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THE IMPACT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE ON THE MOTIVATION AND EFFICIENCY OF AGILE DEVELOPMENT TEAMS – RESULTS OF PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between the organizational climate and the motivation and efficiency of work in agile development teams. The article describes the concept of organizational climate, its factors and its impact on motivation and efficiency in those teams.

Design: The study was conducted in five development teams that operate both in enterprises whose main activity is based on software development and in enterprises where the teams develop software only for the internal use of the company. These teams are using agile software development methodologies. The empirical research was carried out using a questionnaire among members of those teams.

Findings: Standard motivating factors are no longer sufficient to motivate and retain the company programmers. They value more independence in the tasks performed and want to have a real impact on the company's operations and the atmosphere in the workplace. Organizational climate factors contribute to this commonly understood work atmosphere. These factors can be created by the organization to achieve the greatest possible motivation of employees, and therefore their efficiency. It is worth noting that agile software development methodologies determine the intensity of some of these factors.

Value: Appropriate measurement and metrics of projects, processes, and IT teams allows us to determine whether they work optimally and to improve their efficiency. Motivated, creative and satisfied employees, who identify with the company, and consequently are efficient, are the keys to success.

Keywords: organizational climate, organizational behavior, work efficiency, motivation, agile development teams

Article classification: case study

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1. INTRODUCTION

Motivated, creative, satisfied and loyal to the company employees are usually more efficient at work and less willing to change employers (Ganta, 2014). Currently, programmers are not so loyal to the company they currently work for, due to the high demand for this type of specialist on the labor market. To motivate them, standard motivating factors, such as (Aguenza, Som, 2018): independence at work, financial issues (remuneration along with various benefits), stability (job security), good working conditions (e.g., a comfortable desk, necessary materials, appropriate temperature, good equipment), nice working atmosphere, opportunities to develop skills, low stress, praise and being appreciated are no longer sufficient. Programmers value more independence in the tasks performed and want to have a real impact on the company's operations and the atmosphere in the workplace (Graziotin et al., 2018). This commonly understood work atmosphere consists of six factors that create the social conditions for people to cooperate and influence:

- employees' behavior in the organization,
- approach to work,
- degree of innovation,
- degree of teamwork,
- effective communication,
- the level of internal motivation to work¹.

Studies have shown that these factors are understood as the organizational climate and organizational culture and can be consciously created by the organization in order to achieve the greatest possible motivation of employees, and thus their efficiency. The organizational climate will be different in individual development teams, but some of its factors will be determined by the chosen software development methodology or the way the company operates and its organizational culture (Grobelna, Trzeciński, 2016).

The aim of this article is to examine the relationship between the organizational climate and the motivation and work efficiency of agile development teams. In order to be able to answer the above research question, two hypotheses were formulated:

H1. The more liberal and open (also understood as extremely positive) an organizational climate is in any given programming team, the more motivated and therefore more efficient the team is.

H2. Development teams working in IT companies are more motivated than programming teams in enterprises whose main activity is not based on software development (because the organizational climate of these teams is more moderate due to the organizational culture prevailing in enterprises as a whole).

¹ Based on literature review, read more (Grobelna, 2021).



The above hypotheses have been verified during the empirical preliminary research carried out in programming teams using agile software development methodologies in various enterprises. Some of the surveyed companies are enterprises that base their main activity on software development and those that produce software only for the company's internal needs.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

2.1. Idea of the concept

Organizational climate is a difficult concept to define, because it is most often identified with the subjective feeling and perception of the atmosphere prevailing in any given organizational unit, which affects people (Dessler, Turner, 1992). Therefore, almost all studies on the subject have shown that every researcher of this issue provides his own definition or interpretation of this concept. It is popularly understood as a set of norms characteristic for an enterprise that condition the behavior of employees and is a result of objectively functioning organizational processes and subjective feelings (Wereda et al., 2016). Both of these images overlap and set the framework for the behavior of employees in any given organization. On the other hand, M. Bratnicki (2005) defines this concept as “a set of characteristics of organizational situations subjectively perceived by employees of the enterprise, which are relatively permanent results of the functioning of the social organization, shaping the motives of organizational behavior of these workers”. Here it is worth citing one more definition, which leaves the greatest space for interpretation. Hershberger, Lichtenstein and Knox (1994) claim that the organizational climate is a set of specific features of an organization that induces the way it behaves towards its employees and the environment. In business, it is considered that organizational climate concerns the policies (written rules for the behaviors) and practices of an organization or unit of an organization (Spector, 2019). It concerns the behaviors that are encouraged and supported (supervisor's expectations, rewards, etc.) and it is communicated in several ways.

