ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

Vikas Madhukar[*]

Sulabh Sharma[**]

Despite the fact that there have been a number of research studies on organisational climate, there has yet been no unanimity on its definition as also on its dimensions. This diversity of opinions has made the organisational climate an interesting area of research. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study the views of different experts, right from the period when the concept of organisational climate originated till date, with regard to the concept, definition and dimensions of organisational climate. While some authors have defined organisational climate **as a function of a person and his interaction with the organisational environment,** a few others have defined it as a **dependent variable** which may be influenced by individual or subjective perception. Yet a few others have referred it as an **independent variable**. Not only this, some experts have defined organisational climate as **recurring patterns of behaviour depending on the values and atmosphere prevailing in an organisation** from time to time, and so on. However, having studied the views of different authors on organisation climate, the authors of the present paper are of the view that the organisational climate refers to the general perception of the personnel (as a whole) of an organisation with regard to relevant dimensions of organisational climate prevailing during a particular period of time in their organisation. With regard to dimensions of organisational climate also, there has been a lot of controversy as many climate researchers have assessed the specific climate in which they were interested rather than attempting **to develop a single and central view of dimensions** which is, indeed, a challenge for researchers in the times to come. This is a challenge because organizations differ widely in terms of their size, complexity, structure, products, vision, mission, values, and so on. However, a few key dimensions which are common to almost all organizations need to be identified. Research studies carried out so far in the area of organisational climate have served a good purpose but more is yet to be done so as a to overcome or, at least, to minimize the difference in the opinions on relevant issues of organisational climate..

[*] **Professor and Deputy Director, Amity Business School, and Director Admissions, Amity University Haryana, Manesar, Gurgaon**

[**] **Research Scholar, Amity Business School, Amity University Haryana, Manesar, Gurgaon**

Introduction

Since different authors have not yet been able to have a similarity of opinion with regard to the concept and definition of organizational climate and further that they have also not been able to develop a single and central view of dimensions of organization climate, organizational climate continues to be an interesting area for research. The present paper, therefore, endeavours to critically examine the said issues.

The Conceptual Framework

It is not simple to trace the origin of the concept of organisational climate. It was Lewin, Lippit and White (1939)[1] who made a reference of the organisational climate in their experimental research on social climate though there was hardly anything concrete they came forward with regarding any conceptional framework or the technique for measuring the organisational climate. Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) highlighted the significance of individual differences, group collaborations, social interactions and employee participation

while making decisions.[2] However, it is the Field Theory in Social Science of Lewin (1951) which can claim the credit of originating the concept of organisational climate. It defines organisational climate as a function of person and his interaction with the organisational environment.[3]

It was Argyris (1958) who not only introduced the concept but also defined organisational climate in terms of employee needs, values, personalities and formal organisational policies.[4] Later on Argyris (1964) stated that mature employees get frustrated by the formal organisational structure, directive leadership and rigid managerial controls. He further mentioned that organizations not only fail to recognize full potential of their employees but also do not provide adequate impetus for their self–development.[5] While explaining the relationship of organisational climate with attitude and behaviour of people, Gilmore and Von (1961) highlighted the differences in individual attitudes in relation to psychological structure of their enterprises.[6] Forehand and Glimer (1964) stated that organisational climate can be defined on the basis of characteristics of organizations. Characteristics of one organisation usually differ from the characteristics of other organizations. Such characteristics are enduring overtime and are

instrumental in affecting the behaviour of the employees of the organisation concerned.[7] Organisations differ not only in physical structure but also in attitudes and behaviours they evoke in people. Insel and Moos (1971) have also pointed out that an enterprise has its own personality i.e. unique identity that causes directional influence on the behaviour of its employees.[8]

"It was with the introduction of a book regarding the theory of organisational climate by Litwin and Stringer (1966) that the concept of organisational climate assumed popularity.[9] In addition to providing a detailed framework on organisational climate, the experimental research measures the organisational climate with the help of dimensions identified for the purpose. The organisational climate was spelled out by Litwin and Stringer (1968) as a function of history, tradition, leadership style and physical state of organisation. It subsequently influences the motivation and behaviour of employees in an organisation. According to traditional industrial psychologists, behaviour is the outcome of the characteristics of both the individual and the organisation but the subsequent researches by the industrial psychologists are tilted towards individuals. Later on, according to James and Jones (1978), psychological meaningfulness in organisational environment became an explicit point of climate.[10] Tagiuri and Litwin (1968) in their book explored the concept and nature of organisational climate and spelled out various approaches to study it. They stated that organisational climate is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an enterprise that is felt by its employees, affects their behaviour and can be expressed in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics or attitudes of the enterprise.[11]

