

Emotional Climate in UN Peacekeeping Organization: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

UN peacekeeping missions involve the participation of military personnel from different countries, and all the interactions between soldiers take place in a culturally diverse military environment. Deployment in a foreign soil, away from family and home creates a lot of physical and emotional challenges for the soldiers; therefore the emotional climate of the military base gains importance. This paper aims to explore the emotional climate and the factors influencing it in a UN military organization in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Africa. The data was gathered from 5 officers of Indian Armed Forces deployed in DRC, using e-mail interviewing technique in which participants' responses were gathered using an interview schedule of open-ended questions. The findings suggest that overall a positive emotional climate of security and trust exists in the organization. Political context, commanders' practices and the relationships among soldiers are the factors influencing and shaping the emotional climate. Future research into these factors is important to help identify positive climate practices (PEC) which have several implications for the soldiers' performance, motivation, and well-being.

Keywords: *Emotional Climate, Peacekeeping, Emotional Well-being.*

The United Nations (UN) has been deploying military personnel from all different nations for peacekeeping operations since 1948 when UN military observers were authorized by the Security Council for deployment to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The idea of peacekeeping is to maintain and restore peace in the places where conflict and non-violence are prevalent, and the peacekeeping soldier is expected to cooperate with other members coming from different nations and with civilian personnel of international assistance organizations (Hundt, 1996). The interaction and cooperation among these peacekeeping soldiers, coming from different nations, doesn't just take place in

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different geographical conditions (such as the terrain, climate, and weather) but also in a socio-emotional context.

Emotional Climate

Emotional Climate is defined as “the predominant collective emotions generated through the social interaction of a group’s members in a particular milieu” (de Rivera, 2007). The “predominant collective emotions” could be of fear which dictators use to ensure order or hierarchy, or it could be of sorrow when the nation struggles through a terrorist attack, or it could be of security the employees feel in an organization. In other words, emotional climate reflects individual’s perception of how the majority of others would be feeling in a particular situation or environment (de Rivera, 1992). Moreover, these climates are the product of social interactions and relationships between group members and are relatively stable over time (Schneider, Parkington, and Buxton, 1980; Evans et al., 2009).

Though emotional climate is an interesting concept, it is relatively difficult one to measure objectively. One way to assess the emotional climate of an organization is by exploring the relationships people have or how they seem to relate with one another. In this context, the climate is about the emotional relationships between people in a society or organization and is indirectly understood through questions about how ‘most’ people feel. Emotional climates can also be labeled using names of emotions such as fear or joy, or it could be labeled as solidarity or hostility referring to the emotional relationships among people (de Rivera, 1992). These labels are descriptive of the emotional climate existing in an organization or society.

Emotional climates are influenced by number of factors including prior information - objective facts, institutional arrangements, political policies, culture, and collective rituals. They are also shaped by the leader practices that create shared experiences and influence the emotions experienced by the individual when he/she thinks and acts in a public space in which the emotional climate operates (de Rivera, Kurrien, & Olsen, 2007).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The present study is grounded in the notion that emotional climates exist and current emotional climates can be experienced by individuals in a given environment (Schein, 2000). Emotional Climates are important because they have the power to influence moods and emotional well-being of military personnel. This study aims to explore the emotional climate of a UN peacekeeping organization dealing with peacekeeping operation in Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa.

METHOD

The participants in this study were Indian officers currently deployed in Democratic Republic of Congo for UN peacekeeping mission. Data was collected through an interview schedule of open-ended questions, aimed at exploring different attributes of the emotional climate like group social climate, the extent of emotion sharing, attitudinal climate, the climate of

opinion, organizational climate, relational climate etc., which was later e-mailed to the participants.

The data from the interview was analyzed using a qualitative/social constructionist approach. Social constructionism assumes that knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but is in some sense ideological, political and permeated with values (Schwandt, 2003). It provides a useful way of understanding emotional climate as they are socially constructed and perceived by individuals and indicates how individuals think the majority of others are feeling in the group's current situation (de Rivera, 1992a).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Climate of Security

The climate of security or trust is created when there is freedom to speak to one another, publicly discuss issues and there is a feeling of trust and cooperation among people (de Rivera, 1992). The responses from the officers indicated a climate of security/ trust in the organization. Describing the relationships among soldiers as essential, 34 years old officer M explained:

“The environment is very encouraging, and soldiers are always trusting & enthusiastic. More so, it is also evident while interacting with troops from other country's contingents as well.”

It should be understood however, that military organization operates according to certain rules and norms. According to Ruth Benedict (1970), a differentiating factor between secure and insecure culture is the presence of customs and rules which ensures that actions benefitting the individual also benefit the group. The consonance between advantages to the individual and advantages to the group was called "synergy" (Benedict, 1970). This factor of secure culture was reflected in 39 years old officer a response as he shared:

“The extent of emotion sharing between soldiers of different nations develops gradually depending on number of interaction. However, the spirit of cooperation is omnipresent, and it is there right from the beginning. The same is evident when joint operations against rebel groups are launched which involve forces of different countries. The operations exhibit great amount of synergy.”

Interestingly, the norm of cooperation is an inherent part of every military organization. Such norms indicate more about how people should feel in a particular situation rather than the presence of felt emotion (Fernández-Dols, Carrera, Oceja, & Hurtado de Mendoza, 2007). In other words, norms to cooperate should facilitate a climate of trust.

