

THE MANAGER

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING HEALTH SERVICES

In This Issue

Recognizing the Impact of Climate on Motivation and Performance 2

 What Experts Have Discovered about Work Climate 3

Understanding the Manager's Role in Influencing Work Climate 3

 Factors Influencing Work Climate 4

 Understanding What Motivates Employees 5

 External and Internal Motivation 5

 Focusing on Developing a Motivating Work Climate 6

 Research Findings on the Effects of Engaged Work Groups 6

Improving Climate in Your Work Group through Good Leadership and Management 7

 Indications of Low Motivation and Performance 7

 Understanding Three Key Dimensions of Climate 8

Working Solutions—Nicaragua 9

Assessing Work Group Climate 10

How to...Apply the Work Group Climate Assessment 10

 The Work Group Climate Assessment Form 12

 Analyzing the Gaps 13

Taking Action to Improve Your Work Group's Climate 14

 Leadership and Management Practices for Improving Work Climate 15

Working Solutions—Worldwide 18

Case Study

The NGO "Healthy Families" Improves Its Work Climate

Creating a Work Climate That Motivates Staff and Improves Performance

Editors' Note

HEALTH MANAGERS ARE UNDER PRESSURE to achieve sustainable results. To meet this challenge, managers must develop high-performing work groups and cultivate a positive work climate that fosters staff motivation. A positive work climate encourages and sustains staff motivation. In fact, experience in industry has shown that a positive work climate can account for nearly 30 percent of improvements in financial results. How can the findings in industry be used to improve employee motivation and organizational results in the health sector?

Managers can often sense when the work climate is affecting staff's performance. Absenteeism, unmet performance objectives, lack of initiative, and reduced interest in their work or organization are signs that a work climate may be less than optimal and that staff may be holding back the "discretionary," or extra, effort they could bring to their jobs. Managers can often turn their work groups around by applying leadership and management practices that promote on-the-job clarity, support, and challenge.

THIS ISSUE OF *THE MANAGER* outlines the connections between work climate, employee motivation, and performance. It describes how managers can assess the climate in their work group and shows how they can use the results to make changes in leadership and management practices that will motivate their group to do the best work possible and improve results. ■

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Recognizing the Impact of Climate on Motivation and Performance

Health managers at all organizational levels are responsible for producing sustainable results—strengthening institutional capacity, expanding access to health care, and improving the quality of services. They are asked to enhance organizational, programmatic, and financial sustainability. They strive to reduce health risks, morbidity, and mortality in their communities. While they face multiple challenges to producing results, they cannot adequately face these challenges and achieve results by themselves. They must rely on the efforts of their staff and colleagues, day in and day out.

Most managers who have achieved results recognize how much their achievements are due to a group effort involving staff members. Perhaps these staff members contributed to a particular project or to a community faced with overwhelming social and economic needs. Perhaps they generated new ideas or helped to improve a management system. Maybe they simply stayed committed to their work under difficult conditions.

Overall performance is apt to be strong and sustained when both managers and staff are motivated. They are committed to the mission of their organization and work energetically to carry it out. They show up, take responsibility, cooperate with others, and follow through. Highly motivated employees willingly address challenges, innovate, take risks to make things happen, and achieve results. In contrast, unmotivated employees often do not appear at work, fail to reach performance targets, and may even offend clients. They may be uninterested in or opposed to new ideas or processes, engage in staff conflicts, and communicate poorly with others at the workplace.

Staff motivation to perform well is influenced by many factors, including the climate in an organization. People think of climate as related to weather conditions that affect their outdoor activities, but they may not have considered the climate of their workplace and its effect on their productivity.

Work climate is the prevailing workplace atmosphere as experienced by employees. It is what it feels like to work in a place.

- Leadership and management practices that provide clarity, support, and challenge contribute to a positive work climate.
- A positive work climate increases the "discretionary effort," or level of extra effort, that employees exert above and beyond job expectations.
- A positive work climate leads to and sustains employee motivation and high performance.

Research has shown that work climate significantly affects employees' desire to learn and apply material, and ultimately affects results. For this reason, it is critical that managers learn ways to improve a less than optimal work climate. Improving the work climate is the responsibility of health managers at all levels who oversee employees on a day-to-day basis, from the executive director of an organization or program to the leader of a team

of providers in a small clinic. All managers, even those working in extremely resource-poor environments and in large, demoralized organizations can produce better results if they strive to improve the work climate.

This issue of *The Manager* can help managers who supervise groups of employees to increase motivation and performance by improving the work climate in their group. It presents a way to assess work climate and offers leadership and management practices that managers can use on a daily basis to improve climates that demotivate employees. These practices focus on key factors—clarity, support, and challenge—that create a

motivating work climate.

