




2015

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**To cite this article:** Lauri Goldkind (2015) Leaning Out: Exploring Organizational Advocacy Activities From an Open Systems Perspective, Journal of Policy Practice, 14:3-4, 191-211, DOI: [10.1080/15588742.2015.1004395](https://doi.org/10.1080/15588742.2015.1004395)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15588742.2015.1004395>



Published online: 18 Sep 2015.



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## **Leaning Out: Exploring Organizational Advocacy Activities From an Open Systems Perspective**

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*This article explores the effect of organizational culture on engagement with advocacy activities, both traditional and electronic. The Competing Values Framework offers a model for understanding how organizations' culture influences behavior. Using a sample of nonprofit providers from across the country, the author hypothesized that organizations that use electronic advocacy tools are more involved with advocacy activities of all types. A paper and pencil survey was used to collect data on organizational culture, advocacy tools and techniques, perceived effectiveness of the advocacy tools, policy goals, organizational sustainability goals as well as barriers and facilitators of electronic advocacy. The study used path modeling to describe the connections between organizational culture and engagement in advocacy activities. The article examines the barriers and facilitators of electronic advocacy, the penetration of electronic advocacy use in this sample of agencies and the perceptions of effectiveness associated with using these strategies; lastly, the implications of these findings for managers and organizational leaders are discussed.*

**KEYWORDS** *Competing Values Framework, electronic advocacy, Open Systems model, organizational culture*

The relationship between organizational culture, an organization's advocacy practice, and the adoption of innovation has been relatively unexplored by social scientists. Although each of these areas has been studied, the interaction of the three is still uncharted. Now more than ever, in a climate of

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scarce resources and intense competition, the ability of organizations to orient themselves to their external environments, navigate changing political and economic landscapes, and adapt relevant new technologies is critical. So, also, is an organization's ability to advocate effectively on behalf of its constituents.

The nonprofit sector has been growing steadily, both in size and financial impact, for more than a decade. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of nonprofits increased 25%, from 1,259,764 to 1,574,674. Impressively, the growth rate of the nonprofit sector has surpassed the rate of growth in both the business and government sectors (Roeger, Blackwood, & Pettijohn, 2012). Given the sector's significant growth, especially in a stagnant economy, as well as its prospects for further expansion, it is critical that we begin to understand the relationship between organizational culture, adaption to innovations, and advocacy, so that agency leaders are better informed as they attempt to grow their organizations and retain their ability to serve their constituents.

### Study Purpose

Using the Competing Values Framework (CVF) as its theoretical orientation, this study examines the relationship between an organization's open systems focus, its internal structures, and its engagement in electronic advocacy activities. It asks the questions: Do organizations operating from an open systems perspective attend to their environments in ways that are significantly different from their more internally focused counterparts? Does this differential attention translate into higher rates of electronic advocacy behavior? In this case, the environment orientation, consistent with the CVF, is conceptualized as the forces external to the organization, to which the organization has limited to no control over but are central to an organization's success. Elements of the external environment might include the sociopolitical climate, the geographic region or community where an organization is situated as well as the changing demographics of an organization's clientele. The hypothesis this study specifically tests are:

- H1: Organizational "imperatives"—policy goals and organizational sustainability—are expected to have direct effects on organizational climate, electronic barriers and facilitators, the use of electronic advocacy strategies and, ultimately, upon the perceived effectiveness of those strategies.
- H2: Organizational climate is hypothesized to have direct effects on electronic advocacy barriers and facilitators, the use of electronic strategies and the perceived effectiveness of the use of these strategies.

- H3: Electronic barriers and facilitators will have direct effects on the use of electronic advocacy strategies and organizations' perceptions of their effectiveness.
- H4: The use of electronic advocacy strategies will have a direct effect on organizations' perceptions of their effectiveness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

About 34% of all nonprofit organizations are providers of direct human services. Such organizations are commonly referred to as human service organizations (HSOs) (Blackwood, 2012) and provide services such as case management, poverty relief, crisis intervention, workforce readiness, mental health, and child and family services. Delivering such services is a challenge: HSOs face ever-increasing pressure to monetize and quantify their service delivery models and outcomes to funders and other external constituents while engaging clients who face difficulties rooted in challenges on the interpersonal, community, and/or structural levels.

Given the intense pressure on HSOs to do more with less, to provide unduplicated services, and to uphold their missions that often include client empowerment, advocacy should be integral to the operations of this sector (Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). However, organizational advocacy in support of policy change and sustainability is not a common feature of the behaviors of such organizations (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2013).

### Nonprofit Advocacy

Advocating for disenfranchised groups, empowering constituents, and working on behalf of social justice frequently are considered central tenets of the human services sector (Berry, 2005; Mosley, 2011; Schachter, 2011). However, the level of policy advocacy engagement by nonprofit human service providers has been found to be relatively modest (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2013; Kimberlin, 2010; Macindoe & Whalen, 2013). Many factors, including limited resources and knowledge and fear of reprisal from funders, contributes to the less than robust advocacy activities of this sector.

