Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate

The indigenous feel of the workplace has been analyzed and studied under a variety of labels, including "milieu," "atmosphere," "ideology," "character," "culture," and "climate." Two of the most frequently used terms to capture the feel of the workplace are organizational culture and organizational climate. These two related terms capture the natural, spontaneous, and human side of organization and attempt to uncover the shared meanings and unwritten rules that govern organizational behavior. Many use the terms organizational culture and climate interchangeable, but there are some subtle differences. Culture focuses on shared perceptions of *core values or beliefs* whereas climate concentrates on shared perceptions of *dominant behavior*. The be sure, however, shared perceptions of values and beliefs are typically not much different than shared perceptions of behavior.

Organizational Culture *is a system of shared values and beliefs that bind the unit together and give it a distinctive identity*. In other words, organizational members accept and share a dominate a set of core values or beliefs, which influence virtually all aspects of organizational life. There are many ways to conceptualize school culture. We will briefly describe three cultural frameworks that map the collective beliefs of teachers and can be readily measured—efficacy, trust, and academic optimism.

I. **A Culture of Efficacy.** The shared beliefs about the capacity and ability of teachers and administrators are a critical part of the culture of a school. *Collective teacher efficacy* is the *shared perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole have a positive effect on students.* Collective teacher efficacy, for example, is an important school property because it helps explain the differential effect that schools have on student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status (Bandura, 1997; Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Moreover, a *culture of efficacy* is comprised of beliefs and social perceptions that are strengthened rather than depleted through their use. Bandura (1997) suggests four basic sources of collective efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states.

- *Mastery experiences* are important for organizations as well as individuals. Teachers as a group experience successes and failures. Group successes build strong beliefs in the faculty's sense of collective efficacy; failures undermine it.

A resilient sense of collective efficacy requires overcoming difficulties through persistent effort. Indeed, organizations learn by experience.

- *Vicarious experiences* such as modeling are another source of information for teachers about their collective efficacy. Teachers listen to successful narratives and see examples of the accomplishments of their colleagues as well as hear success stories of other exemplary schools. Just as *vicarious experiences* serve as effective sources of personal teacher efficacy, they also promote collective teacher efficacy.
- *Verbal persuasion* is another means of strengthening a faculty's conviction that they have the capabilities to achieve what they seek. Pep talks, coaching, workshops, professional development activities, and feedback about achievement can be effectively used to increase collective efficacy. The more cohesive the faculty, the more likely the group as a whole can be persuaded by sound argument. Verbal persuasion alone, however, is unlikely to be a powerful change agent unless it is coupled with models of success and mastery experiences.
- *Affective states* of organizations are important. Just as individuals react to stress, so do organizations. Efficacious organizations tolerate pressure and crises and function effectively because they learn how to adapt and cope with disruptive forces. Less efficacious organizations typically misinterpret stimuli—sometimes overreacting and other times underreacting or not reacting at all. The affective state of an organization has much to do with how it interprets challenges.

II. **A Culture of Trust.** School culture can also be mapped in terms of the collective beliefs of teachers about trust. *Faculty trust* is *the teachers' willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open.* Faculty trust is important in schools because it facilitates cooperation, enhances openness, promotes group cohesiveness, and improves student achievement. Trust is embedded in relationships and specified by its reference to others. Three referents of faculty trust are of particular interest in mapping a culture of organizational trust in schools. The extent to which the faculty trusts 1) students and parents, 2) the principal, and 3) each other provides a base for a general picture of trust in schools. Interestingly, teachers do not distinguish between trusting students and trusting parents; to trust the students is the same as trusting the parents and vice versa.

A culture of trust in schools is one in which faculty trust is high with respect to a variety of referents. First, teachers trust the principal. They believe that the principal will consistently act in their best interests and is open, honest, and competent. Second, the faculty also sees their teacher colleagues as competent, open, honest, and authentic in their interactions with each other. Finally, perhaps most important, the faculty as a whole believes in its students and parents; teachers believe that students are competent learners and they believe that parents are reliable, competent, honest partners. Furthermore, the faculty believes it can consistently depend on parents and students and that parents and students are honest, open, and authentic. In brief, a strong **culture of school trust** *is one in which the faculty trusts the principal, teachers trust each other, and the faculty trusts both students and parents; all groups work together cooperatively.*