This issue was written by Sarah Johnson and Greg Rodway of the Management and Leadership (M&L) Program of Management Sciences for Health (MSH). Sarah Johnson, a Senior Program Associate, has implemented leadership development programs that focus on improving work climate and organizational results. Greg Rodway, a Senior Program Officer, has used his years of experience in management assessment to develop and fieldtest the Work Group Climate Assessment. “When we looked at the impact of climate on financial results—such as return on sales, revenue

What Experts Have Discovered about Work Climate

CLIMATE AFFECTS PERFORMANCE

growth, efficiency, and profitability—we found a direct correlation between the two.... That is not to say that organizational climate is the only driver of performance. Economic conditions and competitive dynamics matter enormously. But our analysis suggests that climate accounts for nearly a third of the results. And that is simply too much of an impact to ignore.” (Goleman 2000, p. 82)

MANAGERS INFLUENCE CLIMATE

“An analysis of data on 3,781 executives, correlated with data from climate surveys filled out by those who worked for them, suggests that 50 to 70 percent of employees’ perception of working climate is linked to the characteristics of the leader.” (Goleman 2001, p. 42)

“What the boss of a work group does is the most important determinant of climate. The boss’s behavior drives climate, which arouses motivation. And aroused motivation is a major driver of bottom-line performance.” (Stringer 2002, p. 99)

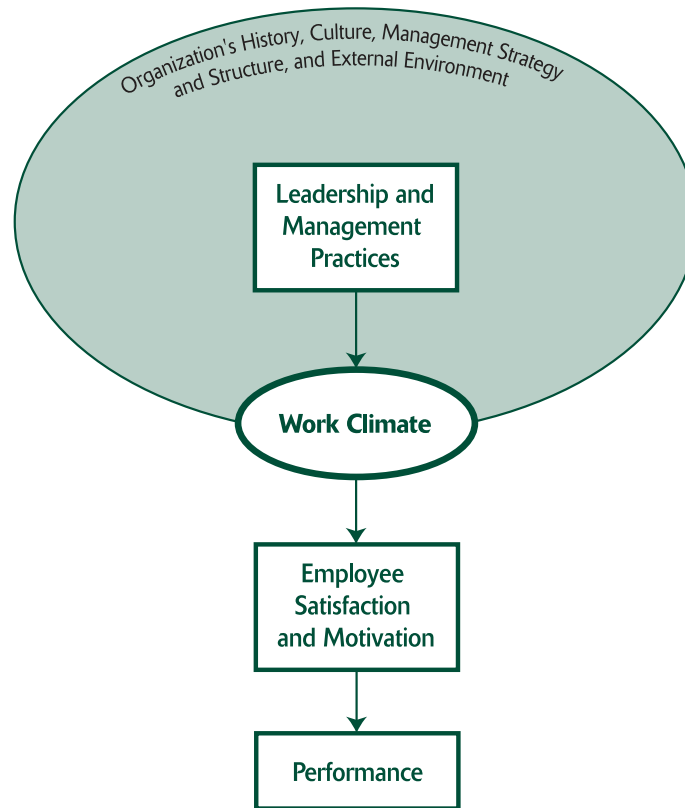
“Leaders can sustain performance improvements by creating a climate that motivates, develops, and retains talented people.” (Watkins 2000, p. 13)

Understanding the Manager’s Role in Influencing Work Climate

An organization’s work climate is affected by many factors inside and outside an organization: the organization’s history, culture, management strategies and structures, and external environment, as well as internal leadership and management practices. As the manager of a group of employees, you can control some of these factors (such as your own management and leadership practices), but not others. The following diagram can help you understand those factors that you can influence. The left column at the bottom of the box

indicates the factors over which all managers have some control. The right column lists factors that may be beyond a manager’s influence unless he or she holds a very influential position.

For example, management systems are one of the factors that managers have some control over. Managers need to pay attention to systems, processes, and policies that facilitate work getting done in the organization. If systems are overly bureaucratic and inefficient, both managers and end-users need to periodically evaluate them to see how they can make them effective, helpful, and easy for staff to use.



Factors All Managers Can Influence

Leadership practices

- providing vision, living organizational values
- knowing staff aspirations, skills, and interests
- focusing staff attention on critical challenges
- aligning work with skills and interests, motivating teamwork
- recognizing accomplishments; and inspiring confidence in staff

Management practices

- work group communications, inclusion in decision making where appropriate
- revisions of job descriptions
- improvements in planning, policies, procedures, work planning
- supervision and feedback, including performance reviews, and job recommendations
- the organization's management systems, or procedures and processes that affect both tasks and the flow of information, and the work systems that affect efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Factors beyond the Control of Most Managers

Organizational history

- organizational experience with success and failure
- its experience with incentives, sanctions, and consequences
- its reputation in the community

Organizational culture

- values, beliefs, traditions, and assumptions shared by employees, whether expressed or unexpressed
- "the way we do things around here"

Management strategy

- approaches related to job opportunities and growth that help an organization meet its goals

Management structure

- defining roles and responsibilities
- addressing policies regarding rewards and promotions

External environment

- the broader context in which the organization operates. Prevailing disease patterns, political and economic conditions, regulations, processes of health sector reform, donor priorities, competition, and an organization's reputation in the community add pressures on staff to perform.
- available workforce skills, salary expectations, cultural and gender barriers, and the condition of roads and public transportation. These may restrict the pool of potential employees, possibly requiring a stronger focus on developing and retaining staff.

How you, as a manager, exercise leadership and management practices is very important. In fact, your practices have the largest impact on the climate of your work group. At least 50 percent of the differences in work group climates can be attributed to differences in day-to-day practices of those who manage the work group (Buckingham and Coffman 1999). The organizational elements that you can arrange, such as the design of tasks and jobs, reward systems, policies and procedures, and strategy can also have a large impact (Stringer 2002).

A **work group** is a group of people who work together on a regular basis to produce results. Work groups include:

- employees in a structured reporting relationship, such as in a department or clinic;
- an ad hoc team brought together to carry out specific tasks to develop or refine a service or product, or produce another result.

The performance of the various work groups in an organization affects the overall performance of the organization. In order for you and other managers of work groups to motivate personnel, you need to:

- understand what motivates employees;
- focus on developing a motivating work climate.

