1-1-1995

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of structural, normative, and communal dimensions of organizational behavior are defined and described, and aspects of the integration of these dimensions are discussed. Some of the dynamics of consultation utilizing these dimensions are described, and some issues and problems are delineated. The behavioral descriptions come from the author's experiences as a consultant to a variety of organizations.

Introduction

Integration refers to the state of being unified, a state in which the parts are brought together into a whole. The concept of integration was utilized by Durkheim in Suicide in referring to the relationship between suicide and the degree of integration of religious society, domestic society, and political society. Mead discussed "the ideal of social integration" in *Mind, Self and Society,* where he defined the ideal as a state " . . . in which all human individuals would possess a perfected social intelligence, such that all social meanings would each be similarly re-

flected in their respective individual consciousnesses." Durkheim stressed the idea that social integration varies in degree among social systems, and Mead stressed the idea that social meanings vary in the degree to which there is agreement among persons in social systems.

Although the concept of integration was utilized by Durkheim and Mead it has not become a major concept in the sociological literature. A recent search of the concept turned up few references, and most of those referred to racial and ethnic integration in society.

In sociological practice a focus on social integration can be an important way to explore some dimensions of an organization. In organizations where social integration is low, agreement on social meanings ought also to be low. Practitioners have generally found that when persons meet together and discuss their perceptions and understandings of their relations with each other, an increase in agreement on social meanings occurs. This is not automatic, but rather, the outcome of being able to focus the discussion on issues of importance to the members of the organization involved.

Organizational Integration

Differentiation and integration are two major processes in an open system. Generally speaking, as an organization increases in size and complexity, the need for differentiation of roles, functions, and units increases and, concomitantly, the need for integrative devices increases (Baker, 1973).

Bringing parts together into a whole is the process of integration. To provide a focus on integration for a client organization means identifying the parts and clarifying what one means as a whole. I have found it desirable to identify three "wholes" or dimensions as foci for intervening in an organization with the goal of increasing that organization's level of integration. The three dimensions may be identified as *structural, normative,* and *communal.* The parts may be *persons or groups.* In the following discussion the emphasis is on persons as the parts involved in seeking to increase social integration. Groups in organizations must also be focused on, in ways analogous to that of persons.

Structural refers to the positions of the members of the organization. Each members' position includes title, duties, responsibilities, to whom that person reports, who reports to that person, and related information. I find that it is common for members of an organization not to know this information about their colleagues and co-workers. I also find it common for members not to know all of the major tasks others engage

in regularly, nor to be in agreement with each other on the rank order of these tasks with regard to time devoted to tasks or importance of tasks. When members of an organization have very different conceptions of the structural system, it is not surprising that their agreement is low and that expectations of each others' position or role may be in conflict.

Normative dimension includes norms and expectations of self and others' behavior as a member of the organization not officially stated nor sanctioned (these latter are part of the structural dimension). Many norms are unstated and will probably not be known by newcomers and may not be known by oldtimers. Norms may include expectations about various formal properties of employment, such as utilization of sick leave, annual leave or vacation leave, or informal compensatory time for un-compensated overtime work. Norms may also include expectations about dress, courteous behavior of members toward each other, helping each other with work, and other aspects of interpersonal behavior. I find it typical for members not to know some of the norms of the organization, and, in some cases, to consider it inappropriate to identify such norms unless they are written into position descriptions. When perceptions of the norms are different and not shared, it is to be expected that people will be violating expectations of each other and attributing such behavior to all sorts of presumed motivations or attitudes.

Communal dimension refers to the strength of attachment of the member to the organization. This attachment may involve strong positive feelings about the social system and may mean that the member defends the social system against others who criticize or demean it. The attachment to the organization as a collectivity may be somewhat analogous to the individual's attachment to mother or father or significant other. If the attachment is strong it may mean the member never considers leaving the organization (i.e., seeking employment elsewhere, in the case of work). On the other hand the attachment may be weak and involve negative feelings, or the member may view membership in a given organization as a temporary involvement, a stepping stone to membership in another more valued organization. In cases where the communal attachment is strong one finds such phenomena as individual adornment of work or living spaces, periodic rituals or ceremonies (Turner, 1969) celebrating various events, symbols of the organization (i.e., pictures of the founder, trophies of members' sport teams), and frequent regular meetings of the total membership or of subgroups of members.

