

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

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ABSTRACT

This article has tried to make a review of the significant research works on Organizational Climate. It has been observed that though the term was almost as old as the concept of management itself, an initial framework of Organizational climate was not found until 1964. All the earlier studies on Organizational climate can be broadly classified under three principal approaches - MMOAA, PMOAA, and PMIAA. The first approach essentially emphasise on organizational model, taxonomy, context, and structure. The second approach, PMOAA considers OC as a set of attributes and delves into the question how the organization deals with its members' perceptions. The third and the last approach (PMIAA) basically enquires into the individual perceptions on the organizational environment. The dimensions for Organizational Climate have been evolved from various researches under the three approaches. Basically the Climate can be divided into two parts: i) Organizational Climate - from organizational viewpoint and ii) Psychological Climate- from individual viewpoint. Finally in search of a unified theory the concept of "Collective Climate" becomes very useful. This concept considers shared individual perceptions of work environment and also considers the influences like technology, demographics, etc. The strategic context of Collective Climate is found to be one of the most effective model for diagnosing Organizational Climate.

Development of the Conceptual Framework of Organizational Climate

Organizational Climate is a very popular subject for research in the domain of industrial and organizational psychology. The origin and the use of the specific term are found to be as old as the original concept of management itself. However, over a long period of time there appeared various frameworks, conceptual as well as operational, different sets of dimensions, techniques of measurements, and research findings that are highly diverse and often contradictory. It created considerable ambiguity in the particular area. Up to a certain point of time it had been even confused with another very important concept, 'Organizational Culture'.

This particular article has put some effort to clear some of the ambiguity in the area of Organizational Climate and has tried to establish it as a single construct.

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Evolution of the Concept

The earliest reference of Organizational Climate is found in the article of Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939). This article is focussed on the experimentally created social climates on a number of groups of teenage boys. But astonishingly the authors failed to provide any conceptual framework or the technique of measurement of Organizational Climate. The article mainly emphasised on the relationship between leadership styles and so-called 'Social Climate'. Climate was again mentioned in an article by Fleishman (1939). This article discussed the development of leadership attitude and its implication through the measurement of behavioural scales. In that article Fleishman discussed 'Leadership Climate' as a construct but he did not explain the concept of climate very elaborately. Climate was first very comprehensively defined by Argyris (1958). In his attempt to diagnose the group dynamics in a bank, Argyris introduced the concept of Organizational Climate. In that paper Argyris defined climate in terms of formal organizational policies, employee needs, values, and personalities. This paper also triggered off the popular ambiguity between culture and climate that persisted till late 70's in the realm of organizational studies. The famous book 'The Human Side of Enterprise' (1960) opened a new horizon of management science. It introduced many pioneering concepts of organizational and industrial psychology. McGregor in this book elaborated the concept of managerial climate. He argued that the climate is primarily determined by the managerial assumptions and the relationship between the managers and their subordinates. There were of course drawbacks on the conceptual framework. First, McGregor did not present any technique of measurement of Organizational Climate. Second, it is culture, not climate which are measured by the sets of assumptions. Climate is more dependent on perceptions rather than assumptions. Apart from these principal research works there were also other studies and the collection of all the research work ultimately provided the initial framework of Organizational Climate. In their research work Forehand and Gilmer (1964) defined Organizational Climate as 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 behaviour of people in the organization.' Gregopoulos (1963) defined Organizational Climate as a 'normative structure of attitudes and behavioural standards which provided a basis for interpreting the situations and act as a source of pressure for directing activities.'

