, or whatever—has certain paradigm features: (a) Participation is intrinsic; it is done with no further end in mind. (b) Participation consists of engaging in some particular and characteristic activities (fielding and throwing the ball; moving a bishop) none of which are themselves intrinsically significant and satisfying.

(c) Participation in the game is accompanied by satisfaction—specifically, the kind of satisfaction players of this game get from playing it.

A few important points can be derived from this paradigm. First, note that it is the playing of the game as a player of the game which is both intrinsic and significant. Remove the context provided by the game or the status of player, and significance collapses. Batting practice is at best a necessary evil for many baseball players, and almost everyone hates practicing bunts; hatting and bunting in a game, while in performance terms exactly the same activities, are simply a different matter altogether. The difference lies in playing the game. The young man who plays chess purely to impress his date with his intellectuality is playing a game—but he isn't a chess player, and whatever satisfaction he gets will not be the satisfaction of playing chess. The game itself is what makes the activities in the game significant; only players of that game can participate and get its satisfaction.

This paradigm of participation fits quite well for the practices of an organization. It directs our attention to two facts: (a) practices cluster into intrinsic work patterns which are the organizational equivalent of games, in that they provide a context within which specific activities acquire significance, and (b) just as some people are baseball players but hate chess (and vice versa), each individual in an organization will happily participate in some of these intrinsic work patterns but will be left cold by others.

Experience and reflection lead me to identify four intrinsic work patterns that together seem to account for virtually all job satisfaction: achievement, problem-solving, teamwork and service. (There certainly may be other, equally important patterns, but they have not come to my attention.) Participation in any of these requires the existence of certain conditions, just as one needs pieces and a board to play chess. Dissatisfaction is frequently the result of one or more necessary condition being unmet, which makes participation in that pattern impossible. Let us look briefly at each pattern.

*Achievement.* This is undoubtedly the most familiar and widely available of the intrinsic patterns. It has traditionally been seen as having the strongest appeal for the greatest number in our culture, although I believe that is arguable. Unquestionably it is the source of very substantial satisfaction for many achievers, and equally substantial frustration for would-be achievers whose participation is blocked for lack of a necessary condition.

The satisfaction of achievement centers on the achievement itself. There are four necessary conditions for the intrinsic pattern of achievement to be available; the lack of any one of these makes

participation impossible, just as it is impossible to play soccer without a ball. The necessary conditions are: (a) Goals. Not just any goal will do, of course. At the least it must be a high enough goal to present a real challenge, while not seeming clearly impossible—neither three feet nor seven feet will motivate me to achieve in the high-jump. And for some in the organization, there must be a clear connection between the goal and mission; otherwise, it is "just a game". (b) Methods and resources. Unless one can see some method for attaining this goal, and has the needed resources, there is no reasonable chance of achievement. Actually reaching the goal under these circumstances is a matter of luck, not achievement. (c) Standards. Setting a goal of bringing in four new accounts this week will not by itself create conditions for achievement, even if one can see how to do it. One needs standards to assess just how much an achievement "four new accounts" represents. Standards cannot be arbitrary; even if they are only comparative, they must have some credible basis or else they may be seen as coercive and will likely undermine achievement by creating resistance (see Putman, 1985). (d) Feedback of results. While this is obvious, it is nonetheless overlooked surprisingly often, particularly when the results in question are rather intangible or subjective, like customer satisfaction.

*Problem-solving.* Checkers resembles chess, in that both are played on the same board, but they are nonetheless very different games which are satisfying to a very different group of players. A similar relationship holds between the intrinsic pattern of achievement and that of problem solving. Both involve accomplishment, but this resemblance can be very misleading. To the achiever, getting to the goal is what the game is all about, and one solves whatever problems one must in order to do so. To the problem-solver, the solving of the problem is everything; reaching some goal as a result of solving the problem may be nice, but it is clearly secondary.

Conditions necessary for the problem-solving pattern are: (a) Intrinsic interest. Not just any problem will do; "uninteresting" problems are just a headache. The problem must be intrinsically interesting to the individual to stimulate efforts to solve it. (b) Criteria for success. How will we know that the problem has in fact been solved? It is a truism that, before you can set out to solve a problem, you must know what would qualify as a solution—but surprisingly often people are given "problems" to solve for which the criteria are unclear. (c) Tools and support. The worst thing you can do to a dedicated problem solver is give her an interesting, clear-cut problem and then refuse the tools or support necessary to get the job done—but, again, this happens with surprising frequency in some organizations.