In summary the *structural* dimension directs attention to positions, statuses, roles, and their accompanying rights, duties, and rewards. The

normative dimension directs attention to informal perceptions and ex-pectations that are embodied in a negotiated order that is developed, maintained, and modified primarily by small work groups (or teams) and informal groups of members. The *communal* dimension directs at-tention to the emotional and identity needs of members, validating self worth and organizational value.

Sociological Practice

Since the early 1980's the field of sociological practice seems to be developing more strongly than before. This may reflect the growing num-ber of sociologists engaged in some kind of applied or clinical work as well as an increasing interest of potential clients in utilizing consultants who have a sociological perspective. I have found it useful in my socio-logical practice to focus on the dimensions of integration as described above, especially since this perspective is rarely encountered in the or-ganizational development or change literature. Usually the social sys-tem involved is an organization engaged in production of some kind of material goods or one providing services of some kind to individuals or other organizations. Sometimes all members of the organization are in-volved in the consultation, especially if it is a small organization, and at other times (the more frequent case) one or more subgroups are involved.

Managers in organizations seek consultation for a variety of human problems, including communication difficulties, low morale, high use of sick leave, interdepartmental conflict, and low productivity. When managers seek consultation it often follows attempts on their parts to identify the problems and try as many solutions as they deem desirable. Having failed to achieve the level of solution they want, they seek out-side help from a consultant. It is wise on the consultant's part to find out how the problems have been defined, what solutions have been tried, and what the outcomes have been (Fisch, 1982). There are at least two reasons for this: one, it helps the consultant understand the situation better and avoid suggesting things that have already been tried; and, two, it supports the idea that the consultant has respect for the client's attempts to cope with the situation.

It is also wise for the consultant to have in mind a variety of models or theories about interventions in organizations since he or she will have to conceptualize what they propose to do and be able to explain it clearly to the managers and other members involved.

Structural Integration

There are a number of ways of engaging members of one or more groups in an organization in describing and discussing the structural, normative, and/or communal dimensions of that organizations' social integration. I usually begin with the structural dimension, since that dimension is the most public and members will most likely agree that describing members' positions and associated activities (and/or groups' functions and activities) is an acceptable and important focus. Often members contend that such information is widespread, but as members are asked to provide information regarding a particular member's position, it soon becomes apparent that people have different and often mistaken notions about each others' activities. This leads into a discussion of priorities and provides an opportunity to clarify rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, and supervision. It also means that members begin to see that they may not "possess a perfected social intelligence" and that periodic discussion of members' activities in their positions, or of groups' goals and activities, is highly desirable in order to increase the level of mutual understanding and agreement.

It is not unusual in this discussion to find that some members do not have, or claim not to have, a "position description." It is frequently the case that a member's conception of his or her "position description" is quite different from others conception, and also often different from what that person currently does in his or her position. Sometimes this is due to ambiguity in the position description, sometimes due to the lack of a written position description, and sometimes due to failure to change a position description to keep up with changes in duties and activities. People may be hired for or promoted into a position with verbal understandings only, and these verbal understandings may later lead to considerable disagreement and misunderstanding. This is especially true at managerial and professional levels since in the recruitment process the person being recruited may interpret statements of resources or potential resources for the recruit as ironclad promises, while the recruiter may intend the statements to be suggestions and enticements.

Organizations are regularly in some degree of flux and change, adapting to changes in the environment as well as to internal changes. Position descriptions need to be sufficiently detailed so that agreement on work activities can be reached easily, but also sufficiently ambiguous so that work activities can be modified and adapted to changing circumstances.

