

# A unified model of organizational effectiveness

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Scholars for long have been interested in finding effective ways to assess organizational effectiveness. However, lack of consensus on its definition, and consequently on measure parameters has dogged researchers, almost to the point that some academics have declared organizational effectiveness a subject that cannot be researched. The purpose of this paper is to present a unified model of organizational effectiveness by recognizing the underlying synergy in the body of research – a framework that could guide future research on organizational effectiveness as a comprehensive, but contextual paradigm.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper is based on extensive exploratory review and critique of extant literature on organizational effectiveness.

**Findings** – The lack of consensus among scholars on the meaning of organizational effectiveness and its measures is primarily the result of compartmentalized perspectives. The authors found that there is an underlying synergy among them. Basis a big picture review and analysis of extant literature, the authors have been able to identify a unifying framework for the apparently disparate and conflicting models of organizational effectiveness.

**Practical implications** – This paper can provide guidance to managers on appropriate selection of organizational effectiveness measures, and to scholars on developing a more holistic and pragmatic research approach on the subject. It can potentially lead to development of context-based scales that facilitate meaningful comparative studies.

**Originality/value** – This paper presents a unified model and framework for organizational effectiveness by building on the valuable but disparate contributions of previous researchers. The authors believe that this is a novel attempt that simplifies the discourse on organizational effectiveness, and will help to remove some of the negativity around the research subject.

**Keywords** Model, Organizational effectiveness, Definitions

**Paper type** Literature review

## Introduction

Extant literature on organizational effectiveness is extensive and marked by diversity of views. The lack of convergence in the understanding of organizational effectiveness, through over 50 years of research on the subject, is palpable. Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum (1957) referred to organizational effectiveness as “most complex and least tackled.” Interestingly, even with passage of time, it continues to be referred to as a “fragile” construct (Fischbacher-Smith, 2014). In-between, researchers have continued to vent their exasperation. Some dub organizational effectiveness as an “untidy construct” (Campbell *et al.*, 1974; Connolly *et al.*, 1980). Some opine that there is only a “rudimentary understanding” of organizational effectiveness (Steers, 1975; Connolly *et al.*, 1980), or that “confusion persists regarding what organizational effectiveness is” (Cameron, 1978). Still others lament the “chaotic nature of theoretical research” (Cameron and Whetten, 1981). Scholars have continued to highlight the lack of consensus on the definition of organizational effectiveness from early times (Mahoney and Weitzel, 1969), till recently (Mishra and Misra, 2017), and during the intervening period as well (Cameron and Whetten, 1981; Hitt, 1988). Lack of consensus on definition as well as measurement of organizational effectiveness (Henri, 2004) has led some authors to assert that organizational effectiveness is an abstract and theoretical concept (Connolly *et al.*, 1980; Mishra and Misra, 2017) that can neither be defined, nor measured (Campbell, 1977; Mishra and Misra, 2017).

In order to get a better sense of the direction of developments in organizational effectiveness research we studied the literature on organizational effectiveness in chronological order of date