*Teamwork.* Some people find great satisfaction in being part of a well-functioning work team. Achievements and problems in this pattern are simply part of the context in which teamwork occurs. Necessary conditions for teamwork are: (a) Interdependence. It has to be a real team, in which the success of one individual's efforts depends substantially on the efforts of team-members. Merely sharing an organizational umbrella or being designated a team is not enough. (b) Communication. Team members must keep each other informed of relevant activities and progress. (c) Negotiation. As differences arise, a team settles them primarily among themselves via negotiation; otherwise it becomes a group of prima donnas. (d) Leadership. This is required for the individual efforts of the team members to amount to an overall effort.

*Service.* The satisfaction that accompanies serving others is powerful and, I believe, vastly underestimated and underesteemed in our society. The traditional view has it that Americans (especially American males) are primarily achievers; by contrast, finding satisfaction in service is seen as much less satisfying, less prevalent and probably due to low self-esteem. Perhaps this pejorative view of service stems from association with such notions as servant and servile; whatever its origin, it is patently inaccurate. In my experience most people are hungry for opportunities to serve, and find tremendous satisfaction in doing so. This may be, as the late Ron Lippitt maintained for years, the great untapped resource of our organizations.

The conditions for service are straightforward: (a) Access. One must have access to whomever one is serving; for example, you cannot expect an administrative assistant to serve you well while denying him regular access to you. (b) Relationship. Service is a person-to-person thing; it depends on and occurs through the relationship between the individuals. "Impersonal service" is a contradiction in terms. (c) Clear expectations. How can I serve you if I am not sure of your expectations and standards of service? You can have your tea with milk or lemon, one lump or two, however you like it—but only if I know how you like it.

I would like to conclude this section with a few intentionally provocative thoughts regarding work and "growth". In the 1960s and 1970s, a myriad of "growth" or "human potential" methods appeared, each attempting to remedy in some degree a perceived rigidity and stultification in the lives of ordinary folk. One result of this time of exciting experimentation was an unspoken consensus that "growth" is an extraordinary event, highly desirable, and requiring special attention to ensure its taking place. I would like to file a minority opinion. The study of persons and organizations have lead me to the conclusion that

growth—by which I mean a significant increase in an individual's actualized behavior potential—is an ordinary result of participation in everyday work. This is not to say that growth is undesirable; quite the contrary. I mean simply that genuine participation in work is a deeply satisfying matter, which calls out and refines the best in us. The necessary conditions for growth are the same as for living itself—"Lieben und Arbeiten". Living *is* growth, unless something occurs to strip living of its significance. In that case, take care of living; then growth will take care of itself.

### Mission Clarification, Implementation and Renewal

As the final topic of this paper, let us consider, once again, mission.

If an organization is a community with a mission, it follows that, as an organization loses its focus and vitality, it degenerates into a mere community. This is the last and most central of the "irreducible tensions" of organizational life, a rough parallel with the physicalist notion of entropy: with the passage of time, unless steps are specifically taken to avoid it, the focus on mission in an organization (and therefore the alignment and congruity of the actions of individual members) becomes increasingly diffuse until it becomes indistinguishable from a community with no mission. At this point, the "organization" either continues as a classic self-sustaining bureaucracy with little purpose other than maintaining its own existence, it is taken over by someone who infuses it with a new mission, or it collapses. It is to avoid such degeneration that methods dealing with keeping mission alive are needed.

The first set of methods deal with mission clarification. Since mission is meant to serve as a "guiding star" for behavioral choices within the organization, it is vital that the mission be very clear to each member—and that each member has the same clear image. Of course, top managers can clarify mission by decree, but this is rarely very effective in an on-going organization; there is a strong and legitimate tendency to see management as over-stepping the bounds of their authority by coopting mission, which "belongs" to everyone in the organization. To get both clarity and consent from the members requires a more engaging process. Let us look briefly at two such processes which have been used to good effect in organizations: "futuring" and "distillation".

The futuring method relies on the members' ability to project mission into a vision of its accomplishment. (I may not be able to tell you exactly what our mission is, but with a little support I can describe to you what things will look like when we have accomplished it.) Members are asked to "take an imaginative trip into the future of this organization" (say, eighteen months from now) with the stipulation that

"we have done very well indeed in accomplishing what we set out to accomplish". Individually, members write down "everything you see and hear as you look down on this future organization that is an indication that pleases you of what we have accomplished". Once individuals have completed their "future trips", they are collected and shared publicly in a group setting; from these, the group generates a common vision of its "preferred future". (Obviously this is only a quick overview of the process; specific details can be found in Lindemann and Lippitt, 1979.) This "image of the preferred future" can be used to create a specific agenda and action plans for the organization which are clear, aligned and congruent. Roughly a decade of experience with "futuring" methods indicates that it can be very powerful indeed; observers close to the scene, for example, credit a great deal of Ford Motor Company's dramatic improvement in the mid-1980s to a thorough-going application of such mission-clarification via futuring.

