*A Model for Diagnosing*

*Organizational Behavior*

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***3i*** anagement's primary job is to make organizations

operate effectively. Society's work

gets done through organizations and management's

function is to get organizations to

perform that work. Getting organizations to

operate effectively is difficult, however. Understanding

one individual's behavior is

challenging in and of itself; understanding a

group that's made up of different individuals

and comprehending the many relationships

among those individuals is even more complex.

Imagine, then, the mind-boggling complexity

of a large organization made up of

thousands of individuals and hundreds of

groups with myriad relationships among

these individuals and groups.

But organizational behavior must

be managed in spite of this overwhelming

complexity; ultimately the organization's

work gets done through people, individually

or collectively, on their own or in collaboration

with technology. Therefore, the management

of organizational behavior is central

to the management task—a task that involves

the capacity to *understand* the behavior

patterns of individuals, groups, and organizations,

to *predict* what behavioral responses

will be elicited by various managerial

actions, and finally to use this understanding

and these predictions to achieve

*control.*

How can one achieve understand-

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ing and learn how to predict and control organizational

behavior? Given its inherent

complexity and enigmatic nature, one needs

tools to unravel the mysteries, paradoxes,

and apparent contradictions that present

themselves in the everyday life of organizations.

One tool is the conceptual framework

or model. A model is a theory that indicates

which factors (in an organization, for example)

are most critical or important. It also

shows how these factors are related—that is,

which factors or combination of factors

cause other factors to change. In a sense

then, a model is a roadmap that can be used

to make sense of the terrain of organizational

behavior.

The models we use are critical because

they guide our analysis and action. In

any organizational situation, problem solving

involves the collection of information

about the problem, the interpretation of that

information to determine specific problem

types and causes, and the development of action

plans accordingly. The models that individuals

use influence the kind of data they

collect and the kind they ignore; models

guide people's approach to analyzing or interpreting

the data they have; finally, models

help people choose their course of action.

Indeed, anyone who has been exposed

to an organization already has some

sort of implicit model. People develop these

roadmaps over time, building on their own

experiences. These implicit models (they usually

are not explicitly written down or

stated) guide behavior; they vary in quality,

validity, and sophistication depending on

the nature and extent of the experiences of

the model builder, his or her percept iveness,

his or her ability to conceptualize and

generalize from experiences, and so on.

We are not solely dependent, however,

on the implicit and experience-based

models that individuals develop. Since there

has been extensive research and theory de-

36 velopment on the subject of organizational

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behavior over the last four decades, it is possible

to use scientifically developed explicit

models for analyzing organizational behavior

and solving organizational problems.

We plan to discuss one particular

model, a general model of organizations. Instead

of describing a specific phenomenon or

aspect of organizational life (such as a model

of motivation or a model of organizational

design), the general model of organization

attempts to provide a framework for thinking

about the organization as a total system.

The model's major premise is that for organizations

to be effective, their subparts or

components must be consistently structured

and managed—they must approach a state

of congruence.

In the first section of this article, we

will discuss the basic view of organizations

that underlies the model—that is, systems

iheory. In the second section, we will present

and discuss the model itself. In the third section,

we will present an approach to using

the model for organizational problem analysis.

Finally, we will discuss some of the

model's implications for thinking about organizations.

A BASIC VIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS

There are many different ways of thinking

about organizations. When a manager is

asked to "draw a picture of an organization,"

he or she typically draws some version

of a pyramidal organizational chart.

This is a model that views the stable, formal

relationships among the jobs and formal

work units as the most critical factors of the

organization. Although this clearly is one

way to think about organizations, it is a very

limited view. It excludes such factors as leadership

behavior, the impact of the environment,

informal relations, power distribution,

and so on. Such a model can capture

only a small part of what goes on in organizations.

Its perspective is narrow and static.

