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## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, INC: ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE RESEARCH AS EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY

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### ABSTRACT

A Research study and a pedagogical exercise on organizational climate were undertaken jointly using The Looking Glass Inc. The research indicated clear differences in perception of climate among organizational players and observers. The class debriefing, focused on experientially derived research data, was rich and productive as a learning experience

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational climate is important to organizational performance. Several authors claim a significant relationship between organizational climate and performance (Kaczka and Kirk 1968, Marrow, Bowers, and Seashore 1967, Frederickson 1964, Kararick 1973). Given this research a manager must have a clear understanding of an employee attitude and perceptions in order to "Manage" them toward higher organization performance.

Organizational climate is defined as " A set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in this environment and assume to influence their motivation and behavior" (Litwin and Stringer, P.1). The Plethora of research over the past twenty-three years in this area has lead to some confusion concerning the term's organizational climate and job satisfaction. While Johannesson (1973) concluded that job satisfaction and organizational climites were similar concepts, LaFollette and Sims (1975) disagreed. Other researchers (Gavin and Harris 1977, James and Jones, 1975 Payne, Fineman and Wall 1976, and Hellriegel and Slocum 1973), concur that climate instruments attempt to describe work environment while satisfaction instruments strive to evaluate them. In either case, the reality of the situation is based upon perception. Guion (1973) suggest that if the notion of organizational climate is to be operationalized through employees perceptions, then the accuracy of those perceptions then become worthy of research. Comparing perceptions with some experimental objective measurements lead to more accurate findings (Payne, Fineman and Wall 1976). Johannesson (1977) suggest non-participant observers as an appropriate method of measuring climate. Further, perceptions of climate differ according too hierarchal level within an organization and Top Management may be inclined to view climate more positively than lower level employees, Potter and Lawler (1967) and Payne and Mansfield (1973) have shown significant differences and perceptions and climate by organizational level.

Employee perceptions have been shown to be an effective reflection of organizational climate, but generally speaking, these perceptions are not legitimized: Therefore managers do not incorporate these perceptions into their leadership style. Results of one survey of CEO's and presidents indicate that leaders may be perceived by their Choice of leadership style based on only their individual perceptions of climate (Harris 1987).

From a pedagogical stand point one could lecture about the need to monitor organization climate and the likelihood that top executive's and those lower in the organization would have differing views of climate. This, the authors feel, would have about the same effect as lecturing on conflict resolution, motivation, consensus building and trust. That is, much more powerful lessons would be learned if the differing views of organizational climate could be explored in an experiential setting. This paper thus reports research on organizational climate in an experiential setting and use of the research and experience as an organizational behavior learning experience.

### METHOD

The purpose of the study was to compare views of organizational climate in a simulated environment, form the president, mid and lower level employees, and observers. The observers, not being caught up in the simulation, and moving from office to office would fully focus on the proceedings to infer the overall organizational climate. The resulting observations would offer a more complete and objective view of organizational climate. ON the other hand one might argue that the participant's, under the simulated game pressure were in fact better able to judge organizational climate, at least as it affected them.

THE SIMULATION

THE LOOKING GLASS INC. was selected as the experiential exercise to demonstrate organizational climate. The Looking Glass Inc. simulation creates a day in the lives of the top twenty managers at a midsize manufacturing corporation. There are three divisions in Looking Glass, Industrial Glass Division (IGD), Commercial Glass Division (CGD) Advanced Products (APD): each has a unique external environment. For further information see Lombardi, MeCall, and Devires (1983). For this research and pedagogy the divisional vice presidents were considered mid management and their subordinates were considered lower level employees. The simulation took place within a six-hour period on a Saturday in Management department offices at a southern regional university. The setting provided a realistic environment including all forms of communication, corporate files, lunch and a presidents report at the end of the day prior to the simulation debriefing. A graduate class of management participants provided the twenty-two simulation participants.

OBSERVERS

Observers were very important to the experiment and subsequent class debrief/learning experience so a

Fairly large numbers were used in the simulation experience. Eight observers were selected from the graduate course based on the instructor's prior knowledge of their capabilities. They were given a short briefing as too what and how to observe in the simulation. They were asked to evaluate seven dimensions of organizational climate using a modified version of the Litwin and Stringer (1966) dimensions of climate instrument to collect data. Also, they were requested to make general comments about their observations. The comments were useful in fleshing out class discussion and reflection. They generally paralleled quantitative scores and so will not be considered further in this paper.

## DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the debriefing eight charts were prepared to assist the facilitators to quickly gather broad data. The presidents data was listed on one chart, the VP's data was listed on three individual charts, the divisional participants data was also listed on three charts, and the eight observers ratings were placed on one chart. The importance of this data and feedback cannot be overstated, since most learning is based on obtaining data about performance (feedback) and then determining how far the performance deviates form a desired goal ( Schein and Bemis, 1965).