Expressing his contention on organisational climate, Baumgartel (1971) stated that it is a product of leadership practices, communication practices, and enduring and systematic characteristics of working relationship among personnel and departments of any particular enterprise.[12]

Having reviewed all earlier research studies, James and Jones (1974) came up with a new approach where organisational climate was studied and measured by individual perception rather than organisational. They also distinguished psychological climate from organisational climate and stated that the latter is the psychologically meaningful cognitive representations of the situation perceptions.[13]

James, et.al. (1978) stated that each enterprise functions in a set of policies, norms and procedures and employees that enterprise perceive and make sense of enterprise policies, practices and procedures in psychological meaningful terms. Such policies, procedures and practices assume an enduring quality and create unique organisational climate.[14]

Multiple measurement-organisational attribute approach, perceptual measurement–organisational attribute approach, and perceptual measurement-individual attribute are the three measurement approaches into which Schneider (1975) summarised the previous theories and research studies on organisational climate.[15] The said three measurement approaches are based on *individual's interactions* to their organisation. The perception of organisational climate can be measured for an individual with the help of survey techniques. Schneider (1975) presented organisation climate as a cognitive theory and defined organisational climate as perceptions psychologically meaningful molar descriptions that people can agree characterize a system's practices and procedures.[16] However, a system may create many climates. It is worthwhile to note that people perceive climate because the molar perceptions function as frame of reference for the attainment of some congruity between behaviour and system's practices and procedures.

Having studied the concept of organisational climate on the basis of previous constructs, Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) identified it as a set of attributes which can be perceived about a particular organisation and/or their systems based on the interaction of its personnel and their environment.[17]
 Based on the results of their research on school teachers and their (school teachers) interactions with their working environment, Hoy and Forsyth (1986) defined organisational climate as individual's perceptions related to his/ her work environment.[18] According to them, organisational climate is a relatively enduring quality that is experienced by employees, influences their behaviour, and is based on their collective perceptions. Owens (1987) also felt the same way when he defined organisational climate as individual perceptions related to their working environments in the organisation.[19]

While giving a new approach to organisational climate, Reichers and Schneiders (1990) defined organisational climate as the shared perception of the way the things are around here.[20] Joan

Rentsch (1990) referred to organisational climate as policies, practices and procedures in psychologically meaningful terms, which are regarded as objective properties of the organisation and tend to exist for long.[21]

Of late, sincere efforts have been made to conceptualise, measure and utilize the organisational climate construct that has been concerned with the description of the styles of forms of behaviour in the organisation. James and Jones (1974) point out that most research studies have assumed that individuals develop global or summary perception of their organisation based on their perception of organisational policies and procedures.[22]

Almost the same were the views of Koys and Decottis (1991) when they stated that psychological climate is an "experimental-based, multi-dimensional, and enduring perceptional phenomenon which is widely shared by the members of a given organisational unit."[23]

Referring to climate as an atmosphere, Katz and Kahn (1996) assert that climate is atmosphere in which individuals help, judge, and reward, constrain and find out about each other. It influences moral attitude of the individual towards work and his environment.[24]

Thus, it is clear that there is a great diversity in the views of authors on the issue of organisational climate. It is also because of the diversity and variety that we come across in organisational environment which differs from organisation to organisation and of which each employee has some knowledge. Each employee perceives organisational climate from his point of view and his own position in the organisation. This *individual perception* is the measure of organisational climate and this perception of an individual differs from the perception of other individuals in the organisation and this organisational perception of an individual affects his motivation as also his behaviour within the organisation concerned. Besides, it is the subjective perception of reality rather than the reality itself that affects human conduct more directly.

It is a fact that the subjective meaning that individuals have about the reality, influences their behaviour more than the objective environment itself. The organisational climate, therefore, is the mid-way between the subjective (perception) and the objective (reality) though the former

has greater weightage. Thus, there is significant relationship between the perceptional description of an enterprise and its objective reality.

