University of Minnesota

Development and Implementation of an Organizational Climate Assessment Tool.

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

Response: Improved Policies, Using Climate Assessment to Inform Action; Prevention: Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values.

Description of Work:

Background.

The University of Minnesota developed an institution-wide initiative, the President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct (PIPSM) in 2017. PIPSM is institutionalized with a permanent home in the University of Minnesota Office of Human Resources. PIPSM consists of a Steering Committee, a large diverse stakeholder Advisory Committee and five standing committees. A multi-year initiative of the PIPSM was the development of a tool to assess the climate and culture at the departmental level at the University of Minnesota. A collaborative, community-informed approach to climate assessment started in 2018 and culminated in a pilot of the "Organizational Climate Assessment" tool in the fall of 2020.

Purpose and goal.
The purpose of this climate assessment tool is to guide departments and other units in review of procedures, practices and/or policies in order to foster respectful conduct among department and unit members. The goal is to identify perceptions of the organizational climate from diverse perspectives within the unit in order to recognize strengths, identify gaps, and create plans of action to establish best practices for respectful interactions.

Methods.
The development of the inventory took multiple stages and stakeholders. The final iteration occurred in June of 2020, and the assessment is currently in a pilot testing phase. A brief synopsis of the development of the final tool and processes are described below:

Stage 1: In April, 2018, PIPSM created an "Inventory Framework" group to facilitate institutional accountability and responsibility for the prevention of sexual misconduct. The charge to the group included conducting an inventory of departmental level practices and policies, testing a series of sexual misconduct scenarios against the matrix of policies and procedures, and developing an "Inventory Framework".

Stage 2: PIPSM piloted the "Inventory Framework" in summer of 2018 with three units (academic and administrative). Feedback from the pilot resulted in restructuring the inventory as guiding questions that scaffolded a department's self-assessment, engaged departmental leaders and stimulated communities to assess their knowledge, practices and processes.

Stage 3: In 2019, PIPSM created a revised audit framework and named it the "Organizational Climate Assessment". The assessment tool went through another round of extensive stakeholder reviews, revisions, and final approval by PIPSM committees in 2020. The changes included making the assessment a more quantifiable rubric based on key prevention indicators.

Stage 4: A pilot of the "Organizational Climate Assessment Tool" began December, 2020. Departments are encouraged to include constituents from all levels (e.g. faculty, academic leadership, staff, students and other professional trainees such as fellows and postdocs) in the assessment.

Leaders of the "Organizational Climate Assessment" project developed a guide to implementing the tool, including a short video introducing the topic, purpose, goals and processes. Leaders of the assessment also meet with the contact people in the department to walk through the assessment in great detail. A committee of knowledgeable, experienced faculty members and staff, external to the department conducting the assessment, review the data and aggregate results in an unbiased manner and look for any data that may be identifiable in the results. In the assessment tool implementation guide, there are resources for departments on talking points, suggested questions to guide discussion of the findings, resources for how to have difficult conversations, and questions that trigger follow-up of the results, including:

- What is the assessment item and its score?
- What is the change you would like to achieve?
- What are the steps needed to move forward on this item?
- What resources will you need to accomplish the change?
- What is the timing for the steps?

Five departments/institutes underwent the pilot to date. Lessons learned so far are:
- Sensitive data will emerge and departments need to know how to approach and handle them.
- Use of the assessment tool is a very time intensive process.
- The development (contact interaction, communications, department implementation) and dissemination (data results sharing, review, and recommendations/actions processes) need to be tailored for each department/unit.
- Departments can use flexibility in how the assessment may be used depending on unit readiness for feedback, examples are:
  - Culture-building starting place
  - Temperature-taking
  - Data to support known issues previously dismissed by some voices
  - Plans for longitudinal assessment

As we hoped/expected, this process is bringing gaps in perceptions and knowledge and experience of the climate to light to serve as a starting point for challenging (new and/or ongoing) discussions.

Next Steps.
- Based on our pilot experience to date, we will adjust the process and use the tool in a rolling model due to the intensity of the time and effort involved. The goal for future dissemination of the number of Departments or Units/year is a discussion that will be held with the PIPSM Steering Committee when pilot findings are shared.

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- PIPSM will continue to focus on key messaging and action at the unit level to increase awareness about the building blocks of a healthy culture of respect, free of harassment, and facilitate capacity building.
- PIPSM will continue to evaluate the "Organizational Climate Assessment" tool; specifically the PIPSM Evaluation Committee will aid in process improvement (reach, satisfaction, usability) and outcomes metrics (change metrics related to practices, procedures, and unit level policy revision and/or development) of the assessment.

Website for further information (if applicable): NA

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