A CASE STUDY: VALIDATING THE ORGANIZATIONAL UNIVERSE MODEL (OUM®)

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on the validation of the Organizational Universe Model (OUM) posited as a holistic approach towards sustainable organizational success (Becker, Hallcom & Herrera, 2014). Through an initial case study evaluation, the OUM was validated as an evaluative model for an organization’s current state as well as its ability to attain sustainable success. Through the application of an International Organization for Standards (ISO) based evaluative framework, each component of the OUM was analyzed and examined as to its maturity and viability. Consistent with the preceding research, all aspects of the OUM are required to be in synchronous harmony so as to maximize the organization’s potential success. While the initial research was based upon a conceptual meta-analysis resulting in the creation of the OUM, this research validated its viability through an initial longitudinally based case study of an existent organization. Further development and application of the model is warranted to evolve the qualitative instruments and measures herein, while continuing to validate the interdependency of each of the OUM elements (and force fields) for sustainable organizational success.

Keywords: High performance teams, Organizational culture/climate, Team transformation, Leadership, Followership, Core Values, Goals and Objectives, Sustainable Success

1. INTRODUCTION

The Organizational Universe Model (OUM) (Figure 1) was introduced as a holistic approach for examining, analyzing and evaluating an organization’s ability to achieve sustainable success (Becker, Hallcom & Herrera, 2014). The underlying premise and theoretical construct posited that the sustainable success for an organization was dependent on the appropriate alignment of key elements (planets) that included leadership, followership, team constructs, espoused and ingrained beliefs (including value’s, mission and vision), as well as stated organizational goals and objectives. This proper alignment, referred to as syzygy (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015) reflects optimal alignment of the planets with appropriate tension provided via the force fields. The inherent interaction and dependency upon each element was concluded to impact and potentially forecast the organization’s ability to not only achieve success, but ensure its sustainability for an elongated period of time. The model has been updated (from its original introduction) to reflect the “tension” created via the “force fields” discovered during the execution of this research, as well as the existence of syzygy resulting in sustainable success; additional potential impact of negative, neutral or positive influences of the force fields has been expanded.
Based on the preceding research, validation through a series of case studies was warranted to add credibility and validation to the OUM. The research herein is a follow on validation through an initial case study application of the original OUM. Through the application of ISO9000© based qualitative functional maturity stages (defined and discussed in the subsequent section), the organization was reviewed, analyzed and evaluated as to its ability to achieve sustainable success, while highlighting those elements requiring substantive attention and transformation. As provided in the summary and conclusions, the tension inherent within the force fields was evaluated as to the negative, neutral or positive impact with the underlying elements (planets) in the OUM, and a thematic analysis provided suggestions of either moving forward in the maturation cycle, or having to revert back to prior stages for a more positive impact for sustainable success. Force field analysis reveals that in any change process driving forces and restraining forces create a dynamic tension, thus influencing the rate, nature, and success of transformation (Sanger, 2008; Wagner, Morton, Dainty, & Burns, 2011).

2. FUNCTIONAL MATURITY STAGES FOR THE OUM

Functional alignment can be considered as the ability to apply stages of maturation (a capability maturity model) to various organizational elements (Becker, 2007; Curtis, Hefley & Miller, 2002; Wademan, Spuches. & Doughty, 2007). The defined maturity model for this research utilized a five step process similar to that often related to ISO 9000 standards. The five stages (Figure 2) highlight a progression with attendant definitions for each stage of alignment and maturity for each of the elements within the defined OUM.
**AdHoc/Chaotic** is the first phase of maturation and is typified by processes which are not necessarily repeatable nor consistent throughout the organization - each area or person has their own process for similar functions; **Repetable** is indicative of existent processes that may not be fully ingrained within and throughout the organizational construct but are frequently repeated and/or adopted by individuals or departments for each of the OUM elements (Engle, 2011); **Defined** represents more formalized manifestations for each of the elements that are also repeatable in nature and are consistent throughout the organization - this is normally typified through the documentation of these processes that are used; **Managed** highlights a more advanced stage of maturation and is also typified by consistent communication between the elements of the OUM model in the organizational construct; and, **Optimal** represents that state where the force fields are in consistent harmony with all of the elements within the organization (Becker, 2007).

