
Relationship outcomes in an organisation with a mechanical structure

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Abstract

This study tests the boundaries of theories about the effects of organisational structure on relationship outcomes by examining the relationship between a military base and the military members and family members who are stationed there. This study found that contrary to previous theorising, a mechanical structure alone does not result in low relationship outcomes for employees in every context. In addition, this study presents the concept of relationship goggles to explain the behaviour of viewing occurrences that could affect a relationship through the lens of what one already thinks about an organisation. This is also the first study to empirically confirm that control mutuality can be high despite a low amount of control in a relationship when trust is high.

Introduction

The 15-year, \$400,000 Excellence Study resulted in the identification of best practices that would likely result in meeting communication objectives, achieving high job satisfaction among employees, and reducing costs from government regulation, pressure campaigns, and lawsuits (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). These characteristics of excellence were not designed to be a foolproof recipe for communication success. Rather, they serve as “a set of principles that...units can use to generate ideas for specific practices in their own organizations” (p. 7). The characteristics of excellence are organised by recommendations at the programme level (i.e., strategic management), department level (e.g., direct reporting to senior management), and organisational level (e.g., complex

environment with pressure from activists). One of the six recommendations for the organisational level suggests that an organisation’s structure should be organic rather than mechanical (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002).

As operationalised by the Excellence Study, an organic structure, as opposed to a mechanical structure, enables employees to personally influence an organisation’s decisions and policies, and it provides them with the autonomy to make decisions about their work that don’t need to be cleared with people at higher levels of the organisation (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). The first excellence book served as a comprehensive review of literature in strategic communication and related disciplines such as business; based on this extensive research, J. E. Grunig (1992) speculated that excellent communication “probably cannot exist within mechanical structures” (p. 229). This statement is supported by several studies (e.g., Boshoff & Mels, 1995; Kim, 2007; Schminke, Ambrose, & Cropanzano, 2000). This paper investigates part of the claim that excellence probably cannot exist within mechanical structures by examining the military, which is an organisation with a mechanical structure. To achieve depth in an exploratory study, a rural Air Force base served as the organisation that was examined. The outcome of excellence that was explored was the ability to meet communication objectives, which was narrowed to the area of cultivating strong relationships with members of the military and their spouses.

Cultivating strong relationships is important to the military, considering that an outcome of strong relationships is retention (e.g., Bruning, 2002; Gallicano, 2009). The military spends about \$20,000 per person on recruiting,

training, and screening for basic skills (Clark et al., 1999), so efforts to retain soldiers are financially justified, beyond a primary ethical justification to treat publics as “ends in themselves, rather than as means” (Bowen, 2006, p. 334). Retention used to be a significant challenge for the military. A study from 1999 found that approximately 30 to 35 percent of enlisted personnel left the military before completing their first term of employment (Clark et al., 1999). Significant causes of soldier attrition include soldiers’ intense workload and the challenges military families confront (Castro & Adler, 2000, cited in Britt & Dawson, 2005).

Some of the challenges military members and their families face include frequent life changes (e.g., moves), deployment, the possibility that the military member is killed or injured, and relatively low wages (Black, 1993; Sanchez, Bray, Vincus, & Bann, 2004). Given these challenges, married military members’ decision to stay in the military is strongly influenced by their spouses’ opinions (Bourg & Segal, 1999; Lakhani & Hoover, 1997). In fact, using resources to show soldiers that the military cares about their families has been found to increase soldiers’ commitment (Bourg & Segal, 1999), a finding supported by another study that concluded that establishing a family-friendly culture influences soldier retention (Huffman, Culbertson, & Castro, 2008). Thus, although intense workload and family challenges are significant causes of attrition, research suggests that building strong relationships with family members can increase soldier retention. Although retention was a significant problem back in 1999, for the fiscal year 2009, retention objectives for all branches of the military were met or surpassed, which could be the result of cultivating strong relationships, having a bad economy, or both (Grisham, 2009). Although retention objectives were met, there is always room for improvement.