In their extensive research work Litwin and Stringer (1966) introduced a very comprehensive framework of Organizational Climate. They provided six dimensions of Organizational Climate that include i) structure ii) responsibility iii) reward iv) risk v) warmth and vi) support. In another book by Litwin and Stringer (1968) emphasis was given on the concept of climate and its influence on the McClelland's 'need factors' of motivation i.e. n. power, n. achievement, and n. affiliation. Attempts were also made to establish the operationalization of climate through the assessment of members' perceptions. During this time the actual concept of Organizational Climate began to take shape. In a study by Schneider and Bartlett (1968), attempts were made to develop a measure of climate. The authors conducted extensive empirical study on the employees in life insurance companies by developing two sets of separate dimensions, one managerial

level and another for the field agents of the companies. During this time the studies of Organizational Climate has established the fact that it can be conceptualized and measured through the shared perceptions of the organizational members and almost all the contemporary studies embraced the concept. Another study titled ‘Managerial behaviour, performance, and effectiveness’ (1970) made an extensive survey of the existing literature and presented four compact dimensions of Organizational Climate. In their unique effort, James and Jones (1974) reviewed all the previous relevant researches, definitions, conceptual frameworks, and measurement approaches and differentiated them into three principal categories. According to them, all the major theoretical concerns and relevant researches related to Organizational Climate can be divided into three approaches:

- a. Multiple measurement-organizational attribute approach (MMOAA)
- b. Perceptual measurement-organizational attribute approach (PMOAA)
- c. Perceptual measurement-individual attribute approach (PMIAA)

Each of these approaches carries a number of research works under its belt. The concept of Organizational Climate was established separately under each of these approaches. The categorization has resulted in the re-conceptualization of climate construct and the domains of researches have become differentiated. As recommended by James and Jones, the distinction should be made between organizational attributes and individual attributes approach. They also emphasised on the use of the phrase ‘Psychological Climate’ instead of Organizational Climate in case of individual attribute approach. We can have some overview of the approaches for further elaboration.

The Approaches Towards The Research Of Organizational Climate

A. Multiple Measurement- Organizational Attribute Approach (MMOAA)

The most suitable definition of Organizational Climate under this approach was provided by Forehand and Gilmar (1964). They defined Organizational Climate as a ‘ set of characteristics that (a) distinguish the organization from the other organizations, (b) are relatively enduring over time, and (c) influence the behaviour of the people in the organization. Forehand and Gilmar model of MMOAA can be summarized below:

I. Dimensions of Organizational Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Size ▪ Structure ▪ System Complexity ▪ Leadership Style ▪ Goal directions
II. Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Field Studies ▪ Experimental Studies
III. Measurement Procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual perception ▪ Objective Indices

Following the model provided by Forehand and Gilmar, it appears that any study focusing on organization or group characteristics would be included in the general area of Organizational Climate. In fact an exhaustive list of studies in the field of Industrial

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Psychology or Organizational Behaviour is shown to be included under MMOAA. This approach is a much generalized conceptual framework and lacks the degree of precision that can provide the objective measurement of Organizational Climate. The precise nature and implication of Organizational Climate tends to be lost in the jungle of dimensions and parameters, derived from the different areas of Industrial Psychology.

Some Studies Under MMOAA are shown below:

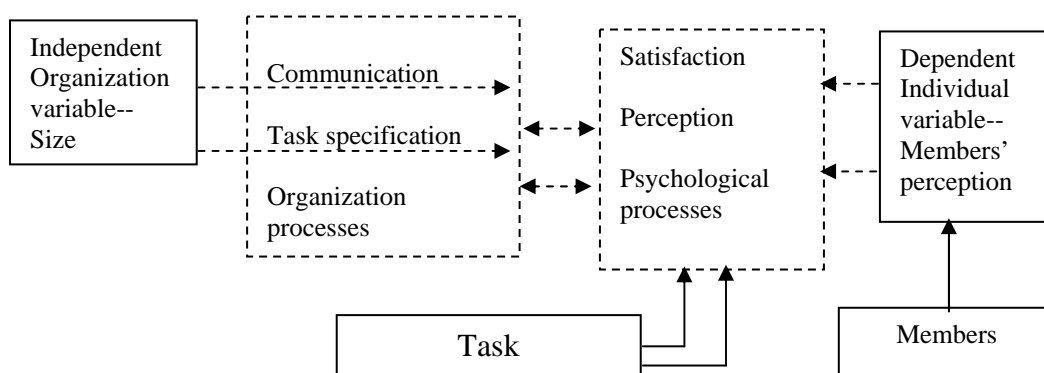
Area	Studies	Researcher(s)
Organizational Model and Taxonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An examination of the Blau-Scott and Etzioni typologies. ▪ Organizational size and member participation. Some empirical test on alternative explanations. ▪ Studies on different organizational processes like leadership, conflict, reward, communication, and control. 	Hall Indik Katz and Kahn
Organizational Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization and environment ▪ The construct of organizational structure ▪ Industrial organization 	Lawrence and Lorsch Purge et al. Woodward
Organization Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Properties of organization structure in relation to job attitudes and job behaviour ▪ The dimensions of organization structure 	Porter and Lawler Puge et al.