## HYPOTHESIS

The following hypotheses were established.

H1 The president would view the organizational climate more positively than the observers.

H2 The president would view the organizational climate more positively than lower level managers.

H3 The Vice Presidents would view the organizational climate differently than the observers.

H4 The Vice Presidents would view the organizational climate more positively than their subordinates.

## RESULTS OF THE SIMULATION

## RESEARCH

The eight observers exhibited and internal consistency coefficient of .395, which was relatively, low. This was not surprising given the selection of observers and given that psychological climate is rarely an obvious phenomena (Glick 1985). Viewing the raw scores of the eight observers of the seven climate dimensions, conformity, responsibility, standards, rewards, organizational clarity, warmth, and leadership indicates a range of about five points (from a total score of 10) for each dimension from six to ten for example. For computational purposes the presidents (self) score for each dimension was subtracted from each observer's score to determine a different score. Obviously, if the observer assigned the same score as the president, the difference score would be zero. A T-Test was used to determine if the difference scores were significantly different from zero indicating that observers viewed organizational climate significantly different from the president. Table 1. Presents the mean difference scores and the probability of occurrence gives no difference in scoring between the observers and the president. For each dimension the hypothesis of no difference must be rejected at the point 05 level: The observers viewed the organization climate more negatively for six of the seven dimensions. So they

Support H1.

A second look at perceived differences in organizational climate was made by comparing the vice presidents perceptions against the president's perceptions. Descriptive statistics were used for this task because the total population was included: One president and three vice presidents. The data indicating actual scores are presented in table 2 which indicates that the subordinate VP's average scores were more negative on six dimensions than the president, and more positive on the one dimension of organizational clarity (this was more in line with the observers views). The data support H2.

The congruence of the vice presidents perceptions of climate and the observers was markedly different than that of the president and observers. Only the IGE VP had one significantly different dimensional score, even at the P< 1.0 level of significance. IN this case the VP rated warmth and support lower than did the observers. The data did not support H3.

Analyses were undertaken to compare the three vice presidents views of the organization to their particular subordinate's views using descriptive statistics. The IGD VP had five subordinates who reported an overall response of 7.0 in comparison to the vice presidents average overall respond of 6.8. There was practically no difference in the average of the subordinates for each dimension versus the VP's response. The subordinates did have a somewhat less positive average view of organizational clarity (6.4 versus 8.0) and a somewhat more positive view (7.2 versus 5.0) of warmth/support than did their VP.

The CGD VP and her five subordinates had exactly the same average view of organizational climate with the subordinates having a somewhat wider range of average view around the VP than in the previous division. The lowest subordinate average view for all seven dimensions was 4.9. The highest was 8.4. IN contrast to the vice presidents score of 6.7. For individual dimensions the subordinates had a more positive view (6.6 versus 5.0) of responsibility and a more negative view (6.0 versus 8.0) of warmth/support than the VP.

In the APD the six subordinates were not as close in average assessment of climate to their vice president as occurred in the previous two divisions. They were more positive in every dimension except organizational clarity and by overall average score of 7.2 to the average score of 5.9 for vice president. ON the individual dimensions the subordinates had a more positive view (8.3 versus 5.0) of responsibility and (7.8 versus 4.0) rewards, while being lower (4.3 versus 6.0) in organizational clarity.

For the three divisions, the closeness of average scores and understanding the use of descriptive statistics would incline the researchers to reject H4.

## PEDAGOGY

The second purpose of the exercise was pedagogical: information from the Looking Glass exercise was feed back too the participants and observers so that the group could discuss, reflect, and learn. The raw data from the observers, presidents, vice presidents and subordinates were compiled on the eight sheets of newsprint's by each class member reading his/her individual scores. Class time did not allow computation of inferential statistics as discussed

Above but the general results were obtained by an overview of observers versus the president and vice presidents, the president versus the vice presidents and the vice presidents versus their subordinates. The higher ratings of the president expect for dimension five, were noted in contrast to the observers and vice presidents. The nixed results for the vice presidents versus their subordinates were not as well defined by the class although the results were noted to be closer superior/subordinate agreement that results involving the president. Also noted were the fairly wide range of individual responses. Also the observer's scores were noted and discussed by the class as generally more in line with the VP and subordinates in contrast to the president.

