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UNITY AND SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

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Abstract

An organization is a group of persons who coordinate their actions to achieve certain goals in which all have an interest, although that interest may stem from very diverse motives. The concept of the success of an organization must therefore take into account not only the achievement of the common goal, but also the achievement of the particular goals of the organization's members: in a sense, the organization's goal must be to satisfy the needs both of its customers and of its members. Organizational members will act out of different types of motives, giving rise to three key variables in any organization: effectiveness (difference between resources obtained and resources used); attractiveness (ability to attract and retain members by virtue of what they do in the organization); and unity (ability to motivate members by the consequences of their actions for others). In a word, the organization's goal will be to increase its unity, while maintaining a certain minimum of effectiveness and attractiveness.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Models of organizations, Success, Trust, Unity

UNITY AND SUCCESS IN BUSINESS*

Introduction[1]

An organization is "a group of persons who coordinate their actions to achieve certain goals in which all have an interest, although that interest may stem from very diverse motives."[2] In any organization there has to be, at the very least, a group of people (whom we shall call participants or members) and a common purpose or goal, as well as the necessary coordination of those people's activities to achieve that common goal.

The concept, used here, of the "participant" or "member" of an organization is similar in many respects to that of the "stakeholder," but it adds two important features: 1) participants have an interest in achieving the organization's external goal (although possibly for very diverse reasons, depending on the personal goals they hope to achieve by belonging to the organization); and 2) participant's collaboration is necessary in order to achieve the organization's goals.[3] In the specific case of a company, the members will include owners, managers, and employees, but also direct suppliers and clients, and in some cases, the end consumers of the company's products.[4]

The simple definition given above makes it clear that in the operation of any organization there is a need to coordinate one or more external corporate goals with the personal goals of the participants. The concept of organizational success must therefore take into account not only the achievement of those common external goals but also that of the particular goals of the organization's members. We can speak, therefore, of an internal organizational goal, which is to create the conditions that will allow (some of) the needs of the organization's members to be satisfied as a result of their working together to achieve the external goal.[5] Or rather, if clients, users and customers are included among the participants, the internal and external goals coincide in a single purpose: to satisfy the needs of the participants over time.[6]

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2 Cfr. Pérez López (1993), 13. In what follows I refer in general terms to an unspecified type of organization, though always bearing the case of a business company in mind.

3 A participant, therefore, is not just a person who is "affected" by the company's activity. On stakeholder theory, the classical texts are Carroll (1989), Freeman (1984), and Freeman and Gilbert (1988).

4 Direct customers and end consumers may be genuine participants in the company (what is often referred to as "customer loyalty"), or else have an occasional and distant relationship to it.

5 The internal goal cannot be to satisfy participants' needs, but merely to create conditions that will allow those needs to be satisfied.

6 The reference to the time horizon (the long term) is important because success must involve not only achieving certain results for a short period, but also creating the conditions for those results to be maintained over time.

This is an ongoing, open-ended process, because every day each member of the organization assesses whether she has achieved her particular goals, compared with what she might have achieved by collaborating in a different organization or by taking up a different activity (that is to say, compared with her opportunity cost of belonging to this particular organization). And if a participant comes to the conclusion that she is not achieving a level of satisfaction equal to or greater than her opportunity cost, then the organization will not be achieving its goal.[7] And that will have to be taken into account when assessing the organization's success.[8]

The purpose of this paper is to briefly set out a theory of organization that accommodates the existence of both internal goals (those of the members) and external goals (those of the organization), built around the concept of unity. I will base my argument on ideas developed by Juan Antonio Pérez López, principally in his book *Fundamentos de la Dirección de Empresas*.[9]

Thus, three different models of the organization –economic, psychosociological, and anthropological– are considered in succession, each representing an enrichment of the one before. This is followed by a discussion of the role of unity in organizations and the means of creating trust in organizations, ending with the conclusions.

Economic models of the organization

Traditional economic models of the organization, as applied to business, are concerned with the coordination of a set of actions (financing, production, marketing, etc.) that culminate in the sale of a product or service to a customer.[10] The revenues obtained from that sale generate an "incentive fund" that is used to remunerate the participants.

In these models, to be successful a company must meet three conditions: 1) it must satisfy the needs of customers (who are willing to pay the price); 2) it must satisfy the needs of the organization's members (who receive wages and salaries, interest, rents, profits, etc., in an amount equal to or greater than their opportunity cost, so that they remain willing to collaborate in the organization); and 3) it must achieve maximum effectiveness, defined as the difference between revenues earned and the costs of production and sale.[11] Maximum effectiveness will generate the greatest possible incentive fund with which to remunerate participants.[12]

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7 If the organization fails to achieve its internal goal, it may lead to a participant abandoning the organization (a shareholder may sell her shares, or an employee may resign). But if the participant is replaced by another, then the process of satisfying the particular goals of the new participant will start again immediately.