B. Perceptual Measurements-Organization Attribute Approach (Pmoaa)

Under this approach the most appropriate definition was given by Campbell et al. (1970). Organizational Climate was defined as: ‘set of attributes specific to a particular organization that may be induced from the organization, deals with its members and its environment. For the individual member within an organization, climate takes the form of a set of attitude and expectancies which describe the organization in terms of both static characteristics and behaviour outcome and outcome-outcome contingencies.’ The researchers proposed four parameters of organizational situations, viz. a) structural properties b) environmental characteristics c) organizational climate and d) formal role characteristics. They presented four dimensions of Organizational Climate and factors included in each dimension:

The Dimensions	Factors
Individual Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual responsibility ▪ Agent independence ▪ Rule orientation ▪ Opportunities for energising individual initiative
The Degree Structure Impressed on Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization structure ▪ Managerial structure ▪ Closeness of supervision
Reward orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reward ▪ General satisfaction promotion-achievement orientation ▪ Profit and sales orientation
Consideration, Warmth, and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Managerial support ▪ Warmth and support

The PMOAA model suggested that Organizational Climate is individual perception of the organization and the set of properties governs the individual behaviour. Climate itself was perceived as a situational variable or organizational main effect. The perceptual model based on organizational attribute raised some difficulties. There may be significant difference between actual and perceived situations in terms of behaviour and attitude. It is also difficult to establish a direct relationship between objective and perceptual factors. The difficulties encountered by the PMOAA model was tried to be resolved through a model proposed by Indik (1965). The 'linkage model' stated that the bond between an independent variable and a dependent variable formed by two sets of processes, organizational processes from the side of independent variable and psychological processes from the side of dependent variable. The diagram presents the 'linkage model' by Indik:



From a long series of studies by various organizational scientists it was established that the perceptually measured Organizational Climate represents a set of responses to the organizational processes, while the characteristics of the responses are

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determined by the psychological processes. Evidently the responses may or may not be the outcome of the stimuli and in the second situation it may present inconsistent results.

Some studies under PMOAA are shown below:

Area	Studies	Researcher (s)
Identification of the dimensions of original climate based on perceptual measurement	Managerial behaviour, performance and effectiveness.	Campbell et al.
Perceptual measurement of job performance and satisfaction as influenced by organizational climate	The effect of organizational climate on managerial job performance and satisfaction	Pritchard, R. D., and Karasick, B. W.
Perceptual definition, and measurement of organizational climate	A note on organizational climate	Guion, R. M.

C. Perceptual Measurement- Individual Attribute Approach (Pmiaa)

Schneider and his associates was the champion of the third approach in the research domain of Organizational Climate. Schneider and Hall (1972) presented Organizational Climate as a set of global perceptions held by individuals about their organizational environment. The sets of perceptions are basically the result of interactions between personal and organizational characteristics. Schneider *et al.* used systems approach to explain the concept. They considered individual as an information processor and the inputs used are: a) objective events and characteristics of the organization, and b) characteristics of the perceiver. Organizational Climate was imagined as a summary evaluation of events based upon the interactions between actual events and the perceptions of these events. In another paper, Schneider described climate perceptions as the results of a process of concept formation, based on macro-observations of the organization. This conceptualization of Organizational Climate bears many resemblance with the PMOAA model discussed earlier. In both the approaches, Organizational Climate is viewed as the sum total of perceptions based on the interaction between the individual perceptions and organizational environment. In fact the proposed model by Schneider *et al.* was almost identical to the psychological process model proposed by Indik. But, of course, there exist some points of differences. The PMOAA emphasized on Organizational Climate from the viewpoint of the organization and put greater emphasis on organizational attributes. PMIAA on the other hand focused on Organizational Climate as the sum total of the individual attributes neglecting the organizational parts.

