

THE CONCEPTUAL MAP FOR UNIVERSITY EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

This article explores the factors underpinning university effectiveness and the malleable conditions that influence its performance. The concept of University effectiveness is developed from the general concept of organisational effectiveness. The concept of university effectiveness is based on the belief that the survival and assured future of a university rests on its ability to attain its goals and objectives. The article discusses the criteria of university effectiveness in the context of organisational theory. Five effectiveness criteria are namely productivity, adaptability, involvement and satisfaction of stakeholders, continuity and responsiveness are discussed to give a base for determining effectiveness. A holistic approach to university effectiveness is presented as the one that can address all the five criteria because of its emphasis on both the domain of effect and domain of causes as means. A model by Mintzberg (1979) and DeLeeuw (1986) is adopted to demonstrate interrelationship of the five basic elements of effectiveness – goals, organisational culture, structure, environment, and primary processes. Theoretical orientations that underpin the concept of university effectiveness are discussed under the themes of synoptic planning and bureaucratic organisation, retroactive planning and the learning organisation, public choice theory, contingency theory and chaos theory. These are categorized, as mechanisms levers of university effectiveness. The article lastly presents leadership in the university as the key variable around which the success or failure of a university rotates.

Introduction

University effectiveness is a concept, which is often perceived as being causal. The conceptual orientation of university effectiveness usually refers to the extent to which the university outputs or outcomes are influenced by malleable conditions. These conditions may be financial or material inputs, or more complete activities and processes in areas of teaching, research and community service. Researchers in the effectiveness of educational organisations have linked the concept of university effectiveness to that of organisational effectiveness and sets of antecedent conditions. In this article, university effectiveness is discussed in the context of the concept of organisational effectiveness. It is therefore important to first draw upon the orientations of organisational effectiveness literature, which distinguishes effectiveness criteria and relate them to university operations.

The criteria for university effectiveness:

Every university puts great concern on being effective especially under the current fierce competition brought about by globalization. University effectiveness should be a concern for all the people in the university. The success, the survival and the future of a university rests on its ability to attain its goals and objectives. However, measuring the effectiveness or success of an education institution is a complicated task. This is so because it involves analyzing its structure and the structures that emerges as a consequence of human intervention. Despite its complexity, one important common element upon which the success and effectiveness of a university depends

is achieving results through effective management of the resources, commanding people's commitment to and involvement with the university and developing compliant survival instincts to the changing and competitive environment.

Scheerens (1992) distinguished five alternative effectiveness criteria each embedded in a particular type of administration or organisational theory. These criteria apply effectively to the concept of university effectiveness.

These include:

- a. **The productivity criterion:** This criterion is concerned with the consideration of the output of the organisation primary process. It is mainly concerned with the economic rationality of the process. Universities have to justify their purpose of existence in the context of economic, social, and political demands on their services.
- b. **Adaptability:** This criterion is concerned with how much the university can adapt to external circumstances. It is anchored in the orientation of organisational science known as organic systems theory. This theory views the organisation as being in constant open exchange with the environment. In order to survive the organisation has to adapt to external circumstances. This view dictates that adaptability is the main criterion to judge whether an organisation or university is to be seen as effective. Adaptability can be manifested by choosing the right objectives, acquiring vital resources and satisfying external constituencies and clients.
- c. **Involvement and satisfaction of the members of the university.** People in a university differ in the manner and extent of their involvement with and concern for what the university does to achieve its objectives. This criterion originates from the human relations school of organisational thought, which emphasises the human side of the organisation. This thought advocates for a perception of human nature and support as an approach, which gives new people encouragement to work willingly and to perform to the best of their abilities. This requires university administrators to develop a high sense of people perception and understand their feelings, needs and expectations.
- d. **Continuity:** This criterion is concerned with the ability of the university to run smoothly and harmoniously within a competitive environment. The ability to predict the likely circumstances and events which may threaten the health of the university ensures its continuity.
- e. **Responsiveness:** This is the degree to which a university adapts to emerging situations. It is the degree to which a university is able to meet the emerging needs of its client systems. It leads to the satisfaction of its external stakeholders.

The multiplicity of these criteria has of recent generated a lot of debate as to how to deal with them. Fearman and Quinn (1985) perceive them as competing values, while Scheerens (1992) argues that the criteria can be related to each other according to a means to end framework, with productivity as the ultimate criterion and the others "supportive conditions; to this criterion. Cheng (1993) considers alternative effectiveness criteria from a contingency perspective. He takes the relevancy of particular criteria as dependent on characteristics of the situation in which the university finds itself at a given time. He identifies three relevant situational dimensions namely:

- (i) the degree to which goals are clear and consensual
- (ii) the importance of powerful constituencies the degree to which relevant environmental
- (iii) contingencies are changing.

