

Climate for Creativity

The following characteristics are necessary for a creative organization based on research by Goran Ekvall. Although it is geared toward business environments, as you read, think about how it is also applicable to a classroom.

Challenge

Challenge refers to the emotional involvement of the members of the organization in its operations and goals. A high-challenge climate is seen when people experience joy and meaningfulness in their jobs, and therefore, they invest much energy. Low challenge indicates alienation and indifference; a common sentiment and attitude is apathy and lack of interest for the job and the organization.

Freedom

Freedom refers to the independence in behavior exerted by the people in the organization. In a climate where this kind of freedom prevails, people make contacts to give and receive information and discuss problems and alternatives. They plan and take initiatives of different kinds and make decisions. The opposite climate would include people who are passive, rule-fixed, and anxious to stay inside the established frameworks and boundaries.

Dynamism/Liveliness

Dynamism and liveliness refer to the eventfulness of the organization. In highly dynamic situations, new things are happening all the time, and alterations in ways of thinking about and handling issues often occur. A kind of psychological turbulence exists, which is described by people in those organizations as “full speed,” “go,” “breakneck,” “maelstrom,” and the like. The opposite situation could be compared to a slow jog-trot with no surprises. There are no new projects, no different plans. Everything goes in the usual way.

Trust/Openness

Trust and openness refer to the emotional safety in relationships. In an environment with a strong level of trust, everyone in the organization dares to put forward ideas and opinions. Initiatives can be taken without fear of reprisals and without ridicule in case of failure. Communication is open and straightforward. However, where trust is missing, people are suspicious of each other and count on high expenses for mistakes that may occur. Without trust, people are afraid of being exploited and robbed of their good ideas.

Idea Time

Idea time refers to the amount of time people use for elaborating new ideas. In the high idea-time situation, impulses and fresh suggestions are discussed and tested. This available idea time is not planned or included in the task assignment; people tend to use these possibilities as creative moments. In the reverse case, every minute is booked and specified. Time pressure makes it impossible to think outside the instructions and planned routines.

Playfulness/Humor

Playfulness and humor refer to the spontaneity and ease that is displayed. A relaxed atmosphere with jokes and laughter characterizes the organization. The opposite climate is characterized by gravity and seriousness. The atmosphere is stiff and gloomy, and jokes and laughter are regarded as improper.

Conflicts

Conflicts refer to the presence of personal and emotional tensions (in contrast to idea tensions in the debates dimension in the organization). When the level of conflict is high, groups and single individuals dislike each other, and the climate can be characterized by “warfare” with gossip and slander going on. Plots and traps are the usual elements in the life of the organization. In the opposite case, people behave in a more mature manner; they are caring and considerate. They have psychological insight and control of impulses.

Idea Support

Idea support refers to the ways new ideas are treated. In the supportive climate, ideas and suggestions are received in an attentive and kind way. People listen to each other and encourage initiatives. Possibilities for trying out new ideas are created. The atmosphere is constructive and positive. When idea support is low, the reflexive “no” is prevailing. Every suggestion is immediately refuted by a counterargument. Fault-finding and obstacle-raising are the usual styles of responding to ideas.

Debates

Debates refer to the occurrence of encounters and clashes between viewpoints, ideas, and differing experiences and knowledge. In the debating organization, many voices are heard, and people are keen on putting forward their ideas. Where debates are missing, people follow authoritarian patterns without questioning.

Risk Taking

Risk taking refers to the tolerance of uncertainty exposed in the organization. In the high risk-taking environment, decisions and actions are prompt, arising opportunities are taken, and concrete trying is preferred to detailed investigation and analysis. In a risk-avoiding climate, the mentality is cautious and hesitant. People try to be on the “safe side.” They set up committees and “cover themselves” in many ways before making a decision.