

Enhancing Leadership through Assessments of Organization Climate and Leadership

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Abstract

Given the diverse and challenging demands facing military leaders today, the search for methods and instruments to assist leaders in successfully meeting objectives is at an all time high. One method that can facilitate leaders' understanding of their soldiers, their units, and, ultimately, their combined combat readiness and effectiveness is the measurement of organizational climate. Organization climate measures have been used successfully to improve productivity and performance. Within the CF, unit climate profiles have been used as an indicator of unit effectiveness and operational readiness. Furthermore, within climate measurement, the assessment of leaders has facilitated commanders' and leaders' ability to lead their units effectively. This paper presents a pivotal links between organizational effectiveness, organization climate measurement and leadership assessment and provides a rationale for their importance and utility for leaders. The discussion of the climate measurements tools developed and used by the Canadian Forces (CF), both in operational and non-operational settings, will provide a practical example of their utility. Recommendations for facilitating leaders' success through training and education into order to increase the likelihood of their success will be made.

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the cold war, the Canadian Forces (CF) experienced a broadening of operations, from conventional warfare to a range of various types of operations, both internally (e.g., assisting civil authorities) and externally (peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace enforcement missions). According to our statistics, "about 8,000 Canadian Forces members – one third of our deployable force – are preparing for, engaged in or returning from an overseas mission" (DND site, 2004).

Because it is increasingly subject to close scrutiny by the federal government and the media, not only is the CF expected to successfully complete its missions, but it must also be increasingly transparent in management, finances and social policy. To better control its resources and fulfill their missions, each element of the CF (Navy, Army and Air Force) has developed and uses its own performance measurement framework. These instruments include also the evaluation of the well-being of personnel.

Where there may be no enemies *per se*, where displaying military might and the total defeat of an identified enemy no longer has lost its meaning (Van Doom and Mans, 1989), it is increasingly necessary to rethink methods for measuring operational effectiveness. As part of this new military and social context, these measurements must thus include different and more evaluation criteria than in the past. For instance, the importance that the CF now places on "human" variables and quality of life is a development that requires new, different methods for evaluating effectiveness. In today's military environment, with it is increasing complexity and ambiguity, commanders need a means of objectively monitoring and making efficient use of resources, both human and materiel.

In short, the relationship between organizational effectiveness, leadership and organizational climate is becoming an increasingly important element for leaders within the Armed forces. By evaluating the organizational climate and the perception that members of the organization have of the leadership they experience, leaders can more adapt to various contexts and effectively carry out their missions. Furthermore, if giving feedback regarding their subordinates' perceptions of their leadership, they can adopt various leadership styles (Hunt and Phillips, 1991) based on operational contexts, in order to generate a positive influence on the climate within the unit and through that, improve their unit's operational performance.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AND LEADERSHIP

Organizational Effectiveness

Working from the organizational effectiveness model (see Figure 1) developed by Morin, Savoie and Beaudin (1994), which incorporates the different schools of thought (psychosocial, economical, ecological (social responsibility) and systemic), Villeneuve, Dobрева-Martinova, Little and Izzo (2000) suggested three conceptual changes to the theoretical model (see Figure 2) in order to adapt it to the military context. First, they suggested introducing the notion of operational readiness to the psychosocial dimension of the model rather than retaining the criteria of mobilization, morale, performance and professional development proposed by Morin *et al.* (1994). They also propose to change the notion of orthogonally of those four dimension to a notion of interdependence, and for the political process included in the model, rather to be the source of those four separate dimensions, it should view more as moderator variable. This adapted model allows the various commanders to more accurately assess the operational effectiveness of their units. In this paper, we will examine only the "human measures" of the psychosocial dimension, i.e., operational readiness.

The Director, Human Resource Research and Evaluation (DHRRE) defines operational readiness as soldiers' capacity and willingness to complete the tasks assigned. We see readiness as a psychological state resulting from mental preparation, training, equipment, support, and situational forces that operate at individual, group, or unit level, and the three levels serve as reference in its operationalization.

