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Putting the *Fight* Back Into Your Organization:

by Dr. James Bohm

A Case Study In Organizational Confidence

Digging in the wrong place . . .

In the cult classic, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones and his companion, Salah, received word from a soothsayer that their rival archaeologists obtained incorrect information about the location of the mythical "Well of Souls." With glee they both exclaim, "They're digging in the wrong place!" While the incident is humorous, it points to a greater truth—if we have the wrong information, we'll get the wrong answers.

We have all participated in organizational surveys that measure culture, morale, employee satisfaction, and just about anything that appears to have an impact on organizational performance. Our goal is noble—to find the "Holy Grail" of performance and take steps to improve it. But we may be going after the wrong thing. The question, "What contributes to organizational performance?" has been around for a long time. Maybe we're asking the wrong question. Perhaps the question should be, "What gives an organization the capacity for performance?" Said differently, what gives an organization a sense of "fight," a sense of persistence in the face of obstacles, and a willingness to move forward? In short, what gives an organization the *power to perform*?

For many decades, consultants, academics, and others have tried to find a way to increase organizational performance, but we've come up short. It's possible we're digging in the wrong place. We need a tool that measures all of the things that contribute to organizational performance, including its leadership style, culture, morale, and other myriad factors. We need a concept that upper level executives can sink their teeth into, that makes sense to them, and that resonates with their personal struggle for success.

What exactly is the "fight" in organizations?

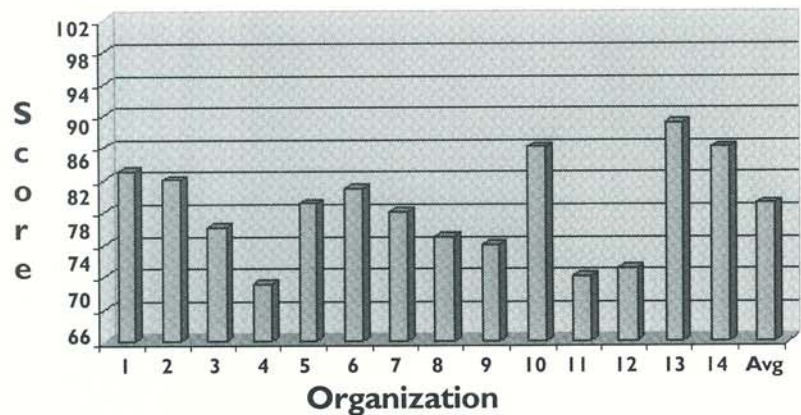
The fight in organizations is the same as the fight in an individual—it is a willingness to go on, to persist in the face of the struggle, and smash through the barriers when things get tough. It is the ability of a group of people to work together for a common goal until they stand exhausted as victors. In the academic tongue, it is known as organizational efficacy, or more simply put, **Organizational Confidence**.

The analogy is clear—when people have confidence, they take risks, they keep going, and they persist in the face of extreme difficulties because they know who they are, they know what they want, and they know they can do it. They are ready to take on a challenge, they are ready to take on a fight, and they are going to keep on going until they are done. Organizations need that same sense of fight.

Research

In 2001 in partnership with MRA, a survey was conducted of multiple organizations to assess organizational confidence. The questionnaire comprised 23 items specifically measuring organizational confidence. Of the 23 items, 17 were selected and used to come up with the overall score. The highest possible overall score was 102 (17 items times a maximum score of 6 per item). As can be seen from the graph below, even the highest scoring company (#13) has room to improve. The following chart shows how nearly 800 people in 14 organizations perceived their level of organizational confidence.

Level of Organizational Confidence Across 14 Companies



The research shows that organizational confidence is composed of three distinct things:

1. **A Sense of Mission: Do we know where we're going?**
2. **A Sense of Collective Capability: Can we work together to get the job done?**
3. **A Sense of Resilience: Can we stay the course in the face of obstacles?**

Do we know where we're going? *Sense of Mission*

Decades of research demonstrate a strong theme that organizations need a mission to give them a sense of future perfect thinking. This is consistent with what we know about people: understanding a goal increases the likelihood of achieving the goal. The problem is often that people within an organization do *not* know what they are trying to accomplish, and instead they are fed unclear objectives through an unpruned grapevine. This leads to confusion in the ranks. Lack of clarity of goal focus is a recipe for chaos. Measuring this sense of mission at all levels of the organization is critical for goal alignment. The more people are aligned, the greater the organizational confidence. That will put the fight back in the organization.

Can we work together to get the job done? *Sense of Collective Capability*

Some of the richest corporate folklore and mythology throughout the past decades has been that if we are to perform we need teams. However, a key element of “teaming” is rarely discussed. Simply because a large (or small) group of people is assembled together around a project or goal doesn't necessarily mean something good will arise from the group.

“Can we work together?” is a critical question for an organization. When we want to get something done, we are often stymied by interdepartmental conflicts and other obstacles. An organization must understand how the parts are working together to have the horsepower and fight that is required to survive and thrive in the current economic situation. It is really very simple—we need to collaborate to be successful.

Can we stay the course in the face of obstacles? *Sense of Resilience*

So the team knows where it is going, and that it can work together. What else is missing? If an organization does not sense that it can stay the course when the going gets tough, that issue needs to be addressed. An organization with a sense of resilience will believe it can go on, and will have the guts and fight to stay the course in the presence of obstacles. If people know the goal, if they can work together to attain the goal, and if they can hold the line when things are falling apart, they will be successful and improve the performance of the organization. That's a sense of fight, a sense of organizational confidence.

The Impact of Organizational Confidence

The research demonstrated a strong statistical relationship between organizational confidence and several important business variables. Employees were asked questions about the customer focus of their organization and their workplace and job satisfaction. In a separate section of the questionnaire, they were asked their perceptions of their leaders. The following table shows the correlations between organizational confidence

and specific business variables. Note that the higher the number, the stronger the relationship.

Business Variable	Organizational Confidence
Customer Focus	.564
Workplace Satisfaction	.659
Job Satisfaction	.519
Leadership	.758

Clearly, these relationships make sense. These statistics confirm what common sense tells us—leadership has a strong relationship with organizational confidence. The link between workplace satisfaction and organizational confidence should not surprise us—people like working for a winner. If an organization is functioning with a high level of organizational confidence, people will enjoy their jobs more and sense a greater focus on customer outcomes.

Digging in the right place: Using the right tool to get results

Self-efficacy research has been around for nearly 30 years and it has a strong track record in improving individual performance. Since efficacy theory is superior to other methods of assessment, this study elevated self-efficacy research to the organizational level. The research showed that organizations do indeed have a level of confidence. Companies seek performance improvement to boost their revenues, market position, and their long-term prospects. Increasing the level of organizational confidence bodes well for increased performance.

Dr. James Bohn is a researcher with over 30 years' experience in multiple aspects of business, ranging from manufacturing to HR to customer service. He has been published in multiple journals and periodicals.