The past two decades have seen a

growing consensus that a viable alternative

to the static classic models of organizations

is to envision the organization as a social

system. This approach stems from the observation

that social phenomena display many

of the characteristics of natural or mechanical

systems. In particular, as Daniel Katz

and Robert L. Kahn have argued, organizations

can be better understood if they are considered

as dynamic and open social systems.

What is a system? Most simply, a

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system is a set of interrelated elements—that

is, a change in one element affects other elements.

An *open system* is one that interacts

with its environment; it is more than just a

set of interrelated elements. Rather, these

elements make up a mechanism that takes input

from the environment, subjects it to

some form of transformation process, and

produces output. At the most general level,

it should be easy to visualize organizations

as systems. Let's consider a manufacturing

plant, for example. It is made up of different

related components (a number of depart- 37

ments, jobs technologies, and so on). It receives

inputs from the environment—that is,

labor, raw material, production orders, and

so on—and transforms these inputs into

products.

As systems, organizations display a

number of basic systems characteristics.

Some of the most critical are these:

• *Internal interdependence.* Ghanges

in one component or subpart of an organization

frequently have repercussions for other

parts; the pieces are interconnected. Again,

as in the manufacturing plant example,

changes made in one element (for example,

the skill levels of those hired to do jobs) will

affect other elements (the productiveness of

equipment used, the speed or quality of production

activities, the nature of supervision

needed, and so on).

• *Capacity for feedback—that* is,

information about the output that can be

used to control the system. Organizations

can correct errors and even change themselves

because of this characteristic. If in our

plant example plant management receives information

that the quality of its product is

declining, it can use this information to identify

factors in the system itself that contribute

to this problem. However, it is important

to note that, unlike mechanized systems,

feedback information does not always lead

to correction. Organizations have the potential

to use feedback to become self-correcting

systems, but they do not always realize this

potential.

• *Equilibrium—that* is, a state of

balance. When an event puts the system out

of balance the system reacts and moves to

bring itself back into balance. If one work

group in our plant example were suddenly to

increase its performance dramatically, it

would throw the system out of balance. This

group would be making increasing demands

on the groups that supply it with the infor-

38 mation or materials it needs; groups that

work with the high-performing group's output

would feel the pressure of work-in-process

inventory piling up in front of them. If

some type of incentive is in effect, other

groups might perceive inequity as this one

group begins to eam more. We would predict

that some actions would be taken to put

the system back into balance. Either the rest

of the plant would be changed to increase

production and thus be back in balance with

the single group, or (more likely) there

would be pressure to get this group to modify

its behavior in line with the performance

levels of the rest of the system (by removing

workers, limiting supplies, and so on). The

point is that somehow the system would develop

energy to move back toward a state of

equilibrium or balance.

• *Equifinality.* This characteristic

of open systems means that different system

configurations can lead to the same end or to

the same type of input-output conversion.

Thus there's no universal or 'one best way"

to organize.

• *Adaptation.* For a system to survive,

it must maintain a favorable balance of

input or output transactions with the environment

or it will run down. If our plant

produces a product for which there are fewer

applications, it must adapt to new demands

and develop new products; otherwise, the

plant will ultimately have to close its doors.

Any system, therefore, must adapt by

changing as environmental conditions

change. The consequences of not adapting

are evident when once-prosperous organizations

decay (for example, the eastern railroads)

because they fail to respond to environmental

changes.

Thus systems theory provides a

way of thinking about the organization in

more complex and dynamic terms. But although

the theory provides a valuable basic

perspective on organizations, it is limited as

a problem-solving tool. This is because a

model systems theory is too abstract for use

in day-to-day analysis of organizational behavior

problems. Because of the level of abstraction

of systems theory, we need to develop

a more specific and pragmatic model

based on the concepts of the open systems

paradigm.

A CONGRUENCE MODEL OF

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Given the level of abstraction of open theory,

our job is to develop a model that reflects

the basic systems concepts and characteristics,

but that is more specific and thus

more usable as an analytic tool. We will

describe a model that specifies the critical

inputs, the major outputs, and the transformation

processes that characterize organizational

functioning.