Understanding What Motivates Employees

As a manager, you need to create conditions that will encourage employees to perform. To find out what that means, reflect for a moment on your own experience. Have you ever been a member of a high-performing team in an organization? What motivated you and your colleagues to perform well? Or, if you have ever been part of an unmotivated team or organization, what held you back? How did it affect your performance and that of your colleagues?

Motivation is the energy to do something. Each person has motives, needs, and reservoirs of energy that represent potential motivators. As a manager, your task is to discover your employees' motivations and help unleash their energy. Then you can direct their energy into productive work. It is also critically important for you to understand more about your own sources of motivation. Part of the capacity to create a positive work climate comes from learning to choose the leadership practices and management styles you use rather than allowing yourself to be solely directed by your natural inclinations. To understand motivation, you need to pay attention to both its external and internal forms.

External and Internal Motivation

EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

External motivation involves using motivators that come with a job, for example, pay, benefits, office space, and safety. A dangerous worksite or pay at survival level demotivates many employees. External motivation can also include giving positive feedback and recognition, often constructive motivators.

INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Internal motivation comes from within an employee. It can be influenced by the feeling that a supervisor cares about her or him as a person, and opportunities for growth, advancement, recognition, and responsibility. Think back for a moment to your own experiences as a member of a high-performing team. What were some of your internal motivators? Were they related to the satisfaction of innovating and creating a new approach, solving problems, making a contribution, surpassing established standards and goals, or learning and working with a dynamic group of people? Everyone has many of the same internal motivators, but individuals may be more inspired by different motivators. Do you know what motivates each member of your work group? Once you get to know your staff members and what motivates each of them, you can create a work climate that offers opportunities that will motivate them and encourage their performance.

Focusing on Developing a Motivating Work Climate

Developing a positive work climate takes concentrated effort. If there are demotivating factors within your control, you can look for ways to change the work climate and stimulate different kinds of motivation.

Where should you start to affect climate—at the organizational level or the work group level? While every organization has an overall climate, each work group also has its own climate. A work group's climate may be

similar to or different from the overall organizational climate. High-performing work groups sometimes operate in organizations clouded by declining funding or inadequate leadership at the senior level. No matter what your organizational level, your leadership and management practices can create a positive work climate within your work group, even if your organization's climate is less than optimal. Your efforts to improve your work group's climate can contribute to strong organizational results. Consider these examples from major corporations.

Research Findings on the Effects of Engaged Work Groups

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION DEPENDS ON WORK GROUP CLIMATE

In 1998, Gallup, a polling company surveying opinions on political, economic, work, and other issues, studied employees in 2,500 business units and 24 companies throughout the US. Findings from this study show the influence of employee motivation and work group managers. Engaged employees improved business outcomes (productivity, profit, retention, and customer service). When asked about their work environment (what is expected of me, support to do my work, recognition and praise for my work, importance of my work, having the opportunity to do what I do best, etc.), employees responded differently depending on which work group they worked in, rather than which company they worked for. In other words, their immediate work group manager was more critical in building a strong workplace than the overall policies and procedures of the company. (Buckingham and Coffman 1999)

WORK GROUP MANAGERS TRANSFORM COMPANIES

In the mid 1980s, British Airways adopted a new "putting people first" vision in response to changes in the airline industry. They needed to change from a bureaucratic state-controlled transportation company to a customer-focused, market-driven service organization. The strategy was communicated from senior management, but the changes were primarily implemented at the level of the work group.

Every staff member participated in a two-day "putting people first" training program. Acknowledging the importance of work group managers, British Airways implemented a five-day managers' program that stressed the importance of trust, vision, leadership, and feedback. The managers then reinforced the "putting people first" message among the members of their work groups. The changes introduced at the work group level drove the reorientation of the company and led to record-setting improvements in the airline's financial performance and a marked change to a customer-focused culture. (Goodstein and Burke 1991)

Improving Climate in Your Work Group through Good Leadership and Management

You can make a difference in the climate of your work group. Your work group's climate is the key to unleashing the discretionary effort available in the work group. In order to make beneficial changes, you can examine

and enhance your leadership and management practices, the structure of your work group, and the norms and standards you adopt, all within the framework of existing organizational policies and procedures.

Reflect on your work group's motivation and performance for a moment. As the manager of a work group you are usually aware whenever something is "not right" in your group. Does your group show signs of low motivation and performance?

Indications of Low Motivation and Performance

SIGNS

Staff may show specific signs of low motivation or performance:

- increasing employee absenteeism and tardiness
- decreasing employee productivity
- disengagement and inflexible work habits
- reports of dissatisfaction among your clients
- the failure of your work group to meet specific performance targets
- frequent or unresolved conflict among staff
- poor communication among group members and with you
- staff resistance to new processes and ideas

COMPLAINTS

Staff may also complain. The following are some of the common complaints that managers worldwide have heard:

This place is so disorganized. We don't know what direction we are going in. Today, one task has high priority, but tomorrow a different task has priority.

We are asked to produce results, but we don't have support or necessary resources.

No one appreciates our work. No one says thanks.

We get plenty of criticism when things go wrong, but rarely any positive feedback.

Things are tense and unpleasant. Our boss just barks at us. Sometimes I wish I didn't have to go to work.

If you see signs of poor motivation and declining performance among even a few employees, you need to look for the reasons. If there are no visible signs, ask your staff to be sure you have not overlooked something important. If your work group has just been formed, take the time to think together about the kind of climate you want to create to stimulate high motiva-

tion and performance. To influence your work group's climate, you need to:

- understand three key dimensions of climate;
- assess the climate of your work group;
- take action to improve your group's climate.

