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SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYEES PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies the organizational environment prevailing in a self-service business located in Tabasco, Mexico. The research is descriptive and correlational. It is a cross-sectional non-experimental study with a quantitative approach. The questionnaire used consists of 32 items, which analyzed eight dimensions of organizational climate; structure, motivation, communication, identity, reward, recognition, companionship and support. Reliability of the research instrument was 0.931 calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The data analysis was made by descriptive statistics, analysis of variance and Pearson correlation. Twenty-seven percent of the population experiences an unfavorable organizational climate and 23% experience a favorable climate. The structure dimension has the highest average and the reward dimension the lowest average. Analysis of variance showed no statistically significant differences between the dimensions of organizational climate and sociodemographic variables. We conclude that favorable organizational climate occurs more in the dimensions of structure, identity and communication. N unfavorable climate was found in rewards. This dimension showed a negative correlation with the age of workers which indicates that older workers believe they are less rewarded.

JEL: L26

KEYWORDS: Work Environment, Organizational Climate, Business, Employees

INTRODUCTION

The study of organizational climate has become more significant as organizations develop new ways of working give more importance to the context in which workers perform their duties. In all types of organizations the proper administration of the human factor is very valuable as it is the most important capital the firm has. Companies are able to achieve their goals more efficiently if people are committed to them. Therefore human needs require special attention.

One determining factor of employee performance is the work environment. The work environment can be a link or an obstacle to proper company performance. It can also be a factor of distinction and influence on the behavior of those within it. Organizational climate establishes how people perceive their performance, job, satisfaction and productivity in an organization and has been associated in the literature as a key factor in productivity of organizations. For these reasons, a suitable working environment is essential for workers to perform their activities efficiently and effectively. However it is sometimes difficult to achieve a climate according to the needs of individuals, because organizational climate is constantly changing due to the influence of external and internal factors. A work environment unfavorable to employee functions is source of conflict, loss of enthusiasm for the work and affects their level of satisfaction. It is also likely to cause absence and hence low productivity as opposed to individuals working in a favorable climate.

The aim of this study was to identify the organizational climate prevailing in a self-service company located in Tabasco, Mexico. Dimensions that conform the work environment of the company were analysed. These dimensions include structure, motivation, communication, identity, reward, recognition, affiliation and support. The existence of significant statistically differences between sociodemographic variables and dimensions were determined and the existence of correlation between dimensions of organizational climate with workers of the company's age and seniority was identified.

The paper is organized in the following way: The first section introduces organizational climate and work environment and the importance it represents for companies. The second section provides a theoretical development by some authors who have given definitions of organizational climate and have emphasized its association as part of the quality of work life. The third section explains the objectives of the research, the fourth part presents the methodology. Finally the results and conclusions are provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

García and Sanchez (2006) indicate that most research on organizational climate considers Lewin as the introducer of climate construct in relation to the study and analysis of organizations. Soria (2008) mentions that the study of organizational climate comes from diverse backgrounds and has roots in studies of Lewin in 1951 on "experimentally created social climates." He adds that implementation of the term climate in organizational studies was done by Litwin and Stringer in 1968 and Likert in 1967. It was later extended to the organizational psychology. The same author notes that in the mid-nineties Denison based his study on three main topics: measuring perceptions of individual attributes (psychological climate) measuring perceptions of organizational attributes (organizational climate) and the joint and combined measurement of individual perception and the objective perception of the organization's attributes.

Dessler (1996) argues that studies analyzing organizational environment are divided into three categories: First are those that see organizational climate as an independent variable. Second are those that treat climate as an interposed variable. Finally some treat climate as a dependent variable. Climate occurs as an independent variable is when the weather is considered a factor on things like employee satisfaction. Climate as an interposed variable exists when organizational climate acts as an intermediary to link elements like structure with the satisfaction or employee performance. Organizational climate as dependent variable occurs when factors such as technology, structure, leadership and administrative practices, have influence over organizational climate.

When we talk about organizational climate we must mention the significant contribution of Likert (1974 cited by Brunet, 1997) and his theory of organizational climate. This theory states the performance of company management and the conditions of the organization perceived by employees, are responsible for the behavior of individuals, their hopes, values and skills. In this line of thought, Brunet (1997) affirms that an individual's reaction to certain situations depends on his or her perception of it. What matters is how things are seen rather than objective reality. If reality influences perception, this determines the type of behavior that an individual adopts. For this reason the four main factors that influence an individual's perception about organization climate are: a) the parameters related to the context, technology and the organizational system structure; b) the hierarchical position the individual occupies in the organization as well as the salary earned; c) personal factors such as personality, attitudes and satisfaction d) the impression he or she has of the subordinates, colleagues and superiors of organizational climate (p.28).

