Psychological Climate in an Institution of Higher Learning: A Case Study

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Interest in organizational climate as an important index to the quality of human behavior in organizations has grown consistently since Elton Mayo first studied the significance of behavior in institutions. Various concepts have emerged to measure organizational climate. Obviously, one of the most significant variables reflecting the pervading atmosphere is job satisfaction, or how human resources look at their jobs.[1] Job satisfaction is equated with atmosphere brought about by individual perceptions—the psychological climate—an integral part of the organizational climate.

Five dimensions are important in determining the psychological climate of an organization: goal directions, size and shape, leadership patterns, communication networks, and decision-making procedures. But studies have shown that such specific factors of the work environment do not determine employee morale as such. Rather, morale results from the worker's perception of his working conditions and his job. How this job is perceived is a function of his ego-involvement with it. Ego involvement, in turn, is associated with a feeling of belonging, with recognition, with a sense of one's worth, with the feeling that one has an opportunity to contribute to a worthwhile effort.[2]

Measures of institutional climate have included absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, participation in decision-making processes, the communication system, and a host of other variables. Palmer analyzed such personal behavior as tardiness and turnover in 188 firms and found these variables useful as objective indices of climate.[3] Perceptions of people in the organization have also been sources of information for climate studies. Respondents may perceive the climate according to how they view the general social environment. Perceptually-based measures have been formulated by Likert and others and have been useful in providing indicators of climate.

In a review of the large literature focusing on psychological climates, Forehand and Gilmer conclude that adjustments are made in terms of how the individual perceives his work climate. This perception to a large extent is governed by personality factors and how these factors are related to the satisfaction of one's needs. The accumulation of individual perceptions through time leads to what Bavelas considers a "common fund of experience" in an organization. "Out of it develop ways of behaving, ways of working, ways of loafing, ways of cooperating and ways of resisting."[4]

Colleges and universities have climates distinct from those of other organizations. One of the main differences between a college and a business or industrial firm is the difference in their reasons for being—education as opposed to profit making. Pursuit of academic excellence, increase in enrollment and faculty size, type of academic organization and administrative structure, and supervisory practices have brought about rapid changes in the climate of educational institutions.

Areas of Study

This paper attempts to present the significant findings of two studies conducted toward the end of school year 1980-81 in a private college in Negros, Philippines. The first study looks into the rates of tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover among full-time and part-time college faculty members.[5] The second study is a survey of 57 full-time faculty members' perception of identified morale factors.[6] Concerned administrators and faculty members may well see value in these descriptive studies of college climate.

Turnover rate and incidence of Tardiness and Absenteeism

This section focuses on the actual practices of college teachers in terms of turnover, tardiness, and absences. Numerical data were derived from available administrative records.

Turnover rate. A turnover profile of full-time and part-time college faculty members over a three-year period (1978-81) was drawn. This picture considered mid-year and end-of-the-year rates of turnover.

There was a greater turnover of teachers at the end of the school year than between terms of the same year (22% versus 16%). More full-time teachers tended to leave school at the end of the school year than between the first and second terms (12% versus 1%). More part-time teachers quit teaching in the middle of the school year than at the end (37% versus 34%).

The figures show that a little more than one out of ten full-time teachers left school at the end of the school year, while about three out of ten part-time teachers did so. The common reasons for the turnover were transfer of work and residence, increase in the volume of work in the primary occupation, and non-renewal of contract initiated either by the college administration or by the teacher himself.

Tardiness and absenteeism. Lost faculty contact hours were determined by tallying the recorded hours of absences and tardiness of each faculty member for the school year 1980-81. Percentages of total lost hours against total expected contact hours of each full-time and part-time faculty member were computed to get an index of absenteeism and tardiness.

Among the full-time teachers, the percentage of missing lecture hours ranged from 0 to 20, while among the part-time faculty the range was 0 to 23. The ten highest rates of absences of full-time teachers ranged from 8 to 20, while the top ten of the part-time faculty showed a percentage range of 15 to 23. A 20% rate of tardiness and absenteeism signified that a faculty member missed one hour out of five expected lecture hours. On the average, part-time teachers wasted more lecture hours (Mean $=7\%$, SD $= .9$) than full-time teachers (Mean $= 3\%$, SD $= .4$).