## DISCUSSION

### RESEARCH

The observer's views were significantly different than the president's views for all eight dimensions. They were almost two points less positive for all dimensions but were organizational clarity, where the president was less positive than by over three points. The president was mostly confined to her office: working and meeting with VP's there. Working in this condition with three well-informed and eager VP's (after all she was the president) the president perhaps developed a distorted more positive view of the organization. For organizational clarity the president had to deal with the most pressing (and unrelated) problems with each division. This, plus not having a part of lower level discussions, which were more, focused perhaps allowed the president to obtain a lower view of organizational clarity.

The vice Presidents had a much more accurate view of the organizational climate. The VP's communicated laterally in the hallways; They worked in-groups with their subordinates, and also participated with the president in decision making. They communicated with more hierarchical levels and were more focused on a narrower range of problems and were in tune with their subordinates/and a greater number of subordinates/ so they received better data on which to view a better organizational climate. They accumulated data from a wider variety of sources, not as many as the observers, but more than the presidents certainly. The VP's also did not have a less positive view of organizational clarity. Within their more focused they obtained a better view of clarity.

In regards to vice presidents and subordinates assessment, the results were much closer than the president and vice presidents. Again the VP's spent most of their time working directly with the subordinates in their respective divisions so they could come to more consistent conclusions about organizational climate.

The industrial glass division VP perceived greater organizational clarity than his subordinates and less warmth/support. This division was designed to be the most stable division, which became apparent to the VP through discussions with the other vice presidents and the president. This may have increased his perception of clarity above that of his subordinates who were not aware of other divisions more difficult problems. Less warmth and support may have been due to interactions at the presidential level.

The VP of the commercial glass division also had average perceptions very close to his subordinates. However, he was less positive about responsibility and more positive about warmth/support than his subordinates. Perhaps he viewed the presidents as not allowing enough responsibility, and perhaps he (the VP) was as an individual more cool to his subordinates causing them a lower perception while he was receiving more positive imputes from all his organizational sources.

The VP of the advanced products division rated the overall organizational climate somewhat lower than his subordinates particularly in responsibility and rewards. The overall lower rating may be due to the fact that the APD was the more volatile, difficult to manage division. This would have been very apparent to him due to his meetings with the other vice presidents and president but not apparent to his subordinates who had no information outside their division. The responsibility and rewards difference might be attributed to his feelings similar to the commercial glass vice president, that the president was not giving enough responsibility to him and also not enough rewards for managing the most volatile division.

### PEDAGOGY

Results also include the classroom discussion, which was elicited after compiling the climate data for the simulation. The students were able to discuss the differences in the president's rosy view of the organizational report to all others, and attributed that to her isolation. They also noted the closer view among the vice presidents, observers and subordinates. Also discussed were the large individual differences among subordinate's responses. A discussion ensued about the importance of organizational climate to them, and the importance of managers including themselves, making serious efforts to maintain an accurate view of climate. That individuals will have widely differing views of climate and that managers need to "manage" climate to the benefit of the organization emerge as an important concept. Since the organizational climate instrument used seven dimensions the student's key on those, and perhaps internalize the need to consider at least those as important in managing organizational climate.

## CONCLUSIONS

The student group which "played" and observed THE LOOKING GLASS, INC was small, so little statistical inferences can be made, and the applicability of conclusion – even that different organizational players have differing views- is tentative in application to other long term organizational environments. However the results of differing views of climate were congruent with the literature and supportive of the researchers initial beliefs. This exploratory study may be methodologically enhanced and applied to outside environments of larger size. Conclusions might then be drawn about differing perceptions of organizational climate in respect of organizational levels and divisions.

As a pedagogical tool, the exercise was a major success. In addition too many other learnings from THE LOOKING GLASS, INC exercise, the focus on perceptions of organizational climate brought vividly home differences in those perceptions. Much discussion ensued about the reason for those

Differences, the importance of organizational climate, the importance of managers being aware of climate and the importance of managing this fact of organizational.

## TABLE 1
### Observers vs Presidents views
### of climate dimensions

| Dimension | Mean difference | P>T |
|---|---|---|
| Conformity | -1.88 | .030 |
| Responsibility | -2.25 | .002 |
| Standards | -2.25 | .001 |
| Rewards | -1.63 | .010 |
| Org.clarity | 3.75 | .000 |
| Warmth/support | -2.00 | .005 |
| Leadership | -2.50 | .001 |

## TABLE 2
### Vice Presidents Vs Presidents Views
### Of Climate Dimensions

| Dimension | Vp Average | President |
|---|---|---|
| Conformity | 6.0 | 8 |
| Responsibility | 5.7 | 10 |
| Standards | 6.7 | 10 |
| Rewards | 6.3 | 9 |
| Org.clarity | 7.0 | 4 |
| Warmth/support | 6.7 | 10 |
| Leadership | 7.0 | 10 |

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