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Measuring Organizational Confidence:

A New Way to Tackle Organizational Change in Corrections

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Organizations continually seek new ways to evaluate performance. Leadership evaluations, performance-management assessments, 360-degree feedback, employee surveys and employee focus groups are some of the performance measurement tools used today. Yet, in spite of the various tools available, a key factor, organizational efficacy, is missing in this process.

Most of these tools focus on the individual. As such, they are limited in scope with regard to their effectiveness. For example, leadership evaluations tend to focus on a few individuals and their impact on the organization. Missing is the organization's view of its own capabilities, a view of organizational efficacy, and employee perspectives on the effectiveness of the organization as a whole as opposed to its individual components.

J.G. Bohn¹ defined organizational efficacy as a generative capacity within an organization to cope effectively with the demands, challenges, stressors and opportunities that it encounters within the business environment. Otherwise referred to as the "three factor solution," organizational efficacy exists as an aggregated judgment of the organization's individual members about their sense of collective capacities, their sense of mission or purpose/future, and their sense of resilience. In an organization, the three factor solution encompasses the following:

- A sense of collective capacity: Can we work together to accomplish the goal?
- A sense of mission or purpose/future: Do we know where we are going?
- A sense of resilience: Are we capable to stay the course or are we unable to adapt to our situation?

Corrections Organizational Efficacy Questionnaire (COEQ)

Stanford professor Albert Bandura, Ph.D.,² developed the concept of self-efficacy as one's assessment of one's capability to bring about outcomes and to manage stressors. In simplest terms, self-efficacy is a sense of "can do."

Our research has taken the concept of self-efficacy to an organizational level to develop a new tool, the Corrections Organizational Efficacy Questionnaire (COEQ), to help correctional administrators, human resource teams and performance managers evaluate organizational performance. Using the research conducted by Bohn,³ the authors of this article and a small number of personnel at the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Academy,

modified Bohn's existing questionnaire, which focused on manufacturing organizations, to one that corresponded with the specific challenges in today's correctional environment.

The COEQ uses the three-factor solution to allow researchers and practitioners to focus on specific areas for organizational improvement. Modifying Bohn's organizational efficacy questionnaire included adapting his original scale items so that the questionnaire, overall, would address the issues facing corrections.

The Study

The intent of the research was to compare the newly developed COEQ scales with Bohn's original Organizational Efficacy Scale (OES) in an attempt to validate the new scales. Knowing that the original scales were reliable and valid, the authors were able to analyze the collected corrections organizational efficacy data from the respondents in the study. The scales revealed both validity and reliability and were analyzed accordingly.

The COEQ was tested with eight correctional agencies that participated in the NIC Management Development for the Future (MDF) program. The study comprised mid-level managers from seven state departments of correction and one large jail system. Participants were not new to supervision and had been employed at their institutions for some time. Thus, their experiences allowed them to make effective and accurate judgments of the efficacy of their correctional agency.

At the time of the study, the participating agencies faced similar organizational changes and challenges. Changes in top leadership, budget cuts and program shifts highlighted the one constant as change itself. Moreover, respondents were being pulled — by senior-level leaders, by subordinates and by offenders — in all directions.

NIC Academy Chief Robert Brown confirmed the significance of how major changes affect organizations by suggesting that when a correctional system, its people, its programs and its finances all change simultaneously, a "can do" attitude (efficacy) by those below the leader is particularly essential. Bandura⁴ states that "perceived collective efficacy will influence what people choose to do as a group, how much effort they put into it and their staying power when group efforts fail to produce results."

The Results

The COEQ data indicated statistical differences between agencies involved in this study. However,

because this study focused on the validation of the COEQ in the correctional context, no key indicator data was collected that might help explain the differences.

However, the authors and Brown, in an attempt to identify the organizational factors that may have caused the differences, posited some general ideas. In all organizations included in this study, where new top-level leadership visited NIC's MDF program frequently, instrumentation data reflected a stronger perception of overall efficacy. This may support the idea that leadership can affect the collective efficacy of employees in an organization. Accordingly, leadership may very well affect the power of the group's belief in its competency for successful action. Moreover, the study did show validation of the COEQ and indicated a variation in levels of organizational efficacy between agencies. Bohn's three-factor solution allowed researchers to isolate the areas of concern, as opposed to an omnibus metric, which does not articulate areas for improvement.

While the study showed statistically valid variation of organizational efficacy between agencies, it would have been stronger using pre- and post-test protocol, as well as identification of internal criterion variables such as key performance indicators applicable to the respondents' sphere of influence to substantiate the conclusions. For instance, in Bohn's original research, predictive measures (e.g., customer focus, workplace satisfaction and employee satisfaction) correlated highly with his organizational efficacy questionnaire initially designed for a manufacturing environment.

This type of criterion variable evaluation is necessary in future studies. With criterion grounding, it can be assessed whether mid-level managers "take care" of the subordinate supervisors under their charge. In this scenario, where providing the appropriate levels of guidance and performance incentives for subordinate supervisors are in short supply, those working in subordinate supervisory positions may seek other employment opportunities. This relationship also holds true between executives and senior level leaders, senior level leaders and managers, managers and supervisors, and supervisors and line staff.

Future Implications

Ultimately, the COEQ does provide reliable data, which is useful for further analysis within and between organizations. Perhaps the greatest strength of the study was to provide the corrections community with a tool that takes into account the collective efficacy of an entire management team, as opposed to merely questioning employee morale or the effects of leadership.

Organizational efficacy is measurable through the responses of mid-level management. Moreover, an analy-

sis of the results allows researchers to suggest interventions that may improve an organization's overall level of efficacy, thereby enhancing the performance of the entire organization.

What employees actually perceive about their collective capability to achieve is critical to an organization's long-term success. Quite often, without an ongoing assessment to measure the level of collective capability within an organization, gut intuition prevails, regardless of good intentions.

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The effects of internal and external environmental factors continue to challenge leadership at all levels of an organization. And correctional agencies are no exception. The benefit of assessing organizational efficacy as the construct to measure an organization is that it assembles a multitude of informational sources under a single construct, aggregating into a most useful metric to examine organizational capability. Moreover, it can show, on a broad scale, the perceptions of an organization's ability to succeed and its capabilities. Organizations that understand their strengths and weaknesses are in a better position

to make improvements than those that do not. More important, they are in a much better position to manage and lead change, rather than to be managed and led by change.

ENDNOTES

¹ Bohn, J.G. 2002. The relationship of perceived leadership behaviors to organizational efficacy. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, 9(2):65-79.

² Bandura, A. 1977. Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2):191-215.

³ Bohn, J.G. 2001. The design and development of an instrument to assess organizational efficacy. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. Unpublished dissertation.

⁴ Bandura, A. 1986. *Social foundations of thought and action*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

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