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Organisational Climate Survey: An Instrument to Address Organisational Performance

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Abstract

This paper offers the results of an organisational climate survey that was done in the South African Provincial Government's Department of Economic Development and Tourism (Mpumalanga Province). The concepts of climate and culture were defined in the literature review section. A qualitative research method has been employed. 184 employees participated by completing the survey questionnaire. The findings suggest that there is a direct correlation between employee productivity and an organisation's climate, and that productivity and service delivery issues can only be addressed once the climate has changed.

1. Introduction

Climate and culture are metaphors used to describe the complex social systems that are present in organisations. According to Schneider, Gonzales-Roma, Ostroff and West (2017) there are no clearly demarcated components called climate and culture. These concepts are rather perspectives on the same entity. For the purposes of this paper the concept "organisational climate" will be used.

Organisational climate and job performance are distinct but related constructs, and both appear to influence employees' understanding of the work environment and their level of performance or non-performance (Johnston, N., Sharma, B. and Spinks, W., 2013). The objective of this paper is to conduct an organisational climate survey with the purpose to identify factors that contribute to the performance of employees in order to address the problem areas in the workplace.

The South African Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDT) in the Mpumalanga province is dedicated to steering the provincial economic growth activities and ensure the preservation of the environment. The department also have the mandate to speed up economic growth and transformation of the economy to create decent work and a sustainable livelihood for everybody.

Only an effective organisation operating within a conducive environment can achieve this. However the DEDT strategic review done in previous years, identified a non-conducive internal environment as a risk factor in contributing to the non-performance of its employees. These results necessitate the research done and presented in this paper.

1.1. Background

An organisational climate survey is the best gauge of how well the organisation or company uses its people (Ziviani, Wilkinson, Hichliffe and Feeny, 2015). The concept of organisational climate has a long history in the organisational literature. From early writers such as Littré and Stringer from the 1960's to more recent research such as Schneider et al. (2017), there is a general consensus regarding the definition and underlying assumptions of organisational climate. Organisational climate can be defined as the shared perceptions of, and the meaning attached to the policies, practices and procedures employees experience, and the behaviours they observe. It includes the manner in which they get rewarded and supported as well as what they perceive as being expected from them (Schneider et al., 2013).

Organisational climate and organisational culture are two different constructs used to conceptualise the way people experience and describe the work setting. Organisational culture may be defined as the shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a setting. This culture are taught to newcomers. It gets presented to them as the proper way to think and feel. It is communicated through the myths and stories people tell about how the organisation came to be the way it is. In this way it solves problems associated with external adaption and internal integration (Schein 2010; Zohar and Hofmann, 2012). A historical review of organisational climate and culture reveals that issues addressed can both overlap and be considerably different (Schneider et al., 2013, Zohar and Hofmann, 2012). This tension makes it a dynamic field to work and do research in.

Although there are distinctions between the two concepts, there are also communalities in that both can shape the attitudes of workers to the extent in which they are productive, and prepared to use and share their knowledge and skills (Hislop, 2004). One can therefore argue that the only varying factor between the two is their degree of impact. Culture is deeply rooted whereas climate can be dealt with in a shorter term.

A review of the work on the possible relationship between the organisational climate and organisational effectiveness and productivity makes it clear that such research will necessarily be based on a measurement of the organisational climate (Sackman, 1974).

Organisational environments are complex social systems defined by the relationships between the people, bureaucratic procedures, structural arrangements, institutional goals and values, traditions and large socio-historical environments. Similarly, this suggests that employees in different organisations experience climates differently based on their group membership and group status (Rankin and Reason, 2005). Organisational climate influences employee performance and employee's productivity, success and well-being. As different employees perceive the organisational climate differently, their perception may adversely affect

their performance and ultimately the organisational performance.

The personal and professional development of employees are also impacted by the complex nature of the organisational climate. In a study by Settles, Courtina, Malley and Stewart (2006), sexism for an example, significantly negatively impacts on the overall attitude towards employment for women in a certain company's department of sciences. The same happens when an organisation employ only men in certain sectors e.g. technical, mechanical, transport sector, etc.

A link has over the years been established between a specific set of human resource policies and organisational performance (Ziviani et al., 2015). Human resource management could directly be linked to organisational performance because effective organisational practices may develop employee's commitment to their job and elicit increased employees' effort.