The model puts its greatest emphasis

on the transformation process and

specifically reflects the critical system property

of interdependence. It views organizations

as made up of components or parts that

interact with each other. These components

exist in states of relative balance, consistency,

or "fit" with each other. The different

parts of an organization can fit well together

and function effectively, or fit poorly

and lead to problems, dysfunctions, or performance

below potential. Our *congruence*

*model of organizational behavior* is based on

how well components fit together—that is,

the congruence among the components; the

effectiveness of this model is based on the

quality of these "fits" or congruence.

The concept of congruence is not a

new one. George Homans in his pioneering

work on social processes in organizations

emphasized the interaction and consistency

among key elements of organizational behavior.

Harold Leavitt, for example, identified

four major components of organization

as being people, tasks, technology, and

structure. The model we will present here

builds on these views and also draws from fit

models developed and used by James Seiler,

Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch, and Jay Lorsch

and Alan Sheldon.

It is important to remember that we

are concerned about creating a model for *behavioral*

systems of the organization—the

system of elements that ultimately produce

behavior patterns and, in turn, organizational

performance. Put simply, we need to deal

with questions of the inputs the system has

to work with, the outputs it must produce,

the major components of the transformation

process, and the ways in which these components

interact.

*Inputs*

Inputs are factors that, at any one point in

time, make up the "givens" facing the organization.

They're the material that the organization

has to work with. There are several

different types of inputs, each of which presents

a different set of "givens" to the organization

(see Figure 1 for an overview of inputs).

The first input is the *environment,*

or all factors outside the organization being

examined. Every organization exists within

the context of a larger environment that includes

individuals, groups, other organizations,

and even larger social forces—all of

which have a potentially powerful impact on

how the organization performs. Specifically,

the environment includes markets (clients or

customers), suppliers, governmental and

regulatory bodies, labor unions, competitors,

financial institutions, special interest

groups, and so on. As research by Jeffrey

Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik has suggested,

the environment is critical to organizational

functioning.

The environment has three critical 39

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features that affect organizational analysis.

First, the environment makes demands on

the organization. For example, it may require

certain products or services at certain

levels of quality or quantity. Market pressures

are particularly important here. Second,

the environment may place constraints

on organizational action. It may limit the

activities in which an organization may engage.

These constraints range from limitations

imposed by scarce capital to prohibitions

set by govemment regulations. Third,

the environment provides opportunities that

the organization can explore. When we analyze

an organization, we need to consider

the factors in the organization s environment

and determine how those factors, singly or

collectively, create demands, constraints, or

opportunities.

The second input is the organization's

*resources.* Any organization has a

range of different assets to which it has access.

These include employees, technology,

capital, information, and so on. Resources

can also include less tangible assets, such as

the perception of the organization in the

marketplace or a positive organizational climate.

A set of resources can be shaped, deployed,

or configured in different ways by

an organization. For analysis purposes, two

features are of primary interest. One concerns

the relative quality of those resources

or their value in light of the environment.

The second concerns the extent to which resources

can be reshaped or how fixed or flexible

different resources are.

The third input is the organization's

*history.* There's growing evidence that

the way organizations function today is

greatly influenced by past events. It is particularly

important to understand the major

stages or phases of an organization's development

over a period of time, as well as the

current impact of past events—for example,

key strategic decisions, the acts or behavior

of key leaders, the nature of past crises and

the organization's responses to them, and the

evolution of core values and norms of the organization.

The final input is somewhat different

from the others because in some ways it

reflects some of the factors in the organization's

environment, resources, and history.

The fourth input is *strategy.* We use this

term in its broadest context to describe the

whole set of decisions that are made about

how the organization will configure its resources

against the demands, constraints,

and opportunities of the environment within

the context of its history. Strategy refers to

the issue of matching the organization's resources

to its environment, or making the

fundamental decision of "What business are

we in?" For analysis purposes, several aspects

of strategy are important to identify.

