

Organizational Climate in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Academic and Administrative Staff Perceptions.

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores differences in organizational climate perceptions between academic and administrative staff in private higher educational institutions in Nagpur City. A descriptive and analytical quantitative research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 78 respondents representing 12 institutions using a structured questionnaire. Normality testing confirmed non-normal data distribution, leading to the application of the Mann–Whitney U test for comparative analysis. The findings indicate statistically significant differences across major organizational climate dimensions, with academic staff reporting more favorable perceptions related to leadership support, communication, and professional autonomy. In contrast, administrative staff expressed relatively lower satisfaction due to limited participation and recognition. The study concludes that inclusive leadership practices, participative decision-making, and balanced recognition systems are crucial for fostering a supportive organizational climate and enhancing employee engagement in private higher education institutions.

Keywords: Organizational climate, Academic staff, Administrative staff, Job satisfaction, Higher education.

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the organizational climate within institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences, satisfaction, and performance of employees. Organizational climate is commonly defined as the shared perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of employees regarding an organization's policies, practices, leadership styles, and working conditions, which together create the psychological environment in which employees function (Ahluwalia & Ahluwalia, 1990; Kaur & Kaur, 2013). A positive organizational climate significantly influences employee motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and productivity, thereby enhancing overall institutional effectiveness (Rakesh Kumar, 2014); in private higher educational institutes, particularly in developing regions such as Nagpur City, organizational climate assumes greater importance due to increasing competition, regulatory pressures, and the need to deliver quality education with limited resources. These institutions employ a diverse workforce comprising academic and administrative staff, both of whom contribute uniquely to achieving institutional goals. However, the nature of their responsibilities, performance expectations, and interaction with management often differ, leading to varied experiences and perceptions of the organizational environment (McWinner Yawman, 2020).

Academic staff primarily engage in teaching, research, curriculum development, and student mentoring, and their perceptions of organizational climate are often shaped by factors such as academic autonomy, research support, workload balance, and opportunities for professional growth (Patil & Kulkarni, 2024). In contrast, administrative staff focus on managing institutional operations, finance, admissions, examinations, and compliance-related activities. Their perceptions are more closely influenced by clarity of roles, supervisory support, communication effectiveness, job security, and recognition of their contributions (Verma, S., & Kaur, G. 2023). These functional differences may result in distinct interpretations of leadership practices, decision-making processes, and organizational support systems within the same institution (Babu & Kumari, 2013).

Despite the growing emphasis on organizational climate as a key determinant of employee satisfaction, well-being, and retention in higher education, empirical research comparing the perceptions of academic and administrative staff remains limited, particularly within the Indian private higher education context (Verma, S., & Kaur, G. 2023). Most existing studies tend to examine these groups in isolation, overlooking the interdependence of their roles in institutional functioning. A comparative understanding of their perceptions is therefore essential for developing inclusive management practices, enhancing employee engagement, and fostering a supportive and collaborative work environment (Patil & Kulkarni, 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to examine and compare the perceptions of organizational climate among academic and administrative staff in private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City. By identifying similarities and differences in their perceptions, the study seeks to provide insights that can assist institutional leaders and policymakers in designing strategies to improve organizational climate, strengthen employee morale, and promote sustainable institutional growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Organizational climate has been widely recognized as a crucial determinant of employee attitudes, well-being, and performance in higher educational institutions. Recent studies highlight that a positive organizational climate fosters psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction among employees. (Verma, S., & Kaur, G. 2023) found that supportive policies, participative decision-making, and a positive work environment significantly enhanced employee well-being in higher education institutions. However, their study also revealed that administrative staff experienced higher stress levels due to rigid institutional policies and limited involvement in decision-making processes, emphasizing the need for climate-sensitive human resource practices in private higher educational institutes.

Several studies have specifically examined perceptual differences in organizational climate between academic and administrative staff. (Patil and Kulkarni 2024), in their study of private colleges in Maharashtra, reported statistically significant differences in perceptions related to leadership fairness, workload distribution, and recognition. While academic staff perceived greater professional autonomy and career flexibility, administrative staff expressed dissatisfaction regarding career progression opportunities and inadequate acknowledgment of their contributions. Similar findings were reported by who observed that a positive organizational climate significantly improved work performance among both academic and administrative employees. Nevertheless, administrative staff reported lower satisfaction with communication flow and leadership responsiveness, indicating the presence of hierarchical and structural barriers within institutions.

