

## **The Army Culture - Climate Survey**

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### **Introduction**

#### Background

The research described in this paper is one of a number of studies sponsored by the Chief of the Land Staff to examine the organizational culture of the Canadian Army. The aim of this group of Army culture studies is to gather the information needed to meet one of the Army's strategic objectives -- shape Army culture (Army Strategy, 2002). The focus of the study described in this paper is on obtaining a baseline measure of Army culture as it is today.

#### Purpose

The research described in this paper has two objectives; (a) to provide a comprehensive description of the Army's culture, and (b) to obtain information that will be useful to senior leaders as they develop policies to shape Army culture for the future.

#### Distinguishing Culture from Climate

Organizational culture research has evolved from earlier work on organizational climate. Organizational climate is an established construct that has been studied since the late 1930s (e.g., Glick, 1985; Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939; Schneider, 1972, 1975a,b). Schein (1992) describes climate as members' collective perceptions of their organization, which have an impact on behavior and the manifestation of the culture of the organization.

Studies of organizational culture did not begin to surface until around 1980 (e.g., Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980; Ott, 1989; Schein, 1984; Shriber & Gutek, 1987). Culture is normally defined as something deeper than climate, identified in values, beliefs and assumptions held by organizational members (Denison, 1996). There is little argument about how to measure climate; however, there is much debate about whether culture should be assessed with quantitative, qualitative or a combination of measurement methods. These controversial issues will be discussed.

#### Organizational Climate

The study of organizational climate is grounded in the theory of Kurt Lewin and colleagues who argued that behavior is a function of the person and the environment ( $B=f[P,E]$ ; Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939). Climate research has endeavored to explain the environmental variable. Many definitions of organizational climate exist in the literature (e.g.,

Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Moran & Volkwein, 1992). Schneider (1975) suggests that organizational climate comprises perceptions that are psychologically meaningful environmental descriptions which people agree characterize a system's practices and procedures. Campbell, Dunnington, Lawlor and Weick (1970) concluded that climate has four fundamental dimensions, including individual autonomy, degree of structure, reward orientation, and a combination of consideration, warmth and support. The Agency Culture Questionnaire (ACQ; Schneider, 1972) suggests the existence of six dimensions: managerial support, managerial structure, concern for new employees, intra-agency conflict, agent independence and general satisfaction. These researchers and others have approached organizational climate as a multi-faceted, organizational construct (e.g., Moran & Volkwein, 1992; Schneider, 1975; Ott, 1989); however, others see it as a set of more narrowly defined constructs such as safety climate (Zohar, 1980, 2000), customer service climate (Schneider, Parkington & Buxton, 1980), innovation climate (Abbey & Dickson, 1983), and ethics climate (Dickson, Smith, Grojean & Ehrhart, 2001). Whether climate is viewed as a multi-faceted or a narrowly defined construct, it has been linked to organizational performance (Franklin, 1975; Mudrack, 1989) as well as motivation and behavior (Decoitus & Summers, 1987; Lafollette & Sims, 1975; Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Pritchard & Karasick, 1976; Schneider & Snyder, 1975).

### Organizational Culture

Schein (1990, 1992) conceptualized organizational culture as the process of socialization that takes place to integrate individuals into an organization, and allow organizations to adapt to external demands. The essence of organizational culture is the underlying values and beliefs that work to shape behavioral norms in organizations (Cooke & Lafferty, 1989; Kroeber & Klukhohn, 1952; Louis, 1983; Moran & Volkwein, 1992; Ouchi, 1981; Swartz & Jordan, 1980; Trice and Beyer, 1984; Uttal, 1983; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). Most definitions are derived from Schein (1992) who describes culture as

*a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel as related to those problems (Page 13).*

Culture has three distinct layers ranging from the observable rituals, symbols and behavioral norms at the artifactual level, to the less obvious espoused values and beliefs at the intermediate level, and finally underlying assumptions at the deepest, most subjective level of analysis (Denison, 1996; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1990, 1992). Although the impact of culture on other organizational measures is somewhat unknown (Lawson & Shen, 1998), relationships with organizational strategy (Rousseau, 1990), job satisfaction (e.g., Allen & Dyer, 1980), and performance (e.g., Denison, 1984) have been demonstrated.

