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**THE COMPREHENSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT TOOL:
COSST ASSESSMENT**

By

**Amanda Kroger
Honours Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986**

**THESIS
Submitted to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree
Wilfrid Laurier University
1997**

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Abstract

This thesis describes the development of an instrument (the Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool (COSST)) designed to assess the extent to which organizations foster socially supportive interactions amongst their employees. Research indicates that the support that individuals receive from their co-workers in the workplace can have a significant impact on their physical and emotional health, and their commitment to, and performance within, an organization. Organizations can do much to foster these kinds of supportive interactions. However, in order for an organization to determine the strategies it should employ in enhancing support, it is necessary to assess what it is currently doing in this regard. While many measures are available to assess social support on an individual level, there are no instruments available to assess support at an organizational level.

The development of the COSST was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, two focus groups were held in which participants were asked to comment on the kinds of things their organization did to encourage people to connect with and support each other. Their responses were organized into seven major categories: respondents indicated that organizational activities with regard to the physical structure of the workplace, administrative practices, policies and procedures, work practices, leadership, communication, and social activities, could all be employed to enhance social support. This framework was then used to create a 25-item assessment instrument, with 2 to 5 items covering each of the seven areas identified by the focus groups. Each item was accompanied by a 5-point rating scale, with descriptive statements for ratings of 1, 3 and

5 on the scale. A score of 5 on an item indicated that the organization was extremely good in its efforts to foster a supportive work environment in that area and a score of 1 indicated that little or no effort was being made in that area. An accompanying interview schedule was designed to gather the information necessary to use the tool.

In the second phase, COSST was used to assess three organizations. Two interviewers used the interview guide in discussions with personnel staff at each of the organizations. They also went on a tour of each of the organizations. The information from the interview and tour was used to arrive at a rating for each organization on each of the 25 items in COSST, and to then complete an assessment and series of recommendations for each organization.

The results indicated that the COSST instrument, and its accompanying interview guide, were an effective means to elicit information about the ways in which an organization fostered social support amongst its employees. Furthermore, the high degree of correspondence in the ratings of the two interviewers suggests that the instrument has a reasonable degree of reliability. In general, the results indicate that, with further development and testing, the COSST could provide a very useful means of helping to develop more supportive workplaces.

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I. INTRODUCTION

People spend a great deal of time in the workplace. Work is not only a place to earn a living and feel useful; people can also feel worthwhile in terms of making a contribution. Often, people develop a sense of belonging there. Many of us find our friends and supporters there too. As a result, these working environments can have a major influence on people's lives.

The social support that individuals receive from their friends and colleagues in the workplace can have a major effect on the quality of their work life. Social support can be affected by the physical, procedural and relationship structures of a work organization. These work structures are a few of the areas that can have an impact on workers, and organizations play a key role in creating healthy work structures and environments. This research examines organizational factors or characteristics that facilitate social support and are therefore important for a healthy work environment. The purpose of this research is to develop an assessment tool (the Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool – COSST) that will (a) help organizations determine how well they are doing in fostering supportive work environments, and (b) identify possible areas for improvement in the work setting.

Literature Review

A review of some definitions and descriptions of health, wellness, well-being, environments, social support and workplace social support will help focus the discussion in this research. Specifically, several aspects of social support are summarized and information with regard to workplace social support is reviewed.

"Health" and "wellness" are terms people use to describe a state of well-being.

Both individuals and organizations have attempted to define these terms and the following paragraphs capture their effort. Webster's College Dictionary (1991) defines well-being as "a good or satisfactory condition of existence, a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity" (p. 1512). The World Health Organization [WHO] has provided a few definitions over the years and their most recent holistic definition of wellness for individuals that has been incorporated into their constitution is as follows: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1990, p. 1). Myers (1992) reported that a review of the wellness literature formulated the following definition: "the process and state of a quest for maximum human functioning that involves the body, mind, and spirit" (p. 311). He also reported that an expansion on this definition has resulted in a wellness model with six dimensions: intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational and spiritual (Myers, 1992).

The Vanier Institute of the Family (1980) defines health as "a state of being which flows from harmony within persons, between persons and between them and their natural environment..." (p. 17). Wilkinson and O'Connor (1982) specifically define mental health as "a congruent relationship between person and surrounding environments and systems" (p. 986). Health and Welfare Canada (1988) go beyond these definitions and suggest that health is "something that is experienced not only individually but collectively" (p. 4). Further, they argue that there are mutual influences on health such as "the individual, the group and the environment" (p. 6). In summary, health, wellness and well-being are

states or conditions that involve multiple dimensions of the body, mind and spirit such as the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational and spiritual dimensions in the context of one's relationships and environments. In particular, social environments nurture relationships (individual and group) that influence the emotional and social components of health.

Webster's College Dictionary (1991) describes the environment as "the aggregate of surrounding things, conditions, or influences; surroundings; milieu...the social and cultural forces that shape the life of a person or a population" (p. 447). Within psychology, environments have been described in terms of behavioural settings ("naturally occurring spatial and temporal features that surround behaviour and the appropriate behavioural match", p. 123) by Roger Barker (1968). Rudolf Moos' (1973) conceptualization included physical factors, group characteristics, organizational structure, reinforcement consequences and organizational or social climate. Moos found that these environmental characteristics affected the health and well-being of individuals and groups. His research in environmental domains and dimensions has focused on social climate scales for families, the workplace, classrooms, treatment programs and various organizational settings. Individuals report on their views of the setting. In a workplace setting, employees and supervisors report their perceptions of the social climate and these responses are compared and contrasted (Moos, 1996).

Work environments, in particular, have a significant impact on our lives (Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 1984; Health and Welfare Canada, 1991; Dooner, 1990; Fleisher, Fleisher & Brown, 1994; Fleisher, Fleisher & Brown, 1996;

House, 1981; Health Promotion in Action [HPA], undated; Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger & Wandersman, 1984). The Canadian Mental Health Association (1984) states that "Our work is an assertion of our humanity. Work provides us with the means for physical survival, but it also engenders feelings of self worth, purpose, belonging and contribution to the community" (p. 1). House (1981) points out that the "time and importance most adults invest in their work suggests that what happens on the job can have pervasive effects on their health and well-being" (p. 8).

There is considerable evidence that social support in the workplace can have a profound effect, not only on individuals' feelings about their jobs, but on their emotional and physical health, as well. Wolfgang (1995), for example, found that pharmacists who experienced greater levels of social support had greater commitment to their careers. Lim (1996), in a study of MBA graduates in the U.S., found that social support from coworkers was helpful in buffering individuals against job stress. Similar findings have been reported by Chay (1993), Daniels and Guppy (1994), and van der Pompe & de Heus (1993). Unden (1994) found that individuals with higher levels of support in the workplace showed lower levels of absenteeism, and reported fewer symptoms of illness than did those with lower levels of support.

Several authors (CMHA, 1984; Fleisher et al, 1994; Heller et al, 1984; LaRocco, House, & French, 1980; Moos, 1996) agree that many characteristics of work organizations or settings can enhance or diminish well-being. Most often attention is paid to the physical aspects of work such as safety standards or ergonomic concerns (HPA, undated; Shain, 1990). Some organizations have incorporated employee assistance

programs, but the focus is on the individual changing or getting better while the organization maintains the status quo. House (1981) suggests that although the impact of social support in the workplace on stress and health is becoming clear, little is known about the determinants of workplace social support. House identified several research questions concerning social support and interaction in the work setting: 1) how supportive are supervisors and co-workers? 2) how are the organization and jobs/tasks structured? 3) are tasks highly specialized and work roles isolated? 4) is work independent and competitive? 5) are supervisors and co-workers trained to give and receive support, and 6) to what extent do the organizational, technological and personnel policies of an organization foster social support? Even stronger arguments are being made for researching social support in the workplace (CMHA, 1984). Shain (1990) states that the social environment or climate is "a result of the constant human interactions that take place in the workplace between colleagues, co-workers, subordinates, supervisors, and managers" (p. 1). These relationships are a source of social support.

In an effort to define social support, House (1981) reviewed both expert opinions (Caplan & Killilea, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Lin, Simeone & Kuo, 1979; Nuckolls, Cassel & Kaplan, 1972) and ordinary people's views (Gottlieb, 1978) and found that these groups agreed that "social support is an interpersonal transaction involving one or more of the following: (1) emotional concern (liking, love, empathy), (2) instrumental aid (goods or services), (3) information (about the environment), or (4) appraisal (information relevant to self-evaluation)" (p. 39). These four types of support affect us in different ways. House challenges researchers to develop measures that will

determine how these and other supports affect our stress levels and health. He believes that thorough measures of support will indicate "*who gets how much of what kinds of support from whom regarding which problems*" (p. 39).

Not only must we be able to identify social support, but we must also be able to measure it and understand how it works. Gottlieb (1983) thought that some people may be more successful than others at mobilizing the resources and supports they need to avoid illness and adopt healthy coping mechanisms. Mitchell and Trickett (1980) also wondered about an individual's ability to access and maintain resources. They questioned whether the supportive environmental structures were lacking or whether people were not able to take advantage of the support because they lacked the social skills to interact. They proposed that further study is needed to understand how social support and environments impact on community life and interventions.

To further understand questions related to how social support works, Cohen and Wills (1985) reviewed several studies with regard to social support and well-being. Two models of support were considered; the buffering model, which proposes that support protects a person from the negative effects of stress, and the main effect model, which proposes that support has a positive effect on people whether or not they are experiencing stress. They found that both the buffering and main effect models contributed to "understanding the relationship between social support and health" (p. 353).

With regard to work environments, effects of both support models may be experienced. For example, structural support such as the existence of work relationships (coworkers, supervisors, managers) and the number of contacts (work teams, social

integration) may have a general benefit or main effect on well-being. That is, on a day to day basis, people feel they are able to cope even if they are not currently facing specific problems or stresses. In general, social support can reduce the experience of stress and improve health. As a second example, functional support or social resources such as esteem support, informational support, social support and instrumental support (job knowledge/direction, training, feedback/appraisals, tangible support/resources) can have a buffering effect or protect individuals who are under stress. That is, when people experience a significant degree of stress, they are protected from the negative effects of stress because they have several personal resources or functional supports.

Barrera (1986) concludes that in order to understand the relationship between social support and health it is most beneficial to conceptualize social support as 1) social embeddedness, 2) perceived social support and 3) enacted social support. Social embeddedness is the degree to which people are connected to others in their social environments. Perceived social support refers to a person's cognitive appraisal of being reliably connected to others. Enacted social support is described as the action that others engage in to help a person.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (1984) comments that as employment life becomes more distant from family and community life, the workplace may become an important source of social support and a base of primary social relationships. During the course of their nation-wide study, the CMHA (1984) surveyed 1218 employed Canadians and interviewed 176 community business, labour and health professionals in five communities. Participants were asked questions about their attitudes toward work, job

satisfaction, the experience of stress on the job, and their opinions about various mental health concerns in the workplace. Sixty one percent of the people surveyed had met their closest friend at work. The CMHA survey also found that most people liked to work but were not happy with their current jobs. Sixty percent had experienced negative stress within the year. Major sources of negative stress are work structures, conditions of work and quality of interpersonal relations.

Dooner (1990) states that Canadians spend 60% of their waking hours at work and that "negative stress is endemic in the work environment - it is an accepted part of the working day, an unwanted 'friend'." He also states that workplace policies, rules and regulations can affect health and productivity, and suggests four key strategies that are fundamental for supportive and positive work environments: 1) shape unity of purpose (clear policy direction), 2) build organizational and individual self efficacy (empowerment), 3) eliminate unnecessary organizational stress and 4) commit to and work toward a healthier organizational culture. Dooner believes that the health of the organization and individual are one and that working on these strategies will improve the health of both.

The health and well-being of both the individual and community is affected by systems of social support (Baron, 1986; Cobb, 1976; Hirsch, 1980; Mitchell & Trickett, 1980; Saulnier, 1982). Saulnier (1982) explored network concepts in relation to change and crisis. She states that supportive networks can "reduce the incidence of stress-related illness and facilitate recovery". Also, different configurations of support may be useful as individual needs change. Size, density and composition can differ for distinct situations.

Mitchell and Trickett (1980) discussed personal and social networks of support. An understanding of people's social and personal networks can be gained by utilizing a network analysis; size (number of people), density (number of people known and connected), multiplexity (advise, information, support, etc.), strength of ties, durability and reciprocity.

Both Mitchell and Trickett (1980) and Saulnier (1982) believed that in addition to the positive impact on individual health, the study of social support and social networks has "significant implications for an understanding of community life and for the design of intervention programs" (Mitchell & Trickett, 1980, p. 41). Further, the study of social support in the workplace, a sub-group of the community, and environmental determinants may lead to supportive workplace interventions.

