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WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE?

The term "organizational climate" can be used in either a technical or colloquial sense. As a technical term, it is defined as "a set of measurable properties of the work environment, based on the collective perceptions of the people who live and work in the environment and demonstrated to influence their motivation and behavior."¹ As an everyday term, it describes the way it *feels* to work in an organization. People use "climate" as a catchall phrase to describe the overall "tone" or "work atmosphere" of an organization. Simply stated, climate is people's perceptions of the environment in which they work.

WHY STUDY CLIMATE?

According to either the technical or the everyday definition of the term, climate seems to play an important role in determining how people behave in an organization. Different climates attract and motivate different kinds of employees by subtly or blatantly defining the "rights and wrongs" and "dos and don'ts" for each organizational member. If people perceive that certain kinds of behavior will be rewarded, they will be motivated to engage in those behaviors. Similarly, if there is a feeling that other behaviors are punished ("that's not done around here"), these will be avoided.

Research and experience have shown that organizational climate has a long-term impact on an organization's productivity and performance. For example, climates characterized by informality, few procedures, independence, and high responsibility tend to motivate creative R&D professionals. This same kind of work environment might prove extremely frustrating to other employees, who would be most productively motivated by a more structured and predictable climate.

The study of climate is important because it helps explain employee motivation, employee behavior, and organizational performance. It provides managers with insight into the "people side" of the business. Another reason for studying climate is that it seems to be determined primarily by the practices of the leaders of the organization. Climate, then, can become an active and useful tool for managing the people side of the business.



In order to use climate as a management tool, managers need a simple, straightforward way of gauging climate. The research that has been done has identified six categories or dimensions that make up the climate of an organization. These six dimensions have been shown to be the most important predictors of employee motivation and performance.

THE DIMENSIONS OF CLIMATE

Structure	This dimension reflects employees' sense of being well organized and of having a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities. Structure is high when people feel that everyone's job is well defined. It is low when there is confusion over who has decision-making authority
Standards	This dimension measures the feeling of pressure to improve performance and the degree of pride employees take in doing a good job. A high level of standards means that people are always looking for ways to improve performance. A low level reflects lower performance standards.
Responsibility	This dimension reflects the feeling employees have of "being their own boss" and of not having to double-check decisions with others. High responsibility signifies that employees are encouraged to solve problems on their own. Low responsibility indicates that risk taking and the testing of new approaches tend to be discouraged.
Recognition	This dimension indicates the feeling of being rewarded for a job well done. This is a measure of the emphasis placed on reward versus criticism and punishment. High-recognition climates are characterized by an appropriate balance of reward and criticism. Low recognition climates mean that good work is inconsistently rewarded.
Support	This dimension reflects the feeling of trust and mutual support that prevails in the organization. Support is high when employees feel they are part of a well-functioning team and they sense they can get help when they need it. It is low when employees feel isolated and alone.
Cooperation	This dimension measures the sense of interdepartmental teamwork and of "working together" with other departments. High cooperation signifies that employees feel their efforts are expected to be carefully coordinated with those of other departments. Low cooperation means there is friction and competition among work groups.



WHAT DETERMINES AN ORGANIZATION'S CLIMATE

A climate profile not only provides managers with a "snapshot" of how their people view the work environment but it also highlights how managers can *change* the climate to improve employee motivation and productivity. Research into the determinants of climate is continuing, but the primary determinants of climate and how climate relates to motivation and bottom-line performance is how a manager behaves.

Management Practices

Most studies have shown that the single most important determinant of an organization's climate is the day-to-day behavior of the boss. The leader of a work group has a powerful influence on the expectations of its members. Many times, the quickest way to change organizational climate is to change the manager or the way the manager is managing.