Through interviews and a focus group, this study explores the relationship that a military base has with employees living on the base and their spouses. The purpose of this study is

to discover the ways in which previous theorising about the connection between a mechanical structure and relationship outcomes holds true or does not hold true for a type of organisation that is expected to have a mechanical structure. Relationship outcomes research can help communication professionals guide an organisation’s actions towards the development of beneficial, lasting relationships, which enhance effectiveness (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). Ultimately, this study provides insight into the organisational level of operations, which is an understudied area of strategic communication.

Literature review

Attention has been drawn to the negative consequences that arise from conflicts between work and family commitments (Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, & Sha, 2008). Some organisations have moved toward a family-friendly culture to support employees’ personal lives (Kossek & Lobel, 1996). The military recognises the need “to keep the whole military family happy” to increase member retention and to keep deployed forces focused on their mission (Scherer, 1998, p. 1). The U.S. military has established several programs to support the personal lives of military employees and family members (Kozaryn, 1997). For example, Air Force bases offer military spouses free 15-minute phone calls, oil changes, town hall meetings about deployment situations, and free day care for one day each month (Scherer, 1998). The Air Force’s Youth Action Program for at-risk children of military families helps military families cope with stresses associated with a turbulent military environment (Ansay, Perkins, & Nelson, 2004).

Relationship outcomes

Relationship outcomes are a type of outcome that results from communication. They are defined as the consequences that alter the environment and secure, maintain, or adjust goals both within and outside of organisations (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000). Relationship outcomes are a key indicator of the success of the communication function (Ki & Hon, 2007).

When evaluating organisation-public relationships, communication scholars and practitioners can use the relationship outcomes of control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction, which are used in this study (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999).

Control mutuality refers to how satisfied people are with the amount of influence they have in their relationship with an organisation (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). Healthy, stable relationships typically result from sharing control in the relationship; however, one party could be satisfied with minimal control when it trusts others in the relationship (J. E. Grunig, 2002). Satisfaction increases when organisations share power with publics early in the decision process (Ray, Dozier, Broom, & Hofstetter, 2006). For companies, at least, control mutuality scores tend to be lower than scores for other relationship qualities, suggesting that many companies' publics are unsatisfied with the amount of power they have in the relationship (Scott, 2007). Control mutuality is important to evaluating relationships because it reflects the widespread occurrence of power asymmetry in organisation-public relationships (Huang, 2001). More work is needed to adequately theorise power in the strategic communication literature (Holtzhausen, 2007).

The degree of trust depends on the extent to which an organisation is perceived as 1) being competent, 2) keeping its promises, and 3) being fair. Concepts to consider with regard to fairness come from the organisational justice literature. Distributive justice is "the perceived fairness of decision outcomes such as pay", procedural justice is "the perceived fairness of the procedures used to make decisions", and interactional justice is "the perceived fairness of how decisions are enacted by authority figures", including dignified, respectful treatment (the interpersonal component) and informative, honest explanations (the informational component) (Kim, 2007, pp. 171-172).

Commitment refers to the degree to which a public feels justified in spending time and effort to maintain the relationship (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). Three types of commitment

include normative, continuance, and affective (Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000). People with a positive normative commitment stay because they feel a moral obligation to help an organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). A public with continuance commitment has self-serving reasons to stay in an organisation, such as financial benefits or social connections (Gruen et al., 2000). People with a positive affective commitment stay because they feel emotionally bonded to an organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Satisfaction refers to the degree to which a public feels amiably toward an organisation because the organisation fulfils positive expectations for the relationship (J. E. Grunig, 2002). Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson (1999) and Thomlinson (2000) reinforced this concept by concluding that meeting or exceeding expectations results in satisfaction. Whereas control mutuality and trust could be cognitive qualities, satisfaction is an affective quality (Huang, 2001).

Researchers have found that the order of importance for relationship outcomes depends on the context and public. For example, students in Ki and Hon's (2007) study perceived control mutuality and satisfaction to affect their attitude toward their university more than the other relationship outcomes. Students in Hon and Brunner's (2002) study, however, reported that control mutuality was one of the weakest indicators of their relationship with university administrators.