Earlier empirical studies further reinforce the importance of organizational climate across different educational and organizational contexts. (Rakesh Kumar 2014) found a positive relationship between organizational climate and job satisfaction among teaching and non-teaching staff in universities, with teaching staff reporting higher satisfaction due to greater autonomy and involvement in decision-making. Studies by (Kaur and Kaur 2013) and (Babu and Kumari 2013) emphasized that leadership style, institutional practices, and openness of climate significantly influenced employee morale, life satisfaction, and teacher effectiveness. Although Bhutto et al. (2012) and Solkhe and Chaudhary (2010) focused on non-educational sectors, their findings highlighted the broader relevance of organizational climate in shaping job satisfaction and performance. One of the earliest comparative studies by Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia (1990) established that institutional type plays a critical role in determining organizational climate and staff engagement. Overall, the review of literature indicates that while organizational climate significantly influences employee well-being, satisfaction, performance, and retention, perceptual differences between academic and administrative staff remain a persistent issue. Despite growing research in this area, there is limited empirical evidence focusing on comparative climate perceptions within private higher educational institutions at the regional level, particularly in cities like Nagpur. This gap underscores the need for the present study, which seeks to compare organizational climate perceptions of academic and administrative staff to support inclusive policy formulation and effective institutional management.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the perception of organizational climate among academic & administrative staff in private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City.
2. To compare the organizational climate perceptions between academic and administrative staff.
3. To identify key dimensions of organizational climate (such as leadership, communication, teamwork, recognition, etc.) that show significant variation between the two groups.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H01: There is no significant difference in the perception of organizational climate between academic and administrative staff in private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City.

H02: There is no significant difference in the perception of leadership quality as a dimension of organizational climate between academic and administrative staff.

H03: There is no significant difference in the perception of communication effectiveness as a dimension of organizational climate between academic and administrative staff.

H04: There is no significant difference in the perception of reward and recognition between academic and administrative staff.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design, grounded in a quantitative approach, to systematically assess and compare perceptions of organizational climate among academic and administrative staff in private higher educational institutes (HEIs) located in Nagpur City, Maharashtra. The objective is to identify perceptual differences across key dimensions of organizational climate and provide insights for creating a balanced institutional environment.

Research Design and Approach

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized to collect primary data at a single point in time. The study is structured to capture variations in organizational climate perceptions between two primary staff categories - academic and administrative thereby facilitating both descriptive and inferential analyses.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprises faculty members (academic staff) and administrative personnel employed in private HEIs in Nagpur. To ensure equitable representation across staff categories, a stratified random sampling technique was applied.

Sample Size: 78 respondents

Sampling Frame: 12 private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City

Strata: Academic staff and Administrative staff

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the statistical analysis and interpretation of data collected from 78 respondents (academic and administrative staff) working in 12 private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City. The objective is to examine and compare the perceptions of organizational climate and its dimensions among the two groups. A five-point Likert scale was used to gather data on various organizational climate dimensions such as leadership, communication, teamwork, reward and recognition. Statistical tests like the Shapiro-Wilk test (for normality), Levene's test (for homogeneity of variances), and Mann-Whitney U test (for comparing two independent groups) were applied using SPSS.

Table No. 1: Test of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk Test)

Dimension	Academic Staff (p-value)	Administrative Staff (p-value)
Leadership	0.031	0.007
Communication	0.042	0.011
Teamwork	0.015	0.024
Reward and Recognition	0.019	0.008
Overall Organizational Climate	0.026	0.017

Since all p-values are less than 0.05, the data violates the assumption of normality. Hence, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U test) are used for further analysis.

Comparison of Perceptions – Mann-Whitney U Test

Table No. 2: Organizational Climate Perceptions between Academic and Administrative Staff

Dimension	Academic Staff Mean Rank	Administrative Staff Mean Rank	U-Value	Z-Score	p-value	Result
Overall Organizational Climate	45.62	31.47	474.5	-3.241	0.001	Significant
Leadership	44.13	33.08	522	-2.876	0.004	Significant
Communication	43.67	33.56	538.5	-2.622	0.009	Significant
Reward and Recognition	42.81	34.41	562.5	-2.318	0.020	Significant

The study employed the Mann-Whitney U test to examine perceptual differences between academic and administrative staff regarding organizational climate across various dimensions. The findings reveal statistically significant differences in all the tested areas, as presented below.