First, what is the core mission of the organization,

or how has the organization defined

its basic purpose or function within the larger

system or environment? The core mission

includes decisions about what markets the

organization will serve, what products or

services it will provide to those markets, and

how it will compete in those markets. Second,

strategy includes the specific supporting

strategies (or tactics) the organization

will employ or is employing to achieve its

core mission. Third, it includes the specific

performance or output objectives that have

been established.

Strategy may be the most important

single input for the organization. On

one hand, strategic decisions implicitly determine

the nature of the work the organization

should be doing or the tasks it should

perform. On the other hand, strategic decisions,

and particularly decisions about objectives

determine the system's outputs.

In summary, there are three basic

inputs—environment, resources, and history

—and a fourth derivative input, strategy, 41

which determines how the organization responds

to or deals with the basic inputs.

Strategy is critical because it determines the

work to be performed by the organization

and it defines desired organizational outputs.

*Outputs*

Outputs are what the organization produces,

how it performs, and how effective it is.

There has been a lot of discussion about the

components of an effective organization. For

our purposes, however, it is possible to identify

several key indicators of organizational

output. First, we need to think about system

output at different levels. In addition to the

system's basic output—that is, the product—

we need to think about other outputs that

contribute to organizational performance,

such as the functioning of groups or units

within the organization or the functioning of

individual organization members.

At the organizational level, three

factors must be kept in mind when evaluating

organizational performance: (1) goal attainment,

or how well the organization

meets its objectives (usually determined by

strategy), (2) resource utilization, or how

well the organization makes use of available

resources (not just whether the organization

meets its goals, but whether it realizes all of

its potential performance and whether it

achieves its goals by building resources or by

"burning them up"), and (3) adaptability, or

whether the organization continues to position

itself in a favorable position vis-a-vis its

environment—that is, whether it is capable

of changing and adapting to environmental

changes.

Obviously, the functioning of groups

or units (departments, divisions, or other subunits

within the organization) contribute to

these organizational-level outputs. Organizational

output is also influenced by individual

behavior, and certain individual-level outputs

(affective reactions such as satisfaction, stress,

or experienced quality of working life) may be

desired outputs in and of themselves.

*The Organization as a*

*Transformation Process*

So far, we've defined the nature of inputs and

outputs of the organizational system. This

leads us to the transformation process. Given

an environment, a set of resources, and history,

"How do I take a strategy and implement

it to produce effective performance in the organization,

in the group/unit, and among individual

employees?"

In our framework, the organization

and its major component parts are the fundamental

means for transforming energy

and information from inputs into outputs.

On this basis, we must determine the key

components of the organization and the critical

dynamic that shows how those components

interact to perform the transformation

function.

*Organizational Components*

There are many different ways of thinking

about what makes up an organization. At

this point in the development of a science of

organizations, we probably do not know the

one right or best way to describe the different

components of an organization. The task

is to find useful approaches for describing

organizations, for simplifying complex phenomena,

and for identifying patterns in what

may at first blush seem to be random sets of

activity. Our particular approach views organizations

as composed of four major components:

(1) the task, (2) the individuals, (3)

the formal organizational arrangements, and

(4) the informal organization. We will discuss

each of these individually (see Figure 2

for overviews of these components).

The first component is the organi- 43

zation's *task*—that is, the basic or inherent

work to be done by the organization and its

subunits or the activity the organization is

engaged in, particularly in light of its strategy.