Organisational structure

It is generally accepted that the four most cited structural characteristics of organisations include "centralization (the extent to which decision making is concentrated at the top of the organisation), formalization (the number of formal rules and regulations and the extent to which an organization follows them), stratification (the extent to which rewards and recognition are concentrated on a few people), and complexity (the extent of specialization)" (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 226). Usually, these structural characteristics go hand-in-hand in an organisation; for example, a mechanical

organisation tends to be “centralized, formalized, stratified, and less complex” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 226). The main differences between organic and mechanical structures can be summarised as “the amount of autonomy given employees and the extent to which all employees participate in the management of an organisation” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 226). Certainly, the military has a more mechanical structure than an organic one.

Relationship outcomes are favourably influenced by having an organic structure; thus, it should not be surprising that having an organic structure is a characteristic of excellence (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). Although control mutuality is based on satisfaction with the amount of control in the relationship rather than the amount of control one has, organisations are more likely to achieve high control mutuality scores when they share power by allowing employees to influence decisions (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). In fact, several questions used to measure control mutuality ask respondents about the amount of influence they have, such as “I believe people like me have influence on the decision-makers of this organization” (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999, p. 29). Members of the military and their spouses are unlikely to have much control in the relationship, and it will be interesting to see if they are satisfied with the amount of control they have.

In addition, an organic organisational structure is positively correlated with trusting an employer, while a mechanical organisational structure is negatively correlated with trusting an employer (Kim, 2007). Reinforcing these findings, a study found that perceived fairness, which is a dimension of trust, is negatively related to centralisation (i.e., the concentration of decision making at the top of an organisation) and formalisation (i.e., the extent to which rules influence actions), which are two characteristics of mechanical organisations (Schminke et al., 2000, cited in Kim, 2007). Specifically, the area of fairness that could be compromised by a mechanical structure is

procedural fairness (Schminke et al., 2000, cited in Kim, 2007). These findings are interesting to consider in the context that soldiers are put in a position of putting their lives on the line as part of the military, which likely involves a high degree of trust in terms of competence and fairness. If military members significantly trust their employers, then the relationship between the military and soldiers would serve as an exception to the findings of previous studies because the military has a mechanical structure.

Another benefit of having an organic culture is commitment. Employees who are involved in decisions that affect them have higher levels of commitment than employees who are excluded from the decision-making process (Boshoff & Mels, 1995). Given the hardships of military life and the sacrifices soldiers and their spouses are willing to make, normative commitment (i.e., commitment extending from a moral obligation) could be quite high, which would establish the military context as an exception to previous research.

Job satisfaction is also an outcome of an organic structure (Hage, 1980, Peters, 1987; both cited in J. E. Grunig, 1992), and satisfaction in the relationship is negatively related to a top-down style of management (Kim, 2007). Employees are more likely to experience personal fulfilment in their jobs when bosses “really let go”, and there is a consequent psychological incentive to perform to one’s limits when a great amount of responsibility is given (Peters, 1987, p. 451, cited in J. E. Grunig, 1992). Although military members do not have significant autonomy in their jobs, they could experience personal fulfilment if they have joined the military for reasons of normative commitment.

Given the beneficial results of an organic structure on the organisation-public relationship, it will be interesting to discover how an organisation-public relationship is affected by a mechanical structure in an organisation that is expected to have a mechanical structure. This study examines the following research question: How do military employees and their spouses perceive their relationship with their Air Force base in terms

of control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction? At the conclusion of this paper, the results of this research question are considered in light of the Excellence Study's recommendation to establish an organic structure of operation.

Method

The context of the military was chosen because the context of a study should be selected to maximise learning, and selecting a context that tests the generalisations of a theory is one way to achieve insight (Stake, 1995). Thus, the selection of the context for this study represents the strategy of maximum variation by identifying an "outlier case to see whether main patterns still hold" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28).

This study took place on a rural, remote Air Force base located in the South Central region of the United States. Of the two researchers, one had been with the Air Force for seven years at the time of this study and had experience as an Air Force employee and as the wife of an Air Force employee. The other researcher did not have experience with the military. The researchers worked together to gain the benefits of an insider's perspective and a cultural stranger's perspective. The research questions were investigated through a qualitative approach, which enabled an in-depth exploration of the issues that participants identified as important to shaping the organisation-public relationship. J. E. Grunig's (2002) guide was used for the interview protocol.

The researcher with military experience conducted 18 interviews. There were 10 interviews with military members, five with family members, and two with public affairs officers. Each interview lasted an average of 35 minutes. Unfortunately, interviews were not recorded due to a lack of equipment; however, detailed notes were taken and all quotes were confirmed with participants.