The concept of organizational climate can be considered at various levels, from very large social groups (such as nationalities), through narrower ones (such as companies, administrative institutions), to small groups (such as organizational units or teams) (Schneider et al., 2017). Moreover, the organizational climate may be diametrically different between various groups, while “the boundaries separating such groups may be the boundaries of organizational units, offices, or differences resulting from the way managers run”. In this article, the concept of organizational climate refers to the “boundaries” of the software development teams; therefore, the organizational climate may be completely different between teams working in the same company.



Although the organizational climate concept is not new (researchers have been dealing with it since the 1960s), modern authors are eager to use this concept (over 5.5 thousand documents in the Scopus database since 2015), in relation, for example, to the company's performance, innovation, change management or employee stress. The organizational climate can also play an intermediate role for managerial skills and management style (Mehralian et al., 2020).

It is also worth mentioning at this stage, that apart from the concept of organizational climate, the studies on the subject also include the concept of organizational culture. In common understanding, these two concepts are most often identified with each other. This is due to the rather subtle difference between them. Organizational culture is often understood by researchers of the subject as a set of values, norms and views shared by a group of people that determine their behavior. Thus, the organizational climate is perceived and felt, and the organizational culture is created by elements perceived and realized to a varying degree. The organizational climate can be treated as a narrower concept, as it partially affects and is shaped by elements of organizational culture. Additionally, the organizational climate can undergo quick, even rapid changes, while the organizational culture is relatively stable (usually it undergoes evolutionary changes).

2.2. Organizational climate factors

The conceptual research perspective of the organizational climate is constantly changed and updated (Iljins et al., 2015), and experts in the subject admit that the study of such phenomena is a process (a never-ending story). Therefore, it is difficult to define the elements conditioning the organizational climate in a complete, unambiguous and universal manner for all and each organization or team. Nevertheless, G. Wudarzewski (2012) made an attempt to systematize the concepts and, on the basis of the analysis of the works of thirty scientific researchers on this topic, created over the years (from 1968 to 2011), lists of those components of the organizational climate that were significant for the results of these studies. The resulting fifty-seven elements were then conceptually narrowed and categorized into nine groups (shown on Fig. 1). All these elements are connected and influence each other.

Interesting reflections can be drawn from this summary. The most important of them is the fact that contemporary authors use the achievements of earlier years, developing concepts about the organizational climate and adding further important components. This shows that the previously indicated determinants have not lost their importance, and they only need to be updated over time and new components added to talk about a more comprehensive and modern understanding of this topic. Moreover, particularly visible here is the subjectivism of understanding the concepts as well as their evaluation. The dimensions proposed by Wudarzewski are reflected in the typologies of the organizational climate presented, *inter alia*, by Kolb [after: (Coda et al., 2015) or Yahyagil (2015) et al.:



