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Psychological Climate and Work Attitudes: The Importance of Telling the Right Story

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By Bonnie S. O'Neill and Lucy A. Arendt

In this field study, the authors explore how choosing one context over another influences both research results and implications. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the authors examine context from both an organizational and a business-unit perspective by studying relationships between five psychological climate variables and outcomes of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave. Results show different contextual influences between the organization and two business units, suggesting that different bundles of psychological climate variables yield similar outcomes depending on the context studied. These results bolster the contention that researchers need to identify the right context in field research.

Rousseau and Fried (2001) argue that we must provide a richer picture of our research settings and their influence on the variables being examined. As suggested by Johns (2001), "Context often operates in such a way as to provide constraints on or opportunities for behavior and attitudes in organizational settings" (p. 32). In brief, context matters. We argue that assessing the *right* context is as critical as recognizing that context matters. Failure to understand the context in which individuals behave can yield inaccurate or partial understanding, jeopardizing the utility and generalizability of research results (Johns, 2001). For example, researchers may gather data from only one organization assuming, perhaps incorrectly, that any intraorganizational variation will be less than any interorganizational variation. Failure to understand the relevant context may also result in ineffective managerial prescriptions and behaviors. Examining salient contextual factors can help managers "tease out" and understand the missing links that explain how individual activity results in different individual and organizational outcomes (Johns, 2006).

In this article, we contrast two contextual viewpoints on familiar work outcomes. First, we explore whether our focal organization is homogeneous with respect to five contextual variables identified by upper management as salient. The full sample is not split along contextual lines, and influences related to local leadership and general daily operations are assumed irrelevant. This contextual view coincides with Ashforth's (1985, p. 841) view of climate as a shared inference or perception about aspects of the work environment that are considered psychologically important to workers. Next, we examine whether the same climate variables

have trivial or more substantial effects on common work outcomes when a different contextual lens is used. Specifically, we split the sample to match the two business units to which employees belong. Here, a more symbolic interactionist approach, in which employees help shape each other's perceptions of the work climate, is employed to illustrate the emergent influence of local leadership and attainment of profit goals (Ashforth, 1985). For both viewpoints, we examine job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave as multiple dependent variables to capture the "differential meaning that variations in context can occasion" (Johns, 2006, p. 402).

Johns (2006) suggests that both omnibus contextualization (e.g., who, where, when, why) and discrete contextualization (e.g., task, social, and physical) can result in a host of countervailing effects. We sought to empirically examine whether discrete contextual variables examined both at the broader, more general omnibus context of the larger organization and at the individual level might tell different stories when bundled together to explain various work attitudes (Johns, 2006). To that end, psychological climate variables are used to compare and contrast employees' perceptions of the work context (Brown & Leigh, 1996).

The decision to examine the context of employees' business units was rooted in both practical and theoretical concerns. In terms of the practical, interviews with organizational leaders revealed that many employees thought of themselves as belonging to their unit first and to the organization second. In terms of the theoretical, research suggests that departments within large organizations may have different structures (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Because our focal organization is large, it may seem obvious to assume important differences between units. However, what is not so obvious—and what we sought to explore—is whether these differences result in substantial influences yielding markedly different outcomes or whether contextual factors considered salient to the organization prove relatively trivial (Johns, 2006). The answer has implications for both rigorous theory development and effective managerial behavior.

Contextualizing the Organization

We used semi-structured interviews of three individuals at the executive or next level down to understand the focal organization's context, augmented with secondary sources (e.g., cases, the organization's annual report). The individuals were affiliated with the two business units that composed this study's full sample. Although the business units were in the United States, the reporting lines for the interviewed individuals were in both the United States and Europe.

The study's full sample is part of a global organization with about 220,000 employees. It is located in the United States and comprises two physically co-located divisions. The overall organization is run by European leaders from Sweden, Germany, Finland, and Switzerland. Executive leadership was slashed in the mid-1990s to give business units autonomy and accountability for increasing sales. An important contextualization of time to note (Johns, 2006) is that shortly before the data collection for this study, the organization's CEO and president stepped down from the top leadership role. As CEO, this individual developed a successful organization in which a matrix design operated. Its more than 1,300 divisions throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States operated as freestanding profit centers. Mergers and acquisitions were constant, resulting in an ever-changing internal environment. The next CEO attempted to shift to a "one-team concept" to reduce intraorganizational competition. The matrix structure was pervasive, however, and it became impossible to shift how 220,000 employees worked. This individual resigned after approximately 18 months (approximately 1 year after this data collection). At the writing of this article, the matrix structure remains intact. According to Johns (2006), this structural conflict suggests potential countervailing effects arising from task contextualization.

The organization describes itself as decentralized, with a stated goal of serving the customer at all times. Determining how best to set priorities and goals is left to business-unit leaders, who are expected to foster an entrepreneurial environment in which employees do whatever it takes to serve customers. All employees, including those at the lowest levels of each business unit, are encouraged to determine individually how to accomplish their tasks. Everyone is expected to want a high degree of autonomy. Bonuses and promotions follow success.

Interviewees viewed the units as distinct contexts. Thus, our qualitative research suggested that the answer to the question, "Is the full sample, what we're calling the overall organization, the right context to assess and describe?" was "No." However, the question of which context—the overall organization or the individual business units—might be the right context is both academic and empirical. On one hand, our interviewees saw the two units as facing distinct challenges, thereby suggesting distinct contexts. On the other hand, both units are part of the same overall organization, with the same overall mission, and within close proximity to each other, thereby suggesting one over-arching context. Thus, the potential for countervailing influences directed our attention toward empirical examination of multiple contextual effects.

To answer what seemed the natural follow-up question, "Does business-unit affiliation influence the array of contextual variables found to be significantly related to the study's work outcomes?" we chose five psychological climate variables identified by local leadership as a set

of contextual variables expected to relate to the study's three outcomes (Johns, 2006). We were not interested in whether unit affiliation (treated as a dichotomous variable: Unit 1 or Unit 2) would yield statistically different results for job satisfaction, affective commitment, or intent to leave. Rather, our follow-up question reflects the view that each business unit's context comprises a constellation of factors that influence each outcome beyond average scores for that outcome.¹ We contextualize the organization's climate using an average of overall perceptions related to job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave and compare it to business-unit climate effects representing how those average perceptions are acquired.

In the next section, we describe the two business units as a basis for developing a discrete contextual picture of each unit. From this, we develop hypotheses related to outcomes for the organization as a whole (i.e., the full sample) that we contrast with unit-specific hypotheses.

Contextualizing the Business Units

Business Unit 1, The "Aligned Unit"

Employees sell large, automated machines and are reported to be "self-directed." They initially sold automated machines only but began selling "total business solutions" to customers to serve them better, despite pressure from European leadership to "just sell the machines." Although sales approval is given locally, finalizing bids requires coordination with an external profit center that frequently rejects the bids. Thus, there is uncertainty about the actual level of autonomy held by local employees. Struggles for control among the U.S. leadership are visible to employees. When the external profit center's leader began aggressively making decisions for both groups, there was confusion in the local chain of command. This led to the local unit leader's resignation and the relocation of the local unit to the external site.

Despite these changes, employees in this business unit view their work environment as relatively relaxed and close-knit. Employees serve their customers well, generate sales, and have growth opportunities. New hires are eager to prove themselves. Employees are proud and believe they are attached to a winning group. According to one interviewee, "No one messed with these guys." Confidence in their abilities is reinforced by recruiters who regularly court them.

Unit leadership empowers employees to make customer-focused decisions. Managers tell employees that they will do what they can to "buffer them from [leadership shifts and demands from] Europe." Despite the turmoil, sales are exceptional within this business unit. Bonuses are plentiful and employees believe they receive the "best pay in the industry." Because of its sales success, this unit is "aligned" with the overall organization and its focus on

profitability.

