

EDITORIAL

Work climate within justice as a basis for a change in offender behavior

There is a clear connection between work climate (or organizational climate) and an organization's performance, whether public or private. Organizational climate makes reference to workers' shared perceptions on the types of behaviors and actions that are supported and rewarded by an organization's policies, practices and procedures¹. Understanding an organization's working climate is relevant because it includes all its aspects; for example, at an individual level it entails a series of consequences as far as the attitude towards work is concerned, regarding safety, ethics, innovation and personal performance. Furthermore, it also has an influence on a wider sense, such as clients' attitudes and the performance of specific teams or units². Therefore it is not surprising that work climate is an aspect of paramount importance in organizational management and that there are several publications on this issue and on the connection with organizations' results. Likewise, it is not hard to understand that research on working climate can be highly beneficial for a myriad of different organizations. Research can provide information on working climate different facets and organizations can use this information to initially implement measures targeted at improving working climate. Eventually this could entail a continuous improvement cycle in which research provides with knowledge on the real situation and on the other hand promotes new changes and improvements.

Furthermore, working climate can also play an important role within justice. In their article for this edition of the Spanish Journal on Prison Health, the authors Güilgüiruca and Herrera-Bascur explain in detail the several connections between occupational health's different aspects and convincingly state the relevance of research and management in this regard in correctional facilities. Likewise, previous publications have shown the relevance of working climate within justice. For example, according to a study (carried out before the implementation of the structured assessment of risk) on working climate and the perceived relevance of recidivism risk factors by juvenile justice professionals in Catalonia, Hilterman, Ferrer and Capdevila³ detected that working climate can strongly influence the evaluation of recidivism risk. Professionals with a negative appreciation of working

climate estimated that the risk for recidivism among young offenders was higher than professionals with a more positive appreciation. A more conservative estimation can entail iatrogenic effects since criminal measures or the intensity of interventions may not be correlated with the risk for recidivism among young offenders⁴. The results of a study including 106 correctional facilities in the United States suggest an effect in the same direction. Garcia⁵ researched the perception of penitentiary professionals on workplace hazards (for example, the perception on the risk of being attacked or injured at work) in all the 106 facilities and he found that a positive perception of working climate (job satisfaction, organization's transparency, levels of stress at work) had a negative connection with the fear among professionals.

As in any other organization, within justice there are several factors regarding working climate which play a negative role in regard to stress at work, the possibility of burn-out among professionals⁶ and the increased possibility of a long-term work leave.

The tendency towards a rehabilitation model or towards a control and punishment model also influences working climate in correctional facilities. Day, Casey, Vess and Huis⁷ found that professionals developing their work in a prison oriented towards a rehabilitation model (through treatment) perceived a more positive social climate in comparison with professionals from a prison more oriented towards control. Along the same lines, it is important to consider that working climate in enclosed settings affects not only working conditions among professionals but cohabitation conditions between inmates too and thus the detention climate. Detention climate is measured in several prison systems in the USA, England and the Netherlands through inmates' self-reports. The data derived from these reports are used for the management of facilities and as reference and monitoring parameters. A study carried out in the Netherlands concluded that the appreciation of working climate by professionals had a positive and significant correlation with the appreciation of detention climate by prisoners⁸. Moreover, an improved working condition was connected with a more appropriate supervision of prisoners by professionals. An improved working condition

was also found to be connected with a reduced rate of aggression and internal incidences⁹. Based on these data, the Dutch Ministry of Justice concluded that research on working and detention climates contributed significantly to the accomplishment of the penitentiary administration mission, including the rehabilitation of prisoners and a reduced recidivism.

An important mission for the criminal system, and thus for the penitentiary administration, is to achieve a change of behavior among re-offenders. A change that has to contribute to reduced recidivism. In the last decades, several evidence-based interventions and treatments that have the ability to achieve this change have been developed. However, the implementation of these measures while there is not a positive working climate clearly supporting a rehabilitation model would be like wasting seeds on arid land. Working climate within prisons is as important as the orientation towards evidence-based treatment interventions. Both with regard to the management of working climate and with interventions with prisoners it is relevant to avoid strategies oriented towards control, repression and intimidation. Research clearly shows that coercion entails poorer results such as higher recidivism which also entails a higher public cost. In this sense, measuring and improving working climate within prisons and juvenile detention centers can have a direct and indirect relevance in public security. Likewise, investing in research to obtain further data on working climate within justice can entail improved results and furthermore, save costs.

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