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DEPARTMENTAL MORALE AS A FUNCTION OF THE PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS*

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The object of this paper is to analyze some of the factors underlying differing levels of morale in university departments. Morale is conceived to be primarily a product of perceived department-head performance, although it is also suggested that environmental and satisfaction variables may be important. Morale is seen as a potential symptomatic attribute which might be used in diagnosing organizational difficulties. The authors did indeed find, using multiple discriminant analysis on departmentally aggregated data, that the perceived performance of department heads was more important in predicting levels of morale. In addition, department size was also found to be useful. The conclusions drawn were that morale could be used as a symptom of departmental (or organizational) well being and that such data could be useful to those managing department heads both in the selection of department heads and in their ongoing supervision.

Although there is a considerable literature on the general topic of organization morale (Blum and Naylor, 1968, pp. 391-413), there remains some question about the effect of morale on varying aspects of organizational behavior. Part of the problem in assessing morals may be in the manner in which morale, as an organizational variable, has been treated. The effort is sometimes made to use morale as a predictor of other forms of organizational behavior, such as produc-

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tivity. If, however, the intent of organizational research is to identify problem areas, then, perhaps, morale should be treated as a symptomatic variable rather than as a determinant of other behaviors. For the purposes of this article we have adopted a global definition of morale as a group's psychological state characterized by confidence, enthusiasm, discipline, willingness to work, and related attributes. More explicit definitions of the concept of morale are available (e.g., Blum and Naylor, 1968, p. 392), but most of these are contained in our global definition.

It is quite possible that organizational units, such as departments in a university, will have low morale as a function of a wide variety of problems: pay, colleagues, supervision, etc. If it can be demonstrated that low morale stems predominantly from some correctable source, then morale may be useful as a symptomatic variable. There are rather direct analogies from other disciplines which might clarify the issue. In medicine, for example, a common symptom for a variety of diseases is a high body temperature. No one assumes that a high temperature "causes" the disease, yet we use the presence of high temperature as a beginning point in diagnosing the disease. In a more popular area, public opinion analysts often publish global ratings dealing with how well the President is doing his job as president. It is well known, however, that the responses to such global ratings do not correlate well with how people actually vote in elections for president. Yet it is reasonable to assume that if public confidence in the President is low, there is some problem in the body politic.

We would argue that in a university, departmental morale can be used in the same symptomatic manner as body temperature is used in medical diagnosis or ratings of the President are used in political analysis. If departmental morale is low, then there may be organizational problems which should be remedied. Furthermore, when departmental morale is low, it is possible to search for the source of that low morale and to attempt to modify the situation. If, for example, it is found that low morale is a function of the perceived performance of department heads, then the department heads in the low morale departments should be counseled by their respective supervisory officers regarding appropriate changes in behavior. An example of such an approach has been conducted in a university setting, and some of the data are reported in this article. An implicit assumption with respect to this research is that university teachers and supervisory officers behave in a manner consistent with the behavior of people in other kinds of organizations such as business, industry, and government. While large numbers of university personnel would likely object to the foregoing assumption, there is nothing in our data which would lead us to other conclusions.

In the present analysis we are concerned primarily with the extent to which departmental morale is related to various perceptions of department head behaviors. Specifically, three general areas might be of importance in the distribution

of morale across departments: 1) situational and environmental factors; 2) perceived leadership performance; and 3) satisfaction of departmental members with their work environment. Three situational and environmental variables were of interest in the study: salary, age, and size. Salary and age were deemed important because of the overt interest of faculty in both attributes, although the effect of such variables on morale is somewhat unclear (Robinson, et al., 1969). In fact, Robinson et al. suggest that many executives and economists may overrate the importance of wages while many social scientists may underrate the importance of money. Size was considered important because of the role of size in organizational literature, at least since the writings of Simmel (1902) and Durkheim (1933). Many studies of the relationship between member participation and size have shown that relationship to be negative regardless of the kind of organization studied (Alexander, 1954; Baumgartel and Sobol, 1959; Faunce, 1962; Indik, 1965; Talacchi, 1960; Warner and Hilander, 1964; Wilken, 1971). Size appears to influence participation through its influence on organizational structure. Warner and Hilander, in fact, suggested that large size and high rates of participation are usually incompatible. In sum, environmental and situational factors have been found important in the study of morale (Wofford, 1971).

