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The Work Environment and the Perception of the Institutional Image of the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University - Ecuador

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Abstract

The work environment is based on work motivations, regulates institutional and organizational life, promotes a type of behavior and relationships between workers, it fulfills the function of nexus between its actors; two years ago where the labor conflict within the university campus has multiplied, this makes the dimension of the work and organizational climate disjointed, good compliance with institutional policies is not possible and it makes it impossible to comply with the processes in relation to teaching and the deficiency in the institutional mission, where the work environment is absent and deteriorated. The present research aims to analyze how the work environment is related to the perception of the image, a quantitative approach with correlation, descriptive, explanatory and non-experimental design was used, these methods will be focused on revealing the cause of the events, event and phenomena that occur in the educational institution, which affects the work environment. The statistical technique used was the Pearson correlation coefficient and a Trux index survey, it was applied to teaching staff, service, administrative staff and students; After obtaining the results, it is determined that one thing affects the other, that is, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between them; Due to the nature of the study, it is not possible to establish causal relationships, however, it is feasible to affirm that the better the work environment, the greater the degree of perception of institutional satisfaction of the university campus.

Keywords: Educational Management, Educational Institution, Education Administration, Perception.

Introduction

The work environment is an essential component of the organizational setting, supported by the individual and collective motivations of staff, regulating institutional dynamics and determining patterns of behavior and interpersonal relationships among an organization's members. Its influence is crucial as a connecting element between institutional actors. In this sense, a negative work environment can trigger internal tensions, persistent conflicts, and a consequent impact on the institutional image, generating questions from the various levels that make up the university (Sierra, 2016).

From this perspective, the progressive escalation of labor conflicts recorded over the last two years within the university campus is worrisome. This situation has generated a dissociation between the dimensions of the climate and the organizational structure, making it impossible to

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efficiently implement institutional policies and significantly affecting academic, administrative, and mission-oriented processes. In contexts where the work environment is absent or deteriorating, the principles that guide the institutional mission are compromised (Agudo, 2012).

It should be noted that, like other institutions, universities project strategic goals and objectives that can only be achieved in a healthy and functional organizational environment. While activities can be carried out under adverse conditions, a hostile work environment compromises employee motivation, productivity, and commitment, directly influencing the university community's perception of the institutional image. Therefore, it is pertinent to analyze the relationship between the work environment and this institutional perception at the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University. This analysis will allow for establishing correlations between both variables and proposing strategies aimed at improving or continuing institutional processes, supported by empirical evidence obtained through the use of scientific methods, population and sample definition, and the rigorous application of data collection techniques and instruments (Charry, 2018).

The central axis of this research focuses on university workers, with the aim of identifying whether the institutional environment fosters unfavorable working conditions that impact their physical and emotional health. An unfavorable organizational climate can lead to states of anxiety, chronic stress, and even psychological disorders, forcing staff to adapt under conditions of sustained emotional suffering. In this context, Monroy and Palacios (2011) emphasize that resilience is not limited to invulnerability, but implies the ability to confront and overcome adversity. For their part, Gutiérrez and Carpintero (2021) argue that, in the face of dysfunctional work environments, it is essential to develop emotional adaptation mechanisms that preserve psychological balance and spiritual integrity.

From this perspective, this research is oriented toward the reconstruction of human rationality and sensitivity, which are frequently nullified by everyday institutional dynamics. The deterioration of the work environment manifests itself in the mental and somatic health of individuals, generating negative impacts at both the personal and collective levels. Consequently, it is imperative to demonstrate and explain the relationship between the organizational climate and the perceptions held by various stakeholders—students, faculty, administrators, and support staff—of the institutional image of university extension (Chiang et al., 2017).

This study, therefore, assumes an ethical and human commitment that transcends a mere diagnostic description to propose solutions aimed at collective well-being. Hence, the research is linked to an integrative vision, where knowledge is articulated with artistic, expressive, and social dimensions, recognizing that all academic endeavor must be based on principles of justice, respect, and human sensitivity (Sotelo & Figueroa, 2017).

Methodology

This research was developed using a quantitative approach, given that this paradigm allows for observing, analyzing, and measuring phenomena through the collection and processing of numerical data, in order to contrast hypotheses and generate verifiable conclusions. As Bernal (2016) argues, quantitative research makes it possible to delimit associations, establish generalizations, and systematize results through statistical analysis, thereby allowing for the consolidation of theories or the generation of new interpretive proposals.

The exploration of the work environment in relation to the perception of the institutional image

allowed us to describe structural variables and internal dynamics that influence organizational behavior. Along these lines, both positive factors and critical elements within the public sector work environment were identified, yielding an in-depth analysis of its functioning (Arias et al., 2016). The descriptive method was adopted, aimed at characterizing the variables studied in their real context, without attempting to establish direct causal relationships. Through the systematic collection of information, we were able to describe the perception of institutional actors—teachers, administrative and service staff—regarding the organizational environment and its implications for institutional culture (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018).