Organizational Climate

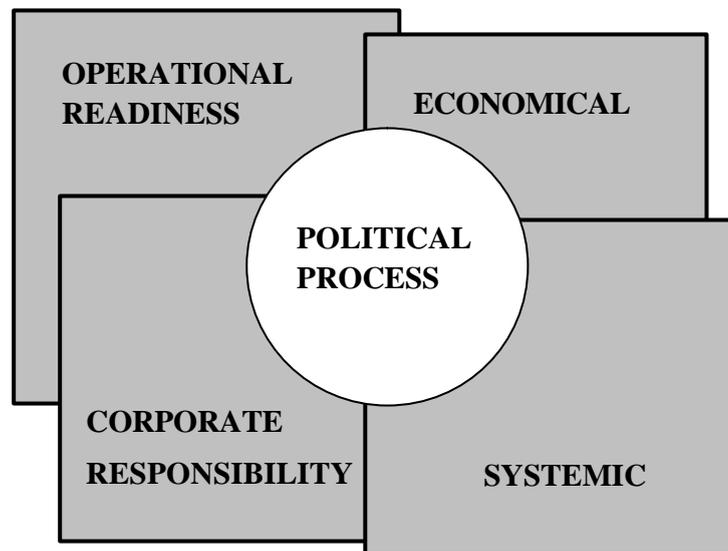
In developing measures to be used in evaluating the human dimension of the operational readiness in CF units, DHRRE examined the concept of organizational climate. In terms of organizational climate, we can see that there is interaction between people and the organizations for which they work. This interaction can be slanted towards the person or the organization. According to Lewin (1935), human behaviour is a function of the interaction between personality and environment ($B = f [P * E]$). On the other hand, Schneider (1987) suggested that the environment is a function of the people acting within it ($E = f [P * B]$). Together, the two competing views suggest that a more comprehensive vision of the climate requires both perspectives. Because organizational climate is better understood when interaction between the person and the organization is taken into consideration; it provides, by extension, a conceptual

link between organizational analysis and analysis of the individual (Litwin and Stringer, 1968; Payne and Mansfield, 1973). This approach also provides an understanding of the effect of interactions between the person and organization on the nature of the work environment and an understanding of how those interactions in turn influence the behaviour and motivation of the individual (Litwin and Stringer, 1968; Sims and Lafollette, 1975; Ashforth, 1985).

Figure 1 - Dimensions and Criteria of Organizational Effectiveness Model



Figure 2 - Integrated model of military unit effectiveness



As indicated by Brunet and Savoie (1999), considerable research in the education sector has attempted to examine the relationship between organizational climate and organizational effectiveness. The findings of those studies vary. Some authors (Halpin and Crofts, 1963; Glasser, 1969; Madaus, Kellaghan, Rakow and King, 1979; Steward, 1979; Kalis, 1980, as cited by Brunet and Savoie, 1999) indicate that several organizational attributes (e.g. individual characteristics and experience of organizational members, organizational culture) could have a moderating or mediating effect on the relationship between organizational climate and organizational effectiveness. Others, like Dow (1983), found that a favourable organizational environment has a major impact on organizational effectiveness. Some authors, however, conclude that leadership is a better indicator of organizational effectiveness within small units, while organizational climate would be a better indicator within larger units (Brunet, Brassard and Corriveau, 1991).

Leadership

The potential influence of leadership on organizational climate has been clearly established in the fields of administration, education and sport (Bolman and Deal, 1991b; Bryman, 1992; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Schein, 1985; Snyder, 1990; Wallace and Weese, 1995; Weese, 1995). Wenek (2003) in her review of the leadership literature proposes a definition of leadership that is independent of context and corresponds to the notion of leadership that we wish to use in this paper. “Leadership”, she writes, can be defined as “directly or indirectly influencing others, by means of formal authority or personal attributes, to act in accordance with one’s intent or a shared purpose”.

Measurement of Organizational Climate and Leadership

Based on these premises, DHRRE has developed instruments to measure operational readiness in both garrison and field units. Among other things, these diagnostic tools evaluate leadership and some aspects of the climate within the unit. To assess the climate within garrison units, the CF uses the “Profile of Unit Leadership, Satisfaction and Effectiveness”(PULSE) and, on operations, the Human Dimensions of Operations (HDO) survey. Both instruments evaluate specific dimensions climate and present a profile of the climate that reigns within the unit. The information gathered is useful, as it provides unit commanders and their senior officers with a snapshot of the dimensions observed of the time of administration. From this information, leaders can either maintain the climate or intervene more specifically where problems are observed.

DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS

Profile of Unit Leadership, Satisfaction and Effectiveness (PULSE)

At the request of Commanding Officer (CO), PULSE offers them a “snapshot” of the organizational climate of their unit in a garrison or non-operational, that can be taken as an index of psychological well being. As indicated in the model in Figure 3, this instrument examines the relationship between determining factors such as leadership and organizational climate indicators, using several attitudinal sub-scales based on the perceptions of the person, the group and the unit. Results can be also present in comparison with benchmarks (norms) or by group such as rank, officer/NCM, or with a previous administration. PULSE thus provides commanders with an overall picture of the unit climate, thus allowing for direct measures to correct any problems identified.

PULSE evaluates six core dimensions that DHRRE uses to measure organizational climate: job satisfaction, job motivation, communication, leadership (confidence in the chain of command and empowering leadership behaviour), cohesion, and job stressors. Additional scales can be used to further examine certain aspects of the climate within the unit, i.e., health, unit climate, operational readiness, organizational support and commitment, career intentions and, finally, certain organizational behaviour.

Human Dimensions of Operations Survey

Organizational climate during operational tours is measured by the Human Dimensions of Operations (HDO) survey. This survey has been administered in various theatres of operations (e.g., Bosnia, Afghanistan, Kosovo) since its inception in 1996 (Murphy & Farley, 2000). The ultimate objective of the HDO is to provide in-theatre commanders with supplementary information about important aspects of unit climate, as well as stress levels and reactions that have been linked with combat effectiveness. The HDO includes measure of climate assessing perceptions of morale, cohesion, professional morale (reflection of the soldiers’ self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities as soldiers), military ethos, supervisors’ leadership behaviors, and confidence in leadership (at various chain-of-command positions; e.g., CO). It also assesses

respondents' perceptions of sources of stress, their reactions to stress, and the coping strategies they use to deal with those reactions.

Figure 3 - Profile of Unit Leadership, Satisfaction and Effectiveness Model



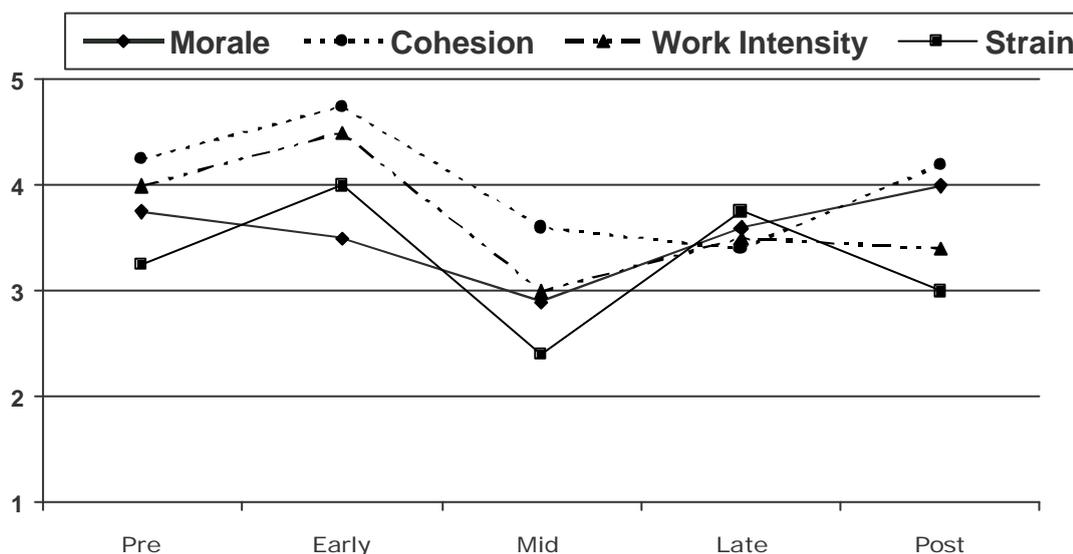
In addition to the main objective of informing commanders, the HDO is being used to validate two models. To better understand and react to the changes in work and personal intensity that soldiers face over the course of a tour, the Schmitz's (1999) "Stage Model of Operations" is being tested. This model attempts to represent the various levels of intensity that occur throughout a six-month operational deployment. Riley (2001) found that mature tours and immature (i.e., newly established) ones have different profiles for work intensity across the life span of the tour, indicating that different tours may have different profiles. For this reason, it was considered necessary to establish norms for the HDO when administered various stages of deployment. To assess these models and provide commanders with periodic "snap-shots" to permit them to understand their units' climate, the HDO is administered five times across the span of an operational tour: prior to deployment, early, mid, and late tour in-theatre, and after their return to Canada (4 to 6 months). The resultant climate profile will provide, at a glance, an impression of the changes that occurred over the life span of a tour (Figure 4) when viewed in the light of the appropriated norm set.