The collected data, together with an assessment of the factors behind turnover, lateness, and absences, may prove strong measures for determining college climate. It should be understood, however, that while these three factors are widely accepted indices of avoidance response and, consequently, of job dissatisfaction, some management authorities feel that these indicators, particularly turnover rates, cannot be considered an absolute index. Maier argues that turnover rates are more a reflection of motivational differences than of job dissatisfaction.[7] Quitting a job, therefore, implies the availability of an alternative. G. K. Ingham, in a related study, contends that turnover rate is also more reflective of motivational differences than of dissatisfaction,[8] although according to S. Talacci, dissatisfaction with the job is expected to result in turnover.[9]

Teachers' Perceptions

Survey questionnaires were accomplished by 57 of the 63 full-time college teachers. Twenty-eight respondents had been with the college for three years or more ("old group") while 29 had taught at the school for 0 to 2 years ("new group"). In the old group, heavy modal distribution was in the range of 3 to 8 years of employment.

The new group of teachers tended to be younger than the old group. There were more women than men in the old group but sexes were about equal in the new group. More members of the old group held administrative positions in the college. The faculty of Liberal Arts dominated both groups.

The majority of the sample viewed fairly positively the satisfaction of their needs for belonging and recognition in their present jobs. They registered differences, however, in their perception of themselves in relation to students, teachers, and administrators.

Belongingness. No one in either group felt he was not accepted by members of the community. All responses were distributed in the *mildly accepted—accepted—highly accepted* continuum. The majority of the teachers in the old and new groups saw themselves in the middle scale. If we compare the mid-range teachers' perceptions on relation to their students, fellow teachers, and administrators, variations in the two groups' responses are evident.

Q: How do you see yourself in relation to students, fellow teachers, and administrators?

	Students	Teachers	Administrators
Old group			
Mildly accepted	17.86%	21.43%	34.14%
Accepted	50	42.86	35.21
Highly accepted	32.14	35.71	32.14
New group			
Mildly accepted	3.45%	10.34%	6.89%
Accepted	55.17	65.52	65.52
Highly accepted	41.38	24.14	27.59

One-half of the teachers in the old group felt accepted by their students; a lesser number felt the same way about their fellow teachers; and still a lesser number felt accepted by the administration. In the new group, a greater number of teachers felt equally accepted by fellow teachers and administrators, while more than one-half of the same group felt accepted by the students. Moreover, the old group had higher percentages in the *mildly accepted* category than the new group. It appears, therefore, that teachers in the new group see their general relationship with students, fellow teachers, and administrators in a better light than teachers in the old group.

While the sense of belongingness of young faculty members is high, administrators must strive to maintain or reinforce this perception. Yale University president A. Barlett Giamatti underscored this administrative

responsibility when he wrote that the concern for faculty well-being must be significantly focused on the special needs of the younger faculty. It is observed all over the world that young faculty leave teaching for other professions. Giamatti recommends that institutions continuously bring in new and vital people, encouraging and rewarding the best of them by paying them well and appreciating their commitment to the academe. Administrators must find them time to pursue their research, encourage their civic involvement, and keep faith in them.[10]

Personal relationships are always important in an institution. All teachers in the study, except one in the new group, reported having someone in the school they could call a friend. Teachers in both groups felt that their colleagues, on most occasions, respected their ideas and opinions during group discussions. When asked to rate their interaction with fellow teachers on a scale of 1 (least) to 5 (highest), the old group's responses ranged from 3 to 5 and showed concentration of replies in the fourth scale. In the new group, the range was 2 to 5 and the majority of the replies were between the scales of 3 and 4. The old group showed a higher rate of interaction with fellow teachers than the new group.

Recognition. This factor measures whether the teachers perceived the students and administrators to have recognized or appreciated the services they rendered. All the respondents felt that the students had shown their appreciation for the faculty members' contribution to academic development. Some teachers in both groups, however, answered *no* or *not sure,* and others did not reply when asked their opinion regarding the administration's recognition of work rendered to the school. When asked "Have you received any award from the administration for your services and/or contribution?" the majority answered negatively — a higher negative percentage was registered in the new group than in the old group (89.65% versus 53.57%).

Incentives. The teachers, excluding three, recognized the administration's provision for work incentives. Monetary rewards were perceived to be better incentives by both groups.

The majority of the respondents reported having received salary increases since they joined the school. Some commented, though, that increases were given "across the board," not based on merit. Some wondered how merit increases were arrived at. These reactions approximate Renwick and Lawler's suggestion that workers have in mind a level of compensation they judge adequate. If their pay falls below this level, money becomes more important than interesting work. If wages or salary are above this level, the interest one finds in his job

assumes more importance. Renwick and Lawler's study also suggests that pay plans, seniority advantages, and fringe benefits are powerful incentives to stay with a company, even if the employee is not happy there.

