ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE - DIFFERING CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENTS

Dr. K. Suguna

ABSTRACT

Organizations today are facing major challenges in terms of intense competition, workforce diversity, cross –cultural interactions, employee retention, innovation and productivity, changing consumer preferences and dynamic government polices. The need of the hour is creating teams and fostering high level of competencies among them while maintaining high spirit of achievement. In view of this, the study of organizational climate as a causal factor of effectiveness has gained prominence. However, there are many problems in conceptualizing, measuring and improving organizational climate. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight them for the benefit of researchers and practitioners.

I. CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Terms such as environment and atmosphere are used as synonyms to organizational climate (OC). Organisational climate is a meaningful construct with significant implications for understanding human behaviour in organisations (Allen, 2003; Al-Shammari, 1992; Ashforth, 1985; Cotton, 2004; Glission & James, 2002; Tustin, 1993; Woodman & King, 1978). This is evident from all the research conducted and published on the role and value of organisational climate in organisations and its impact on various organisational outcomes over the past 50 years.

A number of definitions of organisational climate have been formulated in the various studies on the concept.In the literature, organizational climate has been defined by different writers. While there are some differences, there seems to be a greater degree of commonality. Consider the following definitions and those in Exhibit I.1 which say what it is.

Forehand and Gilmer (1964) defined OC in the following terms.
A set of characteristics that (a) describe the organization and distinguish it from other organizations, (b) are relatively enduring over time and (c) influence the behavior of people in the organization.

Tagiuri and Litwin (1968) define OC as:

Relatively enduring quality of the internal environment that is experienced by its members, influences their behavior, and can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics of the organization.

Campbell et al. (1970) define OC as:
A set of attributes specific to a particular organization that may be induced from the way the organization deals with its members and its environment. For the individual member within the organization, OC takes the form of a set of attributes and expectancies which describe the organization in terms of both static characteristics (such as degree of autonomy) and dynamic characteristics (such as behavior outcomes).

Payne (1971) defines OC as:
A molar concept, reflecting the content and strength of the prevalent   values, norms, attitude, behavior and feelings of the members of a social system, which can be operationally measured through the perception of system members or observational and other objective means.

From the above definitions, the following salient features can be highlighted.
·   OC as characteristic of an organization that describes and distinguishes it.
·   An atmosphere.
·   A normative structure of attitudes and behavioral standards.
·   Characterizes the personalities - a product of leadership practices, communication practices, and enduring systematic characteristics of the working relationships among persons and division of any particular organization.
·   Result of interactions among task, technology, structure, people and power variables of the organization which produce a culture and process.
·   Influences behavior of people and provides employee job satisfaction and organizational goal achievement.
·   An enduring one.
However, there have been others who consider OC to be result of the perceptions of the members of an organization. The following definitions and those in Exhibit I.2 present this kind of view.

Litwin and Stringer (1968) observed:
A set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in that environment, which influences their motivation and behavior.

Taylor and Bowers (1970) maintained:
OC is the perceived traits of organizational stimuli which become a group property through interpersonal interactions and which modify overt behavior of people within the organization.

Schneider and Synder (1975) defined organizational climate as:
A summary perception which people have of (or about) an organization. It is, then, a global impression of what the organization is.

Liturin and Wilson, (1978) viewed organizational climate as follows.
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.

The above definitions have a number of common elements such as:
(a) OC is a molar concept.
(b) OC is a product of behavior and policies of members in the organization, especially in the top management.
(c) Though subject to change OC is enduring over time.
(d) Despite differences in individual perceptions, there can be broad overall agreement in describing OC.
(e) When used in the form of summated, averaged perceptions of the individuals, OC is a characteristic of the organization instead of the individual.
(f) OC influences the behavior of members of the organization.

II. ORGANIZATION CLIMATE: A MEDIATING VARIABLE
While many definitions highlight organizational climate as a variable that influences behavior, job satisfaction etc., the following definitions describe it as linkage and mediating variable.
Sakthivel Murugan (2007), Venkatapathy (1990) and Litwin and Stringer (1968) in their studies found that task-oriented managerial climate in private sector firms made employees hard working, nurturing task created a more favorable climate for subordinates and their satisfaction, productivity increased.