The emphasis is on the specific work activities

or functions that need to be done and

their inherent characteristics (as opposed to

characteristics of the work created by how

the work is organized or structured in this

particular organization at this particular

time). Analysis of the task would include a

description of the basic work flows and functions

with attention to the characteristics of

those work flows—for example, the knowledge

or skills demanded by the work, the

kinds of rewards provided by the work, the

degree of uncertainty associated with the

work, and the specific constraints inherent in

the work (such as critical time demands, cost

constraints, and so on). Since it's assumed

that a primary (although not the only) reason

for the organization's existence is to perform

the task consistent with strategy, the

task is the starting point for the analysis. As

we will see, the assessment of the adequacy

of other components depends to a large degree

on an understanding of the nature of the

tasks lo be performed.

A second component of organizations

involves the *individuals* who perform

organizational tasks. The issue here is identifying

the nature and characteristics of the organization's

employees (or members). The

most critical aspects to consider include the

nature of individual knowledge and skills,

the different needs or preferences that individuals

have, the perceptions or expectancies

that they develop, and other background

factors (such as demographics) that may potentially

influence individual behavior.

The third component is the *formal*

*organizational arrangements.* These include

the range of structures, processes, methods,

procedures, and so forth that are explicitly

44 and formally developed to get individuals to

perform tasks consistent with organizational

strategy. The broad term, organizational

arrangements, encompasses a number of different

factors. One factor is organization design—

that is, the way jobs are grouped together

into units, the internal structure of

those units, and the coordination and control

mechanisms used to link those units together.

A second factor is the way jobs are

designed within the context of organizational

designs. A third factor is the work environment,

which includes a number of factors

that characterize the immediate environment

in which work is done, such as the physical

working environment, the available work

resources, and so on. A final factor includes

the organization's formal systems for attracting,

placing, developing, and evaluating human

resources.

Together, these factors create the

set of formal organizational arrangements —

that is, they are explicitly designed and specified,

usually in writing.

The final component is the *informal*

*organization.* Despite the set of formal

organizational arrangements that exists in

any organization, another set of arrangements

tends to develop or emerge over a period

of time. These arrangements are usually

implicit and unwritten, but they influence a

good deal of behavior. For lack of a better

term, such arrangements are frequently referred

to as the informal organization and

they include the different structures, processes,

and arrangements that emerge while

the organization is operating. These arrangements

sometimes complement formal organizational

arrangements by providing structures

to aid work where none exist. In other

situations they may arise in reaction to the

formal structure, to protect individuals from

it. They may therefore either aid or hinder

the organization's performance.

Because a number of aspects of the

informal organization have a particularly

critical effect on behavior, they need to he

considered. The behavior of leaders (as opposed

to the formal creation of leader positions)

is an important feature of the informal

organization, as are the patterns of relationships

thai develop both within and between

groups. In addition, different types of informal

working arrangements (including rules,

procedures, methods, and so on) develop.

Finally, there are the various communication

and influence patterns that combine to create

the informal organization design.

Organizations can therefore be

thought of as a set of components—the task,

the individuals, the organizational arrangements,

and the informal organization. In any

system, however, the critical question is not

what the components are, but what the nature

of their interaction is. This model raises

the question: What are the dynamics of the

relationships among the components? To

deal with this issue, we must return to the

concept of congruence or fit.

*The Concept of Congruence*

*A* relative degree of congruence, consistency,

or "fit" exists between each pair of organizational

inputs. The congruence between

two components is defined as "the degree to

which the needs, demands, goals, objectives,

and/or structures of one component are consistent

with the needs, demands, goals, objectives,

and/or structures of another component."

Congruence, therefore, is a measure

of how well pairs of components fit together.

Consider, for example, two components—

the task and the individuaL At the

simplest level, the task presents some demands

on individuals who would perform it

{that is, skill/knowledge demands). At the

same time, the set of individuals available to

do the tasks have certain characteristics

(their levels of skill and knowledge). Obviously,

if the individual's knowledge and skill

match the knowledge and skill demanded by

the task, performance will be more effective.

Obviously, too, the individual-task

congruence relationship encompasses more

factors than just knowledge and skill. Similarly,

each congruence relationship in the

model has its own specific characteristics.

