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Attitudes, Attitude Change,
and Organizational Climate:
A Search for a Pragmatic Relationship

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate relationships among elements of a model linking organizational climate to performance. Specific focus was to be on the motivational factors located in the organizational climate, and attitudes and attitude change. Sources of attitudes were to be determined with regard to a job satisfaction-attitude link. The strength (positive or negative) of the attitude was also to be assessed.

Unanticipated restrictions placed upon the research by the organization in question precluded collection of sufficient data for full analyses of relationships as proposed.

An extensive review is made of pertinent research in the field of attitudes and attitude change. Emphasis is placed upon problem areas found in a majority of studies in this area. Also covered in the review section are organizational climate, job satisfaction and the attitude/behaviour consistency controversy.

Attitudes to the subjects' organization and work location are assessed from semantic differential data. A job analysis questionnaire is adapted to investigate areas of potential satisfaction. Data from these instruments are analysed and subjects placed into rank order. These ranks are then compared. Results show some trend toward consistency, i.e. subjects who ranked high on the attitude scales tended to rank high also on the job satisfaction scale. Further correlational studies of attitudes as predictors of job satisfaction investigate the relationship of these two variables. Highest positive correlation was found between

the E Factor on the work location attitude and job satisfaction.

The proposed model offering pragmatic relationships among the elements under study was based on the functional approach to attitude change. Adoption of this model would conceivably offer a rationale for the investigation of relationships of employee performance, satisfaction, attitudes, motivation and the sources of these variables.

It is suggested that future research may usefully investigate further the relationships in this model, keeping the central idea of attitudes as the major influence and predictor of an individual's satisfaction and/or performance.

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Rationale

Historically the development of psychology as the scientific study of behaviour began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with Wilhelm Wundt. From this time psychology began to develop as a separate science independent of its roots in philosophy and physiology. Expansion and refinement occurred in this science throughout the twentieth century with resultant depth and precision in methodology, clearer definition of subject matter and associated objectivity (Misiak and Sexton, 1972). Specific interest in the 1920's in methodology and theoretical issues saw Cassirer in 1923 make an important observation which has recurred over the years since demonstrating its validity cited by Lewin in 1947 and Newcomb in 1968, in particular, "There is a general direction of movement in science from the study of discrete elements to that of relationships among them."

This same quote provided a valuable rationale for this present research, as to study employees' attitudes, job satisfaction, or organizational climate in isolation appeared to be analogous to the study of a member of the body without reference to its function in serving the whole. To study these concepts and their interrelatedness appeared to be a valuable and worthwhile research topic. The original hypotheses on which this project was based were concerned with relationships among the elements

of organizational climate and attitudes, and support or rejection of these hypotheses was dependent upon investigation of the possibility of relationships existing.

A full investigation of this aim would have required a 'before-after' study around a change process. Since the organization concerned decided belatedly not to introduce the change nor to permit a second series of measures being taken, the analysis could not be completed.

The literature review identifies certain problem areas demonstrating the complexity of attitude research. Given the existence of these inconsistencies, this present research has been carried out with the development of one school of thought in attitude theory which is felt capable of explaining and accepting these inconsistencies. The further development of a model using this school of thought relating attitudes to organizational climate further eliminates inconsistencies by demonstrating relations of parts to a whole - the parts being attitudes, satisfaction and performance and the whole being the employee. Thus the focus is not upon the consistancies of attitudes or the consistancies of organizational climate per se, but rather upon the consistency or inconsistancy provided by the interrelation of one upon the other; That is, the influence in any direction one of these elements would have upon the other and the stability of this influence.

This rationale was summarized by Lewin (1947) who expanded the initial work of Cassirer (1923) and concluded

that research methodology in the social sciences should deal with problems of constancies of relationships rather than with constancies of elements. This was taken up by Newcomb (1968) who in focusing on the complexity of attitude research, concluded that the likelihood of an entity presenting inconsistencies depends upon its complexity. Furthermore the degree to which these inconsistencies will become objects of study depends upon the importance and the need to understand and predict their characteristics.