In order to relate perceived performance of department heads to morale, four attributes of supervisory style were considered important: consideration, rigidity, participation, and a general rating of supervision. As Robinson et al. point out, it is probably not possible to contend that participative mangement or high consideration management is always best. Yet, especially in a university setting, both implicit and explicit value judgments are made regarding the value of participative styles of leadership. Yukl (1971) and DeVries and Snyder (1974), among others, have noted the importance of the extent to which group members perceive they are allowed to participate in the making of decisions. Yukl describes what we have called participation as the extent to which a leader allows his subordinates to participate in decision making. In addition to the environmental and performance attributes, aspects of job satisfaction were also considered useful: satisfaction with the kind of work being done; satisfaction with co-workers and colleagues; satisfaction with pay; and satisfaction with promotions. While it has been found that morale and satisfaction are related (Blum and Naylor, 1968), the two concepts are not the same. A primary distinction is that satisfaction is the result of various attitudes the *individual* holds toward his or her job while morale is a *group* generated attribute and "may best be considered as a by-product of the group" (Blum and Naylor, 1968, p. 392).

For the present purposes, then, a total of 11 characteristics or attributes were identified for use in evaluating departmental morale. Since our first objective was to determine the extent to which morale is a function of department head performance, our over-arching research hypothesis must be that one or more of

the performance measures will have predominant power relative to morale, with situational and satisfaction measures explaining somewhat lesser amounts of variance.

METHOD

Subjects

The population consisted of the teaching faculty at Western Kentucky University during the spring semester of 1974. All faculty were given an extensive questionnaire with 62.3% (337 of 541) returning them.

Instruments

The instruments used included 74 items of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (Hemphill, 1956; Madron, 1969; Schriesheim and Kerr, 1974), the Job Description Inventory (Smith et al., 1969), a participation measure generated locally, and a morale index, generated locally. Measures of rigidity and consideration were constructed through a factor analysis of the LBDQ items. The five scales of the JDI, work, supervision, people, pay, and promotions, were scored. Participation was measured by presenting a checklist of possible kinds of departmental participation, then asking whether the faculty member was allowed to have such participation and whether the faculty member thought such participation should be allowed. The morale index was constructed from three global items which compared the individual respondent's department to other departments, to his or her department one year earlier, and to an "ideal" level of departmental morale. (More detailed descriptions of the instruments can be obtained from the authors.)

Procedure

During the 1973-74 academic year a set of data was collected at Western Kentucky University, under the auspices of the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Council. The study was designed to solicit systematic descriptions of the behavior of department heads and other supervisory personnel.

Scoring and analysis. Among the data collected were various measures (described above) of perceived supervisory and departmental behavior as well as an index of departmental morale. The data were aggregated into departmental scores using the departmental means as estimates of departmental behavior, then

department size, mean age, and mean salary (excluding department heads), acquired from university records, were added to the data set. All scales and indices were constructed using the aggregate data rather than the individual data. The analysis reported in this paper is based on the aggregate data. The reason for aggregating the data was that we were interested in departmental characteristics, not in the characteristics and descriptions of individual departmental members. Of the 41 departments of the university in 1974, there were sufficient questionnaires (five or more) returned to make departmental aggregates for 35 departments.

Individual faculty members were asked to respond to the LBDQ items on a 1-99 scale depending on whether the item was or was not descriptive of the behavior of the respondent's department head. The items were then factor analysed using a principal component factor analysis with a varimax rotation, and factor scores were generated. Two factors were produced labeled "consideration" and "rigidity." A department head scoring high on the consideration factor was perceived by the faculty as accessible, flexible, open to new ideas, receptive to criticism, and true to promises made. Moreover, the department head was described as encouraging faculty to work to capacity while providing appropriate evaluative feedback, sharing decision making with the faculty, and emphasizing communications both up and down the organization. By way of contrast, a department head scoring high on rigidity was described as being slow to accept new ideas, failing to take into account faculty ideas, resisting compromise, difficult to approach and talk to, and in general, discouraging individual initiative.