Several authors (CMHA, 1984; Health and Welfare Canada, 1991; Dooner, 1990; Fleisher et al, 1994; Heller et al, 1984; House, 1981) believe that the work setting can be improved by making changes to its structure and improving relationships. In particular, House (1981) states that work and work organizations are to adults what school settings are to children. Just as successful interventions and prevention programs have taken place in schools (Heller et al, 1984; Nelson, 1980), work settings are "potentially powerful and efficient mechanisms of planned social intervention and change" (House, 1981, p. 8). For example, Trickett and Moos (1973) developed the Classroom Environment Scale. The 90 item scale assessed nine dimensions of junior high and high school classrooms. Students reported their perceptions on: involvement, affiliation, support, task orientation, competition, order and organization, rule clarity, teacher

control, and innovation. Measurement of the classroom environment over time can provide useful information that can facilitate change and planned intervention.

In order to improve the way in which organizations foster social support in the workplace, it is necessary to assess what they are presently doing in this regard. This calls for some means of assessing or measuring the way in which organizations structure themselves so as to promote positive social interactions among their employees. A review of the measures and instruments currently available to assess social support (e.g. see Winemiller, Mitchell, Sutliff & Cline, 1993) suggests that these measures are inadequate to the task of assessing social support at an organizational level. All of the measures that Winemiller et al. review focus on the individual. The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (Cohen, Mermelstein, Kamarack, & Hoberman, 1985), for example, asks individuals to indicate the extent to which they know people who could provide support to them when they are in need. Such measures are not well-suited to looking at what organizations are doing (in terms of policies, physical setting and work structures, for example) to foster social support.

Even measures that are designed to assess attributes of a setting (as opposed to an individual) rely on individual ratings of workers' perceptions. For example, current research into work environments focuses on individuals' self-report of stress, well-being, job satisfaction, mental and physical health, and perceptions on their environments (Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neil & Payne, 1989; Levi, 1990; Loscocco & Spitze, 1990; Millar, 1990; Moos, 1974; Sen, 1992; Williams, 1994). Specifically, Moos (1974) developed the Work Environment Scale (WES) that assesses the social climate of work

groups. The WES Form R is a 90 item true or false scale. The individual worker provides a self report on his/her work environment utilizing the 90 statements. There are 10 subscales within 3 dimensions: the relationship dimension (involvement, peer cohesion, staff support), the personal growth dimension (autonomy, task orientation), and the system maintenance and system change dimension (work pressures, clarity, control, innovation, physical comfort). Scores are plotted to create a group profile. Cronbach's Alpha ranged from .69 to .86.

Fleisher et al (1994) proposes a more balanced and diverse approach to examining the organizational environment. In his model, the Comprehensive Organizational Wellness Model (COW), he encourages work group and organizational assessment as well as individualized assessment. The study of organizational settings or environments can be "enhanced by considering them within an ecological framework" (Heller, et al, 1984, p. 139). An ecological framework focuses on the relationship or fit between the individual and his or her environment. This approach is particularly helpful when examining the interaction between the person and environment in order to develop planned interventions. One of the six dimensions in Fleisher et al.'s (1994) model is the social support dimension, but a specific measure is yet to be developed.

Purpose of Research

As previously reviewed, social support in the workplace impacts on well-being. Little is known about the determinants of workplace social support. Most measures that are developed to assess work environments rely on individuals' perceptions of their work environment; few measures focus on the attributes of the work setting itself. It is

therefore important to develop measures that are designed to look at organizations as a whole. This research resulted in a measure that assesses social support at the organizational level.

This research focused on the social element of wellness and specifically explored characteristics of the work environment that facilitate social support. Social support was conceptualized as people having opportunities to make connections and support each other. Some examples of possible characteristics of the work environment were organizational procedures, training, work structures, work relationships, formal and informal social activities. Based on these indicators of social support in the work environment, a specific measure, the Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool (COSST) was developed.

Development of an Assessment Procedure

The main purpose of this research was to develop a measure that will help organizations to determine how well they are doing in fostering supportive work environments, and to identify possible areas for improvement in the work setting. Utilizing the information collected during focus groups and reviewing measurement structures such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1980), a new measure, the Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool (COSST), was developed.

The structure for the new measure was based on Harms and Clifford's (1980) Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). The ECERS assesses early childhood settings for both the children and adults that share the setting. Environments

such as day care facilities and kindergarten programs are rated through a combination of site observations and participant interviews. ECERS provides an environment profile by utilizing 37 items that are organized into 7 subscales: Personal Care Routines of Children, Furnishings and Display for Children, Language-Reasoning Experiences, Fine and Gross Motor Activities, Creative Activities, Social Development, and Adult Needs. Each of the 37 items is given a rating of 1 (inadequate), 3 (minimal), 5 (good) or 7 (excellent). These ratings are added within each of the 7 subscales and subscale scores are plotted on a graph to show relatively weak and strong areas of the environment.

Items for COSST were generated through focus group discussions. The items were developed based on the insights shared and personal experiences of group members.

Organizational Assessment of Social Support

Social Support as measured by currently available instruments has been almost always assessed from an individual's point of view. In order to shift the level of analysis from the individual to the organization, objective measures of social support in the workplace were developed. This action was not only a next step but a challenge. Work environments are complex and have multiple determinants of social support in the workplace. Keeping in mind that the focus was on the kinds of things organizations do to encourage people to connect and support each other, COSST has provided a framework for some of the determinants in this developmental phase of a measure. A combination of interview, observation and a review of documents was utilized to complete the organizational assessment (Lawler, Nadler & Cammann, 1980).

II. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS

Two Phases of Research

This research was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a discussion with two focus groups. These groups helped to identify what organizations are doing to encourage healthy interactions among workers. The groups shared their ideas about activities, procedures and policies that foster social support within a work setting. During the second phase, the information from the focus groups was utilized to develop an assessment tool. Specific items were generated from the group discussions. These items were clustered and organized into theme areas to create the Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool (COSST). COSST was then piloted with three organizations.

III. PHASE ONE: THE FOCUS GROUPS

Introduction

The first phase involved two focus groups. Six insurance companies were approached about the research and two agreed to participate in the focus group phase. The focus groups were the first step in the discovery of policies, procedures and activities that may enhance social support in the work place. These discussion groups helped identify what organizations are doing to encourage and facilitate healthy interactions among workers.

Method

Participants

The participants were from two large insurance companies. Both organizations

employ over 2500 people each. They had several divisions and locations across the country. The head offices were locally situated and agreed to participate in the research. There were eleven women who participated in the focus groups that were held at each of the work sites. The first focus group had three women between the ages of 30 and 50. They represented the clerical, service and human resource sectors. Two of the women had seen each other before but the participants did not know each other. The second focus group had eight women between the ages of 25 and 60. The participants were from both staff and management. They represented the clerical, service and human resource sectors. Some of the participants were acquainted with each other. While there appeared to be a good cross-section of job roles represented in the focus groups, unfortunately, no male employees volunteered to participate. The groups met for 1 to 1 1/2 hours for the purposes of discussion.

Procedure

During the first phase of this research, Human Resource Directors and/or Vice Presidents were contacted (Appendix A) and informally interviewed. Human Resources management staff or other company representatives were acquainted with the research and then asked to comment on the focus group question: *What does your organization do now that encourages people to connect with and support each other?* At the conclusion of the interview they were asked to post or circulate some information about the research. (Appendix B) Both insurance organizations selected a few departments to approach. The information was circulated and the workers identified themselves as participants for the focus groups. There was no arrangement that a specific number of employees would

participate. It was hoped, however, that a broad cross-section of employees would attend the focus group sessions.

Both groups met at their respective work sites. The first group met in their spacious cafeteria after the lunch hour rush. They were asked to comment on the following questions:

- 1) What does your organization do now that encourages people to connect with and support each other?
- 2) What other things could your organization do to encourage people to connect with and support each other?
- 3) What are some things that your organization does that discourages people from supporting each other?

Their responses to the three discussion questions (Appendix C) were captured on flip chart paper and additional follow up notes were made. They shared many examples of support in the work place. The second group met in a small private meeting room in the health services department of their company. Both flip chart paper and a tape recorder were used to capture their responses to the discussion questions. This group gave useful information too, but not as many personal examples.

An information letter (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix D) were developed for the research. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and by informed consent. If there were any questions they did not wish to answer, they had the right to refuse. Also, they had the right to withdraw at any time. Participants were also assured anonymity as their names would not be used or reported at

any point during the research. Any material to be quoted would not be identified.

Analysis

The information from both focus groups that was captured on the flip chart paper, in research notes, and on audio-tape, was transcribed and reviewed. In the first stage of the analysis, a list was compiled of all the activities that each focus group identified as fostering social support within their organizations. A standard content analytic procedure (Patton, 1990), in which each item on the list was compared and contrasted with the others, was then used to group the activities into categories. These categories were then themselves organized into a higher-order set of categories, forming a conceptual model of the results. Rather than using a quantitative approach and counting the number of times a particular activity was mentioned, a more qualitative, grounded theoretical approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was employed to generate a conceptual model from the data.

Results

There were two groups from the insurance industry that shared their ideas about policies, activities and procedures that foster social support within a work setting. Although the size and composition of the groups were different, a number of their ideas and comments overlapped. As a result, several themes emerged from the discussions. This section discusses the information gathered in the focus group in relation to the seven themes that surfaced.

The people in the first group did not know each other very well but had no difficulty discussing the questions posed. All group members were active participants and needed very little prompting. The second group seemed to have a few people that

knew each other. They were also able to engage in a lively discussion with regard to the questions. At times there were several conversations going on at the same time and group members sought clarification from each other.

Participants in the focus groups identified several activities that helped them gather together for both work and social activity. Their stories often related to one another.

Social Activity

In response to the question "What does your organization do now that encourages people to connect with and support each other?", both groups frequently mentioned social activities that served to bring people together at work. For example, everyone was able to name an activity they had been involved in such as sports teams (interdepartment as well as outside organizations), Christmas parties, company picnic, staff fashion show, birthday committees, car rallies, bus trips, free tickets, etc. Both organizations had a staff association or social committee that worked to pull a lot of these activities together.

A few people seemed to be more involved in the social activities and had more experiences with some of the special events than their coworkers in the group. Special events were identified as United Way campaigns, the Corporate Challenge and food bank drives. In general, members of the focus groups enjoyed the social activities and one participant said "it's a great way to meet people". Another group member stated that "it gives you a chance to meet people that you wouldn't normally meet in your day to day [work], you meet people outside of your department, across the company". A third participant offered "it's nice to meet socially...the loggerheads go a lot easier...social

activities help smooth things over".

The groups also thought it was important to celebrate and recognize a work anniversary or a team goal as well as organizational milestones. They suggested that "the company buys everybody pizza for [maintaining] accident free days" and "you could have a luncheon in recognition of your work anniversary". Staff Appreciation Days were also very important to the group members.

Work Practices

Another theme in the discussions of the focus groups concerned the kinds of work practices employed by their organizations that served to foster social support. They had a lot to say about team meetings and they thought that regular meetings where people could keep each other up to date and coordinate their activities were really important. For example, they said things like "we have regular meetings...we are keeping everybody updated" and "we have communication teams.....there are representatives from each department....everybody has to go to one but you are all on different teams". Another participant suggested that "meetings help us connect with people" and "we have regular meetings....share information....support each other during busy times....we are keeping everybody updated". A third group member reflected that "it's easy to drift if there is no regular cohesive group". They also mentioned that there were a variety of meetings for the managers, supervisor forums, clerical staff meetings as well as an annual meeting. Both organizations extended invitations to all their employees. Sometimes the organizations held two annual meetings as they did not have enough room for everyone to meet. One focus group talked about how hard it is to include people sometimes. "The

people who work in the computer department....no one really knows them. They could be shy or maybe it's cultural differences. It may be difficult for them to participate...to meet others."

Communication

Communication was the third area to surface during the discussions. Meetings seemed to be a key way to share information with smaller groups within the organization. Participants also mentioned newsletters, bulletin boards and e-mail. They said "e-mail is a good source of information", it is "a system to keep everyone updated", and "you can find out who has moved around". One group thought that "people didn't bother with the bulletin boards any more" as most information was posted through e-mail. The second group thought the bulletin boards were used by individuals who wanted to post items that were for sale or to announce garage sales.

One group talked about their Retirement Club. Once a month people who have retired from the organization meet for lunch. They receive a newsletter that tells them about the things that are going on in the organization as well as who has retired most recently. The retirees are also consulted occasionally. They stay connected to the organization beyond their retirement.