8 This implies that simple models for maximizing a single target variable (profit or shareholder value, for instance) are impractical, unless achieving the internal goal coincides precisely with achieving the external goal.

9 Cfr. Pérez López (1993). See also, Pérez López (1991, 1997, 1998).

10 Pérez López (1993, chp. 5) calls these models "mechanistic."

11 The concept of effectiveness used here is based on Pérez López (1991), 30ff., and basically encompasses the concepts of effectiveness and efficiency in organization theory (cfr., for example, Grandori (2001), chp. 2).

12 Some participants receive the remuneration stipulated in their contract, which tends to be equal to their opportunity cost in conditions of perfect competition, or greater, when rents are generated. Other participants take the surplus, the maximization of which illustrates the maximization of effectiveness, under certain conditions. Cfr. Argandoña (2004a), Salas (2004).

These models are useful insofar as the participants are motivated by extrinsic motives, that is, insofar as the participants expect from the organization a direct response to their contributions (in the form of wages, salaries, promotion and career opportunities, interest, profits, prestige, power, etc.). Effectiveness (defined as the difference between the response of the environment to the organization's activity –i.e., revenues– and the opportunity cost of the resources contributed by the organization's members – i.e., costs) is important, because the more effective an organization is, the better it will be able to attract members and stimulate their extrinsic motives. In any case, a minimum of effectiveness is essential for any organization to be viable, which means being able to remunerate all its members at a level at least equal to their opportunity cost.[13]

Nonetheless, the economic models have major limitations:

1. They assume that members' preferences are given and unchanging, and are fully satisfied by the means that the organization is able to offer them.[14]

2. They assume that the motives governing organizational members' behavior are exclusively extrinsic, in other words, that the motives are confined to what the organization is able to give its members (wages, promotion, interest, profits, etc.) as compensation for their contribution. That means that the only tool of motivation is remuneration: employees, for example, will be willing to work harder only if they are paid more than before, and more than they could expect to earn in any other job.

3. In these models, interactions between agents are relevant only within the formal system of production and remuneration. In other words, interactions take place between roles, rather than between persons.

4. The models are static: they do not provide for changes, either in the interactions or in the organization, because they allow no scope for learning.

Psychosociological models of the organization

The motives of an organization's members are not only extrinsic, governed by the need to achieve external results, or whatever the organization gives them. There also exist internal motives, which are satisfied by what a person does or puts in to the organization, rather than by what she gets out of it or from the environment.[15] In organizations, people learn (they acquire knowledge and, above all, abilities and skills), and learning is a motive for participating in organizations.[16]

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[13] This applies to all organizations, not only for-profits. In an NGO, for example, even if revenues are less than expenses, the donors will have to be motivated to continue to provide funds: the minimum level of effectiveness will be one that allows that regular contribution of necessary resources to continue.

[14] Cfr. Argandoña (2003, 2004b), Pérez López (1991).

[15] There already exists an extensive literature on internal or "intrinsic" motives, above all due to the supposed "crowding out" of intrinsic motives by extrinsic motives. A classic example is that of blood donors, who become less generous when paid for donating (cfr. Titmuss 1970). As an example of that literature, cfr. Frey (1999).

[16] This is the traditional distinction between the external effects of action (production, *poiesis*) and the internal effects (action, *praxis*). On agents' learning processes, cfr. Argandoña (2004b).

Besides effectiveness, we now need to introduce the concept of attractiveness: attractiveness is an organization's ability to satisfy its participants' internal motives by virtue of what they do (the fact that they like and enjoy what they do), not what they receive; in other words, by virtue of what they learn. A more attractive organization will be able to improve its effectiveness, because employees will be willing to work harder, for example, and put more effort in, without the company having to pay them more in return.[17]

Thus, psychosociological models of organizations take into account the system of incentives governed by effectiveness, just as the economic models do, but they also take into account the satisfaction of people's internal motives. People whose internal motives are satisfied will be willing to collaborate in the organization not only because they get what they want in return, but also because they are doing something that they like doing and because they are learning to do things better.

However, being more attractive need not always be best for the organization and its members, if members pursue their personal whim: an organization may be very attractive to people precisely because it allows everyone to do what they like, even though that cannot possibly be best for the organization as a whole.[18] And yet, there is another type of internal motivation, which we shall call transcendent motivation, where participants act out of consideration of the effects that their action can be expected to have on other people. And in that dimension, there is no limit to how attractive an organization can be.