Each participant was shown a list of quotes in person or via email that he or she offered and was asked if the quotes were accurate. In addition, member checks were performed by

sharing copies of the paper with participants and receiving verification that the quotes were used in an appropriate context. Based on a central concern that emerged from the interviews, a four-person focus group was conducted, which lasted an hour, in addition to one interview with the medical commander, which lasted 30 minutes. Again, detailed notes were taken during the focus group and all quotes used in this study were confirmed with participants. During data analysis, a tentative conclusion was developed about the comparative importance of relationship outcomes for the context that was studied. This conclusion was tested and verified with seven military members. All military members had experienced deployment situations prior to the interviews and were not currently in them at the time of the interviews.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) guidelines were followed for thematic data analysis. Following line-by-line coding of the data, the relationship between each category and the subcategories contained within it was identified. Codes were revised throughout the process, and negative evidence was sought before drawing conclusions.

Results

In this paper, the term *family members* refers to spouses of military members. *Military members* consist of people who work for the Air Force base. Enlisted members are in the lower tier of the organisation, whereas officers are in the middle and upper tiers of the organisation. Officers are required to at least have bachelor's degrees. *Military staff members* refer to people in public affairs positions, as well as the base's medical group commander. The quotes in this paper are organised by the question that participants were asked. For example, all quotes under the control mutuality subhead were offered in response to the control mutuality questions from the protocol.

Control mutuality

Most family members expressed overall satisfaction with the amount of control they

have in the relationship and said that the Air Force is generally attentive to what families say. A wife of an Air Force officer said that persistence is key: "I have seen some services change because of enough people complaining about a need on the base – that makes us feel like we have some control on what goes on at this base." A mother of two and wife of an Air Force officer wanted more influence because she disliked the local school: "At this base, the school district lacks the fundamental values in education that I have seen in other states. The base has not come to aid by putting a school on the base to rectify this ongoing problem."

Although most military members were satisfied with the amount of control they have in the relationship, fewer than half of the military members interviewed said the Air Force considers their interests when making decisions. For example, when it comes to control over an Air Force member's career, a female military officer with 16 years of experience said, "They have to do what's best for the masses". A single male who is an enlisted military member agreed that control is limited: "As far as control on where we get stationed ... I have no control on those types of situations." A military staff member with more than a decade of experience expressed agreement that most of the power lies with the organisation and is concentrated in the military member's relationship with the Air Force.

Members of the focus group acknowledged some control in the relationship but mentioned having to use a chain of management to voice their concerns. A wife of an officer and mother of two small children said, "Members of management are always ready to help out, but it shouldn't take a colonel to get help". A retired female enlisted member commented, "[The Air Force] doesn't take into account your location. Large military medical facilities are located in major cities where medical care is plentiful." The Air Force base is located in a rural area. Another concern mentioned was that patients should be able to see physicians outside of the medical facility if there are

extenuating circumstances, especially involving children. Patients are referred to off-base facilities if there are no appointments available on the base. There are no provisions for appointments at alternative facilities at the patient's request. A patient is financially responsible for any unauthorised appointments. The medical group commander is working to obtain a new contract to revise the referral process.

Trust

When family members responded to questions about trust, most of them focused on medical care at the base. Most family members did not think that medical care at the base was fair. A family member who is a mother of three (and former enlisted member) stated:

The top-down organizational structure creates a feeling of resentment within the lowest tier. For example, choosing to remove hospitals from bases geographically separated from major metropolitan areas to reduce costs creates a feeling of being unimportant and in some cases expendable within the community. Members question why they are not receiving the same level of care as others in the same organization.

In this quote, a family member expresses that the organisation is not fair with regard to its decision to only have hospitals in major cities because all members of an organisation should be entitled to the same level of care.