"The validity of climate measures by comparing objective and subjective measures", was examined by Rayne and Pugh (1976).[25]

In some research studies, organisational climate has been treated as dependent variable which may be influenced by technology, leadership, etc. where the focus has been on understanding of the cause of climate perception.[26] Efforts were also made by Dieterly and Schneider (1974) to establish that the relationships of organisational climate as dependent variable are affected by organisational structure and also by management assumptions and practices but could not succeed in labeling the above sets of practices and procedures with climate label.[27] Some other studies conducted by Lawler, et.al., Dayne, and Mansfield also endeavoured to prove climate as dependent variable measured through questionnaire but could not prove their contentions effectively.

At a point of time, organisational climate was treated as *independent variable* implying thereby that it (organisational climate) influences employee performance, his satisfaction and hence may cause manipulation of organisational policies and procedures. Based on the premise, Litwin and Stringer labeled different manipulations causing different types of climate and came to the conclusion that different kinds of organisational climate cause different types of behaviour.[28]
Some authors are of the view that organisational climate is the recurring patterns of behaviour depending on the values and atmosphere prevailing in the organisation from time to time. Echoing this view, Aiswarya and Ramasundaram (2012) stated that organisational climate is the recurring patterns of behaviour, attitudes and feelings that are indicative of life in the organisation which are more related to atmosphere and values.[29]

An employee's behaviour and actions reflect the values and beliefs of the environment he lives in. Supporting this view, Moghimi and Subramaniam (2013) defined organisational climate as values and beliefs that are not visible but exist within the employee's behaviour and action.[30]

Thus, having studied the views of different authors on organisation climate, the authors of the present paper are of the view that the organisational climate refers to the general perception of the personnel (as a whole) of an organisation with regard to relevant dimensions of organisational climate prevailing during a particular period of time in an organisation.

Dimensions of Organisational Climate

Though several studies have been conducted on organisational climate but there has been no agreement about a common set of dimensions of organisational climate. It is so because, as explained by Schneider also, many climate researchers have assessed the specific climate in which they were interested rather than attempting to develop some omnibus measures. [31] For example, while F.W. Taylor explored climates for creativity[32], Schneider and Bartlett examined climates for new employees[33], Fleishman spoke about leadership climate[34], and Litwin and Stringer initiated a climate for motivation. [35] Hence the aforesaid researchers endeavoured to assess the organisational climate in a particular situation, from their own point of views and, therefore, cannot be generalized. Denison has, therefore, rightly remarked that it is a challenge for researchers to offer a single and central view of dimensions. [36]

In order to have a better understanding of the diversities in the arena of climate researches, following is a brief description of findings of some of the main climate studies:

So far as the conceptualization and measurement organisational climate in schools is concerned, Halpin and Croft (1963) can be considered as pioneers. In order to measure the climate of elementary schools, they constructed the Organisational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ) which is divided into eight dimensions, viz. disengagement, hindrance, s-espirit, intimacy, aloofness, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration. Of these *eight dimensions*, four refer to characteristics of the teachers and four concerning to the characteristics of the head of the institution as a leader.[37]

In their study, Environment Variation in Studies of Organisational Behaviour, Forehand and Glimer (1964) identified five dimensions, viz. structure (of the organisation), size, complexity, leadership style, and goal directions.[38] Tagiuri (1968) pointed out four dimensions of

organisational climate, viz. ecology (physical and material factors in the enterprise like technology used, condition of the building, size, etc.), social system (organisational and administrative structure of the enterprise), milieu (everything socially related to employees of the enterprise), and culture (set of beliefs, norms, values, way of thinking of the personnel of the enterprise). [39]

Litwin and Stringer (1966) introduced a very comprehensive framework of organisational climate measuring the perceptions of organisaltional climate on six dimensions – structure, responsibility, reward, risk, warmth and support with the help of a structured questionnaire. [40]

While defining organisational climate based on individual attribute approach, Schneider and Barlett (1968, 1970) identified involvement, co-worker support, cohesion, supervisor support, autonomy, task orientation, work preassure, clarity, managerial control, innovation, physical comfort, etc., as the dimensions of organisational climate. Work Environment Scale developed by Moos in 1994 incorporated some of these dimensions.

Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler and Wick (1970) while defining organisational climate as psychological climate, gave four dimensions, viz. degree of structure imposed, individual autonomy, considerations/warmth/support, and reward.[41] Later on, a new dimensions, viz. orientation towards development and progressiveness to measure organisational climate was added by Payme and Pugh (1976).[42] House and Rizzo identified around fourteen dimensions of organisational climate including timely decision making, upward information requirement, induction, top management receptiveness, formalization, job pressure, selection criterion, team work, chain of command, inter-group cooperation, etc. [43]

Autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, pressure, recognition, innovation, and fairness are the eight dimensions of organisational climate that were identified by Decottis and Summers (1987). [44]

In a research conducted by James, Jones, Hartman, and Stebbins (1977) in a big health care organisation on management employees, six dimensions of organisational climate identified

included conflict and ambiguity, importance and variety, job challenge, facilitation and support, leadership, professional and organisational spirit and job standards.[45]

Payne and Mansfield (1973) identified twenty dimensions of organisational climate including management concern for employee involvement, emotional control, open mindedness, job challenges, intellectual orientation, readiness to innovate and orientation to wider community, scientific and technical orientation.[46]

It is Udai Pareek (1989) who identified twelve dimensions of organisational climate and which are heavily relied upon even today, include: orientation (related to people concern in the enterprise), supervision, interpersonal relationship, problem management, conflict management, management of mistakes, communication, decision making, trust, management of rewards, risk taking and innovation and change. [47]

Later on in 2002, Stringer pointed out that it is with the help of six dimensions of organisational climate, viz. structure, standards, responsibility, recognition, support, and commitment that we can measure the impact on organisational performance. [48]

Taylor and Bowers (1970) came forward with four dimensions of organisational climate that include decision-making, human resource primary, motivational conditions, and communication flow. [49]

Newman (1977) identified ten dimensions of organisational climate, namely, task characteristics, supervisory style, performance, employee work motivation, equipment and arrangement of people, co-worker relations, employee competence, work space, decision-making policy, and job responsibility.[50]

 With regard to safety climate in industrial organisations, Zohar pointed out eight dimensions which he categorized under three broad categories, viz. organisational structure, leadership functions, and individual behaviour.[51]

Since there is no agreed list of dimensions of organisational climate, the researchers concerned studied organisational climate somewhat differently from others. This is also due to absence of any organisational theory explaining clearly the dimensions of oganisational climate affecting behaviour of personnel of an organisation.

Thus, it is seen that there has been a lot of controversy as many climate researchers have assessed the specific climate in which they were interested rather than attempting to develop a single and central view of dimensions which is a challenge for researchers in the times to come. This is a challenge because organizations differ widely in terms of their size, complexity, structure, products, vision, mission, values, and so on. However, if a few dimensions which are common to almost all organizations need to be identified.

Research Studies on Organisational Climate

Till date, a good number of studies have been conducted on organisational climate and allied issues. However, there is a lack of uniformity in the findings of these studies. A brief of some of the relevant main research studies is as follows:

While studying the relationship between organisational climate and training and development practices, Baumgartel and Jeanpierre (1972) in their study found that if formal and informal support and financial autonomy are extended to an employee, his chances of learning new knowledge and skills get increased.[52]

Stating that individual character and attitudes become a part of organisational climate, Payne and Mansfield (1973) took for their research study a sample of 987 respondents representing different organizations at different levels to find out the relationship between perception of organisational climate with organisational structure and context. They concluded that there is a conceptual linkage between organisation and individual intervening, specific situation attitudes on events and individual perceptions, attitude and behaviour. [53]

Sinha (1980) studied organisational dynamics in the form of leadership styles in eight organizations and found a significant relationship between leadership styles and organisational

climate, e.g. a change from authoritarian style to participative style had the main positive influence on organisational climate. [54]

In order to find out labour management relationship with organisational climate, Sharma (1987) using a 27 item questionnaire concluded that both the sectors – private and public – were almost equally concerned about their employee welfare, safety and security and monetary benefits.
Using the organisational climate questionnaire and role stress questionnaire developed by Udai Pareek, Khanna (1985) in his Ph.D thesis concluded that organisational climate was positively correlated with total satisfaction and that affiliation climate was negatively correlated with job satisfaction, total satisfaction and total effectiveness. [55]