As the second model, the Operational Effectiveness Stress Model developed by Wild (1988) is also being validated with the HDO. This model postulates relationships between stressors, moderator factors (e.g., organizational support, task satisfaction, and effective leadership), stress coping strategy and outcomes such as performance and their impact on each other. For example, previous research has confirmed the positive relationship between poor coping strategies and reported levels of stress and strain (Farley, 2002) and negative correlations between climate dimensions (e.g., morale/cohesion and confidence in leadership) and physiological signs of stress have also been found (Izzo et al., 2000).

Leadership Calibration Scale

The Leadership Calibration Scale (LCS) was developed to address concerns that leaders may not be able to assess climate accurately in their units; this is significant because inaccurate assessment may lead to inappropriate or lack of action to improve aspects of climate that directly influence combat effectiveness (e.g., morale and cohesion; Brown & Johnston, 2003). Previous research focusing on military populations has revealed that leaders (e.g., officers) tend to perceive dimensions of climate as more positive than do their followers (e.g., Eyres, 1998; Korpi, 1965; Stouffer et al., 1949). In addition to determining the extent of discrepancy between leader and subordinate perceptions, the LCS measures leaders' confidence in their assessments, with the ultimate goal to assist leaders in re-calibrating any perceptual discrepancies they have (Brown & Johnson 2003).

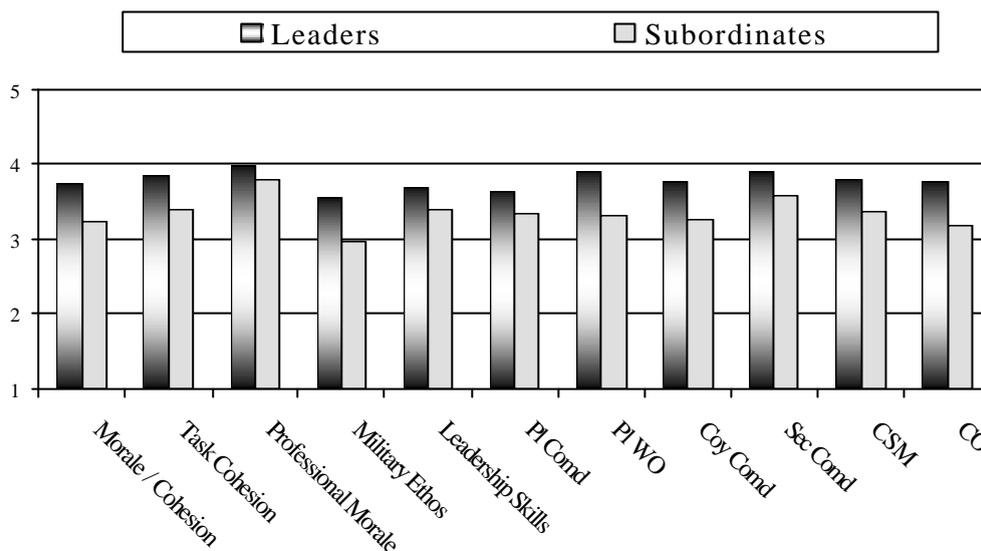
Figure 4 – A Sample Longitudinal Unit Climate Profile



The LCS has been administered to warrant officers and above, in the HDO (replacing the UCP for this group of leaders) since 2001. Thus, sergeants and below are asked to complete the UCP and warrant officers and above the LCS. Initial analyses of the LCS, in comparison to UCP, revealed that army leaders significantly overrate dimensions of climate in their unit while remaining confident in their ability to do so accurately (refer to Figure 5; Brown & Johnston, 2003). Later, Brown (2003) confirmed these findings and found significant differences at the company level in leaders' ability to accurately rate followers' perception of climate. Further, although it was hypothesized that repeated administrations of the LCS over time would result in changes in leaders' confidence and accuracy, Brown and Johnston (2003) found that confidence level varied but discrepancies did not decrease over the span of an operational tour. The lack of support for this hypothesis could have been related to the level of feedback given to leaders (which was unknown) and/or the changes in the characteristics of the respondent group with each phase of administration. Overall, the LCS is providing the CF with information about how

leaders' perceive subordinates' attitudes towards climate and their confidence their perceptions. Future research with established work groups and structured feedback will provide additional insight.

