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Audrey DeFrank
University of Nebraska at Omaha, adefrank@unomaha.edu

Nora Hillyer
University of Nebraska at Omaha, nhillyer@unomaha.edu

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Using ClimateQUAL® with Thinklets to Facilitate Discussion and Set Priorities for Organizational Change at Criss Library

Audrey DeFrank and Nora Hillyer
University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE

Abstract

Criss Library conducted the ClimateQUAL survey during the 2009 fall semester. The library had been experiencing numerous changes due to a three year library renovation, several personnel resignations and library reorganizations. There was an over-riding perception of mistrust, fear and uncertainty that needed to be addressed. Our first step in addressing the negative perceptions was to run the ClimateQUAL survey to gather statistics for a better understanding of staff perceptions. Our next step was to report on the ClimateQUAL data to the library staff and start discussions on goals and solutions for addressing the organization climate. The third step was to identify the areas of the organization to address first. Once those organizational areas were identified, they were prioritized and goals with solutions were developed.

Due to the negative perceptions and climate of mistrust, we wanted a way to offer an open, comfortable line of communication so library staff felt free to express opinions and offer ideas for solutions. We found the answer to anonymous expression of opinion by using thinkLets, ways for people to use a pattern language for reasoning toward a goal, developed at the UNO Institute of Collaboration Science. The group support system (gss) software was loaded on computers and the library staff was divided into groups where each individual in the group added their comments and ideas to their computer anonymously. Using thinkLets and the gss software in the facilitated discussions allowed each participant the freedom to openly express opinions, comments and ideas and led to a consensus of prioritizing problems and solutions with goals and timelines.

This paper will discuss the process that the Criss Library has been through from the ClimateQUAL survey, the facilitated discussions using thinkLets and the strategies for improvement.

Introduction

The Criss Library at the University of Nebraska at Omaha has experienced some exceptional change within the last five years. The library has undergone a complete physical transformation; a thirty thousand square foot addition was completed in 2006 and a total renovation of the library that was completed in 2009. Throughout the construction, the library remained open and all services available to patrons.

Not only did the library faculty and staff endure the environmental stress of a renovation, we have also been affected by three reorganizations in a three-year time frame. The reorganizations changed job descriptions for 30% of the employees and resulted in a 50% turnover in staff from resignations, layoffs, and retirements. The personnel changes have left the remaining employees uneasy; and while there is a high level of achievement, an undercurrent of low morale, distrust, and fear remains.

After the completion of the building renovation and a change in leadership, the focus returned to collections, services, and employees after long being on the facilities. Recognizing

the strain of years of construction and personnel changes had placed on the organization, we wanted to uncover the mood of the employees and reveal the true issues behind the low morale, uneasiness and fear. After doing some research on organizations, change, and the effects of change on employees, it was decided to use the ClimateQUAL® survey for assessment of the library staff.

Overview/Background and ClimateQUAL®

The Criss Library at the University of Nebraska at Omaha set out to determine the organizational health of our library by measuring the diversity and climate of our organization. The climate of an organization helps employees interpret and understand what behavior is rewarded, supported, and expected in the organization[1]. A healthy organization creates climates that show that teamwork, diversity and justice are valued and there is a strong concern for customers[2].

To gain a broader understanding of organizational development and the different principles or elements involved, a literature review was conducted. Richard Beckhard defined organizational development in *Organization Development: Strategies and Models* as:

"Today there is a need for longer-range, coordinated strategy to develop organization climates, ways of work, relationships, communication systems, and information systems. It is out of those needs that systematic planned change efforts – organizational development – have emerged."[3]

The father of organizational development in academic and research libraries, Duane Webster, listed some principles for improvement of organizations: interpersonal competence is important; participation leads to commitment; groups and teamwork are important; and those who will implement a change must be involved in the planning of that change[4]. Some of these same principles were repeated as elements of organizational development described by Karen Holloway: putting decision making closer to people doing the work; improving group dynamics, organizational structure, and organizational culture; learning how to work collaboratively and across hierarchies; and building trust[5]. The Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment (OCDA) has used the principles and elements of organizational development and described them as climates. Questions were developed for the OCDA to help libraries discover their strengths and weaknesses within each principle or climate.