Physical Structure

A fourth theme to arise was that of physical structure. Focus group participants were able to identify places where people can meet. This seemed to be quite important as their organizations were large and the employees were quite busy. They said things like "Our cafeteria is in-house....it's important because even if you only take twenty minutes to

socialize.....while you grab a coffee, it can help you feel good". Both organizations had on site health and exercise centres. The participants thought that a lot of people took advantage of the facilities. One person shared "You can exercise at lunch at the gym.....meet socially.....meet people who you may not work with.....it increases your relationships". Another place that people often congregated was the "in-house" store. "We have a store...it's the centre of everything.....it's also a place to socialize....".

In addition to where people could meet the group also made some comments about their work spaces and how work areas are arranged. The following comments were made "...pay attention to office placement.....location and traffic flowa little interaction is good..." and "we have an open door policy...you can drop in...have an opportunity to talk to everyone". Participants said that they enjoyed having some interaction with their colleagues but did not want informal conversations to interfere with their work schedules. One person in the group felt quite isolated in his/her work area and went to another just to have a little contact and see if anything was going on. A second person's desk was out in the open, in a main traffic area. She had lots of contact with people but this occasionally distracted her from the work that needed to be completed.

A third discussion that seemed to fit within the theme of Physical Structure was work sites. These organizations had several geographical locations. The focus groups said there were some efforts made to help people from the different sites connect face to face, such as having conferences to bring the divisions or sites together. Most of the interaction off site happened through e-mail, voice mail or teleconferencing.

Administrative Practices

A number of focus group participants credited the Human Resources departments, and the administrative practices that they oversaw, for helping to connect people. Specifically, they talked about the kind of activities that were arranged by human resource staff such as in house courses. Focus group participants commented on the variety of learning opportunities available to them and said "courses through the Human Resources Department encourage people to connect and support each other....courses like The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People; and Work and Family". Another participant maintained that "in house courses are convenient....a very friendly group" and another added "it's an easy way to take stress management". Professional Development opportunities were also available for employees. There appeared to be a number of courses available for self study and groups. People said that when a whole group needs to learn a particular skill or build knowledge they often attended a course or training together. They shared comments like "there are training and development self study courses" and "courses offered for team training, the whole team gets pulled in for client services courses or something like that".

Both groups mentioned that there was an orientation for new employees. This activity seemed to begin with the Human Resources department; however, individual departments often had their own orientation to specific tasks. New employees seemed to be involved in brief introductions. This comment was offered by one of the group participants "orientation for new employees....you learn about the company....a tour and introduced to your department".

Policy and Procedures

In response to the other two interview questions "What other things could your organization do to encourage people to connect with and support each other?" and "What are some things that your organization does that discourages people from supporting each other?", the groups identified a number of policies and procedures that they thought might be effective in enhancing social support in their workplace. For example, one participant noted that they "have a grievance procedure but should focus on the positive". They thought that perhaps a suggestion box or an open meeting might be a way to welcome ideas and suggested changes. Another person shared that although there was a way for supervisors to be clear about employee performance, they felt that they also needed a way to tell supervisors "what we expect of them". Both groups mentioned that there were occasional "loggerheads" and that not all management was "open to flexible work hours" or "participation in organized social activities". One person expressed that although there were occasional difficulties, it was "good we are not in a union". A process to resolve conflict or to share controversial ideas seemed to be identified by the group.

The focus group also suggested that getting to know the people you work with is important to getting your work done but also to getting along with one another. They mentioned things like people having a sense of humour, Myers-Briggs testing and new people fitting in.

Leadership

The seventh and final theme to surface involved ideas about management, supervision, and the company's message and direction, which were subsumed under the

category of leadership. One participant shared some positive thoughts about the supervisors and said "they're pretty good around here". Another person felt that they needed "guidance not supervision, we are adults". On a helpful note, one participant stated that although "managers and supervisors have knowledge and expertise" they could "improve their people skills" and encourage people to contribute to a team effort.

One group thought that their organization was "sensitive to people's feelings around change" and that the organization "keeps us informed about the change process". They also felt that the organization was good about "admitting mistakes". The other group also felt that "the message from the company was important...they care about me as a person".

The information from these focus group discussions, informal conversations with human resource staff and previous research provided the base information to construct the assessment measure.

IV. PHASE TWO: DEVELOPMENT AND PILOTING OF ASSESSMENT

PROCEDURE

Introduction

The second phase of the research focused on developing and piloting the assessment tool (COSST). The Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool was drafted based on the information gathered in the focus groups. This information was sorted and arranged to construct a 25 item assessment. Three organizations participated in pilot testing the draft assessment tool.

Method

Development of Assessment Instrument

During the second phase of the research, the information gathered in the focus groups was analysed and similar comments and ideas were clustered together. These clusters were organized into seven groupings: Social Activity, Work Practices, Communication, Physical Structure, Administrative Practices, Policy and Procedures, and Leadership. Assessment items were generated for each of the groupings or theme areas. The clusters of information from the focus groups provided details for item generation. A total of twenty five items were generated for the COSST assessment.

Five items were generated in the *Social Activity* theme area. They included Organized Social Events, Sports Activities, Informal Social Events, Community Awareness and Support, and Celebrating Milestones. Another five items were developed under *Work Practices*. They included Organizational meetings, Team Meetings, Professional Group Meetings, Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles, and Mentor Programs. Four items were created for the *Communication* section. They included Communication Modes, Newsletters, Interest Groups and, Timely and Accurate Information. Three items were generated for *Physical Structure*. These were identified as Gathering/Meeting Places, Work Space and Work Sites. Under *Administrative Practices*, the three items created were Orientation for New Employees, Professional Development and Personal Learning Opportunities. Conflict Resolution Process and Hiring Practices were the two items developed for the section on *Policy and Procedures*. Finally, three items were generated for *Leadership*. They included Supervision and

Management, Shared Leadership, and Visioning and Strategic Planning.

The seven groupings were organized into three key categories: **Physical Environment, Organizational Environment** and **Human/Social Environment**. The Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool (COSST) was structured in the following manner:

- A. Physical Environment**
 - I. Physical Structure**
 - a. Gathering/Meeting Places
 - b. Work Space
 - c. Work Sites
- B. Organizational Environment**
 - I. Administrative Practices**
 - a. Orientation for New Employees
 - b. Professional Development
 - c. Personal Learning Opportunities
 - II. Policy and Procedures**
 - a. Conflict Resolution Process
 - b. Hiring Practices
 - III. Work Practices**
 - a. Organizational Meetings
 - b. Team Meetings
 - c. Professional Group Meetings
 - d. Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles
 - e. Mentor Programs
 - IV. Leadership**
 - a. Supervision and Management
 - b. Shared Leadership
 - c. Visioning and Strategic Planning
- C. Human/Social Environment**
 - I. Communication**
 - a. Communication Modes
 - b. Newsletters
 - c. Interest Groups
 - d. Timely and Accurate Information
 - II. Social Activity**
 - a. Organized Social Events
 - b. Sports Activities
 - c. Informal Social Events

- d. Community Awareness and Support
- e. Celebrating Milestones

Each of the 25 items in the assessment tool was accompanied by a five-point response scale. A score of five on an item indicated that the organization was extremely good in its efforts to foster a supportive work environment and a score of one indicated that little or no effort was being made in this area. These low scores may indicate possible areas for improvement in the work setting. The complete COSST assessment is provided in Appendix E; however, a sample item is provided here for illustration.

a. Gathering/Meeting Places

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5 | There are a variety of places that allow for people to gather and connect with each other. (eg. lunch room, staff lounge, coffee station, fitness room, etc) |
| 4 | |
| 3 | There are a few places for people to gather and connect with each other. |
| 2 | |
| 1 | There are no places within the organization for people to gather and connect with each other. |

Each item had three descriptive statements that related to a very positive rating (5), an average rating (3) and a less desirable rating (1). The other two ratings were used to describe an organization that had some but not all of the characteristics described in the statements. After each item, space was provided for the researchers to make detailed notes with regard to the interview response.

Participants

Four local organizations were approached about their participation in the second

phase of the research (see Appendix F). I sought to broaden the type of organization involved to those outside the insurance industry, and therefore only one of the four organizations was an insurance company. However, I did attempt to find organizations that were comparable in size to those from which the focus group participants came. Three organizations agreed to participate in the assessment interviews. The fourth organization was interested but not able to participate due to a number of organizational changes and time constraints. Two organizations had their Human Resource managers participate in the assessment and the third organization asked the assistant Human Resource manager to take part. The organizational representatives were middle and senior management with several years employment with their respective organizations. The companies were well established within their industrial sectors (a food service, a software company, an electronics and computer hardware organization). The organizations were either experiencing some growth or just moving into a growth period with regard to their businesses. All three organizations had other geographical sites. Two were considered the head offices of the organizations. One organization had just moved to a new building, the second was in the process of renovating a larger building and would be moving within a few months. The third organization was renovating and expanding the existing building. The sites employed between 130 and 205 people.

Administration of Assessment Procedure

Two researchers met to prepare for the assessment interviews. Each item was reviewed. The statements and scale were clarified in order to obtain accurate ratings. The researchers agreed to record key words and descriptive phrases that were relevant and

would be the basis for assigning a rating. The lead researcher was responsible for conducting the interview and utilized questions from the interview guide (Appendix G). These questions related to each item on the COSST assessment and were generated in order to explore information relating to the item and a rating. The complete interview guide is provided in the Appendix; however to follow through with the previous illustration is a sample question:

Describe some of the places within the organization that people gather to connect with each other. For example, would you have a coffee station, lunch room or gym?

The interview questions provide an opportunity for organizations to share information beyond the statements created for each item.

A prearranged interview time with the three organizations was agreed upon and a site visit was confirmed. Before the interviews, the researchers met to familiarize themselves with the assessment and to focus on the interview at hand. After consent was obtained (see Appendix H), some general information about the organization was collected for a profile (Appendix I). The researchers met with human resource representatives from the organizations. During the interview, both researchers recorded information and assigned a "first impressions" rating independent of each other. At the conclusion of the interview, the researchers asked for a tour of the organization and some newsletters and reports if available. Immediately following the site visit, the researchers made some follow up notes and discussed the information collected during the interview. Independent ratings were then finalized in context of the overall assessment. Individual items were compared and notes were made about the similarities and differences in

ratings. A one point difference was averaged. However, if a two point difference or more had occurred the item would be discussed further in order to reach an acceptable rating. The ratings were captured in a chart format. Individual organizational assessments were prepared.

Results

Site 1

This food service and sales organization was established in 1968. It purchases, stores and ships food, supplies and equipment to grocery stores and restaurants. It was a family owned business that had a large number of long-term employees. There were two locations within Southern Ontario with a total of 225 full time and part-time employees. The site visited had 205 employees. Some employees were office workers performing routine administrative duties. Some employees were sales representatives and others worked in the warehouse. The warehouse employees “picked” orders and loaded them onto truck. The organization has a fleet of trucks and truck drivers. The organization was a leader in its sector and was experiencing a small amount of growth through its service area.

Physical Environment

Physical Structure.

Gathering/Meeting Places (rating = 2)

The lunch room and smoking areas were identified as places for people to gather and connect with each other. Sometimes people went into fellow employee's offices. The warehouse was also an area for social contact. During the tour of the organization, it was

noted that the lunch room was small and in need of some paint or wallpaper to brighten it up. It was referred to as the Diesel Cafe. The smoking area had some patio tables and chairs but transport trucks regularly drove by the area as an entrance to the truck yard.

Work Space (rating = 2.5)

There were a number of arrangements with regard to offices, work space and furniture. For example, employees who had outside contact with people had private offices with traditional office furnishings. Employees who worked on the phones had a desk with area dividers. Others, based on function, were housed four to a room with desks and file cabinets. The tour revealed that there was quite a bit of division in the work spaces and some areas were spread out while others appeared cramped.

Work sites (rating = 2.5)

Although there were two locations, efforts were made to have sales meetings and a friendly hockey game was arranged. Employees utilized the telephone and e-mail to keep in touch and all employees went to the Christmas party.

Organizational Environment

Administrative Practices.

Orientation for New Employees (rating = 4)

New employees were taken on a walk through the building and were introduced to people and their functions. They were also introduced to the company's products. New employees were also walked through the organization's human resource manual.

Department supervisors looked after the social introductions.

Professional Development (rating = 2)

Management paid for and organized upgrading that was useful to the company.

Occasionally groups got together to increase their knowledge about products while computer training was done on a one to one basis.

Personal Learning Opportunities (rating = 1)

There were no personal or informal learning opportunities that allow employees to connect with each and support each other.

Policy and Procedures.

Conflict Resolution Process (rating = 2)

There was a Safety Committee that reviews issues with regard to safety. Although there were no specific policies with regard to conflict resolution, employees were encouraged to seek support. Individuals were expected to approach their supervisors and then senior management if resolution was difficult to obtain.

Hiring Practices (rating = 1)

Jobs were posted internally as well as unsolicited resumes were received and reviewed daily. Supervisors usually interviewed and hired on their own. However, they could collaborate with human resources. Employees were not involved in the hiring process.