From these perspectives two important implications to the criteria for university effectiveness and improvement can be identified. These are:

- a. Each of the criteria can be used as a target for university improvement oriented actions.
- b. The realisation is that the bulk of effectiveness research is only relevant to the degree that the university improvement is outcome oriented.

Despite these perceptions, a new approach to university effectiveness and improvement is emerging. This approach advocates for a "holistic" approach, which addresses all criteria at the same time. This is based on the dictates of the concept of university effectiveness, which is divided into two basic domains namely: a domain of effect and a domain of causes or means. In differentiating the two, there is a need to draw a distinction of all possible features of the functioning of a university, which are malleable in order to reach the effects that are aimed at. This broader perspective is needed to obtain as complete picture as possible of all elements and aspects of university education and university functioning, which are potentially useable in improving effectiveness. Mintzberg (1979) and De Leeuw (1986) came up with the following aspects of the organisation which are applicable to universities. The degree of harmonious relationship of these aspects to each other determines the effectiveness of the university.

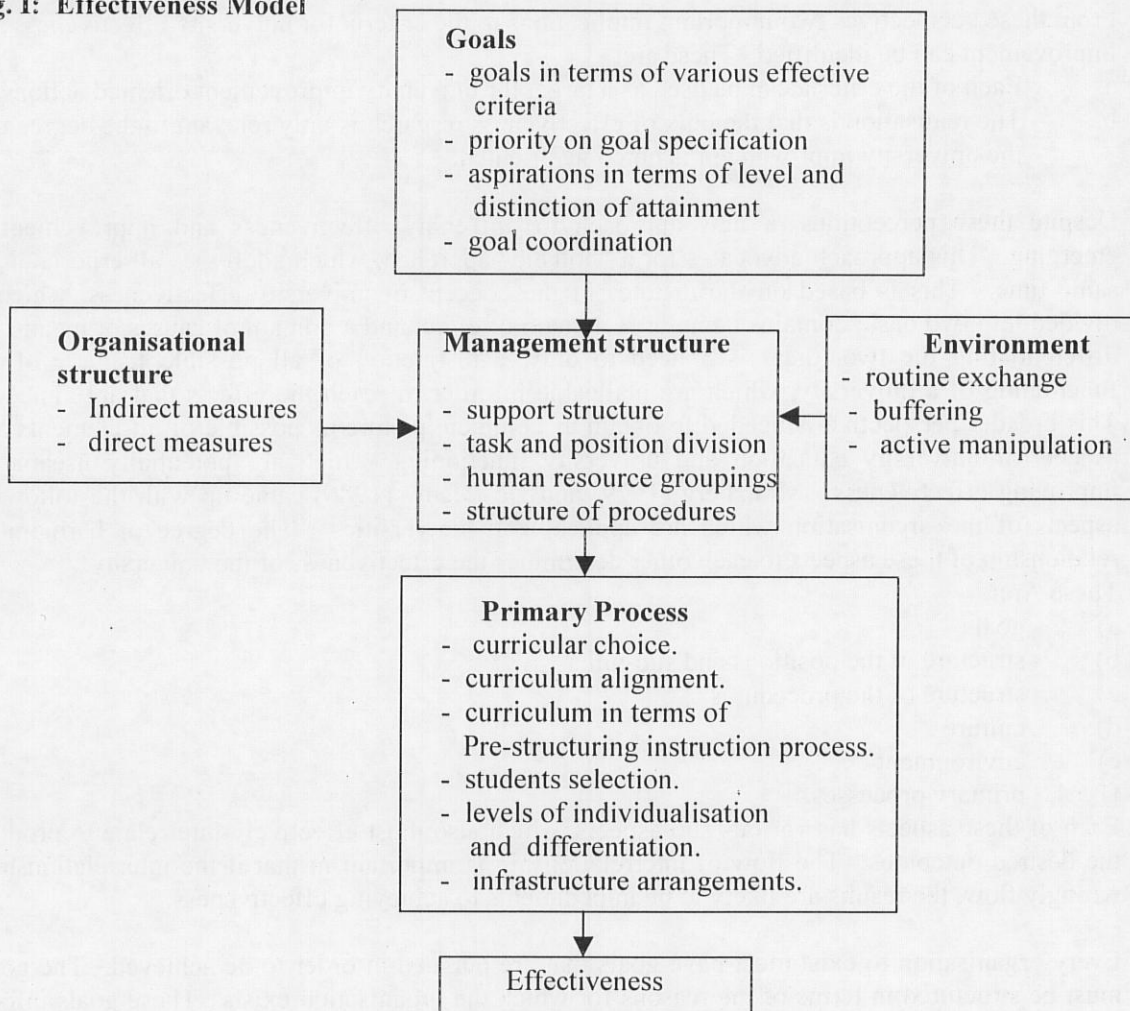
These Are:

- a) goals
- b) structure of the positions and sub-units
- c) structure of the procedures
- d) culture
- e) environment
- f) primary processes.