The base's medical facility has minimal staffing, and patients rely on medical care at alternative facilities as directed by the Air Force healthcare system. The closest city with a major medical facility is three hours away. A mother of two commented, "Medical care for families is insufficient due to the distance we have to travel for adequate care". Additional concerns raised by family members regarding medical care include the lengthy referral process to obtain appointments at alternative facilities, the qualifications of physicians at the medical facility, and the lack of communication with the facility. A mother of two and wife of an officer focused on funding as the only

constraint to the Air Force's ability to fulfil its promises. She stated, "As long as the funding is available, I am confident that the Air Force has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do." A handful of family members discussed support programmes when asked about whether the military treated them fairly:

They offer many family activities to assist mothers and fathers whose spouse may be deployed or TDY [temporary duty]. For example, they give parents a break where one Saturday a month you can drop off your child at the CDC or Youth Center for free to give parents some time alone. They have other military family members assist with chores like mowing your lawn for you while your spouse is deployed, and there are many other programs that assist on any burdens that may come along while your spouse is deployed/TDY.

Military members tended to express a higher level of trust than did family members. One 22-year-old male who is an enlisted member said, "Just like in the civilian world, promises are kept and broken, depending on the circumstances and what obstacles may not allow those promises to be kept". Another participant emphasised the dependability of the Air Force. "They always come through," he commented. The public affairs representatives said that military members and their family members are fair and keep their promises, demonstrating a high level of trust in the Air Force base community.

Focus group members exhibited a low level of trust in the medical facility. A retired enlisted female said, "They [medical facility] do not have the doctors or equipment to do most anything". The fact that staffing is low and the facility has minimal resources at their disposal is understandable to all participants, but they also agree that the resources the medical facility does have are not used efficiently. Communication with personnel available in the clinic is inadequate, and the one person people can talk to over the phone

only takes requests for appointments. When asked about staffing concerns at the medical facility, the commander (the highest-ranking representative for medical care on the base) stated, "I don't have the resources to control [this situation]. Unfortunately, this is above my pay grade." A public affairs specialist acknowledged this problem and noted the newly implemented telephone hotline dedicated to questions from family members about their medical concerns. Family members in this study agreed this is one step in the right direction, but they remain concerned about the reality of inadequate medical care.

Commitment

Half of the family members interviewed believe that the Air Force wants to maintain a long-term relationship with them. Several participants referred to the benefits package as an indicator of long-term commitment. One woman expressed that once you are out of the Air Force, medical benefits continue, and you have an "Air Force relationship your whole life". Another participant who is the wife of an officer referred to the "tax-free shopping, housing facilities, free utilities, and housing maintenance". In addition, a family member, who is a mother of two, commented, "They definitely want to maintain a long-term commitment with families. That is why they offer so many family programs to show their commitment to us." The support system the Air Force provides is also an important benefit for family members. The wife of an officer and mother of two stated, "They assist as much as possible with family matters without interrupting the mission at hand. Especially when my husband was deployed, the military was my second family in assisting us with our needs." A family member, whose husband has deployed more than 10 times, also spoke appreciatively of programmes that occur during deployments and commented, "I believe all this helps military families know that the military is trying to do all they can to maintain their relationship with families and military members". Most family members who were critical of commitment focused on the problems

with healthcare and pointed to the facility's "steadily decreasing services". Public affairs personnel said that the commitment level of Air Force families is high. One staff member attributed this to family cohesion. She said, "They have made a commitment to the Air Force by being a part of the military member's life".

Some military members reported that their relationship with the military was harmed by the discontinuation of bonuses for serving additional time. The loss of re-enlistment bonuses resulted from downsizing the Air Force and managing budget constraints. An enlisted military member said that taking bonuses away made him feel as though "you're not a valuable commodity". Another enlisted male member stated, "With the world situation the way it is today, there is no desire to re-enlist, and in turn, the Air Force loses good people". Some military members noted problems with the military providing adequate healthcare for their family members. For example, an enlisted female Air Force member with 15 years of service stated, "The military member has everything provided, but the family is often shunned medically". Another participant who is a retired enlisted female commented, "When they stepped the base hospital down to a clinic, they had no concern for the people".

The focus group identified several factors concerning the lack of a long-term relationship effort by the medical facility. Several participants explained that the clinic personnel's attitude is terrible, and no one seems willing or happy to help patients. One participant said she has the option to use alternative healthcare, which is more expensive but "well worth it". Another participant, who is the wife of an officer said that it is tough to consider alternative medical care when using the facility is free. She said that she has "threatened to break off the relationship", but for her husband's sake, she continues to use the facility.