The "futuring" process results in mission clarification but may not produce an explicit statement of mission. "Distillation", by contrast, focuses on a progressively refined description of current activities that results in an explicit mission statement. The mission statement can then be used, for example, to begin and anchor a round of futuring. Distillation begins by asking members, in a group context, to write down "everything we do in this department that is consonant with our mission—no matter how obvious or trivial it seems". The group builds a single list of such statements (with the proviso that discussion or debate will be deferred until later) and is encouraged to expand it until the ground is thoroughly covered. Then the group is invited to "step back a bit from the list and look at it. Now call out simple declarative sentences that describe the activities on this list—try to stay with the very obvious". Finally the group is invited to look at this second list of declarative sentences and see what patterns emerge from them. These patterns form the basis for the mission statement. This method is especially useful in ongoing organizations in which one finds conflict regarding direction; for example, a particularly fractious and divided research department of Bell Labs used it to work out a mission that energized its members while promoting alignment.

Mission clarification, by whatever means, is only the first step. It must be followed by implementation. As previously mentioned, futuring is an excellent starting point for implementation; the organizational literature is filled with good methods for goal-setting and action-planning. Regardless of the specific method employed, the end result must be a specific plan for the individual which guides him in deciding how to apply himself and his resources most effectively in pursuit or support of mission.



Management's responsibility for ensuring mission implementation does not end with goal-setting, of course; as the old saying has it, "It's not what *expected* that counts; it's what's *inspected*". Managers must periodically review performance with their subordinates and a constant topic must be "What are you doing to contribute to the mission?" In particular, members in staff positions must be frequently challenged and supported to draw explicit links between their projects and activities on the one hand, and accomplishment of mission on the other. Staff, if left to follow their natural tendency, will choose activities that make sense in terms of the logic of their technical specialties rather than in terms of contribution to mission; a manager who allows this tendency to go unchecked will see progressive diffusion of the force of mission within the organization (or else will inadvertently foster war between line and staff).

Mission renewal is, I believe, the most critical factor in ensuring the long-term success and continuity of an organization. At least two major tasks are involved—initiating newcomers into the "culture" of the organizational community, and periodic revitalization of clarity and commitment among members. Organizations which have been successful over time invariably have strong, almost ritualized methods of introducing new members to their essential mission and choice principles (examples that come readily to mind are the Salvation Army, International Business Machines, and the Masons). "Mentoring"—the practice of assigning new members to the tutelage and protection of a successful older member—is a particularly powerful method of transmitting the culture. Many organizations use training and orientation meetings as a venue for stressing the importance and value of the mission; some have even experimented with computer-based "mentors" to supplement training. In general any method of embodying the organization's choice principles—culture heroes, slogans and the like—can serve as a means of mission transmission and stabilization.

Finally, mission must be periodically revitalized. Times change; a mission that made sense before may need to be adapted, or even transformed, to fit today's circumstances. Goal setting methods help ensure that the implementation of mission stays current; to revitalize the mission itself requires a method like futuring that clarifies and stimulates the commitment of the individuals.

### Summary

Organizations are among the most important and complex aspects of modern life. I have attempted to demonstrate the utility, both conceptually and pragmatically, of using the perspective and concepts of Descriptive Psychology to shed light on what organizations are and how

we can effectively deal with them. A framework has been delineated for future development; at the very least, it seems that both the prospect and the need for such future developments have been established.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper represents at least twenty years of intellectual influences. The bibliography and this note will inevitably leave out some who should have been included, had I but remembered. Among those whose contribution clearly springs to mind are James N. Farr, who gave me my first intensive experience in working with organizations and my first exposure to someone attempting to make conceptual sense of the whole scene; the late Ron Lippitt, who shared his wisdom tirelessly as partner, colleague and friend; Keith Davis, whose patience as an editor is matched only by his enthusiasm as a cheerleader; Tom Mitchell, whose steadfast insistence on the importance of linking Descriptive Psychology to other intellectual traditions was decisive in my approach to this paper; and of course Peter G. Ossorio, who kept demonstrating how a Descriptive Psychologist sees the world until eventually even I finally got it.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Ronald Lippitt, the most tireless and selfless benefactor of organizations I have known.