Criss Library used the Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment (ClimateQUAL®) tool to survey the employees and develop a baseline to assess the effectiveness of any changes. The ClimateQUAL® survey addressed climates for diversity, teamwork, learning, and fairness. The survey was administered in November 2009 and results were received in December 2009. The results were based on a seven point Likert scale and showed averages for each climate. With some exceptions, a high average indicates a strong or healthy climate. The Criss Library results showed healthy climates in several areas but also indicated three areas where changes are warranted. Criss Library employees scored well on interpersonal justice (5.86 or 84%), informational justice (5.02 or 69%), a healthy climate for leadership, a healthy climate for deep diversity and demographic diversity, organizational citizenship behaviors, interpersonal conflict and task conflict. The three areas where the average scores were low for Criss Library were distributive justice, procedural justice and structural facilitation of teamwork.

Criss Library's ClimateQUAL® Results

With a better understanding of organizational development, the literature was researched for additional clarification on the three climates with the lowest average scores at Criss Library: distributive and procedural justice and the structural facilitation of teamwork. The ClimateQUAL® web site Core Scales page defines distributive justice as the degree to which staff perceives that rewards are fairly distributed upon performance. On the same Core Scales page, procedural justice is the degree to which staff perceives the procedures that determine the distribution of rewards are uniformly applied. The climate for teamwork and the structural facilitation of teamwork is the degree to which staff perceives that teamwork is valued by the organization and to which they perceive that they are valued as team members[6].

In general, distributive justice is related to specific attitudes or perceptions of the fairness of organizational outcomes or processes received in a given transaction (pay satisfaction, job satisfaction)[7]. Individuals evaluate and compare the outcome they receive to a standard or rule or the outcome received by a coworker. Distributive justice perceptions are positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust and negatively associated with organizational withdrawal[8]. Negative associations of distributive justice can contribute to spreading rumors, counter-productive work behaviors, conflict at work, faking sick and damaging or wasting company materials or equipment[9].

Procedural justice is more strongly related to global attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment, group commitment)[10]. Procedural justice in the context of a group show individuals care about fairness because of their relationship with the groups to which they belong[11]. Procedural justice can be defined as the perception of the fairness of the processes used to arrive at outcomes. It is the individual's perception of the fairness of the process components of the social system that regulates the distribution of resources. Procedures are judged on their consistency of application, their prevailing ethical standards, their degree of bias, accuracy, and correctability, and the extent to which they represent all people concerned. Fair procedures ensure acceptance of policies such as smoking bans, pay systems, parental leave policies, and disciplinary actions. Positive procedural justice is associated with trust in management, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Negative or low procedural justice can lead to counterproductive work behaviors, conflict at work and the use of organizational revenge strategies[12].

Structural facilitation of teamwork was another opportunity area with lower results than other universities. Criss Library employees scored a mean of 3.79 compared to 4.24 for all institutions, showing UNO at .45 below the average. Only 40% of Criss Library employees responded positively to the question in the scale for Structural Facilitation of Teamwork, which compares to the mean of 48% for all institutions. Teams as defined by Sue Baughman are "small groups of staff working on a common purpose" and "teamwork is the environment that is created to foster how the members of a group work together"[13]. A true team is empowered to make decisions, improve processes, and implement strategies to better serve the user[14]. A team can add to the success of an organization by taking ownership of identifying ways to improve processes, continuous learning and development, and increasing innovation and risk-taking. Libraries that develop into learning organizations with a focus on customer needs and building a culture of continuous learning for team members can establish a culture of teams and teamwork and increase service to their customers[15].

Criss Library scored the highest on the ClimatQUAL® survey in the Climates for Diversity. In the Valuing Diversity climate, defined as the degree to which equality between

minorities and majorities is valued, 71% of Criss employees responded positively. In Race – the extent to which the library supports racial diversity, 96% responded positively. Another climate where Criss employees responded positively was in Interpersonal Justice (84%) - the degree to which one perceives there is fairness and respectfulness between employees and supervisors and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (71%) – the degree to which employees perceive that 'professionalism,' politeness and care is exhibited within the organization. Some comments:

> "Overall this is a very good place to work. Folks are generally helpful, good natured and open minded."
> "Our library caters greatly to the patrons. There is a great working atmosphere at the service desks, and you know that other employees are friendly and ready to help you, should you require it."