One participant said she is frustrated with the facility and feels there is no effort by it to continue the relationship. To obtain a follow-up gynaecology appointment that was

required for an abnormal test result, the participant called the appointment desk, spoke with a nurse, and waited weeks for a referral letter that approved an appointment at an alternative facility. When the participant contacted the approved facility, the waiting list was three months. It took six months for her to receive treatment; she went to a clinic three hours away because the wait for the local provider was unreasonable. According to this participant, when circumstances merit care within a quick timeframe, allowances should be made. Staffing levels at the medical facility are low, and there is not a gynaecological specialist available. The medical group commander also acknowledged the need for specialists. The commander said that the underlying problem is the location. Many specialists do not want to relocate to the remote area where the base is located.

Satisfaction

Overall, satisfaction with the relationship is high with family members. A wife of an officer and mother of two stated, "So far the Air Force has been the best thing that has happened to our family. It has helped my husband get a college degree and allowed us to see parts of the world that we would otherwise never have the opportunity to see." She acknowledged that there is a downside to military service and said, "That is a small price to pay knowing that my husband is helping maintain our freedom". A staff member expressed high satisfaction with family members and said that if there is an issue a family member wants addressed, he or she could always call.

Most military members also expressed satisfaction. One woman commented, "I had zero aspirations when I came in...and I got the opportunity to become an officer, and [the Air Force] paid for my education. How cool is that?" An officer who is dissatisfied and awaits notification for whether he will receive discharge paperwork said he has "a lot of respect for the Air Force and people doing the job", but the Air Force needs to "keep people informed and provide better options". It could be months before he finds out if he will be able

to remain in the Air Force. If the decision is made to sever the relationship, he will be obligated to reimburse the Air Force for his college education because he was unable to fill the position for which he volunteered. Public affairs personnel expressed a high level of satisfaction. A male staff member said that this is a result of both parties' "time, energy, dedication, patriotism, and more".

Focus group participants are not satisfied with the relationship they have with the medical facility. There is only one paediatrician assigned to the base clinic who is responsible for the care of all children through the age of 18. Several incidents have lowered the satisfaction of a woman who is the wife of an officer, and mother of an infant. She plans to wait until the family moves to schedule an appointment for her daughter. Because of procedures in place, the option to seek paediatric care at alternative facilities is not possible. Three members of the group said management officials have gone out of their way to help in medical crises, but primary care physicians do not. The medical group commander was aware of complaints about one of the physicians on the staff and the quality of care this physician provides.

To improve satisfaction, focus group members had several suggestions. Had they been invited to engage in dialogue and task sharing with the military base with regard to problems with the medical facility, they would have suggested speeding up the referral process by temporarily allowing female patients automatic referrals to alternative facilities. Staff should respond to feedback offered by patients through phone calls and status reports. They should have quarterly meetings requesting feedback from patients and include action reports that are made public so the community can see how their concerns are being addressed. Participants want the centre to hold physicians accountable when legitimate complaints are made. Suggestions offered to improve the Air Force medical care system included having a full-service hospital facility in remote locations such as the base,

providing specialists, increasing staffing requirements in the facility, and considering contract medical personnel for members and families not on flying status.

Order of importance of relationship outcomes

During the interviews, military members emphasised the importance of trust while downplaying control mutuality. As previously mentioned, several military members were interviewed at the end of the study to test a conclusion about the comparative importance of relationship outcomes. Most participants verified the importance of trust and minimised control mutuality. A female officer and mother of two explained, "If I'm placing my life in their hands, I have to trust that they will make the right decisions for my life". An enlisted female member with 15 years of service compared the relationship to marriage and said, "The most important quality to me is trust". In talking about control mattering least, an enlisted male member with four years of service said, "They [the Air Force] have control over where they send you and can dismiss you if they don't like what you give them". Military members appear to be comfortable with a low degree of control and because of this, the amount of control in the relationship is not as important as the other relationship outcomes. However, control mutuality becomes critical when trust and satisfaction are low. Due to the medical facility's inability to adequately fulfil the health needs of military members and their spouses, having influence in decisions in this area has become critical.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that contrary to previous theorising (e.g., Kim, 2007), a mechanical structure alone does not result in low control mutuality, trust, commitment or satisfaction among employees in every context. Military members were satisfied with the mechanical structure of the organisation, and the structure itself did not appear to harm the relationship, although the multiple layers of management aggravated family members who

were frustrated with taking their concerns up a long chain of management before having such concerns resolved. Based on the abundance of feedback and suggestions regarding the health facility, an organic structure in which decisions are decentralised and frontline staff are empowered to make significant changes would strengthen the relationship with family members, which confirms general theorising about relationships and organisational structure (e.g., J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). Thus, previous theorising about organisational structure generally held true for the military's relationship with family members but not with military members.

