

# STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE CREATION



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One of the most powerful aspects of assessing your work climate is obtaining deliberate insights about something that has a profound effect on achieving business results. Once you have reviewed your results from the Situational Outlook Questionnaire™ (SOQ) you can identify what you see as working well, and those areas needing attention. The purpose of this document is to help you focus your awareness and understanding of your climate, and then use these insights to prepare you to take actions to improve behavior. The following information can help you develop strategies and tactics for improving your working climate.

## Behaviors, Causes, and Actions

There is no such thing as a “perfect” climate score. Your goal should **not** be getting a score of 300 on all the positive dimensions and a zero on conflict. Instead, you should compare your results to the general averages of innovative and stagnated organizations, and to the average scores for your organization. Then, as with all assessments, you need to make your own judgment about what’s working well and areas needing attention. Your scores can be:

- just about right for you and the current situation
- too low for you and the current situation
- too high for you and the current situation

For each of the nine SOQ dimensions below, we have included some general strategies that may lead to an improved set of behaviors related to that dimension. In addition, we have identified some likely behaviors you would observe, some probable causes, and a few potential actions you can take if your scores are too high or too low.

# Challenge/Involvement

The degree to which people are involved in daily operations,  
long-term goals

## General Strategies to promote Challenge/Involvement

- Take time to cooperatively set group goals.
- Celebrate the accomplishment of key milestones.

## If Challenge/Involvement is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- People are apathetic about their work.
- People are not generally interested in professional development.
- People are frustrated or unconcerned about the future of the organization.

### **Probable Causes:**

- People are not emotionally 'connected' to the organization's vision, mission, and goals.
- Professional development goals don't stretch people to continuous learning.
- There is a gap between the stated strategies and day-to-day realities.

### **Potential Actions:**

- Get people involved in interpreting the vision, mission, purpose, and goals of the organization, for themselves and their work teams.
- Provide real-time coaching and feedback on work related to vision, mission, and goals.
- Develop a plan to close the gap between the organization's vision, mission, and goals and day-to-day (current) reality.

## If Challenge/Involvement is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People are showing signs of 'burn out'.
- People are unable to meet project goals and deadlines.
- People spend "too many" long hours at work.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- People may be doing the work of more than one person.
- Work goals are too much of a stretch.
- People feel like they must do everything because there are no clear strategic priorities.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Conduct work elimination sessions to remove unnecessary work. (GE's Work Out, IBM's ACT, etc.)
- Encourage people to set more realistic and obtainable goals.
- Examine and clarify strategic priorities and check on clarity of understanding.

# Freedom

The independence in behavior exerted by the people in the organizations

## General Strategies to promote Freedom

- Ensure that outcomes (projects, deliverables, or delegated tasks) are well defined, but let individuals develop their own means for obtaining them.
- Share power and decision-making where possible.

## If Freedom is Too Low...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People demonstrate very little initiative for suggesting new ways of doing things.
- People spend a great deal of time and energy obtaining permission and gaining support (internally and externally).
- People perform their work "by the book" and focus on what they are told to do.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Authoritarian or overly bureaucratic leadership practices may be in place.
- Goals, processes, procedures, and improvements are imposed and not explained.
- The need for individual initiative is unclear.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Employ a leadership improvement initiative - training, feedback, 360°, coaching, managing up, etc.
- Involve employees in re-engineering efforts, and perhaps some team problem-solving sessions on specific high-priority tasks.
- Send clear messages by product/process owners inviting and specifying creative suggestions for improvement (sell the need as well!).

## If Freedom is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People go off in their own independent direction with more concern for themselves than the work group or organization.
- People do things that demonstrate little or no concern for important policies/procedures.
- People perform tasks differently and independently; they redefine how they are done each time.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Insufficient explanation, instruction, reinforcement, or involvement in obtaining consensus on vision and desired outcome.
- There may be too many policies/procedures or the costs for not following them may be too low.
- People may not know the procedures, they could be too difficult to follow, or the need may be too low.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Make consensus or required procedures more clear, visible, and engaging.
- Prioritize policies/procedures, provide positive reinforcement, and extract costs for non-compliance.
- Reward improvement of manuals, process improvements, and ways to communicate and share best practices.

# Trust/Openness

The emotional safety in relationships

## General Strategies for promoting Trust/Openness

- Establish and reinforce “norms” (or agreed guidelines and practices) for operating together.
- Involve the group in some activities that help the people to get to know each other better.

## If Trust/Openness is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- People hoard resources (i.e., information, software, materials, etc.).
- People avoid getting feedback on new ideas for fear of having concepts stolen.
- Management does not distribute resources fairly.

### **Probable Causes:**

- Lack of values and/or integrity among people.
- Traumatic organization experience - people feel “burned”.
- Management does not trust the capabilities and/or integrity of their employees.