In contrast to healthy climates, there were three areas where the results from the survey indicated needs for improvement: distributive justice, procedural justice and structural facilitation of teamwork. In the Climate for Justice/Fairness, Distributive Justice and Procedural Justice ranked lower for Criss Library (22% and 35% employees responded positively) than compared to all institutions (30% and 47% respectively). In the area of Climate for Teamwork, the Structural Facilitation of Teamwork received a lower average score with Criss Library employees (3.79) than all institutions (4.26). Also Criss Library employees (4.10 mean score or 43%) perceive they do not have as much influence over their teams as other institutions' employees (4.86 or 62%). Some comments on the teamwork issue:

> "Staff members, librarians, and administrators need to be more open to helping other departments within the library when asked."
> "I feel communication and teamwork are two areas at the library that need to be addressed."

Criss Library employees also expressed concern in the Climate for Psychological Safety which is the degree to which employees feel the organization is a safe environment for offering opinions and taking risks. The mean score for Criss library was 4.52 compared with 4.95 for all institutions. Criss Library employees expressed concerns regarding expressing ideas and opinions, and fear that this is not a safe environment for risk-taking.
The comments below express this concern:

> "There is a great deal of fear in this organization."
> "This organization is a mess. People don't trust. Communication is the pits."
> : "……they were out of favor with administration. It created a climate of fear across the library. This is why people are still afraid to try new things or offer dissenting opinions."

There were several comments regarding the absence of rewards in the organization. The average score for the Climate for Continual Learning shows that the Criss Library employees feel they are not as encouraged to express new ideas and their ideas are not accepted or rewarded. The average score for Criss Library was 5.05 compared to an average score of 5.28 for all institutions.

> "The rewards questions were very hard to answer because the library doesn't give reward."
> "There are attempts at saying thank you but I'd say most people do not feel personally rewarded for their work."
> "It would be nice if the Directors or the Dean provided greater recognition and/or rewards (not just monetary, but treats, prizes or even paper certificates) to those

departments or individuals who go 'above and beyond' to serve our patron population."

The following tables break out the lowest and highest average scores, by percentage of respondents assigning a ranking 5 or above on each 7 point scale.

All Library Organizational Climate **Lowest** Five Ranked	
Organizational Climate for Justice	
Distributive Justice	22.22%
Procedural Justice	34.62%
Climate for Teamwork	
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	40.00%
Climate for Customer Service	62.26%
Climate for Psychological Safety	62.26%

All Library Organizational Climate **Highest** Five Ranked	
Climate for Demographical Diversity	
Race	95.74%
Gender	90.38%
Sexual Orientation	90.00%
Organizational Climate for Justice	
Interpersonal Justice	84.44%
Leadership Climate	83.67%
Leader-Member Relationship Quality	

The following chart shows the top three Opportunity Areas for all departments and the range of average responses. All departments, with the exception of one (who did not have the minimum number of responses for reporting), had the same three lowest scoring climates (Opportunity Areas), but in varying rank order.

Top Three Opportunity Areas for All Departments	
Organizational Climate for Justice	
Procedural Justice	2.00 – 4.88
Climate for Teamwork	
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	2.75 – 4.36
Organizational Climate for Justice	
Distributive Justice	2.44 – 4.14

After the Survey: Group Support Systems (GSS) and ThinkLets

The receipt of the survey results coincided with the semi-annual ClimateQUAL® partners meeting at ALA midwinter in Boston, January 2010. A number of partners spoke informally on their experiences with survey administration and the common theme running through those

discussions was the importance of library staff involvement in the identification of interventions or solutions. This concept was returned to the Criss Library ClimateQUAL® advisory team and we began to discuss ways to garner feedback from library staff. One of the team's members is a senior fellow at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Collaboration Science (CCS), an experienced facilitator, and knowledgeable about the institute's use of group decision software to facilitate meetings both on-campus and in the Omaha business community.

