



Creating a Work Climate That Motivates Staff and Improves Performance

- A positive work climate leads to and sustains employee motivation, high performance, and better results in health care.
- Good leadership and management practices contribute to a positive work climate.

Work climate is the “weather of the workplace.” Just as the weather can affect daily activities, the work climate influences employee behavior. Every organization has a work climate. Within an organization, the climate of an individual work group may differ from the prevailing organizational climate. High-performing work groups can operate well even in organizations that are troubled by declining funding, weak senior leadership, or similar problems.

Work-group climate influences results. A positive work-group climate motivates employees to improve their performance by going above and beyond job expectations. Better performing work groups contribute to better organizational performance, which in turn leads to better results. In the health sector a good work-group climate leads to improved service delivery and thus to better health outcomes.

Good Leadership and Management

How managers perform is crucial to organizational outcomes. Work-group climate itself is an intermediate outcome of effective leadership and management. At least 50 percent of the differences in work-group climate can be attributed to differences in day-to-day practices of the people who manage the work group.¹ Organizational practices that managers can influence, such as the design of tasks and jobs, reward systems, policies and procedures, and strategy, can also have a large impact.² To influence a work group’s climate, managers need to:

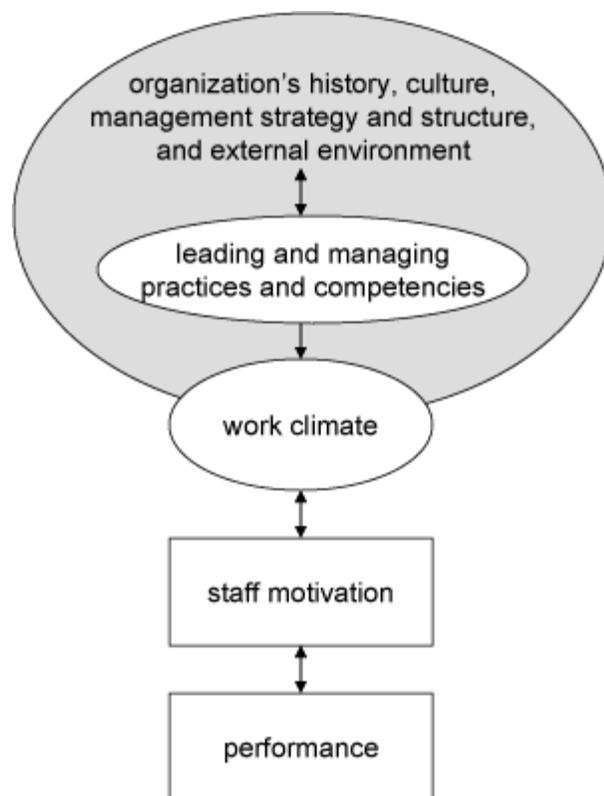
- Understand the three key dimensions of work climate;
- Assess the climate of their work group; and
- Take action to improve their work group’s climate.

Three Key Dimensions of Work Climate

Clarity. An environment provides clarity when the group knows its roles and responsibilities within the overall organization.

Support. In a supportive environment, staff members feel that they have the resources and backing they need to achieve the work group’s goals.

Challenge. An environment of challenge offers group members opportunities to stretch their abilities, take reasonable risks in solving problems, and discover new ways of working to become more effective.



All three dimensions are needed to improve performance and achieve better health care results. For example, staff members who work in an environment of challenge but who lack support or clarity often experience stress and frustration that prevent them from becoming more effective. Similarly, without challenge or support, even

people who are clear about what is expected of them often find little intellectual or professional stimulation in their work. In contrast, the right balance of clarity, support, and challenge in a work group's climate enables the staff to improve performance and achieve better results.

Assessing Climate

An assessment of the prevailing work climate is a vital first step to improvement. A work group can measure its own climate using a short survey—the *Workgroup Climate Assessment (WCA)*. Work-group climate is measured according to the perceptions of the individual work-group members. The WCA consists of eight climate perceptions which, together, measure the group's climate. While the WCA primarily measures work-group climate, it also engages work-group members in a conversation about their particular climate so that, together, they can find ways to improve it. The WCA encourages a participatory process—that is, team members, including the manager, first respond to the survey individually and then discuss and act upon the results together.

The WCA tool and facilitator's guide can be accessed at:
<http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=96.9.htm&language=english&module=toolkit>.

A positive work group climate is a primary intermediate outcome of leadership and management development efforts to improve the performance of managers and their work groups. By tracking a baseline and changes in work-group climate, the WCA makes an important contribution to monitoring leadership and management improvements to strengthen health care service delivery in developing countries. Use of this tool by MSH consistently shows an association between positive changes in work-group climate and achievement of work-group goals to improve health care service delivery.

Taking Action

Because work-group climate is influenced by the actions of the work-group manager and members, improving managerial leadership and operational practices will improve the climate. Depending upon the deficiencies identified by the WCA process, work groups could undertake the following activities: get to know one another better through routine or periodic events scheduled during or after work hours; clarify mutual expectations for performing work; define and align the work group around shared goals and aspirations; inspire team members by recognizing their accomplishments; schedule regular meetings to exchange information on progress towards goals and learning; strengthen organizational management systems, especially those that promote work efficiency; monitor progress; and use mistakes as opportunities for learning to do things better. No matter what actions managers or other members of a work group take, they should communicate effectively with each other in ways that encourage understanding and learning.

¹Buckingham M, Coffman C. *First Break All The Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. New York: Simon and Schuster; 1999.

²Stringer R. *Leadership and Organizational Climate*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall; 2002.

Where to get more information: This brief is based on Chapter 3 from *Managers Who Lead: A Handbook for Improving Health Services*, published with support from the US Agency for International Development through the Management and Leadership Program under award number HRN-A-00-00-00014-00. See http://www.msh.org/resources/publications/LandM_handbook.html.

References:

Perry C, LeMay N, Rodway G, Tracy A, Galer J. Validating a work group climate assessment tool for improving the performance of public health organizations. *Human Resources for Health*. 2005; 3 (10) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1478-4491-3-10>.

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