We now have a complete list of the motives that prompt an agent to act: 1) extrinsic, based on what the organization gives her (salary, prestige, promotion opportunities, interest, profits, power, etc.); 2) intrinsic internal, based on the expected effects of the agent's action on the agent herself (what she likes doing, how much she learns); and 3) transcendent internal, based on the expected effects of the agent's action on other persons (independently of how those persons may respond or their effect on the agent). Acting out of transcendent motives therefore implies internalizing the goals of the organization and of other participants: opening up to their needs (or, in a negative sense, "learning" to ignore what happens to them, "learning" to deceive them, etc.). This leads us to the third type of organizational models.

Anthropological models of the organization

Anthropological models study how the actions that take place in an organization may be coordinated to satisfy the needs of all the persons related to the organization: owners, managers, employees, consumers, suppliers, etc.,[19] now and in the future.

In anthropological models of the organization there are three key variables:[20] 1) effectiveness, defined as the difference between the resources the organization generates and the resources it has to use (revenues less expenses) in order to accumulate the incentive fund needed to satisfy its participants' extrinsic motives; 2) attractiveness, defined as the

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17 Yet a minimum of effectiveness is always needed: even if there are employees who declare themselves willing to pay to work for the company, they need to be offered a salary not too far off their opportunity cost, because they need material resources to satisfy certain needs.

18 This is what Pérez López (1993) calls intrinsic internal motives, which depend only on the action itself, without any other external reference.

19 We are referring to real needs, not to the whims of the participants, as pointed out earlier.

20 Cfr. Pérez López (1993), chp. 7.

ability to satisfy intrinsic internal motives (the extent to which members enjoy what they are doing because they are learning to do things better); 3) unity, which expresses the degree to which members identify with the organization, as a result of having internalized the organization's goals and the needs of its participants (including end consumers). Unity is essentially the organization's ability to satisfy its effectiveness needs in the long term, while at the same time meeting the real needs of other participants, including consumers.[21]

Unity in an organization therefore demands: 1) that effectiveness be measured in terms of the satisfaction of the real needs of all participants; and 2) that the members of the organization be capable of responding to transcendent motives, that is, of taking the foreseeable effects of their actions on other people into account in their decisions.

The company's function or goal will therefore be to create social wealth (which relates to effectiveness) by developing the specific operational capabilities of its members and of the organization as a whole, that is, the ability to learn to do things (which relates to attractiveness)[22] in order to satisfy specific needs of consumers and participants, so that the company's goal is effectively internalized by its members (which relates to unity).[23] This is a dynamic process that goes on all the time: as it performs its function, the organization generates learning in its members, who improve their ability to do things (what we called their specific operational capabilities), as well as their ability to know what needs to be done (through the process of building organizational unity).[24]

This latter ability constitutes the company's external mission: the definition of the specific needs that the company will satisfy in its customers, users and consumers – what needs, of what persons, determined on what criteria, and with what priorities.[25] That is unity: the ability, developed by the organization's participants, to apply their operational capabilities to satisfy human needs through a correct definition of their goals. And that is how, by accepting those values and acting accordingly, the organization's members develop as persons, grow in virtue, and become more ethical.

The role of unity

Unity measures organizational participants' trust in the organization and in each other. Greater unity in an organization means that the members consider it less likely that the organization itself, its managers or other participants will engage in opportunistic behavior, making it possible to reduce transaction costs and so improve effectiveness.[26]

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21 Cfr. Pérez López (1993), 108.

22 These operational capabilities derive from investments in specific human capital and, more generally, in the process of specifying the company's capital (human, physical, technological, operational, etc.).

23 Note that here we are referring to a specific type of organizations, namely companies, whose differentiating elements are satisfaction of market needs and effectiveness of resource management, which become a *sine qua non* for their existence. Cfr. Pérez López (1997), 27.

24 As Pérez López (1991, 1993) points out, learning to place one's knowledge and skills at the service of others is not a matter of acquiring knowledge, nor of developing abilities and skills, but a form of evaluative learning: learning to value what effectively has value, by acquiring virtues.

25 That is the key to the decision-making process, specifically when it comes to choosing alternatives. On the decision-making process, cfr. Argandoña (1999), McNair (1954), and Leenders and Erskine (1987).

26 Opportunistic behavior is the kind of behavior that occurs when a person pursues her own interests by fraudulent means or using guile or deception. Cfr. Williamson (1985), 47.

