

UNDERSTANDING THE POLICE WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Thurston L. Cosner, Ph. D., Police and Public Safety Psychologist
21625 Chagrin Blvd. Suite 200
Beachwood, Ohio 44122-5335

Thomas Brickman, Lieutenant

Robert Payne, Sergeant

Euclid Police Department
525 East 222nd Street
Euclid, Ohio 44123

Introduction

Our study, *Understanding the Police Work Environment*, is part of a larger action research activity involving two police departments in Northeast Ohio with decidedly different operations, the Euclid, Ohio Police Department, and the Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department. The city of Euclid, Ohio is a mid sized city with a population of approximately 53, 000 inhabitants, located east of the city of Cleveland. The Cleveland Metroparks is a popular sprawling interconnected park system that forms what is known as The Emerald Necklace. There are park facilities, forests with pathways and trails, and waterways, including ponds, rivers, and canals that ring the city of Cleveland. There are approximately 95-100 Euclid Police Officers, and 64+ full-time and 10+ part-time Metroparks Rangers.

History of the problem: Our previous work in the development of a performance evaluation system for the Euclid Department led to a search for ways to include the environment into the process. We realized that, many times, an officer's performance was the result, not only of his or her personality characteristics and motivations, but that the environment also played a role in performance. Reviewing environmental models of police environments led us to conclude that the police work environment is not usually a major reason given to explain police behavior unless an officer has violated a department rule. Officer infractions usually cause others to march out the tiresome and familiar "Blue Wall of Silence," views of police work settings, or other views that the police work environment is somehow or other a pathological influence on police behavior. Existing descriptions of the police work environment usually either focus on *tasks* of police work, *belief systems* of department members, or *personality types* that permeate the field.

Any study of police officers will reveal that personality factors are only partially useful in explaining and predicting behavior. Environmental forces also influence police behavior. In addition to performing the tasks of their job, officers also spend a considerable amount of time engaged in other types of activities. They visit with coworkers, discuss personal and professional concerns, work out in the exercise room, and deal with organizational maintenance and development issues. There is an organizational culture in all police departments. Social climate, the personality of the environment, also serves to affect officer behavior and thinking. In our search for literature we did not find many studies of how the organizational culture or social climate affects behavior of officers.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to explore different ways to study police work environments. We focused on three components of the environment: *behavioral task demands*, *social climate*, and *organizational culture*. We were also interested in whether or not it was useful to talk about the police environment as a unitary concept; or is it more appropriate to discuss different subcultures within and between departments. The present study focused solely on one department, the Euclid, Ohio police. In future studies we will compare different departments to see if they exhibit different cultures, social climates and task demands.

Task Identification: In identifying tasks we took an environmental perspective similar to Murray's (1938) need/press analysis of motivation, which attempted to explain motivation in terms of forces in the individual as well environmental pressures. We were interested, not only in the task an officer must perform; we also attempted to identify the environmental demand that was the stimulus situation that evoked, elicited, or was associated with the task. Our belief was that including the environment to explain performance would provide a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the forces that are associated with police behavior than current models. Too often police behavior is viewed strictly from personality-based approaches. We believe that this is a narrow way to approach behavior, which limits success in understanding and changing behavior. A more effective approach to behavior change includes both environmental as well as personality factors. It should be noted that, at this time, the task demand analysis model is incomplete. We are continually reviewing and elaborating the model.

Social Climate: Although there have been a few studies of social climate factors in the police work environment, most have focused on the using social climate in organizational consulting (Moos, 1994). We have not found any studies that focused on describing the police work environment in terms of social climate. Our approach addresses this problem by describing and developing a framework for understanding the police work environment. The model we chose of the social climate was developed by Rudolph Moos (1994), which provides a theory as well as an instrument, the Work Environment Scale (WES) to measure the essential components of the theory. We rewrote many of the WES items to improve the face validity for the police work environment without losing content. This revised Police Work Environment Scale (PWES) maintained the content of the WES, but used terms, such as sergeants and department instead of the more generic work environment terminology. Table 1 summarizes the major components of the theory, which were measured by the 90-item PWES:

Table 1
Components of the Social Climate (Moos, 1994)

RELATIONSHIP DIMENSION

- 1. Involvement: The extent to which employees are concerned about and committed to their jobs**
- 2. Coworker Cohesion: How much employees are friendly and supportive of each other**
- 3. Supervisor Support: The extent to which management is supportive of employees and encourages employees to support each other**

PERSONAL GROWTH DIMENSION

- 1. Autonomy: The degree to which employees are encouraged to be self sufficient and make their own decisions**