Each of these aspects has various sub-aspects, which also must effectively interrelate to produce the desired outcomes. The flow of interrelationship is important in that if the interrelationships wrongly flow, the results are likely to be impediments to achieving effectiveness.

Every organisation to exist must have goals that are pursued in order to be achieved. The goals must be structured in terms of the reasons for which the organisation exists. These goals inform the cultural domain which refers to the measures that can be used to shape the organisation's culture in a way that is supposed to be effectiveness enhancing. Direct measures refer to attempts to deal directly with cultural aspects while indirect measures refer to cultural implications of the structural innovation. The goals also inform the way the organisation is structured both at strategic and operational management levels. They inform the structure of the technologies of social control (policies, rules and regulations). Goals are also set to be achieved in a particular environment (organisational environment). Such environment must favour the existence of the organisation. The way the organisation is structured is much influenced by the cultural and environment domains. In other words for any organisation to survive and be effective, it must accommodate, in its structure, the cultural and environmental domain which support the existence of the organisation.

Fig. I: Effectiveness Model



Source: Mintzberg (1979) and De Leeuw (1986)

In the context of a university, the interrelationship of the three domains (culture, structure, and environment) informs the primary processes. It is the proper functioning of these processes that leads to effectiveness.

The Theoretical Orientations of University Effectiveness

There are little literature and research outputs on the theoretical orientations of university effectiveness. Specifically, however, since universities are considered as organisations and more so, educational organisations, attempts to relate economic and organisation theories to university effectiveness have been made. Scholars, such as Scheeren (1996) identified synoptic planning and bureaucratic organisation, retroactive planning and the learning organisation, public choice theory, contingency theory and chaos theory, as theoretical orientations that are applicable to university effectiveness. He categorised them as the mechanisms and levers of university effectiveness:

(i) **Mechanisms of University Effectiveness**

These mechanisms are also referred to as theory embedded principles. They are considered as generally applicable explanatory principles that may be used in making clear why and what works in educational organisations such as universities. Levers are very much applied in these principles. Nevertheless the term is thought to have additional meaning because the “levers” refer to directly operational measures to realise the action potential implied in the levers. For instance, the cybernetic principle (evaluation/feed back/correctisation) is seen as a mechanism, whereas the application of university self-evaluation system is taken as being associated to “lever”.

Theoretical orientations of university effectiveness are perceived as using available theory to deduct levers that, applied to a mode of university education, may explain why a particular factor (or set of factors) is expected to increase the chance of the attainment of a particular effectiveness criterion.

(ii) **Synoptic Planning and Bureaucratic Structuring**

Synoptic planning results into conceptualisation of a broad spectrum of long-term goals and possible means to attaining them. Instrumental relationship plays an important role in selecting alternatives. The main characteristics of synoptic planning as a prescriptive principal conducive to effective organisational functioning as applied to university are:

- a. proactive statement of goals, careful deduction of concrete goals, operational objectives and assessment objectives.
- b. decomposition of subject content matter, creating sequences in a way that intermediate and ultimate objectives are approached systematically.
- c. alignment of teaching methods (design of didactical situations) to subject content matter segments.
- d. monitoring of the learning progress of students by means of objective assessment.
- e. creating knowledge through research and disseminating it.

Synoptic planning approach as applied in university settings is concerned with curriculum planning, planning of supportive resources and structures to curriculum implementation.

When the ideal of rational planning is extended to university structuring, related principles about controlled arrangements, are applied to the division of work, the formation of units and the way supervision is given shape. The organisational, structural pendants of rational planning are mechanistic structure, scientific management, and machine bureaucracy (Morgan. 1986). It is also based on Max Weber’s ideas of the principles of bureaucracy, which put emphasis on precision, speed, clarity, regularity, reliability and efficiency achieved through the creation of fixed division of tasks, hierarchical supervision, and detailed rules, procedures and regulations.

(iii) **Individual vs University rationality**

A central assumption in the synoptic planning and bureaucratic interpretation of the rationality paradigm is that organisations act as integrated purposeful units. Individual efforts are directed towards collective efforts to attain university goals.