Business Unit 2, The “Misaligned Unit”

Products sold within this second business unit are manufactured in and shipped from European facilities, creating a time lag between order placement and receipt. Despite the overall organization’s philosophy of decentralized decision making, sales representatives in this unit are at the mercy of people and activities outside their locus of decision-making control, resulting in considerable frustration and increasing the likelihood of self-serving behavior (Johns, 1999).

This unit’s sales have been mixed for more than a decade. Projections for growth are flat. Thus, this unit is “misaligned” with the overall organization’s focus on profitability. The head of this unit reports to nine different bosses, more than half of whom are in Europe. Employees in this unit are not shielded from the negative consequences accruing from the frequent changes in U.S. and European leadership, as are the employees in the other business unit. This results in greater uncertainty and, frequently, competing demands that are difficult to reconcile.

Top management in this unit explained the difficulty in meeting the demands of U.S. customers due to R&D being located in Europe. Although dissatisfied and frustrated with the current processes and the inability to effectively maximize in-house talent, leaders touted employees’ success at developing creative alternatives to meet customer demands.

Psychological Climate and Work Attitudes

Psychological climate is how employees perceive their organizational environment (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Being descriptive in nature (rather than affective or evaluative), it is a particularly appropriate representation of several discrete context dimensions (e.g., task and social context; Johns, 2006). Psychological climate captures the meaningful psychological representations made by individuals relative to the structures, processes, and events that occur in the organization. Parker and his colleagues (2003) note that most climate research is focused on aggregate studies (i.e., organizational climate). Yet individuals leave organizations; work units rarely, if ever, leave en masse. And it is often said that individuals leave bosses rather than organizations (Tulgan, 2004), making individual-level contextualization even more compelling.

Context is aptly captured by psychological climate, because it helps individuals make cognitive sense of the current state of their world when it is perceptually different from what was expected (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). What distinguishes it from collective climate and makes it useful for examining context perceptions is that psychological climate does not require individuals within work units to agree in their climate perceptions (Joyce & Slocum, 1984). Jones

and James (1979) suggest that because perceptual data reflect individual characteristics in addition to situational events, data aggregations can yield erroneous inferences. Practically speaking, managers cannot know if inferences about employee perceptions are erroneous unless they are examined. Also, because job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave are individual-level outcomes, using aggregate measures of climate for their prediction is inappropriate. And, as discussed above, we do not compare how average scores for these outcomes vary between the two business units, as that is more properly captured by the organizational unit inherent in organizational climate (see Glick, 1985). Rather, we assess employee perceptions of events resulting from context-specific influences within each business unit and how they may vary from shared meanings thought to exist organization-wide. Like McMurray (2003), we quantitatively assess climate perceptions and supplement our understanding with qualitative data about the organization. The climate dimensions identified as most salient to local leadership in this study include autonomy, pressure, perceived structure, self-expression, and trust.

The following narrative, in which we articulate our study's hypotheses, is organized to reflect our interest in discovering whether the organization overall or the two business units represents the right context for our research questions. Following Johns's (2006) conceptualization of a more general, omnibus context, we examine the "organization as context" by distinguishing these hypotheses with the lowercase *a* for each psychological climate variable and the three outcomes (e.g., Hypothesis 1a). In examining the more discrete contextual dimensions, we expect to see the various climate variables bundle together differently to yield the work attitudes (Johns, 2006). Therefore, the "unit as context" hypotheses are represented by the lowercase *b* and *c* for each psychological climate variable (e.g., Hypothesis 1b for the Aligned Unit, and Hypothesis 1c for the Misaligned Unit).

Autonomy

Autonomy is the degree to which individuals can set their own work procedures, goals, and priorities (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991). A recent meta-analysis found autonomy to be positively related to job satisfaction (Parker et al., 2003). Although individual dispositional characteristics may influence job satisfaction, it tends to be maintained by malleable environmental characteristics. Because the focal organization actively asserts its emphasis on decentralization (Kets de Vries & Florent-Treacy, 1999), individuals who determine their own work processes should be more satisfied. Individuals who do not determine their own work processes should experience cognitive dissonance made more acute by the organization's stated focus on

decentralization. Being denied something that is promised results in perceptions of psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1995) and may direct focus on that missing “something.”

There is a strong negative correlation between job satisfaction and intention to leave (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). From this, we predict that individuals with a high degree of autonomy report less intent to leave the organization. Research also suggests that autonomy has a strong, direct relationship with affective commitment (Cohen, 1992; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Parker et al., 2003), which is employees’ emotional attachment and involvement with the organization. Affective commitment is frequently examined in studies examining job satisfaction, and it is correlated with withdrawal intentions and turnover behavior (cf. Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Because this study’s participants are all located in the United States, their affective commitment is most likely based on a U.S. orientation rather than the cosmopolitan orientation of the organization’s global operations (Cohen, 1992). We argue that when considering commitment, employees are most likely responding on the basis of their commitment to local management (Meyer & Allen, 1997). In this case, we expect employees to want to stay with managers whose actions are consistent with those stated in the organization’s mission. Therefore, employees should report greater levels of affective commitment when autonomy is high.

Hypothesis 1a: In the organizational context, autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Dickson, Resick, and Hanges (2006) acknowledge that researchers are unlikely to find perfect agreement on climate perceptions within an organization. In the present study, although stated organizational values include doing whatever it takes to please the customer, constant reorganization of upper management has created confusion and differing perceptions over how much autonomy employees really have. In the Aligned Unit, the unit’s managers tend to shield employees from the chaos of constant reorganization and encourage them to make their own decisions. Employees feel taken care of by managers and develop close relationships with each other. Here, we argue that autonomy is likely to be a nonissue yielding trivial or nonsignificant effects when bundled with other climate dimensions (e.g., structure).

Among employees in the Misaligned Unit, similar relationships between the employees and managers do not exist. These employees struggle to manage the matrix structure’s myriad bosses. Uncertainty and contradictory cues from the structure cause considerable ambiguity, yielding more self-serving behavior (Johns, 1999). Despite organizational directives to generate sales, frustration at the red tape created by having major R&D operations in Europe may cause

these employees to focus on asserting personal autonomy to reduce threat and increase positive individual outcomes (Johns, 1999). Among employees in the Misaligned Unit, then, perceived autonomy is likely to positively predict job satisfaction and affective commitment and to negatively affect intent to leave when considered as part of a contextual bundle.

Hypothesis 1b: In the Aligned Unit, autonomy is unrelated to job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave.

Hypothesis 1c: In the Misaligned Unit, autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Pressure

Pressure is defined in terms of employees' perception of time demands for completion of tasks relative to existing performance standards (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991). Swift and Campbell (1998) found that pressure significantly predicted job satisfaction when it was considered manageable. Similarly, Strutton, Chowdhury, and Pelton (1997) found that excessive levels of externally imposed constraints resulted in perceptions of powerlessness. Accordingly, we predict that individuals who perceive the workplace as relatively relaxed and who are able to complete their tasks experience higher job satisfaction and less intent to leave.

Meyer and Allen (1997) suggest a negative correlation between affective commitment and stress. Because stress is likely to be associated with perceptions of pressure, affective commitment also should be negative when pressure is perceived to be too high. In the current organization, the availability of other employment opportunities should result in employees' perceiving less desire to stay with the organization when the work environment is too stressful.

Hypothesis 2a: In the organizational context, pressure is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.²

Like autonomy, pressure can yield enhanced work outcomes (Swift & Campbell, 1998). Employees in the Aligned Unit report a relaxed environment and the ability to meet customer demands. Because demands are reportedly made clear through realistic job previews, pressure is likely to energize employees. The close-knit environment, with managers buffering employees and intercepting obstacles, most likely enhances affective commitment. Gould (1991) suggests that managers can be the conduit for providing a critical link between strategic goals and personal rewards. In the context of the Aligned Unit, then, leaders work hard to help employees find personal meaning and rewards in their work. Being considered part of a winning team likely results in a strong desire to stick with fellow employees through any difficulties that may arise.