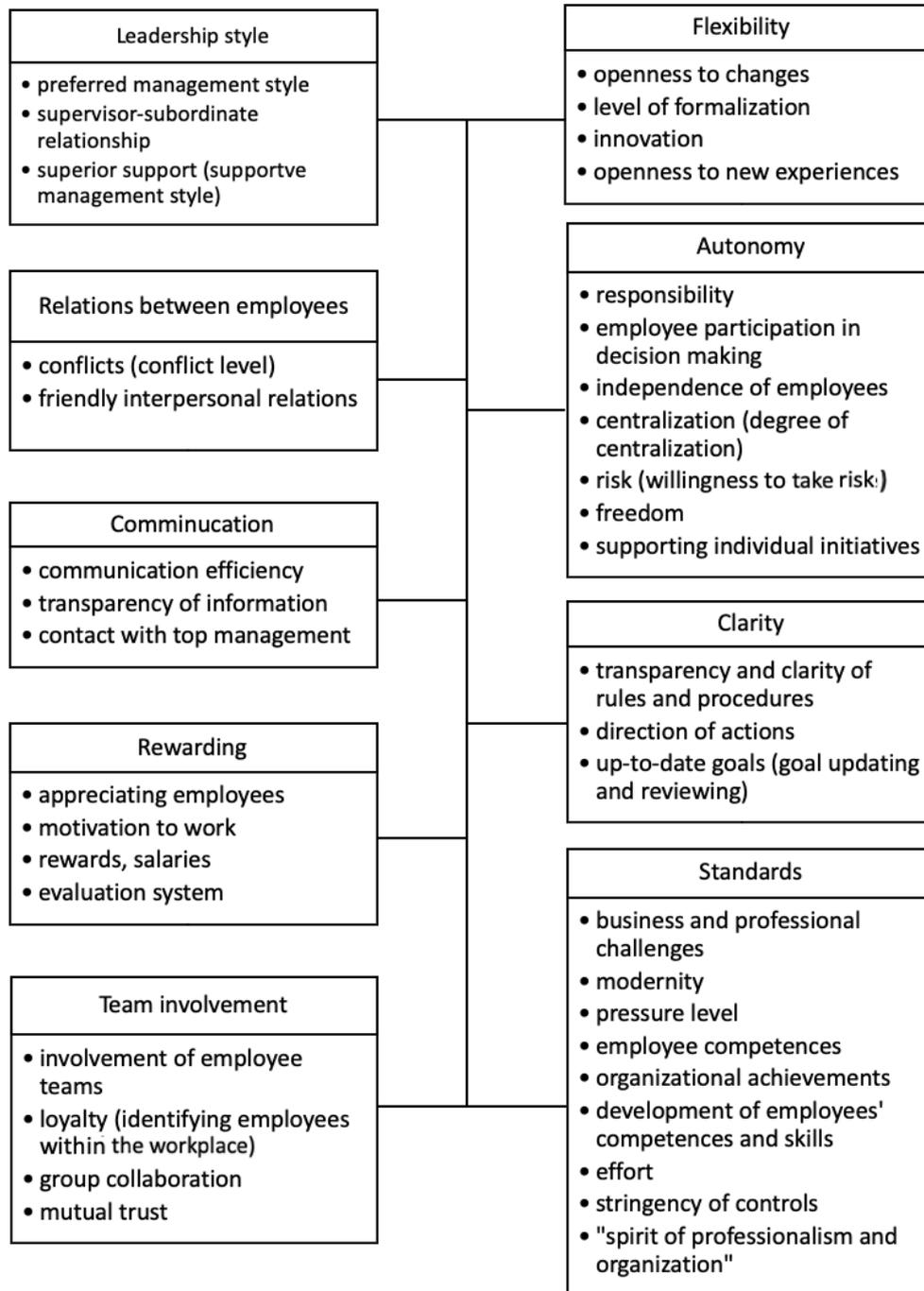


Fig. 1. Dimensions and descriptive components of the organizational climate (own elaboration based on Wudarzewski, 2012)

- the “leadership style” dimension corresponds to an authoritarian climate (with strong centralization of power) and a supportive climate (where employees can count on the help of others as well as the kindness and constructive evaluation of their superiors),
- the “flexibility” dimension corresponds to a bureaucratic climate (focusing on bureaucratic adherence to procedures), a climate of innovation (where the employee is expected to be creative and original in finding new and better solutions) or a climate of stagnation,
- the dimension of “relations between employees” corresponds to the social climate (focus on people, satisfaction of their individual needs and integration of teams),
- the “autonomy” dimension corresponds to a participatory climate (with a developmental and participatory approach to employees), a climate of openness (to employees' ideas, independence and freedom) or a climate of distrust,
- the “communication” dimension corresponds to a climate of friendship (where the level of conflict is low and there are friendly relations between people, also in an informal sense), a climate free of conflict or hostile attitudes,
- the dimension “clarity” corresponds to a climate of transparency (clarity, understanding) or a climate of a lack of understanding,
- the dimension of “rewarding” corresponds to the climate of appreciation (fairness of evaluation, appreciation of employee commitment and motivation) or the atmosphere of the shoulder of appreciation,
- the “standards” dimension corresponds to the knowledge climate (creating an internal atmosphere conducive to learning),
- the dimension “team involvement”, corresponds to the climate of commitment (identification with the organization, team, team cooperation) or the climate of passivity.

Defining the type of organizational climate can be based on the predominance of the occurrence of individual determinants in the dimensions. It is worth remembering, that apart from those mentioned above, studies also include other dimensions and their intermediate and transitional values (however, these are less popular, and those intermediate values might be difficult to include in the analysis).