### **Potential Actions:**

- Design an intervention to get feelings on the table and establish norms and values.
- Promote a sense of community and a process to resolve tensions related to the stealing of ideas. Also, develop a formal recognition process.
- Establish norms and values that management can follow regarding the disbursement of resources and a means to assure the resources are used wisely.

## If Trust/Openness is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- Relationships are so strong that a great deal of time at work is spent on personal issues.
- Lack of questioning or development of suggestions - may lead to mistakes or less productive outcomes.
- Cliques may form where there are “pockets” of high trust, but there is low trust across cliques.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Close friends work together and do not separate work from personal issues when necessary.
- Individuals do not see the need for outside support, experience, or input in their work.
- People go through a traumatic work experience together and survive (e.g., down-sizing).

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Clarify priorities and rotate people in positions.
- Create a forum to welcome questions (e.g., newsletters, upper management is visible and open to conversations).
- Develop opportunities for inter-departmental, cross-functional or inter-group exchange of information and ideas.

# Idea-Time

The amount of time people can (and do) use for considering new ideas

## General Strategies for promoting Idea-Time

- Convene special topic working sessions.
- Devote some time during each team meeting to explore one new idea.

## If Idea-Time is Too Low...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People are only concerned with their current projects and tasks and have an unhealthy level of stress.
- People see professional development and training as hindrances to their ability to complete daily tasks and projects.
- Management avoids new ideas because they will take time away from the completion of tasks and projects.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Project schedules are intense and do not allow time to refine the process to take advantage of new ideas; individuals are physically or mentally drained.
- Professional development is not seen as a productive use of an individual's time.
- The value of long-term improvements is not recognized when short-term goals and commitments need to be accomplished.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Develop project schedules that allow time for modification and development.
- The organization needs to stress the importance of the personal development of their employees to the future of the organization.

- Provide managers with a means to evaluate new ideas and a method to determine if the long-term benefits of a delayed project are greater than the short-term set backs.

## If Idea-Time is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People are showing signs of boredom.
- Decisions are made through a slow almost bureaucratic process because there are too many ideas to evaluate and so much time dedicated to exploring them.
- The management of new ideas becomes such a task that short-term tasks and projects are not adequately completed.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- People lack an achievement or results orientation.
- Individuals, teams, and managers lack the skills to handle large numbers of ideas and then converge or focus on the most practical idea(s) for implementation.
- Management lacks the ability to effectively manage and implement new ideas.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Keep individuals informed of their personal, as well as the company's, progress on short- and long-term goals.
- Provide project and program management training.
- Provide training in creativity and facilitation of creative problem solving.

# Playfulness/Humor

The spontaneity and ease displayed within the workplace

## General Strategies for promoting Playfulness/Humor

- Have designated places for sharing jokes, funny stories, etc.
- Encourage some wild and silly thinking.

## If Playfulness/Humor is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- Personal areas lack artifacts that provide personal pleasure.
- People are listless and don't smile or interact beyond business-related discussion.
- Company does not promote extracurricular activities.

### **Probable Causes:**

- Company policy or individual dislike of their work/company.
- Excessive workload.
- Management does not see the business need for Playfulness/Humor on the job.

### **Potential Actions:**

- Modify policy or work with individual to increase job satisfaction (consider a special project or a transfer).
- Examine tasks, remove repetition, work simplification.
- Encourage management to reflect on their own work environment and provide support from literature for the need and benefit of Playfulness/Humor.

## If Playfulness/Humor is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- Personal areas are cluttered with artifacts that impede work.
- Good-natured joking turns ugly (i.e.: racial/gender jokes, destructive practical jokes).
- Activities become so numerous that individuals lack desire to do them and participation may actually be viewed as an obligation or mandate.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Individuals see work as a playground designed for their personal pleasure.
- Lack of discipline or methods to address issues of harassment.
- It has become a policy and part of the organization's bureaucracy.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Promote a team/community spirit.
- Establish a means to inform impartial management or an outside agency and develop a disciplinary policy that is shared.
- Make activity voluntary and engage employees in development and coordination activities.

# Conflict

The presence of personal and emotional tensions

## General Strategies for reducing Conflict

- Identify common goals and expectations among people who are experiencing tension.
- Take some time to do some role-playing or socio-drama to help people see the effects of conflict.

## If Conflict is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- Individuals lack any outward signs of motivation or interest.
- Meetings are “tell and forget” rather than seeking consensus.
- Deadlines are not being met.

### **Probable Causes:**

- Raises based on seniority, not merit.
- Hierarchical structure overemphasizing top-down communication.
- No sense of urgency.