Employees in the Misaligned Unit are also socialized to expect constant demands. At the same time, failure yields greater focus on meeting sales targets at all costs. Johns (1999) suggests that threats to individuals' identity can provoke self-serving behavior. Here, the relentless failure to meet sales goals likely drives individuals toward self-serving, competitive behaviors. Pressure results in the lack of collaboration among sales representatives, because such behavior is not beneficial. Therefore, the pressure for these employees is likely to be unrelated to either job satisfaction or affective commitment. If pressure perceptions shift (as they might in such a volatile internal environment), employees working within this business unit are likely to be even more self-centered in meeting sales targets. If a better situation presents itself, employees may be lured to "jump ship." Therefore, we argue that employees in the Misaligned Unit report greater intent to leave, as stress results in self-serving distortions arising from increased threats to their identity (Johns, 1999). When considered as part of a contextual bundle, we argue the following.

Hypothesis 2b: In the Aligned Unit, pressure is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Hypothesis 2c: In the Misaligned Unit, pressure is unrelated to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Structure

The amount of structure in the work environment is likely to affect individual behavior (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Whether individuals perceive the amount of structure as constraining their behavior or providing opportunities for goal achievement is a matter of perception (Johns, 2006). By definition, an appropriate amount of structure is construed to constitute clear goals, defined tasks, and known lines of authority (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Although originally considered a dimension of organizational climate (i.e., not psychological climate), any dimension that provides a psychologically meaningful interpretation of the situation is appropriate for examining individual perceptions (James, Hater, Gent, & Bruni, 1978). The amount of perceived structure encountered in achieving performance goals, although not entirely sufficient to "ensure contextual impact on organizational behavior" (Johns, 2006, p. 387), was identified by leaders in this study as a salient feature to be considered as part of a bundle of situational features.

In the organizational context, we predict that structure is closely linked to satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave. When employees perceive an appropriate amount of structure (i.e., enough to minimize uncertainty and inefficiency but not so much bureaucracy that it

hampers creativity and flexibility), there is greater job satisfaction, more commitment, and less intent to leave. In this organization, there are few layers of bureaucracy, and individuals are encouraged to be entrepreneurial (Kets de Vries & Florent-Treacy, 1999). Decentralization, the variety of skills individuals use, and the degree of autonomy and challenge all tend to be positively correlated with job satisfaction and affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). In this purportedly decentralized organization, employees are expected to turn to one another for answers. We predict that employees perceiving appropriate structure (i.e., those who understand their goals and the related tasks) are likely to prefer addressing uncertainty by capitalizing on strong colleague networks (Johns, 1999). In addition, Arthur (1994) found that manufacturing employees in decentralized contexts with formal participation mechanisms were more motivated and committed to the organization. Therefore, employees may have fewer intentions to leave, preferring to remain with their knowledgeable and respected colleagues.

Hypothesis 3a: In the organizational context, structure is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Dean, Yoon, and Susman (1992) found that firms operating with advanced manufacturing technology (AMT) tend to be both formalized and decentralized. The Aligned Unit operates with high levels of AMT and decentralized decision making. Managers remind employees that they have the discretion needed to meet sales goals by doing what it takes to serve customers and that managers will use their leverage to support their efforts. Goals are clear and obstacles to goal achievement are removed by management. Consistent with Ambrose and Schminke (2003), we suggest that such organic structures yield satisfaction, especially when decentralization is prominent and salient. Consequently, because of the emphasis placed on decentralization in the Aligned Unit, we argue that when considered as part of the bundle of contextual features, positive structure perceptions positively influence satisfaction and commitment. In addition, because skills in this highly automated context are perceived to be valuable and are rewarded both with collegial respect and above-market wages, individuals are more likely to remain.

A more mechanistic structure exists in the less automated Misaligned Unit. Here, sales representatives are constrained by European structures so different from their own that the locus of decision making is believed to be outside their purview. Sales policies and practices are not seen as malleable by those in the Misaligned Unit, and perceptions surrounding these structural constraints create a context in which customer complaints are commonplace. Although inconsistent with the organization's stated decentralized approach, such perceived constraints are not likely to yield either satisfaction or commitment, as they are essentially a nonissue within

this work context. To the extent that employees might report positive perceptions of the structure, it is unlikely to play a prominent role in their satisfaction, affective commitment, or intent to leave, particularly when considered as part of a contextual bundle that includes other, more salient psychological climate variables (e.g., autonomy). Thus, we predict that structure perceptions in this unit will not be significantly related to any of the work outcomes.

Hypothesis 3b: In the Aligned Unit, structure is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Hypothesis 3c: In the Misaligned Unit, structure is unrelated to job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave.

Self-Expression

Freedom of expression in the workplace allows employees to express the unique elements of their personality (Kiewitz, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Castro, 2002). Employees who express individuality without fear of negative sanctions feel psychologically safe (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Likewise, individuals who feel safe enough to express their individuality experience greater job satisfaction (Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000) and greater commitment (Kiewitz et al., 2002). Although a detailed discussion of personality traits is outside this study's scope, individuals hired into this organization are both competitive and achievement oriented. Brown, Cron, and Slocum (1998) found an interaction between competitiveness and competitive psychological climate that influenced individuals' self-set goals. Therefore, we argue that believing that the work context offers opportunities to capitalize on one's unique personality results in positive outcomes. In this organization, the official organizational stance asserts that behaviors that successfully meet customer needs will yield formal rewards. As a result, opportunities for self-expression that result in increased sales and customer loyalty are likely to result in greater job satisfaction and commitment and fewer turnover intentions (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994).

Hypothesis 4a: In the organizational context, self-expression is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

In the Aligned Unit, opportunities for self-expression are apparent in descriptions of employees making their own decisions and being successful. Although there is pressure from European leaders to push sales of stand-alone machines, local managers support employees' use of creative behavior to sell total business solutions. Brown and Leigh (1996) argue that employees who feel psychologically safe enough to inject their "personalities, creativity, feelings,

and self-concepts into their work roles” (p. 360) are likely to identify more closely with role expectations. And self-expression was positively correlated with commitment and negatively correlated with turnover intentions (Kiewitz et al., 2002). In this unit, then, we expect management’s overt support of self-expression to yield increased job satisfaction and affective commitment and reduced intent to leave when considered as part of a contextual bundle.

For the Misaligned Unit, R&D operations are maintained in Europe, yielding unwieldy processes different from those in the Aligned Unit. For individuals working in this unit, there is little benefit in actively asserting individuality, because customer complaints actually increase when sales representatives deviate from standardized procedures. For these employees, we do not expect to see a significant relationship between self-expression and job satisfaction and affective commitment, as other contextual features are likely to be more salient, producing marked effects (Johns, 2006). Given the constraints on self-expression and the influence of other contextual features, we also predict that individuals seeking greater opportunities for self-expression than the limited ones here may desire opportunities elsewhere.

Hypothesis 4b: In the Aligned Unit, self-expression is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Hypothesis 4c: In the Misaligned Unit, self-expression is unrelated to job satisfaction and affective commitment. Self-expression is negatively related to intent to leave.