The ability for each of the elements (*planets*) within the OUM manifests as an inertia driven model (tension within the *force fields* of the model: communication and organizational culture/climate) similar to the *flywheel* effect (Collins, 2001) whereby the more functionally mature and aligned all of the elements are within the construct, the easier it propels itself forward. The forward propulsion could be positive (+) in nature, neutral (0) in nature, or negative in nature (-); regardless, it is propelled forward along the alignment and maturity stages. Dependent upon the typology of characteristics, the forward propulsion could be mitigated for negative and/or neutral tendencies indicating a misalignment; while positive thematic characteristics would provide a more sustainable positive inertia indicative of alignment.

Through the application of these stages of alignment and maturation, a case study was conducted to review, analyze and evaluate the current state of an existent organization as well as its potential to induce the *flywheel* effect while attaining or striving for syzygy (sustainable success). Thematic analysis was required to evaluate the positive, negative or neutral characteristics for each of the *planets* as well as their alignment based upon the tension inherent within the *force fields*. In order to progress up the functional alignment stages towards syzygy (sustainable success), it became evident that positive (and potentially neutral) results for the element (*planet*) undergoing evaluation could/would result in alignment towards syzygy (this was heavily dependent on the tension from the *force fields* resulting in the alignment or misalignment). It also became evident, that the natural progression forward, and ultimately alignment would be attainable, but would be associated with potentially additional costs to ensure its potential success.

Thematic analysis which displayed negative tendencies for the elements (*planets*) indicated misalignment and would require that the element revert back to the beginning of the functional alignment and maturity stages in order to inculcate a more positive (or minimally) neutral set of thematic characteristics. Although somewhat daunting and undesirable on the surface, it was concluded that stages must be positively solidified for the appropriate level of alignment resulting in syzygy (sustainable success) (Curtis, Heffley & Miller, 2002).

### 3. CASE STUDY ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The organization of this case study was a manufacturer in the healthcare industry (i.e. pharmaceuticals, medical devices, biologics, etc.) which are distributed in the United States and other countries including Canada and Europe. As this organization participates in a regulated sector of industry and has a global presence, failure to meet the regulatory requirements in multiple geographies has resulted in significant compliance issues. In order to address the compliance issues, the organization is heavily involved in numerous activities to mitigate claims of adulterated and misbranded products, avoidance of product recalls, and minimization of additional penalties being levied for not complying with respective regulatory requirements (Schnoll, 2013).

Performing root cause analyses and implementing corrective actions to address the compliance issues are a substantial part of the remediation activities. Not unlike many organizations involved in remediation plans, a significant amount of the strategic and tactical activities are directly linked and/or driven by these remediation plans. As a result of this, the key organizational elements (referred to as organizational planets in the OUM) and the organizational environmental factors (referred to as force fields in the OUM)
are impacted (Becker, Hallcom & Herrera, 2014). Therefore, this organization was chosen as an initial case study to validate the OUM as an evaluative model for the organization’s current state as well as its ability to attain alignment resulting in syzygy (sustainable success).

4. APPLICATION OF THE FUNCTIONAL MATURITY STAGES

Through the application of the Functional Maturity Stages (Figure 2), leadership, followership, core values, mission, vision, team constructs, objectives and goals were evaluated as to their development (as the “planets”); these were then examined, analyzed and evaluated as to their alignment relative to the “force fields” of organizational culture/climate and communication. Based on the thematic research and analysis, many of the planets and force fields are at formative stages, and based on the subsequent discovery indicating negative characteristics (see Tables 1 & 2 below), these stages may be indicative of less than positive adoption of existent processes and actions. Following is the summary table of force fields and their assessment based on the current planet alignment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORCE FIELD</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>TENSION</th>
<th>DISCOVERY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Stage 3: DEFINED</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>“Yes” people; turf wars; silos; weak accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Climate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Stage 2: REPEATABLE</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Uni-directional downward; employee concerns rarely acknowledged; “bad news” not welcome; lack of trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Force Field Assessment of Case Study Organization

