ORGANIZATIONAL SYNC

Making Your Job Work for You

Barbara Forisha-Kovach

with Randy Kovach and Glenn Morris

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A SPECTRUM BOOK

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Preface

Organizational synchrony as a concept—and all its ramifications and applications—developed from many meetings and informal discussions with friends and colleagues for a period of over two years. Early in 1980, when Randy and I began to explore the idea of developing a consulting firm committed to improving both individual and organizational effectiveness, we invited others pursuing similar goals to share their time and ideas with us. We spent long afternoons and evenings with many of these people. In the process we agreed that we wanted to develop programs for both individuals and organizations that would help human beings live more satisfactorily and productively within their formal and informal systems. Consequently, in September of 1980, we incorporated under the name of Human Systems Analysis.

Still, however, we did not have a way to conceptualize our purpose in working with individuals and organizations. We were searching for a term that would be a theoretical focus for our way of thinking about human beings in their systems. Finally, when about a dozen of us were gathered together after an arduous two-day conference, we arrived at the term *organizational synchrony* to symbolize our commitment to improving the "degree of fit" between individuals and organizations. Our purpose, as we saw it, was to increase synchrony between individuals and their personal and organizational systems.

Since the development of the concept in the fall of 1980, we have come to recognize that the concept of synchrony is not as simple as it first seemed, and that there are many permutations of synchrony between individuals and organizations. We have elaborated on the concept and developed a theoretical structure that includes both adaptation and

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individual growth as well as organizational change. Yet we return always to the idea that everything works better when individuals are for the most part in synchrony with their organization.

The ideas in this book are not mine alone. Most of them were developed over time with various individuals. However, the greater part of the theoretical work came out of sessions in which Randy, Glenn, and I met twice a month for a period of almost a year. A pattern emerged in our discussions. Randy provided the overview for each concept and each development. In broad strokes, he sketched out the path that we would take. I refined the ideas and placed them in a theoretical and contextual format. Glenn then evaluated and challenged the ideas and helped us to apply them in specific situations, often creating materials to help the ideas come to life. In this sense, this book is as much Randy's and Glenn's as it is mine.

Furthermore, almost all our ideas have been tested both in research and in practice. During the course of the past two years, we have conducted four major research studies and developed and implemented programs in two major corporations. We have developed the means of measuring synchrony in assessment instruments and confirmed the hypothesis that individuals are more satisfied and productive when they are in synchrony with their organizations. We have used the concept of synchrony in training sessions with dozens of corporate managers and have their testimony that the applications of our theoretical framework are useful in their own work.

It is not always, however, the specific concept of organizational synchrony to which individuals respond. For some people, our conceptualization of personality styles is most pertinent to their own experience. For others, our explication of organizational structures has been a useful handle for discussing behaviors in organizations. Some have been challenged by our explanation of motivation in organizations and have as often debated as accepted particular theoretical points. Still others, of course, have found that what we have to say has been said before and have challenged the newness of our theoretical orientation.

Our theory of organizational synchrony is not new and has many predecessors and counterparts in the writings on organizational behavior and development. There are many theoretical giants, such as Chris Argyris, Rensis Likert, Douglas MacGregor, and others, who have led the way, and there are few if any who do not follow in their footsteps. We are therefore pursuing a direction common to many who have considered the necessities of organizational change in the years since World War II. On the other hand, we have conceptualized this direction in a new way and have found that our formulation has been an exciting and

useful way to understand individual and organizational behavior. We hope that it may prove to be so for the reader as well.

This book is written for several audiences. It is primarily intended for individuals who want to learn more about themselves and the organizations in which they work. It is written also for managers who have the opportunity to shape their work setting and to increase opportunities for their subordinates. Finally, it is written for consultants and professionals in the field who may find a new way to examine organizational behavior useful in their own work with organizations.

As a consequence, particular chapters may be more interesting to certain readers than others. Individuals seeking to increase their own understanding of human behavior may be most drawn to the chapters that delineate personality styles in Part One and those that focus on individual change in Part Three. Managers may be most interested in the chapters that discuss organizational structures in Parts One, Two, and Three, and those that focus on managerial behavior in Part Two. Academicians and consultants may emphasize the chapters that give brief reviews of research studies in both Parts One and Two. The chapters in this book, therefore, may not all be of equal interest to particular readers, but we hope each reader will find chapters that are of particular relevance to his or her own situation.

Finally, each chapter is followed by an exercise that leads individual readers through the steps emphasized in the preceding chapter. The exercises are designed for individuals rather than groups and should be equally pertinent to all readers.

The organization of the book parallels our development of the theory of organization synchrony and thus fits with our experience. As we have shaped this material to our situation, we hope that each reader will select and highlight information that is most relevant to the his or her experience.

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helping us develop early instruments and other materials. Alan Davenport has recently challenged and supported our ideas and forced us to clarify unnecessary ambiguities. Wendy Cole also read the manuscript carefully and made cogent and helpful comments based on her corporate experience. Her advice was very useful in the final preparation of the manuscript. Finally, I appreciate the careful reading of material by Pat Materka, Carol Dworkin, and Gail Bavol, all of whom offered useful commentary as this work was in process.

My continuing appreciation goes to the staff of Prentice-Hall for their editorial support and encouragement, most particularly to Lynne Lumsden, who has seen me through more than one manuscript and has provided the gift of discriminating judgment—highlighting important passages and recommending the deletion of others.