Trust

Trust was a contextual feature of particular salience to leaders in this organization. It is defined as employee beliefs about being able to communicate with superiors with the expectation that the integrity of such communications will not be violated (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991). Including this view of trust ensures that we are examining perceptions of managerial trustworthiness and the resulting influence on attitudes rather than classifying context based solely on business-unit affiliation and effects on outcomes. Such distinction is key in that it contextualizes what is perceptually important to individuals as something that can also be lost if trust is violated (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Perceptions of trust influence satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave. Positive interactions between employees and managers lead to increased trust (Brashear, Boles, Bellenger, & Brooks, 2003). Even when controlling for leader–member exchange effects, perceptions of trust significantly explain feelings of safety and increased job satisfaction (Cunningham & MacGregor, 2000; Wech, 2002). In this organization, effectively managing the matrix design requires extensive communication and the development

of trust at all levels (Kets de Vries & Florent-Treacy, 1999). Similarly, the global makeup of the business requires managers to honestly convey decisions and messages. Accordingly, we expect high trust to positively influence job satisfaction and commitment. Knowing that trust takes time and effort to cultivate, individuals who trust their leaders will have fewer intentions to leave.

Hypothesis 5a: In the organizational context, trust is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

In the Aligned Unit, despite power struggles described earlier between this unit and the external profit center, leaders have integrity and follow through on commitments. Employees rely on their leaders for honest and sound advice, which positively influences trust perceptions (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991). Such positive perceptions of trust tend to increase job satisfaction and affective commitment (Brashear et al., 2003). We also expect a negative relationship between trust and intent to leave because of these positive managerial interactions.

In the Misaligned Unit, the frustration from having so many bosses drives employees to engage in more self-serving behavior (Johns, 1999). The countervailing influences between the organization's focus on decentralization and the unit's actual lack of decentralization likely aggravate negative perceptions of this unit's managers. The ability to rely on individuals keeping their word and fulfilling obligations is an aspect of trust called honesty-based credibility (Brashear et al., 2003). To the extent that employees in this unit trust their managers, it may be that they trust them to behave consistently, even if they behave badly, because the unit has operated as it has for some time. We assert that, when bundled with other contextual influences, managerial trust is not likely to significantly influence attitudes in this unit.

Organization-wide policies dictate rewards contingent on strong sales, which do not require perceptions of managerial integrity. As such, it is unlikely that trust influences job satisfaction or affective commitment among employees in this unit, at least in the context of other psychological climate variables. At the same time, we expect that intent to leave will be negatively related to trust in light of other contextual influences. Effective retention requires organizations to deliver on promised rewards. Heneman and Judge (2003) argue that "failure to do so not only violates a firm expectation on the part of the employee, but also jeopardizes the potency and believability of future reward initiatives" (p. 692), including stimulating job-seeking intentions. Despite having multiple bosses, we argue that employees are likely to target more proximal sources for blame laying in the face of perceived trust violations. With the potential for other job opportunities, and despite the absence of any wrongdoing on the part of local

leadership, perceptions of mistrust are likely to be directed at local management, as they are the “intermediary between the employee and the rewards” (Heneman & Judge, 2003, p. 694).

Hypothesis 5b: In the Aligned Unit, trust is positively related to job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively related to intent to leave.

Hypothesis 5c: In the Misaligned Unit, there is no relationship between trust and job satisfaction and affective commitment. Trust is negatively related to intent to leave.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in the empirical data collection were 208 of a possible 881 employees working for a large, global manufacturing company with two business units located in the midwestern United States. Employees voluntarily completed the study’s survey on work time. No inducements were offered to encourage participation. The overall response rate was 23.6%. The response rates were 22% (101 of 457) for Unit 1–Aligned and 24% (103 of 424) for Unit 2–Misaligned. Four respondents did not indicate their unit affiliation. Of the respondents, 78% were male, and the average age was 41. Education ranged from a high school diploma to a master’s degree. Position tenure ranged from less than 1 year to 26 years, with an average of 3.7 years. There were no statistically significant differences between the sample and the full group ($N = 881$) or between the two business units.

Measures

Climate contextual variables

All climate measures were Likert-type scales with responses from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Three subscales from Koys and DeCotiis’s (1991) Psychological Climate Scale were included: Autonomy, Pressure, and Trust. An example from the four-item Autonomy scale is “You organize your work as you see best.” High scores indicate greater autonomy. Cronbach’s alpha was .71. An item from the five-item Pressure scale is “Overall, your company is a relaxed place to work.” High scores indicate less pressure. Cronbach’s alpha was .66. Two items were dropped from the scale, resulting in a three-item scale with a Cronbach’s alpha of .69. For Trust, a high score indicates greater trust in one’s boss. A sample item from the five-item Trust scale is “You can count on your boss to keep things you tell him/her confidential.” Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

Structure was measured using an eight-item scale (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). A sample item is “The jobs at your company are clearly defined and logically structured.” High scores suggest that policies and tasks are clear and facilitate goal achievement. Cronbach’s alpha was .78. Self-expression was measured using the four-item scale from Brown and Leigh’s (1996) Psychological Safety Scale. High scores indicate more freedom to express oneself. An example is “You feel free to be completely yourself at work.” Cronbach’s alpha was .74.

Work outcomes

Responses on all outcome scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Job satisfaction was measured using a five-item scale adapted from Brayfield and Rothe’s (1951) Overall Job Satisfaction Scale. Respondents indicated how satisfied they were with their overall job. Cronbach’s alpha was .85. Affective commitment was measured with Allen and Meyer’s (1990) six-item scale. Cronbach’s alpha was .82. Intent to leave the organization was assessed by a three-item scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). A sample item is “I will probably look for a new job next year.” Cronbach’s alpha was .92.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the extent to which the measures in the measurement model were distinct. We created two manifest indicators for each latent factor using up to four items from each scale (e.g., the two manifest indicators for Autonomy consisted of Items 1 and 3, and Items 2 and 4). The CFA, $c^2 = 126.89$, $df = 76$, $p < .01$, achieved excellent fit (comparative fit index [CFI] = .98, non-normed fit index [NNFI] = .98, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .06). All indicators loaded significantly on their constructs, with all standardized loadings exceeding .52 and most exceeding .80.

Because the study’s “unit as context” hypotheses differentiated between Unit 1 and 2, we next determined whether the covariance structure among the model’s constructs was invariant across the two units. The goal was to determine empirically if business-unit affiliation moderated whether and how the five psychological climate variables together affected the three work outcomes. Separate analyses were run in LISREL 8.54 for each of the three dependent variables. In the first constrained run, the structural coefficients between the exogenous and endogenous variables were constrained to be equal. In the second unconstrained run, the parameters were allowed to covary. Examination of the change in the c^2 statistic associated with each model was used to determine whether the model was invariant. Significant change in the c^2 statistic between each of the nested models was understood to indicate that the model was not invariant, meaning

that the covariance structure among the models' constructs differed depending on unit affiliation. In that case, running separate structural equation analyses for each business unit would be appropriate, enabling direct comparison of which psychological climate variables were associated with the three work outcomes and the strength of those relationships.

For each dependent variable, then, examination of the change in the c^2 statistic associated with each model was used to determine whether the model was invariant across the two units. The model change for job satisfaction was significant, $Dc^2 = 16.46$, $Ddf = 5$, $p < .01$. Likewise, the model change for affective commitment was significant, $Dc^2 = 13.24$, $Ddf = 5$, $p < .05$. Finally, the model change for intent to leave was significant, $Dc^2 = 19.00$, $Ddf = 5$, $p < .01$. From these analyses, we determined that it was appropriate to run separate structural equation analyses for each unit for each of the three dependent variables. Briefly, these analyses confirmed empirically that business-unit affiliation was a significant moderator of whether and how the five psychological climate variables together affected the three work outcomes.

The means, standard deviations, interitem reliabilities, and correlations for all variables are reported in Table 1. An examination of the correlations in Table 1, which are limited to relationships for the overall organization, suggests support for all of the study's hypotheses related to the overall organization (i.e., Hypotheses 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, and 5a). Specifically, for the overall organization, all five predictor variables are positively associated with job satisfaction and affective commitment and negatively associated with intent to leave, as predicted.