Likert (1967) maintained:
OC is considered to be a linkage between structural attributes of an organization and its effectiveness.

Payne and Mansfield (1977) described climate as,

A conceptual linkage between an organization and individual. From this perspective, climate mediates between specific situational attributes or events and individual perceptions, attitudes and behavior.

From the definitions, it can be said that organizational climate reflects socio-psychological reality. It is a manifestation of the attitudes of organizational members (all employees) towards the organization itself. These attitudes are, of course, based upon such things as management policies, supervisory techniques and the "fairness" of management, labor's reactions to management and literally anything that affects the work environment.

III. MEASUREMENT OF OC

Various issues in measuring organizational climate are presented here. Tagiuri (1968) highlighted the need to resolve the following problems in the area of climate research:
(a) need to distinguish between the objective and subjective environment;
(b) need to distinguish between the person and the situation;
(c) need to determine as to which aspects of the environment should be specified; and
(d) Need to identify the structure and dynamics of the environment.

A. *Perception Is Important Than Objective Reality*

Woodman and King (1978) are of the view that phenomenological OC is externa006C to the individual yet cognitively, it is internal to the extent that it is affected by individual perception. It has been observed that an individual acts on the basis of what he perceives to be appropriate or acceptable in a given social setting (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). He receives messages and cues from different sources in the social environment which form the basis for his perception. An important source of information, according to Franklin (1975) and Likert (1967), is the manager.

Organizational climate, although intangible, is a very real phenomenon. The confusion centering on the concept of organizational climate is whether we are trying to capture the objective features of the organization, or organizational features as perceived by individual organizational members? While studying organizational climate we are interested in knowing how the objective reality of the organization impinges on the individual members rather than objective reality per se. This is because behavior within and outside an organization is not

caused by objective reality, rather by the way the individual responds to objective reality. Therefore, individual's perception of organizational reality is more important than the objective reality that exists within an organization.

B. Perception Not Attitude

Johannesson (1971) equated perceived OC with job satisfaction. Robert M. Guion (1973) too has viewed OC as, no different from job satisfaction and therefore, considers it an attribute of the individual and not that of an organization. Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) viewed that organizational climate is perceptual in nature, which is descriptive of a situation rather than evaluative, as in the case of attitudinal measures.

 Attitudes towards organizationally relevant dimensions involve an affective component, whereas organizational climate involves perceptual component (Sinha 1990). In measuring attitudes researchers try to elicit responses which the respondents think to be 'good' or 'bad' but in organizational climate measures, researchers try to elicit responses as to what is happening in the organization. Thus, it is not intended to capture affects of individuals but their opinions about what goes on in the organization. Therefore, affect related measures, such as job satisfaction and job involvement are out of the purview of organizational climate measures. Rather they are the outcomes of organizational climate Sharma (1989). Schneider and Reichers (1983) opined that some methodological progress has been achieved. Researchers now have the ability to differentiate climate from attitudinal variables such as job satisfaction.

C. Divergent Perceptions And Divergent Climates

But the question remains, that if perception is important, then within an organization we may possibly land up with as many climates as there are number of individual members (Johannesson, 1971). James and Sells (1978,1981) argue that since individuals differ from one another in terms of their cognitive construction competencies, encoding abilities, self-regulatory systems, beliefs, needs, values and self-concepts, they are predisposed to differ in what they perceive as ambiguous, challenging, fair, friendly, supportive, and so forth. Perceptions of climate of the same environment may, therefore, differ for different types of individuals. The aggregation of climate scores of a heterogeneous sample is likely to mark important variation.

But perception itself is the result of both the objective conditions and subjective factors. Thus, if we include a sizeable number of individual subjective data points of a particular organization, we may be able to approximate the

organizational reality better. There is no such thing as 'objective' in social reality (Hofstede, 1980 and Katz and Khan 1978) when they emphasized the informal culture that develops in an organization when the formal system is reinterpreted by the employees in different ways.