We chose to use this group decision software based on prior experience using it in other meetings at UNO. In addition to being a very productive and successful system, it is fun and engaging to use. There is a level of anonymity which can provide psychological safety to participants which they may not have in other traditional brainstorming venues, as well as providing a focus on the quality of the feedback and not on the personality of the person providing it. We felt the anonymity was an important factor given the general feeling of mistrust among library faculty and staff.

The system developed at CCS uses "thinkLets." A "thinkLet" is "the smallest unit of intellectual capital required to create one repeatable pattern of thinking among people working toward a goal"[16]. The institute has developed over sixty thinkLets that can be configured and used within a group decision system and can " encapsulate the components of a stimulus used to create a single repeatable, predictable, pattern of thinking among people working toward a goal"[17]. It was decided that Criss library would use the ThinkTank group collaboration software, www.groupsystems.com and employ the FreeBrainstorm, FastFocus, and PriorityVote thinkLets.

Facilitated Discussion Process

The ClimateQUAL® survey was administered to the following library departments, which align with the current organizational reporting structure: Administrative Services, Collections, Leadership Team, Patron Services, Research Services, and Virtual Services. Likewise, the facilitated discussions were conducted among these same departmental groups, with the exception of student assistants, who did not participate in the initial facilitated discussions. There are plans to hold conversations with student assistants later in the process.

Prior to the scheduled discussions, each departmental group was provided a summary report of ClimateQUAL® results. The report included both the highest and lowest scoring climates for their department as well as the library as a whole. Faculty and staff were asked to reflect on the lowest-scoring climates, referred to as "opportunity areas" and to begin thinking of possible answers to this question "*Over the next year, what can we do to improve our work environment.*" Given the complexity of organizational development and possible interventions to address opportunity areas, the one-year time frame was presented in order to provide a manageable time frame for our initial work.

Two hour blocks were scheduled to maximize participation from faculty and staff. Sessions were facilitated with faculty and graduate students affiliated with the Center for Collaboration Science as well as faculty from the University of Nebraska Love Library ClimateQUAL® team. The GSS software was installed on library laptops and each participant was given a machine with which to work. Facilitators used the ThinkTank group facilitation software to garner answers to the aforementioned question. A page was displayed for each participant in the session and the *FreeBrainstorm* thinkLet was used to provide participants the opportunity to share their particular points of view, and it also enabled them to quickly see the bigger picture and to diverge from comfortable patterns of thinking. Participants were instructed

to move to another page where they could either enter a new idea or comment on the other ideas that were entered onto that page by another participant. This thinkLet activity varied by the size of the group, but ranged from 20 minutes to over an hour in length.
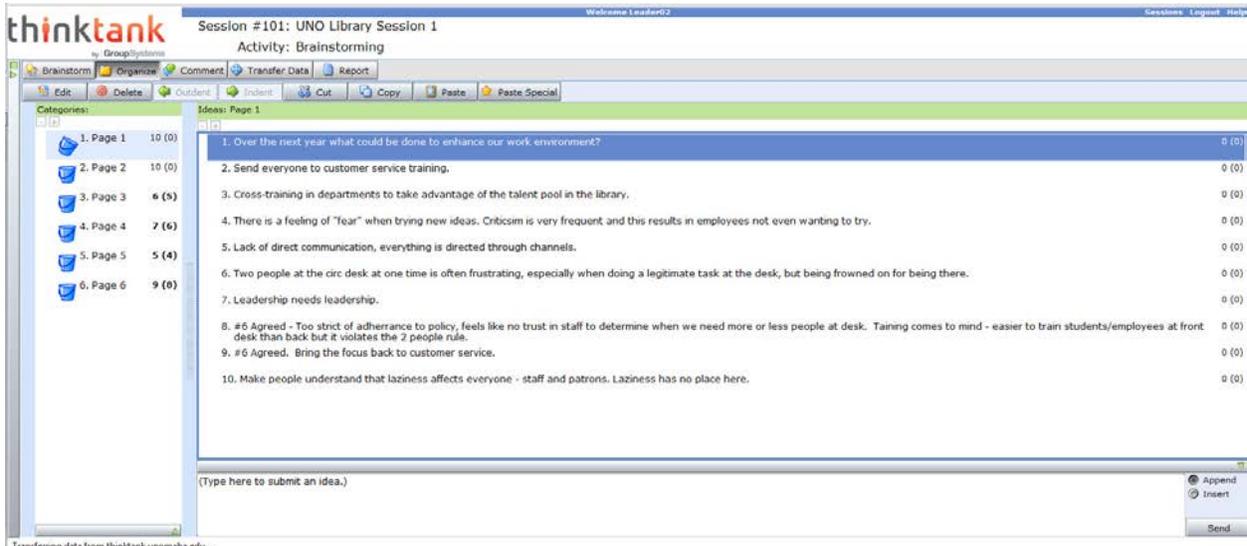
Figure 1: Free Brainstorm thinkLet