Author's address: Descriptive Systems, 1019 Baldwin Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

## NOTES

1. The parametric analysis of communities presented here is essentially the same as in the "Communities" paper (Putman, 1981), except for the addition of the "choice principles" parameter which Ossorio included in his analysis of the closely-related concept of "culture" (Ossorio, 1981/1983). I originally subsumed choice principles under the practices parameter, which, while conceptually adequate, turned out to be awkward in application. In particular, the need to represent the relations between ethics and mission in organizations made it clear that choice principles were best not lumped with practices.

2. The subject of this paper is organizations, not management; accordingly, I have chosen to restrict discussion of management to the minimum needed to indicate its special conceptual and practical place in organizations. An exhaustive account of management practices can be found in Drucker's magisterial work (Drucker, 1974); an equally exhaustive, albeit quite different account is furnished by Dan Popov's "Total" model of management (Popov, 1985), which has at times been inaccurately termed a model of organizations.

3. The version of the Intentional Action paradigm presented here is a slight adaptation and modification of Ossorio's formulation. A few of the distinctions within the Intentional Action paradigm are crucial for the conduct of behavioral science, but seem cumbersome for the task of improving productivity; accordingly, I have trimmed away three of Ossorio's eight parameters and have subsumed their useful aspects under the single concept of "eligibility". Over the last dozen years this formulation has been used to improve productivity among literally thousands of people in hundreds of organization, to some degree at least thereby vindicating the reformulation.

## REFERENCES

- Boulding, K. (1953). Toward a general theory of growth. *Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, 19, 326-340.
- Drucker, P. F. (1974). *Management: Tasks, responsibilities, practices*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Fukuda, R. (1983). *Managerial engineering*. Stamford, CT: Productivity, Inc.
- Homans, G. (1950). *The human group*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Katz, D., & Kuhn, R. L. (1966). *The social psychology of organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Likert, R. (1967). *The human organization*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lindemann, E. B., & Lippitt, R. (1979). *Choosing the future you prefer*. Ann Arbor: Ron Lippitt Associates.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McKelvey, B. (1982). *Organizational Systematics: Taxonomy, evolution, classification*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The structuring of organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Ossorio, P. G. (1966). *Persons* (LRI Report No. 3). Los Angeles and Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute.
- Ossorio, P. G. (1969/1978). *Meaning and symbolism*. (LRI Report No. 15). Whittier, CA and Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute, 1978. (Originally published in 1969 as LRI Report No. 10. Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute.)
- Ossorio, P. G. (1969/1981). Notes on behavior description. In K. E. Davis (Ed.), *Advances in Descriptive Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 13-36). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1981. (Originally published in 1969 as LRI Report No. 4b. Los Angeles and Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute.)
- Ossorio, P. G. (1970/1981). Outline of Descriptive Psychology for personality theory and clinical applications. In K. E. Davis (Ed.), *Advances in Descriptive Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 57-81). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1981. (Originally published in 1970 as LRI Report No. 4d. Whittier, CA and Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute.)
- Ossorio, P. G. (1971/1978). "What actually happens". Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1978. (Originally published in an earlier version in 1971 as LRI Report No. 10a. Whittier, CA and Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute. Later listed as LRI Report No. 20.)
- Ossorio, P. G. (1981/1983). A multicultural psychology. In K. E. Davis & R. Bergner (Eds.), *Advances in Descriptive Psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 13-44). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1983. (Originally published in 1981 as LRI Report No. 29. Boulder: Linguistic Research Institute.)
- Ossorio, P. G. (1985). An overview of Descriptive Psychology. In K. G. Gergen & K. E. Davis (Eds.), *The social construction of the person* (pp. 19-40). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Perrow, C. (1986). *Complex organizations: A critical essay*. 3rd Ed. New York: Random House.
- Popov, D. (1985). *The "Total" model of management*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Porter, M. E. (1985). *Competitive advantage*. New York: The Free Press.
- Putman, A. O. (1981). Communities. In K. E. Davis (Ed.), *Advances in Descriptive Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 195-209). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Putman, A. O. (1985). Managing resistance. In C. R. Bell & L. Nadler (Eds.) *Clients and consultants* (2nd, ed.). Houston: Gulf Publishing Co.

- Schein, E. H. (1980). *Organizational psychology*. 3rd. ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Scott, W. G. (1961). Organization theory: An overview and appraisal. *Academy of Management Journal*, April, 7-26.
- Scott, W. R. (1981). *Organizations: Rational, natural and open systems*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Shostack, G. L. (1984). Designing services that deliver. *Harvard Business Review*, January-February, 133-139.
- Taylor, F. W. (1947). *Scientific management*. New York: Harper & Row, first published in 1911.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1956). *General systems theory: Foundations, development, applications*. New York: Brazillier.
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. In A.H. Henderson & T. Parsons (Eds.), Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1947 tr., first published in 1924.