Roberts, Hulin and Rousseau (1978) have suggested that a composition theory relating psychological climate (PC) scores to OC scores can be established if perceptions of climate are shared among the individuals whose scores are to be aggregated. There are, of course, some critics of the climate instruments who are unlikely to be satisfied with any of the suggested precautions or solutions to the problem. For example, Starbuck (1976) recommends that the formulators of a concept like climate must adhere to the principle that measures based solely on subjective data provide information about the subject, not about his environment. This is an extreme position and is not shared by most of the scholars working on the climate construct.

D. Different Concepts To Measure

Organizational climate is perceived at three levels, further complicating the measurement effort, (Field, Abelson and Abelson, 1982).
o   Individual (or psychological) climate is the individual's perception of the work environment;
o   Group climate is the perception of work groups or subgroups; and
o   Organizational climate is the collective perception of all employees within a unit.

Even though the group climate may be different in various units of a company, organization wide profiles are the most common. Gilmer (1964) equated it with the psychological climate of an industry. Dill et al. (1962) used the term organizational personality.

     Sharma (1989) has pointed out that when organizational climate is studied within a
particular organization (i.e. individual is used as a unit of analysis) we may use the term psychological climate, but when cross-organizational comparisons are made by averaging the responses of the members of a particular organization, (i.e. the unit of analysis is the organization) then we can use the term 'organizational climate'.

E. Fragmented vs. Integrated

The fact that there are often differences in climate between work units suggests that the criteria for successful operations may be somewhat different from one department to the next. Is it then necessary to have a fragmented view rather than an integrated view? There are arguments against fragmented view.

·   Difficult to measure Although it is recognized that any one individual may influence the organizational climate to some degree, the tracing of the effects of individual behavior on the climate would be quite burdensome and complex.

·   Concerted view is more stable When viewed in concert, the actions of the individuals become more meaningful for viewing the total impact upon the climate and determining the stability of the work environment.

·   Minor differences   However, since the climates in organizational subsystems are seldom radically different, a view of the total organizational climate and its determination will be more meaningful to the student of human behavior in the work environment than a fragmented view of the subsystems.

For the above reasons, researchers favored total system (organization) perception. While there may be differences in climates within subsystems (departments), these will be integrated to a certain extent just as the attitudes of individuals are integrated to form the existing organizational climate.

E.   Dimensions of OC

What are the dimensions of OC? It is indeed surprising that despite general agreement over the definition of the concept and two decades of considerable research effort there is as yet no agreement about a common set of dimensions of OC.

Richard M. Hodgetts (1991) has classified OC into two major categories. He has given an analogy with an iceberg where there is a part of the iceberg that can be seen from the surface and another part that is under water and is not visible. The visible part that can be observed or measured include the structure of hierarchy, goals and objectives of the organization, performance standards and evaluations, technological state of the operations and so on. The second category contains factors that are not visible and quantifiable and include such subjective areas as supportiveness, employee's feelings and attitudes, values, morale, personal and social interaction with peers, subordinates and superiors and a sense of satisfaction with the job. Both of these categories are shown in Figure I-1

The dimensions of OC are classified by B.R. Sharma (1989) into three broad categories as follows.

1.   Leadership function Formal actions of the executives of a company that are intended to motivate employees, including formal systems of reward and punishment, various employee benefit programmes, incentive pay plans, communication programmes, the quality of leadership offered by the top management and the resulting supervision exercised by the middle and lower levels of the managerial hierarchy, etc.
2.   Structural properties Characteristics of the total organization or of the sub-organizational units in terms of size, span of management, degree of decentralization, line - staff structure, number of levels in the organizational hierarchy and shape of organization structure, etc.
3.   Employee satisfaction Attitudes are feelings of employees about fellow workers, job experience and the organization, etc.
The different dimensions of organizational climate as stated by different writers are given here to understand that there are differences.

Garlie A.Forehand and B. Von Haller Gilmer (1964) established the following eight dimensions.
Structure: Deals with structure of authority and relationships among persons and groups.
Size: Deals with the position of the individual in the organization.
Complexity: Deals with the number of components and number and nature of interactions among the systems employed by the organization.
Leadership Style: Deals with the personality measure of individuals in leadership positions.
Goal Direction: Deals with organizational goals and the relative weight placed on main and subsidiary goals.