The JDI items were presented simply as a checklist and individuals were asked to check which items described the five constructs of the inventory. This procedure was somewhat different from that originally recommended but was used for improving speed of response and coding. A -1 was assigned to negative items, a +1 to positive items, and a 0 to items not checked, and the subscale scores were then summed across the appropriate items. From the participation items a discrepancy score was constructed by subtracting the departmental percentages on each "should be" item from the departmental percentage on each "is" item. These discrepancy item scores were summed and divided by the number of items (13) to give a mean discrepancy score. In general, low scores indicate the view that actual participation was low and there should be more participation; middling scores indicate a balance between what is and what should be; while high scores imply that there is, perhaps, more participation than is desired. The two factor scores from the LBDQ, the five subscales of the JDI, and the participation measure were then converted to standard scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of approximately ten.

The morale index was constructed by assigning a 4 to those departments with a higher percentage of "high" than "low" responses on all three items; a 3 to

those with a higher percentage of high than low responses on two of the items; a 2 to those departments with a higher percentage of high than low responses to one of the items; and a 1 to those departments with a higher percentage of low than high responses on all three items. Thus the morale measure extends from low morale to high morale in four steps. For interpretive purposes a simple clustering technique (McQuitty, 1957) was applied to the set of 11 independent variables using as a base the product-moment correlation matrix. The primary multivariate statistical technique used to test our research hypothesis was stepwise multiple discriminant analysis. It should be emphasized that in all cases we are dealing with faculty perceptions of department head behavior and not with objective measures of that behavior.

RESULTS

Although this article is directed toward the problem of morale, it is instructive to look first at the 11 predictor variables and their intercorrelations. The intercorrelations among the predictor variables are set forth in Table I, and when those correlations are scrutinized, some interesting patterns emerge. If the correlations are carefully observed it will be found that the 11 variables will cluster

Table I. Intercorrelations Among the Independent Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Size	1.00	-.18	-.13	-.29	.00	-.32	-.06	-.02	-.30	-.04	-.18
2 Age	-.18	1.00	.60	.08	.26	.02	-.13	.01	-.13	.44	.21
3 Salary	-.13	.60	1.00	-.12	.42	-.24	-.39	-.03	.10	.24	.07
4 Consideration	-.29	.-9	-.12	1.00	.01	.81	.51	.15	.32	.24	.51
5 Rigidity	.00	.26	.42	.01	1.00	-.19	-.70	-.51	-.27	.03	-.02
6 Participation	-.32	.02	-.24	.81	-.19	1.00	.54	.18	.26	.31	.53
7 Supervision	-.06	-.13	-.39	.51	-.70	.54	1.00	.40	.34	.09	.19
8 Work	-.02	.01	-.03	.15	-.51	.18	.40	1.00	.72	.21	.25
9 Colleagues	-.30	-.13	.10	.32	-.27	.26	.34	.72	1.00	.00	.03
10 Pay	-.04	.44	.24	.24	.03	.31	.09	.21	.00	1.00	.34
11 Promotions	-.18	.21	.07	.51	-.02	.53	.19	.25	.03	.34	1.00

N = 35

into four groups. These clusters consist of (1) colleagues (people, from the JDI/work (JDI); (2) participation (local/consideration (LBDQ)/promotions (JDI); (3) rigidity (LBDQ)/supervision (JDI); and (4) age/salary/pay (JDI)/size. Without exception the clusters would seem to follow common sense dictates

about the manner in which these variables should relate to one another. It might also be noted parenthetically that even though we can cluster the predictor variables, the overall magnitude of the intercorrelations was sufficiently low, and the robustness of discriminant analysis sufficiently high, to preclude problems relating to multicollinearity.

Table I and the resulting clusters suggest that where departmental satisfaction with work is high, satisfaction with colleagues is also high. In departments where there is substantial participation the department heads are perceived to be considerate, and considerate department heads are perceived as providing satisfactory rates of promotion. Where supervision is thought to be good, department heads are seen as flexible rather than rigid, while departments which rate low on supervision have department heads perceived to be rigid. With respect to environmental variables, age is, of course, related to salary and satisfaction with pay. A bit surprising, however, is the fact that size is related to age: as age increases size decreases, suggesting that the smaller departments are also more stable than are the larger departments. This descriptive summary in no way conflicts with the results of the discriminant analysis which follows, but it does provide some basis for an understanding of the patterns inherent among the predictor variables.