Electronic, Internet-based interactive tools (social media and the like) are facilitating the ways in which individuals and organizations engage in advocacy campaigns (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Nah & Saxton, 2013). Although there is some discussion in the literature about the types and goals of various advocacy activities undertaken by HSOs, there is general agreement that the nonprofit human services sector has a responsibility to uphold a civil society through advocacy activities and a belief that the human service sector is uniquely positioned to engage in these activities. Still, there is much to be understood about how and under what conditions agencies adopt the use of electronic advocacy tools.

## Facilitators of Advocacy Practice

The growth and maintenance of an organizational advocacy program and the ability to meet advocacy objectives require organizational structures and supports. Facilitators of organizational advocacy include coalition membership, leadership support (including board support), and resources (Donaldson, 2007). Not surprisingly, organizations with greater capacity in terms of staff, dollars, and volunteers are more likely to engage in advocacy behaviors than organizations with fewer resources (Berry & Arons, 2003; Suarez, 2009). Gibelman and Kraft (1996) identify the type of agency, agency size, mission, functions, and staff expertise that are associated with the nature of an agency's advocacy practice. They also lay out a conceptual model of agency-level advocacy practice that elevates advocacy activities to the same status as agency's programmatic activities, and suggest that without resources (e.g., money, staff expertise, and technology), a robust agency advocacy agenda cannot be executed.

Organizational leadership may be one of the key factors that influences an agency's advocacy activities. De Vita, Montilla, Reid, and Fatiregun, (2004), Gibelman and Kraft (1996), Saidel and Harlan (1998), and Salamon (1995) all suggest that leadership and the leader's orientation, vision, and commitment to advocacy are critical factors in an organization's advocacy engagement.

## Barriers to Advocacy Practice

As agencies are pressured to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency with ever-shrinking resources, advocacy, and civic engagement activities are often considered nonessential. Time, resources, and expertise are the most frequently mentioned barriers to advocacy activities (Donaldson, 2007; McNutt & Boland, 1999). Given that advocacy should be a singular feature of the sector, it is noteworthy that a significant number of organizational leaders do not think they are competent to engage in these activities.

In terms of the use of electronic advocacy specifically, these same barriers seem to exist (McNutt & Boland, 1999). However, McNutt (2008) goes further, and suggests that similar to the Digital Divide discussed in the early 2000s, an emergent Organizational Digital Divide threatens to leave small, less-capitalized organizations behind because they lack both the access to technology tools and the human capital to deploy them.

## E-advocacy Tools and Tactics

Media tools (Twitter, Facebook, text messaging, etc.) are revolutionizing policy advocacy practices in the United States and around the world. Fitzgerald

and McNutt (1997, p. 3) define electronic advocacy as “the use of technologically intensive media as a means to influence stakeholders to effect policy change.” Increasingly pervasive, these strategies and tools cannot be ignored by nonprofit leaders wishing to remain relevant in their increasingly competitive climates.

“Social media” and “Web 2.0” are terms used to describe technologies that support interaction and networking, user-generated content, and the pooling of collective intelligence (Bryant, 2006; Germany 2006; Kanter & Fine, 2010; O’Reilly 2005). These tools tend to be interactive rather than unidirectional; users are connected to each other and create feedback loops or information channels between actors rather than transmitting information in a single direction (historically, from an organization to a constituent/stakeholder). These technologies tend to be cloud applications where the Internet is used as the platform.

Social network sites are one of the fastest growing technological arenas. They have become an important advocacy tool, regularly used by political campaigns, advocacy groups, and social movements. Such sites function as virtual hubs on the Internet, allowing individuals, organizations, and institutions to connect with one another. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google +, and others are driven by user participation and user-generated content (Tredinnick, 2006). Through interactions with stakeholders such as clients, donors, and volunteers on such sites, organizations seek to develop relationships with important publics.

### Organizational Culture and the Competing Values Framework

Schein (1983), a leading scholar of organizational culture, defines it as:

the pattern of basic assumptions which a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 186)

Since 1980, more than 4,600 articles have examined organizational culture (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011). Organizational scholars agree that culture has a powerful influence on an organization’s success and effectiveness (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Greenhalgh, MacFarlane, & Peacock, 2009; Khazanchi, Lewis, & Boyer, 2007; Schein, 2006), and organizational culture is the driver of effectiveness, innovation, staff satisfaction, and a broad range of other organizational characteristics.

One theoretical perspective for understanding organizational culture is the Competing Values Framework (CVF). CVF organizes the tensions, contradictions, and opportunities that organizational leaders encounter across

four broad quadrants. It is widely used in the literature and as an assessment has been administered to more than 10,000 organizations globally (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff, & Thakor, 2006; Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003).

The CVF offers one meta-theoretical model that is inclusive of the values that underlie organizational climates (Gifford, Zammuto, & Goodman, 2002; Quinn & McGrath, 1985; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). It calls attention to “how opposing values exist in organizations” and how “individual organizations are likely to embrace different mixtures of values that are reflected in their desired ends and in the means to attain them, such as their structural designs and mechanisms of co-ordination and control” (Zammuto & O’Connor, 1992, p. 711).