G.H Litwin and R.A Stringer (1968) identified 9 dimensions of organizational climate.
Structure: The feeling that employees have about the constraints in the group; how many rules, regulations, procedures there are; emphasis on red - tape and going through channels.
Responsibility: The feeling of being your own boss; not having to double - check all your decisions; when there is a job to do, knowing that it is your job.
Reward: The feeling of being rewarded for a job well done; emphasizing positive rewards rather than punishments; the perceived fairness of the pay and promotion policy.

Risk: The sense of risk and challenge in the job and in the organization; is there an emphasis on taking calculated risks or is "playing it safe" the best way to operate.

Warmth: The feeling of general good fellowship that prevails in the work group atmosphere; the emphasis on being well - liked; the prevalence of friendly and informal social groups.

Support: The perceived helpfulness of the managers and other employees in the group; emphasis on mutual support from above and below.

Standards: The perceived importance of implicit and explicit goals and performance standards; the emphasis on doing a good job; the challenge represented in personal and group goals.

Conflict: The feeling that managers and other workers want to hear different opinions; the emphasis placed on getting problems out in the open, rather than smoothing them over or ignoring them.

Identity: The feeling that you belong to a company and you are a valuable member of a working team; the importance placed on this kind of spirit.

J.P Campbell, M.D. Dunnette, E.E. Lawler and K.E. Weick (1970) listed four factors.

Structure: Degree to which superiors established and communicated a job's objectives and the methods for accomplishing them.

Consideration / Warmth / Support: Degree to which there exists managerial support and nurturance of subordinates.

Autonomy: Degree to which an individual can be his own boss and reserve considerable decision- making power for himself: degree to which there is a lack of constant accountability to higher management.

Reward: Degree to which there is a promotion- achievement orientation.

Robert D. Pritchard and Bernard Karasick (1973) measured OC using 10 factors.

Autonomy: Degree to which freedom exists.

Cooperation: Degree to which personnel cooperate with each other.

Supportiveness: Degree to which the organization tries to satisfy personnel needs for recognition.

Structure: Degree to which the organization specified the methods used to accomplish tasks; degree to which organization likes to specify, codify, etc.

Reward Structure: Degree to which personnel are well rewarded.

Performance- Reward Relationship: Degree to which rewards are fair and appropriate.

Achievement Motivation: Degree to which organization or sub-system attempts to excel.

Status Polarization: Degree to which there are physical and psychological distinctions between hierarchical levels.
Flexibility: Degree to which there is a willingness to try new procedures.
Decision Centralization: Degree to which organization centralizes the responsibility of decision-making.

Academicians and practitioners alike have attempted to crystallize the factors that influence or determine HRD climate. According to Kalburgi (1984), Parthasarathy (1988), Rao (1991), Murthy (1991), Chandrasekar (1993) and Coelho (1993), a combination of various factors such as openness, team spirit, trust, autonomy, cooperation, integrity, recognition, communication, participation, fair compensation, counseling, encouraging risk taking, problem solving, valuing human assets, grievance handling, collective bargaining, and respect for the individual influenced the climate of an organization.

Rao (1986) developed a 38-item HRD climate questionnaire and conducted a study in 41 organizations. These 38 items were grouped into three categories; general climate, OCOPAC culture, and HRD mechanisms. Another study purporting to measure the HRD climate was conducted at the State Bank of Patiala (Agarwal, 1989). This study had employed 42 dimensions.

Thus different writers have employed different combinations and permutations with the result that every one has ended up studying OC some what differently from all others. Different versions of climate like HRD climate, Safety climate, Ethical climate, and Achievement climate, are proposed and measured. Exhibit I.3 showcases dimensions of organizational climate given by other writers.

IV. IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS
The above presentation makes it clear that there is no standard definition or instrument of measurement that can be utilized by researchers and practitioners. The divergent views are not only due to perceptual differences among researchers but also because of evolving and expanding nature of the concept of organizational climate. As such researchers and practitioners have to first define what they intend to measure in clear terms and then design an appropriate measuring instrument that is valid and reliable. Fortunately, there is sound knowledge base to guide them in understanding the horizons of the concept and designing methodologies in an innovative way.