Different terms are used to describe the effective set of practices including "high commitment management", "high involvement management", and "high performance work systems". High performance work systems for example, give a central position to employee involvement, greater job satisfaction, and the development of mutual trust between employees and managers. These positive experiences of high performance work systems produce a discretionary effort from employees which improves a firm's performance and productivity due to employee satisfaction, perceived fairness, trust and belief that managers are delivering on their promises (Guest 1999; Sturges et al, 2005). There is thus a positive relationship between human resource management practices and corporate performance (Klein, 2004).

1.2. Leadership Within the Organisational Context

There is an urgent need for companies to develop a culture that foster positive work environments and increase productivity (Chinomona, Popoola and Imuezerua, 2017). To accomplish this, leadership within an organisation is crucial. Leadership is generally defines as the social process of influencing people to work voluntarily, enthusiastically and persistently towards a purposeful organisational goal (Werner et al., 2016). The main purpose of leadership in an organisation is to ensure that the organisation achieves its mission and strategic vision.

Manpower is a vital possession of any organisation and the survival of any organisation is dependent on the quality and empowerment of its employees (Chinomona et al., 2017). The leadership of the organisation has the responsibility to develop and empower the manpower to ensure that the organisation achieves its mission and strategic vision (Werner et al., 2016). Managers at all levels act as leaders if they can convey the vision of their section, department, group or team to their employees.

Within an organisation leaders are able to influence others because they possess power. Power is the potential to

influence behaviour, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do. The power leaders have refer to legitimate power, reward power, referent power and expert power (Smit et al., 2016).

Other components of leadership to take into account within an organisation are authority, responsibility, accountability and delegation. Each of these as well as the different leadership style, have an influence on the climate within an organisation. Contemporary style of leadership and approaches to leadership include charismatic leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, servant leadership and peer-to-peer leadership (Smit et al., 2016).

1.3. Organizational Climate Surveys

Organisational climate refers to employees who share perceptions of the work environment. Climate is an enduring state that impacts on behaviour and how the work gets done (Ziviani et al., 2015). Some aspects of the environment that affect the culture include morale, trust, and leadership, teamwork, rewards, recognition, benefits and compensation, and conflict resolution. Climate is thus the internal atmosphere of the organisation.

An organisational climate survey is like a weather report that quantifies attitudes and beliefs. The results can help to create a holistic picture of the organisation and allow the company to leverage its strengths. The feedback also highlights issues that may be inhibiting individual and organisational success.

Individuals may feel inhibited to be open and honest in one-on-one interviews. Anonymous surveys can therefore help to identify the cause of employee turnover and describe the impact of current programs and policies, as well as problems in an organisation. Surveys also give employees the opportunity to describe their desired culture (Rankin and Reason, 2008). Organisations can establish a benchmark for evaluating changes in overall performance over time. Management has to demonstrate that they care about their employees by taking action, based on the feedback from the surveys.

1.4. Functions of Organisational Survey

Organisational climate surveys serve two important functions (Harvey and Brown 2001: 403):

“To identify opportunities for improvement and evaluate the effectiveness of change programmes;

To provide a communication channel and facilitates dialogue between managers and employees.”

Bellou and Andronikidis (2009) showed that efficiency, reflexivity, innovation and flexibility, supervisory, support and quality were among the prominent characteristics that affected organisational climates whereas outwards focus and pressure to produce, were of the least affecting factors.

Dastmalchian (1986) found that the agreement within the work group with respect to climate perception may not be as

critical as the agreement on organisational values and goals. In his study he also stated that different environmental characteristics have different associations with organisational climates. He also stated that relationships between organisational environments and climate are not similar to those found between the environment and the structure.

1.5. Factors Influencing Organisational Climate

Organisational climate is a manifestation of the attitudes of organisational members or employees towards the organisation. These attitudes are based upon things like management policies, supervisory techniques, labour reactions, and fairness of management regarding anything that affect the work environment (Bernstein and Trimm, 2016). Factors that influence the organisational climate can be classified as: The organisational context-management philosophy; the manner which goals are put into operation; organisational structure; relationships between superiors and subordinates; physical environment; and, values and norms.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance and contribution of this paper lies in the recommendations made. These recommendations should stimulate discussion with and among top management. Management may benefit from the results because it will inform them regarding the climate they are creating within the organisation. Organisational Climate Survey is thus a measure of how well the organisation is doing in terms of important issues that affect the expectation, commitment and productivity of an important stakeholder group in the organisation, namely its employees and human resource factor.