The CVF proposes that organizational effectiveness criteria can best be understood when organized along two fundamental dimensions—flexibility versus control and internal versus external orientation. Depicted as a four-quadrant model, the horizontal axis represents organizational focus as either internal or external; the vertical axis focuses on organizational adaptability as either flexible or controlled (Zaffit & Adams, 2008).

The two axes split the framework into four competing quadrants (also known as profiles). The quadrants are the Human Relations model (flexible structure with an internal focus), the Open Systems model (flexible structure and external focus), the Internal Process model (controlled structure and internal focus), and the Rational Goal model (controlled structure and external focus; Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009; Quinn, 1988). Each quadrant of the model has a competing opposite; for example, the Human Relations quadrant, which emphasizes a flexible structure with an internal focus, is diametrically opposed to the Rational Goal model with its focus on a controlled structure and external focus.

This study explores the effect of organizational culture, and specifically an Open System’s orientation, on the adoption of electronic advocacy strategies. Organizations operating in the Open Systems quadrant of the CVF focus on an adaptation to the external environment and have flexible structures. Leaders in these organizations value and support strategies that foster growth, innovation, and creativity (Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Gillespie, 1999).

Thus, the Open Systems model emphasizes readiness for change and innovation, and norms and values are associated with growth, resource acquisition, creativity, and adaptation. Climate dimensions associated with this orientation are (a) flexibility and innovation—an orientation toward change (e.g., Garrahan & Stewart, 1992; King & Anderson, 1995) as well as the extent of encouragement and support for new ideas and innovative approaches (e.g., West & Farr, 1990); (b) an outward focus—the extent to which the organization is responsive to the needs of the customer and the marketplace in general (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; West & Farr, 1990); and (c) reflexivity—a concern with reviewing and reflecting upon objectives, strategies, and work processes, in order to adapt to the wider environment (West, 1996, 2000).



Since electronic advocacy tools and tactics are new and innovative and foster growth within an organization, this study hypothesizes that organizations operating most strongly in the Open Systems quadrant will make greater use not only of traditional advocacy strategies but of electronic advocacy tools and tactics than other organizations.

## METHOD

### Design

The study used a mailed survey to reach a national sample of human services executives. Cover letters and paper survey instruments were mailed to more than 3,800 executive directors of human service agencies. The letter to agency executives invited them to participate in a study exploring how agencies engage in policy advocacy work and use electronic media tools in particular. It also introduced the principal investigator as a faculty member with a personal interest in the subject matter of the study, and laid out the study's objectives. Following this initial mailing, four follow-up reminder postcards were sent in an attempt to increase the response rate.

Anonymous surveys were returned in postage-paid envelopes; agency leaders did not submit their names or the names of their organizations. This research was conducted with Institutional Review Board approval from the authors' university.

### Study Sample

The executive directors of all Category P20 human services providers with budgets greater than \$30,000 per year ( $N = 3,804$ ), as identified by the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE), were included in the sample. The NTEE system is used by the IRS and the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) to classify nonprofit organizations (Sumariwalla, 1986); Category P20 identifies human service providers.

Two hundred sixty-four completed surveys were returned. Despite using tactics to increase the response rate suggested by Dillman (2000) and others, such as sending four rounds of reminder postcards and offering a post-survey incentive, the response rate was 7%. It should be noted, however, that organizational researchers (e.g., Hager, Wilson, Pollak, & Rooney, 2003) suggest that surveys of organizations frequently report noticeably lower return rates than do surveys of individuals.

### Instruments

To capture Quinn and Rohrbaugh's (1981) CVF, parts of Patterson et al.'s (2005) Organizational Climate Measure were used. The Child Welfare

Electronic Advocacy Survey, developed by McNutt (2007), was used to capture the barriers and facilitators of advocacy activity.

*Organizational climate.* Three subscales of the Organizational Climate Measure (Patterson et al., 2005) were used to capture the organization's place in the Open System's quadrant of the CVF: Outward Focus composed of five questions; Innovation and Flexibility composed of six items; and Reflexivity composed of five questions. Table 1 identifies the exact items that were used.

Sixteen Likert-type items comprised the three subscales of flexibility, outward focus, and reflexivity that were used by the respondents to indicate the degree to which they believed that their organization behaved in the Open Systems Model of the CVF. More specifically, the respondents indicated whether the attribute in question was *Definitely false* (1), *Mostly false* (2), *Mostly true* (3) and *Definitely true* (4) of their organization.