Subsequently, the correlational method was incorporated to determine the degree of association between the work environment and the perception of the institutional image. This stage sought to answer research questions aimed at identifying whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the two variables. Finally, the explanatory method was integrated to understand the causes underlying the phenomena observed in the organizational environment and their impact on the internal processes of the educational institution.

The total study population was 1,421. For students, a sample of 294 participants was selected using simple random sampling with a 95% confidence level. Regarding teaching and administrative staff, the total population was comprised of 58 teachers, 4 administrative staff, and 9 service workers, given their representativeness and small number. The data collection technique used was a structured survey, administered anonymously and digitally via a Google Form, in consideration of the restrictions arising from the pandemic. The collection instrument consisted of a structured Likert-type scale questionnaire, composed of 57 items distributed across six dimensions and eighteen indicators, each with three specific questions. A second diagnostic questionnaire based on the Great Place to Work organizational management model (Trust Index survey) was also administered to validate the findings obtained from the first application and develop a proposal for improving the institutional work environment.

The collected data were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS software, which facilitated the graphical representation of the results in pie charts and percentage tables. The instrument's internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's alpha, a technique that evaluates the reliability of an instrument by measuring the degree of coherence between the questionnaire items. A high Cronbach's alpha coefficient implies a lower margin of error and greater precision in the measurement of the construct studied. To determine the relationship between the variables "work environment" and "institutional image," Pearson's correlation coefficient was used, ideal for assessing the degree of linear association between continuous variables. Finally, the ethical aspects of the research were rigorously maintained, guaranteeing the confidentiality of information, voluntary participation, informed consent, and the integrity of the results, without data manipulation or intentional bias. Thus, the findings obtained constitute relevant input for both institutional decision-making and the development of organizational policies with a social impact.

Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained from the application of the survey will be analyzed and described as follows: an operationalization of the variables on the work environment and the perception of the institutional image will be carried out in a table, in addition the results of the survey will be analyzed by indicators, as well as the correlation between the variables, and the correlation between the work environment and the dimensions of the variables of the perception of the institutional image.

		VAR. 1	VAR.2
VAR 1 Work Environment	Pearson correlation	1	,778**
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000
	N	349	349
VAR 2 Perception of institutional image	Pearson correlation	,778**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	
	N	349	349
Note. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Prepared by: Guamán, (2020).			

Table 1.

Correlations between work environment and perception of institutional image.

The value obtained is 0.778, which allows us to conclude that there is a significant correlation between the two variables: work environment and the perception of the institutional image, thus allowing us to verify the hypothesis raised in this research.

		Work Environment Variety	Management here.
VAR Work Environment	Pearson correlation	1	,759**
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000
	N	349	349
Academic management	Pearson correlation	,759**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	
	N	349	349
Note: The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Prepared by the authors (Guamán, 2020).			

Table 2.

Correlations between Work Environment and Academic Management indicators

The values of the results between the correlation that was performed between work environment and the academic management indicator of the university headquarters are 0.759, which leads to a significant correlation and confirms the verification of the hypothesis.

		VAR Work environment	Level here.
VAR Work environment	Pearson correlation	1	,723**
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000
	N	349	349
Academic Level	Pearson correlation	,723**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	
	N	349	349

Note. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Prepared by the authors (Guamán, 2020).

Table 3.

Correlations between Work Environment and Academic Management Indicators

From the results obtained between the work environment variable and the academic level indicator, the correlation is 0.723 and is not very significant: the Hypothesis is rejected.

		VAR Work environment	Services
VAR: Work Environment	Pearson correlation	1	,695**
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000
	N	349	349
Services	Pearson correlation	,695**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	
	N	349	349
Note. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Prepared by the authors (Guamán, 2020).			

Table 4.