Understanding Three Key Dimensions of Climate

In order to influence climate, you can survey employees' perceptions of three key aspects of work environment. The following dimensions of climate have a predictable impact on motivated behavior:

- clarity
- support
- challenge

Understanding these dimensions of work group climate can help you think about what interventions you can use to improve climate and performance. When employees perceive these properties as present and strong in their work group, they perceive the climate of their group as positive.

Clarity. An environment provides clarity when the group knows its roles and responsibilities within the big picture. Each member understands “what I have to do and why” and perceives his or her role as aligned with the purpose of the group and the organization. Group members are aware of the needs of their clients. Standards of performance are clearly expressed, and the consequences of failing to achieve these standards are understood.

Support. In a climate of support, group members feel they have the resources and backing they need to achieve the work group's goals. Resources include essential supplies, equipment, tools, staff, and budget,

without which their performance would be severely constrained. Emotional support includes an atmosphere of trust, mutual support, and deserved recognition, in addition to individuals' inner resources. Such an atmosphere is created when group members feel their capabilities are acknowledged, when they participate in decisions that impact the work group, and when they sense appreciation and reward for both individual and group successes.

Challenge. A climate of challenge exists when group members experience opportunities to stretch, take on challenges with reasonable risks, and discover new ways of doing things to be more effective. Group members feel a sense of pride in belonging to their work group and a commitment to shared goals, purposes, and activities. They are willing to learn from mistakes and feel prepared to adopt alternative activities when required. They actively take responsibility, develop skills and capabilities to deliver appropriate services, and are better equipped to take reasonable risks.

Interaction among the dimensions. All three dimensions are critical for fostering performance. Employees faced with challenges but lacking support or clarity can experience stress and frustration. They may feel set up to fail. Without challenge or support, employees who are clear about expectations may find their workday restrictive, deadening, or even punitive. Supported staff will not stretch themselves or build their skills if they feel unchallenged.

Working Solutions—Nicaragua

IMPROVING WORK CLIMATE IN A DECENTRALIZED HEALTH SYSTEM

The Ministry of Health (MOH) in Nicaragua is in the process of strengthening decentralized health services in regional departments throughout the country. In Matagalpa, Boaco, and Jinotega in the northern part of the country, the MSH Prosalud Project and M&L Program, financed by USAID, have assisted the MOH in strengthening the leadership skills and competencies of MOH managers working at the decentralized level.

The climate assessment. One of the main challenges that MOH managers described in a

two-day dialogue on leadership was unmotivated personnel. This became the focal point of the leadership development program. To better understand the organizational climate in the MOH's facilities, a climate survey was conducted in municipalities participating in the leadership development program. Developed by the Pan American Health Organization, the organizational climate survey instrument examined four components: leadership, motivation, reciprocal relations between supervisors and employees, and participation. Within each of these areas, the

survey explored factors such as direction, encouraging teamwork, encouraging excellence, conflict resolution, recognition, adequate work conditions, equity, sharing information, and participation among a representative sample of employees and managers.

The leadership development program. The subsequent leadership development program helped the MOH to build the capacity of local municipal managers to improve climate and performance. The data from the climate survey were analyzed and shared with all of the municipal managers and then the municipal staff. Together, they developed a performance improvement plan in each municipality. Their plans targeted two or three areas they wished to improve, such as increasing employee recognition, improving communication, making information more accessible to personnel, increasing participation in the health team and in decision making and, in some cases, improving working conditions.

Outcomes. At the conclusion of the leadership development program, the Prosalud Project reapplied the climate survey to determine whether there had been any change in climate.

Of the 12 participating municipalities, four showed improvement in all four components (leadership, motivation, reciprocity, and participation), and four showed partial improvement. Of the 12 municipalities, San Lorenzo in the Department of Boaco showed the greatest improvement. Both the results of its follow-up survey on work climate and its

performance improved. Its staff surpassed its family planning, prenatal care, and other service goals for the number of people covered.

Closer investigation into leadership and management practices in San Lorenzo indicated that letters of recognition were given to the best employee for the period, and the best team was given a banner. Efforts were made to procure equipment and training for staff to improve working conditions. Through a special emergency fund and help from the mayor, funds were sought to improve the infrastructure of the health posts.

In San Lorenzo, the teamwork, self-learning, and commitment of individuals and health units to goals were strengthened. As the Director of the municipality said, "In the beginning [after the climate diagnosis and with the start-up of the leadership learning modules], we began to see how it was a process of leadership. We developed teamwork, we clarified our goals and mission..., and once we determined the positive and negative aspects of our work climate, we focused on things that needed to be improved... We developed a plan for improvement...; the interventions began.... All members of the municipal team took part.... We are working as team and there is really a warm atmosphere, a lot of friendliness."

The leadership development program has been successfully implemented in 17 other municipalities and will be offered in other regions of the country.

Assessing Work Group Climate

To improve your work group's climate, you will need to understand how your employees perceive their work environment. Their perceptions guide how they respond to workplace situations. While you and your employees may differ in how you perceive the climate in your work group, remember that climate is always characterized in terms of employees' perceptions. Surveying employees' perceptions offers a way for you to explore perceptions other than your own. It is also important for you to complete a survey. Then, you can compare your perceptions with those of your team.

Climate exists objectively in an organization, but it can only be described and measured indirectly through the perceptions of the members of the organization.