Structural equation analyses are reported next. They show the impact of each predictor variable in the context of all five predictors. As such, they represent a more robust test of the hypotheses and highlight differences in the bundle of predictors by business unit (Johns, 2006). Figures 1 through 3 show the structural equation results with job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to leave as the dependent variables, respectively. Each figure shows the structural equation parameters for the organization overall, for Unit 1—Aligned, and for Unit 2—Misaligned. Table 2 highlights all significant study results overall versus Unit 1 versus Unit 2.

The structural model with job satisfaction as the dependent variable provided an adequate fit to the overall organizational data, $c^2(36) = 53.70$, $c^2/df = 1.49$ (CFI = .99, NNFI = .98, RMSEA = .04, $R^2 = .43$). Autonomy and self-expression were positively associated with job satisfaction, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 4a. Pressure, structure, and trust were not related to job satisfaction, contrary to Hypotheses 2a, 3a, and 5a. Likewise, the structural model with job satisfaction provided an adequate fit to the Unit 1 data, $c^2(39) = 75.19$, $c^2/df = 1.93$ (CFI = .96, NNFI = .93, RMSEA = .08, $R^2 = .57$). Pressure and self-expression were positively associated with job satisfaction, supporting Hypotheses 2b and 4b. Autonomy was not significantly related to

job satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 1b. Structure and trust were not related to job satisfaction, contrary to Hypotheses 3b and 5b. Finally, the structural model with job satisfaction provided an adequate fit to the Unit 2 data, $c^2(39) = 59.44$, $c^2/df = 1.52$ (CFI = .97, NNFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, $R^2 = .42$). Autonomy was positively associated with job satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 1c. Pressure, structure, self-expression, and trust were not significantly related to job satisfaction, supporting Hypotheses 2c, 3c, 4c, and 5c.

The structural model with affective commitment as the dependent variable also provided an adequate fit to the overall data, $c^2(39) = 59.21$, $c^2/df = 1.52$ (CFI = .99, NNFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, $R^2 = .42$). Autonomy, structure, and trust were positively associated with affective commitment, supporting Hypotheses 1a, 3a, and 5a. Pressure and self-expression were not related to affective commitment, contrary to Hypotheses 2a and 4a. Likewise, the structural model with affective commitment provided an adequate fit to the Unit 1 data, $c^2(37) = 55.66$, $c^2/df = 1.50$ (CFI = .98, NNFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, $R^2 = .50$). Pressure, structure, and trust were positively associated with affective commitment, supporting Hypotheses 2b, 3b, and 5b. Autonomy was not significantly related to affective commitment, supporting Hypothesis 1b. Self-expression was not related to affective commitment, contrary to Hypothesis 4b. Finally, the structural model with affective commitment provided an adequate fit to the Unit 2 data, $c^2(39) = 28.38$, $c^2/df < 1.0$ (CFI = .99, NNFI = .99, RMSEA < .01, $R^2 = .47$). Autonomy was positively associated with affective commitment, supporting Hypothesis 1c. Pressure, structure, self-expression, and trust were not significantly related to affective commitment, supporting Hypotheses 2c, 3c, 4c, and 5c.

Finally, the structural model with intent to leave as the dependent variable provided an adequate fit to the overall data, $c^2(38) = 47.95$, $c^2/df = 1.26$ (CFI = .99, NNFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, $R^2 = .39$). Pressure, structure, and trust were negatively associated with intent to leave, supporting Hypotheses 2a, 3a, and 5a. Autonomy and self-expression were not related to intent to leave, contrary to Hypotheses 1a and 4a. Likewise, the structural model with intent to leave provided an adequate fit to the Unit 1 data, $c^2(37) = 42.74$, $c^2/df = 1.16$ (CFI = .99, NNFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, $R^2 = .63$). Autonomy was not significantly related to intent to leave, supporting Hypothesis 1b. Pressure and structure were negatively associated with intent to leave, supporting Hypotheses 2b and 3b. Self-expression and trust were not related to intent to leave, contrary to Hypotheses 4b and 5b. Finally, the structural model with intent to leave provided an adequate fit to the Unit 2 data, $c^2(39) = 50.28$, $c^2/df = 1.29$ (CFI = .98, NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .04, $R^2 = .42$). Self-expression and trust were negatively related to intent to leave, supporting Hypotheses 4c and 5c. Structure was not significantly related to intent to leave, supporting

Hypothesis 3c. Autonomy and pressure were not related to intent to leave, contrary to Hypotheses 1c and 2c.

Discussion

In general, the psychological climate dimensions in the present study were significantly associated with several important work attitudes. Below, we summarize the results from the overall organization and then discuss how context influenced employee perceptions in each unit.

Autonomy

In the overall organization, autonomy is correlated with all work attitudes as predicted. When viewed in relation to the other four psychological climate variables, autonomy is also a significant predictor of job satisfaction and affective commitment. However, it does not predict intent to leave. The relationships between autonomy and both satisfaction and affective commitment may be because of the organization's values involving an emphasis on sales and customer service. The greater the autonomy, the more employees conform to this value.

As hypothesized, autonomy does not significantly predict any attitudes within the Aligned Unit. Because employees are both empowered by local management and shielded from structural chaos, autonomy has trivial (i.e., nonsignificant) effects. Without such a buffer, however, autonomy may significantly influence work attitudes in this business unit.

In the Misaligned Unit, autonomy predicts both job satisfaction and affective commitment. As described earlier, these employees tend to work in a more self-serving manner. Extensive time lags result in frustration and a longing for autonomy. For employees reporting perceptions of greater autonomy, more satisfaction is reported, most likely because of consonance between perceived autonomy and the organization's stated decentralization. However, autonomy did not predict intent to leave, suggesting that existing satisfaction and commitment do not influence turnover intentions. As discussed below, other contextual factors are more influential.

Pressure

In the overall organization, pressure is correlated with all work attitudes, as predicted. In the presence of the other four psychological climate variables, pressure predicts intent to leave, but it does not significantly predict satisfaction or commitment. Such differences may be partially explained by the decentralized nature of the organization. Decentralization operates as a "corporate control process" that not only defines organizational goals but also allows for upward feedback on goal achievement to top management (Goold, 1991, pp. 69-70). However, successful decentralization requires that leaders intervene when adjustments are needed to meet goals. When interventions by leaders are effective, employees are likely to perceive the

context of their working environment as relatively relaxed, because they are able to complete their tasks. Being able to complete tasks may be sufficient to assuage turnover intentions but insufficient to evoke the positive feelings that lead to emotional attachment. Among all work outcomes, pressure has the lowest correlation with affective commitment. It is correlated in similar strength to other contextual variables and job satisfaction, although it is still lower. Therefore, other factors may be influencing job satisfaction that do not similarly apply to commitment perceptions.

Within the Aligned Unit, perceptions of pressure significantly predict all work outcomes. Employees view their work environment as relatively relaxed, and such perceptions are sufficiently strong to create an emotional attachment toward the organization (via local leadership), with fewer intentions to leave. Interviews revealed that employees were “proud and confident” and able to successfully meet profit goals. These statements demonstrate the emotional attachment reported via positive satisfaction and commitment. As discussed earlier, such emotional attachments typically result in fewer turnover intentions (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Within the Misaligned Unit, pressure does not predict any attitudes, although we predicted that it would be negatively associated with intent to leave. We suspect that the countervailing effects from lack of goal achievement more significantly affect work attitudes than does pressure (Johns, 2006). Whether employees here perceive their work environment to be relaxed is probably less salient than is accountability for sales. Operating in a highly competitive environment, it is likely that employees in this unit accept pressure as a natural influence, separate from any manufacturing and delivery lags.