Collecting data from 269 employees of an IT company and carrying out three hierarchical regression analysis with each of the employee perception of involvement variables as dependent variables and organisational climate as independent variable, Shadur (1999) found a predictor relationship of supportive climate and commitment of each of the employee involvement variable. [56]

Using the Motivational Analysis of Organisational-Climate (MAO –C), developed by Udai Pareek (1989), Jain et.al. (2007) examined the motivational climate in ICT education and training institutes. With the help of twelve dimensions of organisation climate, a total of six motives of organisation climate were studied. They concluded that in all the institutions understudy, dependency motive was the dominant one. [57]
In order to explore the components impacted by ISO 9000 both before and after its implementation, Kunnanatt (2007) measured the organisational climate by using the questionnaire, Motivational Analysis of Organisational Climate (MAO-C) developed by Udai Pareek (1989), and concluded that ISO 9000 was successful   change   both   for   quality improvement and as vital tool for strategic change management.[58]

Having a sample of 200 respondents in four public and private textile organizations to assess the relationship between organisational climate and workers' dual commitment, Reddy et.al. (2000) found a positiveship relation between organisational climate and organisational commitment.[59]

In order to study the existence of relationship between components of psychological climate and commitment in a leading group in school, Nammi (2009) conducted a research having 170 teachers as its sample size and using correlation and regression method for data analysis. He concluded explanation of variance organisational commitment is greatly affected by innovation, trust, recognition, and fairness. [60]

In another study, having a sample size of 41 employees at Andhra Pradesh Mahila Abhivruddhi Society (APMAS) and using individual attribute approach, Gupta (2008) found the working environment at APMAS a favourable one, especially the participative management and transparency in the decision making process.[61]

Having a sample of 112 executives from different tele-communication companies including Airtel, Idea, and Tata, Singh et.al. (2011) studied the impact of organisational climate on job satisfaction, with the help of two welt structured questionnaires. Using correlation and regression analysis as statistical tools, the researchers found a positive relationship between organisational climate and job satisfaction especially in Tata.[62]

In order to find out the relationship between demographic variables and organisational climate, Veni and Ramchandran (2012) conducted a study on a sample of 260 respondents from Sundram Fasteners Limited. They found positive results alongwith strong climate in the organisation and a satisfied workforce. [63]

While exploring the concept of organisational climate in district hospitals, with the help of MAO –C instrument, designed by Pareek (1984), Purohit and Wadhwa (2012) surveyed 66 employees of the district hospitals in India and found dysfunctional profile of organisational climate in respect of district hospitals. While dependency motive was found to be the dominant motive, control motive was identified as backup motive for the organisational climate. [64]

In yet another study of impact of organisational climate on job satisfaction at Bharti Airtel India Ltd., Kumar (2014) conducted a survey of 35 professionals employed in the Shimla Zonal office of the company and found that while junior management could not correlate themselves with the

policies of the organisation, senior level management had higher satisfaction with the work environment of their company.[65]

Conclusion

Thus, it is seen that different authors have different perceptions with regard to the conceptual framework, definition and dimensions of organisational climate. For example, while some authors have defined organisational climate as a *function of a person and his interaction with the organisational environment,* a few others have defined it as a *dependent variable* likely to be influenced by individual or subjective perception. On the other hand, some experts have referred it as an *independent variable.* Not only this, some experts have defined organisational climate as *recurring patterns of behaviour depending on the values and atmosphere prevailing in an organisation* from time to time, and so on. However, having gone through the diversity of views, the authors of the present paper are of the view that organisational climate refers to the general perception of the personnel (as a whole) of an organisation with regard to the relevant dimensions of organisational climate prevailing during a particular period of time in their organisation.

Similarly, there is no uniformity of opinions with regard to the dimensions of organisational climate because many climate researchers have assessed the specific climate in which they were interested rather than attempting a single and central view of dimensions. Consequently, while some authors have pointed out only three-four dimensions of organisational climate, some others have included as many as ten to twenty dimensions. This may be due to the fact that organizations differ widely in terms of their size, nature, complexity, structure, values, culture, vision, mission, products, ethics, etc. Therefore, there is a need for more research in future in order to find out and agree on some core dimensions which may be applicable to all organizations.

It is good that a number of research studies have already been carried out on organisational climate as also its impact on employee motivation and allied issues. Even then, there is scope for more research studies so as to reduce the wide diversities and contradictions in the findings of such studies.

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