I think it is important to display the "table of organization" to the assembled members of the organization either on a blackboard or on newsprint sheets. For each position it is usually evident that even the title of that position is not widely known. By each position with its title it is useful to list the more important activities the position's occupant carries out and, from this beginning, further clarification and discussion may ensue as extensively as time and interest permit. For example, there will likely be differences of opinion regarding not only the activities engaged in, but also the time and energy devoted to those activities. This can become an important focus of discussion since in some cases a member at an upper management position may be devoting considerable time and energy to an activity he or she believes most members want, but most members may in fact not consider as important as some other activity that has a lower priority. With the table of organization displayed, it becomes the focus of attention and it is easier to maintain the members mutual understanding and agreement than when the focus is only on the person who occupies that position. This latter is often the case when a group is meeting assembled as an audience facing one person (the leader or chairperson) who is presenting information without handouts, blackboard, newsprint sheets, or slide projector. Various information about each position and the person occupying that position can be incorporated in this process, depending on the consultant's or the group's interests. For example, it is useful to include the number of years that person has been with the organization as a member, and the number of years that person has been in the specific position currently occupied.

Why is structural integration often less than is desirable? The most common reason I have encountered is failure to utilize written statements of mission and the rights and duties of persons in positions as a basis for performance expectations and assessment. A second frequent reason is failure to review and modify such policies and practices in response to external and internal changes. It is enticing to leave expectations unclear since it can give persons and groups greater freedom of action. The cost of this, however, is confusion and failure to meet conflicting expectations.

Normative Integration

The focus on normative integration is more difficult than that on structural integration. Some norms are written into the employment contract and the official policies and practices of an organization. Other norms are informally known, developed and maintained by the various

groups in which the organization's members participate. Some of these other norms are general social norms that are characteristic of human society. The norm of reciprocity, the norm of social responsibility, the norm of turn-taking, and the norm of equity and other norms of justice are four such norms (Krebs and Miller 1985:27). Other norms evolve in the course of organizational behavior and are learned and reinforced through interpersonal interaction and group processes. It is most effective to focus on norms and normative integration by meeting in small groups. In an organization it is useful to meet in small groups of persons who form an organizational unit (a family), or persons who crosscut organizational units (cousins), or persons who occupy similar positions (peers), or randomly selected persons from the organization (strangers). Groups may engage in free discussion or in discussion focused on "how people get along with each other" or some such statement of purpose which directs people's attention to the norms of interaction.

Norms governing dress and appearance are a common focus of discussion. Considerable variability may exist in an organization. If members are spread out across a rather large geographical area so that many members rarely see each other there may be considerable variation in dress and appearance. Similarly, the opinions of upper management regarding dress and appearance have considerable influence. Some organizations (i.e., the military) formalize norms of dress and appearance in official rules, some do not formalize such norms but normative expectations are made very clear by managers and supervisors, and in others these areas are left largely to individual or small group preferences.

Other norms that seem to be common areas of discussion involve the use of annual or vacation leave time, sick leave time, coming to work late (especially when shift changes are involved), and prejudice and discrimination. It is important to keep in mind that the primary issue involved in normative integration is mutual understanding and agreement, not necessarily uniformity of norms across groups and other units of the organization.

Why is normative integration often low? The most frequent reason I have seen is a fear by managers of organized collective action and anxiety over the threat of reciprocity, and fear by nonmanagers of reprisals. If people enter into an open and relatively frank discussion with each other, everyone involved is subject to public (within the group and setting) confrontation and accountability.

Communal Integration

Communal integration is the most difficult to focus on partly because it is the least formalized and partly because it may seem inappropriate in a rational and bureaucratic organizational system. Nevertheless organizations display a considerable variety of ways in which attachment and humanness are evident. One of the most common is to celebrate a member's birthday with a small party of refreshments and presents. Other events often provide a focus for a communal event, including promotions, retirement, transfers, weddings, births, etc. Regular meetings of units of an organization, or even of the entire organization, provide a sense of community (Almond, 1974), even though the meeting may be called for other purposes. Retreats for planning purposes often contribute a sense of bonding and commitment to the organization.

Knowledge about, and interest in, a members life outside employment by coworkers builds a sense of community. Attachment is also enhanced by response of members to crises persons may face, either with regard to accidents on the job or to other critical events in a person's life.

