**AREA IV OVERVIEW  
The Organizational System**

Lessons 25. The Organization as an Open System

26. Leading the Environment

27. Shaping Organizational Culture

28. Leading Change

29. The Ethical Dimension of Leadership

**AREA OVERVIEW**

As we begin our examination of the Organizational System, you will notice that three concepts—*indirect leadership*, the *environment*, and *pro-activity*—begin to take on increased significance and emphasis.

As leaders move up the organizational hierarchy, they never really stop having direct face-to-face encounters with individuals and groups. Chief executive officers and chiefs of police continue to exert direct influence over some group of immediate subordinates. At the same time, these top officials make decisions that influence and shape the entire organization. To help executive-level leaders excel in senior management positions and to help junior leaders understand and prepare for positions of greater responsibility, Area IV shifts its focus to the unique and complex challenge of indirect leadership.

The influence of environmental factors has been present throughout the course. In Area IV, the environment takes on an even greater role. At the organizational level, leaders must manage the environment in a way that supports, rather than detracts from, the accomplishment of the organization’s primary mission and goals. These lessons contain strategies to assist organizational leaders in this demanding task.

As we enter this final area of study, students often sense that the course begins to feel different. Certainly organizational theories are unique because they involve larger, systemic, indirect or environmental issues. One other important difference exists—more than in previous areas, you will be asked to take action proactively. These lessons contain many situations where things are not necessarily broken, at least not yet. Organizational leaders must have the ability to anticipate future problems and to apply proactive solutions. Area IV affords the leaders the opportunity to develop and practice these vital planning skills.

**Lesson 25: The Organization as an Open System**

**Introduction**

This lesson consists of:

1. The Organization as an Open System

2. Two Student Journal Entries

**Assignment**

1. **Read Course Guide**

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify*** the Areas of Interest.

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using the Organization as an Open Systems Theory.

***Identify*** the following:

A. The Inputs

B. The Throughput Processes

C. The Technical Core

D. The Outputs

***Describe***the following:

A. The Boundaries

B. The Feedback that exists

C. The Organizational Environment

III. ***Explain***Area(s) of Interest in terms of:

A. How the components are interdependent.

B. What the significance of the environment and feedback are to the throughput processes of this organization.

C. How did the change in one of the internal components change the other internal components?

3. **Complete Student Journal** entries for Organization as an Open System.

In this lesson, there are **two** separate Student Journal entries. Please complete **both**.

**Student Journal** **number one:** Provide a brief description of a change in the technical component of your department, division, watch, or unit. Analyze the change in the technical component in terms of the following:

Who or what was the source of the change? What was the input(s) that created the change? How was the change implemented? How did the change affect the structural component? What changes occurred in the psycho/social component? How did the leadership of your organization react to the change? What was the effect on the goals and values of the organization? How did the output of the organization change? In retrospect, did your department, division, watch, or unit respond to the change in terms of an open system, as you now understand the concepts of inputs, boundaries, feedback, and interdependence? What happened and why?

**Student Journal entry number two:** Reflect on the changes, if any, that Community Policing has had on your department, and describe the impact of the changes in terms of your police department’s goals and values, technical, psycho/social interactions, structure, boundaries, feedback mechanisms, and leadership. In addition, describe how the departmental changes have impacted your specific division, watch, or unit.

**The Organization as an Open System: Understanding Complex Structures and Dynamics**

The concept of leadership in large organizations has existed for millennia, as evidenced by biblical wisdom in *Exodus 18:20-22*. This passage highlights leadership concerns in complex structures, touching on delegation, training, and management. As organizations grow in size, they face challenges distinct from smaller groups, such as decreased face-to-face contact and increased differentiation by role and authority. These changes necessitate a deeper understanding of how organizations are structured and how they interact with their internal and external environments.

**Why Organizations Exist and How They Function**

Organizations exist as a result of social organizing—a process that occurs naturally when people come together to achieve a shared goal. Whether in response to a crisis or for ongoing operations, the need for coordination and collaboration emerges as a group grows. This is reflected in stories of survival, where leaders organize individuals toward a common purpose. Similarly, complex organizations are social entities that combine people’s skills, experiences, and expertise to achieve collective goals.

According to Porter and Lawler, organizations are purposeful entities that rely on differentiated roles and functions. They are structured to achieve objectives through rational task coordination. Importantly, they exist over time, meaning relationships and operations within them are designed for longevity.

**Open vs. Closed Systems: Key Perspectives**

Organizations can be studied from functional, communication, sociological, decision-making, and power perspectives, each offering insight into different facets of organizational life. However, traditional views often treat organizations as closed systems, focusing primarily on internal functions while ignoring external environmental factors.

**Closed-System Perspective**

A closed-system perspective views organizations as self-contained, with rigid boundaries and predictable internal processes. While this can create a sense of stability, it also fosters a reactive approach to change, as organizations become insular and fail to adapt to external influences. Leadership in a closed system tends to search for singular causes of problems, limiting the organization’s ability to address complex issues effectively.