Due to the high level of coordination involved in the military and death risks that depend on precise tactics, it makes sense that the military would have a mechanical structure. This research shows that a mechanical structure does not have to impede the quality of relationship that the military has with members, although initiatives should be taken to offset the challenges that family members face when they have a problem and must carry their concerns to several people until they finally reach someone empowered to resolve the problem. Theoretical implications for trust and components of it (competence, promise keeping, and fairness, including procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice) are discussed below in the context of their interaction with control mutuality assessments. Following this examination, commitment and satisfaction are explored.

Control mutuality and trust

Family members tended to express satisfaction with the amount of control they have in their relationship with the military base, except for the base's healthcare facility. The healthcare provided by the military base facility was often inadequate. Fighting for the resolution of matters and enduring layers of bureaucracy resulted in dissatisfaction, even when demands were eventually met, which shows a negative relationship between a

mechanical structure and procedural justice in this context. This finding is reinforced by a study of a nonprofit organisation in which people at all levels of the organisation were empowered to respond to members' concerns without referring members to other people, which resulted in member satisfaction (Gallicano, 2009). Even if another person needed to be consulted, the staff member would do this himself or herself rather than asking the member to talk with someone else, which is a practical strategy an organisation with a centralised structure could adopt to offset frustrations involved with layers of management. Thus, task sharing can be an especially helpful relationship-building strategy for organisations with mechanical structures.

Assessments of control mutuality were also influenced by negative assessments of distributive justice. Some participants did not think it was fair that the military placed large healthcare facilities in large cities where medical care was plentiful, while people at their base were stuck with an inadequate facility and no alternatives without authorisation that was difficult to obtain and which involved a six-hour round trip. Not surprisingly, distributive justice was influenced by an unequal distribution of benefits. The military was not perceived as compensating for the inadequate healthcare that resulted from stationing people in a remote location.

Control mutuality appeared to be only important to family members when they were dissatisfied with an aspect of the relationship. It seems that control mutuality was particularly important to the healthcare aspect of the relationship because trust and satisfaction in the health facility were low. If the facility were competent (which is one component of trust), if it were fair (in terms of procedural justice and distributive justice), and if the facility had met participants' positive expectations for it (which would mean that participants were satisfied with it), the desire to use other medical providers for free might not have mattered as much. Thus, it appears that when trust and satisfaction are low, control mutuality will be low as well.

Most military members thought they had little influence in decisions affecting them and did not think that decisions were made with their individual interests in mind; however, they were supportive of this arrangement due to the significant normative commitment they experienced with regard to their moral motivation to serve in the organisation. They agreed that decisions should be made for the cause rather than for personal interests. Because military members experienced high levels of procedural justice (in this case, they agreed with making decisions in the military's best interests) and there were no problems with trusting the military's competence, nearly all were satisfied with control mutuality, despite having little influence in the relationship. Thus, this appears to be the first study to empirically confirm J. E. Grunig's (2002) statement that control mutuality can be high despite a low amount of control in the relationship because trust is high.

What is particularly interesting to note is the considerable flexibility for broken promises that most military members allowed because they reasoned that circumstances change and the military did the best it could to keep its promises. Thus, although military members recognised broken promises, trust was still high because the promises that were broken appeared to be unavoidable. On the other hand, broken promises could have been avoided by not making them in the first place or by qualifying them with exceptions such as changed circumstances; however, this was not important to participants. Consequently, there seemed to be a desire among most military members to consonantly process setbacks such as broken promises with their favourable overall evaluation of the military.