An initial confirmatory factor analysis on these 16 items indicated that the Patterson et al. (2005) factor structure provided a suboptimal fit to these

**TABLE 1** Organizational Climate Measure Items

| Subscale                 | Item  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Outward Focus            | This organization is quite inward looking; it does not concern itself with what is happening in the marketplace.<br>Ways of improving service to the customer are not given much thought.<br>Customer needs are not considered top priority here.<br>This company is slow to respond to the needs of the customer.<br>This organization is continually looking for new opportunities in the marketplace.  |
| Innovation & Flexibility | New ideas are readily accepted here.<br>This company is quick to respond when changes need to be made.<br>People in this organization are always searching for new ways of looking at problems.<br>Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available.<br>This organization is very flexible; it can quickly change procedures to meet new conditions and solve problems as they arise.<br>Management here is quick to spot the need to do things differently.   |
| Reflexivity              | In this organization, the way people work together is changed readily in order to improve performance.<br>There are regular discussions as to whether people in the organization are working effectively together.<br>The methods used by this organization to get the job done are often discussed.<br>In this organization, time is taken to review organizational objectives.<br>In this organization, objectives are modified in light of changing circumstances. |

**TABLE 2** Organizational Climate Factor Structure and Factor Intercorrelations

| Variable  | Innovation - Flexibility        | Outward Focus        | Reflexivity        |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| New ideas accepted  | .65*                            |                      |                    |
| Organization responsive to changes                          | .69*                            |                      |                    |
| Management quick to identify needs                          | .57*                            |                      |                    |
| Org is flexible   | .80*                            |                      |                    |
| Assistance for new ideas                                    | .65*                            |                      |                    |
| People look for new ways to think about problems            | .65*                            |                      |                    |
| Organization looks for new opportunities in the environment | .50*                            |                      |                    |
| Organization is inward looking                              |                                 | .49*                 |                    |
| Service improvement not a priority                          |                                 | .86*                 |                    |
| Client needs not priority                                   |                                 | .80*                 |                    |
| Organization slow to respond to clients                     |                                 | .67*                 |                    |
| Staff reconfigured to improve performance                   |                                 |                      | .63*               |
| Service delivery discussed                                  |                                 |                      | .67*               |
| Review of team effectiveness                                |                                 |                      | .72*               |
| Objectives modified   |                                 |                      | .60*               |
| Reviews organization goals                                  |                                 |                      | .61*               |
| <b>Inter-factor Correlations</b>                            | <b>Innovation - Flexibility</b> | <b>Outward Focus</b> | <b>Reflexivity</b> |
| Innovation-Flexibility                                      | —                               | —                    | —                  |
| Outward Focus   | .41*                            | —                    | —                  |
| Reflexivity   | .75*                            | .37*                 | —                  |

\* $p < .05$ .

data ( $\chi^2 = 280.13$  (101),  $p < .001$ , CFI = .88, RMSEA = .08). However, one item failed to load on the factor to which it was assigned by Patterson et al. (2005). Given these findings, the confirmatory factor model was re-specified, moving this item from the Outward Focus factor to which it was initially assigned to the Innovation/Flexibility factor.

The re-specified model provided an improved and now satisfactory fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 230.84$  (101),  $p < .001$ , CFI = .91, RMSEA = .07). Essentially, the revised factor structure replicates the original Patterson et al. (2005) factors structure with sole exception of this one item (see Table 2). Moreover, each of the loadings of three scales that operationally define organizational culture is substantial and statistically significant. The internal consistency reliability coefficients for the three factors are Innovation/Flexibility ( $\alpha = .84$ ), Outward Focus ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and Reflexivity ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

*Barriers and facilitators of electronic advocacy use.* Eleven items asked the respondents to characterize the degree to which various structural characteristics of the organization serve as barriers to, or facilitators of, the use of electronic strategies for advocacy. They were adapted from the Child Welfare Study mentioned previously (McNutt, 2007). For example, “structural

characteristics” included board support, financial support, technology infrastructure, and senior leadership support, among others.

The response scale for the 11 items referencing these characteristics ranged from  $-5$  through  $0$  to  $+5$ , where  $-5$  indicated that the characteristic was the greatest possible barrier to advocacy activities and  $+5$  indicated that the resource functioned as the greatest possible facilitator of those same advocacy activities. These 11 items were summed to form a unidimensional scale, and had an internal consistency reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .85$ .

*Engagement in advocacy activities.* Engagement in advocacy activities and the exploration of the use of electronic Internet-based strategies were captured using an adapted version of McNutt’s Child Welfare Advocacy Survey. The organizations who participated in the study were asked to describe their level of use of an array of 27 electronic advocacy strategies, including social media tools, for example, Facebook, blogs, and podcasting, as well as direct electronic communication tools such as e-mail, chat rooms, and Listservs. Specifically, the participants were asked to indicate whether they used each strategy (1) *not at all*; (2) *sometimes*; or (3) *regularly*. For the purposes of operationalizing the use of electronic advocacy strategies, a unidimensional summary score, (i.e., the mean of the electronic strategy items) was estimated for each of the organizations in the study sample. The internal consistency reliability of this summary measure is  $\alpha_s = .90$ .

## Data Analysis

As noted previously, a confirmatory factor analysis was first used to test the factor structure of the items developed by Patterson et al. (2005). Once this was completed and the data structure was finalized, the analytic focus of this investigation turned to the development of a path analytic model that explains traditional and electronic advocacy use by human service organizations. This path model is developed to explain the relationships—direct and indirect—between aspects of organizational culture and the use of electronic and traditional advocacy strategies.