2. Methodology

Methodology, (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 1999), is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a research project. It is the design process for carrying out research and it is a way to systematically solve the research problem (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The objective of the research done for this paper was to explore the factors that impact upon the organisation and employees from an organisational climate perspective. The management process employed and factors which have a bearing as organisational performance, such as staff, management relations, communication, performance, reward systems, career development, teamwork, conflict management and role clarity will be explored. The climate survey has been conducted with the aim of obtaining employee perceptions about the present state of affairs in the department. The findings of the survey were utilised to identify best change management programmes and to offer relevant remedial actions.

The qualitative research methodology was utilized. The first part of the survey, gathered the demographics of the

participants and the second part collected data through open-ended questions and interviews which were processed to arrive at the findings. The survey questionnaire was drafted, critiqued and refined before being used for data gathering.

A structured interview was used to collect quantifiable data, also referred to as qualitative research interviews (Saunders et al. 2009). The interviews were standardized.

3. Results Analysis

The findings of the Organisational Climate Survey questionnaire represented the views of 184 staff members of the DEDT. It can be summarised as follow:

Role clarity is the dimension of the organisational climate that received a relatively positive rating from the respondents. Questions in the questionnaire that were used to clarify the perception regarding employees role clarity were: I have clear goals and objectives regarding my job; I am clear about my priorities at work; I know what my responsibilities are; I know exactly what is expected of me; I know what most people around me do.

Without exception all interviewees emphasised the need for work related resources including items such as space, furniture, laptops, cell phones and transport. Respondents were of the opinion that all resources were inadequate and constrain effective job performance and execution of their jobs and role responsibilities. Poor resource planning and inefficiencies in the procurement process are perceived as factors contributing to the inadequate deployment of resources.

Although poor planning and budget management as well as inefficiencies in the process of acquisition are all perceived as factors contributing to the lack of required resources, unfairness in the allocation of resources is seen as the main reason for short falls. There is a widespread and strong opinion that favouritism is a major issue in the allocation of resources. "Who gets what" depends on who you are and who you know. The interviewer often heard statements referring to either the perception that the more senior the status, the more the resources that will be received, irrespective of whether the level of resources allocated is required by the job/role or to the perception that resources allocated is done on the basis of in-group favouritism. The basis of in-group favouritism maybe friendship, culture similarity, organisational politics, and personal, subjective likes and dislikes. Staff at all job levels report that the inequity in resource allocation leads to high levels of resentment, frustration and negative feelings towards those managers who are held to be responsible. At the same time staff feel powerless to confront the issue with supervisors for fear of victimisation.

The issue is further aggravated by perceptions that non-performance as a result of the lack of resources such as transport, or cell phones will not be acknowledged as a resource problem, but be regarded as a performance problem and thus contribute to poor performance appraisals. In this regard it is also the view that the review process is flawed in

the sense that it focuses on progress against the implementation plan only, and thus does not inquire into the reason for the lack of productivity.

The focus group interviews clearly confirm the perception that conflict in the DEDT is not managed constructively. The following were the topics which they could comment on: Conflict are constructively resolved in the department; We are generally encouraged to resolve our conflicts quickly; There are helpful ways in the department to prevent conflict; There are little conflict between the sections; In general conflict is well managed in the department.

An often cited cause of conflict is the condescending style assumed by senior ranks when interacting with junior ranks, older staff and the demeaning and dismissive style employed when addressing junior or younger staff. Other specific causes of conflict mentioned, include various forms of perceived unfairness resulting from inconsistent application of policy guidelines such as resource allocation, protocol, the performance management system, unequal workloads, favouritism, lack of cooperation between sections, and job grading.

The handling of conflict is more likely than not a personalised and emotional win-lose action. The handling of conflict is perceived to be destructive. With regard to conducive work relationships, it is seen to severely constrain work performance. At all levels, staff are withholding support of one kind or another e.g. restricting information flow, delaying service, ignoring one another. Mention is also made of a lack of role clarity between at least some chief directorates which are leading to conflict around functions and responsibilities; or completion of the handling of certain line functions; or the duplications of projects which result in frustration and irritation.

The focus group was asked to react on the following statements regarding planning and decision making which also appeared in the questionnaire: The work of all sections are well coordinated; People rarely start new projects without deciding in advance how they will proceed; I am allowed to participate sufficiently in significant decisions which affect my work; Financial decision making is carried out at all levels; I am delegated work and authority appropriate to my expertise; People at all levels show responsibility in their decision making; I have confidence in the process by which important decisions are made in the department.

