

Research Matters

A synopsis of significant research projects

“Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.” - Dr. Carl Sagan

Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE)

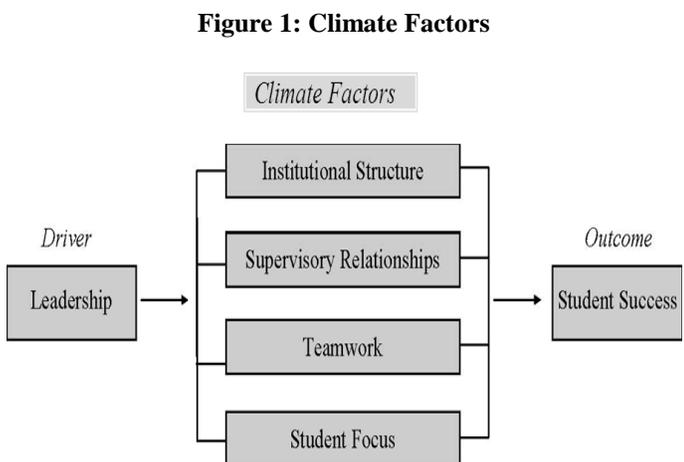
Introduction

The National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness (NILIE) serves to assist institutions in developing strategies that support the improvement of student success. Research is conducted on leadership and institutional effectiveness satisfaction within the college environment using the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) climate survey. The survey was designed to assess the organizational climate and provide a foundation for developing strategies to further student success.

In September 2011, researchers at NILIE and representatives from Institutional Research and Information Technology at Harper College collaborated to administer a survey that would capture the opinions of personnel across job functions. The response rate was slightly more than 50%, as 1461 employees were surveyed and 748 completed and responded.

Design Model

In the PACE model, it is the leadership of an institution that impacts the overall climate factors. The climate factors are the motivators of student success.



The figure to the left graphically depicts the PACE model. As shown, Leadership serves as the driver that influences the four climate factors: Institutional Structure, Supervisory Relationships, Teamwork, and Student Focus. Each of these factors contributes to the outcome of Student Success.

Organizational Systems

Equally important as the climate factors, there are four leadership or organizational systems identified by NILIE through the synthesis of related research. Based on the ground work of Rensis Likert, NILIE has identified the following organizational systems: Coercive (system 1), Competitive (system 2), Consultative (system 3) and Collaborative (system 4). Based on the scores derived by calculating the survey items a school can be identified as operating as one of the four organizational systems.

According NILIE, in agreement with Likert, the Collaborative system generally produces better results, in terms of productivity, job satisfaction, communication, and overall organizational climate. Similarly, the Coercive system is identified as being the one that produces least favorable results.

Consistent with previous data, NILIE concluded that the Collaborative system (system 4) represents the “ideal”. Most institutions are found to fall in the Consultative system across the four factors of the climate instrument.

Methodology

At Harper College, employees completed a 46-item PACE instrument organized into the four climate factors: Institutional Structure, Supervisory Relationships, Teamwork, and Student Focus. In addition, the employees completed a customized section designed by researchers within the institution. Respondents were asked to rate the items that comprised the four climate factors using a five-point Likert-type scale.

Including the 10 custom items, participating employees rated a total of 56-items on a five-point satisfaction scale from a low of “1” to a high of “5.” The survey was administered entirely online and results were initially analyzed by NILIE.

Results

The analysis of the administered survey yielded the following results:

- Of the 56 items, none fell within the Coercive range, which is the least favorable (rated between 1 and 2) or within the Competitive range (rated between 2 and 3).
- Thirty two composite ratings fell within the Consultative range (rated between 3 and 4).
- Twenty four composite ratings fell within the Collaborative range (rated between 4 and 5).

Figure 2: Climate Factors Ratings for All Employees

Factor	2005	2008	2011
Institutional Structure	3.58	3.24	3.53
Supervisory Relationships	3.15	3.64	3.92
Teamwork	3.72	3.72	3.95
Student Focus	3.99	3.99	4.18
Overall	3.56	3.61	3.86

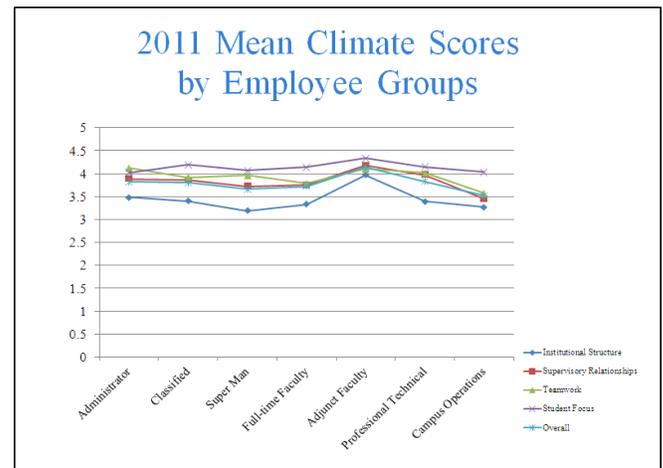
The PACE survey was also administered at Harper College in 2005 and 2008. Figure 2 above compares the Climate Factor ratings between 2005, 2008 and 2011. It is important to note that across each climate factor (excluding Institutional Structure), the ratings improved with each survey cycle, which signifies an increase in reported satisfaction. For Institutional Structure, the ratings decreased from 2005 to 2008. There was an increase in 2011, but the rating was still lower than it initially reported in 2005. Further analysis of data would be needed in to determine the cause of the decline.

In figure 3 the overall mean Climate Scores for each employee group are displayed. The data yielded the following major findings:

- The Adjunct faculty group has the highest overall Climate Rating, (4.14).
- The Campus Operations group has the lowest overall Climate Rating, (3.52).

In addition, it is important to note that even the employee group with the lowest Climate Score rating still falls within the Consultative range. This speaks to a fairly high overall satisfaction rate for all employee groups.

Figure 3: Employee Group Climate Mean scores



Conclusion

At Harper College, the overall results from the PACE instrument indicate a healthy campus climate, yielding the following:

- The highest ever overall mean score (3.86).
- The Student Focus category received the highest mean score (4.18).
- The Institutional Structure category received the lowest mean score (3.53), but is still in the high Consultative range.

Consistent with Harper’s dedication to student success, nine of the top ten performance areas were related to the Student Focus climate factor. Conversely, there were areas for improvement indicated. Many of these were related to Institutional Structure, specifically the lack of professional advancement, shared institutional information and the lack of ability to influence institutional change.

The data generated from this survey can be used to promote and support constructive communication and change within the college. This study can also be useful in supporting benchmarking for re-accreditation, state-wide accountability initiatives, and strategic planning processes. More specifically, the information provided from the analysis of the survey can be used as a foundation for improvement strategies within the college.

Zhang, J. & Mercer, K.(2011). *Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE)*. Raleigh, North Carolina: The National Initiative for Leadership & Institutional Effectiveness.