2. **Task Orientation:** The emphasis on good planning, efficiency, and getting the job done
3. **Work Pressure:** The degree to which high work demands and time pressure dominate the job milieu

SYSTEM MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE DIMENSION

1. **Clarity:** Whether employees know what to expect in their daily routine and the degree of explicitness of rules and policies
 2. **Managerial Control:** How much management uses rules and procedures to keep employees under control
 3. **Innovation:** The emphasis on variety, change, and new approaches
 4. **Physical comfort:** The extent to which the physical surroundings contribute to a pleasant work environment
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Organizational Culture: Organizational culture can be thought of as the way an organization solves its problems, achieves its goals, and maintains itself over time (Harrison and Stokes 1993). The term culture refers to the underlying set of cultural and social belief systems that operate within a department, which form the environmental glue that holds it together. Although there are similarities between social climate and organizational culture, they differ in that social climate is the “personality” of the environment, whereas organizational culture is the conscious and unconscious belief system that maintains the organization.

One of the most innovative approaches to understanding organizational culture was presented by Harrison (1993; Harrison & Stokes, 1993). This approach, which was primarily developed as a training and feedback model for sensitizing individuals to their organization’s culture, contains a well-developed theory of the organizational culture as well as a questionnaire measuring four components of culture as specified by the model. Table 2 summarizes the major components of Harrison’s organizational culture theory:

Table 2
Components of Organizational Culture (Harrison, 1993)

1. **POWER CULTURE:** In power cultures resources are unequally distributed, and those in power have more than others. Workplace power includes such factors as money, privileges, job security, working conditions and the ability to control others’ access to these. Persons in power have the ability to satisfy or frustrate and control the behavior of others. Leaders have the ability to administer rewards and privileges, and persons in such organizations are

typically motivated by the desire to be associated with a strong leader. Any military or para-military organization is likely to contain many power culture features.

2. **ROLE CULTURE:** The role orientation substitutes a system of structures and procedures to counter the power of leaders. This type of culture provides protection of subordinates and stabilizes an organization. Roles of each person in the organization are clearly defined, and act as the typical part of a formal or implicit contract between the person and the organization. Workers perform specific duties for which they receive specific rewards. Bureaucracies are the best examples of a role oriented work culture.
 3. **ACHIEVEMENT CULTURE:** Achievement culture organizations emphasize the intrinsic nature of work. Individuals believe they are working for something larger than themselves, and typically are rewarded by completing the task. In the achievement culture organization individuals supervise themselves, authority, power, and role are generally unimportant, and the person who does the best job is the one who gets the rewards, which are intrinsic to the task. In this culture the mission is clearly understood by all and serves as the basis for all decisions.
 4. **SUPPORT CULTURE:** The organizational of a support culture is based on mutual trust between the individual and the organization. A humanistic value system permeates this type of culture, and employees care for each other. A warm, fuzzy type of climate prevails in this culture, and there is a considerable amount of communication and interpersonal warmth. Support culture work environments are places where employees go out of their way to cooperate and help each other. Cooperation and harmony are emphasized and members of the department experience a strong sense of belonging.
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Procedure: Task demand analysis: We conducted task demand analyses in a series of informal meetings over a four-month period during which time the performance evaluation system for the Euclid Police Department was being expanded and revised. This resulted in a listing of critical and frequent task identification for each unit of the department. The tasks identified in the task demand analysis were rationally derived and abstracted from the behavioral units that have become the core of the revised performance evaluation. With each task we attempted to identify factors in the environment that create demands for the tasks in question. We felt that an identification of the demands would broaden the approach to performance evaluations in the sense that our focus would also include the environmental demands that affected officer performance. If successful, this approach has potential for training as well as the modification of environmental forces to change officer behavior.

The Work Environment Scale (WES) (Moos, 1994) was rewritten, with permission, to more accurately depict the police work environment. For example, the WES term

“worker” was changed to “officer,” and “boss” was changed to “sergeant.” The content of each item remained the same, which allowed the use of published norms in scoring the questionnaire. The rewritten form of the instrument was identified as the Police Work Environment Scale and is referred to as the PWES in this report.

Harrison’s organizational culture questionnaire, which he labeled Diagnosing Organizational Culture, was copied with permission from the publisher and presented with a rewritten set of instructions. To increase the likelihood of participation, participants were informed that the results would only be used for research purposes, and that no individual records would be disclosed to anyone but the principal researcher, who is not a police officer. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to review their individual records and compare their profiles with their respective unit as well as that of the department. Unless they wanted feedback, names were optional, but participants were encouraged to identify their rank, the unit, and the number of years on the force.