### **Potential Actions:**

- Change the reward system and/or plan alternative forms of recognition.
- Change meeting format to develop consensus and seek interaction.
- Include employees in decision-making process.

## If Conflict is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- Sabotaging of projects and/or undermining efforts of colleagues.
- Overly sarcastic and nasty (sometimes borderline violent) confrontations between co-workers.
- Invention and spreading of vicious, unfounded, and inappropriate rumors.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Lack of appreciation of talents and contributions of others.
- Inability to separate ideas from the people who suggest them, as well as, the inability to distinguish personal from professional relationships.
- Overemphasis on competition and individualistic goals.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Make diverse talents of others more apparent and valued.
- Conflict resolution intervention – help people to realize and reduce (personal) tensions.
- Increase the emphasis on and accountability for collaborative and cooperative goals.

# Idea-Support

The ways new ideas are treated

## General Strategies for promoting Idea-Support:

- Develop a deliberate procedure for hearing and responding to new ideas.
- Keep the criticism of ideas focused on the idea, not the person.

## If Idea-Support is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- People shoot each other's ideas down.
- People keep ideas to themselves.
- A low number of ideas in idea suggestion system(s).

### **Probable Causes:**

- People resist novel suggestions.
- Competition for recognition and reward.
- People don't think anything will be done (past experience).

### **Potential Actions:**

- Train people in how to respond to novel thinking.
- Develop cooperative goal structures.
- Re-examine idea suggestion systems.

## If Idea-Support is Too High...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- People are only deferring or suspending judgment.
- Nothing is getting done; there are too many options.
- Too many people are working in too many different directions.

***Probable Causes:***

- People avoiding conflict - staying “too open”.
- People are afraid to make important decisions.
- There is no clear focus for thinking and acting.

***Potential Actions:***

- Train people in the use of affirmative judgment tools.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities; provide decision-making skills.
- Clarify project priorities and objectives.

# Debate

The occurrence of encounters and disagreements between viewpoints and ideas

## General Strategies for promoting Debate

- Actively encourage people to take and share different viewpoints and perspectives.
- Model effective listening; generously seek the whole thought being sent before responding.

## If Debate is Too Low...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- Constant moaning and complaining about the way things are rather than how the individual can improve the situation.
- One-on-one “secretive” conversations in hallways.
- Lack of willingness by individuals to engage others in conversation regarding new ideas, thoughts or concepts.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Decrease in management/employee interaction.
- Individuals have small ‘cliques’ where they feel comfortable voicing opinions and ideas.
- People have had bad experiences when they have interacted in the past.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Increase the formal and informal interactions between management and employees (e.g., eat lunch together, make management more visible, socialize after work).
- Develop and promote team building activities and introduce resources to increase communication.
- Clarify the rationale of debate in the organization and begin to model the behavior.

## If Debate is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- More talk than implementation.
- Individuals speak, but with little regard for other points of view.
- Individualistic rather than organizational goals and visions become the focus of conversation and debate.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- Unclear strategic direction/priorities.
- Lack of listening skills.
- Too much diversity or different values.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Management should involve employees in building strategic direction and continue to communicate.
- Train in listening, non-verbal communication, and dialogue.
- Discuss and affirm common values.

# Risk-Taking

The tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity exposed in the workplace

## General Strategies for promoting Risk Taking

- Reinforce the importance of learning from mistakes.
- Provide "stretch" goals of projects and tasks.

## If Risk Taking is Too Low...

### **Behaviors Observed:**

- Employees offer few new ideas.
- People complain about boring jobs (i.e., they have little control over their jobs).
- People who put ideas forward are frustrated by a long, tedious process used to get ideas to action.

### **Probable Causes:**

- In the past, ideas have been met with rejection.
- Everything stays the same -- there are no surprises/excitement in their jobs because it is safer to keep things constant.
- The organization does not value new ideas or has developed an evaluation system that is bureaucratic.

### **Potential Actions:**

- Involve people in learning methods of idea generation that include deferred judgment.
- Invite people to put forward ideas for change.
- Develop a company plan that would speed up "ideas to action".

## If Risk Taking is Too High...

### ***Behaviors Observed:***

- People are confused - there are many ideas, but few are sanctioned.
- People are frustrated because nothing is getting done.
- There are many loners in the organization and no evidence of teamwork.

### ***Probable Causes:***

- People have the freedom to come up with new ideas, but there is no structure for putting ideas into action.
- People spend so much time trying new things that day-to-day business gets left behind.
- Individuals do not feel the need for consensus or buy-in from others within their team, department, or organization.

### ***Potential Actions:***

- Develop a deliberate plan for treatment of ideas.
- Allow dedicated time during the workday, separate from daily tasks or projects, for individuals to develop or test new ideas.
- Provide team-building training and activities.