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Exhibit I.1   Definitions of Organizational Climate

Author	Definition
Georgopoules (1965)	Defines OC as a *normative structure* of attitudes and behavioral standards which provide a basis for interpreting the situations and act as a source of pressure for directing activities.
Schneider and Bartlett (1968)	Defined organizational climate as that which prompts an individual to be in a set or readiness, in line with explanations and general experiences specific to an organization.
Friedlander and Margulies (1969)	Defined OC as a relatively *stable or ongoing property* of the organization which may release, channel, facilitate or constrain an organization's technical as well as human resources.
Baumgartel (1971)	Organization climate is *a product of leadership practices, communication practices*, and enduring systematic characteristics of the working relationships among persons and division of any particular organization.
Johannesson (1971)	Defines OC as the *condition of an organizational environment* as related to the characteristics of the job, the leadership, the work group and the various subsystems as well as the total organization. In other words, OC refers to the characteristic environment within which the members of an organization operate.
Slocum and Strawger (1972)	OC refers to the *interactions* among task, technology, structure, people and power variables of the organization which produce a culture and process for employee job satisfaction and organizational goal achievement.
Insel and Moos(1974)	OC is characterized by *personalities* that exert directional influences on behavior.
Meera Komarraju (1981)	Defined OC as *atmosphere* that exists within an organization as a consequence of various factors such as management policies and goals, relationship between management and employees, communication systems, controls, leadership styles, welfare activities and so on.

Exhibit I.2 Organizational Climate as Employee Perceptions

Author	Definition
Pritchard and Karasick (1973)	Define OC as a relatively enduring quality of an organization's internal environment, distinguishing it from other organizations, which (a) results from the behavior and policies of members of the organization, especially in top management, (b) is perceived by members of the organization, (c) serves as a basis for interpreting the situation and (d) acts as a source of pressure for directing activity.
James and Jones(1974)	View OC as a set of individual perceptions of the organizational context i.e. descriptions that represent interpretations of salient organizational features, events and processes.
Hellriegel and Slocum (1974)	Defined OC as a set of attributes which can be perceived about a particular organization and / or its subsystems and which may be included from the way that organization deals with its members.
Schneider(1975)	Describes climate as a set of macro perceptions which reflect processes of concept formation and abstraction based on micro perceptions about specific organizational conditions, events and experiences.
Downey et.al(1975)	OC is a characteristic of organization which is reflected in the descriptions of the employees make of the policies, practices and conditions that exist in the work environment
Gavin(1975)	Defines climate as being composed of perceptually based sets of descriptions that incorporate people interpretations of the organizational context. These climate perceptions, in turn form the basis for responses such as performance, satisfaction or commitment.
Gibson et.al (1976)	OC is a set of properties of the work environment, perceived, directly or indirectly by the employees who work in this environment, and is assumed to be a major force in influencing their behavior on the job.

Exhibit I.3   Different Dimensions of Organizational Climate

Newton Margulies(1965)

Group Characteristics(Disengagement, Hindrance, Esprit and Intimacy) and   Leader Characteristics(Aloofness, Production Emphasis, Thrust and Consideration)

Baumgartel(1971)

1. Autonomy, 2. Growth and development, 3. Willingness to train the executives, 4. Opportunities to use new knowledge, experimentation and innovation, 5.Participative management, 6. Confidence and trust, 7. Openness in communication and interpersonal trust, 8. Structure.

D.C.Hall and Benjmin Schnieder(1973)

1. Work challenge, 2. Autonomy, 3. Valued work activities, 4. Support in achieving his work goals.

Downey, Hellreigel and Slocum(1975)

 Decision making, Warmth, Risk, Openness, Rewards and Structure.

Applebaum (1976).

Responsibility, Conformity, Rewards, Standards and Organizational clarity

P.M. Muchinsky(1977)

1. Quality of leadership, 2. Amount of trust, 3. Communication: Upward and Downward, 4. Feeling of Useful work, 5. Responsibility, 6. Fair rewards, 7. Responsible job pressures, 8. Opportunity, 9. Responsibility controls, Structure and Bureaucracy, 10. Employee involvement.