(Stringer 2002, p. 10)

To get a better idea about what may be reducing the productivity of your work group, you can assess its climate using one of several available surveys. The Work Group Climate Assessment developed by MSH and used by work groups in Latin America and Africa offers a straightforward process that will give you insight into the three key dimensions—clarity, support, and challenge—that describe work group climate.

Using the Work Group Climate Assessment

The Work Group Climate Assessment is an instrument for scanning work groups of three or more people and the group's manager. It can be used with or without a trained facilitator. The Assessment is a 14-item survey that all members of a work group complete. Each item focuses on a specific perception. The guidelines for using the Work Group Climate Assessment follow.

How to...

APPLY THE WORK GROUP CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Before Applying the Survey

Ask a associate to act as survey administrator.

The administrator manages the assessment process, including distributing and collecting completed surveys, analyzing the data, and giving feedback to you and your staff. The administrator also acts as a resource to members of the work group who have questions about the survey or the process for completing it. The administrator can be someone who works either within or outside the organization, but should be someone whom the staff trusts, so that staff are more likely to respond honestly.

Encourage staff to participate. Ask the administrator to invite each member of your work group to complete the assessment.

Ensure the confidentiality of all participants. The work group needs to have at least three members to

ensure confidentiality. Five or more members is optimal. Encourage staff to answer honestly. To do this, you and the administrator should stress that:

- their answers are anonymous;
- a feedback report will be produced only when three or more group members complete the assessment. The feedback report will not identify any individual's responses;
- in no case will individual ratings be released to others in your organization;
- the usefulness of the assessment depends entirely on the frankness and honesty of the responses.

Distribute the surveys. Hand out the assessments and ask that they be completed without discussion among group members.

Complete the Assessment

To follow the steps below, please refer to the sample assessment form on page 12.

Rate each item for Actual Performance. Actual Performance reflects the way that respondents feel things currently are. In the column labeled “Actual Performance (How are things now in your work group?),” each respondent enters a score from 0 to 4 for each item. (Please note: Questions 13 and 14 in Part II. Work Group Outcomes only require a score for Actual Performance.)

Rate each item for Importance. Importance reflects the level of significance that respondents feel would apply to this item. In the column labeled “Importance (How important is this in your work group?),” each respondent assigns a score from 0 to 4 for each item.

Submit the survey. Respondents submit their anonymous surveys to the administrator.

Analyze the Results

The administrator can analyze the data with pencil and paper. Alternatively, he or she can access a spreadsheet on the Internet that will simplify the analysis of the data and produce a feedback report. Please refer to <http://erc.msh.org/toolkit> and click on Leadership Development. If the administrator uses the spreadsheet to score the assessment, then he or she enters the data from each assessment into the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet will calculate the score for work group climate and provide a feedback report.

Find an average score for each item. The administrator enters the scores from each assessment onto a tally sheet. Enter the scores from the manager’s assessment in the first row of the tally sheet. Enter the scores from the staff’s assessments below that of the manager. Add up the staff’s score for each item (Questions 1–12) and divide by the number of responding staff to find the average for each item. *Remember, the scores are only estimates of behaviors that affect climate.*

Compute the gaps between Actual Performance and Importance. For the first item, the administrator subtracts the group’s average score for Actual Performance from the group’s average score for Importance. This gives the gap between the actual performance and the assigned importance for the item. Compute this gap for each item. Then list the items in order from the largest to the smallest gap. Repeat for the manager’s scores.

Compute the score for the Work Group Outcomes. The administrator adds up the staff’s score for Question 13 and divides by the number of respondents to find the average for this outcome. Repeat for Question 14. A higher score indicates a greater perception of the level of quality produced by the work group (Question 13) or its productivity (Question 14).

Prepare a report. The administrator prepares and presents a report for the group. This report lists the items from the largest to smallest gap for the staff (and for the manager if the manager agrees).

Review the results. The manager and work group look at the gaps together and identify two or three areas that need improvement. Please see the section “Analyzing the Gaps” on page 13 for more information.

The Work Group Climate Assessment Form

RATING SCALE



PART I. Work Group Climate

WORK GROUP CLIMATE

Please read each item below and indicate your selection by circling the appropriate number in both columns.

I feel that in my work group...

1. We are recognized for individual contributions
2. We have a common purpose
3. We have the resources we need to do our jobs well.
4. We are developing our skills and knowledge.
5. We have a plan that guides our activities.
6. We strive to improve our performance.
7. We understand each other's capabilities.
8. We are clear about what is expected in our work.
9. We seek to understand the needs of our clients.
10. We participate in the decisions of our work group.
11. We take pride in our work.
12. We readily adapt to new circumstances.

ACTUAL PERFORMANCE

(How are things now in your work group?)

Please rate each item on a scale from 0 to 4 where:

- 0 = not at all
- 1 = to a small degree
- 2 = to a moderate degree
- 3 = to a great degree
- 4 = to a very great degree

	0	1	2	3	4
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					

IMPORTANCE

(How important is this in your work group?)

Please rate each item on a scale from 0 to 4 where:

- 0 = not at all
- 1 = to a small degree
- 2 = to a moderate degree
- 3 = to a great degree
- 4 = to a very great degree

	0	1	2	3	4
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					

PART II. Work Group Outcomes

This section is an assessment of your feelings about whether your work group is known for quality work and whether it is productive.

Being known for quality work means that your work group is known for meeting your clients' or customers' needs and receives positive feedback from your clients or customers.

