

Best Practices for Improving Community College Climate

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Introduction

The climate of a college is the prevailing condition that affects satisfaction and productivity (Baker & Associates, 1992). Leadership, decision-making, motivation, and communications are the main factors in achieving an excellent campus climate (Roueche & Baker, 1987).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine how community college leadership used the PACE results to create a collaborative campus climate. This case study contrasts the actions taken by two colleges and the subsequent climate that was created.

Research Questions

- In what ways did the college leadership use the PACE results as an agent for change?
- How did the changes impact the campus climate?

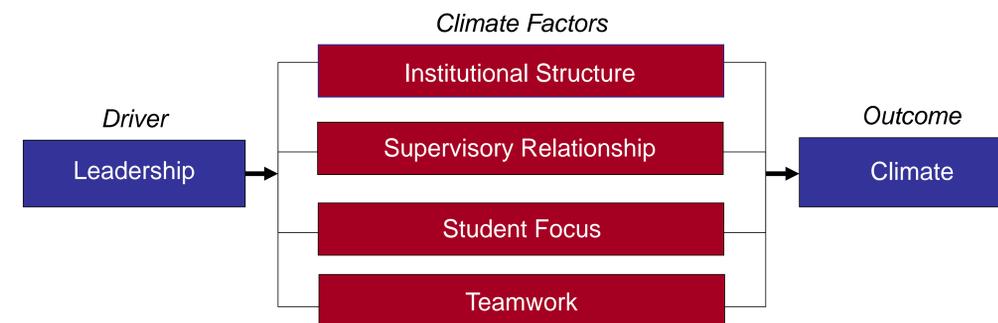
Methodology

This case study consists of two colleges that had multiple PACE administrations and consistent leadership over the study period. Data were collected using the PACE survey to calculate the climate factors, employees' open-ended comments to measure the overall climate of the college, and semi-structured phone interviews of campus officials to assess best practices.

Data Analysis

- Significant differences of the means were analyzed using t-tests
- Interview transcripts were coded to identify specific leadership actions within the four climate factors
- Employees' open-ended comments were coded to the four climate factors to evaluate the overall campus climate

Conceptual Framework

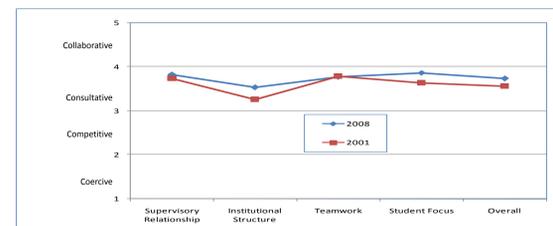


Case Study of Phi College and Tau College

Phi College

Phi college is located in the South with FTE student population of 4547. The college personnel is comprised of 553 full-time and 299 part-time employees. Their initial PACE was administered in 2001 and the follow-up PACE in 2008.

Climate Factors as Rated by Employees



Sample employee comment from 2001

"I would like to see more cooperation and communication between departments, faculty, and administration."

Sample employee comment from 2008

"I think there is much camaraderie, and faculty and administration work well together."

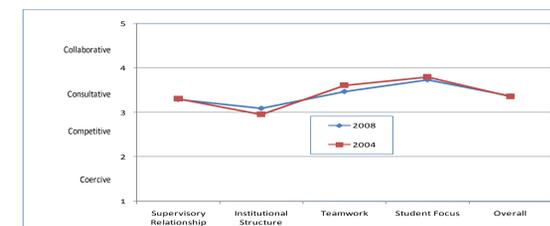
Sample campus official comment from 2009

"Face-to-face communication about what is in [the PACE report] and what we are doing about it is very important to making people feel like their participation mattered."

Tau College

Tau college is located in the Midwest with FTE student population of 4833. The college personnel is comprised of 540 full-time and 46 part-time employees. Their initial PACE was administered in 2004 and the follow-up PACE in 2008.

Climate Factors as Rated by Employees



Sample employee comment from 2004

"[Tau] lacks inter-district communication within programs and collaborative effort within district."

Sample employee comment from 2008

"Nothing has changed for the better specific to the organization structure or communication between employees and administrators."

Sample campus official comment from 2009

"New communications strategies were implemented because the PACE showed us that employees did not feel they were being communicated with, even though we thought we were."

Leadership Action Taken

Phi College

Institutional Structure

- Open forums within divisions by administrative leadership to discuss PACE report
- Made changes in the organizational structure
- Face-to face communications with employees to update on changes as opposed to emails

Student Focus

- Streamlined systems to improve student services
- Surveyed previous and current students to understand the student perspective

No reported actions on the other climate factors

Tau College

Institutional Structure

- Created a current happenings section on employee intranet
- Leadership team reports meetings attended on the web site
- Face to face discussion between administration and union
- Caused administration to reflect on actions as related to the accreditation process

No reported actions on the other climate factors

Conclusions

Phi college experienced a significant increase in both the Institutional Structure and the Student Focus climate factors after engaging employees in open forum and face-to-face communications, as well as taking actions to improve student services. Conversely, Tau college experienced a significant decrease in teamwork after failing to address concerns expressed by employees in the initial PACE administration. Therefore, these findings indicate that to achieve a collaborative environment, college leaders need to take purposeful actions designed to engage employees and improve climate (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005).