Structure

In the overall organization, structure is correlated with all work attitudes, as predicted. When viewed in relation to the other four psychological climate variables, structure is also a significant predictor of both affective commitment and intent to leave. Attitudes are more positive when employees perceive the structure as sufficiently bureaucratic to enable goal achievement but not so bureaucratic that inefficiency is created. Although in the predicted direction, job satisfaction was not significantly predicted by structure. One explanation for the nonsignificant results may be that the decentralized nature of the organization resulted in physical distance from supervisors. Clinebell and Shadwick (2005) found that physical distance from supervisors had a negative influence on job satisfaction among bank employees located at branch locations. In the present case, structure did not predict job satisfaction within either the Aligned or Misaligned Unit. With strong management coming primarily from European sources, employees

likely experienced communication problems in attempting to achieve sales targets. Although not examined here, such difficulties may have led to greater political maneuvering.

Like the organization overall, structure predicts affective commitment and intent to leave in the Aligned Unit. Despite the relative chaos occurring within the corporate structure outside the Aligned Unit, its leadership works hard to buffer negative effects. Although satisfaction with the overall job may not result from local leadership's efforts, such shielding might explain individuals' emotional attachment to local leaders, not to their job or the organization as a whole. Not surprisingly, structure is also a strong predictor of intent to leave. Recent power struggles and a shift in the unit's structure may cause employees who see the writing on the wall to keep their employment options open while still being relatively committed to local leadership.

As hypothesized, structure does not predict any attitudes in the Misaligned Unit. We suspect that in the bundle of contextual influences, autonomy explains work attitudes better. Nothing in our interviews suggested that this group was buffered from the corporate chaos. Given the universal difficulty that employees in this unit have with securing their customers' products from the European manufacturing facilities, it seems likely that everyone in this unit is similarly frustrated with structure. Rather than perceiving frustration as a result of nonhuman structural elements, employees in this unit may focus their frustration on their European leaders, as evidenced in the positive relation between autonomy and more emotion-laden outcomes.

Self-Expression

For the organization overall, self-expression is correlated with all attitudes, as predicted. In relation to the other four psychological climate variables, self-expression is also a significant predictor of job satisfaction, although it predicts neither commitment nor intent to leave. Having opportunities to express individuality is likely to result in more fun on the job, which influences feelings about the job and is positively related to overall job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006). However, we wondered why the same positive feelings did not transfer to either affective commitment or intent to leave (although the relation was in the predicted direction for intent to leave). Karl and Peluchette (2006) found that job satisfaction positively predicts customer satisfaction. Despite the organization's focus on customer satisfaction, customers are not always satisfied, particularly when employees in the Aligned Unit follow orders and attempt to sell stand-alone units. In addition, in the Misaligned Unit, even when employees are self-expressive in attempting to outbid competitors, they sometimes discover that the "competitors" are employees in another part of the organization, an unintended consequence of the ever-changing matrix structure. In the context of the organization as a whole, these effects may be eclipsed by

other, stronger contextual influences. For example, our interviews found that employee salaries lead the market and that opportunities for international assignments are abundant. Such influences could confound overall perceptions of the organization as a safe place to be (i.e., self-expression being defined as one dimension of psychological safety; Brown & Leigh, 1996) while still affording some level of job satisfaction.

Within the Aligned Unit, opportunities for self-expression predict only job satisfaction. These employees are encouraged, with more success than are the employees in the Misaligned Unit, to satisfy their customers. And because employee satisfaction is linked to being able to deliver results to customers (Heskett et al., 1994), managerial buffering may have created enough of a connection between employees' ability to express themselves and resulting sales. Despite moderate correlations with commitment (positive) and intent to leave (negative), self-expression did not predict these outcomes when considered alongside the other four psychological climate variables. Despite explicit orders to the contrary, employees in this unit sold total business solutions, increasing customer satisfaction. Still, the unique selling tactics did not typically yield positive feedback from European leaders, who preferred stand-alone unit sales, possibly explaining nonsignificant findings for commitment and intent to leave.

Within the Misaligned Unit, self-expression predicts only intent to leave, as hypothesized. Because this unit is not performing at a high level, those with numerous opportunities to express themselves may feel a duty to the unit, perhaps borne of guilt (Adams, 1965), to focus on more traditional problem-solving mechanisms to reduce customer complaints within their business unit. Thus, the relationship between self-expression and intent to leave may reflect employees' beliefs that they should give the unit their allegiance so that, as a whole, it does not suffer punitive outcomes, such as layoffs and terminations. As predicted, we would not expect such beliefs to result in any emotional attachment to the organization or the job.

Trust

For the organization overall, trust is correlated with all attitudes, as predicted. In the presence of the other four psychological climate variables, trust predicts both affective commitment and intent to leave but not job satisfaction. Despite the constant shift in leadership, employees may believe that they can commit to and stay with the organization as long as their current leaders can be trusted. In terms of job satisfaction, employees may not see trust as having a causal effect on the overall pleasantness or enjoyable nature of their job. One potential reason for these findings may be found in a study conducted by Lester and Brower (2003). In examining trust in supervisors and employee-felt trustworthiness (i.e., supervisor perceptions

that employees could be trusted), they found that employees trusting their supervisors did not predict job satisfaction. However, employee perceptions that they were, indeed, trusted themselves by supervisors significantly predicted job satisfaction, even when controlling for supervisor trustworthiness. It may be that the organization's matrix structure left employees wondering who was in charge and who could be trusted. Such confusion as it related to overall job satisfaction may be more evident in felt trustworthiness (not measured in this study) or some other factor.

In the Aligned Unit, trust predicts affective commitment. Employees here may have trusted their managers because of the lengths local managers took to insulate them. Such feelings of trust may have resulted in emotional attachment to local management that did not extend to aspects of one's job that required interactions that are more global. Although not significant, intent to leave was in the predicted direction for employees in the Aligned Unit. Despite their continued growth and profitability, employees knew that this success might vanish if European leaders successfully forced sales inconsistent with customer wishes. Therefore, their emotional attachment to local leadership would not be sufficiently strong to reduce turnover intentions or positively influence job satisfaction, because commitments made by local leaders could be overturned by enforcement of mandates from European leadership.

As predicted, within the Misaligned Unit, trust is significantly related to intent to leave, and job satisfaction and commitment are unrelated to trust. In this underperforming unit, the "every-man-for-himself" attitude, where trusting one's manager has no impact on satisfaction or commitment, is heightened by structural obstacles. Because the employees in this unit are not buffered from structural chaos, they may trust their managers less. However, compensation practices are well established, and those who report perceptions of trust may remain as long as the reciprocal monetary relationship exists (Adams, 1965). How they feel about their job or immediate boss is not salient when bundled with other contextual influences (Johns, 2006).

Summary and Conclusions

If we used only the full sample to tell our story, we would conclude that most of the psychological climate variables chosen to examine the context of the focal organization influence the studied work attitudes. A closer look at salient situational events within each business unit reveals that there is a slightly different story to tell, such that psychological climate dimensions bundle together differently to predict the work attitudes found in each unit. For the Aligned Unit, pressure and self-expression predicted job satisfaction; pressure, structure, and trust predicted affective commitment; and pressure and structure predicted intent to leave. For the Misaligned

Unit, autonomy predicted satisfaction and affective commitment, and self-expression and trust predicted intent to leave. Pressure affected all three work outcomes in the Aligned Unit, where employees felt buffered from structural chaos by their managers. Autonomy affected both satisfaction and affective commitment in the Misaligned Unit, where people believed the promise of the organization's decentralized structure was countermanded by the interference from European leadership and lack of buffering from local management.

These dissimilar findings suggest that the predictors of various work outcomes depend on identifying the right context for understanding and acting on individuals' perceptions. For this organization, the bundle of predictors varies by business-unit affiliation, consistent with Johns (2006). The organization is not homogeneous in its context. Hence, it would be inappropriate to assume that conducting the research in this one organization would adequately "control for" any extraneous factors. Researchers must take care when assuming that there is more variance between organizations than there is within a given organization. At a minimum, researchers should assess the extent to which their assumption of homogeneity is supportable. To that end, our findings support prior recommendations for a better understanding of context (Clinebell & Shadwick, 2005; Johns, 2001, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Failure to identify the proper context could cause researchers to prematurely dismiss or embrace relevant findings.