### Measurement of Organizational Climate and Culture

The most appropriate assessment technique for organizational culture is still the subject of debate. Glick (1985) contrasted organizational climate with culture and concluded

that climate research requires quantitative methods of measurement to describe and measure dimensions of the construct, while culture requires qualitative techniques to explain processes that may underlie those dimensions. There is little disagreement that climate is relatively salient (Schein, 1990), it operates at a level of awareness (Moran & Volkwein, 1992) and it can be reasonably well measured using interviews or paper and pencil measures and quantitative analysis techniques (Al-Shammari, 1992; James & Jones, 1974; Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Schneider, 1975). On the other hand, the most appropriate means of measuring organizational culture has yet to be agreed upon.

Organizational culture has been measured with qualitative and quantitative methods including, surveys (e.g., Hofstede, 1998), analytical descriptions (e.g., Trice & Beyer, 1984) ethnographic investigation (e.g., Barley, 1983), historical investigation (e.g., Pettigrew, 1979) and clinical description techniques (e.g., Schein, 1990, 1992). Early research on organizational culture typically used qualitative methods; however, the use of quantitative methods is also supported (e.g., Rousseau, 1990; Xenikou & Furnham, 1996). A strong argument for using qualitative methods is based on the non-observable nature of culture. For example Schein (1990, 1992) states that basic underlying, often unconscious, assumptions are the most important dimension of culture, and accessible only through intense observation and focused interviews. Another argument points out that organizations are unique; therefore, it would be unwise to assume any pre-conceived dimensional model of an organization's culture, as all off-the-shelf surveys must do. On the other hand, those who support quantitative methods argue qualitative assessment is insufficient for organizational analysis (Xenikou & Furnham, 1996). They suggest measuring the level of consensus of organizational members on a set of practices and cognitive dimensions. Some researchers are now advocating a multiple method approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1990, 1992; Xenikou & Furnham, 1996).

### Summary

The literature suggests that organizational culture and organizational climate are separate but related constructs. Organizational climate is accepted to be a temporary condition comprised of objective or perceived environmental issues that can be measured quantitatively, manipulated and changed relatively easily; whereas, organizational culture is thought to be the set of values, beliefs and assumptions held in common by members of the organization and necessary for internal integration and adaptation to external forces. Compared to climate, culture is more complex, difficult to assess and resistant to change. Organizations who want to assess their culture must start by conducting a comprehensive qualitative analysis through ethnographic and clinical descriptive methods, to develop a conceptual model for their organization. When sufficient data are collected and a conceptual model is developed, quantitative analysis can be conducted to determine model fit.

### Focus of the Current Study

The intent of this research is to develop a questionnaire suitable for measuring elements of Army culture and climate. We decided on measuring both climate and culture for two reasons. First, it is clear from our review of the literature that there is considerable overlap between culture and climate. Second, it was felt that a mix of culture and climate

measures would be most useful given the practical requirement of this research to obtain information that will be useful to senior army leaders in policy development. What follows is a description of our survey development work.

## **Method**

### Model development

Overview. The research design was aimed at addressing the applied interests and concerns of the project sponsor by following lessons learned in the empirical literature. The Army Culture Survey would be developed in four phases. In Phase One qualitative data was collected through focus groups and ethnographic interviews. In Phase Two, a thorough review of the literature was conducted to find other previously developed questionnaires related to Army culture or climate. In Phase Three, the pilot survey was written. Items were extracted from existing surveys or written from scratch. Phase Four involved a pilot administration, data analysis and refinement of the survey, paying attention to user feedback, validity and reliability. The final administration will be conducted and followed by analysis and reporting results in 2004.