Figure 5 - Differences between Climate Perceptions



FUTURE ORIENTATION

Development of an internal organizational consultants capability for the CF

Together, the PULSE, the HDO, and the LCS provide commanders in garrison and in theatre with supplemental sources of information about the climate in their units, which in turn gives them an indication of how effective their unit might be in combat. Although the administration of the HDO in-theatre is currently a mandated program, more commanders are anticipating and finding practical applications for the results. In garrison, the popularity of and demand for the PULSE has increased substantially. Towards these goals of supporting commanders, researchers at DHRRE are looking for alternative methods of fulfilling this need for commanders.

One way of doing this has been the training of organization consultants in the administration and analysis of PULSE. Due to limitations of personnel and time, it was decided to teach Personnel Selection Officers (PSO), who are employed on Bases and Wings, organizational consulting skills and the use of the PULSE instrument. Approximately 30 PSOs have completed the first phase of the training (theory and statistical training) and a small number have been qualified through the practical application (second phase). This programme will meet the demands of commanders and give them access to consultants that are more familiar with their

units, while providing DHRRE researchers with the flexibility to control the process, the data files, and to test theoretical models.

Training

Many of the results of the climate measures have led to the conclusion that further education and training of leaders should result in improved organizational climate and ultimately in enhanced operational effectiveness. First, it is suggested that educating leaders about the utility and application of climate surveys and their results, will make them aware of a valuable resource in the organization, senior leadership training programs, for example, now include an introductory lecture on organizational climate and the instruments used with the CF, and recently, a briefing to all Base Chief Warrants Officer included a similar presentation. The two-year validation program of the HDO (ending summer 2004) will also provide additional evidence to commanders about the potential application of climate profiles. These efforts towards educating the senior leaders will benefit the entire organization; this might be doubly true once the proposed Performance Measurement Framework, which makes commanders accountable for human dimensions of performance, is established.

Second, many of the climate research results have potential application to training. For example, the Operational Stage Model, once validated, can be used to implement changes to in-theatre training schedules. Previous research has indicated, for example, that during the mid-tour phase soldiers tend to become restless, results in lower morale, cohesion, and increased behavioral disruptions such as disciplinary problems and accident; to correct this, in-theatre training schedules can be altered to include larger exercises that will distract soldiers from their established routines and the remaining duration of their tour.

Further, results from the LCS can be used “one-on-one” to assist individual leaders with their ability to accurately judge their subordinates’ perceptions of climate, which can in turn enable them to react immediate to changes in climate. Formal leadership training could be expanded to include education on the importance of having an accurate appraisal of group (e.g., unit, section, etc.) and assessment training, practice, and evaluation of their ability to accurately judge climate dimensions of troops. Finally, professional development programs can be developed to enhance self-awareness of factors such as self-monitoring and defensive mechanisms that might account for the discrepancies between leaders and followers on climate (Brown, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Measuring unit operational readiness and supervisors’ leadership behaviors, as well as the confidence in leadership is an excellent way for Commanding Officer (CO) to intervene on various aspects of the unit climate. The feedback that we receive from those COs is quite positive, for example, a CO said: “I am interested in the results/recommendations as presented-- and will act quickly on the ones I think I need to, and know enough about. But I don’t know how to react to some findings-I have NO BASELINE. Without that, on those issues, I can’t determine whether: We are actually OK; or ours is the only unit with a given problem; or all units have a given problem”. By helping CO and their staff to understand some human

dimensions of their unit, we are helping them to act meaningfully on some situations and possibly enhancing the way they are perceived by their subordinates and their leadership behaviors. By measuring the unit climate and the leadership in operation and garrison, the feedback the CO and his staff is receiving would help them to adjust the way they lead to the situation.

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