In addition, the business-unit analysis reveals relationships between pressure and both job satisfaction and affective commitment that are not present in the overall organization analysis. In at least some organizations, the context of an employee's work unit is the more immediate situational influence. Understanding how employees' perceptions of multiple contextual variables fit into the broader context of the overall organization highlights the difficulty managers have in balancing multiple situational contexts. Although for this organization, meeting customer needs is the primary organization-wide value, customer demands are often in conflict with profit strategies demanded by the parent company. The fact that both manufacturing and R&D operations are physically distant from sales associates also makes the goal of meeting customer needs more challenging. This leaves local managers struggling to balance the competing interests between customers and corporate business units.

In the case of the Aligned Unit, successful managerial buffering and a history of meeting sales goals appear to mitigate many of the negative consequences of the corporation's structural problems. In the case of the Misaligned Unit, structural influences have a direct bearing on the ability to reach sales goals, and this lack of success appears to exacerbate employees' inability to surmount obstacles. Managers looking to increase employees' performance would do well to note how the immediate context for employees might negate organizationally espoused values

and employees' best efforts. Exhortations and reward programs may be found wanting unless they are accompanied by efforts that address the root cause of diminished motivation and performance. Given the role played by managerial buffering in this organization, managers of other organizations may want to examine closely their ability to buffer employees from chaos.

In essence, then, our findings suggest that managers pay careful attention to identifying accurately the context that directs and constrains their employee attitudes and behavior. Such identification cannot rely solely on the typical collection and analysis of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent-to-leave data. As demonstrated by this study's data, average scores for these work outcomes did not vary significantly by business unit, and yet the array or bundle of predictor variables did vary significantly by unit. Context is not simply a function of average attitudes; instead, it includes the means by which attitudes are developed and reinforced. Hence, failure to identify the proper context could cause managers to miss or misconstrue opportunities to direct constructively employees' attitudes and behavior. And human resources initiatives designed to motivate workers as a whole may miss the mark in certain contexts.

We used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology to richly describe worker–organization relations within different work settings and to illustrate the heterogeneous nature of this organization's climate (Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Although detailed information on the influence of the parent company was limited, stories told by those interviewed illustrated that chaos frequently resulted from cross-national differences and a matrix structure. The immense size of the organization leads employees to contextualize their work experiences at a local level. Despite the close proximity of the business units, there are very different psychological climate perceptions. This may be based on the ability of management to buffer each unit against the parent organization's structural turmoil and the disconnect between the organization's espoused decentralization and limited autonomy perceived by the Misaligned Unit's members.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample is from a single organization in a highly automated, competitive industry. Results may not generalize to organizations with less intensive technology or to organizations in which industry forces are less dynamic. Second, although participants' job functions (e.g., sales, administration, operations, etc.) were relatively broad, respondents were mostly relatively well-educated, middle-aged White men. Organizations with dissimilar demographics may find different results. Third, recent work has found variables that mediate the relationship between psychological climate and work attitudes. For example, Carless and Jeffs (2001) found that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between psychological climate and job satisfaction. Future research should continue to examine various direct and indirect relationships between psychological climate and work attitudes.

Another potential limitation is common methods bias. The benefits of conducting field research notwithstanding, there are risks associated with a single-survey method that were intended to be offset by gaining access to sensitive information in a field setting (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In addition, although both the predictor and dependent variables were perceptual in nature, data from other sources would be inconsistent with the theory being tested. Likewise, being able to supplement survey information with qualitative interviews lends support and credibility to the results and should be noted. Last, CFA results also suggest that the survey's related items converged and diverged as appropriate.

Biographies

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Notes

1. To illustrate, although average scores for job satisfaction might not be statistically significant or different between the units, the specific contextual variables contributing to job satisfaction might differ between the two units.
2. Increasing pressure is operationalized here as a more relaxed work environment, not a more stressful one.

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Appendix

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Interitem Reliabilities, and Pearson Correlations

Variable	M_0	SD_0	M_1	M_2	t	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1. Age ^a	3.69	.92	3.67	3.72	-.35													
2. Sex ^b	.78	.42	.74	.82	-1.26	.09												
3. Education ^c	5.32	1.90	5.31	5.34	-.12	-.11	.23**											
4. Position tenure	3.68	3.93	3.36	3.99	-1.13	.20**	.09	-.14										
5. Autonomy	5.25	1.15	5.36	5.12	1.50	.14*	-.14*	.02	-.12	.71								
6. Pressure	4.06	1.45	3.96	4.16	-.96	-.18*	-.13	-.01	-.11	.23**	.69							
7. Structure	3.61	1.11	3.58	3.66	-.48	-.02	-.04	.19**	-.21**	.28**	.45**	.78						
8. Self-expression	4.54	1.25	4.60	4.48	.70	-.03	.07	.05	-.12	.36**	.41**	.46**	.74					
9. Trust	5.20	1.37	5.14	5.21	-.38	-.01	.05	.18*	-.18*	.32**	.22**	.35**	.47**	.87				
10. Job satisfaction	4.99	1.23	5.10	4.85	1.45	.11	.07	.09	-.17*	.38**	.36**	.43**	.43**	.39**	.85			
11. Affective commitment	4.14	1.32	4.14	4.12	.11	.16*	.12	.17*	.18*	.38**	.28**	.44**	.37**	.45**	.59**	.82		
12. Intent to leave	3.21	1.94	3.28	3.19	.33	-.06	-.09	.05	.13	-.25**	-.39**	-.40**	-.35**	-.37**	-.64**	-.56**	.92	

Note: Except where indicated, all information presented is drawn from the full sample. Pearson correlations by business unit affiliation are available upon request. Interitem reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are on the diagonal in bold ($n = 199$ to 208 because of missing data). M_0 and SD_0 = mean and standard deviation, respectively, for the organization overall; M_1 = mean for Unit 1, the Aligned Unit; M_2 = mean for Unit 2, the Misaligned Unit.

- Age was divided into six categories in approximately 10-year increments (1 = younger than 21; 6 = 60+ years of age).
- Sex was coded 1 = male and 0 = female.
- Education level was divided into 11 categories

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2: Comparisons of Structural Equation Results for Dependent and Independent Variables (Overall vs. Unit 1-Aligned vs. United 2-Misaligned)

	Job Satisfaction	Affective Commitment	Intent to Leave
Autonomy			
Overall	Supported (+)	Supported (+)	NS
Unit 1	Supported (*)	Supported (*)	Supported (*)
Unit 2	Supported (+)	Supported (+)	NS
Pressure			
Overall	NS	NS	Supported (-)
Unit 1	Supported (+)	Supported (+)	Supported (-)
Unit 2	Supported (*)	Supported (*)	NS
Structure			
Overall	NS	Supported (+)	Supported (-)
Unit 1	NS	Supported (+)	Supported (-)
Unit 2	Supported (*)	Supported (*)	Supported (*)
Self-expression			
Overall	Supported (+)	NS	NS
Unit 1	Supported (+)	NS	NS
Unit 2	Supported (*)	Supported (*)	Supported (-)
Trust			
Overall	NS	Supported (+)	Supported (-)
Unit 1	NS	Supported (+)	NS
Unit 2	Supported (*)	Supported (*)	Supported (-)

NOTE: + = positive relationship, as predicted; - = negative relationship, as predicted; * = no relationship, as predicted; NS = predicted relationship not supported.