2.3. Organizational climate versus motivation and efficiency

From a practical point of view, the organizational climate is primarily related to the impact on the motivation and efficiency of employees. The growing interest in this topic results from the growing awareness that a good organizational climate can be shaped in an instrumental way, which in turn translates to an increase in employee satisfaction, motivation and efficiency. In human resource management, the importance of issues such as the atmosphere in the workplace, the morale of the workforce or motivation as well as the way of perceiving and assessing organizational



reality is emphasized. These elements, as J. Stankiewicz and M. Moczulska (2012) accentuate in their work, are included in the organizational climate.

Popular scientific studies most often list eight factors that motivate us to work, regardless of the industry (Aguenza, Som, 2018) – independence at work, financial issues (remuneration with various salary benefits), stabilization (job security), good working conditions (e.g., comfortable desk, necessary materials, appropriate room temperature, good equipment), nice working atmosphere, opportunities to develop skills, low stress, praise and being appreciated. Most of these factors are also included in the determinants of the organizational climate. It is also worth noting that in the case of a fast-growing industry (which is also the IT industry), these elements in terms of motivation are often insufficient, and employees expect independence in the tasks performed, a real impact on the company's operations or challenges, which is why programmers often reach for tasks that are new to them and for which they need additional knowledge.

Agile software development methodologies introduce (and even force) elements of a more open and liberal organizational climate, including through the emphasis on teamwork and cooperation, direct communication channels, minimal formalism, transparency and adaptation (Grobelna, Trzcieliński 2016). Appropriate action with the elements of the organizational climate at times of decline in the efficiency of agile development teams allows us to maintain the regularity of the pace of work of these teams, and thus increase their predictability (Grobelna, Trzcieliński 2019). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that in order to achieve the greatest possible motivation and efficiency in agile development teams, the organizational climate should be much more liberal, sociable and innovative than in other teams.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE IN SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

3.1. Methodology of empirical research

The case study empirical research was conducted in five development teams that operate both in enterprises whose main activity is based on software development and in enterprises where the teams develop software only for internal use of the company. These teams operate in various Polish cities. The number of members of the analyzed teams varies from five to eight people, depending on the team. All these teams work using agile software development methodologies.

This article describes the research results for the five teams – these are typical agile teams, which are an example of diversity in terms of the number of team members, the type of company they operate in, and location. The presented teams A and E are located in companies whose main activity is not based in software development, while teams B, C and D work in a large IT company in various areas and



locations. This divides the research teams into two groups – those operating strictly in IT-related enterprises and those enterprises that development teams have only for their own use, and their main activity is not related to IT.

To measure the organizational climate, a questionnaire² was developed by the author, modeled based on the tool invented by Patterson et al. (2005) (the structure and mode of operation). In the questionnaire, the average assessment of the previously presented components of organizational climate was used to determine the orientation of the climate (the dimensions proposed by Wudarczywski were also used here). In the survey, members of these teams were asked twenty-eight questions related directly to factors of the organizational climate, proposed by G. Wudarczywski, and four questions in which the respondents were to subjectively define their own and the team's motivation and efficiency in the ongoing project. In the responses a 5-point Likert scale was used.

The research aims to look qualitatively (in the form of a case study) at the possibility of measuring the organizational climate in teams (validation of the proposed questionnaire) and to initially test the hypotheses. The author is aware that the amount of input data does not allow for full quantitative analysis and drawing generalized conclusions (five teams took part in this study, which translates into 35 people). For this purpose, further research will be needed, and this will be expanded upon in the conclusions and future research section.

3.2. Empirical research result

In table 1 the average scores³ are presented for each dimension of the organizational climate of all surveyed teams, and the sum of the average scores for each determinant of the organizational climate (after earlier standardization of the variables). The green color marks the dimension of the organizational climate best assessed, while the orange color shows the dimension which received the lowest score for every team. In Table 2 the average scores are compared for motivation and efficiency in any given team with the sum of the average scores for factors.

The relationship between the subjective assessment of motivation and efficiency, and the organizational climate in the team can be seen. The more liberal, open-minded, based on trust, autonomic and friendly atmosphere (extremely positive, as expressed by the sum of averaged scores) organizational climate there is in the team, the better the personal (individual) and team motivation as well as efficiency are

² The construction of the questionnaire and its rationale are described in detail in: Grobelna (2021).