Work Practices.

Organizational Meetings (rating = 1)

There were no opportunities for people to gather together for company wide meetings.

There were no general staff or annual meetings. There were a variety of shifts and work schedules with about 20% of the work force in the office at any one time. Things could

get quite fragmented.

Team Meetings (rating = 2)

There were some department meetings that were regularly scheduled such as meetings for sales and purchasing. Most meetings were scheduled as needed. Sometimes meetings were needed but were not arranged.

Professional Group Meetings (rating = 2.5)

There were some opportunities for professional groups to meet. For example, managers met every two weeks and supervisors met once a month. It was not clear if the clerical staff met. However, the organization had an open door policy and people generally met as needed.

Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles (rating = 3.5)

All employees were connected to a group in some way. Some departments were quite broad and worked together even though areas of responsibility were diverse. For example, the computer department was responsible for both data entry and technical support. This support was for customers, PC users and terminals.

Mentor Programs (rating = 3.5)

There were opportunities for people to connect with mentors. Every department had some senior employees. Many people had been with the company for a number of years. New employees could connect with veterans. However, there was no formal mentor program and employees were left on their own to seek out a mentor.

Leadership.*Supervision and Management* (rating = 3)

The organization promoted from within to supervisor or management positions. The company occasionally organized informal noon hour meetings where management and leadership videos were reviewed. Managers and supervisors were encouraged to consult with their colleagues around issues. In-house support was also available.

Shared Leadership (rating = 1.25)

Management asked everyone for their ideas and input. As well, employees were asked to share ideas and evaluation of new initiatives. Employees were asked to self evaluate their yearly performance. A meeting between the employee and supervisor was an opportunity to share each other's perceptions on individual performance.

Visioning and Strategic Planning (rating = 1)

The organization was a family owned and operated business. Employees were informed of a new vision and plans after they had been conceived. Employees were not asked for input in this area, decisions were handed down from upper management. Upon review of the human resources manual, the organization had stated that all employees were involved in the continuous planning process.

Human/Social Environment**Communication.***Communication Modes* (rating = 2)

The primary mode of communication was the grapevine. Employees also utilized e-mail and bulletin boards that were located throughout the building. Most management

communication was top down and one way. During the tour a number of bulletin boards were observed.

Newsletters (rating = 4.5)

The organization had a monthly newsletter that was distributed to employees through their pay envelopes. Everyone was encouraged to make submissions. Announcements with regard to new employees, babies, tax information, RRSPs, etc., as well as recipes were shared through the Newsletter. The month's newsletter was in production and a past newsletter was not available.

Interest Groups (rating = 1)

There were no opportunities for people to get together and discuss topics of interest.

Timely and Accurate Information (rating = 3.5)

Announcements and invitations were usually made with enough lead time for people to become involved. There were always people working around the clock so often someone was not available. However every effort was made to include people.

Social Activity.

Organized Social Events (rating = 3.5)

The organization hosted and invited everyone to the Staff Christmas Party. A Christmas party for the children was organized and included lunch, skating and gifts. Employees were asked to volunteer for the children's party. The organization's social committee arranged barbecues, raffles, pizza parties, etc.

Sports Activities (rating = 1)

The organization did not sponsor or encourage participation in sports events.

Informal Social Events (rating = 3.5)

Departments organized lunches and celebrated birthdays. Bridal and baby showers were often joint efforts. There was a golf tournament that was more of a company function. Two informal events that were known are 'a guys fishing trip' and a small bowling group.

Community Awareness and Support (rating = 4)

The organization encouraged employees to participate in the Corporate Challenge, food bank drive and Blue Jeans Charity. Employees typically formed small groups to work on these kinds of activities. The organization contributed to the Children's Wish Foundation, Cystic Fibrosis, St Agatha's Children's Village and minor hockey. They donated perishables to the food kitchen. For employees who had long-term health problems, fellow employees 'send the hat around'.

Celebrating Milestones (rating = 2)

The organization had one corporate celebration. This event was for its 25th anniversary. Individual recognition with regard to years of service was often noted at the annual Christmas party.

Assessment Rating Summary for Site 1

Question	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average Score
A I a	2	2	2
A I b	2	3	2.5
A I c	3	2	2.5
B I a	4	4	4
B I b	2	2	2
B I c	1	1	1
B II a	2	2	2
B II b	1	1	1
B III a	1	1	1
B III b	2	2	2
B III c	3	2	2.5
B III d	3	4	3.5
B III e	3	4	3.5
B IV a	3	3	3
B IV b	1	1.5	1.25
B IV c	1	1	1
C I a	2	2	2
C I b	4	5	4.5
C I c	1	1	1
C I d	3	4	3.5
C II a	4	3	3.5
C II b	1	1	1
C II c	4	3	3.5
C II d	4	4	4
C II e	2	2	2
Totals	59.0	60.5	59.75

Global Impressions/Summary

The organization had demonstrated that it encouraged people to connect and support each other in a number of areas such as orientation for new employees, including people performing isolated work roles, an informal mentor program, company newsletter, timely invitations, organized social events, informal social events, and community awareness and support. These areas appeared to have an above average rating and were well developed. One comment with regard to the informal mentoring: a small amount of structure would greatly improve connecting employees to mentors and might build on the organization's solid foundation. The organization draws its strength from being a family owned business and from its long term employees who are the informal mentors. A review of the items explored suggests that the organization was below average in creating a socially supportive environment. At the time of the observations and assessment, the organization had several areas that if improved could lead to a more socially supportive place.

Areas where the organization might improve their efforts are such areas as all of the items under the Physical Structure, and most items under Administrative Practices, Policy and Procedures, Work Practices, and Leadership. One or two items under Communication and Social Activity are also worth mentioning. Some ways that the organization could facilitate connections and support among employees are as follows.

Since the organization is doing some minor renovations and reorganization, it might be timely to improve the lunch room. Perhaps a coat of paint and some pictures or posters would brighten the room and encourage employees to stay in and socialize at

lunch. The smoking area/patio might be improved by the addition of a shelter from the diesel fumes and elements. These renovation projects could be more fun if employees were asked to help create these spaces or perhaps bring some items from home that would make the areas more inviting. Also, several different work space arrangements are utilized which can be a good idea for both privacy and social interaction. However, it is important to have some office areas where people can come together for either department or inter-department meetings.

Another suggestion is to review the organization's approach to training and development. Investing in the professional and personal development of staff is a strategic move in creating and maintaining a skilled and current work force. A small recommendation is to create opportunities for group learning. A few things could be gained by this: job related skills might increase, and the group might learn to work together and support each other. On an informal level, the organization could offer some lunch and learn sessions. These sessions are another way to bring people together.

A couple of items were explored under policy and procedure. One was regarding a conflict resolution policy and the second was with regard to hiring. It is recommended that some formal steps for conflict resolution be developed. The formation of a review committee of both management and staff is also recommended for times when the conflict resolution steps might fail.

Another area for consideration is that of team building and leadership. The organization could introduce a leadership training program and formal team management skill building workshops. With the number of long-term employees it would be ideal to

capitalize on many people's strengths and capacities. Employees were asked to participate in a few areas of planning. By introducing regular company wide and department meetings and by organizing some management and staff planning groups, employees could actively participate in the continuous planning process.

An inexpensive but key recommendation might be to review, design and implement a structured plan for communications. How information gets shared and who it is shared with is important to people. Open communication helps people to feel connected to each other and to develop a sense of belonging to the organization. Communication is vital to the operation of a successful organization. For example, the organization could share daily announcements and bulletins through its e-mail or design an organizational bulletin board on its network. An employee could be assigned to ensure that the information was distributed appropriately or everyone could be oriented and trained to distribute information. This type of strategy would help avoid some of the "grapevine" communication and encourage people to seek accurate and timely information. This type of open communication helps people to connect in healthier and supportive ways.

Also for consideration is for the organization to help initiate some special interests groups. Groups where people share the same interests or issues can be very supportive and connecting. For example, a group for working mums to share coping strategies or a group for home computer buffs to share the latest information helps people to connect.

Although the Social Activity area seemed to be strongly developed there are a few suggestions. For example, sponsoring a sports team and encouraging people to

participate or support the team can assist with organizational team building and increase employee morale. And finally, regularly celebrating collective and individual milestones can support and facilitate our purpose for working together.

In conclusion, the factors explored resulted in a general sense of community at the organization. With some changes in a few of the theme areas mentioned, and some development and structure in the recommended areas, social support could be improved to a more desirable level.

Site 2

This high technology organization was established in the early 1980s. Its niche technology focused on systems integration and network communications. It was a private company and had a high entrepreneurial spirit. Twenty percent of the profits go to the employees who were described as creative, young and dynamic. There were two locations within Southern Ontario with a total of 200 full time and part-time employees. The site visited had 170 employees, including engineers, clerical staff, and some assemblers. The organization was a leader in its sector and was experiencing exceptional growth in sales. Company sales increased from 25 million last year to almost 35 million this year. The organization most recently suddenly lost its president, a key figure in developing the corporate culture. The organization thought that the diversification of responsibility was its strength.

Physical Environment**Physical Structure.***Gathering/Meeting Places (rating = 4)*

There were several places for people to meet. The lunch room was small but had a refrigerator for pop and juice. There were four board rooms at this site and two board rooms at the other site next door. Many offices had extra chairs so that people could gather. The spaces were well lit and bright. In the new building plans were in place for a gym, floor hockey space, ping pong and a games room. The lunch room was also going to be considerably larger.

Work Space (rating = 3)

Most of the work space utilized dividers to create work cubicles. About 10% of the staff had offices. During the tour it was noted that work space was quite cramped, although meeting rooms appeared to be spacious. There was also an assembly area that was set up with work stations. This area was very clean and not as restricted. This building was interesting because there were no straight lines to the walls. The walls curved through the hallways creating spaces where people gathered to talk.

Work sites (rating = 3)

There were two locations but the buildings were side by side. Employees utilized the telephone, a network link and e-mail to keep in touch. E-mail was the primary communication tool. There was a concern about the network link being severed as only the main office was moving to the new location.

Organizational Environment**Administrative Practices.***Orientation for New Employees (rating = 4)*

New employees were given the organization's manual that outlined the rules, regulations and company history. New persons had a buddy assigned to them when they first joined. The buddy looked after most introductions and answering questions. There were no managers or supervisors to look after the social introductions.

Professional Development (rating = 5)

The organization had a policy that pays for related courses. However the catchment area was wide. Often employees initiated requests and attended courses in groups. The company also ran in-house programs and lunch and learn regularly, providing additional opportunities for employees to gather together. These topics covered ergonomics, safety, technology, etc. The organization also sent both individuals and groups of people for intensive technical training courses in Silicone Valley for example. The organization's training budget was \$20,000 per month.

Personal Learning Opportunities (rating = 4)

Stress Management courses were offered regularly. The organization paid for a health club membership. However, employees had to go four times a month to qualify. Sometimes one day seminars were held on topics of interest.

Policy and Procedures.*Conflict Resolution Process (rating = 2)*

There were no formal policies with regard to conflict resolution. In fact written policies

were foreign to this organization. The cultural norms of the organization dominated. The organization had an open door policy and employees were encouraged to discuss issues. If resolution was difficult to obtain employees approached the CEO. He was seen as the unofficial mediator.

Hiring Practices (rating = 4)

Candidates were brought to the company by Human Resources to meet with co-workers and "gurus". These technical "gurus" were seen as "managers" although they were not referred to as such. The gurus make the hiring decisions.

Work Practices.

Organizational Meetings (rating = 3.5)

There were opportunities for people to gather together for company wide meetings. Regular product group meetings were held monthly. Profit and revenue information was shared with the employees. Product development, sales, new prospects and business decisions were also shared. Lunch was supplied.

Team Meetings (rating = 4)

Sales meeting were held regularly and project team meetings were frequent. There were often hallway meetings. Functional areas met weekly for information sharing.

Professional Group Meetings (rating = 4)

There were some project oriented and task/technical specific meetings. There seemed to be frequent internal consultation on "how do you handle..." and "what did you do when...". There were also sales strategy meetings and the clerical group met informally for lunch on a regular basis.

Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles (rating = 3)

All employees attended monthly meetings but were not really integrated. For example, groups such as network support, purchasers and accounting knew what was going on but were not involved at the project level as were most other employees. One clerical person worked with forty engineers. She usually joined the other clerical staff for their informal lunch meeting.

Mentor Programs (rating = 5)

The organization had a "guru" system. The gurus were the product or project "managers". Employees were usually assigned to one when they started with the company. Most people were assigned to a project from beginning to end but changed "gurus" when they changed projects.