## RESULTS

The tenure of the 264 participating organizations ranged from 4 to 155 years old, with a mean of 36 years and a median of 25 years. On average, the organizations’ budgets were \$500,000, but ranged from less than \$50,000 (9%) to more than \$5,000,000 (27%). Sixty-three percent of respondents reported having an individual who is responsible for coordinating technology on their staff. In addition, 66% reported having memberships in coalitions or other affinity group organizations. A substantial majority of the respondents (87%)

report spending 25% or less of their organization's time engaged in advocacy activities.

The univariate descriptive statistics for the 16 items and each of the three organizational culture measures on which they are based are reported in Table 3. As shown, the respondents generally characterized their organizations as sensitive to the nuances of the external environment. That is to say, the means of the 16 items, as well as the three organizational culture measures they comprise, indicate that, on average, the 16 attributes were seen as *mostly true* ( $\bar{x} > 3$ ) of the organizations in the study sample. Stated somewhat differently, and using the parlance of the CVF, these are, on average, "outwardly focused" organizations.

### Barriers and Facilitators of Electronic Advocacy Use

The survey instrument includes 11 items that asked the respondents to characterize the degree to which various structural characteristics of the organization functioned as either a barrier to, or as a facilitator of, the use of electronic advocacy strategies. "Structural" characteristics include board support, financial support, technology infrastructure, and senior leadership support, among others. Specifically, the respondents rated each organizational resource on a scale from  $-5$  (*greatest barrier*) to  $+5$  (*greatest facilitator*). As seen in Table 4, with the exception of Resistance to Technological Change, all of the means are positively signed, indicating that these structural characteristics are generally seen as facilitators, not barriers, to electronic advocacy strategy use, albeit to different degrees. More specifically, Senior Executive Support ( $M = 2.88$ ), Board Support ( $M = 2.37$ ), Coalition Membership ( $M = 2.19$ ) and Expertise ( $M = 2.08$ ) were viewed as the structural resources most supportive of electronic advocacy use. Excepting Resistance to Technological Change, the remaining structural characteristics in Table 4, were also viewed as facilitators of electronic advocacy use but to lesser degrees (all means  $< 1.50$ ).

The descriptive statistics for the electronic strategy variables are presented in Table 5. Note that the percentage of the organizational sample using each strategy at least sometimes is reported as the mean proportion, that is, the percentage of respondents who reported using that strategy (see the column labeled  $\bar{x}$ ). As seen in this table, the most widely used electronic strategies were e-mails to decision makers (56%) and e-mails used internally to coordinate policy advocacy efforts (52%).

With respect to the social media advocacy strategies, the most prevalent strategy was the use of social networking (49%), for example, LinkedIn and Facebook. All of the remaining social media advocacy strategies were much less utilized ( $< 15\%$  of the agencies used these *sometimes* or *more frequently*). Finally, with regard to "other" electronic strategies, the most widely used of these strategies were online fundraising (30%) and instant messaging

**TABLE 3** Organizational Culture Measures

| Item  | <i>n</i>   | $\bar{x}$   | <i>SD</i>   |
|---|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Innovation/Flexibility</b>   | <b>262</b> | <b>3.17</b> | <b>0.48</b> |
| New ideas are readily accepted here.  | 262        | 3.34        | 0.62        |
| This organization is quick to respond when changes need to be made.   | 261        | 3.19        | 0.62        |
| Management here is quick to spot the need to do things differently.   | 259        | 3.23        | 0.62        |
| This organization is very flexible; it can quickly change procedures to meet new conditions and solve problems as they arise. | 260        | 3.19        | 0.71        |
| Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available.  | 258        | 2.95        | 0.72        |
| People in this organization are always searching for new ways of looking at problems.   | 257        | 3.08        | 0.71        |
| This organization is continually looking for new opportunities in the environment.  | 259        | 3.24        | 0.70        |
| <b>Outward Focus</b>  | <b>260</b> | <b>3.60</b> | <b>0.49</b> |
| Organization is not inward looking.   | 257        | 3.32        | 0.75        |
| Service improvement is a priority.  | 259        | 3.64        | 0.62        |
| Clients are a priority.   | 261        | 3.78        | 0.57        |
| Organization is not slow to respond to clients.   | 261        | 3.67        | 0.58        |
| <b>Reflexivity</b>  | <b>261</b> | <b>3.11</b> | <b>0.49</b> |
| In this organization, the way people work together is readily change in order to improve performance.                         | 255        | 2.97        | 0.65        |
| The methods used by this organization to get the job done are often discussed.  | 259        | 3.21        | 0.66        |
| There are regular discussions as to whether people in the organization are working together effectively.                      | 260        | 3.02        | 0.72        |
| In this organization, objectives are modified in light of changing circumstances.   | 256        | 3.15        | 0.64        |
| In this organization, time is taken to review organizational goals and objectives.  | 259        | 3.23        | 0.69        |

(30%), followed by online volunteer recruiting (26%), online mapping (22%), and secure intranet for internal communications (22%).