Productivity means that your work group consistently meets work objectives, such as monthly service objectives, and is recognized by others as a group that gets the job done.

Once you have thought about the quality of your group's work and your group's productivity, answer the questions below.

WORK GROUP OUTCOMES

Please read each item and decide how things actually are now.

I feel that...

13. Our work group is known for quality work
14. Our work group is productive

ACTUAL PERFORMANCE

(How are things now in your work group?)

Please rate each item on a scale from 0 to 4 where:

- 0 = not at all
- 1 = to a small degree
- 2 = to a moderate degree
- 3 = to a great degree
- 4 = to a very great degree

0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4

Analyzing the Gaps

You and your work group need to analyze the gaps in perceptions between the actual performance and the importance of each item. This gap analysis can help identify the items with the largest gaps and prioritize your management and leadership efforts to address two or three of these areas. It is a short cut for identifying and addressing the most urgent climate issues in your work group.

A gap analysis usually focuses on the items with the largest differences between Actual Performance and Importance. (For this analysis, use the gaps for the staff's scores, not those of the manager.) Discuss together the kinds of improvements that could make a difference in

your group's perceptions. The example on the next page illustrates how a gap analysis works.

Next, discuss the scores for the outcomes (Questions 13 and 14). Where the perception of the level of quality or productivity is low, examine the reasons. Your discussion may influence the areas you and your group want to address.

As a manager, you also need to compare the gaps you identified against those of your staff. If you find large differences in these perceptions, you need to reflect on what your staff is saying and be ready to make changes in your behavior. Suggestions from your staff or the administrator of the assessment may help in resolving these differences.

Sample Gap Analysis

In the first of the following items “We have a positive attitude,” the gap between Actual Performance and Importance is 1, whereas in the second item “We enjoy our work,” the gap is 2. Since the second item has the largest gap, you would list the second item above the first item and give it a higher priority in deciding on the issues you should address.

WORK GROUP CLIMATE

The two items below show gaps in the scores between the columns. These items are examples and do not appear in the assessment.

I feel that in my work group...

1. We have a positive attitude*
2. We enjoy our work*

ACTUAL PERFORMANCE					
(How are things now in your work group?)					
Please rate each item on a scale from 0 to 4 where:					
0 = not at all					
1 = to a small degree					
2 = to a moderate degree					
3 = to a great degree					
4 = to a very great degree					
0	1	2	3	4	
0	1	2	3	4	

IMPORTANCE					
(How important is this in your work group?)					
Please rate each item on a scale from 0 to 4 where:					
0 = not at all					
1 = to a small degree					
2 = to a moderate degree					
3 = to a great degree					
4 = to a very great degree					
0	1	2	3	4	
0	1	2	3	4	

Taking Action to Improve Your Work Group's Climate

Once you have discussed the results of the Work Group Climate Assessment with your staff, it is important for you to work on improving the climate of your work group. Think about what you can change in your leadership and management practices so that employees in your work group are clear about the purpose and direction of the work that all of you are engaged in. Consider what support is lacking for members of the workgroup. Reflect on what you have done to be sure that staff are challenged and excited about their work.

Can you improve your communication with the group? Keeping your office door open can foster this communication. Individual employees need your feedback, and your group needs up-to-date information that relates to their work. Are you recognizing employees' good work and achievements? Nothing is more encouraging to an employee than a manager who recognizes the positive contributions an individual makes. You can

acknowledge an employee's efforts through formal work reviews, remarks, or personal notes. If specific negative feedback is later called for, the employee can see this in a more supportive context. Have you taken enough time to make a personal connection with people in your workgroup to make them feel part of their organization, continually underscoring how their contributions help the organization succeed?

The table on page 15 provides concrete examples of how you and your work group can improve your work group climate. Each item reflects one of the three climate dimensions. Review the recommended leadership and management practices associated with each item and determine how you and your group could use these practices to reduce the size of the gap between Actual Performance and Importance. Implementing the suggested practices may not be easy, but it will improve the climate of your work group, bolster employee motivation, and strengthen work group performance. The following practices are arranged by the item they address.

Leadership and Management Practices for Improving Work Climate

Climate Dimension	Assessment Item	Leadership and Management Practices
Clarity	We feel we have a common purpose. (2)	<p>Invite and facilitate participation in the decision-making process.</p> <p>With your group, set clear priorities to meet client needs, and trace the alignment of these goals all the way from the effect on the client back to the group's specific output.</p> <p>Share responsibility for solving problems with other members of the work group. Expect them to resolve difficulties, but be available to assist if required.</p> <p>Communicate clearly the results expected of group members and how they affect the common purpose.</p> <p>Defend the decisions of the work group if challenged by others outside the group.</p> <p>Admit your mistakes and uncertainties, and be willing to learn from others.</p> <p>Make meeting the common goals the focus of your work group's activities, and assess the progress made to determine future activities.</p>
Clarity	We have a plan that guides our activities. (5)	<p>Develop a workplan that clearly defines the goals of the group and work to be done to reach those goals.</p> <p>Set up a system to track the group's processes, timetables, and outcomes.</p> <p>Discuss how individual plans of group members align with group (and organizational) plans.</p> <p>Implement the workplan, and schedule regular meetings to discuss progress towards goals.</p>
Clarity	We are clear what is expected in our work. (8)	<p>With your work group, identify the key work challenges and develop (or revise) the group mission, key goals, and strategy.</p> <p>Communicate the mission, key goals, strategy, and critical challenges to all members of the group.</p> <p>Agree on a group performance plan and group standards and review these regularly.</p> <p>Review anticipated group results, including expected outcomes, and verify that they are clearly understood.</p> <p>Meet frequently as a group to review progress.</p> <p>Meet with group members individually to clarify individual expectations, set individual performance indicators, make individual workplans, and review individual performance, all in the context of the group's plans and standards.</p> <p>Update job descriptions and make them available to group members.</p>
Clarity	We seek to understand the needs of our clients. (9)	<p>Have conversations with clients that focus on identifying their concerns.</p> <p>Build your staff's skills to assess clients' needs by involving them in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ scanning the organization and external environment to understand patterns and trends; ■ efficiently gathering information by using varied sources (interviews, documents, observation, computers, etc.); ■ analyzing routinely collected statistics to understand client needs; ■ facilitating focus groups with clients to discuss their needs. <p>Using the techniques listed above, reflect on client needs and expectations, and adjust practice within the guidelines of the updated group mission, key goals, and strategy.</p>