Referent of Interest: The Political Context

One of the essential aspects of positive emotional climate is the freedom to express one's opinion without the fear of offending anyone. The responses were generally in favor of a

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climate that was conducive to the expression of opinions freely. For instance 34 years old officer M opined:

"The UN environment provides greater degree of freedom in voicing one's concerns and views to all observers as well as staff equally well. Even the independence to act and react as per the mandate is given. For instance, in conferences held at HQ even the junior most person can say how he/she feels and due weightage is given, as per the ability and experience of person is given and not due to his rank and appointment. All are considered as equals in the team"

However, despite having such environment, for some, the freedom to voice one's opinion is not an easy luxury as it seems. As explained by 41 years old officer V:

"In an international environment, a person has to be diplomatic whilst expressing his opinions/ ideas/ views as he is representing his country and keeping in view of safeguarding the interest of nations, the views/ opinion are framed in consonance with the charter of duties/ mandate to be followed by the nation."

In a multinational organization like the UN, soldiers are simply not just representing themselves as UN peacekeepers, they are also representing their respective countries, and therefore there is a sense of responsibility among soldiers to protect their nation's pride and honor. It is possible that this awareness of the political context is mediating the soldier's perception of the climate and how they are getting affected by it. Another 30 years old officer P responded:

"It is not easy to express one's opinion as working in a mesh of international political context has to be kept at the back of the mind. Peacekeeping soldiers are also international diplomatic emissaries and have to behave accordingly."

These differences in perception of climate, however, suggests that though there might be a collective global climate but the perception of climate is largely based upon a choosing a locus or referent of interest (de Rivera & Paez, 2007). Here the locus of climate might be different for the soldiers who feel apprehensive about expressing their opinion with focus on the political context which results in a different experience of the climate. Therefore, the elements of the climate concept may differ across situations as they are based on a locus or referent (Burke, Borucki, & Kaufman, 2002).

Leader Behaviors

The behavior and practices of leader or commander have a great impact on the leader-follower relationship and the emotional climate of the organization. Describing the soldiers-commanders relationships, 39 years old officer A responded:

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“The soldiers and commanders both have mutual feeling of compassion towards each other. The leaders are always forthcoming to address the needs of troops and it is evident in both cases, where commanders are in direct command of troops as well as the civilian higher ups of various UN agencies.”

It is important to note that soldier in peacekeeping missions face a lot of emotional challenges and problems away from their home and families. The commanders’ consideration of soldiers’ physical as well as emotional well-being has a positive effect on soldiers’ motivation and well-being. This was also reflected in 34 years old officer M response:

“Commanders at all levels are understanding and show sympathetic attitude towards troops even the seniors/commanders from other nations are always concerned, this creates a feeling of trust & faith among troops”

The commander’s behavior here reflects positive emotional climate (PEC) practices that shape a climate where leaders take into consideration the emotional needs of the employees, and which subsequently influence employees’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Ozcelik et al., 2008).

Interpersonal Relationships, Emotional Challenges and Coping

The task of being peacekeepers on a foreign soil doesn’t just come with physical but also with a lot of emotional challenges. Some of the emotional challenges reported by the officers were prolonged separation from family and friends, change of cultural and societal setup and the change of professional role of being a peacekeeper. It was also observed that spending time with colleague and troops and focusing on the interpersonal relationship among soldiers was identified as a major way of coping with these challenges. As 39 years old officer A responded:

“The better is the camaraderie between troops the better will be the operational effectiveness and also the day to day life.”

Similarly, 34 years old officer M acknowledged:

“It is the most essential part as soldiers depend upon each other for their emotional support.”

Considering that emotional climates are partly created by people’s need to talk and share their emotional experiences with others (Rime, 2007), the interdependence between soldiers for emotional support can be seen as a characteristic of a positive emotional climate. Predictably, emotional climates also affect person’s moods and emotions (Rime, Paez, Basabe, & Martinez, 2009). Therefore, a positive emotional climate, where officers share their emotional experiences and seek emotional support from one another, has a positive effect on officers’ mood and emotions. This positive mood and emotions can also aid in the officers’

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work performance as broaden and built theory suggests that positive emotions broaden individual's cognition, attention, and action, and build abiding physical, social, intellectual and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, apart from helping the peacekeeping officers to cope with emotional challenges, the positive interpersonal relationships are also important to effective peacekeeping (Furnari, 2004).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The major limitation of this study is the e-mail interviewing technique used to gather responses from overseas. Although e-mail interview enables the researcher to study a sample that is often difficult or impossible to reach or interview face-to-face, it limits the richness of the collected data as e-mail interviews do not have the option of direct probing which is an important way to collect in-depth data. The relatively small sample size can be a limitation. Future research into this direction can be done by conducting face-to-face interviews with larger sample size. Also, the role of culture in shaping the emotional climate of a multicultural peacekeeping organization can be studied extensively by taking interview of peacekeepers belonging to different nations as people's emotional concepts are culturally constructed, and different cultures cultivate different emotional relationships among people. More importantly, in the context of an organization, emotional climate appears to be a significant contributor to overall staff morale, performance, and productivity; therefore, research should be directed at identifying the various positive emotional climate practices (PEC) as it can help stimulate personal growth, creativity and professional development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was aimed to explore the emotional climate of UN peacekeeping organization and identify the possible factors influencing and shaping it. The findings suggest that there is a climate of trust and security among peacekeeping officers. This perception of the emotional climate among soldiers appears to be mediated and shaped by factors like political context, leader behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. The study also suggests the need for future research in identifying Positive Emotional Climate (PEC) practices as it has numerous implications on the peacekeeping officers' motivation and emotional well-being.

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