The discussions indicate that planning and decision making in DEDT is poor with regard to the decision making process, decision quality, and the implementation of decisions. The decision process is perceived as imposed and one sided. Senior management does the planning, makes the decisions and the levels below them have to implement. The practice of "we make the decision and you implement" is perceived to be unfair within the context of the silent counter argument of "those who have to implement have the right to be involved in the decision making process." This one sided decision making process denies the staff the opportunity to provide information and reviews that should be considered. The lack of involvement, at least in a consultative role, is

perceived as a show of disrespect and a feeling of being judged unworthy of a contributing role.

Another related decision process issue refers to the feedback to staff, of important planning, decisions and events, such as strategic planning and review sessions. Staff may know that these decisions and or review sessions have taken place but they feel that feedback on actual decisions taken, the rationale for decisions, or change of decisions, are not fed back, leaving them in the dark when they have to implement it. Meetings are seen as an important mechanism in decision making on all levels of DEDT but they do not play the constructive role that they should. Many sections do not hold meetings or have a haphazard meeting schedule, often at the whim of the manager or only when there is a crisis. The perception is that the inconsistency with meetings are not conducive for good operations, and the management and administration of agendas and minutes do not facilitate effective decision making.

Financial decision making processes are perceived to be poorly managed. It is the general opinion that all financial decisions are centralised in the Head of Department (HOD) and Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) playing a strong controlling role. This leads to interference with allocated budgets as originally approved. Managers thus feel powerless and denuded of their authority—even redundant. The effect of this is that in their interaction with cascading lower levels of managers and staff, the higher level at any point in the hierarchy may even pretend to have authority to approve budget related requests in an attempt to safeguard the perception that they do have decision authority. In reality though, it is perceived that the HOD and the OCFO have the power to control. The perception that all decision authority are centralised within the HOD role, is widely held. Managers at all levels have the view that “we are told”. The Executive Management Committee (EMC) is perceived as toothless and that its meetings are a one-man show. When consultation does happen, it is perceived as a game. Opinions offered, often based on much research, and thoroughly thought through, count for nothing.

The reward system received less discussion in the group interview session. The statements in the questionnaire and in the focus group were: Good work gets appropriately recognised in the department; Sub-standard work is dealt with; In my opinion, salaries in the department is competitive; I receive an appropriate salary; I receive appropriate other benefits; There is an appropriate difference between the compensation awarded to good and poor performance; In general people are fairly rewarded.

The performance management system and specifically the performance appraisal aspect were heavily criticised. While the performance appraisal system and prescribed procedures are deemed to be appropriate in principle, the application and implementation are perceived to be very poor. There is a strong and general perception that the performance rating which a staff member received is far too often the results of favouritism rather than based on actual and objective job performance. The basis for favouritism maybe cultural

similarity, mutual back scratching, personal but unexplainable likes, dislikes and jealousies.

Closely related to the role of favouritism, is the perception that performance rating is used to exact vengeance for the dislike of a person's nature to the appraiser which may have occurred in the period leading up to the appraisal situation. Performance appraisals are the time and way to get even with enemies and those who have in one way or another offended the appraiser. The offence is usually a disagreement about a job issue, a well-intended but unwelcome opinions and or feedback on project or task progress. This practice is perceived as grossly unfair and victimising.

The interviews also indicated that the team work and support within and between structural units within DEDT are poor. Statements that were listed in the questionnaire and discussed in the focus groups were: People in my section pull their weight; I am rarely put under pressure by my colleagues; People are generally supporting each other well; I do not feel that the pressure of work is excessive; All sections in the department cooperate well with each other; In general the department is a caring and cooperative organisation.

The discussion and answers reflected the following: Projects and initiatives are launched by any one unit without informing other units. Chief directorates do not function as an integrated whole but rather as separated substructures. Projects are undertaken by any one chief directorate without the others knowing about it, leading to duplication effort and a waste of resources. Participants reported that the once regular chief directorate workshops held in the past, have fallen away. In the past these workshops served the function of informing staff about the activities of the chief directorate, creating opportunities for dialogue and getting to know each other. The lack of teamwork and support between and within structural units are perceived to have several negative consequences: Cohesiveness and loyalty are lost at both departmental and in the chief directorates and has been replaced by identification with, and loyalty to, small vested interest cliques of managers and their favourites. Members of these groups share information and leads to non-supportive actions including poor internal customer service and even sabotage. Unless the project of another unit is perceived to be important to, and of value to the other unit, cooperation and support are withheld.