Likert notes three types of variables that determine the characteristics of an organization and influence individual perceptions of climate: causal variables, intermediate variables and final variables. Causal variables, also called independent variables, are intended to indicate the direction in which an organization evolves and gets results. Within these variables are the organizational structure and its management, rules, decisions, skills and attitudes. If independent variables are modified the other variables change.

Intermediate variables reflect the internal state and health of a company and constitute the organizational processes of a company. These include motivation, attitude, goals, effective communication and decision making. The final variables, also called dependent, are those resulting from the effect of the independent variables and the results of the company, profits and losses (Brunet, 1997, p. 29).

The concept of organizational climate has been defined by several authors such as Hall (1996) who defines it as a set of environmental properties, perceived directly and indirectly by the workers, and are supposed to be a force that influences their behavior. Caligiore and Diaz (2003) conceptualize organizational climate as the interaction of elements that form the organization such as the structure, organizational processes and the behavior of groups and individuals.

Watkin and Hubbard (2003) argue that organizational climate is "how it feels to work in a particular environment for a particular boss". Sandoval (2004) argues that organizational climate is the work environment perceived by organization members and includes structure, leadership style, communication, motivation and rewards. These factors all influence directly the behavior and performance of individuals. Chiavenato (2007) describes organizational climate as the quality or property of the organizational environment perceived or experienced by organization members and which influences their behavior.

Organizational climate describes an organization, distinguishes it from others and influences the behavior of people conforming it. In addition, it gathers organizational aspects such as practices, policies, leadership, conflict, systems of rewards and punishments, control and supervision, as well as distinctive features of the organization's physical environment (Vega, Arévalo, Sandoval, Aguilar and Giraldo 2006). Organizational climate reflects the deepest culture of the organization and determines how the worker perceives his job, efficiency, productivity and satisfaction in the work performed (Quintero, Africano and Faría, 2008).

Brunet (1997) explains that any work situation involves a set of specific factors in the individual including skills and physical, psychological characteristics, social and physical environments. Each of these elements have their own characteristics. Therefore the individual appears as immersed in a climate determined by the particular nature of the organization. According to Hellriegel and Scolum (1999) it is common that different people perceive a situation differently. They perceive selectively. They organize and interpret the situation perceived. Each person gives different meanings to the stimuli received, indicating that different people will see the same thing in different ways. In the workplace, employee behavior is determined by how he sees a situation or reacts to stimuli.

Salgado, Remeseiro and Iglesias (1996) report that there is a widespread agreement that organizational climate is composed of different dimensions that characterize particular aspects of organizational environment. However, the number of these dimensions varies according to the criteria of authors in this subject. Authors such as Casas, Repullo, Lorenzo and Cañas (2002) and Chiavenato (2009) relate work environment with quality of life at work. They argue work environment is associated with factors such as compensation and human relations that are relevant to satisfaction, motivation and job performance. They note a climate of trust and respect tends to improve the performance of workers.

Organizations such as the Mexican Institute of Standardization and Certification [IMNC in Spanish] associates work environment with quality management. It mentions that all types of institutions should assure a work environment that promotes initiatives to improve quality on services provision to users and to facilitate the media and suitable conditions at the respective job positions (IMNC, 2001, quoted by Alcántar, Maldonado and Arcos 2012).

At present the issue of organizational climate is of great importance to almost every organization looking for continuous improvement of the work environment. They wish to achieve an increase in productivity without forgetting about human resources. Knowledge guides processes that determine organizational

behavior, and allow changes in both performance of members and in organizational structure (Mújica and Pérez, 2007). Organizational climate is definitive in the decision making of an organization and in the way in which personal relationships inside and outside of it are managed. For this reason, to have positive effects in the organization it is necessary to have a satisfactory climate. This may bring many benefits to the company and hence its position in the competitive world (Peña, Díaz and Olivares, 2015).

One determining factor on the performance of employees is the work environment. Work environment may represent a link or an obstacle to company performance. It could be a factor that has a significant influence on behavior of those who compose it.

