

Organizational climate, culture, capacity, and change:

a conceptual and practical review for understanding organizational context and evidence-based practice

Virginia R. Mckay, MA

■ Organizational context, has a prominent influence on the utilization, implementation, and sustainment of evidence-based (EB) practices within public health systems. Organizational climate, culture, capacity, and readiness for change are concepts commonly used to characterize organizational context (Butterfoss et al., 2008). Major overlap exists among these concepts and many theoretical models have been put forth, making it difficult for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to distinguish the utility of one concept over another. A cross examination of these concepts through a conceptual review is valuable.

Objective

1. Discuss four prominent organizational-level concepts: organizational climate, culture, capacity and readiness for change.
2. Outline distinguishing features and areas of overlap.
3. Review theoretical models and assessment tools associated with each of these concepts.

Discussion

■ Each concept embodies a slightly different orientation to the organizational context. Specific theoretical models and associated assessment tools are available for each concept (See Table). Many specific models incorporate similar elements (e.g., leadership or staff attitudes). In addition, many models without instruments and instruments without models have been developed. This resource provides a useful review for those wishing to assess organizational context, which may, in turn, improve utilization of EB practices. However, a systematic review of organizational-level concepts, theoretical models, assessment tools, and applications in practice is needed.

Concepts Characterizing Organizational Context

Culture & Climate	Capacity	Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture: Underlying shared values, norms, and behavior of an organization, often carried out unconsciously. • Climate: The unique mood or personality of an organization. • Frequently addressed together, captures social aspects of an organization. • Example models and tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Culture and Climate and the Organization Social Context Measurement System (OCS; Glisson et al. 2008; Hemmelgarn et al., 2006). • Implementation Climate and the Implementation Climate Scale (ICS; Ehrhart et al., 2014; Ehrhart et al., 2013). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resources needed to deliver services. • Captures physical, human, and financial aspects of an organization. • Example models and tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizational Capacity (Hanusaik et al., 2007). ○ Non-profit Capacity and the Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT; McKinsey & Company, 2001). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A willingness at the organizational level to implement new practices. • Captures social aspects at a point in time in an organization. • Example models and tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Functioning and Readiness for Change (TCU-ORC; Lehman et al., 2002; Simpson et al., 2002). • Promoting Action on Research in Health Services (PARIHS) Framework and the Organizational Readiness for Change Assessment (ORCA; Helfrich et al., 2009; Kitson et al., 1998).

Implications for Public Health Policy and Practice

■ The prominent distinctions among these four concepts provide theoretical clarity for researchers interested in understanding the influence of organizational context on EB practice. This conceptual review may also help practitioners and policy makers apply these concepts and utilize assessment tools to identify existing strengths and areas for improvement within their own organizational contexts.