Where teamwork would suggest consultation, joint decision making and support between the manager and the team members, team functioning is perceived to be a one sided process in which the leadership asks for ideas but then ignore input in favour of own preferences, allocates projects for implementation without providing follow up support, and when problems occur, react with criticism and blaming.

Focus group interviews paint a significantly bleaker picture of leadership in the DEDT than what the questionnaire results would suggest. The results of the focus group interviews on other organisational climate dimensions overshadow this situation. A variety of negative perception exist irrespective of job levels. The following statement were listed in the questionnaire to react upon: The leadership

group in my directorate gives adequate direction; The leadership group in my directorate gives adequate support; The leadership group in my directorate is competent; The leadership group in my directorate is trustworthy, forward-looking and inspiring.

A key perception is that leaders cannot be trusted to keep personal matters, which their staff may discuss with them, in confidence. Such problems, when discussed with the manager, become items of gossip among the leaders in the group, and from there it leaks into the corridors as public knowledge.

Managers at all levels are perceived to perform cliques or in-groups consisting of selected staff managers whom they fraternise with, and then receive favours and protection from the leaders.

The dominant leadership style in DEDT is perceived to be autocratic and discourteous, characterised by one sided decision makings with a scant respect for the views and ideas of staff members at subordinate levels. Managers are mostly perceived as demanding, insisting that their personal priorities receive immediate attention irrespective of the task which the subordinate may be engaged in. Managers often and easily shout at subordinates and scold them in public. Showing initiative and or offering ideas and opinions will often be squashed with an attitude of "who is the boss around here?" Opinions differing from those of the leader, or those that may be perceived as critical of his/her decision, and actions, are interpreted as insubordination and punished by withholding progress opportunities, including positive performance reviews.

Regarding the concept of innovations, the following statements formed part of the questionnaire and focus group discussion: I am encouraged to be innovative in my work; the department plans adequately for the future; the department responds promptly to new methods and technical innovations; Work methods in the department are quickly changed to meet new conditions.

The general views is that the DEDT is slow to adopt change and to implement new innovations. In this regard it was mentioned as an example, that after several months the departmental structure and identity have not yet changed to reflect the inclusion of Tourism and Environment. Likewise DEDT is slow in adjusting job grades in the department to be more comparable with those of other departments in the province.

The introduction of technology and specific software packages to facilitate and improve job performance, is also slow, as is the telephone network for linking with the regions. At the same time though, it is perceived that many staff have a resistance to the adoption of new technologies such as electronic mail.

Regarding respect, the following were discussed: I feel valued by my colleagues in the section; I feel valued by my colleagues in the rest of the department as a whole; my section is respected by the other sections; there are effective procedures and structure to deal with staff victimisation; Language and tone used in communications show respect for

each other.

The focus group interviews elicited strong and at times intense, emotionally laden comments and views regarding the general lack of mutual respect in the DEDT. Various issues and factors were regarded as symptomatic of the lack of respect, including the reward system, conflict management, planning and decision making, leadership, and communication.

The dominant issue in the perception of a lack of respect, is the condescending way in which senior staff treat groupings at job levels lower than themselves. The source for this attitude of superiority may be title or job level, age, cultural affiliation, years of experience or qualifications. The implied message from senior grouping in interaction with other groupings, is one of: "so who are you (to make a comment)? Do you know whom you are talking to? You are a child or you are nothing!" Closely related to this style of communication is the expectations and demands that junior staff have, either in terms of job level tenure or age. Also regarding what they perceive to be inferior tasks namely to make coffee of to go and shop on behalf of their seniors.

Communication is a vexing problem for many organisations and as reported in the focus group discussion, DEDT does not escape the perception of very poor internal communication. The following statements were discussed: I received all the information I need to carry out my work; I am kept adequately informed about issues in the department; My section receives all the information it needs to carry out its function well; I understand clearly how I can contribute to the general goals of the department; I have adequate opportunities to express my views in my section; communication between senior management and other levels in the department is adequate; My colleagues are generally keen to discuss work matters with me.

In general participants perceive communication to be poor in DEDT to the extent of stating that the corridor is a more active and reliable communication medium than the formal institutional mechanisms. Information is poorly disseminated, confusing and contradictory. One source may provide information only to be contradicted by another source.

Knowledge of the activities and projects undertaken in the various structural units are very poor and lead to duplication of efforts. The communication of upcoming events in the department or elsewhere is also poor and this leads to poor attendance. Communications with regards to projects usually contain only information of progress against plan. Reasons or explanations for projects falling behind are seldom including and this leads to a lack of big picture understanding and triggers misconceptions. Participants perceive the predictable response of "I don't know" either from higher job levels to request for information from a lower level, to be the characteristic of DEDT's communication culture.