³ Due to the preliminary nature of the research and the different number of team members, only the average scores were used in the data analysis. In further research, the analyses should be extended with standard deviation or descriptive statistics to obtain a more accurate picture of the research results.



assessed. This conclusion is confirmed by the author's observations and scientific research on this topic (Grobelna, 2021), (Grobelna, Trzeciński, 2019), (Grobelna, 2020). The correlation between the declared motivation and efficiency and the extremes of the organizational climate in any given team is strong (Pearson's correlation coefficient factor is 0.95 and is statistically significant).

Table 1. Dimensions of the organizational climate in programming teams

Dimension/Team	A	B	C	D	E
Leadership style	3.14	4.40	4.70	4.50	3.00
Relations between employees	3.57	4.20	4.70	4.30	3.50
Flexibility	3.21	3.15	4.00	4.05	3.75
Autonomy	3.69	3.84	4.28	4.04	4.20
Communication	2.93	3.40	3.50	3.50	3.50
Clarity	2.71	4.07	4.53	3.53	3.33
Rewarding	2.81	3.93	3.73	3.40	2.00
Standards	3.11	3.60	4.10	4.05	4.00
Team involvement	3.24	4.20	4.40	3.87	3.33
Sum of averaged* grades	89.29	106.80	117.60	109.60	98.00

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2. Team motivation and efficiency versus the extremes of the organizational climate

Team	A	B	C	D	E
Motivation and efficiency	3.15	3.60	4.35	3.80	3.50
Sum of averaged* grades	89.29	106.80	117.60	109.60	98.00

Source: own elaboration⁴.

Interestingly, teams that do not work in strictly IT companies (A and E) evaluate themselves worse in terms of motivation and efficiency. This may be due to the fact that the organizational culture in these enterprises (as a whole), thus the specificity of their activities, is more moderate (with nonextreme values). This, in turn, influences the atmosphere in the teams themselves and tones it down a bit. It would be

⁴ The sum of averaged grades obtained in individual questions regarding the determinants of the organizational climate for each team.

difficult to maintain an extremely positive and liberal organizational climate in software development teams while, for example, in production departments, such an organizational climate would be undesirable and would have a negative impact on the operation of that department. The presence of completely different or even radical organizational climates in different departments or teams could also lead to misunderstandings, conflicts or jealousy between such units. Without a thorough understanding of the nature of the organizational climate and factors that motivate individual social groups to work, it may seem that the IT department is favored and lead to dysfunction within the enterprise. However, in companies that base their main activity on software development, the climate, not only in the programming teams themselves, but also in the organization as a whole, is more liberal, thanks to which they can work more efficiently.

The dimension of the organizational climate best assessed by the members of agile software development teams is the dimension of “relations between team members”, and the worst – “rewarding”. Teamwork, team spirit and cooperation are extremely important and emphasized in agile methodology (Grobelna, Trzeciński, 2016). The empowered, self-organizing agile development teams responsible for the entire development of the product are the basis of this approach. It is not surprising then that this dimension is one of the best assessed in these teams. This means that the agile approach is at the heart of how these teams operate. In turn “rewarding” is also a dimension where there is a significant difference in ratings between teams from IT companies and companies with other core activities. This indicates that programmers in this type of enterprise feel that their work is underestimated and that their remuneration is not adequate to the market. Despite the fact that there is often no significant difference in salaries between developers from such companies. However, perhaps they do not feel fully part of the IT community, they do not see development and learning opportunities for themselves, which makes them feel underappreciated in terms of remuneration and evaluate this dimension poorly.

Other dimensions where the discrepancies are the greatest are “management style” and “clarity”. Therefore, in the discussed teams in non-IT enterprises, particular care should be taken in the case of the clarity of procedures and understanding of goals as well as an integrative style of management (even if it is slightly different at the level of the entire organization). Team empowerment, democratic decision-making style and servant leader are elements that positively influence the perception of the organizational climate by the members of these teams and thus increase their work efficiency.

The most similar results in both groups were obtained in the dimensions of “communication” and “flexibility”. Agile development teams have developed a particular way of internal communication (no attention has been paid to possible communication problems between different teams). “Openness” to changes and “innovation” are at a high level in the surveyed teams, regardless of the company. The mean scores for each dimension and for teams from IT companies and other activities are shown in Table 3.