Blumer's (1969) symbolic interaction theory is insightful for interpreting this phenomenon. According to this theory, people interpret phenomena in light of the meanings they have already created about the phenomena. An example of this occurrence can be seen in the relationships that politicians have with supporters and opponents. Supporters of certain politicians

are more likely than people who oppose those politicians to provide room for mistakes, rationalise mistakes, and forgive mistakes. Conversely, opponents of certain politicians are more likely than supporters to make a big deal about mistakes or ridicule politicians for those mistakes. Thus, if the other party is perceived favourably, there will be a gravitational pull to assess aspects of the relationship in positive ways and to forgive setbacks. Likewise, if the other party is perceived unfavourably, the same setbacks will be processed in a more damaging way than they would otherwise occur for people. This effect can be referred to as *relationship goggles* because people tend to view occurrences that could affect the relationship through the lens of what they already think about the other person or organisation.

With regard to theorising about trust and organic structure, this study is significant because it identifies an exception to findings by Kim (2007) and Schminke et al. (2000). Military members experienced a high degree of trust, despite the military's mechanical structure, perhaps due to a difference in expectations. Most military members did not expect their interests to be considered in decisions; they supported the idea of the military serving its own interests due to their extraordinary normative commitment. Thus, issues of fairness were minimised. This explanation could account for the evidence that contradicts the findings of previous studies.

Commitment and satisfaction

Military members' and family members' mixed assessment of commitment had little to do with the organisation's mechanical structure. Although Boshoff and Mels (1995) found that participation in decisions increases commitment, the desire to participate in decisions was not an issue for participants, aside from problems with the healthcare facility. Likewise, although job satisfaction is associated with an organic structure where employees are empowered with significant responsibility (Hage, 1980; Peters, 1987), the degree to which military members were

satisfied with their jobs had nothing to do with the amount of autonomy they had in their roles. Thus, scholars and practitioners should take care when generalising theory to new contexts.

When participants were asked whether they thought the military was committed to a long-term relationship, most family members and military members focused on benefits. Participants who perceived a high amount of commitment referred to benefits such as housing facilities, free utilities, and housing maintenance; participants who were dissatisfied with commitment referred to a change in benefits. Participants who had a long relationship with the military (such as 15 years) evaluated the military's performance against how it had previously treated them. The removal or downgrade of benefits resulted in negative levels of satisfaction.

This finding makes sense when considering Thibault and Kelly's (1959) social exchange theory that says that a core component of satisfaction derives from comparing how one is treated against what someone thinks is deserved. In this case, the health centre was downgraded from a hospital and bonuses were eliminated as a result of downsizing by the government. Previous treatment by the military resulted in creating expectations for continued benefits. When participants saw these benefits withdrawn, a negative evaluation of the military resulted. Thus, relationship history plays a role in influencing participants' assessments of satisfaction by influencing participants' expectations.

Limitations

There were important limitations with the method used in this study. Interviews should be recorded and transcribed for qualitative research; instead, we relied on detailed notes and member checks by confirming all quotes. More insight could have been gained by having a recording and transcription of the

interviews. Second, the data were collected by a member of the participant community. The interviewer's identity could have restricted participants' comments in important ways because the interviewer would not be leaving the community upon completion of the study. In this way, confidentiality risks could seem higher. On the other hand, participants could have had increased trust with the interviewer because she was part of the community. Another concern was that participants might answer in more socially desirable ways based on their relationship with the interviewer.

Future research

This study resulted in preliminary theory building that is based on just one case; therefore, more research is needed to further explore the tentative theoretical conclusions suggested in this study. Additional research is needed to identify which contexts are exceptions to previous theorising that associated a mechanical structure with low relationship outcomes with employees. Further research is also needed to show why a mechanical structure plays a minimal role in influencing relationship outcomes in the contexts that are exceptions.

It is also important to pursue the initial findings of this research that demonstrate a public's tendency to make meaning of events in a relationship based on what they already think about a person or organisation. What are the formational kinds of speech acts or episodes that result in forming the lens through which an employee makes meaning of a supervisor or employing organisation? Can this lens be changed, and if so, how?

In addition, the context of the military provides an interesting opportunity to explore relationships between levels of leadership, such as the relationship between a base and the office to which it reports. A study about the relationship between levels of leadership in an organisation would be insightful. More research about unique communication contexts would also enrich theory building.

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