From the various comments it is also clear that participants perceive the general style of communication to be mainly a one-way communication from supervisory level to the next subordinate level. This patterns repeats itself throughout the

departmental hierarchy as, in their view, the same as could be expected in an autocratic leadership culture. This style of communication is experienced as “don’t talk back just do it”. Downward communication in the department often ignores the line of authority with more senior levels communicating directly with operational staff. The result of this practice is that the in between level of staff are left in the dark and with the feeling that their authority has been eroded.

Two-way communication is not the norm and are discouraged in both direct and subtle ways. The perception is that this is viewed as challenging either the views, decisions or the authority or competence of the person. Generating a reaction or answer relating to a problem or issues from lower levels upwards, are perceived to be unwelcome and even dangerous. At each supervisory staff level the upward communication of bad news is risky and the view is that in general supervisors perceive such communication as attempts to intimidate them or show disrespect. The perception is that a supervisor often plead to be too busy or he/she does not have time to listen to lower job levels. The responsiveness of supervisors at all levels to subordinate staff are perceived to be poor, much delayed and too often it never happens.

With regards to meetings as an important communication mechanism, the perception is somewhat varied but mostly negative. While some participants do report regular unit level staff meetings, they at the same time assess most of the meetings as ineffective. Much useless talk takes place and resolutions taken at meetings are often not carried out and stay in the minutes or on the meeting agenda for extended periods of time. Other participants report that no regular staff meetings are held. Meetings are mostly a reaction to one or another crisis rather than a consistent tool in the management process.

With regard to memos, the general perception is that it is quite common for those to get lost with the obvious consequence of poor action, lack of cooperation and inefficiency. In addition, it is the view that too often internal memos are not effective in eliciting the action and response intended. The memos are either not read or may be read and then ignored.

Participants are of the view that they need more training to perform at acceptable standards. The following statements formed part of the questionnaire and focus group discussion: Most sections review their work on a regular basis; I have received the training I need to do a good job; Most of us in the department are committed to help each other to learn the job; I get training to further develop my skills; In general, the department helps us to learn and enrich our experience in every practical way.

The common view is that staff is underperforming at all job levels and while a lack of sufficient levels of skills are by no means the only or even the main reason, more opportunities for training and skills are needed.

While skill development is needed at all job levels there is a wide spread perception that such opportunities and the funds they require, are in abundance at more senior levels of management. At operational and lower levels of

management, training opportunities and funding is perceived to be disproportionately scarce. It is the view that while more senior job levels are granted ample skills development opportunities at workshops all over the country, including venues as far away as Cape Town, operational and lower level managers have a tough time securing offsite training as a result of one sided cost allocation. The perception is that rank and status, and favouritism determine who gets what, with regards to skills development opportunities.

Commitment and morale in the DEDT is perceived to be very low. The focus group interviews describe a significantly negative picture. The following statements were discussed and reacted upon: Morale is high in my section; my personal morale is high; I feel that I am a valued member of the department; I am proud to be part of the department; In general, people are strongly committed to the department.

Participants describe the departments as dying and state that staff do not identify with DEDT and find it difficult to show loyalty. They are not engaged with life at work in the DEDT and an atmosphere of alienation prevails. In conversations with each other staff will refer to DEDT as “your” department. The view is that of “why get excited (about DEDT) if nobody else is excited”. Observation of the time at which staff clock in and out on a workday is seen as further evidence for the lack of commitment and morale. In the focus group, the perception was that there is a lack of commitment and morale.

Participants also state that there is very little, if any recognition for effort or achievement. Hard work and no work have the same reward consequences. The way in which the performance appraisal system is applied, does not differentiate between commitment, hard work and apathetic or a sloth on the job behaviour. It is a common view among participants that everybody is just idling. Work supervision and control are poor, inconsistent and irresponsible, and as a result, some staff are overworked while others do the minimum. The overworked staff are demoralised by observing colleagues doing nothing and consistently getting away with it.

The general perception is that quality of products and service is not a priority in the DEDT. The statements in the questionnaire and group discussion were the following: When it comes to service delivery in the department, only the best will do; We are proud of the quality of work done in the department; We are proud of the quality of the service in our section; The quality of reports and documentation in the department is high; The department has quality standards that are higher than those in similar departments.