This is particularly true for police departments, which traditionally operate as closed systems due to their command-and-control structure. The reasons for this include:

1. **Command and Control Structure**:  
   Police departments are hierarchical by nature, with transparent chains of command and strict control over decision-making. This structure allows for predictability and ensures compliance with procedures, which are critical in high-stakes environments like law enforcement.
2. **Focus on Stability and Order**:  
   Law enforcement agencies are primarily tasked with maintaining public order. The stability offered by a closed system aligns with the need for control and consistency, especially during crises or emergencies, ensuring that officers follow protocols without deviation.
3. **Limited Feedback Mechanisms**:  
   Police organizations often have limited mechanisms for incorporating external feedback, such as public opinion or community input. This limitation reinforces the internal focus of closed systems and can lead to slower adaptation to societal shifts or new legislative demands.
4. **Crisis Management**:  
   In closed systems, police departments often react to crises rather than proactively adapting to change. This reactive stance can prevent departments from evolving in response to public needs or external pressures like social movements or new technologies.

**Open-System Perspective**

In contrast, an open-system perspective—rooted in General Systems Theory—sees organizations as interconnected with their environments. This approach, developed by Bertalanffy, highlights how organizations are composed of interrelated psychological, technological, and structural elements. The open system’s success depends on its ability to interact dynamically with external inputs and adapt accordingly.

**The Open Systems Model Applied to Complex Organizations**



The **Open Systems Model** helps us understand how organizations interact with their environment and continuously adapt to internal and external factors. Here’s how the components of the open systems model work:

1. **Inputs**:  
   The organization receives resources such as people, materials, information, and technology from the environment. For police organizations, inputs include recruitment, budget allocations, public expectations, and legislative mandates.
2. **Throughput Processes**:  
   This refers to how the organization processes these inputs. In policing, this could involve training, community engagement, investigations, or administrative functions, transforming inputs into the desired outcomes.
3. **Outputs**:  
   Outputs are the organization's results or products, such as law enforcement services, crime prevention, public safety, or crime reports in the case of police organizations.
4. **Boundaries**:  
   Boundaries separate the organization from its environment. In open systems, boundaries are permeable, allowing for the exchange of inputs and outputs. Police organizations might have boundaries defined by laws, policies, and interactions with the public.
5. **Feedback**:  
   Feedback loops provide the organization with information about the effectiveness of its outputs, which can be used to adjust and improve internal processes. In policing, this might come from community surveys, public feedback, or crime data, informing departments on improving their services.
6. **Environment**:  
   The external environment includes factors such as social expectations, economic conditions, legislative changes, and technological advancements that impact the organization's operations.

This dynamic relationship between an organization and its environment is crucial for long-term success, as organizations must remain adaptable to external pressures.

**The Role of External Inputs in Open Systems**

For police organizations operating as open systems, external inputs such as **legislation, social dynamics, economics, and technology** play a crucial role in shaping internal processes and outcomes.

1. **Legislation as an Input**:  
   Legislative frameworks define the legal boundaries within which police organizations operate. Laws related to using force, transparency, accountability, and community relations heavily influence police policies and procedures.
   * **Example**: Body camera laws have led to the widespread adoption of this technology, requiring police organizations to adjust their operational procedures and training.
   * **In a Closed System**: Police organizations might slowly adapt to new laws and rely on outdated procedures.
   * **In an Open System**: Police departments proactively adjust policies, continuously train, and align their procedures with legislative updates.
2. **Social Dynamics as an Input**:  
   Social factors include public expectations, community needs, and social movements such as police reform efforts. An open system recognizes that policing must be responsive to the people it serves.
   * **Example**: The Black Lives Matter movement has prompted many departments to reconsider how they engage with minority communities and address concerns about systemic racism.
   * **In a Closed System**: Police organizations may resist social change, relying on traditional approaches that could alienate the community.
   * **In an Open System**: Police organizations actively engage with the public, hold town halls, and adjust their community policing strategies to rebuild trust.
3. **Economic Factors as an Input**:  
   Economic conditions affect the funding and resources available to police organizations, impacting everything from personnel to technology.
   * **Example**: Economic downturns might lead to budget cuts, requiring police departments to streamline operations.
   * **In a Closed System**: Departments may struggle to adapt, leading to inefficiencies as they continue operating under outdated resource constraints.
   * **In an Open System**: Departments reallocate resources based on changing priorities, ensuring that critical areas like crime prevention and officer training remain supported even during financial challenges.
4. **Technology as an Input**:  
   Technological advancements, from data analytics to body cameras and surveillance tools, significantly influence how police departments operate.
   * **Example**: Predictive policing tools allow departments to allocate resources more efficiently by identifying crime hotspots.
   * **In a Closed System**: Resistance to adopting new technologies can limit a department's ability to improve operational efficiency.
   * **In an Open System**: Police organizations embrace new technologies, train officers to use them effectively, and integrate them into their crime prevention strategies.