The key to the trust that people place in an organization lies in the intentions of those who make the decisions –what each person seeks to obtain from others. If the person who makes a decision seeks merely to obtain a reaction from the other (in other words, if she acts out of extrinsic motives), she will only be able to build what we might call functional trust, the kind of trust one might have in a machine, deriving from one's power to control it– in this case, to control another person. By contrast, what could be described as personal trust can only be achieved if the person who makes the decision seeks the good of the other, intending to make things better for her, because she acts out of transcendent motives. To generate trust, which is the basis of unity, the decision maker must be willing to sacrifice extrinsic motives in her behavior; because if she is motivated exclusively by extrinsic motives, she will be unable to make that sacrifice, as it will be incomprehensible to her.

Trust between persons develops through experiments. If A does not act out of transcendent motives, she will not be able to learn to trust in B. If A decides to trust in B, and B deserves that trust, mutual trust will grow between them, reducing transaction costs and enhancing organizational effectiveness. If A decides to trust in B, but B does not deserve such trust, mutual trust will not grow between them, although A will have improved as a person –she will have acquired virtues. If A tries to build mutual trust with B out of extrinsic motives, the experiment is bound to fail. If A acts out of transcendent motives, B may come to trust her, if she ever gets to know her motives; but whether she actually trusts her or not will depend on her own motives, not A's.

Unity in a company is closely tied up with the issue of power and authority. Power is the ability to influence people, according to the type of motive that guides the decision maker's actions. The incentive fund that we referred to in connection with economic models of the organization is a store of power to reward or punish actions, in other words, to encourage certain behaviors by appealing to extrinsic motives (coercive power). There is another kind of power, what we might call manipulative power, which aims at encouraging certain behaviors through intrinsic motives. And there is a third kind of power, affective power, which is based on transcendent motives and gives rise to authority. In the case of affective power, A tries to influence B's decisions, not through any advantages that B may expect to obtain, but because B trusts in A's decisions – she trusts that A's decisions will be best for her, even compared with any decisions that B herself might make, because B believes that A is capable of making those decisions (A has the knowledge and ability to do so), and also because she knows that A wants to help B (A acts out of transcendent motives).

The decision maker must use coercive power to ensure that the necessary learning takes place in the organization over time, so as eventually to make coercion unnecessary: she must use power to make it unnecessary, in order to acquire authority, based on the trust that others have in her. That is what creates unity.

Building trust in organizations

As we have seen, unity in an organization is achieved by building trust. And there are two ways of building trust: an informal way, through leadership; and a formal way, through rules.

We can distinguish three dimensions in the task of managing an organization:[27]

[27] Cfr. Pérez López (1993), chp. 8.

1. The strategic dimension, defined by the ability to choose actions that increase the value of the organization's products and services. It involves responding to changes in the environment, or anticipating them and discovering new opportunities. Its results are seen on the level of effectiveness.

2. The executive dimension, which consists of developing the organization's operational capabilities by detecting, using, and strengthening the talents of its people. Its results are seen on the level of attractiveness, as it builds on people's internal motivation, equipping them to be able to do whatever the strategy demands at any given time.

3. The leadership dimension, based on discovering people's real needs and orienting the evaluation of the organization's actions toward satisfying those needs. Its results are seen on the level of unity, which it maintains and strengthens, ensuring that participants learn to evaluate their actions according to the effects that they have on other people – in a word, that they act out of transcendent motives.

These three dimensions of management do not occur in a pure state, but all are present, to a greater or lesser extent, simultaneously. And depending on circumstances, there will need to be an emphasis on one or other of them.

The leadership function starts to be developed in managers when they learn to act out of transcendent motives, that is, to sacrifice their own selfish interests even when nothing can oblige them to do so. And its effect is to strengthen the unity of the organization, when managers persuade participants to act out of transcendent motives, that is, to consider the effects their actions have on others. To do that, managers must, for example:[28]

1. Not be an obstacle to organizational members who want to act out of transcendent motives. They will be an obstacle if, for example, they demand immediate effectiveness, at the expense of efforts to act out of higher motives.

2. Make people aware of the consequences of their actions for themselves in the long run.

3. Teach their subordinates and colleagues about the real value of their actions, that is, teach them to value the consequences of their actions for others.

4. Act out of transcendent motives, so that others may do the same – that is, set an example.

5. Be always very demanding with respect to the rights of others, particularly customers and employees.

6. Use coercive and manipulative power to make subordinates understand the manager's intentions and accept her authority: a) by using power when it should be used; b) by not using power unnecessarily, that is, by not unnecessarily restricting subordinates' freedom and initiative; and c) by not using power unfairly to take from a person what belongs to her.