The *FastFocus* thinkLet was used in the next step to quickly extract a clean list of key issues. Each participant was assigned a page and given the opportunity to choose the idea they felt was most important on that page. Each participant was given two "turns" to choose important ideas. Once each participant had identified their two most important ideas, the facilitator verbally engaged the group to refine this list to eliminate duplication and to ensure that all agreed on and understood the idea presented.
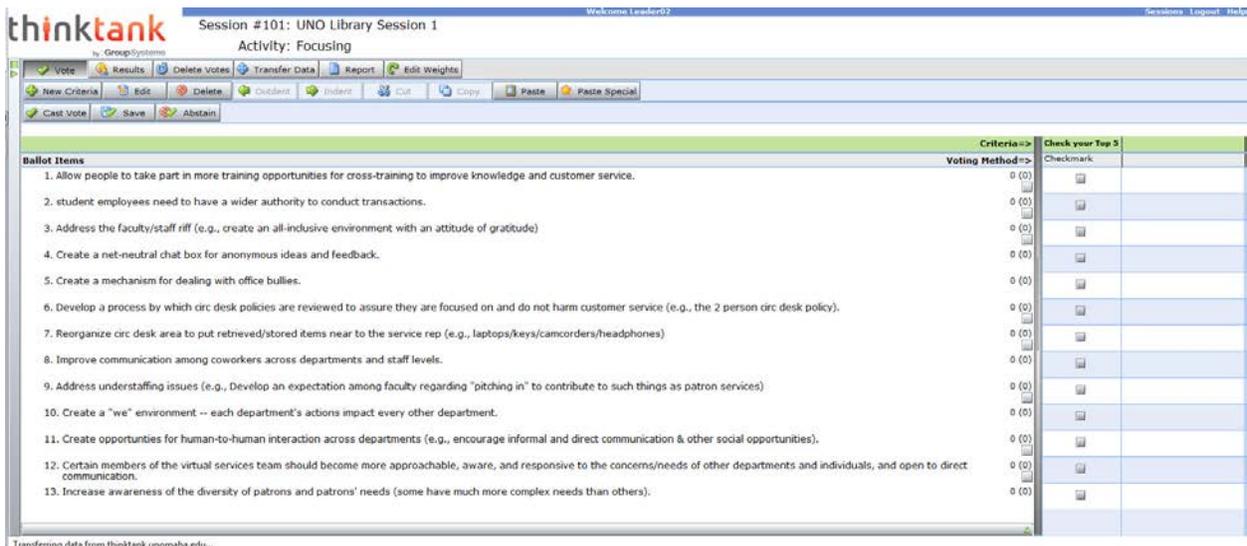
Figure 2 : FastFocus thinkLet

The final thinkLet employed was *PriorityVote* which simply is a rank of the most important idea. The groups were asked to individually rank the list and the top five or six ideas remained.

Figure 4: PriorityVote:

Employee Survey Perceptions of the Facilitated Discussions

To gain more understanding and insight of employees' perception of the facilitated discussions, a four question survey was distributed to all library employees, via SurveyMonkey. Twelve employees answered the survey, 29% response rate. Three essay questions were asked: "In your experience during the ClimateQUAL® facilitated discussion, what worked well? "What did NOT work well?" and "What could have been done differently?" The fourth question was a likert-scale matrix question where the respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with four statements: 1) Differing opinions were openly discussed; 2) It was safe to speak up without fear of a negative effect; 3) I am satisfied with my involvement at the facilitated discussion; 4) There was good cooperation within my group.