First five ranks of incentives as perceived by teachers in the old and new groups

	Ranks given by	
Incentives	Old Group	New Group
13th month pay	1	2
Increase in salary including provisions for overload	2	1
In-service training	3.5	3.5
Promotion	3.5	3.5
Programs for personal growth	5	5

A greater number of teachers in the old group had attended programs for personal growth, like group encounters and recollections, than had those in the new group (89.29% versus 68.96%). While these programs were ranked fifth as incentives, the majority of the teachers who had attended such programs recognized the experience as a means of improving relationships among students, teachers, and administrators, gaining self-awareness and self-confidence, and enhancing personal and professional growth.

Conclusions

Tardiness and absences appear to be more important factors for determining job satisfaction than rates of turnover among faculty. In this climate study, acceptance by students and the friendliness of fellow workers pleased the largest number of teachers. As might be expected, they ranked pay and advancement as chief sources of satisfaction. They frequently complained about the small share of praise they received from the administration for doing a good job and the dearth of information they were given about their job performance, as reflected in their "merit rating."

Previous studies suggest that the rewards provided by an organization and the way they are allocated are major sources of worker dissatisfaction. They probably always will be, so long as budgets are limited and only a few can advance. But there is also evidence that many or-

ganizations aggravate the situation by deciding who gets what in secretive and authoritarian ways.[12] Conflicts over issues are sometimes aggravated by an administration that is apathetic in matters that concern the morale of teachers. Shared decision-making encourages closer working relationships essential to effective administration. Indeed, a school administration plays a crucial role in determining the psychological climate of a college.

Perhaps what Giamatti recommended should be a consideration of every decision-maker in the academe: "The first thing is to act on one's conviction that excellence is transmitted within colleges and universities (and all other schools) through individuals. This conviction places the quality and well-being of the faculty as the most important of all the issues facing us in education for the next difficult years."[13] Teachers may often start a job wishing to work hard and be productive. But if the job fails to meet their expectations — if it does not give them the incentives they are looking for — then they lose interest. Only on ceremonial occasions is obeisance paid to the faculty. Unfortunately, in an academic community, traditionally dependent upon strong self-motivation, the burden of providing incentives for hard work is often placed more squarely on the teachers than on the employer. To make the most of its human resources, an institution must assess the needs of its teachers, understand new job values, and seriously think of ways to improve the quality of work. As Giamatti stressed, schools must take a genuine interest in the needs of their human resources, "for they are the heart of the place, they perform the essential activities of the place, without which no educational institution exists, and through which the quality of the place, and hence of the nation's life is maintained and made better."[14]

Until such a time as machines and programmed instruction dominate the classroom and become the main agents of learning, disintegrative forces in the teaching profession have to be identified and minimized. At the same time, integrative factors have to be strengthened so as not to dampen the enthusiasm and drive essential to teaching.

Notes

[1]Edgar F. Huse and James L. Bowditch, *Behavior in Organizations: A Systems Approach in Managing*, 2nd ed. (Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977), pp. 286-87.

[2]B. Von Haller Gilmer, *Applied Psychology: Problems in Living and Work* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 338.

[3]Gilmer, *Industrial Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), p. 73.

[4]Gilmer, *Industrial*, p. 82.

[5]The two studies were separate ones: Rates of Absenteeism and Tardiness, and Rates of Turnover. The former was a report submitted to the college ad-

ministration; the latter study was part of an institutional self-survey.

[6]This is a re-analysis of a survey conducted in March 1981 by five senior psychology students of La Salle College-Bacolod City: Noel Cuenca, Albert Garcia, John Lim, Jocelyn Positios, and Carmen Villanueva-Meades.

[7]Norman R. F. Maier, *Psychology in Industrial Organizations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 594-95.

[8]Maier, pp. 594-95.

[9]Maier, pp. 594-95.

[10]A. Bartlett Giamatti, "The American Teacher," *Harper's* 261 (July 1980), p. 29.

[11]Patricia A. Renwick and Edward E. Lawler, "What You Really Want From Your Job," *Psychology Today* 11 (May 1978), p. 57.

[12]Renwick and Lawler, p. 57.

[13]Giamatti, p. 28.

[14]Giamatti, pp. 28-29.