Leadership.*Supervision and Management (rating = 3)*

The "gurus" had extra stock options and therefore incentive to make sure that the project was done on time and quality maintained. The organization was involved in a number of outside associations and professional groups such as a steel group, a food and beverage association, hi tech associations and a young presidents association. On a personal level, employees attended Dale Carnegie Courses and conferences. However, there was no formal organizational effort to develop people skills and leadership, skills that would help people to connect.

Shared Leadership (rating = 3)

Leadership was shared by "incremental assignment of projects". For example, smaller

projects were assigned to people who had worked through a couple of team projects and seemed ready to lead a small team project. All teams shared ownership for a project and responsibility was distributed among team members. The organization led by example and technical knowledge. Leadership seemed to be assigned at a specific level of the organizational hierarchy and only with regard to projects.

Visioning and Strategic Planning (rating = 3)

The organization had an annual meeting for direction setting. Company wide issues such as compensation were dealt with at the meeting. Also, an outside mediator was brought in to talk to 30 to 40 people about the corporate culture. He compiled the findings and reported at the annual meeting.

Human/Social Environment

Communication.

Communication Modes (rating = 4)

The primary mode of communication was e-mail. Employees utilized e-mail regularly and frequently and accessed a variety of mailing lists. The communication flow was described as fluid and multidimensional. The term "matrix communication" was used to describe how communication happens. Both electronic and physical bulletin boards were employed. For example, press releases were shared electronically and press clippings were posted on the physical boards.

Newsletters (rating = 2)

The organization had customer oriented newsletters that showcased products and were distributed regularly. Everyone was encouraged to make submissions although often the

contributions came from the "gurus". An organizational newsletter was considered passe for this organization. Newsletter type information was communicated through e-mail.

Interest Groups (rating = 3)

There were some informal opportunities for people to get together through English as a second language classes, floor hockey and the products group "nerf gun wars". People were aware of these activities and joined in if they wanted to participate. There were no informal discussion groups.

Timely and Accurate Information (rating = 5)

All announcements to meetings and invitations to social functions were communicated through e-mail. It worked very well for this organization.

Social Activity.

Organized Social Events (rating = 4)

Two committees organized the company's two large events. One event was an evening Christmas party for adults. The second event was a summer picnic on the CEO's property. Midway rides and a mini put were brought in for the children and a pool was available. Smaller groups also got together at Christmas open houses for families. The "Friday Lunch Bunch" was semi organized in that everyone was invited to meet at the building's entrance and the group decided on a restaurant where they had an opportunity to "gab".

Sports Activities (rating = 3)

The organization did not sponsor or encourage participation in sports events except for the membership at the health club. However there were a number of informal sports

events such as floor hockey, industrial hockey, softball and volley ball.

Informal Social Events (rating = 3.5)

Goodbye parties, wedding and baby showers were supported informally. People often collected for gifts. There was an informal volleyball game once a week and occasionally people participated in a paint ball game. There was also a group of people who enjoyed playing computer games.

Community Awareness and Support (rating = 3.5)

The organization encouraged employees to participate in the United Way campaign. An Oktoberfest Sausage Day was held to raise funds for charity. Food bank drives were held and contributions were made to the House of Friendship. These activities provided opportunities for people to work and or play together, and to connect with each other. The organization has a close relationship with the YMCA. Employees were able to bring forward a charitable organization for consideration although it was not clear that the organization showed or encouraged leadership in this area.

Celebrating Milestones (rating = 3)

The organization prefers to keep its awards and tokens of appreciation low key. To mark these events the awards and a poster were displayed for the employees and the awards were mentioned at the regular meetings. During the tour, it was noted that the awards were discretely displayed in the main foyer. Organizational accomplishments were recognized at semi-annual events. Individual accomplishments were recognized at regular monthly meetings. Recently when the sales milestone was announced the employees applauded.

Assessment Rating Summary for Site 2

Question	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average Score
A I a	4	4	4
A I b	3	3	3
A I c	3	3	3
B I a	4	4	4
B I b	5	5	5
B I c	4	4	4
B II a	2	2	2
B II b	4	4	4
B III a	3	4	3.5
B III b	4	4	4
B III c	4	4	4
B III d	3	3	3
B III e	5	5	5
B IV a	3	3	3
B IV b	3	3	3
B IV c	3	3	3
C I a	4	4	4
C I b	2	2	2
C I c	3	3	3
C I d	5	5	5
C II a	4	4	4
C II b	3	3	3
C II c	4	3	3.5
C II d	3	4	3.5
C II e	3	3	3
Totals	88.0	89	88.5

Global Impressions/Summary

The organization had demonstrated that it encouraged people to connect and support each other in many areas such as Administrative Practices (orientation for new employees, professional development, personal learning opportunities), Work Practices (organizational meetings, team meetings, professional group meetings, inclusion of people performing isolated work roles, a semi-formal mentor program), communication modes, timely invitations, organized social events, informal social events, and community awareness and support. These areas appeared to have an above average rating and were well developed. One comment with regard to the inclusion of people with specialized tasks/isolated work roles is that although people attended a monthly meeting it was not clear that they belonged to an interactive work group that aided with connections.

A review of the items explored suggested that the organization was doing well at creating a socially supportive environment. At the time of the observations and assessment, the organization had a few areas that if improved could conceivably lead to a more socially supportive workplace.

Areas for recommendation where the organization might improve their efforts are a few items under the Physical Structure, one item under Policy and Procedures, and all the items under Leadership. One or two items under Communication and Social Activity are also worth mentioning. Some ways that the organization might facilitate connections and support for each other are as follows.

Since the organization is moving to a new location and will be doing some minor renovations and reorganization, these recommendations may have been implemented.

The organization recognized that they had outgrown their work space. A recommendation to improve some of the cramped working conditions supports the organization's direction to relocate to a larger building. The organization shared a concern about breaking its network link with the other site. It is recommended that they solve this issue as soon as possible as communications through computers appears to be a vital connection for people.

Both administrative and work practices seemed to be highly evolved areas. However within the Organizational Environment some improvements can be suggested. The organization's approach to training and development is commendable. Investing in the professional and personal development of staff is a strategic move that aids in creating and maintaining a skilled and current work force. Nevertheless a recommendation to develop and implement a plan to foster leadership throughout the organization is notable. While employees within the organization look to the CEO as a mediator and negotiator, the "gurus" are seen as technical and product knowledgeable. These senior employees have expertise and show leadership in a particular role. These role models are the cornerstones for the organization's informal approach to leadership development. This effort might be complemented by offering some skill development to employees who are "assigned projects". For example if some support and coaching were to be offered, especially to those employees who are reluctant to take the lead on a project, the employee might approach the task at hand with more confidence. Also, there was no indication that staff led monthly meetings or helped set the agendas. Encouraging staff to be more interactive might strengthen connections that have been established through

other work groups. By creating these in-house learning opportunities, employees who are extended chances at growth can risk learning on the job and will also have some structured supports in place as well as being able to connect with each other about their experiences.

It was not clear at the time of the assessment whether the employees collectively participated in direction setting and planning. It appeared that new directions were announced to staff at the annual meeting. However, some problem solving around specific identified issues did take place. A recommendation would be that the organization utilize their outside mediator to find out if the staff would like to be more involved in direction setting and proactive planning for change. Some staff may indicate an interest in working together in this area. Employees' creativity seemed to be limited to an assigned project. If encouraged, they may be able to bring that creativity to an organizational level. It appears that the organization has a great resource within its staff.

With regard to policy and procedure, the organization has a very good approach to hiring new employees by providing an opportunity for the project team to meet with them. In the area of conflict resolution, the organization relies heavily on the corporate culture to prevail. The organization feels that a person is able to figure out within the few months whether they will "fit in". If they do not fit in, they usually leave on their own. It is recommended that some informal steps for conflict resolution be developed. An informal process to discuss issues may work for this organization as they do not have many traditional structures in place. Also the formation of an informal group that includes the CEO is recommended for times when the conflict resolution steps fail. This

type of arrangement might provide an opportunity for more people to learn mediation skills from the CEO who is highly regarded for these skills.

Another area for consideration was that of team building and leadership. The organization could introduce a leadership training program and formal team management skill building workshops. With the number of long-term employees it would be ideal to capitalize on many people's strengths and capacities. Employees were asked to participate in a few areas of planning. By introducing regular company wide and department meetings and by organizing some management and staff planning groups, employees could actively participate in the continuous planning process.

"Matrix communication" seems to work really well for this organization and people feel connected to each other and there is a sense of belonging to the organization. Although they feel that newsletters are passe, and individuals can share items through their electronic communications, there seems to be a missed opportunity for people to come together to share and create a venture that is their own. An historical record of the people within the organization as they pass milestones or share moments of their lives is lost. It is recommended that the organization consider asking the staff to create an electronic newsletter and maintain an archive. As long as the task does not become onerous, this type of group effort might be another way for people to connect and feel supportive.

Also for consideration is for the organization to help initiate some special interests groups. Groups where people share the same interests or issues can be very supportive and connecting. For example, a group for working parents to share coping strategies, a

group for exercise buffs or gardeners to share the latest information might help people to connect.

Although the Social Activity area seemed to be somewhat developed there are a few suggestions. For example, there seems to be interest in a number of sports activities on an informal level. A recommendation might be that the organization consider sponsoring a sports team such as the industrial hockey team. Encouraging people to participate or support the team at a game might assist with organizational team building and increase organizational spirit. A second recommendation might be to look at how informal events are encouraged and supported by both the organization and the employees. The outside facilitator might ask a sample of employees about informal activities and how they feel people are included and connected through these activities. This type of proactive approach might prevent situations where employees begin to feel excluded or uninvited to join in. A third recommendation relates to Community Awareness and Support. The organization is involved with a few charitable efforts and the employees are supportive. Encouraging employees to work with senior staff to form a group that would review charitable causes and activities might be another way to help people connect and feel involved with their coworkers outside of their project teams. And finally, regularly celebrating collective and individual milestones can support and facilitate our purpose for working together. A low key approach seems to work for this organization. Nonetheless, collectively celebrating small or large wins with a breakfast meeting or an after work get together might help build spirit and connectedness among the group.

In conclusion, the factors explored resulted in a good sense of community at the organization. With some changes in a few of the areas mentioned, and some development and structure in the recommended areas, the organization could build on the solid social support that has been created by organizational efforts and their corporate culture.

Site 3

This high tech and electronic instrument organization was established in 1939. In addition to developing and manufacturing medical, analytical and electronic test equipment, the organization had a computer business that ranged from diodes and chips to computers and printers to calculators. The company had shares available on the stock market and had a competitive edge in a global environment. Company wide profit sharing and employee stock purchase plans were also in place. There were over 1,700 locations worldwide with a total of 112,000 full time and part-time employees. The site visited had 130 full time, part-time and contract employees. The organization had moved recently and was developing two new businesses. The organization was a "world leader or major competitor in each of its business segments" and was experiencing good financial performance. The organization thought that their unique "way of doing business" was its strength. Their way was a foundation of formalized corporate objectives based on underlying corporate values.

Physical Environment**Physical Structure.***Gathering/Meeting Places (rating = 4.5)*

There were several places for people to meet and connect. There was a large cafeteria, patio, and a training room. Research and Development had a coffee lounge that overlooked the cafeteria. People gathered at the cafeteria at 10:00 a.m. everyday to enjoy coffee and donuts that were supplied by the organization. There was a small fitness centre where a few people could work out together. There were several meeting rooms and meeting spaces available for people to gather and connect. Many work spaces had small conference tables so that people could gather together. A tour of the building revealed that the spaces were well lit and bright. An interesting feature of the new building was the smoking shelter. The free standing shelter was constructed to match the new building design and was equipped with benches.

Work Space (rating = 4)

The work space utilized partitions to create work areas. There were no doors or solid walls. Work space was partitioned according to work group or function. Human Resources had a private area away from the organized work groups but did not have any walls or doors. During the tour it was noted that work space was quite spacious. Work groups of two and four shared a comfortable work area. Each employee had a desk, chair and a file cabinet. There was also a small conference table to encourage team meetings.

Work sites (rating = 3)

The organization's locations were worldwide with about 22 located in Canada Employees

utilized the telephone, a computer network and e-mail to keep in touch. The main branch for Canada was about an hour away and served as a training centre. New employees travelled there for a one day seminar. Sometimes people were able to travel to other sites in North America, Europe and the Far East.

Organizational Environment

Administrative Practices.

Orientation for New Employees (rating = 4)

New employees were sent to the training centre for a one day orientation session. The new person was also given a half day training session on site that included safety, security, an introduction to site quality, and policies and procedures. Managers were given a checklist to facilitate the orientation. They were also responsible for a tour of the premises and social introductions within the department and at coffee talks. A number of staff had already met the person during the interview process. Upon beginning their work, the new employee is assigned a buddy or mentor.

Professional Development (rating = 3)

The organization offers training on site for groups. However the emphasis was on an individual's development plan. These plans were developed with the manager and were revisited yearly. Technical training is mainly one on one. There were not many opportunities for people to connect and support each other through training.