Figure 1: Contributors to Job Satisfaction (Overall vs. Unit 1-Aligned vs. Unit 2-Misaligned)

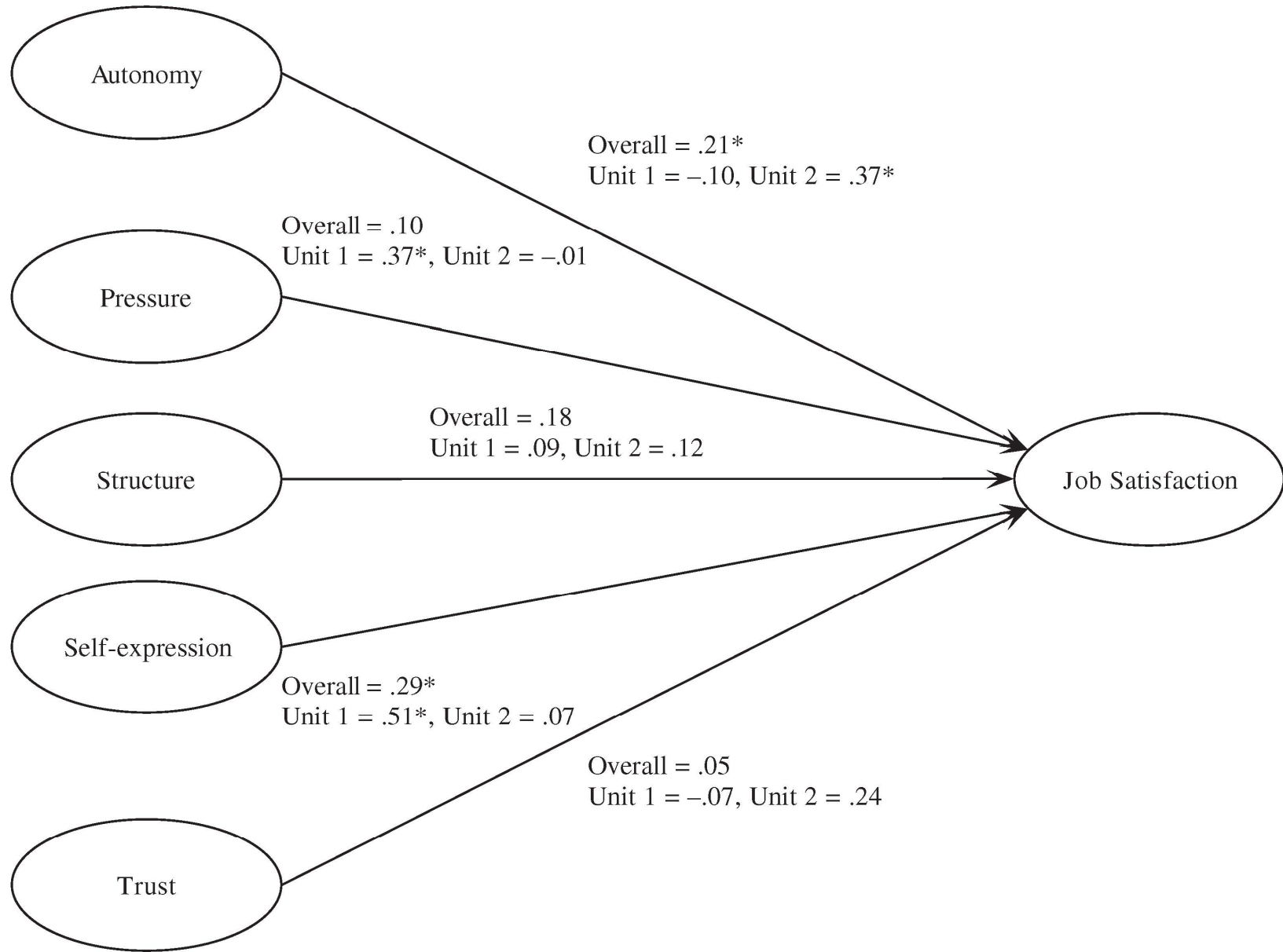


Figure 2: Contributors to Affective Commitment (Overall vs. Unit 1-Aligned vs. Unit 2-Misaligned)

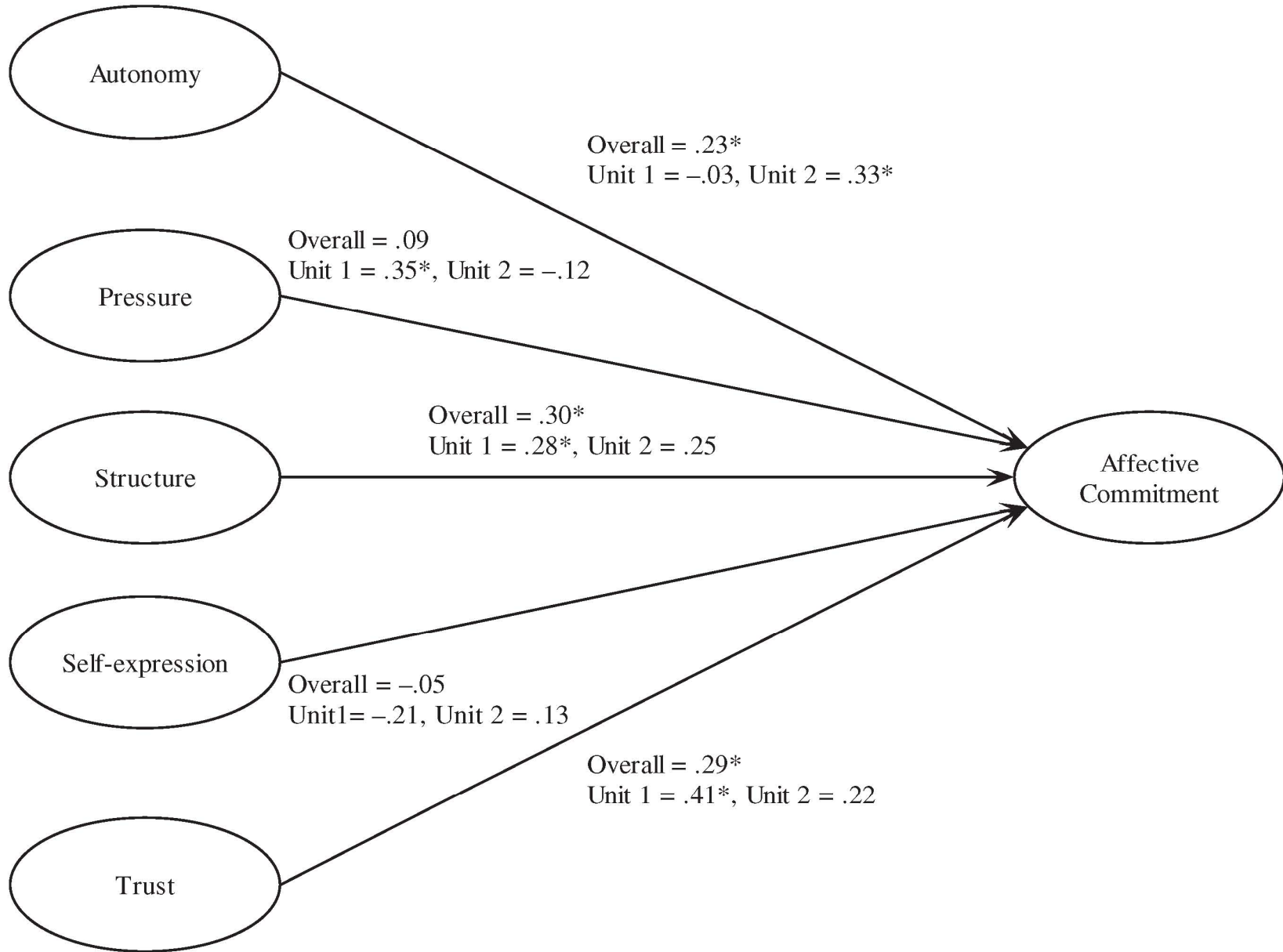


Figure 3: Contributors to Intent to Leave (Overall vs. Unit 1-Aligned vs. Unit 2-Misaligned)