This book, perhaps more than most, is the work of many people. It is tempting to share responsibility for errors of commission or omission with them as well, but as the final writer of these pages, that responsibility must be mine alone. It is my hope that the readers find the perusal of this book as exciting and provoking as did those of us who participated in its creation.

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Contents

INCREASING ORGANIZATIONAL SYNCHRONY

PART ONE

THE CONCEPT OF SYNCHRONY

INDIVIDUAL ORIENTATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Culture patterns and the values and beliefs of an individual can, but need not, coincide. Where they do not coincide, an individual will experience a strain between his own inclinations and what the culture of his group requires. Where they do coincide, people will feel at ease in their environment without the experience of situational strains.

MARIA JAHODA, "A Social-
Psychological Approach to the
Study of Culture," *Human
Relations*, 1961, p. 25.

Joanne is a vibrant, talkative young woman who is rarely still. She radiates enthusiasm and interest in both people and ideas. Yet today she enters our workshop and her movements are jerky rather than smooth; she is scowling rather than smiling. Questioned about her demeanor, she reports a list of work frustrations, winding up with, "If I could just kill my boss!" As the head of a program for training and development, she has brought many innovative programs to her institution. Yet, when confronted with bureaucratic red tape and office politics, she becomes angry and frustrated.

Allen is a dark, saturnine man who keeps mostly to himself and has a reputation for not being particularly fond of people. Allen is, however, extremely articulate and is valued for his assistance in straightening out bureaucratic tangles and writing concise reports. Allen works for a large organization in which he is supposed to make public presentations about the company's product, and also write reports on the product's viability and marketability. The latter he does well; the former he does poorly. Allen has just been fired from his job and does not understand where he has failed.

Both Allen and Joanne are typical of individuals who are out of synchrony with their organization. Joanne's boss, for example, values productivity and procedural conformity and is not enthusiastic about innovative programming. Joanne, in contrast, is always looking for an opportunity to use initiative, to create something new, to do things differently. She expects to be able to use her own ingenuity. The characteristics preferred by Joanne's boss, however, represent the expectations of her division. Joanne's expectations, therefore, do not match those of her immediate work unit. Thus, we might say that Joanne is *not in synchrony* with her organization.

Allen, on the other hand, works for a corporation that values initiative and creativity. Although these qualities are rarely stated as criteria for employment, it has been made clear that individuals who do not create something new have no place in the company. Allen, on the other hand, is content with the rules and regulations of the institution as they are stated. He is excellent at writing, editing, and straightening out thick prose. He does not, however, see the need for generating enthusiasm in his marketing audiences. "If they like it, they'll buy it," is his motto. His expectations are that he will do well whatever he is told. His company, on the other hand, expects him to create his own job. He too is out of synchrony with his organization.

Being in synchrony with one's organization means that the expectations of the individual and the organization match. It means that the

characteristics valued by the organization, whether verbalized or not, are the characteristics exemplified by the individual. We may say, in fact, that an organization has a "valued personality type." Individuals who approximate this type are "in sync" and individuals who deviate from this type are "out of sync" with their work environment.

In the work world there are organizations that value almost every type or personality style. Within large companies, different divisions may value different styles. In small organizations, a single style may be highly valued. When individuals have found an organization that suits their own pattern, their capabilities are being used to the fullest. On the other hand, when individuals and organizations are mismatched, energy that could be used for productivity is absorbed by frustration and bewilderment.

Individuals live within organizations and other human systems. (We will use *organization* to denote a formal or institutionalized human system.) They attempt to sort out their own contradictory desires and to discern those of the corporation. When the direction of the individual and that of the organization coincide and the individual fulfills personal goals at the same time as organizationai goals are met, the individual and organization are in step with each other. In other words, they are in synchrony.

In order to arrive at this goal, individuals and organizations must both have some sense of their direction—must have defined their priorities and chosen a course. Individual and organizational systems cannot be in synchrony when they are torn by conflicting inner forces. Once internal harmony is achieved, however, the search for outer synchrony— that between individuals and *all* the systems in which they live—may begin. Two examples that describe individuals in sync with their organizations follow.

Ellen is clearly in sync with her job. Head of a small unit, she is responsible for supervising eight people, for keeping the books straight, and for maintaining connections with other units. She makes decisions about immediate day-to-day concerns, but other matters are decided by those above her. A warm, likable woman, Ellen is smooth and at ease in her work relations and competent and able in her job. Liked and respected by all who know her, Ellen exemplifies the effective worker. Her manager said recently that Ellen was "one of the finest people I've ever met."

Jim is also in sync with his job. In a university setting that allows for free-floating decision-making among the instructional staff, Jim is a lively and entertaining theorist. Occasionally at odds with the administrative staff, his brief contacts with them are minimal. His time is largely spent illuminating students—and sometimes his colleagues—on the his-

tory of a bygone age. Widely admired and respected, Jim is completely at home in the university structure.

In short, organizational synchrony allows for productive individuals of all varieties to seek the place in which their talents may best be used. In a time of social and economic transformation, when much that was certain is no longer so, individuals can increase their productivity and satisfaction by matching themselves with an organization.

In the chapters that follow, we elaborate on our understanding of individuals and organizations and the resulting synchrony between the two. We begin with the importance of individual perceptions and the shape that we give our own worlds. Then we turn to organizational structures and examine perceptions of the systems in which we live. In the following three chapters, we examine variations on the theme of personality styles and describe the behavior patterns of different groups of individuals. Finally, we examine the degree of fit between personality styles and organizational structures, and the relationship that the degree of fit, or *organizational synchrony*, bears to individual satisfaction and productivity in the workplace.