Table 3. Average ratings of organizational climate dimensions in programming teams

Dimension	Average for the dimension	Average for teams in non-IT enterprises	Average for teams in IT enterprises	Difference	Range
Leadership style	3.95	3.07	4.53	1.46	1.70
Relations between employees	4.05	3.54	4.40	0.86	1.20
Flexibility	3.63	3.48	3.73	0.25	0.90
Autonomy	4.01	3.94	4.05	0.11	0.59
Communication	3.37	3.21	3.47	0.25	0.57
Clarity	3.64	3.02	4.04	1.02	1.82
Rewarding	3.18	2.41	3.69	1.28	1.93
Standards	3.77	3.55	3.92	0.36	0.99
Team involvement	3.81	3.29	4.16	0.87	1.16

Source: own elaboration.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research results indicate that there is a clear relationship between the organizational climate and the declared motivation and efficiency in agile software development teams. Based on the presented case study, there is a connection between organizational climate and individual and team efficiency. The more the organizational climate in any given team is characterized by liberal components, the greater the efficiency and motivation in such a team is. Moreover, members of teams working in enterprises where the main activity is based on software development, declare higher motivation and efficiency. That may be directly related to the organizational culture and the climate prevailing throughout the organization, which is less extreme than in organizations employing mainly programmers and specialized developers. This indicates that both of the hypotheses presented in the introduction seem to be justified (this should be verified in further, extended studies). H1. The more liberal and open (extremely positive) the organizational climate is in any given programming team, the more motivated and therefore more efficient this team is and H2. Development teams working in IT companies are more motivated than programming teams in enterprises whose main activity is not based on software development. Therefore, it is important to further study these two groups in future research.



Identifying the factors that have the greatest impact on the motivation and efficiency of employees is extremely important, because it allows us to emphasize these characteristics. Therefore, similar studies should be carried out in agile software development teams in different countries in order to confirm the universality of the above results. Also, further research should focus on the perception of a liberal, extremely positive organizational climate in agile software development teams from the point of view of superiors, managers and stakeholders. Such research would verify what limitations the management sees to maintaining such a climate in development teams and in IT departments as a whole.

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WPLYW KLIMATU ORGANIZACYJNEGO NA MOTYWACJĘ I EFEKTYWNOŚĆ ZWINNYCH ZESPOŁÓW PROGRAMISTYCZNYCH – WYNIKI BADAŃ WSTĘPNYCH

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie zależności między klimatem organizacyjnym a motywacją i efektywnością pracy w zwinnych zespołach programistycznych. W artykule opisano pojęcie klimatu organizacyjnego, jego czynniki oraz ich wpływ na motywację i efektywność w zespołach. Badanie przeprowadzono w pięciu zespołach programistycznych, które działają za-



równy w przedsiębiorstwach, których główna działalność opiera się na tworzeniu oprogramowania, jak i w przedsiębiorstwach, w których zespoły tworzą oprogramowanie wyłącznie na użytek wewnętrzny firmy. Zespoły te używają zwinnych metod wytwarzania oprogramowania. Badania empiryczne przeprowadzono za pomocą ankiety wśród członków wybranych zespołów. Wyniki wskazują, iż standardowe czynniki motywujące nie wystarczają do motywowania i zatrzymywania programistów w firmie. Cenią sobie oni samodzielność w wykonywanych zadaniach i chcą mieć realny wpływ na funkcjonowanie firmy. Niezmiernie ważna jest dla nich atmosfera w miejscu pracy. Czynniki klimatu organizacyjnego składają się na powszechnie rozumianą atmosferę pracy. Każda organizacja może kształtować je w celu osiągnięcia jak największej motywacji pracowników, a co za tym idzie – ich efektywności. Warto zauważyć, że zwinne metody tworzenia oprogramowania determinują intensywność niektórych z tych czynników. Zastosowanie parametry i odpowiedni pomiar czynników w projektach, procesach i zespołach IT pozwala nam określić, czy działają one optymalnie, a następnie dążyć do poprawy ich efektywności. Zmotywowani, kreatywni i zadowoleni pracownicy nie tylko identyfikują się z firmą, lecz także pracują wydajniej.

Słowa kluczowe: motywacja, klimat organizacyjny, efektywność pracy, zachowania organizacyjne, zwinne zespoły programistyczne