J.E. Newman(1977)

1. Supervisory style, 2. Task characteristics, 3. Performance-reward relationship, 4. Co-worker relations, 5. Employee work motivation, 6. Equipment and arrangement of people, 7. Employee competence, 8. Decision making policy, 9. Work space, 10. Job responsibility/ importance.

D.Zohar(1980)

1. Perceived importance of safety training programmes, 2. Perceived management attitudes towards safety, 3. Effects of safe conduct on promotion, 4. Level of risk at work place, 5. Effects of required work place on safety, 6. Status of safety officer, 7. Status of safety committee, 8. Effects of safe conduct on social status.

B.R. Sharma(1987)

1. Scope for advancement, 2. Grievance handling, 3. Monetary benefits, 4. Participative management, 5. Objectivity and reality, 6. Recognition and appreciation, 7. Safety and security, 8. Training and education, 9. Welfare facilities.

Pareek (2002)

Functional Motives

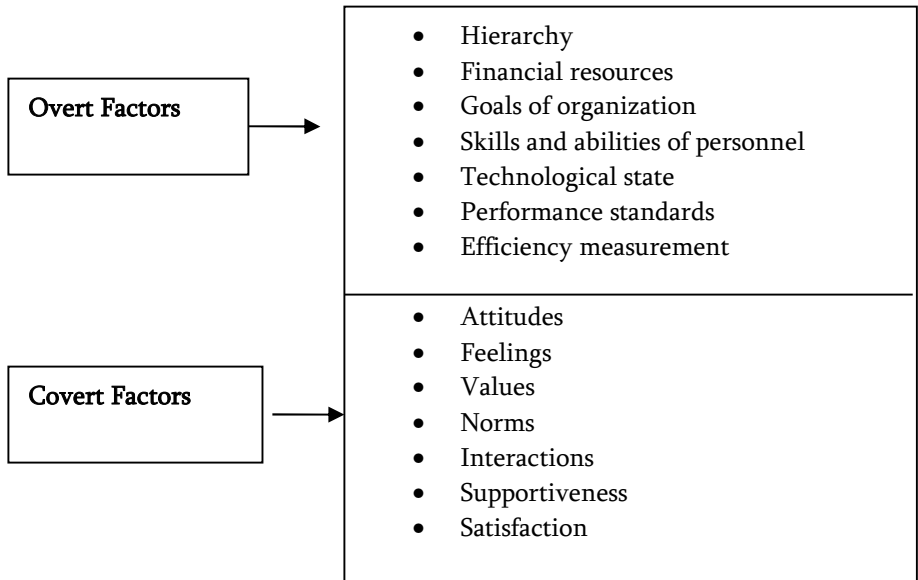1. Achievement Motive, 2. Expert Influence Motive, 3. Extension Motive,

Dysfunctional Motives

4. Control Motive, 5. Affiliation Motive, 6.Dependency Motive
Lewlyn L R Rodrigues (2005)
1. Scope of Advancement, 2. Supervision, 3. Taining and Development, 4. Interpersonal Relations, 5. Objectivity and Rationality, 6. Monetary Benefits, 7. Participative Management

Figure I-1 Categories of Organizational Climate

Overt Factors
- Hierarchy
- Financial resources
- Goals of organization
- Skills and abilities of personnel
- Technological state
- Performance standards
- Efficiency measurement

Covert Factors
- Attitudes
- Feelings
- Values
- Norms
- Interactions
- Supportiveness
- Satisfaction

ABOUT AUTHOR

Dr.K.Suguna is presently working as Professor, Department of Management Program, CMR Institute of Management Studies (Autonomous), Bangalore. She has over 16 years of experience in teaching. Dr.K.Suguna organized number of National Level Conferences, Fests and Workshops. She chaired number of sessions at conferences and seminars. She is the adjudicator of M.Phil and Ph.D dissertations of several universities. She published 2 books and 20 papers in reputed international and national journals. She presented more than 35 papers in both international and national conferences organized by various universities and educational institutions.