

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a business meeting. A man in a dark suit and glasses is speaking and gesturing with his hands. He is surrounded by several other people, including women, who are listening attentively. The scene is set in a bright, modern office environment with large windows in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue and red gradient.

Are You a Thermometer
or a Thermostat?
How Leaders Fine Tune Organizational Climate

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Climate is a key component of company culture, and maintaining a positive climate requires more than just taking the temperature. Leaders and team members capable of fine-tuning workplace climate—that is, functioning as a thermostat rather than a thermometer—help their teams find the ideal range for productivity, well-being and safety.

Consider the Climate

An organization—made up of human beings and human-made processes, hardware and technologies—is like a living thing. And just as live organisms depend on favorable environmental conditions, an organization responds to its climate: too cold, and performance is sluggish and ideas wither on the vine; overheated and there's danger of corner-cutting, straining resources or burnout. It's important for leaders to be sensitive to climate and sensitize their team to it as well, but merely taking the temperature is not enough. Both leaders and team members who function as thermostats, able to adjust and optimize workplace climate, can establish an ideal temperature for their organization to flourish.

Warm It Up: Raise Expectations

When the climate is on the cool side, motivation can stagnate, activity is stuck on autopilot and there is little energy for change. The temperature needs raising, and one way to do that is to lift expectations. Those with the “thermostat capability” are equipped to sense untapped potential, and share that sense with the team, expressing confidence that members can reach higher targets. They encourage

others to stretch beyond their comfort zone. This kind of confidence is catching, because when an individual feels trusted to achieve, the likelihood of success increases, creating a positive cycle: the experience of succeeding builds confidence which in turn leads to more success. It knocks the chill off when team members feel empowered and competent, and they instinctively reinvest that positive energy into support for their colleagues, motivation for the team and trust in company leadership.

Cool It Down: Communicate and Reflect

On the other end of the spectrum, if expectations are unreasonable or there is an overemphasis on reaching specific targets, the climate can become overheated. When people work under constant strain, the result may be reckless behavior, finger pointing and eventually burnout. Safety suffers, too, when corners are cut or protocols ignored in order to reach a given target. To bring down the temperature, communication and reflection are indispensable tools. Opening up two-way communication gives everyone a chance to safely express what's not working or, especially, what might work better. This can start with intentional questions and sincere listening, accompanied by an openness to change.

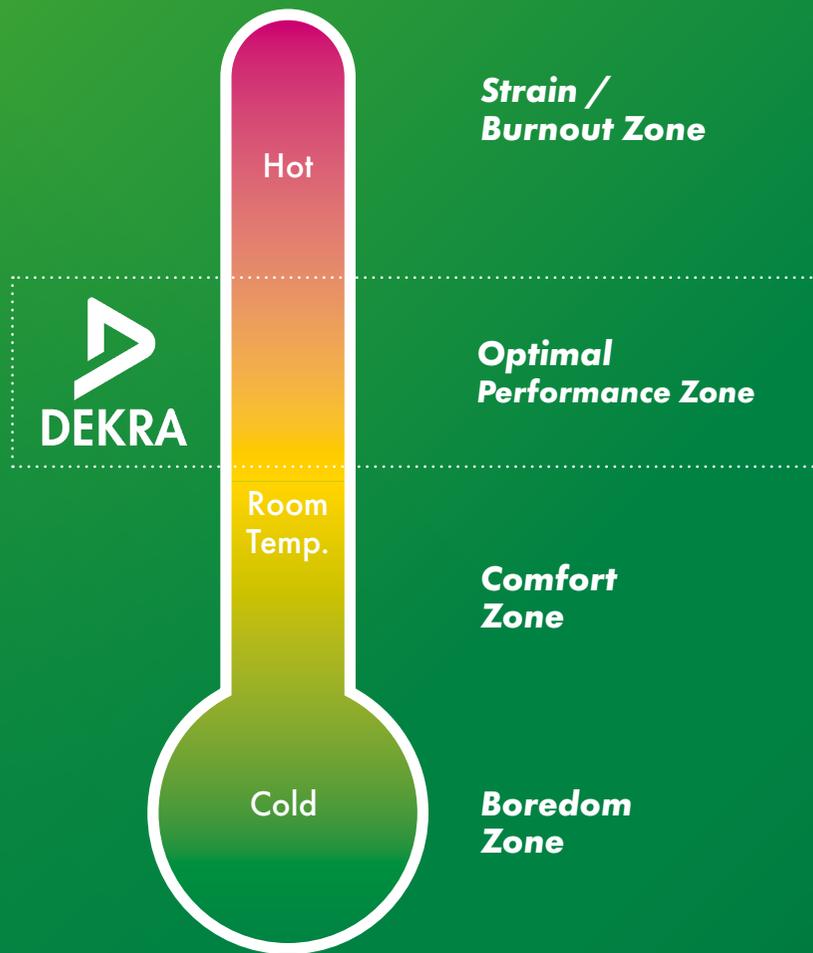


Figure 1. Maintaining the ideal climate range for optimal performance

A companion to this kind of healthy dialogue is self-reflection, where questions are turned inward. Leaders and other team members can benefit from an honest self-inventory considering the why and how of their own behavior. Taking time to reflect and communicate slows down a frenetic pace and brings down the temperature.

Beware the Comfort Zone

Maintaining the ideal temperature range requires ongoing awareness, attention and a commitment to fine-tuning. As damaging as persistent cold or heat, dramatic swings between the polar and the tropical create instability and leave people in a state of constant uncertainty. But allowing the climate to become overly comfortable is also counterproductive. When this happens, people may mistake the workplace for their social circle, where they won't be challenged and can just relax among friends—not the ideal climate for fostering growth or honing a competitive edge.

An Optimal Climate for Optimal Performance

Motivation, creativity and progress are all features of the "Optimal Performance Zone", the climate range most suited for optimal performance. But leaders and everyone on board have to realize that the temperature is going to fluctuate, influenced by myriad external and internal factors. The goal is not to fixate on steady-state comfort, but to maintain the optimal range, from the upper reaches of the comfort zone and stretching toward, but not reaching, feelings of strain. Here's where a strong leader, like a **sports coach**, knows to step in and either fire up the team or reign them in.

Cultivating Care

Calibrating the collective thermostat, from leadership down through the ranks, sometimes takes an objective external instrument. DEKRA specializes in helping companies find and maintain their ideal climate as part of a **culture of care**. Our experts are passionate about their mission and are experienced partners to leaders in industry. We offer consulting, training and coaching for groups and individuals at every organizational level. A mark of a good leader and a successful team is helping others become the best version of themselves, and we at DEKRA strive to do just that.





Craig Sproul

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