### Understanding Electronic Advocacy Use

Figure 1 presents the “trimmed” path diagram for the estimated structural equation model. Initially, this model was estimated as a fully recursive model, i.e., all possible unidirectional paths moving from left to right in the diagram were estimated. Subsequently, any statistically insignificant path

**TABLE 4** Barriers and Facilitators of Electronic Advocacy

|                           | <i>n</i> | $\bar{x}$ | <i>SD</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Board Support             | 250      | 2.37      | 2.31      |
| Fiscal Support            | 250      | 1.32      | 2.86      |
| Technology Infrastructure | 247      | 1.20      | 2.48      |
| Senior Executive support  | 250      | 2.88      | 2.16      |
| Technology Champions      | 243      | 0.99      | 2.52      |
| Coalition Membership      | 243      | 2.08      | 2.22      |
| Advocacy Core Activity    | 248      | 1.36      | 2.73      |
| Universal Access          | 232      | 0.84      | 2.44      |
| Space                     | 245      | 0.72      | 2.53      |
| Resistance                | 236      | 0.07      | 2.03      |
| Expertise                 | 247      | 2.00      | 2.52      |

( $p > .05$ ) was removed from the model. As a result, this diagram includes only the statistically significant (standardized) direct effects of each variable on those variables hypothesized to be affected by it. These direct effects represent only part of the (standardized) total effect of each variable in the model. In fact, the total effect of each variable in the model can be decomposed into its direct effect plus its indirect effect(s) on variables that appear subsequent to it in [Figure 1](#).

As seen in [Figure 1](#), the “imperatives” of human service organizations, i.e., their policy goals and their system maintenance activities (organizational sustainability), are considered to be determinants of the type of organizational culture that evolves to service these imperatives. Consistent with the tenets of Open Systems Theory, human service organizations with a greater emphasis on “system maintenance” activities, i.e., increasing their visibility, capacity, access to volunteers and resources, adopt a more externally focused organizational culture (Organizational Sustainability,  $\beta = .36, p < .05$ ). On the other hand, and contrary to expectation, these organizations’ policy goals do not have a direct effect on the type of organizational culture that develops. That is to say, human service organizations with a greater commitment to a constituent-driven advocacy agenda do not adopt a more externally focused organizational culture.

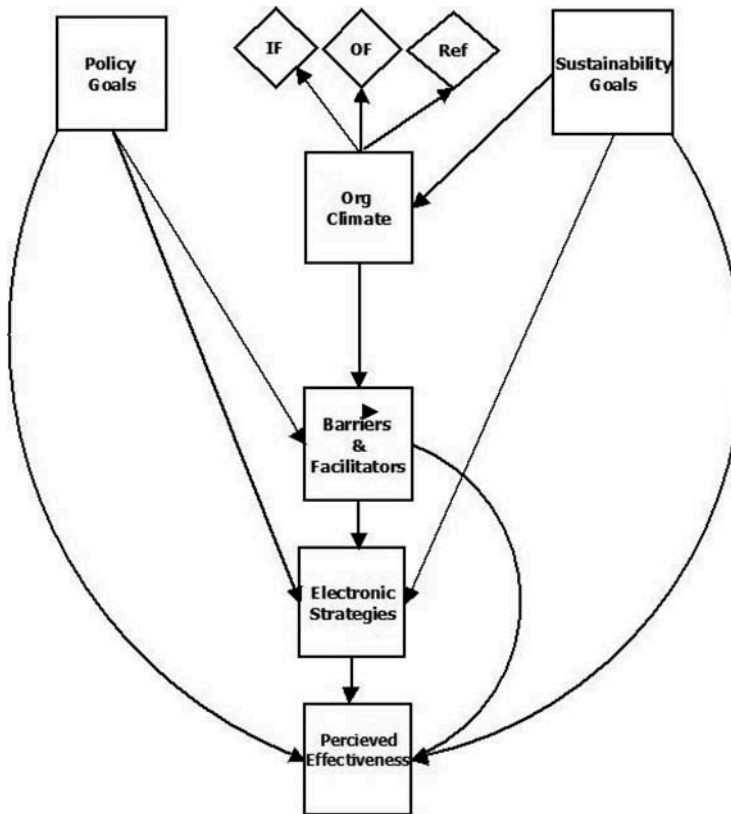
Again, consistent with expectation, Policy Goals ( $\beta = .27, p < .05$ ) and Organizational Climate ( $\beta = .41, p < .05$ ) have significant direct effects on Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators, one of the two key “infrastructure” variables in the model. Organizational Sustainability has no such direct effect; however, it does have a substantial indirect effect on Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators via its effect on Organizational Climate (indirect effect (i.e.) =  $.15, p < .05$ ). Stated somewhat differently, “systems maintenance activities” do have an effect on this infrastructure component but that effect is entirely mediated by Organizational Climate (Patterson et al., 2005).

