

Logistics Effectiveness: Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit

■ By Christopher R. Paparone and George L. Topic Jr.

One definition of efficiency found in the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary is, “effective operation as measured by a comparison of production with cost (as in energy, time, and money).” Note that the word “effective” is included in the definition. This is certainly confusing if one accepts the common belief that there is a dichotomy between being effective and being efficient.

What makes logistics effective is a question of context and cultural perspective. We believe logistics leaders need to understand the cultural challenges associated with mixed views of effectiveness, particularly in the Joint Logistics Enterprise (JLEnt) milieu of organizations and values.

Even within the military there are different views of efficiency. For example, national-level providers see effective logistics as purchasing and delivering logistics efficiently at the lowest possible cost. Operational commanders see effective logistics as successfully sustaining the force on time, often regardless of cost.

A 1981 hallmark study, “A Competing Values Approach to Organizational Effectiveness,” by Robert Quinn and John Rohrbaugh concludes that effectiveness is a complex concept that is driven by organizational cultural propensities toward certain values.

These researchers postulate that organizations have distinct value patterns that differ among four views of effectiveness:

- Clear objectives and comprehensive planning (rational goal values).
- Bureaucratic procedures (internal process values).

- Team building and leader development (human relations values).
- Adaptation and organizational learning (open systems values).

Competition among these values govern different patterns in and among organizations. Because the JLEnt involves many organizations, multiple value patterns co-exist and typify the adage, “Where you stand depends on where you sit.” (See figure 1.)

Logistics effectiveness in the operational force is characterized primarily by rational goal values. Effective logistics mainly includes the traditional goals of providing the supported commander the geographical reach, pace, and duration needed. This is not to say that the operational force acts solely on rational goal values, but the other three value groups are not as greatly emphasized.

At the national level, where Department of Defense budgets are planned, programmed, and expended through well-defined processes, what constitutes effectiveness is driven mainly by criteria embedded in the internal process values.

Both human-relations and open-systems values dominate professional military education (PME) assessment and achievement. Logistics PME is dedicated largely to developing influential leaders who can create and sustain effective teams and operate well when faced with the diversity present in the human dimension.

Trainers prepare Soldiers to execute complex missions, and when “the plan doesn’t survive first contact,” human relations may be complemented with an equal emphasis on the initiative, adaptation, innovation, and improv-

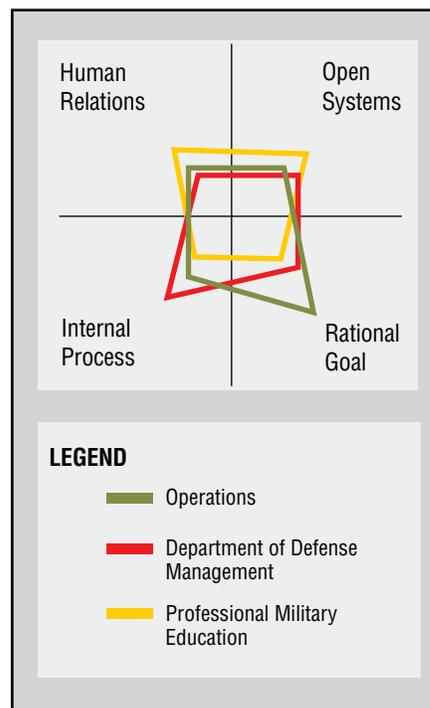


Figure 1. Relative Patterns of Logistics Effectiveness in Organizations.

sation associated with open systems.

Acknowledging that all four value groups compete both within and across organizational cultures is key to understanding operations in the JLEnt; it is a matter of relative context and perspective. This recognition is important in an enterprise made up of diverse organizations because each will likely emphasize different criteria for effectiveness.

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