**The Open Systems Model with Leadership as the Filtration Process**

The **Open Systems Model** illustrated earlier depicts leadership at the core, interacting with the four essential components—Psychosocial, Goals and Values, Technical, and Structural. Leadership acts as the filtration system that integrates, balances, and ensures that inputs from the environment are processed efficiently through each component of the system.

1. **Psycho-Social Component**:  
   This represents employees' emotional and social needs, including teamwork, motivation, and well-being. Leadership ensures a healthy psychosocial environment, fostering trust and collaboration within the organization.
2. **Goals and Values Component**:  
   Leadership aligns the organization’s activities with its overarching goals and values. This alignment provides purpose and ethical direction to the organization, ensuring all actions and decisions reflect the core values.
3. **Technical Component**:  
   Leadership integrates technological advancements into organizational processes, ensuring that tools and methods are up to date and that employees are well-trained. Leaders balance innovation with the psycho-social component, ensuring technology enhances rather than disrupts the workforce.
4. **Structural Component**:  
   Leadership also defines and maintains the organization’s structure, clearly delineating roles, responsibilities, and workflows. By doing so, leaders ensure that the organization operates efficiently and effectively.

**Leadership as the Filtration System**

Leadership in this model acts as the central filter that integrates the four components into a cohesive, functioning system. Here’s how:

1. **Filtering Inputs**: Leadership determines which external inputs (legislation, social dynamics, technology, etc.) are most critical and filters them through the system to ensure alignment with organizational goals and values.
2. **Balancing Components**: Leadership balances conflicting priorities between components. For example, while the technical component may push for rapid technological change, leadership ensures that the psychosocial and structural components are adapted accordingly to prevent disruption.
3. **Managing Feedback**: Leadership uses feedback loops to monitor how well outputs meet external demands and adjusts internal processes when needed, maintaining a dynamic balance between the organization and its environment.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Closed vs. Open Systems for Police Organizations**

Both closed and open systems offer unique benefits and challenges for police organizations:

**Advantages of Closed Systems:**

1. **Control and Stability**:  
   Closed systems provide higher internal control, offering stability and predictability. This is especially useful in law enforcement, where following strict protocols can be crucial for managing crises effectively.
2. **Clear Hierarchies**:  
   The hierarchical structure allows for defined authority, which is essential in high-stress environments like policing. Officers know their roles, and decisions can be made quickly in response to emergencies.

**Disadvantages of Closed Systems:**

1. **Inflexibility**:  
   Closed systems resist change, making it difficult for police organizations to adapt to new laws, social expectations, or technological advancements.
2. **Reactive Approach**:  
   These systems are often more reactive than proactive, addressing issues only after they escalate into crises, which can hinder long-term improvement in police practices.

**Advantages of Open Systems:**

1. **Adaptability**:  
   Open systems allow police organizations to adjust to external pressures such as legislative changes, social movements, or economic challenges, making them more resilient to change.
2. **Innovation**:  
   Open systems foster the integration of new ideas and technologies, enhancing operational efficiency and improving community relationships.

**Disadvantages of Open Systems:**

1. **Complexity**:  
   Open systems require constant adaptation and interaction with the external environment, which can increase decision-making complexity and slow response times in fast-moving situations.
2. **Uncertainty**:  
   Open systems are more vulnerable to environmental changes, which can create uncertainty and require continuous adjustment by leadership.

**Conclusion**

Understanding organizations as open systems provides a holistic view of how they operate and interact with their environment. For police organizations, operating as closed systems may offer control and predictability, but it limits their ability to adapt to the dynamic social, legislative, economic, and technological landscapes. On the other hand, embracing open-system principles enhances the organization’s ability to innovate, build community trust, and remain responsive to external pressures.

In today’s rapidly evolving environment, police organizations that adopt an open-systems perspective will be better equipped to address modern challenges, balance internal efficiency with external adaptability, and ultimately serve their communities more effectively.

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry (Number One of Two)** for The Organization as an Open System.

Provide a brief description of a change in the technical component of your department, division, watch, or unit. Analyze the change in the technical component in terms of the following:

Who or what was the source of the change? What was the input(s) that created the change? How was the change implemented? How did the change affect the structural component? What changes occurred in the psycho/social component? How did the leadership of your organization react to the change? What was the effect on the goals and values of the organization? How did the output of the organization change? In retrospect, did your department, division, watch, or unit respond to the change in terms of an open system, as you now understand the concepts of inputs, boundaries, feedback, and interdependence? What happened and why?

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry (Number Two of Two)** for The Organization as an Open System.

Reflect on the changes, if any, that Community Policing has had on your department and describe the impact of the changes in terms of your police department’s goals and values, technical, psycho/social interactions, structure, boundaries, feedback mechanisms, and leadership. In addition, describe how the departmental changes have impacted your division, watch, or unit.

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