**TABLE 5** Electronic Advocacy Tools and Techniques

| Strategy Type   | $\bar{x}$ | <i>N</i> |
|---|-----------|----------|
| <b>Electronic Advocacy Strategies</b>                                 |           |          |
| E-mail to Coordinate Policy Influence Efforts within organization     | .52       | 258      |
| E-mail to Coordinate Policy Influence Efforts outside of organization | .43       | 258      |
| Electronic Mail Discussion List About Policy Issues (List serve)      | .27       | 256      |
| Electronic Mail [E-Mail] to Decision Makers                           | .56       | 259      |
| Newsgroups  | .16       | 258      |
| Distribution Lists [Mass E-Mail Distribution]                         | .45       | 258      |
| Chat Rooms  | .00       | 257      |
| <b>Social Media Advocacy Strategies</b>                               |           |          |
| Blogs   | .11       | 258      |
| RSS Feeds (Really Simple Syndication)                                 | .03       | 252      |
| Wikis (Wikipedia)   | .07       | 257      |
| Photo Sharing (Picassa, Flickr)                                       | .11       | 255      |
| Podcasting  | .02       | 255      |
| Video Sharing (YouTube)   | .14       | 259      |
| Micro blogging (Twitter)  | .15       | 257      |
| Social Networking (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc)                           | .49       | 259      |
| Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Digg, StumbleUpon, etc)                | .01       | 255      |
| <b>Other Electronic Strategies</b>                                    |           |          |
| Online Fundraising (secure donation sites or shop for a cause sites)  | .30       | 259      |
| Video-Teleconferencing  | .12       | 259      |
| Online Survey Research  | .19       | 259      |
| Online Volunteer Recruiting   | .26       | 260      |
| Online Mapping (Like Google Earth or Google Maps)                     | .22       | 257      |
| Secure Intranet for Coordinating Activities private communication     | .22       | 259      |
| Meet ups [a tool that helps to organize face-to-face meetings]        | .09       | 256      |
| Instant Messaging, Texting, and Short Message Systems                 | .30       | 260      |
| Virtual Reality Simulation [Like Second Life]                         | .08       | 256      |
| OnLine Petitions  | .04       | 257      |
| Web-based Conferencing  | .17       | 260      |

With respect to the second key infrastructure variable, the use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies, Policy Goals has a statistically significant direct effect on this variable ( $\beta = .28, p < .05$ ) as well as a significant indirect effect via its impact on Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators (i.e.,  $= .06, p < .05$ ). Organizational Sustainability also has a significant direct effect on this infrastructure variable ( $\beta = .30, p < .05$ ) as well as a significant compound indirect effect via Organizational Climate and Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators (i.e.  $= .03, p < .05$ ). Organizational Climate's effect on the use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies is also substantial and completely mediated via its effect on Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators (i.e.  $= .09, p < .05$ ). Not surprisingly, the latter variable, Electronic Advocacy





**FIGURE 1** Conceptual model.

Barriers and Facilitators has a significant direct effect on the use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the ultimate outcome of the model, the Perceived Effectiveness of Using Electronic Advocacy Strategies, Policy Goals ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ), Organizational Sustainability ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ), Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) and the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) each have significant direct effects on Perceived Effectiveness. The first three of these variables also have a number of statistically significant indirect effects. Specifically, Policy Goals has a significant indirect effect via Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators (i.e. = .06,  $p < .05$ ) and the Use of Electronic Strategies (i.e. = .06,  $p < .05$ ). It also has a significant compound indirect effect on Perceived Effectiveness via its effect on Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators and through this variable on the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies which, in turn, has an effect on Perceived Effectiveness (i.e. = .01,  $p < .05$ ).

Organizational Sustainability has a significant indirect effect on Perceived Effectiveness via the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies (i.e.

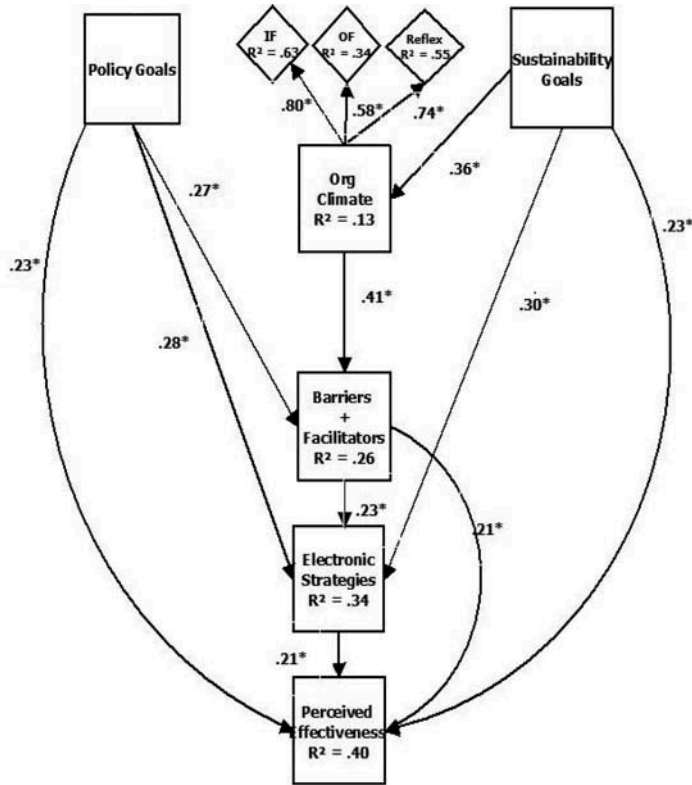


FIGURE 2 Path model.