Research and theory can guide the assessment

of fit in each relationship. For an overview

of the critical elements of each congruence

relationship, see Figure 3.

*The Congruence Hypothesis*

The aggregate model, or whole organization,

displays a relatively high or low degree

of system congruence in the same way that

each pair of components has a high or low

degree of congruence. The basic hypothesis

of the model, which builds on this total state

of congruence, is as follows: "Other things

being equal, the greater the total degree of

congruence or fit between the various components,

the more effective will be the organization—

effectiveness being defined as the

degree to which actual organization outputs

at individual, group, and organizational levels

are similar to expected outputs, as specified

by strategy."

The basic dynamic of congruence

sees the organization as most effective when

its pieces fit together. If we also consider

strategy, this view expands to include the fit

between the organization and its larger environment—

that is, an organization is most effective

when its strategy is consistent with its

environment (in light of organizational resources

and history) and when the organizational

components are congruent with the

tasks necessary to implement that strategy.

One important implication of the

congruence hypothesis is that organizational

problem analysis (or diagnosis) involves description

of the system, identification of 45

*Figure 3*

DEFINITIONS OF FITS

*Fit*

*Indiv idual/Organization*

*Individual/Task*

*Individual/Informal organization*

*Task/Organ ization*

*Task/Informal organization*

*Organization/Informal organization*

*Issues*

How are individual needs met by the organizational arrangements?

Do individuals hold clear or distorted perceptions of organizational

structures? Is there a convergence of individual and organizational

goals?

How are individual needs met by the tasks? Do individuals have

skills and abilities to meet task demands?

How are individual needs met by the informal organization?

How does the informal organization make use of individual resources

consistent with informal goals?

Are organizational arrangements adequate to meet the demands

of the task? Do organizational arrangements motivate behavior

that's consistent with task demands?

Does the informal organization structure facilitate task performance

or not? Does it hinder or help meet the demands of the

task.

Are the goals, rewards, and structures of the informal organization

consistent with those of the formal organization?

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problems, and analysis of fits to determine

the causes of problems. The model also implies

that different configurations of the key

components can be used to gain outputs

(consistent with the systems characteristic of

equifinality). Therefore the question is not

how to find the "one best way" of managing,

but how to find effective combinations of

components that will lead to congruent fits

among them.

The process of diagnosing fits and

identifying combinations of components to

produce congruence is not necessarily intuitive.

A number of situations that lead to congruence

have been defined in the research literature.

Thus in many cases fit is something

that can be defined, measured, and even

quantified; there is, in other words, an empirical

and theoretical basis for assessing fit.

The theory provides considerable guidance

about what leads to congruent relationships

(although in some areas the research is more

definitive and helpful than others). The implication

is that the manager who wants to

diagnose behavior must become familiar

with critical aspects of relevant organizational

behavior models or theories so that he

or she can evaluate the nature of fits in a particular

system.

The congruence model provides a

general organizing framework. The organizational

analyst will need other, more specific

"submodels" to define high and low

congruence. Examples of such submodels

that might be used in the context of this general

diagnostic model include the following:

(1) the job characteristics model to assess

and explain the fit between individuals and

tasks as well as the fit between individuals

and organizational arrangements (job design),

(2) expectancy theory models of motivation

to explain the fit between individuals

*Figure 4*

*A* CONGRUENCE MODEL FOR ORGANIZATION ANALYSIS

*Inputs*

Formal

Organizational

Arrangements

\ **o**

/

*Feedback*

*Outputs*

Organi

Group

Individuai

and the other three components, (3) the information

processing model of organizational

design to explain the task-formal organization

and task-informal organization fits,

or (4) an organizational climate model to explain

the fit between the informal organization

and the other components. These models

and theories are listed as illustrations of

how more specific models can be used in the

context of the general model. Obviously,

those mentioned above are just a sampling of

possible tools that could be used.