Attachment in a communal sense to an organization also represents a difficult area to discuss because variability in beliefs, values, and opinions is most likely to be present. Achieving mutual understanding of meanings and agreement on these meanings is the primary goal, and not consensus on the beliefs, values, and opinions. All organizations experience losses, burnout, and other stresses, and the periodic renegotiation of commitment is important.

Why is communal integration often so low? The major reason, I believe, is that communal integration addresses a more individual and personal dimension of organized life which, historically, has not been considered an essential part of "the work ethic." In some sense many people believe that "communal integration" may compromise objectivity at work, or may be antagonistic to labor/management conflict which some see as essential to the protection of workers rights. The cost of low communal integration is likely to be higher alienation and personnel turnover than may be desired.

Some Problems and Issues

The goal of interventions relevant to the dimensions of integration is to increase members' awareness of the dimensions, their agreement on the meanings of the dimensions, and consequently the strength of

integration of the organization. Where integration is strong the organization is likely to be viable, healthy, and able to achieve its goals.

In exploring these various aspects of organizational integration there are potential problems that arise. One, of course, is the presence of diversity and differences of perception. How much difference can or should be tolerated or encouraged is an issue to be negotiated among the members of the organization. With regard to communal integration, variations in commitment or attachment to the organization are to be expected. Variations in conformity to norms is common. Changes in the external environment and in internal processes may require structural modifications. These suggest that organizational integration is a fluctuating phenomenon, to be negotiated and renegotiated on an ongoing basis (Strauss, 1978).

Another problem is the level of analysis or focus of the intervention. Some interventions or activities are focused on the organization as a collectivity (i.e., some communal activities), whereas others are focused on a work unit or an individual in his or her status and role. In some instances both levels may be involved. The consultant needs to be clear on what level is involved and needs to encourage the members involved to clarify that level.

In pursuing interventions as suggested above, it becomes apparent that a lot of information typically not discussed, or possibly concealed, becomes public. Although it is not necessary that everything be open and public, much more information than is often thought, can be open and public. Members have a need to understand events in the organization and in this quest to understand, seek any information that may be available, whether rumor, misinformation, deliberate lies, or accurate reports. Knowing that a regular meeting is scheduled helps reduce the need to seek answers, since those can be discussed at such meetings. Achieving purposes and goals through concealment and innuendo becomes much more difficult as organization integration is strengthened. Increasing integration is a threat for managers who rely on concealment to strengthen their power and for members who rely on anonymity and hidden agendas to strengthen their power.

The optimal level of integration is problematical. If integration becomes too great it may result in rigidity, stifling of individuality, and inability to adapt to changing circumstances. On the other hand when integration is too weak the result is confusion, manipulation, and irresponsibility. The optimal level may vacillate in adaptive response to such factors as changes in the environment, personnel turnover, and

technological innovations. Thus negotiating, constructing, and reconstructing the social order is an ongoing process.

In the descriptions above of the dimensions of integration and activities and interventions relevant to the dimensions, it should be made clear that some descriptions are of phenomena that occur in the regular course of organizational life, whereas others may, at least initially, be introduced and guided by a consultant. Some activities and interventions may initially be introduced and carried out by a manager or other members of an organization, or, having been initially introduced and carried out by a consultant, may then become an ongoing aspect of the organization. Other activities and interventions may only be maintained through the presence and facilitation of a consultant.

Conclusion

Three dimensions of integration of an organization are described and some suggested interventions aimed at increasing organizational integration are discussed. A few problems and issues are presented. The focus on integration is a broad concept of organization of a social system. Structural integration directs attention to positions, statuses, roles, and their accompanying rights, duties, and rewards. Normative integration directs attention to the negotiated order that must be developed, maintained, and modified. Communal integration directs attention to the emotional and identity needs of members, validating their self worth and organizational value.

There are various ways in which a consultant can observe these dimensions of integration, describe them, and develop interventions to change them. Some level of integration along all three dimensions exists in any organization or social system.

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