Before moving to the core of the discriminant analysis a review of the associated univariate statistics as the predictor variables relate to morale groupings will be helpful. From the information detailed in Table II certain characteristics become clear. At least at the institution studied, the environmental variables age and salary did not discriminate among the four classes of departmental morale. The size of the department, however, does appear to be important – the depart-

Table II. Discriminant Analysis Data Survey

Variable	Mean					
	1	2	3	4	F	p
Size	21.17	13.86	15.67	10.38	3.53	.0257
Age	42.33	41.86	43.67	41.06	.58	.6367
Salary	14014.33	14220.29	14148.33	13344.94	1.20	.3263
Consideration	41.20	46.11	47.76	56.08	5.37	.0046
Rigidity	55.55	51.08	45.78	48.58	1.10	.3658
Participation	43.85	42.82	49.62	56.20	5.62	.0037
Supervision	38.93	47.49	53.12	54.46	5.18	.0054
Work	45.77	47.75	56.24	50.45	1.26	.3048
Colleagues	41.39	50.37	50.78	43.24	2.25	.1010
Pay	49.04	45.02	51.04	51.98	.79	.5105
Promotion	48.31	44.31	53.90	50.72	1.19	.3311

ments with no apparent morale problem were the smallest in the university and averaged 10.38 members. By way of contrast, those departments with the worst morale problems were also the largest, averaging 21.17 members. Not only were the small departments high on morale, but the department heads were perceived to be less rigid, more considerate, had higher rates of participation and generally better supervisory scores than was true of the low morale departments. The low morale departments were larger, had less considerate department heads, who were perceived to be more rigid, had lower rates of participation, and poor supervision scores in comparison to the high morale departments. The univariate F-tests would indicate that size, consideration, participation, and supervision are the most discriminating of the 11 variables, and this is buttressed by the correlations between the variables and the first discriminant score.

We did not anticipate that all 11 variables would be useful in explaining departmental morale. It was our view, however, that if morale was primarily a function of the perceived performance of department heads, we would have to demonstrate not only what predicted morale but also what did not predict morale. From the descriptive data presented above it is reasonably clear that department head performance is important in discriminating among the classes of morale on a variable by variable basis. In addition, department size and participation are important. In order to test explicitly the specific variables important in the prediction of morale we first ran a multiple discriminant analysis using all 11 predictors. We then ran a comparable analysis for the four variables identified as being most important. The resulting predictive model was, therefore, composed of four variables: supervision, consideration, participation, and size.

Table III outlines the effort to determine, in a multivariate model, whether or not the four variables identified above were of primary importance. Most of the data in Table III were obtained through a series of 11 analyses successively eliminating one variable at a time. The purpose was to determine which variables had the greatest impact on the total 11 variable model. These data are to be compared with the row labeled "total" at the bottom of the table, which gives the data for the full 11 variable models. In addition, the last column in the table represents the correlations between each of the 11 variables and the first discriminant score using all 11 predictors. In general, the information in Table III substantiates the preliminary suggestions made on the basis of the univariate statistics in Table II. Size, consideration, participation, and supervision are most highly related to the first discriminant score. When each of these variables is eliminated from the analysis, wilks lambda is no longer significant. The multiple correlations and thetas also drop most precipitously for these four variables. Theta is a simple statistic which is the proportion of cases correctly classified.

It remained only for the four variable model to be explicitly tested; the results are reported in Table IV. (Only the first function was significant (as was the

Table III. Discriminant Analysis Summary Table[a]

Variable	Wilks lambda	F	p	R	Theta	Z	p	r[b]
1 Size	.247	1.326	.1705	.7527	.8000	6.6576	.001	.6040
2 Age	.191	1.648	.0469	.8090	.8000	6.6574	.001	.2014
3 Salary	.197	1.607	.0557	.8029	.9143	8.2492	.001	.3130
4 Consideration	.206	1.553	.0698	.7944	.8000	6.6574	.001	-.6870
5 Rigidity	.187	1.678	.0412	.8134	.8571	7.4533	.001	.2260
6 Participation	.209	1.530	.0768	.7906	.7429	5.8614	.001	-.6000
7 Supervision	.216	1.491	.0903	.7829	.8000	6.6574	.001	-.6069
8 Work	.198	1.601	.0573	.8019	.8857	7.8512	.001	-.1065
9 Colleagues	.195	1.622	.0524	.8051	.8571	7.4533	.001	-.4697
10 Pay	.218	1.480	.0944	.7820	.8286	7.0553	.001	-.1536
11 Promotion	.191	1.647	.0470	.8089	.8000	6.6574	.001	-.0815
Total	.184	1.474	.0933	.8162	.8571	7.4533	.001	

[a]All of the information in this table, except for the last column, represents discriminant analyses successively eliminating the variable noted. Consequently, each row represents a 10-variable model with the variable listed deleted. These figures are to be compared to the Total row which includes all 11 variables.