The same number of respondents (n=5 or 42%) answered questions one and two with opposite answers. For question one, five respondents stated they felt the anonymity of the process worked well. Five respondents for question two answered that anonymity did not work well with one comment stating anonymity was compromised in the facilitated discussions. Additional comments provided from the survey indicated participants could tell who was typing; others were uncomfortable expressing any opinions if their supervisor attended the same facilitated discussion; another stated that anonymity was compromised. Additionally, 33% of the respondents (n=4) felt nothing worked well in the discussions.

The third question asked what could have been done differently in the facilitated discussions. Most people responded by writing they wished they could have chosen their own group rather than joining their department in the discussions. Several reasons explaining this response can be found in the agree/disagree matrix questions. A large number (83%) did not feel safe speaking out about issues, most likely because of a supervisor present. Only 50% of the

respondents felt opinions were openly discussed and were satisfied with their involvement in the discussions. Even though people did not feel safe speaking in their group, a majority of respondents agreed that there was good cooperation in their group.

Results of ThinkTank Sessions in All Groups

Reports were returned for each departmental session, which included transcripts from the FreeBrainstorm sessions and results from the PriorityVote. All departmental sessions were combined to provide 12 general themes from the library as a whole:

- Staffing and Scheduling Issues (5)
- Staff Unity/Teamwork (5)
- Communication (5)
- Goodwill/Morale (4)
- Accountability(4)
- Decision-Making(4)
- Policy Issues (4)
- Skills and Training (3)
- Leadership(3)
- Ergonomics/Physical Work Environment(3)
- Respect(3)
- Bullying (2)

The number in parenthesis represents the number of groups identifying as a priority with the total number of groups n=6. Each of the 12 themes had between three and ten related sub-themes and strongly corroborated sub-themes (priority ranked by over one-half of the generating group) were noted.

ThinkThank Sessions and ClimateQUAL results

Recall that the question asked in the facilitated discussions was "*Over the next year, what can we do to improve our work environment.*" While some of the groups answered that question in the context of the opportunity areas (lowest scoring climates) identified in the ClimateQUAL® report for their department, some did not. Thus, it is difficult to easily draw parallels between the feedback from the facilitated discussion to the ClimateQUAL® results. However, based on keywords and concepts delivered in facilitated discussions, these associations can be made:

General Themes from Facilitated Discussions	ClimateQUAL Core Concepts
Staff Unity/Teamwork	Structural Facilitation of Teamwork
Communication	Climate for Psychological Safety
Goodwill/Morale	Climate for Procedural Justice; Job Satisfaction; Climate for Psychological Safety; Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Policy Issues	Climate for Procedural Justice
Leadership	Climate for Leadership
Respect	Team Psychological Empowerment
Bullying	Climate for Interpersonal Justice

Strategies for Improvement: The Next Steps

The facilitated discussions returned 76 sub-themes under the 12 general themes. The Advisory Team culled the 76 sub-themes into 40 statements, or *improvement strategies* by removing duplicates such as "make people accountable" and "develop a way to make people accountable" and combining like statements such as "reorganize circ area" and "optimize work spaces" into "optimize work spaces for all departments as needed so staff can do their job tasks effectively and efficiently."

Of the 40 improvement strategies, there were five that could be implemented immediately: The Courtesy Committee was reinstated and volunteers/nominations were solicited to form this committee who would not only oversee the social activities, but also organize as well as advise the leadership team and the Dean on a staff recognition program. A mechanism for staff to provide anonymous ideas, comments and feedback is under development. Several members of the leadership team and library supervisors have completed or are scheduled to participate in a new campus leadership program, and lastly, a current project to collate policies on the library's internal wiki will be followed by an internal review of all policy.

The remaining 35 improvement strategies are scheduled to be presented to the faculty and staff via an online survey where they will be asked to rank the strategies in order of importance. The resulting list is where we will take the first solid steps toward organizational change and a healthy organizational climate for Criss Library.

Acknowledgements

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