III. **A Culture of Academic Optimism**. In schools optimism is a function of efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis. These three collective properties are not only similar in their nature and function but also in their potent and positive impact on student achievement; in fact, the three properties work together in a unified fashion to create a positive school environment called academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy). **A culture of academic optimism** *is a collective set of beliefs about strengths and capabilities in schools that paints a rich picture of human agency in which optimism is the overarching theme that unites efficacy and trust with academic emphasis.* Note that a culture of academic optimism includes both beliefs of trust and efficacy. A school culture imbued with such beliefs has a sense of the possible. Efficacy provides the belief that the faculty can make a positive difference in student learning; *teachers believe in themselves.* Faculty trust in students and parents reflects the belief that teachers, parents, and students can cooperate to improve learning, that is, *the faculty believes in its students.* Academic emphasis is the enacted behavior prompted by these beliefs, that is, *the faculty focuses on student success in academics.* Thus, a school with high academic optimism defines a culture in which the faculty believes that *it can* make a difference, that *students can* learn, and academic performance *can be* achieved (Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2006).

For further information on these and other frameworks for organizational culture, see (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). For the actual measures of these frameworks, see www.waynekhoy.com. You can download copies of the scales.

Organizational Climate is another term used to examine the general working environment or "feel" of the school. **School climate** *is the relatively enduring set of internal characteristics that distinguishes schools from each other; climate is the "personality" of the school measured by the collective perceptions of the dominant patterns of behavior that exist*. As with culture, there are a variety vantage points from which to describe and analyze the school climate. We focus this overview on two of those perspectives—**school openness** and **school health**.

I. **School Openness.** Probably the most well-known conceptualization and measurement of the organizational climate of schools is the pioneering study of elementary schools by Andrew W. Halpin and Don B. Croft (1962). They began mapping the domain of organizational climate of schools because although schools differ markedly in their feel, the concept of morale did not provide an adequate explanation. In a series of studies, they developed a descriptive questionnaire, the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), which defines and measures important aspects of teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interactions. The faculties of schools are asked to describe the behavior of their colleagues and principals by indicating how frequently certain principal and teacher behaviors occur in their school, for example, supportive, directive, and restrictive principal behavior and engaged, intimate, and collegial teacher behavior. A general index of the openness of professional relations is also available; in fact, three new organizational climate descriptive questionnaires have been developed to measure the behaviors and openness of the climates of elementary, middle, and high schools.

An **open school climate** is marked by cooperation and respect within the faculty and between the faculty and principal. The principal listens and is open to teacher suggestions, gives genuine and frequent praise, and respects the professional competence of the faculty. Principals also give their teachers freedom to perform without close scrutiny and provide facilitating leadership behavior devoid of bureaucratic trivia and restriction. Similarly, teacher behavior supports open and professional interactions, that is, strong collegial and cooperative relations among the faculty. Teachers know each other well and are close personal friends. They cooperate and are committed to their teaching. In brief, an **open school climate** *is one in which the behavior of both the principal and the faculty is open and authentic.*

II. **School Health.** Another frame for viewing the climate of a school is in terms of its health. The idea of positive health as a metaphor to describe schools is not new; the perspective calls attention to conditions that facilitate growth, development, and goal

achievement. First, the institution needs the support of the community to develop sound educational programs. Second, the principal must connect with teachers by demonstrating influence, obtaining necessary school resources, and providing supportive leadership that attends to both teacher and school needs. Teachers have personal and expressive needs and schools have the instrumental needs of development and goal achievement. Finally, teachers must be engaged with their students and successful in the teaching-learning process. In brief, a ***healthy school climate*** is *one in which the organization is meeting the needs of its principal, teachers, and students as well as its institutional needs of development and academic goal achievement.*

A **healthy school climate** is one in which the school is protected from unreasonable community and parental pressures. The board successfully resists all narrow efforts of vested interest groups to influence policy. The principal provides dynamic leadership—leadership that is both task oriented and relations oriented. Such behavior is supportive of teachers and yet provides direction and maintains high standards of performance. Moreover, the principal has influence with his or her superiors as well as the ability to exercise independent action. Teachers in a healthy school are committed to teaching and learning. They set high but achievable goals for students in a learning environment that is orderly and serious. Students work hard on academic matters, are highly motivated, and respect other students who achieve. Adequate classroom supplies and instructional materials are readily accessible. Finally, in a healthy school, teachers like each other, trust each other, are enthusiastic about the work, and are proud of their school.

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