In summary, then, we have described

a general model for the analysis of

organizations (see Figure 4). The organization

is seen as a system or transformation

process that takes inputs and transforms

them into outputs—a process that is composed

of four basic components. The critical

dynamic is the fit or congruence among the

components. We now turn our attention to

the pragmatic question of how to use this

model for analyzing organizational problems.

A PROCESS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The conditions that face organizations frequently

change; consequently, managers are

required to continually engage in problemidentification

and problem-solving activities.

Therefore, managers must gather data on organizational

performance, compare the data

with desired performance levels, identify

the causes of problems, develop and choose

action plans and, finally, implement and

evaluate these action plans. These phases

can be viewed as a generic problem-solving

process. For long-term organizational viability,

some type of problem-solving process **47**

*Figure 5*

BASIC PROBLEM ANALYSIS STEPS USING THE CONGRUENCE MODEL

*Step*

1. Identify symptoms.

2. Specify inputs.

3. Identify outputs.

4. Identify problems.

5. Describe components of the organization.

6. Assess congruence (fits).

*7.* Generate and identify causes.

8. Identify action steps.

*Explanation*

List data Indicating possible existence of problems.

Identify the system.

Determine nature of environment, resources, and

history.

Identify critical aspects of strategy.

Identify data that define the nature of outputs at various

levels (individual, group/unit, organizational).

This should include desired outputs (from strategy),

and actual outputs being obtained.

Identify areas where there are significant and meaningful

differences between desired and actual outputs.

To the extent possible, identify penalties; that is, specific

costs (actual and opportunity costs) associated

with each problem.

Describe basic nature of each of the four components

with emphasis on their critical features.

Conduct analysis to determine relative congruence

among components (draw on submodels as needed).

Analyze to associate fit with specific problems.

Indicate the possible actions to deal with problem

causes.

must operate—and operate continuously.

Experience with using the congruence

model for organizations for problem

analysis in actual organizational settings has

led to the development of an approach to using

the model that's based on these generic

problem-solving processes (see Figure 5). In

this section, we will "walk through" this process,

describing each step in the process and

discussing how the model can be used at

each stage. Here are the steps in the problemanalysis

process:

1. *Identify symptoms:* In any situation

initial information (symptomatic data)

may indicate that there are problems, but

48 not what the problems are or what the

causes are. Symptomatic data are important

because the symptoms of problems may indicate

where to look for more complete data.

2. *Specify inputs:* Once the symptoms

are identified, the starting point for

analysis is to identify the system and the environment

in which it functions. This means

collecting data about the nature of environment,

the type of resources the organization

has, and the critical aspects of its history. Input

analysis also involves identifying the

overall strategy of the organization—that is,

its core mission, supporting strategies, and

objectives.

3. *Identify outputs:* The third step

is an analysis of the organization's outputs at

the individual, group, and organizational

levels. Output analysis actually involves two

elements; (1) defining the desired or planned

output through an analysis of strategy that

explicitly or implicitly defines what the organization

wants to achieve in terms of output

or performance indicators, and (2) collecting

data that indicate the type of output

the organization is actually achieving.

4. *Identify problems:* Symptoms

may indicate problems—in this case, significant

difference between desired or planned

output and actual output. Such problems

might be discrepancies (actual vs. expected)

in organizational performance, group functioning,

individual behavior, or affective reactions.

These data tell us what problems

exist, but they still don't tell us the causes.

(Note; Where data are available, it's frequently

also useful to identify the costs associated

with the problems or the *penalties* the

organization incurs by not fixing the problem.

Penalties might be actual costs—increased

expenses, and so on—or opportunity

costs, such as revenue lost because of the

problem.)

5. *Describe organizational components:*

At this step the analysis to determine

the causes of problems begins. Data are collected

about the nature of each of the four

major organizational components, including

information about the component and its

critical features in this organization.

6. Assess *congruence (fits):* Using

the data collected in step 5 as well as applicable

submodels or theories, an assessment is

made of the positive or negative fit between

each pair of components.