Morgan (1986) rejects this assumption by emphasising that organisational goals may be rational for some people’s interests, but not for others. The fact that universities consist

Creating market mechanisms is a lever which is more relevant at the university level. The university can enlarge opportunities for more stakeholders' participation with the aim of improving performance to compete with other universities

The same type of reasoning applies to the levers of organisational design to make university responsive to basic contingencies. Some of the contingencies may not be specific to university. The contingency thesis from contingency theory is more amenable to internal control of the university. This thesis calls for fitting arrangements between internal design parameters like the style of leadership and the autonomy of units in the university

Levers, in respect to the enhancement of self organisation are creating a low degree of formalisation, horizontal decentralisation and a playful, dynamic interaction vis a vis external developments. The problem with this organisational image is the degree to which it corresponds to the reality of the university in most countries, assuming that this reality is still rather formalised, predictable and situated in a relatively stable environment.

The mechanisms have so far been associated with levers that are of a structural nature. The question arises to what extent cultural aspects should be seen as independent from these mechanisms and are to be seen as an area of leverage in itself.

The Leverage of Culture:

Organisational culture is a mode of university functioning rather than a mechanism. Culture, is the sense of shared meanings, collective norms, and views on interaction and collaboration. It is also of great importance in providing the normative glue, that holds the organisation together.

Maslowski (1995) identified three aspects of organisational culture namely:

- a. *The substance of direction of a culture:* In university effectiveness, this emphasises two basic substantive dimensions namely; achievement-oriented ethos and a safe orderly climate.
- b. *The homogeneity of the culture:* This is the degree to which the organisational culture is shared among the members of the organisation. This aspect of organisational culture is specifically linked to universities, which have been described as loosely coupled academic bureaucracies, and even organised anarchies. Although there are some important general factors like common training and a relatively stable tool base of skills inherent in the concept of the professional bureaucracy, enstrengthening consistency of practice and the cohesion among academic staff is seen as an important factor of increasing effectiveness.

c. *The strength of the culture:* This is the degree to which cultural elements more or less coercively influence the attitudes and behaviours of the members of an organisation. The strength of the organisational culture is seen as a relative phenomenon. Given the supposedly loosely coupled nature of universities some degree of strengthening the culture will generally be seen as conducive to increased effectiveness.

From this discussion it can be deduced that operational measures (levers) can be discerned and directly influence organisational culture. Most of the structural mechanisms and levers discussed earlier have cultural implication. For example, synoptic planning and bureaucracy call for unity of purpose and harmonious cooperation

The choice perspective encompasses value conflicts between individual and organisational goals and the metaphor. The learning organisation implies openness to new developments and participative planning. Therefore, one can take the position that culture can be changed indirectly, through structural modifications. Schein (1985) dismisses several other indirect mechanisms to change organisational culture; apart from structural design or redesign and common procedures. He identified five direct mechanisms:

- a. Priorities set by organisation leaders.
- b. The leaders' reaction to critical events
- c. The enactment of desired behaviour
- d. The setting of norms and standards of delivering rewards and providing status.
- e. Criteria with respect to hiring and firing.

In the light of the discussion about direct mechanisms distinguished by Schein rather enforce the impression that culture follows structure. The question that arises is: "Which arrangements exist for activities like priority setting, being explicit on desired behaviour, students and criteria setting?". It seems the question as to which degree they exist and what their substantive direction is a matter of structure rather than culture.

Conclusive Remarks

From the earlier discussions, it can be concluded that work in university education, and the implications of university effectiveness knowledge base for improvement-oriented university management, has to be seen in terms of general orientation rather than precise recipes. Where policies of decentralization put certain premium on university management, university effectiveness provides a counterbalance by emphasising leadership. Some authors who define educational leadership say more about structural conditions surrounding the instructions process, Whereas others are more focused on cultural aspects. According to Irwin (1986) the following aspects of educational leaders are very essential in university effectiveness.

The University Leader:

- a- functions as an initiator and co-ordinator of the improvement of the instructions programmes;
- b- states clear mission of the university or units;
- c- has a task oriented attitude;
- d- establishes clear objectives;
- e- supports innovation strategies;
- f- stimulates effective instruction;
- g- is quite visible in the university or units;
- h- sees to it that students progress is monitored regularly;
- i- delegates routine tasks to others.

In addition, Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) identified cultural aspects of educational leadership as:

- a. stimulation of an achievement oriented university policies;
- b. commitment to all types of academic decisions in the university;
- c. stimulating co-operation relationship among academic staff, non academic staff and students in order to realise a joint commitment to the achievement-oriented university mission;
- d. advertising the central mission of the university and obtaining support of external supporters and stakeholders.

In more recent views on educational leadership, inspired by the concept of the learning organisation, motivating staff by providing incentives and creating consensus on issues concerning the university is emphasised. Transactional leadership and transformational

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