

Assessing the Climate and Culture in Your Organization: A CSM's Perspective

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Climate and culture are key elements to any organization's success, and one way you can assess an organization is by looking at these two elements. Organizations that are motivated, dedicated, and have a high esprit de corps tend to have the best climate and culture. Those that do not usually have continuous issues, especially with standards and discipline. Some areas that I feel are important for leaders to look at to have a positive climate and culture are communication, discipline across the formation, leadership, and the level of trust.

Communication

As leaders, we must understand that clear and concise communication is vital to keeping our subordinates informed, and it is just as important for subordinates to communicate with their leadership. Maintaining a positive line of communication across the formation facilitates shared understanding and decreases misinformation. This is true in both garrison and tactical environments. If organizations lack the ability to do this, it causes confusion and continuous misinformation, potentially leading to mission failure or worse. One system that is helpful for communication is the operations process, which includes troop leading procedures (TLPs) and the military decision-making process (MDMP). These processes are helpful to keep organizations synchronized and "in the know" of what is coming up.

Additionally, at the battalion and below level, the use of formations to put out information is a great way to ensure that information is disseminated to the lowest level. Although cell phones are useful for sending out information, this format can sometimes be overused, which causes some members in the organization to miss the required information they need to be successful. It also limits the personal interactions that help build a positive climate and culture. As a battalion command sergeant major, I found myself often relying on my cell phone as well when I put information out to the first sergeants; however, I also used emails to company and platoon leadership. Motorpool and closeout formations are a great way to provide key information to the entire organization and have those personal interactions that are needed. Having clear and flat communication in an organization makes all members feel like they have the tools they need to be successful, which helps build a positive climate and culture.



Closeout formations are a way to provide key information and have personal interaction with your Soldiers. (Photo courtesy of 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment)

Discipline

Discipline is a word that leaders often use to determine the climate and culture within their organization; however, it can refer to many different areas within the organization. Some areas that the word discipline could be referring to include the conduct of a unit's members and if they are in good keeping with the Army Values. It can also refer to how the organization conducts business. Discipline is also tied to how we accomplish tactical tasks, such as training for combat at echelon, and garrison tasks, such as administrative and medical processing to reach required readiness levels. Soldiers like to know that their personal administrative actions are being handled such as their basic allowance for housing (BAH) packets or bonuses that they are entitled to. A well-rounded and disciplined organization can do all that is required but must set priorities. Units that are unable to complete these tasks or do not prioritize tasks tend to try and do too much at one time, which overwhelms the organization. While some fail to set priorities, others may only prioritize tactical tasks as opposed to the garrison tasks. This can be detrimental to an organization's overall readiness and can have a negative impact on its climate and culture. If leaders ignore administrative tasks, it ultimately impacts those they lead, which can create hostility in the organization. We must be disciplined in combat, training, and in garrison. We lead Soldiers no matter where we are at. We must teach our young leaders the right way to conduct business, or it will cause issues for our Army in the future. Set the example on what right looks like and affect the discipline in your organization.

Good Leadership

Leadership in an organization is vital to ensuring a positive climate and culture. If leaders have clear and concise communication on a daily basis and build an organization that is disciplined, they will create an environment that members want to be a part of. Leaders who are unable to do this will cause a climate and culture that is undisciplined with low morale, and members will not want to be there. All this will cause failure in any task or mission that the organization is required to complete. This can easily be fixed, regardless of a leader's time in service or time in an organization. All they must do is care! Leaders should care about the members of their organization, care about the success of the organization, and care about what happens to both once they leave. If leaders are able to do this during their time in a unit, the organization will be better than it was when they arrived and will build an environment that members want to serve in. Leaders can be the solution to a good climate and culture in their organization.

Trust

An organization without trust is an organization that is heading for disaster. Trust is the most important attribute of our profession, and it cannot be absent or it will create a climate and culture that is negative and filled with indiscipline and challenges. If an organization has generally good communication, is disciplined, and has leaders who care about those they lead, then this will ultimately build trust across the organization. It sounds easier than it can be at times. Trust is something that must be earned over time and is not automatic when new members show up to an organization; however, if a positive climate and culture already exist, it is easier to build trust. Build trust early in your organization.

Real-World Scenario

I have been a member of several different types of organizations over my time in the Army. These units had different mission sets and different climates and cultures, depending on the leaders. The climate and culture could change each time a new leader arrived; however, if the organization had good communication, was generally disciplined, and had leaders who cared, the organization would continue to be positive and a place a member truly wanted to serve in. One of the things that I have learned is that when given the opportunity to lead, give everything you have every day to make that organization as great as you can for those who are a part of it.

Conclusion

Climate and culture can be seen as two of the most important aspects of an organization. These have impacts on everything that organization does or fails to do. That is why as leaders it is so important to ensure that your organization has good communication from top to bottom, is disciplined, has leaders who care, and has trust built with its members. By doing these things in your organization, you will see more success, more commitment, and

a higher level of retention than you may have seen previously in that organization or in others you have served in. We owe it to the sons and daughters of this great nation to give them an environment that they will thrive in and want to continue to be a part of in the future.

At the time this article was written, **CSM Jesse J. Clark** was serving as the senior enlisted leader of 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) at Fort Polk, LA. He is currently the senior enlisted observer-coach-trainer in Task Force Panther, Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany. He began his military career in February 2000 when he enlisted in the Army Reserves as a hospital food specialist with the 256th Combat Support Hospital in Cleveland. After 9/11, he joined active duty as an Infantryman. He attended Infantry One Station Unit Training and Airborne School at Fort Benning, GA, and was then assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC. He has served as an infantry team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, first sergeant, observer-coach-trainer, and operations sergeant major. He has deployed twice to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, once to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, to Poland in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield and Operation Inherent Resolve, and to Qatar in support of Operation Allies Refugee. CSM Clark earned an associate's degree in general studies from Troy University as well as bachelor's and master's degrees in organizational leadership from Columbia Southern University.