Through the analysis, the following table captures the planet construction for the case study organization which impacted the force field determination and assessment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLANETS</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>TENSION</th>
<th>DISCOVERY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Stage 3: DEFINED</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Articulation, coaching &amp; mentoring lacking; Strong desire to appease executive management with words (not actions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followership</td>
<td>Stage 2: REPEATABLE</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Non-existent in some areas; infighting; lack of respect for other areas and leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core values,</td>
<td>Stage 3: DEFINED</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Viewed as a backdrop; little belief and not ingrained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission, vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Constructs</td>
<td>Stage 1: AD HOC</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Dysfunctional with little adherence to roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives &amp;</td>
<td>Stage 3: DEFINED</td>
<td>MISALIGNED (-)</td>
<td>Individual/departmental continually changing so they can be met; not aligned with organizational goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Planet Assessment of Case Study Organization

The following figure represents the identification for each planet and force field evaluated for the case study organization in the context of the Organizational Universe Model:
Ultimately, based on the assessment of the planets and force fields, Syzygy (sustained success) appears to sit outside the model as external factors (not internal accountability) and it is what the organization attributes to its current challenges and failures. What has become apparent is that “sustained success” is not congruent with “unchanged”, and requires further exploration in future research. The negative characteristic tendencies and ultimately misalignment among the planets and force fields appear to be contributing to the inconsistencies (therefore, while “unchanged”, it is not necessarily positioned for “sustained success”. It has been identified at either DEFINED or REPEATABLE stages, although it remains questionable as to their sustainability, and therefore would probably require “one step back” to move forward towards syzygy (and true sustainable success).

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY FOR SUSTAINED SUCCESS

Moving forward towards viability for sustained success requires that the organization make the investment in changing certain behavior and practices that influence the interaction of the planets and force fields (Cronshaw & McCulloch, 2008). Applying the OUM illustrates the strategy of working the key elements somewhat in tandem while maintaining a given tension between the planets and force fields as opposed to addressing the key elements independently. Fixing a dysfunctional organization requires insights into the relatively tangible aspects of their culture that is reflected in the behaviors that members believe are expected of them (Balthazard, Cooke & Potter, 2006). Understanding these behaviors enable the organization to address many of the cultural aspects that impact syzygy and ultimately attaining sustained success.

Successful organizations have leadership that is forward looking, adapting to changing conditions and concerned with cultural processes that make it possible for the organization to meet goals and expectations (Pacquin & Kopylay, 2007; Schultz, 2013). Schultz’s perspective on successful organizations ties together the inter-related nature of the key elements of leadership, followership, values, goals, and objectives. As an initial step for teams within the organization to move beyond the AdHoc/Chaotic stage, these teams would benefit by adopting Sanger’s (2001) approach to creating a cohesive group that allows individuals to develop while simultaneously working to strengthen the whole. The assessment of this organization has identified opportunities for individual development, departmental development, and cross-functional team development.
6. CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW ON RESEARCH

Albert Einstein asserted that the best way to predict the future is to create it; Peter Drucker, Buckminster Fuller, and others shared this perspective. Similarly, Scharmer's Theory U (2009; 2013) posits that true transformational change occurs when we lead from the future as it emerges by cultivating and harnessing collective synergy. The OUM model presents a tangible tool for diagnosing the current state of organizational syzygy and charting a course for transformative change. Follow-on research and publications consider the contributions of chaos theory, open systems versus closed systems, and driving versus restraining forces to the OUM model.

REFERENCES


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Dr. Gerard F. Becker is a noted management consultant, university professor and industry change catalyst. He earned his Ph.D. in Organization and Management from Capella University and is currently the MBA Director at Nyack College; he is also a frequent visiting professor at New York University, Keller Graduate School of Management, Kaplan University, Central Michigan University and LIM College. Dr. Becker has been instrumental in major business process initiatives as an enabler of innovation while mentoring and evolving emerging senior leaders in various financial, information technology and manufacturing organizations. He has co-authored a book on management consulting; is currently co-
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