Both the PWES and Diagnosing Organizational Climate questionnaires were administered to groups of three to nine participants during a series of in-service training classes during March-April 2003. Officers were informed that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that no consequences would occur if an individual chose not to participate.

Results:

Task Demand Analysis: Task demand analysis results are presented in Table 3 *:

Table 3
Tasks and Demands By Unit of EPD

1. Patrol Division Tasks and Demands:

- **Environmental awareness: demand for vigilance**
- **Knowledge and ownership of patrol area: identity demands**
- **Knowledge and proper use of laws, ordinances, and case law: knowledge, comprehension, application demands**
- **Readiness to respond quickly and decisively with control strategies: personal effectiveness and skill demands**
- **Verbal and behavioral conflict resolution skills: communication, negotiation skills, and physical fitness demands**
- **Routine and pursuit driving ability: psychomotor coordination, cognitive skills, decision rules demands**

2. Traffic Division Tasks

- **Self-assurance in one-on-one enforcement: personal effectiveness demands**

- **Awareness of traffic laws and ordinances, observation of conditions and traffic flow: knowledge, comprehension, application, vigilance demands**
- **Concentration and maintenance of task focus: task orientation and vigilance demands**
- **Firmness and use of discretion in dealing with offenders: personal effectiveness demands**
- **Ability to work independently and cooperatively: initiative, conscientiousness, and group skills demands**

3. Community Policing Division Tasks

- **Proactive style of relating to citizens and identifying problems: initiative, resource management, interpersonal skills demands**
- **Group activities organization skills: time management, interpersonal skills demands**
- **Understanding and utilization of community resources: knowledge, comprehension, understanding, and application demands**
- **Awareness of community system processes: synthesis demands**
- **Openness to different cultural perspectives: communication, stage presence, and tolerance demands**

4. Detective Bureau Tasks

- **Detail and evidence focus: attentional, perceptual, and cognitive skills (field independence) demands**
- **Interviewing skills: communication and listening skills demands**
- **Fourth amendment law knowledge: knowledge, comprehension, and application demands**
- **Ability to testify and talk to professional groups: stage presence, short and long term memory demands**
- **Ability to set agenda and work independently; time management and identity demands**

*At present, our task demand analysis model has implications primarily for training and educational strategies. In subsequent analyses, we will refine and expand the demand model, to identify the effects of social climate and organizational culture factors as they influence officer behavior.

PWES and Diagnosing Organizational Climate Questionnaire findings: Sixty-four out of 95 police officers from the EPD completed the questionnaires. Two individuals declined to fill out the questionnaires, and eleven were unscorable, due to errors. This resulted in a sample size of 53, although some analyses contain an N of 52.

Social Climate results: Descriptive statistics of the PWES scales are summarized in Figure 1:

Figure 1
Means and Standard Deviations of PWES Standard Scores
N=52

Scale	Mean	SD	Skewness
Involvement	46.73	9.89	.147
Coworker Cohesion	44.77	12.83	-1.094
Supervisor Support	53.60	8.29	-.591
Autonomy	52.52	9.34	-.411
Task Orientation	46.13	11.07	-.207
Work Pressure	42.35	9.15	.307
Clarity	53.63	6.89	-.600
Managerial Control	49.21	9.45	-.277
Innovation	39.77	7.69	.992
Physical Comfort	52.96	8.99	.099

Based on this sample of 52 participants, the social climate of the Euclid Police Department work environment is characterized by higher levels of supervisor support, clarity, autonomy, and physical comfort, and lower levels of innovation, coworker cohesion, and involvement. Overall, the results are fairly typical when compared to other organizations (Moos, 1994).

Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric one-way analysis of variance demonstrated social climate differences between several of the departmental units. Post-hoc contrasts are presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2
Departmental Unit PWES Unit Post Hoc Contrasts

Unit Directional Contrast	PWES Scale	P
Administration > Patrol	Involvement	.08
Patrol > Traffic	Coworker Cohesion	.018
Traffic > Patrol	Work Pressure	.020
Traffic > Community Policing	Work Pressure	.036
Patrol > Community Policing	Clarity	.025
Detective > Community Policing	Clarity	.019

Administration > Community Policing	Clarity	.003
Administration > Patrol	Innovation	.056

Figure 2 reveals that administration sees the social climate of the department as higher on involvement, clarity and innovation than patrol or community policing, while the patrol unit perceives a climate that is higher in coworker cohesion than the traffic unit. On the other hand, the traffic unit perceives a climate that is higher in work pressure than that seen by either patrol or the community policing units. Finally, detectives see a greater level of clarity than their community policing counterparts.