= .06,  $p < .05$ ). It also has a statistically significant compound indirect effect which includes Organizational Climate and Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators as mediators (i.e. = .03,  $p < .05$ ). There is also a marginally significant, second compound indirect effect which includes three intervening variables, i.e., Organizational Climate, Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators as well as the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies (i.e. = .01,  $p = .07$ ).

Organizational Climate's effect on Perceived Effectiveness is entirely indirect or mediated. It has a sizeable and statistically significant indirect effect on Perceived Effectiveness via its impact on Electronic Barriers and Facilitators (i.e. = .08,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, it has a significant, compound indirect effect on Perceived Effectiveness via two intervening variables, i.e., Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators and the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies (i.e. = .02,  $p < .05$ ). Lastly, Electronic Advocacy Barriers and Facilitators exerts part of its impact on Perceived Effectiveness indirectly via its effect on the Use of Electronic Advocacy Strategies (i.e. = .05,  $p = .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Two of the greatest challenges facing HSOs are to better service their advocacy agendas and to ensure their ongoing ability to do so. By capitalizing on the new, digital media, which are designed for this very purpose—it would seem that both objectives can be achieved. However, very little data, for or against this assertion, exists. This effort begins to address this deficit. Specifically, we propose and test a model that links the aforementioned organizational imperatives—policy goal achievement and organizational sustainability—to the development of a particular organizational “culture” that is designed to promote these ends. Drawing upon Open Systems Theory, the author has demonstrated that human service organizations’ sustainability, but surprisingly not their policy agendas, are important determinants of the “organizational cultures” that evolve to service these two organizational imperatives. As such, the “systems maintenance activities” of human service organizations—achieving greater organizational visibility, capacity, access to volunteers and acquisition of resources—are indirectly serviced by the development of an “externally focused” organizational culture which facilitates the adoption of newer digital “tools” the effectiveness of which these organizations attest to. While servicing an advocacy agenda is not a determinant of this more “facilitative” organizational culture, it is nonetheless the case that the policy agendas of these organizations have significant direct impacts on the acquisition of these digital tools and the perception that they are effective in promoting those agendas. In effect, then, we find, admittedly qualified, support for the claim that new “digital age” tools like social media are instrumental in helping human service organizations realize their objectives. Our support is necessarily qualified because the “evidence” for this claim rests on the subjective assessments of the members of these organizations. Needed are more controlled comparisons between human service organizations that do, and do not, adopt these new digital technologies. Until that time, however, the data provided herein can be considered consistent with, but not proof of, the possible benefits of adopting these media to achieve essential organizational objectives.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, as a matter of record, The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities identifies ( $N = 3,800$ ) general human service organizations with budgets of more than \$30,000. Because this list of organizations is the most current and complete list of human service organizations available, it was selected to provide the sampling frame for this study. However, only 7% ( $n = 262$ ) of these organizations participated in this study. Given that fact, it is reasonable to have some concerns about the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, with respect to the mediating variable in our model—organizational barriers and facilitators of electronic communication technologies—it might have been useful to have also directly inquired about the corresponding organizational barriers and facilitators associated with the use of traditional communication technologies. Unfortunately, space limitations in the survey instrument precluded doing so.

Finally, organizational surveys require someone to speak for the entire organization (Hager et al., 2003), and the question remains whether and to what extent any one individual can be said to be “fully sighted” about the broad array of issues of a survey such as the one used in this investigation. Moreover, despite the fact that surveys were mailed to the executive director of the agency, there is no way of knowing who within the organization actually completed the data collection instrument.

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS, FURTHER STUDY

This study focused on the Open Systems model of the CVF as the most likely catalyzing force for driving an organization’s engagement with advocacy activities. There are three remaining quadrants in the CVF for possible exploration and investigation in terms of their influence on advocacy activities in general and electronic advocacy activities specifically. It is possible that organizations operating from different quadrants of the model may value advocacy activities more highly or privilege advocacy activities as a mechanism for organizational stability differently from those found here. Future studies could compare how different quadrants of the CVF effect an organization’s advocacy climate and level of engagement with advocacy activities.

Another logical next question is whether the embrace of the newer, digital age media results in more successful advocacy outcomes. Understanding the effectiveness of these new digital tools is imperative for preparing and educating future advocates entering the field, and is certainly important for individuals already practicing in the field. Human service organizations are not resource-rich institutions and frequently have little money or expertise to invest in their advocacy agendas. Actionable knowledge about the success of digital tools for meeting advocacy goals will be a real service to the sector and a boon in helping organizational leaders to make the appropriate and most efficient choices for their organizations.

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