Correlations between work climate and service indicators

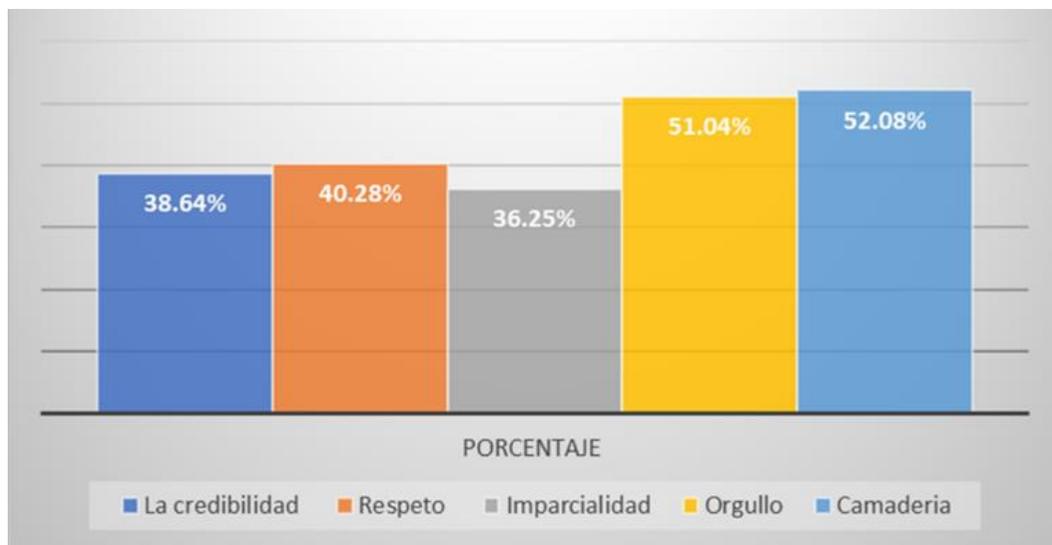
The results obtained from the statistical analysis show that the correlation between the work environment variable and the services indicator yielded a coefficient of 0.70, which, according to Pearson's interpretation scale, represents a moderate correlation. However, from a statistical significance perspective, this relationship was considered insignificant, which is why the proposed hypothesis was rejected. This result can be attributed to the structural dependence of administrative services on the main office, which generates cumbersome bureaucratic, signature, and processing processes. This situation negatively affects staff perceptions of institutional support, contributing to a disconnect between the services provided and the overall perception of the work environment.

Regarding the results obtained from the application of the Trux Index instrument, corresponding to the Great Place to Work organizational management model, complementary aspects not evident in the first diagnostic phase were identified. The survey, administered to professors, managers, administrative and service staff, revealed more qualitative data that allowed a deeper understanding of the internal factors that negatively impact the perception of the organizational climate. In this context, it was deemed pertinent to conduct an additional analysis through discussions with several professors at the university campus, in order to validate the findings and obtain direct narrative evidence to support the quantitative data (Jaya et al., 2018).

Under this management model, institutional credibility is recognized as closely linked to dimensions such as trust, organizational pride, and a sense of belonging. In the specific case of this university campus, credibility was assessed from the perspective of faculty members, who expressed disparate perceptions regarding the performance and leadership of academic directors and coordinators. Credibility, in this context, is also a fundamental parameter for assessing the

professional integrity of those who hold strategic positions, which in turn directly influences the quality of administrative, managerial, and pedagogical processes.

The results suggest the need to strengthen organizational cohesion and review internal communication channels and coordination mechanisms between headquarters and the parent company. They also demonstrate an opportunity to redesign processes to reduce bureaucratic burdens and improve the perception of institutional efficiency, thereby increasing job satisfaction and the perceived image of both employees and students.



Note: Summary of 5 dimensions of the Trux Index survey Source: Guaman, (2020).

The results obtained show that, overall, the perception of the work environment at the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University, Santo Domingo-La Concordia campus, is positive. For most of the items assessed using the Likert scale, the most frequent responses fell into the categories of "4" (mostly met) and "5" (always fully met), suggesting a considerable level of job satisfaction among participants. However, a minority of respondents gave lower ratings, highlighting the existence of specific dissatisfaction that warrants attention.

Among the critical aspects highlighted, the need to design strategies aimed at strengthening the value of institutional respect was identified, not only among teachers but also among administrative, service, and management staff. This is intended to consolidate a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. The majority of respondents state that all members of the workforce are treated equally and have the same opportunities to participate, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. They also expressed that they feel free to express their ideas and opinions, and are treated fairly by institutional authorities. However, the importance of continuing to reinforce the principles of impartiality and equity is emphasized, as these are fundamental elements for maintaining staff motivation and fostering a collective sense of belonging.

One of the most relevant findings relates to institutional pride, as a large majority of participants indicated pride in being part of the institution. This feeling constitutes a key indicator of identification with the organization and can be decisive in staff productivity and commitment.

However, some intermediate responses were observed that expressed a perception of partial fulfillment of this aspect, suggesting that gaps still exist in the recognition and appreciation of the work of certain groups. According to Quaresma and Zamorano (2016), encouraging institutional pride involves addressing several variables, including the quality of leadership, opportunities for participation, effective communication channels, and the promotion of strong interpersonal relationships.

Based on the Great Place to Work model and the results of the Trux Index survey, it is concluded that, although there are favorable indicators, sensitive areas were also identified that require strategic attention, especially regarding access to institutional services. Specifically, the correlation between the work environment and the "services" indicator was 0.695, which represents a moderate correlation. This limitation is largely explained by the administrative dependence of the headquarters on the parent company located in Esmeraldas, which causes delays in the issuance and validation of official documents. This situation, perceived as an obstacle, reduces the efficiency of processes and negatively affects the perception of internal and external users.