It is important for an organization to perform studies of organizational climate. These studies provide feedback about processes that determine organizational behavior, giving information to make decisions regarding necessary changes relating to the conduct of workers and the organizational structure. An improvement of the work climate of the company will impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.

METHODOLOGY

The investigation here is descriptive. We assess and collect data of various concepts (variables), aspects, dimensions or components of the phenomenon to investigate. In a descriptive study a number of issues are selected and information about each s measured or collected. In this way we describe what is researched (Hernández, Fernández andBaptista 2006). The design is quantitative, cross-sectional and non-experimental. Non-experimental studies are performed without the deliberate manipulation of variables and the phenomena are only observed in their natural environment and then analyzed. The transectional or cross-sectional collection of data at a single moment, in one time, describes variables and analyzes their effect and interaction in a given time (Hernandez et. al. 2006).

Individuals of Study

The population studied in this research was the staff of a self-service business located in Tabasco, Mexico. The sample consists of a total of 64 employees working in different shifts. It was not necessary to extract a sample because the population is made up of a small number of employees so a census was conducted. The following figures indicate the classification of individuals by gender, age, marital status, highest level of education and seniority in the company. Table 1 shows the total number of individuals working in the business and provides data on the gender makeup of the sample. The population analyzed in this research is comprised of 35.9% women while men represent 64.1% of the population.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	41	64.1	64.1
Female	23	35.9	100
Total	64	100	

This table shows the number of individuals working in the business classified by gender. Of the 64 study subjects, 41 are men and 23 are women.

Table 2 indicates the number of individuals working in the company and the classification by age. People within the range of 18-22 years old represent 29.7% of the sample. Those within the range of 23 to 27 years old represent 37.5% of the sample. Those between 28 and 32 years represent 10.9%, while those between 33-37 years of age represent 14.1%. Those between 38 and 42 years represent 7.8% of the population tested.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution by Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
18 a 22	19	29.7	29.7
23 a 27	24	37.5	67.2
28 a 32	7	10.9	78.1
33 a 37	9	14.1	92.2
38 a 42	5	7.8	100
Total	64	100	

This table shows the listing of number of employees according to their age. The most common group of individuals is between 23 and 27 years old. The least common individuals are between 38 and 42 years old.

Table 3 shows the number of individuals working in the company and the classification according to their marital status. Table 3 shows that 54.7% of the study subjects are single and the remaining 45.3% are married.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution by Marital Status

Marital status	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	35	54.7	54.7
Married	29	45.3	100
Total	64	100	

This table shows the number of employees classification according to their marital status. Of the 64 employees in the company, 35 are single and 29 are married.

Table 4 indicates the number of individuals working in the company and the classification according to their schooling. Some 20.3% of the population has secondary school level, 59.4% has high school and 20.3% has bachelor degree.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution by Highest Level of Studies

Level of studies	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Middleschool	13	20.3	20.3
High school	38	59.4	79.7
Degree	13	20.3	100
Total	64	100	

This table shows the employees classification according to their schooling. Thirty-eight employees studied until high school. Another 13 studied middle school. Thirteen also obtained a degree.

Table 5 highlights the number of individuals working in the company and classifies them by seniority in the firm. Some 32.8% of the employees have worked less than a year, 32.8% have a period of between 1 and 2 years in the company, 17.2% have a seniority of 2-3 years, while 17.2% have worked for more than 3 years.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Seniority of Employees in the Company

Seniority of employees in the Company	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than a year	21	32.8	32.8
1 a 2 years	21	32.8	65.6
2 a 3 years	11	17.2	82.8
More than 3 years	11	17.2	100
Total	64	100	

This table shows the number of employees in the company according to seniority. Twenty-one workers have been with the firm less than one year in the company. Another 21 have been with the company from 1-2 years in it. Eleven employees have been with the firm from 2-3 years and the same number of workers have been with the company than three years.

Data Collection Instrument and Data Analysis

The questionnaire of Berra and García (2003) is used in this research to measure organizational climate. An adaptation of the survey was made by including some elements of questionnaires by Alanis (2004), Schreiner (2004) and Mercado (2005). The final questionnaire consists of 32 items that analyze eight dimensions of organizational climate; structure, motivation, communication, identity, reward, recognition, companionship and support. Each dimension of organizational climate was measured by four items with 5 possible answers on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = totally agree. The reliability of the research instrument was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which reported 0.931. Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software. Table 6 explains the research tool. It shows the dimensions of organizational climate that were analyzed in this research, the operational definition of each one as well as every question corresponding to each dimension.