The view is that management does not care much about quality and in general the department gets the necessary done without excelling in service delivery quality. When compared to other government functions such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the DEDT, due to a lack of resources, falls far short on quality. Even when compared to other departments in the provincial government, DEDT lags in the implementation of policies and procedures, common to all departments. The perception is that quality in general,

ranging from quality planning and implementation activities, to the quality of reports and documents, are poor since activities in the DEDT are aimed at compliance rather than governed by best practice standards. It was mentioned that the DEDT had been reported for poor service quality on several occasions.

Regarding career development the following statements were discussed and reacted upon: My work is regularly reviewed with my development in mind; I can develop my career within the department; there is an adequate process for assessing my performance; People are promoted fairly in the department; in general there is an adequate system for career development in the department.

Participants perceive a general reluctance of the DEDT to promote staff and ascribe it to the role played by subjective and personal issues, rather than objective considerations. It is stated that supervisors do not want to see other staff progress. Demonstrating competencies and characteristics that qualify a staff member for promotion, triggers jealousy and envy and leads to actions that attempt to withhold promotion. Another subject dynamic is often mentioned namely the practice of getting even for some reason or another through the slowing down or sabotaging of a promotion.

The perception is that when promotions do happen, favouritism determines who gets promoted. The view is that qualifications and experience are remote secondary criteria for promotions, if at all taken into consideration. The promotion process is thus perceived as unfair.

The perceived preference in the DEDT to appoint outsiders rather than to promote from within, even when current staff have equal, and in some cases more experience and higher qualifications, is another example of unfairness.

Participants also state that the advertising of vacancies is a game since the decision as to who will be appointed, has usually already been made.

Regarding direction, the following have been discussed: We all feel part of the department; The future objectives of the department are consistent with my personal objectives; I am clear about the part I can play in helping the department achieve its goals; The future of the department is bright; The vast majority of the employees support the future objectives and direction of the department.

Participants dealt with this dimension of organisational climate in a fashion of stating that enough issues have already been mentioned and discussed to conclude that in general it is difficult to sense that the DEDT is heading in any direction of substance. It was stated that the DEDT is perceived as a joke by outsiders. Other views were that the DEDT should be closed down and its functions assimilated into other departments.

An important contributory factor to the sense of a lack of direction, is the perception of a very poor internal cohesiveness in the DEDT. The experience is that the various structural unit's function in a fragmented manner with no commitment to a shared departmental vision. At operational levels the perception is that management does not allow them to contribute to decisions that relate to the strategic direction

of DEDT. At the same time feedback to them on the future direction of the department is poor, because they have not had any form of input into the decisions. Therefore buy-in is also poor. The perception is that the attitude of management towards sharing and creating opportunities for contributing is one of "if I (the manager) can't score, nobody will".

It is also the view that a number of the managers in senior positions are not conducive to the belief that DEDT is moving in a positive direction. Acting managers in key roles do not create a perception of direction, stability and commitment at senior leadership levels.

The overall interpretation of the data presented by the questionnaire lead to the conclusion that the DEDT's organisational climate is perceived as unhealthy and that it should be regarded as a significant risk factor in the achievement of the department's future strategic objectives. The focus group interviews inform the organisational climate questionnaire's findings and confirm the perception of an unhealthy and negative organisational climate in the DEDT.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Studies

The conclusion and recommendations focus on ways and means of overcoming the perceived organisational injustice in order to develop a conducive organisational climate and to restore organisational citizen behaviour. It also identifies areas that need further research and investigation.

It is strongly recommended that staff on all levels receive feedback regarding the organisational climate survey. Questions regarding feedback on the organisational climate survey were raised at every contact session conducted. In this regard it would seem that no feedback of a previous similar survey was given. Staff were sceptical about receiving feedback this time around and also believed that very little would come out of the current survey. Providing feedback to staff in a structural manner would be an important issue for them. The content and process of the feedback could be discussed and managed by the Head of the Department (HOD).

An organisational climate survey reports on the perceptions which respondents have of the issues or dimensions which the survey covers, and of those raised during the focus group interviews. In this regard the DEDT's management needs to deal with the dilemma of the possibility that on the one hand, respondent's perceptions may not be real, and on the other hand that some perception are real.

In order to align perception with fact, it is recommended that the DEDT senior management arrange information and clarification sessions for all DEDT staff. Those sessions dealing with provincial level policies and procedures which apply to all staff irrespective of departmental affiliation, should be presented by expert staff provided by provincial government. Sessions dealing with policies and procedures

peculiar to DEDT should be presented by an appropriate functional expert.