Apart from Schneider a large number of research works have been conducted supporting the model.

Some studies under PMIAA are shown below :

Area	Studies	Researcher(s)
Measurement of organizational climate through individual perception	Toward specifying the concept of work climate: a study of Roman Catholic Diocesan Priests	Schneider, B., Hall, D. T.
Relationship between situational variables and individual variables of organizational climate	Multiple impacts of organizational climate and individual value systems upon job satisfaction	Friedlander, R., and Margulis, N.
Critical review of PMIAA	Some problems in the measurement of organizational climate	Joannesson, R. E.

It must be pointed out that a large number of researchers have completely neglected the overlapping of the dimensions borrowed liberally from the various models under the three approaches. They were obsessed with measurement techniques and completely neglected the conceptual models and constructs. But measurement should only come into the picture once a model is established and the boundaries are clearly defined. Moreover the dimensions of the organizational attributes have been mixed up with the dimensions from individual attributes. In order to establish a clear distinction between the two sets of attributes, James and Jones insisted on the use of the term Organizational Climate in case of organizational attributes only. In the other case of individual attributes, they used a new term Psychological Climate. Later, in another paper, Jones and James (1979) derived six dimensions based on the individual attributes and categorized them under Psychological Climate instead of Organizational Climate. The six dimensions under individual attributes as devised by them are: a) leadership facilitation and support, b) work group cooperation, friendliness, and warmth, c) conflict and ambiguity, d) professional and organizational spirit, e) job challenge, importance, and variety, f) mutual trust. In the latter research works, the individual attributes approach has gained more importance. Glick, in a study (1985), made another critical review of Organizational and Psychological Climate theories, conceptual models, and measurements and extensively discussed the issue of the level of analysis. Ryder and Southy (1990) in their study explored the usefulness of the measurement scales provided by Jones and James and established the validity of the dimensions provided by them.

Collective Climate: Unison Of Approaches

Previous theories, definitions, models, and measurements have established that both Organizational and Psychological Climate have very strong influence on the individuals in terms of job performance, work attitudes etc (Joyce and Slocum,

1979,1984). But various researches under the three approaches have also proved the necessity of an Organizational Climate model for the strategic purpose of the organization. "Collective Climate" is a conceptual model developed by Joyce and Slocum (1977, 1979, 1982, and 1984) that can serve the purpose. Collective Climates are based on the perceptions of the individuals who share common multidimensional descriptions of their work environment. The composition rule for framing Collective Climates is the consensus among individuals' perceptions of work setting. The concept of Collective Climate has been studied from the individual viewpoint (James, 1982; James, Joyce, and Slocum, 1988). The concept has also been studied in terms of technology, workforce demographics, and required work interactions (Joyce, 1977; Joyce and Slocum, 1984; Jackofsky and Slocum, 1988). Collective Climate formed on the basis of perceptual consensus represents a mid-range concept that may prove to be useful to bridge the strategic organizational and individual levels of analysis. Collective Climate is the perception of particular organizational practices. Organizations influence the perceptions with various factors but principally through structure, technology, and control systems.

The "Collective Climate" concept has simultaneously established and unified the Organizational Climate from the organizational viewpoint, and the Psychological Climate based on individuals' perception on organizational practices and procedures. The Organizational Climate can therefore be described as the aggregate perceptions of the characteristics of the organizations. Organizational and Psychological Climates have been differentiated substantially in terms of the various dimensions. The concept of strategic context of Collective Climate may best represent Organizational Climate.

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