Personal Learning Opportunities (rating = 3)

The organization offered lunch and learn sessions every quarter. For example Making Your Body Computer Friendly and Stress Management courses were offered as well as a

stress management resource kit. The organization had a resource centre where employees signed out resources and a career self-reliance kit was also available. These two strategies did not include groups of people getting together and connecting.

Policy and Procedures.

Conflict Resolution Process (rating = 3)

The organization had an open door policy and procedures were in place to resolve conflicts. Employees were encouraged to discuss issues among themselves. If resolution was difficult to obtain employees had to inform each other if they were going to approach management. The manager helped to resolve the conflict. It was expected that the procedure would be used responsibly and, if so, any complaints were not used against the employee during a performance review.

Hiring Practices (rating = 3)

Several people were involved during the interview process and the department manager made the hiring decisions. The Human Resources manager was available to coach the department manager. Sometimes employees were given an opportunity to interview for their own professional development.

Work Practices.

Organizational Meetings (rating = 2)

Twice a year there were telecasts on profit sharing. Everyone was quite attentive. Worldwide divisional meetings took place via teleconferencing. Product plans and strategies were worked on through the "intranet".

Team Meetings (rating = 4.5)

Various meetings or "coffee talks" were held regularly and in the cafeteria. For example, divisional meetings were held once a month as were department meetings. Management staff met weekly. People were organized into these various work groups and met regularly.

Professional Group Meetings (rating = 5)

There were various professional group meetings held regularly and frequently across the organization. For example, the administrative staff met once a week as did the managers group. There were several project meetings and a quality steering committee pulled people together occasionally.

Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles (rating = N/A)

All employees were thought to be connected to a work group. No one was identified as working in isolation. This question appeared to be confusing so it was not rated at the time.

Mentor Programs (rating = 4)

The organization had a formal mentor system in place. The managers assigned mentors to the new employee. Employees were also provided with some information on mentoring such as how to get one and the qualities to look for. The organization was trying to identify mentors across sites. Also a special effort was being made to find mentors for women and visible minorities.

Leadership.*Supervision and Management* (rating = 4.5)

One of the core values of the organization was team work. The organization shared its team development resources with managers. Team work was a factor on the manager's performance appraisal and impacted on his/her salary. Other employees were given opportunities to lead a team or committee.

Shared Leadership (rating = 3)

Representatives from various departments were encouraged to present at the coffee talks and at management meetings. The organization counted on various people leading as their human resources were stretched for project work.

Visioning and Strategic Planning (rating = 4)

The organization's business plan was developed from the bottom up. At this site there were two teams, a management team and a senior management team. The organizational values were revisited by the management teams. Focus groups were held with the employees to develop a strategy. Management reserves approval rights. Out of this exercise, employees and management developed a mascot to symbolize their strive for excellence. The group developed a character that everyone could identify with in some way. The mascot appears on the organization's home page and a wall calendar that was distributed to everyone. This effort was seen as a lot of fun. A tour of the cafeteria revealed a life size poster of the mascot.

Human/Social Environment**Communication.***Communication Modes* (rating = 5)

One of the primary modes of communication was gathering together for "coffee talks". "Coffee talks" were a way of everyone sharing information and getting involved in open discussion. Employees utilized e-mail, voice mail and had a homepage that was updated regularly. Both electronic and physical bulletin boards were employed. During the tour, it was noted that several partitions served a dual purpose. Not only did they determine work space, a few selected partitions were utilized as bulletin boards. The challenge for those involved with posting information was to keep things current. Posted information related to current training, seminars and social events. Another tool to facilitate communication was the practice of "Management By Wandering Around". This type of approach involved "keeping up to date with individuals and activities through informal or structured communications".

Newsletters (rating = 5)

There were three levels of newsletter that were distributed within the organization regularly. One was for the site, one for Canada and one was distributed worldwide. Everyone was encouraged to make submissions. The site newsletter had more "fun items" than the other two newsletters and featured the mascot.

Interest Groups (rating = 1)

There were no informal interest groups or discussion groups.

Timely and Accurate Information (rating = 4.5)

Most meetings were regularly scheduled. For example "coffee talks" were always at 3:00 p.m. All announcements to meetings and invitations to social functions were posted on bulletin boards and in the newsletter. Occasionally rescheduling was necessary. There were many opportunities for employees to participate.

Social Activity.*Organized Social Events* (rating = 5)

There were two levels of organized social events within the organization. The management sponsored and arranged for a summer picnic and a Christmas party. Everyone was invited to these events. On another level, the social committee arranged for one day events such as a curling bonspiel, golf tournament and a bowling event. There was also an employee hosted open house and children's events were organized. Employees were also involved in customer appreciation days. The organization provided many social opportunities for people to connect.

Sports Activities (rating = 2.5)

In addition to the one day sports events the organization sponsored a baseball team. However it was not clear how people were encouraged to participate.

Informal Social Events (rating = 3.5)

There was some evidence of departmental social activities such as baby showers, lunches and after work activity. Celebrating birthdays was not a "big deal". However, the organization continues with a tradition that at 10:00 a.m. everyday people gathered together in the cafeteria to share donuts, coffee and conversation.

Community Awareness and Support (rating = 5)

The organization encouraged employees to participate in the United Way campaign, food bank drives, crocus sales for the CNIB and daffodil sales for the Cancer Society. The organization also encouraged employees to bring forward initiatives for specific issues. A donations committee comprised of employee volunteers met four times a year to review charitable requests. The committee had a budget and a set of criteria were used to evaluate requests.

Celebrating Milestones (rating = 2.5)

The launch of a new product was a time for celebration. Celebrations took the form of beer bashes and theme nights. These events were often creative and even a little "wacky". Departments took on these "host opportunities" to showcase the new products and their collective talents. The most recent event had a cruise theme. The organizing committee was recognized with a lunch and gifts. These celebrations did not occur often or routinely. Another program that the organization supports is the "Thanks a Lunch". Employees nominated each other for a \$10.00 lunch voucher as a thanks for helping their fellow employees out. Managers occasionally gave out \$100.00 dinner vouchers as gratitude.

Assessment Rating Summary for Site 3

Question	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average Score
A I a	5	4	4.5
A I b	4	4	4
A I c	3	3	3
B I a	4	4	4
B I b	3	3	3
B I c	3	3	3
B II a	3	3	3
B II b	3	3	3
B III a	2	2	2
B III b	5	4	4.5
B III c	5	5	5
B III d	N/A	N/A	N/A
B III e	4	4	4
B IV a	5	4	4.5
B IV b	3	3	3
B IV c	4	4	4
C I a	5	5	5
C I b	5	5	5
C I c	1	1	1
C I d	5	4	4.5
C II a	5	5	5
C II b	3	2	2.5
C II c	3	3	3
C II d	5	5	5
C II e	3	2	2.5
Totals	91.0	85.0	88.0

Global Impressions/Summary

The organization had demonstrated that it encouraged people to connect and support each other across all theme areas: Physical Structure (gathering and meeting places, work space), Administrative Practices (orientation for new employees), Policy and Procedures (conflict resolution process, hiring practices), Work Practices (team meetings, professional group meetings, a mentor program), Leadership (supervision and management, visioning and strategic planning) Communication (communication modes, newsletters, timely invitations) and Social Activity (organized social events, community awareness and support). These areas appeared to have an above average rating and were well developed. One comment with regard to the inclusion of people with specialized tasks/isolated work roles is that although the organization could not identify anyone in an isolated role, it would be worth a review of people's roles and connections to ensure that everyone does belong to a work group. This particular item in the assessment was marked 'not applicable'.

A review of the items explored suggested that the organization was doing very well at creating a socially supportive environment, particularly in the design of their new building, team and group meetings, leadership and communications. At the time of the observations and assessment, the organization had a few items within some of the key areas that if improved could conceivably lead to a more socially supportive workplace.

Areas for recommendation where the organization might improve its efforts are: a few items under Administrative Practices, a few items under Work Practices, and Social Activity. Some ways that the organization might facilitate connections and support for

each other are as follows.

Both administrative and work practices seemed to be highly evolved areas. However within the Organizational Environment some improvements can be suggested. The organization's approach to training and development is commendable. Investing in the professional and personal development of staff is a strategic move that aids in creating and maintaining a skilled and current work force. However, the emphasis is on individual development plans and groups are accommodated if necessary. It is recommended that this effort be complemented by offering some skill development and training to groups of employees. Learning together might help people build stronger working relationships and connections. Also, a formal approach to leadership development coupled with the organization's mentoring program might help create a new group of leaders who are able to share meeting facilitation and project management with increased confidence. Encouraging staff to develop leadership strengths and to become more interactive might strengthen connections that have been established through other work groups.

The organization has a very good approach to hiring new employees by providing an opportunity for department employees and managers to meet with them. In the area of conflict resolution, the organization's policy appears to work quite well for them. A suggestion might be to consider forming a mediation group that includes representatives from both managers and staff. This type of arrangement might provide an opportunity for more people to learn mediation skills and to model working together to resolve conflict. This approach would also complement the organization's way of doing business.

This site belongs to a worldwide organization. Meetings are an integral part of their operational structure. On site, organizational meetings are well developed and a regular occurrence. Nonetheless, as a segment of a world wide organization, the connections are less frequent and the opportunities for people to gather together are almost nonexistent. This may be the nature of a relationship with a worldwide organization and an acceptable standard for this type of assessment.

Also for consideration is for the organization to help initiate some special interests groups. Groups where people share the same interests or issues can be very supportive and connecting. For example, a group for working parents to share coping strategies, a group for exercise buffs or gardeners to share the latest information might help people to connect. The organization could utilize several of its communication vehicles to find out if people would like to get together around specific topics.

Although the Social Activity area seemed to be highly developed around organizational sponsored and promotional activity, there are a few suggestions. For example, there seems to be some interest in a number of one day sports activities. A recommendation might be that the organization consider sponsoring an ongoing sports team or regular sports event such as bowling. Encouraging people to participate or support the team at a game might assist with organizational team building and increase organizational spirit. A second recommendation might be to look at how informal events are encouraged and supported by both the organization and the employees. Although each department organizes its own informal social activity, it might be important to find out if all departments are able to encourage and support these types of activities. Some

staff may be missing out on some informal ways of connecting. It would also be interesting to find out if there are any interdepartmental informal social activities. This may be a way for people to broaden their informal connections and supports at work. And finally, regularly celebrating collective and individual milestones can support and facilitate our purpose for working together. Organizational accomplishments are well celebrated and enjoyed by all. Some committees have their efforts recognized with an opportunity to lunch together and celebrate. A commendable practice in place is the peer nomination for Thanks a Lunch vouchers. A recommendation here is that since employee recognition is on an individual basis, the organization might explore ways to collectively celebrate individual accomplishments and small wins. Perhaps a breakfast meeting or building an informal event onto the "coffee talks" or at morning break might help build spirit and connectedness among the group.

In conclusion, the factors explored resulted in a good sense of community at the organization. With some changes in a few of the theme areas mentioned, and some development and structure in the recommended areas, the organization could build on the solid social support that has been created by organizational efforts and their corporate values.

V. DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Assessment Instrument/Procedure

During the development and subsequent pilot testing of the assessment some lessons were learned. The following discussion points out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the draft assessment and procedure. Some strategies are offered that may

improve both the instrument and process.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool has a number of strengths worth mentioning. First, the items are grounded in and reflect the experience of the people involved. Focus groups were instrumental in the development of the 25 items. The open ended questions used to complete the assessment afforded participants an opportunity to share stories about their organizations. A rich picture of the organization was shared and often participants elaborated more than what was required to complete the assessment. Second, there seems to be a natural flow to the theme areas. Beginning the assessment with questions relating to physical structure was not only a comfortable place for people to start but also, several other themes were often mentioned in this first section. The participants would provide leads that could be readdressed when discussing later topics such as meetings, social events and communications. Third, the use of the headings: Physical Environment, Organizational Environment and Social/Human Environment is not only a good way to organize the assessment items; it was also quite useful when explaining a bit about the assessment and process to the participant. COSST is user friendly. Fourth, the five-point scale with three descriptive statements is easy to use and is based on recorded information. Utilizing the opportunity to select a first impressions rating and then adjust the rating based on additional information collected seems to be a more reliable method to administer COSST. Fifth, conducting the assessment on site is advantageous for a few reasons. The participants are in a known setting and might be more relaxed and open during the assessment. Also, while on site,

the researchers can ask to tour or walk about the site. This provides an opportunity to confirm information shared during the assessment and to add additional information. Last, the advantage of two researchers to listen, observe and rate is beneficial and provides a more accurate picture of the organization.