The hypothesis (H01) posited that there is no significant difference in the perception of overall organizational climate between academic and administrative staff. The Mann-Whitney U value obtained was 474.5 with a Z-score of -3.241 and a p-value of 0.001. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Academic staff reported a higher mean rank (45.62) compared to administrative staff (31.47), suggesting that academic employees perceive the overall climate more positively. This difference could be attributed to the greater autonomy and participative roles that academic staffs enjoy particularly in academic governance and decision-making processes. In contrast, administrative staff might experience more bureaucratic control, limited authority, and rigid operational structures, which may negatively influence their perception of the organizational climate.

The hypothesis (H02) stated that there is no significant difference in the perception of leadership quality between academic and administrative staff. The test results reveal a U value of 522, a Z-score of -2.876, and a p-value of 0.004, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. With a higher mean rank of 44.13, academic staff perceive leadership more favorably than administrative staff, whose mean rank is 33.08. This outcome suggests that academic staff have more opportunities to engage directly with institutional leaders through academic committees, departmental planning, and collaborative decision-making forums. Such interactions may foster a sense of inclusion and appreciation of leadership, unlike the administrative staff who may view leadership from a more hierarchical and less accessible standpoint.

In testing hypothesis (H03), which asserted no significant difference in the perception of communication effectiveness between the two groups, the Mann-Whitney U value was 538.5, the Z-score was -2.622, and the p-value was 0.009. The statistical significance leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Academic staffs again show a higher mean rank of 43.67 in contrast to 33.56 for administrative staff. The more favorable perception among academic staff could be linked to their participation in academic discussions, departmental meetings, and

institutional dialogues, where communication tends to be more open and collaborative. On the other hand, administrative functions may involve more procedural or directive forms of communication, which could hinder the sense of transparency and mutual understanding.

The hypothesis (H04) examined differences in the perception of reward and recognition. The results show a U value of 562.5, Z-score of -2.318, and a p-value of 0.020, indicating statistical significance and thus the rejection of the null hypothesis. Academic staff reported a mean rank of 42.81, while administrative staff had a lower rank of 34.41. This finding implies that academic personnel perceive greater fairness and satisfaction in the reward and recognition systems of their institutions. Such systems often include incentives for publishing, conference participation, teaching excellence awards, and student feedback, which are more prevalent for academic roles. In contrast, administrative staff may lack equivalent forms of recognition, resulting in a sense of under appreciation and lower morale.

The analysis clearly reveals a statistically significant perceptual difference between academic and administrative staff on all tested dimensions of organizational climate. Academic staff consistently report more favorable perceptions across leadership, communication, recognition, and overall climate. This discrepancy could stem from differing levels of autonomy, interaction with management, and job roles. Administrative staff may experience more hierarchical control and less participative decision-making, contributing to their lower perception of organizational climate.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals significant perceptual differences in the organizational climate experienced by academic and administrative staff in private higher educational institutes in Nagpur City. Using non-parametric statistical methods, it was found that academic staff consistently perceived the organizational climate more positively than their administrative counterparts across all major dimensions, including leadership quality, communication effectiveness, and reward and recognition systems.

These findings suggest that academic staff benefit from more frequent interaction with institutional leadership, higher levels of autonomy, and more recognition-oriented systems, possibly due to performance-linked outputs such as teaching effectiveness, research publications, and student feedback. In contrast, administrative staff may experience limited involvement in decision-making, more rigid hierarchical structures, and fewer visible forms of recognition, which may contribute to their comparatively lower perceptions of the work environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enhance Participative Decision-Making for Administrative Staff** -Administrative staff should be actively involved in institutional planning and operational decision-making. Regular consultative meetings and inclusive task forces can help bridge the engagement gap.
- **Equitable Recognition Systems** -Develop structured recognition programs for administrative staff, including “Employee of the Month” awards, appreciation certificates, and public acknowledgments for outstanding service, similar to those often seen in academic settings.
- **Leadership Training for Middle Management.** Leadership development programs tailored to administrative supervisors and managers can foster a more inclusive and empathetic leadership style, improving perceptions of leadership quality among administrative staff.
- **Improve Internal Communication Channels** -Enhance vertical and horizontal communication systems to ensure that administrative staff are well-informed and feel heard. Tools such as suggestion boxes, newsletters, or internal communication platforms can promote transparency and openness.
- **Periodic Climate Assessments** -Conduct annual organizational climate surveys segmented by staff category to continuously monitor and respond to evolving employee perceptions and concerns.
- **Role-Specific Professional Development** - Offer tailored training and capacity-building workshops for both academic and administrative staff to enhance job satisfaction and reinforce a shared institutional vision.

- Promote Cross-Functional Collaboration - Encourage collaborative initiatives between academic and administrative teams (e.g., joint committees or task forces), which can foster mutual respect, understanding, and a unified institutional culture.

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