Table 6: Specifications of Organizational Climate Questionnaire

Dimension	Operational Definition	Items
Structure	Perception of obligations, rules and policies found in an organization.	I am aware of the goals and company objectives. I believe that my duties and responsibilities are clearly defined. I always participate in the regulation of procedures to do my job. I know whom I report my achievements, problems and needs.
Motivation	This dimension deals with the motivational aspects that the organization produces on its employees.	I am satisfied with the work I do. I consider my work environment is appropriate. I think I receive a fair treatment. My boss motivates me to do my tasks.
Communication	This dimension is based on the communication networks that exist inside the organization and also the ease that employees have, to make their demands heard at the direction department.	There is good communication with my boss. There is good communication with my coworkers. I usually inform my boss about ideas or suggestions of the work I execute. My boss' orders are clear and accurate.
Identity	It is the feeling of belonging to the company and the sense of being a valued member of a team; the importance attached to that spirit.	I feel an important part of this company. I am aware of my contribution in achieving the objectives of the company. I enjoy working in the company. I can relate to the mission, values and philosophy of the company.
Reward	This refers to how workers are remunerated (wages, social benefits, etc.)	I feel my salary is proportional to my job performance. I am well remunerated for my work performance. According to my expectations and needs, my salary is enough. My salary is higher than that of other employees on similar positions in other companies.
Recognition	This aspect is based on the distinction that a worker receives from his boss.	My boss recognizes my effort at performing my duties. In recent weeks I have received praise for the work I've done. By doing something good I always get the recognition I need. My boss recognizes the rights, dignity and decorum of employees.
Affiliation	This dimension is based on the friendship and support relations between employees.	My coworkers appreciate me. My boss is tolerant when I make a labor mistake. My colleagues and I help each other when there is overwork. My boss actually helps me and my colleagues in conducting my activities.
Support	This dimension refers to the support and encouragement that direction department gives to its employees.	My boss helps me to solve my work problems. My boss gives me the necessary information to perform my job. My boss takes into account my ideas and suggestions. If there is a problem I have the confidence to go to my boss.

This table explains the operational definition of each dimension of organizational climate and it shows the items that correspond to each of them.

The questionnaire was completed by 100% of the individuals who formed the census. It was applied in the period August-September 2014 and it was distributed at the work area of each person.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Scores obtained in the scale were analyzed using a frequency distribution approach. A normal distribution is observed with a minimum value of 84 and a maximum value of 156, an average of 120.79 and a standard deviation of 16.07. Quartiles of the distribution were identified to establish analysis categories which are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Acceptance Levels of Organizational Climate, Value Range (Rating Scale 32-160)

Perception Level of Organizational Climate	Percentile	Rank	Percentage
Unfavorable organizational climate	25	84-111	27%
Moderately favourable organizational climate	50	112-122	27%
Favourable organizational climate	75	123-130	23%
Highly favourable organizational climate	100	131-156	23%

This table shows the percentages obtained from the level of perception of organizational climate calculated from the total sum of the responses.27% of the population perceives an unfavorable organizational climate while 23% perceive it as highly favorable.

Descriptive statistics are presented in the following tables in order to understand the behavior of each dimension. Table 8 presents the dimensions of organizational climate and result obtained from the averages and standard deviation. The number of workers who responded to the research instrument is also observed.

The dimension of structure has the highest average (17.04), indicating that workers are very familiar with the objectives and goals of the company. They consider their responsibilities to be well defined and externalize their participation in the procedures used in their work. The dimensions of identity (16.60), communication (16.32), affiliation (15.87) and motivation (15.35) have also averages indicating a positive organizational climate. It is perceived that employees feel proud to belong to the company. The exchange of information and good relations prevail between them and their boss, and they are motivated to perform their functions. Dimensions of support (14.78) and recognition (13.57) have a perception that tends to be moderately favorable. The dimension of reward has the lowest average (11.21) showing that individuals in this organization believe they are not properly paid for their work.

Table 8: Shows The Sums of Each Dimension Obtained in the Descriptive Statistics.

Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Deviation
Structure	64	11.00	20.00	17.046	2.0734
Motivation	64	10.00	20.00	15.359	2.3662
Communication	64	7.00	20.00	16.328	2.3708
Identity	64	8.00	20.00	16.609	2.3745
Reward	64	4.00	20.00	11.218	3.7351
Recognition	64	7.00	20.00	13.578	3.1763
Afiliation	64	9.00	20.00	15.875	2.2074
Support	64	4.00	20.00	14.781	3.2828

This table indicates the average and standard deviation obtained from the sums of all responses of the research instrument. The highest average was found in the dimension of structure and the lowest average in recognition.

Comparison of Averages To determine whether there are significant differences between the dimensions of organizational climate and socio-demographic variables, we used ANOVA analysis for gender, age, marital status, seniority of the worker in the company and the highest level of education. The results did not show significant statistically differences between the dimensions of organizational climate and sociodemographic variables.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the existence of correlation between sociodemographic variables of employees' age and seniority in the company and the dimensions of organizational climate. Table 9 shows the results of this calculation.

Table 9: Dimensions of Organizational Climate Correlation with Seniority and Age

Dimensions	Age	Seniority	Structure	Motivation	Communication	Identity	Reward	Recognition	Afiliation	Support
Age	1	.443(**)	-0.055	-0.072	-0.058	-0.105	-0.272(*)	-0.108	-0.019	-0.063
Seniority		1	0.06	-0.2	0.05	-0.027	-0.097	-0.004	0.11	-0.06
Structure			1	0.226	0.526(**)	0.484(**)	0.251(*)	0.386(**)	0.300(*)	0.204
Motivation				1	0.513(**)	0.655(**)	0.368(**)	0.620(**)	0.525(**)	0.533(**)
Communication					1	0.694(**)	0.343(**)	0.662(**)	0.718(**)	0.723(**)
Identity						1	0.373(**)	0.689(**)	0.632(**)	0.522(**)
Reward							1	0.404(**)	0.09	0.303(*)
Recognition								1	0.640(**)	0.795(**)
Afiliation									1	0.671(**)
Support										1

*This table explains the correlation between sociodemographic variables of age and seniority of study subjects in the company and the dimensions of organizational climate. There was only one correlation which occurred between age of workers and their seniority in the company. ** Correlation is significant at the level 0.01 (bilateral). * Correlation is significant at the level 0.05 (bilateral).*

The correlation analysis of sociodemographic variables and dimensions of organizational climate presented in Table 9 shows that only age has a weak negative significant correlation of r -.272 * with the dimension of reward with a significant correlation coefficient of 0.05 .

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines the perception that personnel of a self-service business located in Tabasco, Mexico has of organizational climate. We survey the employees of the firm. The results show that 27% of the population perceives an unfavorable organizational climate, 27% perceives it as moderately favorable and 23% of the population perceives a favorable climate.

Descriptive statistics from the research instrument show an average of 4.26 was found in the structure dimension, 4.15 in the identity dimension, 4.08 in communication, 3.84 in motivation, 3.97 in affiliation, 3.69 in support, 3.39 in the dimension of recognition and 2.80 in reward. The structure dimension results coincide with those obtained by Berra (2003) who found that most of employees clearly understand the activities they must perform and are clear about the position they occupy within the company. The result of the motivation dimension also coincides with those of Berra (2003) as she identified that almost every individual of the company is satisfied with the work they do.

A very favorable organizational climate was found in the dimensions of structure, identity and communication based on data from descriptive statistics. A favorable climate was found in affiliation and motivation; a moderately favorable climate was identified in recognition and support, and an unfavorable climate was found in the dimension of reward.

With regard to the analysis of variability there were no significant differences between the dimensions of climate and socio-demographic variables. This implies that perception of the work environment is not influenced by age, gender, educational level and seniority. Correlation analysis between sociodemographic variables and dimensions of organizational climate show that only age has a weak negative correlation (-0.272*) with the dimension of reward. This finding implies that over the years workers perceive they are less rewarded. This result provides guidelines for future research to identify the causes why older workers feel their work is not fairly reward.

Organizational climate analysis conducted in this paper is expected to help directors of the company establish strategies and create a favorable work environment to develop worker's daily activities in this organization.

As limitations of this research is the results are only valid for the population studied. However the methodology could be replicated in other organisms of the same line of business which may allow comparative studies. Since the results show that unfavorable organizational climate is located in dimensions of reward and recognition, it is necessary to carry out further research to identify factors that, from workers' perspective, can help to improve these elements of organizational climate.

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