The Comprehensive Organizational Social Support Tool has some weaknesses but most are related to the procedure. Some changes to the procedure may improve the flow of the assessment and the results. First, the researchers began the assessment by asking for some basic information about the organization. There was no time set aside for everyone to get comfortable and relaxed before proceeding with the interview. As an external consultant, it is important to build some rapport and trust and gain some credibility. All the participants were quite busy and had to fit the interview in to their very busy days. It would be important to interview people at a time when they are able to fully participate without work demands looming. Second, although there seemed to be a flow to the items, sometimes the responses jumped around. For example people wanted to talk about social activities at several points during the interview. Since social activity is at the end of the assessment it is important to keep track of these responses throughout the interview. A tape recording of the interviews would aid in recording information. It was challenging for the lead researcher to ask questions, listen to the answers, record and rate. Third, there are a number of issues with regard to interviewing one person from the company. Interviewing one person results in one perspective on the environments. This perspective may not be broad enough and should not be a public relations post. For example, it would be important to know the participant's position in the company and if

he/she can speak to a wide range of topics. Also, it would be important for someone to comment on both the formal and informal activities of the organization. Their comments would have to reflect the experience of a general group of employees and not just a specific group that they may be more familiar with. Fourth, some terms within assessment needed some explanation. For example, there seemed to be some confusion around the term leadership. Some participants related information about management only. After some clarification they were able to share more about leadership across the organization.

Correspondence of Two Assessors

The two assessors had conversations before and after each interview. Conversations before the interview helped the assessors get focused on the task at hand. A review of the instrument and some details about the organization were shared. During the interview, little was said between the assessors, although by the third interview, the lead researcher was identifying sections of the assessment to ensure that both the assessors stayed on track and there were no discrepancies. After the interviews, the assessors compared notes with regard to each item. Once they had finalized their independent ratings, they discussed the scores. There was a considerable level of agreement between the assessors on the ratings they made independently after the interview. Percent agreement was 60%, 88% and 76% for sites 1, 2 and 3 respectively. At most, the two assessors differed by only one scale point on any item. By discussing their notes and the organizational tour the assessors were able to agree on a joint rating on each item. They also discussed some things that were not captured by the assessment.

For example, one of the sites received above average ratings on a number of the items.

The assessors wondered if they were getting the whole picture. It appeared that the comments only reflected the involvement of permanent full time employees and possibly only one sector of the organization.

Possible Improvements

In order to obtain a fair assessment it might be important to interview more than one person from the organization. Two or more people would help avoid focusing on any one group and avoid responses such as "I'm not sure we have..." or "I don't think we...". A more interactive approach would be to hold a small focus group with people from across the organization. In addition to being interactive, richer information can be shared and creative solutions might be found.

The instrument needs to be reviewed for additions, deletions, wording and clarification of terms. For example, one of the sites talked about people leaving the organization if they did not "fit in". It would be important to have an item that reflects how people disengage with the organization and the people within it. The focus of the assessment is how people are brought together. However, when someone leaves the circle of support, is there an exit interview and are employees involved? It would be important to review this transition along with the orientation for new employees and conflict resolution process. To help clarify terms it may important to review a glossary of terms with the participants. This type of action may assist with the administration of the instrument.

A review of the items that refer to other locations or how people gather together

with other locations would be helpful. Worldwide organizations would have difficulty with ratings on these items because it would be unlikely that they would be able to have everyone gather together. There may be other ways for people to connect such as teleconferencing and e-mail that are just as or even more connecting.

Relationship to Literature

Social support in organizations, for this research, is conceptualized by how people make connections and support each other. This description was helpful for the design of the assessment and for discussion with focus groups. Some mutual understanding of the multidimensional social support construct is important for research (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Winemiller et al, 1993). COSST attempts to assess social support at the organizational level. In its formative stage COSST has been utilized to investigate characteristics of organizations that are creating socially supportive environments. Organizational assessment utilizes a range of activities and methods to describe organizations (Lawler et al, 1980; Winemiller et al, 1993). COSST may be another tool to add to the range of assessment activities.

COSST has been developed as an objective measure of the workplace environment. Krupat and Guild (1980) suggested that both objective ratings and people's perceptions of their environments can be useful for assessing settings. Administration of the WES (Moos, 1979) along with COSST will provide another piece of information. Krupat and Guild warn that although individual perceptions may not be reliable, they are still an important source of information.

It is important to discuss some ethical dilemmas that emerged in the course of the

research. The information gathered and observed forms the basis for the assessment and recommendations. Some sensitive information or contradictions may be part of the feedback to organizations. It is important to consider the impact that sharing such information will have on individuals, organizational life and business (Furnham & Gunter, 1993; Lawler et al, 1980; Stone, 1978). The use and misuse of information should be carefully considered before a report is presented. Specifically, will there be any reprisal against the individual who shared the information? Is the organization's culture strong enough to weather some negative feedback or contradiction? Will the information affect the organization's ability to conduct business? And finally, will there be any negative effects on the larger community? These questions should be considered carefully and potentially damaging information should be qualified in order to lessen any negative effects.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this research that are worth discussing. With regard to the early stages of developing the assessment, in addition to the focus groups it would have been helpful to conduct some key informant interviews with Human Resource staff and Organizational Development consultants. Key informants might have been able to identify some additional items, as well, they may have been helpful with wording of questions.

The COSST instrument was pilot tested with three organizations. The sample size was small and a wider representation of organizations may have been more helpful to identify additional themes. However the groups were adequate for pilot testing the

assessment in its formative stage of development.

Information received during the assessment may only reflect the activity of a small group of people who are highly participatory. Some additional information may need to be gathered about who is involved in social support activities within the organization. Also it is important to keep in mind that the assessment reflects a snapshot from a one hour conversation and tour of the organization.

Social desirability is always a factor to look out for. If there is an opportunity to build trust with the participant, the assessors may be able to elicit a more accurate picture of the organization. Also, interviewing one person has other difficulties. It is a challenge for the assessor to know when the person is reporting on policy or practice.

Some effort was made to address inter-rater reliability by having two researchers independently rate the organizations. During the development of COSST some effort was made to revise and clarify wording. Test-retest with a large pool of organizations would help determine the reliability of the assessment. Validity was not addressed in this formative stage.

Future Research

Researchers should be encouraged to move beyond developing instruments that ask about the individual's perceptions. Several Social Support measures exist (Winemiller, et al, 1993), but the COSST is distinct from these other measures in that it approaches social support at a very different level, with a different unit of analysis. Organizations are a place not only to assess but to look at strategies for change and interventions. An ecological approach to research with organizations is most fitting.

Social Support Assessments developed should reflect this approach. As well, a strengths based assessment that has a positive focus, and offers interventions that build on the organizations' strengths, will probably find the organization amenable to intervention and change.

This initial promising work with the assessment tool indicates that further research is warranted. A number of aspects of the instrument's reliability and validity would need to be examined. Studies should be made of the tool's inter-rater reliability, and its stability over time. Would the same assessment result if an organization were appraised at six month intervals? Another direction for the future may be to develop norms or standards for organizations who utilize COSST, by using the tool with many different types of organizations. The ratings at this point in time do not have much meaning other than within their descriptive contexts. Norms or standards may vary for different types of business and sizes of organization. To assess the tool's validity, one could have employees rate the amount of social support they receive from co-workers, and compare these ratings to the company's overall rating, across several different organizations.

Some research may combine the COSST assessment with other measures of social support such as the Work Environment Scale. An examination of these objective and subjective approaches with an organization may prove to be highly productive when developing interventions. To administer COSST to organizational groups may have merit on its own; an exploration of the flexibility of the assessment and an appraisal of the value of the information shared is warranted.

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LETTER FOR ORGANIZATIONS - PHASE ONE

APPENDIX A

Dear

My name is Amanda Kroger and I am an M.A. Candidate with the Community Psychology Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am currently working on my thesis and Dr. Mark Pancer is my research advisor. We are interested in developing an assessment measure that will help organizations to determine how well they are doing in fostering supportive working environments and to identify possible areas for improvement in the work setting.

People spend a great deal of time in the workplace. Not only can work be a place to earn a living and feel useful; we can also feel worthwhile in terms of making a contribution. Often we develop a sense of belonging and many of us find our friends and supporters there, too. As a result, these working environments can have major influences on our lives. This research examines organizational factors or characteristics important to healthy work environments that facilitate social support.

The research has two phases. The first phase involves a focus group that will help identify what organizations are doing to encourage healthy interactions among workers. The group will share their ideas about policies, activities, etc that foster social support within a work setting. The second phase will utilize the information from the focus groups to develop a measure.

Participation is voluntary and by informed consent. A summary of the results will be made available to the participants. Individual results will not be available.

At this time I would like to arrange an interview with you to further discuss this research project and will call you over the next week. During our interview, I would like to request permission to conduct research with your organization and to request participants for the first and second phases of the research. I may be contacted through the Psychology Department at 884-1970 extension 3272. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Sincerely,

LETTER FOR FOCUS GROUPS

APPENDIX B

Dear

My name is Amanda Kroger and I am an M.A. Candidate with the Community Psychology Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am currently working on my thesis and Dr. Mark Pancer is my research advisor. We are interested in developing an assessment measure that will help organizations to determine how well they are doing in fostering supportive working environments and to identify possible areas for improvement in the work setting.

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At this time I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group to be held on _____. The discussion group will take about an hour of your time. During our discussion we will consider how our sense of social supports can be affected by the physical, procedural and relationship structures of a work organization. Our group will focus on the following two questions:

- 1) What does your organization do now that encourages people to connect with and support each other?
- 2) What other things could your organization do to encourage people to connect with and support each other?

Participation is voluntary and by informed consent. If there are any parts of the discussion that make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to participate and may withdraw from the group at any time. Attached is a consent form for your review and signature. Please bring it to the focus group if you wish to participate in the discussion.

At the end of the second phase, a summary of the results will be made available to the participants. Individual results will not be available and discussion material will remain confidential. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

If you have any questions and wish to discuss the research further, please contact Amanda Kroger at 884-1970 extension 3272.

Sincerely,

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

APPENDIX C

**COSST MEASUREMENT RESEARCH
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS**

What does your organization do now that encourages people to connect with and support each other?

Can you think of any.....(areas to probe)

- policies
- organizational procedures and practises
- orientation and training
- physical structures
- communication structures
- reporting and supervisory/management structures
- work practices
- relationships
- formal and informal social activities

What other things could your organization do to encourage people to connect with and support each other?

What are some things that your organization does that discourages people from supporting each other?

CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX D

I agree to participate in a focus group conducted by Amanda Kroger, a graduate community psychology student at Wilfrid Laurier University. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the information-consent letter.

I understand that the focus group will meet for approximately one hour and will discuss the questions outlined in the letter. I also understand that my participation in the group is voluntary and that I will answer only those questions that I feel comfortable with. I realize that I may withdraw from the group at any time, therefore withdrawing my consent.

I understand that some of my ideas will be recorded on flip chart paper and/or tape recorded. I may be asked my permission to use a quote. My personal information will not be attached to any quotes in any reports. Tape recorded material will be reviewed by Amanda Kroger and her research adviser, Mark Pancer. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the thesis project.

All information will be held in confidence and I will not be identified in any way in any reports. I agree to keep the conversations of other focus group participants confidential.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

COMPREHENSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT TOOL: COSST**A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT****I. PHYSICAL STRUCTURE****a. Gathering/Meeting Places**

5 There are a variety of places that allow for people to gather and connect with each other. (eg. lunch room, staff lounge, coffee station, fitness room, etc)

4

3 There are a few places for people to gather and connect with each other.

2

1 There are no places within the organization for people to gather and connect with each other.

b. Work Space

5 Offices, work space and furniture are organized in a way that promotes and encourages social interaction between all employees.

4

3 Offices, work space and furniture are organized in a way that allow some social interaction for some employees.

2

1 Offices, work space and furniture are organized in a way that separates and segregates employees.

c. Work Sites

5 The organization is structured so that employees work out of one geographical site and can get together regularly and frequently.

4

3 The organization has more than one geographical site and employees can periodically get together.

2

1 The organization has several geographical sites and employees cannot get

together.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

I. ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

a. Orientation for New Employees

5 New employees are introduced to other workers; a program involving work partners or buddies to help orient them to the company, or a get-together for new employees is in place to help new employees to connect with others in the organization.

4

3 Information about new employees is circulated to staff, but no routine effort to personally introduce new employees to other staff is in place.

2

1 New employees are left on their own to introduce themselves to co-workers.

b. Professional Development

5 The organization offers frequent and regular professional development opportunities that allow employees to come together as a group, enabling them to connect with and support one another. (eg. computer courses, team management, certification courses, etc)

4

3 The organization offers occasional professional development opportunities that allow employees to work together with other employees.