The objectives with this sessions should be to create synergies with regard to policies and procedures and not to evaluate their appropriateness or how they are correctly implemented.

It is recommended that resources, for which budgets have been approved, be allocated as soon as possible. Should it come to light that there are unwanted bottlenecks in the procurement process, as suggested during the group interviews, these should be unblocked. A task team should be formed to investigate this issue, or to report constraints in the system to the HOD for action. DEDT should make it a priority, in the next financial period to spend budgets approved for the acquisition of resources timeously and in the manner prescribed by relevant policies and procedures.

The DEDT survey has confirmed that the leadership behaviour of senior managers plays a crucial role in determining perceptions regarding organisational climate. It follows that senior management need to play a critical role in changing those perceptions that determine organisational climate, if a change in climate is to be effected. The role of senior management in this regard is seen to be so critical that it is a common opinion that often a critical mass of senior management, have to be replaced, to change the culture. This notion is based on the view that it is very difficult, if not impossible for those who are perceived to be the cause of the situation, to be perceived as able to change the situation.

A new HOD, for example, with full support of his management team, may have a window of opportunity to positively impact the perception of fairness. In this regard it is strongly recommended that the senior management team in the first place commit themselves to behaviours and actions that will create the conditions required for the perception of interactional fairness with emphasis on both interpersonal and informational fairness.

In the case of interpersonal fairness the team should jointly and independently demonstrate the behaviour of: politeness, dignified treatment, respect, and absence of improper remarks and comments in their interaction with all levels of DEDT staff. In the case of informational fairness they should clearly demonstrate: candid communication, thorough explanation, reasonable explanation, timely information filling, and personalised communication.

The above behaviours are common social norms and behaviour in the South African society and it is believed that some, if not all senior managers, and for that matter, managers at all levels, as well as operational staff of the DEDT, must comply to these behaviour. The focus group interviews provided the conclusion that when dealing with favourites, supervisors do demonstrate the behaviours listed above. The challenges lies in demonstrating these behaviours in their day-to-day interaction with all DEDT staff.

Senior leadership specifically, because they are seen as role models, need to assimilate and demonstrate these behaviours in their management and supervising roles. At the same time however, all supervisory levels need to understand

and accept that the survey results indicate that staff at all levels expect them to exercise their positional authority within the norms of interactional justice. Thus senior management should at the same time clearly and unequivocally request all levels of staff in their respective chief directorates to cascade fairness leadership downwards.

The conclusion from the perceptions and views shared during many of the focus group interviews are that senior leadership did not function well as a team and that a situation had developed in which team members either individually or collectively, did not know how to confront and solve the dilemma. This dynamic 'uneasiness' in a management team is not uncommon and usually develops when either the team members, the team leader, or both, although aware of flaws, frustrations and limitations in the team, avoid confrontation of issues for fear of rejection, retaliation and victimisation.

As a result the uneasiness quietly spirals to more intense levels of discomfort and team members psychologically, and even physically withdraw from teamwork, preferring to function individually or in a small common interest clique when some form of teamwork is required.

It is recommended that senior management do an evaluation of the factor process currently used to do strategic planning in the department. The review should be done by assessing how the department conducts strategic planning, against the provincial policy and procedure guidelines for their activities. In any decision situation two keys criteria need to be satisfied i.e. the quality of the decision and the commitment to implement the decision. In the discipline of strategic planning it is generally accepted that both these criteria are satisfied, though a process of thorough and appropriate involvement of, and input from both internal and external stakeholders. In the public sector specifically the involvement of internal and external stakeholders are a *sine qua non* with strategic management.

It is suggested that senior management reconfirm that strategic management is a process and not an event and that it needs a period for execution. Middle and junior management levels should be appropriately involved in the process. These levels, by virtue of their functions, do play linking-pin roles within an organisation and as such are in the position to, apart from their own contributions, also channel the opinions of operational staff and other strategic issues, for consideration during the planning process. These levels together with operational staff also play a key role in the implementation of strategic objectives and plans. By appropriately involving them in the decision process, a stronger commitment to 'making it work' will be achieved.

The key implementation role of middle and junior management, does not in any way absolve senior management of their responsibilities in implementation. Key responsibilities in this regard include provision of adequate materials, resources, provision of socio-emotional support and regular progress reviews, inclusive of problem solving.

The implementation of the above can change employees' perception of the DEDT and a change in perception can lead to a change in the experience of the climate within the

organisation. When the climate is experienced as positive and supporting, it can lead to higher productivity and effectiveness of employees and the functioning within the department.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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