

Organisational climate

[Environment](#), [Climate](#)



Organisational climate is regarded as " an attribute of the organisation, a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings and behaviours which characterises life in the organisation, and exists independently of the perceptions and understandings of the members of the organisation" (Ekvall, 1996 cited in King and Anderson 2001). " The climate of an organisation is inferred by its members through the organisations practices, procedures and reward systems deployed and indicative of the way the business runs itself on a daily and routine basis. " (Ahmed, 1998)

Literature has indicated that there are many different factors which need to be present in the climate of an organisation if creativity and innovation are going to be encouraged or enhanced. Research carried out by Feurer et al (1996 cited in Andriopoulos 2001) within Hewlett Packard suggested that " creativity is best achieved in open climates where there is interaction with small barriers, a large number of stimuli, the freedom to experiment and the possibility of building on earlier ideas". McFadzean (1998) found that performance standards help to enhance creativity and innovation.

She noted that " managers should ensure that employees are committed to achieving a first rate performance". A good way of achieving this is to develop achievable objectives (both as an organisation and as an individual) and by producing a strategy for fulfilling them. If employees know that they must give a first class performance they will strive to be creative and produce new and better solutions. Along with climate excellence Evans (1993 cited in McFadzean, 1999) found that employees need to be encouraged to express their ideas open and freely if creativity and innovation is going to occur.

This freedom enables the individuals to do things differently, step away from the norm and begin to think differently about the problems they are faced with. One other major factor which has been indicated as a requirement in a creative climate is participation. Employees need to be involved in all levels as well as participating in other workgroups different to their own. Decisions need to be made through consensus and participation if creativity and innovation is to be successful (Ahmed, 1998).

Closely related to an organisations climate is their culture. Martins and Terblanche (2003) defined organisational culture as " the deeply seated (often subconscious) values and beliefs shared by personnel in an organisation. " Johnson and Scholes (2002) defined it as " the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organisations view of itself and its environment". The culture of the organisation can be seen as a reflection of the climate.

The climate of an organisation is visible in their practices or procedures, but the beliefs and values of the culture cannot be seen here but it does govern the actions and behaviours of the staff (Ahmed, 1998). Research carried out by Tushman and O'Reilly (1997, cited in Martins and Terlanche 2003) found " organisational culture to lie at the heart of creativity and innovation". The organisational culture allows employees to know the extent to which creative solutions will be encouraged, supported or implemented.

There are a numbers of factors which have been identified by research that should be present in an organisations culture if creativity and innovation is

going to be more probable. Literature has indicated that an open flow of communication is crucial (Amabile, 1998 cited in Andriopoulos, 2001). Martins and Terblanche (2003) found that " an organisational culture that supports open and transparent communication based on trust will have a positive influence on promoting creativity and innovation".

Employees who feel that they are able to disagree openly with their superiors and who are not faced with rigid norms which promote conformity will be more likely to think creatively about solving the problems they are faced with. This factor is further related to the idea that there will also be an element of participative safety for the staff. Employees need to feel that they will not be punished or criticised for thinking creatively. If a project fails and an employee is faced with losing his/her job then in the future they will not risk thinking creatively (McFadden, 1998).

Brand (1998, cited in Andriopoulos, 2001) indicated that " creative employees need to be in an environment where top management takes a long-term view in order to tolerate a few mistakes". Research has indicated that risk taking is another factor that needs to be present within a creative organisation. Employees need to feel that they are able to implement the new creative ideas they have for solving problems. A culture that encourages and supports this risk taking will ultimately enhance creative achievement (Amabile, 1998 cited in Andriopoulos 2001).

Judge et al.(1997 cited in Martins and Terblanche 2001) found that " a culture that has too many controls that inhibits risk taking consequently inhibits creativity and innovation". It has also however been indicated that

there does have to be some kind of balance established as to the degree of risk taking that is allowed within the organisation (Martins and Terblanche 2001). If there is not employees may take major risks on several occasions which may be detrimental to the organisation. Literature also proposes that self-initiated activity is a vital part of a creative organisation.

Empowerment of staff to apply their own knowledge and expertise can be a valuable move to enhance creativity and innovation but this can be difficult for managers to do as they may not like losing control. " By allowing individuals and teams to own problems and their solutions, intrinsic motivation is enhanced" (Robinson and Stern 1997, cited in Andriopoulos, 2001). With self-initiated activity comes trust and respect for the individual or team. Literature has shown this to be a valuable part of the organisation's culture.

If an employee feels that they are trusted and respected as an individual and for their work then they will strive to do better in the future for the organisation as well as themselves Ahmed (1998) found that " where there is high trust new ideas surface easily". An important factor in improving creativity in an organisation is the leadership style which is used by the management or team/project leader. Literature has shown that a democratic participative style of leadership is conducive to creativity (Nystrom, 1979, cited in Andriopoulos, 2001).

Research carried out by Deci and Ryan (1987 cited in Thacker 1997) found that a team leader needs to communicate in a style that will provide an 'open field' where employees can feel free to suggest new ideas and be

creative. They also found that a controlling leadership style will be likely to decrease individual motivation because it does not allow the creative process to flow. Along with being supportive and participative the leader's vision is also a key factor in a creative organisation.

Cook (1998) proposed that " leaders must effectively communicate a vision conducive to creativity through any available formal and informal channel of communication and constantly encourage employees to think and act beyond current wisdom". VanGundy (1988 cited in McFadzean 1998) indicated that " creative thinkers look into the future and visualise where they would like to be". A leader's vision helps to define the appropriate course of action for the organisation and its individuals.

It allows the individuals to know exactly what they need to strive to achieve in the future. Leaders also need to be able to develop effective groups. Cook (1998) suggested that creative leaders need to build teams that have a high level of trust and the ability to have conflicts and recover from them. Further literature has shown that these groups need to contain " individuals who have a diversity of skills and who communicate well with each other" (Amabile and Gyskiewicz 1989 cited in Andriopoulos 2001).