2

1 The organization does not offer any professional development opportunities that would allow employees to connect with and support one another.

c. Personal Learning Opportunities

5 The organization offers frequent and regular personal or informal learning opportunities that allow employees to come together as a group, enabling them to connect with and support one another. (eg. lunch and learn, stress management, healthy eating, etc)

4

3 The organization offers occasional personal or informal learning opportunities that allow employees to connect with and support each other.

2

- 1 The organization does not offer personal or informal learning opportunities that
allow employees to connect with and support each other.

II. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

a. Conflict Resolution Process

- 5 The organization has policy and procedures in place that encourage people to get
together on a regular basis to work out difficult issues. (eg. a conflict resolution
committee)

4

- 3 The organization has policy and procedures in place that address conflict
resolution but may not encourage people to work together through difficult issues.

2

- 1 There are no avenues for conflict resolution.

b. Hiring Practices

- 5 Employees are included in the hiring process. They are invited to participate on
hiring teams and in decision making with regard to employment of individuals.

4

- 3 Employees are sometimes consulted with regard to hiring and asked for a
recommendation with regard to the employment of an individual.

2

- 1 Employees are not included in the hiring process.

III. WORK PRACTICES

a. Organizational Meetings

- 5 There are regularly scheduled company wide meetings and all employees are
invited and encouraged to attend. (eg. staff meetings, annual meetings, etc)

4

- 3 There are occasional company wide meetings but not all employees are invited.

2

- 1 There are no opportunities for people to gather together for company wide
meetings.

b. Team Meetings

- 5 People are organized into work groups or work teams, and meet regularly with their team members.
- 4
- 3 People are organized into teams or work groups , but these groups meet at irregular intervals.
- 2
- 1 People work on their own and only meet together briefly to organize work tasks.

c. Professional Group Meetings

- 5 People work on their own but can regularly connect with others who work at similar tasks within and outside of the organization, to support each other and share information and resources. (supervisor's forum, manager's meeting, clerical meetings, etc)
- 4
- 3 People work on their own but have an occasional opportunity to meet with others who work at similar tasks within the organization, to support each other and share information and resources.
- 2
- 1 People work on their own and have no opportunities to meet with others who work at similar tasks within the organization.

d. Specialized Tasks/Isolated Work Roles

- 5 Employees that perform highly specialized tasks or are in an isolated work role are assigned to interactive work groups or teams. (eg. computer technician, janitor)
- 4
- 3 Employees that perform highly specialized tasks or are in an isolated work role are invited to staff meetings on an occasional basis.
- 2
- 1 Employees that perform highly specialized tasks or are in an isolated work role are not connected to any work groups or teams.

e. Mentor Programs

- 5 People have opportunities to observe role models and are encouraged to connect with mentors who will support them in their work and organizational life.
- 4
- 3 People are left on their own to identify role models and connect with mentors who will support them in their work and organizational life.
- 2
- 1 People have no opportunities to observe role models or connect with mentors who will support them in their work and organizational life.

IV. LEADERSHIP

a. Supervision and Management

- 5 The organization prepares all supervisors and managers for team leadership roles and supports them so that they can bring groups of people together and facilitate healthy interaction.
- 4
- 3 The organization offers some information about team leadership to supervisors and managers that indicate an interest in bring work groups together.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not promote team leadership to supervisors and managers.

b. Shared Leadership

- 5 Supervisors and managers encourage members of the work group or team to co-facilitate meetings and work together on agenda items. (eg. joint presentations, brainstorming sessions)
- 4
- 3 Supervisors and managers sometimes ask the group to contribute to a shared agenda but will continue to facilitate team meetings.
- 2
- 1 Supervisors and managers conduct all team and work group meetings.

c. Visioning and Strategic Planning

- 5 The organization shares it's vision with employees and includes and supports the

- 4 employees to collectively participate in strategic planning, action plan development and the change process. (eg. interdepartmental committee work)
- 3 The organization communicates it's vision with employees but introduces strategic plans and change on a need to know basis; employees may participate in the development of action plans through small group work.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not share it's vision and strategic planning with its employees and there are no opportunities for employees to participate in their development.

C. HUMAN/SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

I. COMMUNICATION

a. Communication Modes

- 5 The organizations has a variety of vehicles for relating and receiving information from their employees and utilizes them regularly and frequently. (eg. memos, bulletin boards, e-mail, etc)
- 4
- 3 The organization has some vehicles for relating information to employees and announcements are made regularly.
- 2
- 1 The organization has very few vehicles for relating information to their employees, communication is infrequent and one way.

b. Newsletters

- 5 The organization works with the employees to produce a company newsletter that is widely distributed on a frequent and regular basis.
- 4
- 3 The organization produces a newsletter at regular intervals.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not offer a newsletter to company employees.

c. Interest Groups

- 5 The organization offers opportunities and encourages people to come together to discuss topics of interest. (eg. family support, retirement club, study groups, etc)
- 4
- 3 The organization offers some opportunities for people to get together and discuss topics of interest but participation is not encouraged.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not offer opportunities for people to get together and discuss topics of interest.

d. Timely and Accurate Information

- 5 Announcements and invitations for employees to participate in organizational group activities are made in a timely and accurate fashion. (eg. meeting dates, times, locations,etc)
- 4
- 3 Announcements and invitations for employees to participate in organizational group activities are somewhat accurate and sometimes timely.
- 2
- 1 Announcements and invitations for employees to participate in organizational group activities are inconsistent and irregular.

II. SOCIAL ACTIVITY

a. Organized Social Events

- 5 There are a variety of organized social events that regularly bring people together and everyone is encouraged to participate. (eg. Christmas dinner, skating party, picnics/BBQ, etc)
- 4
- 3 There are some organized social events that bring employees together periodically.
- 2
- 1 There are no organized social events to bring employees together.

b. Sports Activities

- 5 The organization sponsors both in house and community sports teams and employees are encouraged to participate and/or support these events. (eg. bowling league, softball team, coaches, fans, etc)
- 4
- 3 The organization sponsors some sports teams and employees are notified about these activities.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not sponsor or encourage participation in sports events.

c. Informal Social Events

- 5 Employees organize get togethers and activities both within and outside of the organization. (eg. baby showers, birthday lunches, gift exchange, etc)
- 4
- 3 Employees occasionally organize get togethers or activities on their own.
- 2
- 1 Employees do not organize get togethers or activities outside of the organization.

d. Community Awareness and Support

- 5 The organization participates regularly in events that benefit the community and all employees are encouraged to participate by joining a committee, taking part in a sporting event, making a donation, etc. (eg. United Way campaigns, Corporate Challenge, food bank drives, etc)
- 4
- 3 The organization has limited participation in community events and a few individual employees are assigned to work on a project.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not participate in any organized community projects where employees can work together and support each to enhance the larger community.

e. Celebrating Milestones

- 5 The organization regularly celebrates individual and organizational accomplishments by bringing people together and encourages all employees to connect and support each other. (quotas are reached, accident free days, work anniversaries, promotions, retirements, etc)
- 4
- 3 The organization occasionally brings people together to celebrate organizational accomplishments. Most individual milestones are noted on an individual basis.
- 2
- 1 The organization does not bring people together to celebrate their individual and organizational accomplishments.

LETTER FOR ORGANIZATIONS - PHASE II

APPENDIX F

Dear

My name is Amanda Kroger and I am an M.A. Candidate with the Community Psychology Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am currently working on my thesis and Dr. Mark Pancer is my research advisor. We are interested in developing an assessment measure that will help organizations to determine how well they are doing in fostering supportive working environments and identify possible areas for improvement in the work setting.

People spend a great deal of time in the workplace. Not only can work be a place to earn a living and feel useful, people can also feel worthwhile in terms of making a contribution. Often people develop a sense of belonging and many of us find our friends and supporters there, too. As a result, these working environments can have major influences over people's lives. In particular, social support in the workplace can help buffer stressful events. Social support can be effected by the physical, procedural and relationship structures of a work organization. These work structures are a few of the areas that can have an impact on workers, and organizations play a key role in creating healthy work structures and environments. This research examines organizational factors or characteristics important to healthy environments that facilitate social support.

The research has two phases. The first phase involves a focus group that will help develop the assessment measure. The second phase will involve administering the measure with a specific group of people. At this time I would like to invite you to participate in the second phase of the research. I will be making some observation about your department and you will be asked to complete a social support scale.

Participation is voluntary and by informed consent. If there any parts of the scale you do not wish to complete, it is your right to refuse and you may withdraw from the research at any time. If you have any questions, I will be available on site to answer questions during phase two. At the end of the second phase, a summary of the results will be made available to the participants. Individual results will not be available and all information will remain confidential. I may be contacted through the Psychology Department at 884-1970 extension 3272. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Interview Guide for COSST Assessment

APPENDIX G

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

I. PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

- a. Can you describe some of the places within the organization that people gather to connect with each other? For example, would you have a coffee station, lunch room or gym?
- b. Think about some of the places people work and describe the space? For example, are there open work areas, offices or private work places, and how is office furniture and equipment arranged?
- c. Does your organization have more than one geographical work site? Do employees have opportunities to meet and work together? How often would this occur?

B. ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

I. ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

- a. When a new employee joins your organization, what are some of the things that help employees to become familiar with routines and co-workers?
- b. Describe some of the professional development opportunities that are available to employees? How often would these activities take place? Describe how employees can take advantage of these opportunities?
- c. What are some of the informal learning opportunities that are available for employees? For example, do you have a lunch and learn program, in house stress management courses?

II. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

- a. Can you tell me a bit about your policies with regard to resolving conflict within the organization? For example, do you have any steps towards resolution? How are the employees involved? For example do you have a conflict resolution committee that includes employees?
- b. Are employees involved in the organization's hiring process? Can you tell me a bit about how they are involved? For example, is there any consultation about new hires or are people invited to be part of a hiring team?

III. WORK PRACTICES

- a. Are there opportunities for people to gather for company wide meetings? For example, How often do you hold staff meetings and/or annual meetings where all employees are invited to attend?
- b. Describe some of the work groups or teams that meet within your organization. How often would they meet and who would be involved? Are there any employees that are not part of a work group or team?
- c. Are there any opportunities for people who work at similar tasks to get together to share information and resources? For example, are there manger's meetings, clerical meetings. etc?
- d. Are there people in your organization that perform highly specialized tasks (computer technician) or are in an isolated work roles? How are they included or connected to other groups in the organization?
- e. Are there ways that people can identify mentors or role models within the organization in order to help them in their work and connect with others?

IV. LEADERSHIP

- a. What kinds of things does the organization do to encourage team leadership? How do they support managers?
- b. How are employees involved in team leadership/ What are some of the things they are encouraged to do?
- c. What kind of information is shared with employees with regard to the organizations vision and strategic plan? Are there ways for employees to be involved in the planning and change process? For example, are there any committees that people can be involved with to provide input and direction setting?

B. HUMAN/SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

I. COMMUNICATION

- a. Can you tell me about the way information gets communicated to employees? How often would this happen? How do employees share information with the organization and their co-workers?

- b. Does your organization circulate any type of newsletter [or information sharing memo]? Who receives the newsletter? How are people involved in it's production?
- c. Are there any groups or clubs within your organization that bring people together who share an interest or situation? For example, would you have a retirement club, a working parent support group or study groups for people working on certification courses?
- d. Would you send out announcements and invitations for employees to participate in organizational group activities? How much lead time would be involved and do you find there are any difficulties with rescheduling, timing or meeting places?

II. SOCIAL ACTIVITY

- a. Can you tell me about organized social activities within the organization? For example, do you have a social club, a company Christmas dinner or picnic?
- b. Does your organization sponsor any sports teams or events? How do employees get involved in these activities?
- c. Do employees organize get togethers beyond any company sponsored functions? For example, do people get together to celebrate birthdays or organize baby showers?
- d. What types of community or charitable events does the organization get involved in and how do the employees participate?
- e. How does the organization bring people together to celebrate individual and organizational accomplishments? For example, sales quotas were reached for the month, a significant number of accident free days were reached, promotions

CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX H

I agree to participate in an interview conducted by Amanda Kroger, a graduate community psychology student at Wilfrid Laurier University. A second researcher will also be present. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the information-consent letter.

I understand that the interview will last for approximately one to one and a half hours. We will discuss information about our organization. I also understand that my participation in the interview is voluntary and that I will answer only those questions that I feel comfortable with. I realize that I may withdraw from the interview at any time, therefore withdrawing my consent.

I understand that some of my ideas will be recorded on the assessment sheets. I may be asked my permission to use a quote. My personal information will not be attached to any quotes in any reports.

All information will be held in confidence and I will not be identified in any way in any reports.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

APPENDIX I

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Description of Business:

Established:

of locations:

Total # of employees:

of employees at this site:

Type of growth the organization is experiencing:

Other information:

Company Brochure____ Annual Report____ Newsletter____

Committee Work/Reports____ Communications____

Policies/locations____ Tour facility____