

ANTECEDENTS OF ETHICAL WORK CLIMATES:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH  
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This paper introduces a theoretical model to explain, predict and transform moral climate in business firms. I first discuss the concept of climate in the organizational literature. Next I propose an ideal climate for encouraging ethical conduct in business firms. I then describe how such a climate can be created through analyzing and changing aspects of the organization's political, technical, and cultural systems. The paper concludes with a discussion of managerial implications and an agenda for future research.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of ethical work climate has attracted considerable attention from organizational scholars in recent years (Cohen, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b; Gaertner, 1991; Newman, 1993; Trevino and McCabe, 1993; Victor and Cullen, 1987, 1988; Weber, 1992, 1993; Wimbush, 1992; Wimbush and Shephard, 1993). Yet despite a growing literature on the topic, surprisingly little theoretical work has been done to explain precisely how such climate evolves in business firms. Given the compelling empirical evidence for the impact of organizational climate on employee behavior (Koppelman, Brief and Guzzo, 1990), such conceptual analysis is essential if managerial efforts to encourage ethical business practices are to produce sustainable long-term results. Moreover, systematically exploring the antecedents of moral climate can contribute substantially to organizational theory overall, as well as to the development of climate theory in particular (Victor and Cullen, 1988). This paper, therefore, introduces a conceptual model of the antecedents of ethical work climates. The model can be useful in guiding research on moral climate in the firm while simultaneously offering a prescription for managers attempting to create more ethical climates in their organizations.

## BOUNDARY ASSUMPTIONS OF THE MODEL

Several assumptions about the organizational climate construct form the boundary conditions for the model introduced in this paper. First, organizational climate is different than organizational culture. *Organizational culture* is defined as *the set of norms, values and beliefs that uniquely characterize a particular firm* (Burke, 1982; Schein, 1985). *Organizational climate* is defined as *one manifestation of culture, pertaining to the set of managerial practices that convey expectations for appropriate conduct within a specific domain of workplace activity* (see Glick, 1985; Reichers and Schneider, 1990). As such, climate is seen as an intervening variable, located schematically between organizational causal variables, such as culture, and individual end-result variables such as specific behaviors (Koppelman, Brief and Guzzo, 1990; Likert, 1961).

Second, organizational climate is seen here as an objective property of organizations, emerging from the conditioned choices and actions of senior management. This perspective is important to note since there has been some controversy among scholars as to (a) whether