With respect to PWES differences across ranks, there were two findings are worth mentioning, although they did not obtain a .05 level of significance:

1. Higher ranking officers (Lieutenants, Captains, and Chief) see a climate that is higher in innovation than Sergeants (P<.085)
2. Lieutenants, Captains and the Chief perceive a less physically comfortable environment than patrol officers (P<.073)

Organizational Culture: Descriptive statistics of the Diagnosing Organizational Culture Questionnaire are summarized in Figure 3:

Figure 3
Means and Standard Deviations of the Diagnosing Organizational Culture Questionnaire (Raw Scores) N=52

Culture Component	Mean	SD	Skewness
Existing Power	42.61	9.75	.239
Preferred Power	23.73	6.59	2.291
Existing Role	44.54	5.222	-.416
Preferred Role	41.80	4.37	-.019
Existing Achievement	33.31	5.67	.393
Preferred Achievement	45.73	6.50	-1.407
Existing Support	29.35	6.70	.606
Preferred Support	38.69	4.84	.158

From Figure 3 it can be seen that power and role are the two highest existing culture components, while support is lowest. Preferred achievement culture is substantially higher than any of the other components, followed by preferred role, support, and power. Based on these findings it would appear that the Euclid Police Department prefers an organizational culture that is high in achievement and low in power.

Dependent t-tests comparing existing VS. preferred culture scores for each culture variable are all significant at P<.05 or less.

The only significant differences across departmental units with respect to organizational culture scores occurred in existing achievement culture scores. Administration sees a culture that is higher in existing achievement than either the patrol or traffic units ($P < .06$). There were no perceived culture differences across ranks, nor were any relationships related to time on the force. More experienced officers apparently see and prefer the same organizational culture as their less experienced counterparts.

Intercorrelations among climate and culture variables: Social climate and organizational culture variables that are significantly associated (Pearson r) at the .05 level or less are summarized below (see Notes following the intercorrelation summary):

1. **Existing Power:** Negative relationship with the following culture variables: E Achievement, E Support, and with the following social climate variables: Involvement, Coworker Cohesion, Supervisor Support, Autonomy, Task Orientation, Clarity, Innovation, & Physical Comfort.

2. **Preferred Power:** Negative relationship with the following organizational culture variables: E Role, P Achievement, P Support, and positive relationship with E Support; positive relationship with social climate variables Task Orientation and Innovation

3. **Existing Role:** Negative relationship with organizational culture variable E Support; positive relationship with P Achievement; positive relationship with social climate Coworker Cohesion

5. **Preferred Role:** Negative relationship with organizational culture variables P Achievement, P Support; negative relationship with officer rank and social climate variable Physical Comfort.

6. **Existing Achievement:** Positive relationships with social climate variables Involvement, Supervisor Support, Autonomy, Task Orientation, Clarity, and Innovation.

7. **Preferred Achievement:** Negative relationship with organizational climate variable E Support.

8. **Existing Support:** Positive relationship with social climate variables Autonomy and Innovation.

9. Preferred Support; Negative relationship with social climate variable Managerial control.

Note 1: A full intercorrelation matrix is available for interested individuals.

Note 2: As we gain more cases these data will be subjected to principal components analysis to clarify the interrelationship patterns, and underlying factor structure.

Discussion

The following social climate and organizational culture findings are interesting (to us) from the perspective of understanding and explaining the police work environment:

Social climate: First, this study shows that it is possible to describe a police environment's social climate in meaningful and proactive terms. The personality of the Euclid Police Department is characterized by above average supervisor support, and role clarity. Officers, but not administrators, are generally physically comfortable, which translates to greater cruiser comfort than provided by offices and chairs in the building. Also evident in the social climate environmental profile of this department is the emphasis on managerial control, involvement, and task orientation. Finally, although there are common social climate factors in the department overall, there are significant differences among units within the department (Figure 2). Administration sees the department as more involved, having greater clarity, and being more innovative than the patrol and community policing units. Officers in the traffic unit see greater work pressure than patrol or community policing officers. Detectives have a greater sense of clarity than the community policing unit.

Organizational Culture: The *existing* organizational culture of the Euclid Police Department can be described as exhibiting power and role, with substantially less emphasis on support and achievement. Conversely, the *preferred* culture is an achievement oriented department with relatively equal amounts of support and role. The *least* preferred culture, power, is the one that exists at the highest level. We were quite surprised by the finding that there was greater preference for an achievement culture in the EPD than any other culture. Corresponding to this was the low preferred power. Many popular views of the police work environment are exactly the opposite of these findings. It may be that the police culture is in fact changing. However, since there are no previous comparable studies using the empirical methods of our research, a statement about whether or not this is a change from the past cannot be made. But speaking about today's police officer, it is clear that from top to bottom, and across time as a police officer in the EPD, the preferred culture is achievement oriented.