[28] Cfr. Pérez López (1993), chp. 8; (1998), chp. 6.

The other way to develop trust and unity in an organization is through the formal organization, that is, through organizational rules (and the accompanying penalties and rewards).[29] Rules focus only on positive or negative outcomes that the organization wishes to obtain, or that are acceptable to it. Accordingly, they cannot ensure that the agents' actions are performed for the right motives, as one and the same outcome may be obtained by different motives.[30] Nevertheless, rules may help to boost the level of mutual trust – or unity – in the organization, whatever the agents' intentions. Thus,

1. If agents follow the rules and act in good faith, the rules will make up for possible information shortfalls or limitations in the decision making process.

2. Whenever managers take positive steps to comply with the rules and make sure that others comply, they send messages about their own commitment to the values expressed in the rules, and so generate trust in their decisions.[31]

3. For those who feel the effects of the application of the rules, the important thing is that the rules be followed, not the participants' intentions. And trust in the fact that the rules will be adhered to generates trust in the organization.

In summary, the rules represent conditions that the actions of the organization's participants must meet in order to be considered actions of the organization itself, that is, actions that the organization can accept as having been carried out by itself. Thus, the motive that prompts participants to follow the rules is the same motive that leads them to participate in the organization. Hence the role of rules in creating unity in the organization.

The rules will be mainly negative rules, or prohibitions, aimed at excluding unjust actions.[32] Accordingly, they express the organization's specific commitment to avoid behaviors by any of its members, when making decisions within their function or role in the company, that would be unjust to any other member, including customers, users and consumers.[33]

Conclusions: unity and success in companies

Companies are organizations in which effectiveness is key: a company that, over time, consumed more resources than it generated would be pointless. The logical conclusion from this is that, in economic models of the organization, the success of a company should be measured in terms of effectiveness, that is, in terms of the difference between resources employed and resources consumed –that is to say, a variant of profit, perhaps social profit, not necessarily the return to shareholders (except in certain very specific cases).[34]

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[29] Provided the rules are objective and precise, and are not contradictory. On the role of rules in building trust and unity, cfr. Pérez López (1993), chp. 14.

[30] Besides, intentions are no guarantee of good results: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

[31] Adhering to the rules has a clear opportunity cost for the organization, which shows how highly it values them. The rules therefore reflect the organization's values.

[32] Negative rules are more suited to freedom, as they leave ample scope for doing good. Positive rules either limit freedom or are mere declarations of intent. Cfr. Polo (1996), 159.

[33] An important part of these rules are the procedures and resources available to organizational members to decide whether or not they have actually suffered an injustice, and also to remedy the effects of any injustice. Cfr. Pérez López (1993), 228.

[34] Cfr. Salas (2004).

However, a company is an organization, and organizations come into being, primarily, to satisfy the needs of their members. Therefore, that should be the criterion of success, even in the specific type of organizations that we call business firms.

At bottom, there should be no contradiction between the two criteria. A company is an organization created to satisfy the needs of its participants by producing goods and services that satisfy the needs of its customers, users and consumers. It does so by creating the conditions to achieve the greatest possible unity among its members – including customers. "In fact, the greatest possible unity would mean that the transcendent motivation of the company's members would be such that they would value the satisfaction of other people's needs as highly as their own. Leaving aside problems of communication, in such conditions they would spontaneously tend to join efforts to give to the one who needs as much as the others can give, and that precisely would maximize effectiveness."[35] Hence, "the ultimate goal of any organization is to increase its own unity," and so "any organization, by its very nature, can and should sacrifice effectiveness or attractiveness in the interests of unity. To sacrifice unity, however, would be contrary to its very nature, that is to say, self-contradictory," because "the end result, if unity is lost, is self-destruction."[36]

In other words, maximizing profit (or shareholder value) can only have a meaning as a measure of a company's success under certain conditions, and only so long as the company does not lose attractiveness or, more importantly, unity. That is what we usually mean when we talk about maximizing value "in the long term," namely, by creating the necessary conditions to maintain the company's ability to create value now and in the future, which is what unity makes possible.[37]

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35 Pérez López (1998), 54.
36 Pérez López (1998), 54-55.
37 And given that acting in accordance with transcendent motives, which is the essence of unity, is equivalent to having the organization's participants acquire and develop moral virtues, we can also say that the success of a company is inseparable from its ethical condition. Cfr. Pérez López (1998), chp. 2.

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