Focus groups. Qualitative data collection began with focus groups conducted at Army bases across the country. Researchers conducted focus groups at Kingston (Ontario), Gagetown (New Brunswick), Valcartier (Quebec), Petawawa (Ontario), Wainright (Alberta), and Edmonton (Alberta). Participants were volunteers from various units at their respective bases. They included officers (N = 58) and non-commissioned members (N = 59), (men, N = 103; women, N = 14) from operational occupations such as Infantry, Armored and Artillery, as well as support occupations such as Technical, Logistical and Medical. Age and tenure of participants varied widely from relatively new members to some who were nearing retirement. All focus groups were held in neutral locations away from the primary workplace of all participants, normally in a conference room or classroom with ample lighting, climate control, chairs and tables for sitting and writing. During focus groups, researchers generated discussion on the topic of culture in the Army by asking a set of prepared questions and by probing responses for expansion. Questions focused on culture-related issues like the role of the Army, values espoused and/or practiced in the Army, behaviors that are rewarded, and performance standards.

Ethnographic research. In a related study, Shorey (2002) conducted ethnographic interviews with a small sample of Army members at bases in Kingston (Ontario) and Petawawa (Ontario). This sample had a similar demographic configuration to the focus groups. The purpose of these interviews was to take information gathered in focus groups as a guide and using a prepared set of interview questions, probe more deeply into the experiences of participants to explore the assumptions that underlie commonly accepted beliefs, values and behaviors in the Army.

### Pilot Survey

The pilot survey is comprised of 403 items in 28 subscales, grouped into eight broad construct categories. Construct categories include: (a) Role and Mission (scales include role of the army, conflicts between mission success and troop safety), (b) Military Professionalism

(scales include military virtues, institutional-occupational role orientation, careerism, professionalism, discipline, fairness), (c) Readiness (scales include willingness to enter combat, readiness to use lethal force, confidence in skills and capabilities, cohesion, fitness, stress), (d) Leadership (scales include transformational leadership culture, perception of immediate leadership, respect for senior army leadership), (e) Training and Development (scales include learning organizational culture, training), (f) Personnel Policies (scales include acceptance of gender integration, acceptance of diversity, attitudes towards bilingualism requirements, quality of life), (g) Communication, (h) Outcome variables (scales include commitment, satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, career intentions), and (i) Demographics (number of deployments, current unit, military occupation classification, rank, gender, age, years of service, spoken languages, education level). Some items were taken from published measures and others were developed by the researchers. Items employ a variety of response scales including dichotomous (true/false) and Likert-like response formats.

Administration. Surveys were administered to 333 members of the Canadian Army in Eastern Canada (Halifax, n = 38; Gagetown, n = 236), and Western Canada (Edmonton, n = 58). Participants were males (n = 267) and females (n = 53), ranging in age from 16 to 55 years (mean = 31.4). Rank of participants ranged from private to major, including 228 junior non-commissioned members (private, corporal, master corporal), 48 senior non-commissioned members (sergeant, warrant officer, master warrant officer, chief warrant officer), 35 junior officers (second lieutenant, lieutenant, captain), and 5 senior officers who were all majors. The first official language of participants was English (n = 284) and French (n = 35). Participation was voluntary.

Initial Reliability Analysis. Analyses were performed on 333 cases. Reliability was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Initial analysis found acceptable reliabilities above .70 on most scales. Detailed reporting of item analysis is not included here as it was only in the very preliminary stages at the time of this writing.

## **Discussion**

### The way ahead

Item analysis and revisions will be completed this summer and full survey administration will be conducted in Fall 2003. After analysis of survey data results will be reported to the sponsor in 2004. It is anticipated that the current study will provide a snapshot of Canadian Army Culture and draw linkages to organizational outcome measures such as satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay. Results will be used to draw conclusions about potential interventions that would help to attract and retain high quality, well-suited members of the Army. Further research may investigate disparities between the values held by civilians and those held by military members as another potential cause of attraction and retention difficulties.

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