There are more differences across units in terms of social climate than organizational culture factors in the EPD. Thus, the organizational culture of the department appears to

be unidimensional: there is apparently a unitary worldview from top to bottom in the department. The only difference, was a borderline significant difference between administrators and patrol and traffic officers on existing achievement culture. Administration sees the department culture as having more existing achievement, while both patrol and traffic units see less. The finding of greater similarity of culture vs. climate across department units indicates that climate and culture are functionally different and therefore additive in explaining and understanding the police work environment.

Questions for future study: The results of this study raise a number of theoretical and practical questions. Some questions and suggestions that arise from this study's findings are as follows:

- Do individuals with certain personality characteristics “fit” better into the social climate of the Euclid Police Department? Do different departments have different social climates, suggesting different personality traits may be more adaptive for different departments? Research on the interaction of social climate and personality would be a fruitful endeavor, and have great practical utility in the selection and socialization of new hires.
- Would an understanding of the social climate assist in training and assigning officers to different units, or providing more appropriate training models? One hypothesis is that officer performance is not generally due to KSA's but dependent on the degree of congruence with the individual's and the department's climate and culture.
- Based on our personal experience, a commonly held assumption among police officers is that there are major perceptual and personality differences between the older, more seasoned officer and the officer with less experience. Discussions of the “good old days” are rife in many departments, and are the basis of many beliefs that the new officer is remarkably different from his older coworker. The results of this study are counter to this view and provide evidence that, at least on climate and cultural dimensions, older and younger officers have similar views of their work environment. The stories may be more mythic than actual. More research, using additional measures of culture and climate might clarify our findings.
- How can the knowledge of a department's social climate and existing and preferred cultures aid in staff development and training programs? Is it better to design training and staff development strategies based on existing or preferred cultures? Following the social work adage of, “starting where the client is,” would it be possible to develop a model for training that starts with existing and gradually moves toward the preferred culture? For example, the EPD existing culture is highest in power. The most preferred culture is achievement. An effective strategy would utilize this information in designing a process model that moves, by successive approximations, from power to achievement.

- Finally, how do departments differ with respect to the three environmental models examined in this study? We are currently addressing this problem and should have additional findings by the time the next IPMAAC comes around.

Summary

Despite its salience for impacting police officer behavior, studies of the environment have not proceeded in any systematic manner. For the most part, environmental hypotheses about officer behavior are only evoked whenever the officer has exhibited improper performance of duties. This study was an attempt to address the problem from a more proactive stance, i.e., in the absence of problem officer behavior. Many explanations of the police work environment are retrospective and provide post hoc explanations why an officer performed in a given way. Our approach seeks to provide a prospective model of understanding the police work environment that leads to greater prediction and proactive interventions. Furthermore, we believe that our approach to describing and explaining the environment will lead to a better understanding of the factors that guide and control police officer behavior than those models that focus solely on personality, or those that are used only for after the fact explanations of police misbehavior.

To address this issue, we focused our attention on three components of the environment: task demands, social climate, and organizational culture. We believe that each approach has great potential for aiding our understanding of the police work environment. Each model has a theoretical framework for understanding the way the environment operates on behavior. Each model can be measured quantitatively, which promotes research. And each model can be described and utilized in the absence of problematic officer behavior. The task demand analysis approach has potential for the training and intervention of officer behavior by focusing, not only on the behavior, but also on the characteristics of the environment that evoke and sustain the behavior. The task model is admittedly in its primitive stages and we are in the process of updating and revising the demand side of the equation. Paradigms shift slowly (Kuhn 1974,) and the task demand analysis model should be viewed as a work in progress.

The social climate approach of Rudolph Moos as well as the organizational culture approach of Roger Harrison appears to have considerable value for explaining, predicting, controlling, and understanding the environmental forces that cause police behavior. These theories are easily measured, and the prospect of more research in this area is exciting to us.

Finally, we believe that the environmental approach to understanding police behavior has the advantage of focusing on the neglected impact of the work environment in understanding police behavior. As any psychologist knows, it is much easier to change the environment than it is to change personality. Put another way, it is easier to change behavior through environmental interventions than through direct and sometimes power-oriented confrontational methods. Ultimately we are hopeful that we can fulfill Lewin's

dictum (Lewin, 1938) that in order to understand behavior we must pay attention to both personality, the environment, as well as the interaction of the two.

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