

Abstract

Jacobsson, C. 2001. Managing Human Service Organizations. Department of psychology, Göteborg University, Sweden.

The aim of this thesis was to study management in human service organizations with regard to aspects of organizational strategy, organizational structure and individual behavior. The thesis is based on four studies, Study I deal with the strategic perspective, Study II explores organizational structure in terms of coordination of work, Studies III and IV focus on aspects related to individual behavior in operative work. All studies had a cross-sectional design, using questionnaires, and Study I was complemented by interviews. Altogether 1811 individuals from 80 organizations or units were included in the four studies, with response rates from 54 to 89%.

Study I examined the work of management teams in both human service organizations (health care) and three other industries. The results showed that Swedish management teams, though somewhat large, were well structured, formalized and somewhat conflict avoiding. There was a desire for more challenging tasks such as strategy and policy issues on behalf of routine questions. Some characteristics of health care management teams emerged in comparisons with teams from the other industries. They appeared to be more transparent, proved by more openness with regard to meeting reports and secrecy, they were also more focused on sharing information and (together with teams from culture/media-industry) less concentrated on strategic issues.

Study II examined coordination of work as perceived by schoolteachers. Mintzberg's (1979) 'coordinating mechanisms' were defined and operationalized as 'coordinating strategies'. The results indicate that 'Professional consideration' was the main coordinating strategy in Swedish schools, followed by 'Striving for goals' and 'Mutual adjustment'. Schools that mainly coordinated by 'Striving for goals' seemed to have lesser coordination problems than schools that mainly coordinated by 'Professional consideration'.

Study III aimed at elucidating possible ways to reduce unnecessary stress and stimulate feelings of mastery among Swedish comprehensive school teachers. The results showed that teachers' stress reactions were best predicted by perceived work demands, pupil misbehavior and negative feedback. Feelings of mastery were best predicted by teachers' learning orientation, positive feedback and goal clarity. Further, perceived work demands seemed to be best predicted by pupil misbehavior, co-ordination problems and (low) work control.

Study IV investigated consequences of positive and negative feedback for role ambiguity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment among human service workers at a public insurance agency, a social rehabilitation agency and a psychiatric hospital. Using a structural equation approach, the results indicated that positive feedback reduced role ambiguity, while negative feedback contributed to it. Further, role ambiguity seemed to be strongly (negative) related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, there was no support for a direct relationship between the feedback factors and job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Instead the relationships between feedback and work attitudes seemed to be mediated by role ambiguity. Some general conclusions on managing human service organizations in Sweden, based on the four studies, are discussed.

Keywords: Human service organizations; management teams; coordination of work; stress management; goals; feedback; control at work

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ISSN 1101-718X
ISRN GU/PSYK/AVH--82--SE
ISBN 91-628-4579-9