7. *Generate hypotheses about problem*

*causes:* Once the components are described

and their congruence assessed, the

next step is to link together the congruence

analysis with the problem identification

(step 4). After analyzing to determine which

are the poor fits that seem to be associated

with, or account for, the output problems

that have been identified, the patterns of

congruence and incongruence that appear to

cause the patterns of problems are determined.

8. *Identify action steps:* The final

step in problem analysis is to identify possible

action steps. These steps might range

from specific changes to deal with relatively

obvious problem causes to a more extensive

data collection designed to test hypotheses

about relatively more complex problems and

causes.

In addition to these eight steps,

some further steps need to be kept in mind.

After possible actions are identified, problem

solving involves predicting the consequence

of various actions, choosing the

course of action, and implementing and

evaluating the impact of the chosen course of

action. It is, of course, important to have a

general diagnostic framework to monitor the

effects of various courses of action.

The congruence model and this

problem-analysis process outline are tools

for structuring and dealing with the complex

reality of organizations. Given the indeterminate

nature of social systems, there is no

one best way of handling a particular situation.

The model and the process could, however,

help the manager in making a number

of decisions and in evaluating the consequences

of those decisions. If these tools

have merit, it is up to the manager to use

them along with his or her intuitive sense

(based on experience) to make the appropriate

set of diagnostic, evaluative, and action

decisions. 49

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The model we've presented here reflects a

particular way of thinking about organizations.

If that perspective is significant, the

model might be used as a tool for handling

more complex problems or for structuring

more complex situations. Some directions

for further thought, research, and theory development

could include these:

1. *Organizational change.* The issue

of organizational change has received a good

deal of attention from both managers and

academics. The question is how to effectively

implement organizational change. The

problem seems to center on the lack of a general

model of organizational change. It is

hard to think about a general model of organizational

change without a general model of

organizations. The congruence perspective

outlined here may provide some guidance

and direction toward the development of a

more integrated perspective on the processes

of organizational change. Initial work in applying

the congruence model to the change

issue is encouraging.

2. *Organizational development over*

*time.* There has been a growing realization

that organizations grow and develop over

time, and that they face different types of

crises, evolve through different stages, and

develop along some predictable lines. A

model of organizations such as the one presented

here might be a tool for developing

typology of growth patterns by indicating

the different configurations of tasks, individuals,

organizational arrangements, and informal

organizations that might be most

appropriate for organizations in different environments

and at different stages of development.

3. *Organizational pathology.* Organizational

problem solving ultimately

requires some sense of the types of problems

that may be encountered and the kinds of

patterns of causes one might expect. It is reasonable

to assume that most problems encountered

by organizations are not wholly

unique, but are predictable. The often expressed

view that "our problems are unique"

reflects in part the lack of a framework of

organizational pathology. The question is:

Are there basic "illnesses" that organizations

suffer? Can a framework of organizational

pathology, similar to the physician's framework

of medical pathology, be developed?

The lack of a pathology framework, in turn,

reflects the lack of a basic functional model

of organizations. Again, development of a

congruence perspective might provide a

common language to use for the identification

of genera] pathological patterns of organizational

functioning.

4. *Organizational solution types.*

Closely linked to the problem of pathology

is the problem of treatment, intervention, or

solutions to organizational problems. Again,

there's a lack of a general framework in

which to consider the nature of organizational

interventions. In this case, too, the

congruence model might be a means for conceptualizing

and ultimately describing the

different intervention options available in response

to problems.

SUMMARY

This article has presented a general approach

for thinking about organizational functioning

and a process for using a model to analyze

organizational problems. This particular

model is only one way of thinking about

organizations; its clearly not the only model,

nor can we claim it's definitively the best

model. It is one tool, however, that may be

useful for structuring the complexity of organizational

life and helping managers create,

maintain, and develop effective organizations.

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