Climate Dimension	Assessment Item	Leadership and Management Practices
Support	We are recognized for individual contributions. (1)	<p>Regularly acknowledge the contributions and new skills of staff, both publicly and privately and in ways that are appropriate in your organization. A simple, sincere thank you is often the best form of recognition.</p> <p>Ask group members who have specific talents and knowledge for advice, and encourage them to take the lead on specific assignments.</p> <p>Delegate tasks in people's areas of interest and strength, as well as in the areas they want to develop.</p>
Support	We have the resources we need to do our jobs well. (3)	<p>Familiarize yourself often with the activities of the work group, and determine what resources are needed to carry out these activities.</p> <p>Monitor whether the existing resources are adequate for the task at hand.</p> <p>Meet with members of the work group to find ways to better align existing resources or, alternatively, to seek additional resources.</p>
Support	We understand each other's capabilities. (7)	<p>Take time to know each member of your work group. Learn what motivates him or her on the job.</p> <p>Learn about the skills, values, and interests of each member of your group.</p> <p>Create opportunities for group members to inform you and each other of their skills, values, and interests.</p> <p>Observe how the group functions under pressure. Build on members' adaptive capacity and help them cope even more effectively.</p> <p>Organize informal events outside of work during which members of the group can establish rapport and talk about personal interests and skills.</p>
Support	We participate in the decisions of our work group. (10)	<p>Gather and build on the ideas of others. Hold formal and informal sessions in which group members can offer ideas and suggestions.</p> <p>Meet as a group to consider ideas and determine the practicality of each suggestion.</p> <p>Meet regularly to discuss how the group is working together and solicit ideas about how to improve cooperation.</p> <p>Agree on criteria for choosing which suggestion to proceed with.</p> <p>Consider all ideas advanced, even those with which you disagree.</p>

Climate Dimension	Assessment Item	Leadership and Management Practices
Challenge	We are developing our skills and knowledge. (4)	<p>Encourage group members to take on new challenges and create opportunities for them to learn skills and broaden their knowledge.</p> <p>Ask each group member to draw up a self-development plan and share it with you. Develop a plan for yourself.</p> <p>Support group members in their efforts to learn new skills.</p> <p>Provide incentives, such as time away from work, for group members to acquire more knowledge.</p> <p>Arrange times for guest speakers from other departments and organizations to help people think in new ways.</p> <p>Arrange site visits to learn how other organizations or groups operate.</p>
Challenge	We strive to improve our performance. (6)	<p>With the work group, set performance goals.</p> <p>Assess current performance against group goals and identify opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>Give work group members specific responsibility for leading a performance improvement activity.</p> <p>With the group, continually compare current activities with stated plans for improvement.</p> <p>Delegate responsibilities for addressing new challenges so that staff stretch their capabilities and develop new ones.</p> <p>Personally model expected behaviors in your daily activities.</p>
Challenge	We take pride in our work. (11)	<p>Set high standards for the group, and recognize when they are met.</p> <p>Let others in the organization know about your group's accomplishments.</p> <p>Discuss frequently the importance of your group's work and the impact it has on the lives of your clients.</p>
Challenge	We readily adapt to new circumstances. (12)	<p>Scan your environment, identify needed changes in practices, and develop justifications for them. Also show that you can be influenced by good data and arguments.</p> <p>Listen to and understand the reasons for resistance among group members toward changes.</p> <p>Regularly remind people to focus on the vision of the future and use it as a point of reference, so that all group members can see the reasons for changes.</p> <p>While being clear about purpose and values, demonstrate flexibility about plans and tactics.</p> <p>With other members of the work group, develop plans for dealing with changes.</p> <p>Model your preparedness to accept changes and demonstrate new, appropriate behavior.</p> <p>Create ceremonies and rituals that allow people to formally leave things behind.</p>

Meeting the Challenge of Creating a Favorable Work Climate

As a manager who leads a work group, your task includes creating and sustaining a desirable work climate that will motivate your staff. Even as you continually scan the external environment for information about clients' needs, competitors, challenges, and opportunities, you must also scan your internal organizational environment for practices that can motivate or demotivate your staff.

The findings of your climate assessment can help you strengthen your leadership and management practices to provide your staff with clarity, support, and challenge. Together, you and the other members of your group will create a climate that inspires every member to perform at the highest possible level.

The following working solution, illustrates the use of the Work Group Climate Assessment to assess leadership development programs.

Working Solutions—Worldwide

USING THE WORK GROUP CLIMATE ASSESSMENT TO ASSESS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The Work Group Climate Assessment has been applied with encouraging results to leadership development programs in several countries, including Brazil and Egypt.