Likewise, qualitative comments and interviews revealed the presence of personal interests that could bias certain responses, especially regarding the relationship between teachers and administrators. Behaviors associated with hierarchical submission, motivated by fear of sanctions or job loss, were identified, which could partially distort the sincerity of some of the assessments made during the data collection.

Finally, by analyzing the results as a whole, it can be stated that the general research hypothesis has been confirmed, establishing that the work environment significantly influences the perception of the institutional image. This finding validates the need to implement organizational policies that foster a fair, motivating, and transparent work environment in order to strengthen both institutional performance and the cohesion of the human capital that sustains it.

The results reveal a potential bias in the responses provided by the university's teaching, administrative, and service staff. Although the survey was conducted anonymously, a lack of sincerity was perceived in some responses, which can be explained by several factors. One of the main factors is fear of retaliation, as a significant portion of the staff has short-term temporary contracts (approximately five months), which places them in a vulnerable position in the face of administrative decisions by the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University of Esmeraldas, the campus's parent company.

This context generates an asymmetrical power relationship that impacts workers' freedom of expression. Added to this is a strong sense of institutional loyalty or professional secrecy, which leads many employees to avoid openly expressing existing problems, believing that doing so would mean "badmouthing" the institution where they work. This attitude—although understandable from a labor protection perspective—affects the objectivity of the data collected, generating a social desirability bias and projecting a more favorable institutional image than it actually might be (CEAACES, 2018).

However, beyond the positive or negative assessment of the results, this study revealed a statistically significant relationship between the work environment and the perception of the institutional image, which validates the research hypothesis. This relationship shows that the elements that make up the organizational environment—such as communication, trust, respect, and participation—directly impact how members of the university community view their

In this context, the development of institutional strategies that strengthen organizational culture becomes imperative. Bermúdez (2015) argues that improving the work environment requires the collective commitment of all stakeholders and effective leadership from managers, promoting spaces for autonomy, the generation of ideas, and mutual recognition. Along these lines, critical factors that require strengthening within the academic and administrative community must be identified as a basis for designing intervention plans that include training, experiential workshops, and soft skills development programs, with a focus on improving interpersonal relationships, leadership, and institutional communication (Rivera et al., 2017).

The application of the Trux Index, aligned with the Great Place to Work organizational management model, allowed for a deeper understanding of employee perceptions regarding five key dimensions: credibility, respect, impartiality, pride, and camaraderie. This tool assesses how employees perceive their leaders, fairness of treatment, institutional image, and sense of belonging. Although the results showed a majority tendency toward positive assessments, negative responses were also identified in certain dimensions, indicating that there are persistent sources of dissatisfaction that must be addressed as a priority. While the university campus presents a generally acceptable work environment, there are structural and cultural aspects that require immediate intervention. The development of an institutional improvement plan is necessary to strengthen the dimensions with the lowest scores and move toward a more harmonious, inclusive, and efficient organizational climate. Only through the sustained commitment of management and the active involvement of staff can a truly motivating and cohesive environment be achieved.

Conclusions

The results of this research demonstrated a statistically significant and positive relationship between the work environment and the perception of the institutional image at the Luis Vargas Torres Technical University, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas-La Concordia campus. This relationship reveals that as the internal work environment improves—characterized by factors such as respect, trust, equity, and a sense of belonging—the university community's appreciation of the institution increases in terms of its management, academic standing, and quality of services provided.

Although the study design does not allow for establishing causal relationships, the data confirm that a favorable organizational climate directly impacts the levels of institutional satisfaction perceived by teachers, administrative staff, service personnel, and students. Indeed, the greater the support, effective communication, and commitment of managers toward their staff, the more positive the perception of the institutional image both internally and externally within the educational community.

Likewise, it is observed that the active participation of managers in monitoring the work environment has a positive impact on staff performance and the quality of interpersonal relationships, constituting a strategic pillar for institutional strengthening. However, methodological limitations were also identified that should be considered in future research. These include the specific context of the study, which restricts the generalization of the results, as well as the possible existence of responses conditioned by fear of retaliation or commitments to higher-level authorities, despite the anonymous nature of the instruments used.

Even so, the conceptual models used—such as Great Place to Work, the Balanced Scorecard,

and Human Resource Management—are valid and applicable to other higher education settings, as they are based on solid and transferable theoretical foundations. The analysis concludes that, to ensure a healthy work environment, it is necessary to strengthen management, academic standards, service quality, and institutional coexistence through policies that foster dialogue, compliance with regulations, ongoing training, and recognition of human talent.

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