[b]These are the correlations between each variable and the first discriminate variable using all 11 predictors.

Table IV. Discriminant Analysis Summary Table (four variables)

Function	Chi-Square	DF	p	Centroids 1	2	3	4
1	25.621	6	.0005	16.59	28.69	30.09	36.77
2	6.720	4	.1511	21.30	14.56	18.98	20.35
3	2.121	2	.3475	11.35	11.31	15.86	11.47

Generalized correlation ratio (eta squared) = .6710
Multivariate theta = .7429; Z = 5.86, p = .05

case with the 11 variable model). Eta squared dropped from 0.82, for all 11 variables to 0.67, using four variables, and theta dropped from 0.82 to 0.74, a reduction in predictive accuracy of only about eight percentage points. This drop in predictive capability can be better visualized by reference to Table V, which gives the percentage of correctly classified cases in each category of morale. There is only a mild improvement in the predictive capability from the four variable model to the 11 variable model, even on a category by category basis.

Table V. Percentage of Departments Correctly Classfied

Model	Groups				Total
	1	2	3	4	
11 variables	100.00	71.43	100.00	81.25	85.71
4 variables	83.33	71.43	83.33	68.75	74.29

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

These data suggest that perceptions of the performance of department heads are significantly related to the morale in a department. The performance variables of primary importance were supervision, consideration, and participation. The participation measure is somewhat different from the other two in that it reflects administrative styles of decision making. When a department is run in a participatory fashion the department head is perceived to be considerate, and the general ratings of supervision are high. In such departments members also feel that rates of promotion are adequate. Although perceived administrative behavior is clearly the best predictor of morale, gross size of the department is also influential. It is quite possible that size constrains the supervisory style of the department head. It would appear that people in larger departments not only feel more restricted but are in fact more restricted than are others in the university. Notwithstanding cries of university personnel to the contrary, there is nothing in the data presented above suggesting that industrial, business, and government models of employee/employer relationships do not hold for university faculty and administration, although the mores dealing with participatory decision making may be a little stronger in a university than in other kinds of institutions.

In the introduction to this article we contended that morale might be used as a symptom to identify departments with organizational problems. It is clear from the data presented that the specific organizational problem identified by differing levels or morale is supervisory behavior. Departmental size apparently influences supervisory behavior, and size may aid in interpreting the morale measure, although the size of a department may not be capable of being modified. Consequently, the practical import of our findings is that department-head behavior should come under close scrutiny when departments have low morale. In order to monitor the organizational well being of departments it might be possible to devise a rapid response questionnaire built around the concept of morale. If such an instrument were used periodically to find and identify potential sources of organizational disquiet, then more extensive instruments could be used to locate the specific problems.

When problem areas are identified within an organization, given the data analyzed in this paper, two different kinds of responses are possible. If a situational

variable, such as size, is important, then the situation might be modified. If larger departments were subdivided into smaller departments some of the problems of supervisory rigidity and a tendency to make decisions autocratically might disappear. The problem of subdivision for an institution may itself create problems, however, for adding new departments will increase administrative costs and might separate people on a somewhat arbitrary basis. The fact that larger departments do tend to be those with morale problems would suggest that a university should be exceedingly careful in its selection of department heads for those departments.

Even when situations or environments cannot be modified, it is possible the department heads's behavior can be modified or changed. Even though size is important, more important in the determination of morale is the manner in which a department is administered. Consequently, at least in the context of the data presented above, when supervisory personnel improve member participation in decision making and when they give greater consideration to members generally, morale will improve. Granted that problems of consideration are more difficult in large departments than in small departments, it should nevertheless be possible to improve the management of a department in these areas. Knowledge about where problems are likely to occur, and knowledge about where the pitfalls are for the department heads, should provide a means for ensuring that department heads select courses of action more carefully than otherwise might be the case.

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