Brazil

Leadership development has been a priority for SESA, the State Secretariat of Health for Ceará, a large state on Brazil's northeast coast. SESA has worked closely with the Ceará State School of Public Health to build leadership development programs for first-line and mid-level managers. Since the beginning of these efforts, more than 450 managers in Ceará have participated in leadership development programs. Given that public health in Ceará has undergone a revolution, brought on by the recent decentralization of the health system, the focus on leadership development has been timely.

Initially leadership development in Ceará occurred in a traditional face-to-face training program. As demand increased for the leadership development

program as well as for ongoing opportunities for learning and self-development, SESA and the School of Public Health looked for alternative methods of training. Lidernet, a community of practice drawing on face-to-face and distance learning methods, was developed to provide ongoing education in leadership development and offer opportunities for exchanging experience.

As one way to evaluate these programs, several groups completed MSH's Work Group Climate Assessment. A group in Ceará with substantial exposure to leadership development was compared to groups from another state who were just beginning the leadership development process. The Ceará group's scores for actual performance were higher than the scores of the other groups. According to a leadership development consultant based in Ceará, "the Ceará teams show indicators of climate that are much higher, which can in part be attributed to the efforts of the PDL (Leadership Development Program)."

Egypt

In the Aswan governorate of Upper Egypt, an intensive “Developing Managers Who Lead” program was conducted over the past year. This program brought together teams of doctors, nurses, and managers from Ministry of Health facilities in the region. Representatives of the Ministry and local consultants co-facilitated the program with MSH support. The Work Group Climate Assessment was applied at the program’s start to obtain baseline data and at its end to assess the impact of the program.

The participating teams were engaged in identifying specific performance challenges and making plans to overcome them. They used leading and managing practices to close the gap between their actual performance and their desired results. All of the teams reported improvements in their performance indicators and a vast improvement in the climate of their work groups. They said their work groups were more focused and their facilities more effective as a result of their participation in the program.

The Work Group Climate Assessment results supported their reports. It indicated that work

climate among work groups was substantially more positive at the end of the program than at the beginning. While the baseline scores for climate varied from .8 to 2.1 (on a scale of 0 to 4), the scores after the program ranged from 3.1 to 3.8. The two outcome measures also rose. The score for “Our work group meets quality standards” increased from 1.4 to 3.3, and the score for “Our work group is productive” climbed from 1.7 to 3.7.

The participants’ motivation and involvement in producing results have been evident in all of their interactions. They now have the motivation to take on complex challenges and organize themselves to address them. Emerging client data suggests that clients are benefiting from the changes in staff attitudes and behaviors.

Experience in Brazil and Egypt suggests that leadership and climate are intimately linked. As managers develop their leadership skills, they improve the climate of their work groups. The more positive work climates, in turn, help to improve the performance of these work groups.

On developing a sane work climate...

*One reviewer emphasizes, "This issue is particularly important since managers find themselves in a situation where they have to face changes on a daily basis—primarily in the form of policy shifts and technological advances.... Often we use a "crisis management" mode in the attempt to address everything at the same time. The need for some sense of "sanity" and an environment that is *adaptive* to these changes adds to a better work climate. The responsibility of every manager should be to steer the ship with a steady hand. Confusion is always detrimental to an enabling work environment."*

On interacting with staff...

Another reviewer sums up, "So much of this issue reduces ultimately to the way leaders and managers behave in relationship with their staff and to how they engage in what I tend to call the "leadership dialogue."

On caring about employees...

A reviewer noted that, "Motivation influences retention (the opposite of turnover) as well as performance, especially in developing countries. A manager who cares about employees as people, and shows it, applies a critical job retention factor."

On feedback from work climate to leadership practices...

One reviewer elaborated on the diagram on page 4, "There are feedback loops going from good work climates back to positively influence leadership practices. Also, there is negative feedback when things get out of balance.... A demoralized employee can poison the well and unsettle an otherwise good work climate, which may then demoralize the employee's manager (or not), and this calls for some sort of corrective action."

On finding a balance between management and staff...

A reviewer warns, "Be careful in changing things when employee perceptions do not have substance. . . . The subjectivity of employees' perceptions become objective when they are generalized across respondents. There will always be some who . . . complain, 'we don't have enough resources.' If people do not have support and the resources that they need and the organization does not recognize the need to give these, the question is "What are people doing to save this situation?"...We need to seek an equilibrium between management and staff. Both are responsible; both must act proactively."

On monitoring work climate...

A reviewer suggests one way to monitor climate, "We had a subgroup in my project called 'barometer buddies' that helped to take the pulse of staff during a difficult project reorganization. That is one way to ensure that changes come from within the work group and not the top down."

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Checklist for Creating a Work Climate That Motivates Staff and Improves Performance

- Recognize the importance of your role as a work group manager as someone who can influence your group's work climate and, consequently, motivate staff to perform well, regardless of your organization's climate.
- Focus on the ways in which members of your work group perceive their work environment. Reflect on outward signs, such as absenteeism, declining productivity, client complaints, and employees' expressions that might reveal a less than optimal work climate.
- Concentrate on factors related to the work climate that you can influence: the dimensions of clarity, support, and challenge in work.
- Assess these dimensions in your work group's climate, using a tool such as the Work Group Climate Assessment.
- With your work group, take action to improve the group's climate by increasing:
 - the clarity with which your staff members perceive their roles;
 - the support that they experience in doing their work;
 - the challenges that they are encouraged to undertake.

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