# **Questions from Climate Assessment Workshop**

**1. There are issues in the larger team. I'm not sure how much is my responsibility to address and how much should I leave for my Director to address? I'm not sure how to intervene when it's not my team in the conflict, yet everyone is impacted by it.**

Do you meet 1:1 with your Director? If so, you can start the conversation by telling the director that you would like to have a conversation about the team culture. You want to operate from the premise that the Director is unaware of the issues. Having facts is essential. Do not report anything you have not observed personally. Clarify that you are seeking to improve the productivity, morale, service levels (specific impacts) and if you have possible solutions, be ready to share them.

One of the critical observations: is it just one person? Often there is a tendency to paint with a broad brush when the first step would be to address the behavior of the individual.

If the team is relatively solid, but it seems like people are not on the same page, team effectiveness might be a strategy. Note that it is best to work with the leadership team first, then cascade this to the full team.

**2. How do you change the culture and climate of an organization when the leader models positive behavior with certain individuals and departments but is not all inclusive. It is observed and expressed by many but not to the leader due to other potential risks.**

When this happens, it can be that the leader does not notice their behavior and potential implicit biases. Often, leaders are grateful if they are made aware of these observations. Regarding the risks, are they tolerable to you or is the behavior you are observing tolerable? These courageous conversations are necessary. It is normal to be fearful about having the conversation, but often we imagine the worst-case scenario response, which rarely happens if it is handled respectfully. Our best leaders invite feedback and consider it without damaging relationships.

The class Crucial Conversations will be offered spring semester through [Organization & Professional Development](https://hr.msu.edu/professional-development/courses/index.html) and will provide you with skills to have that conversation. Leaders need to have the courage to invite the feedback.

There are a number of 2-5 minute videos from Marshall Goldsmith in [elevateU](https://elevateu.skillport.com/skillportfe/main.action#whatshappening) that are designed to help leaders be more effective. These videos are also great conversation starters for leaderships.

**3. What happens when the main red flag is the leader? and when reporting up the chain does not result in any performance management or consequence in a culture of "oh, that's just the way she is, but she does important work"**

Consider meeting with the leader to respectfully share your view and possible impacts of this lack of accountability. Often there can be legal, professional, and reputational impacts that they are not thinking about. This approach may feel intimidating to do alone. If other peers on your leadership team feel the same, have them raise the issue as well and/or strategize with them about addressing the issue. During conversations with leaders about red-flag behavior, it is important to present solid information and how it is impacting the team. Consider “I’ve noticed...” and “Some of the impacts to our team have been...” types of language, in order to respectfully approach these behaviors. Review the toolkit for additional strategies.

**4. For the unit analysis (SWOT/SOAR etc.) do you recommend bringing in an outside facilitator to work through that analysis?**

It depends. Some leaders are very versed in these activities and enjoy facilitating themselves. Others may prefer to be a full participant and bring in an external facilitator (someone cannot both facilitate and fully participate at the same time effectively). Part of the decision might be influenced by the type of culture currently in the unit. If it is strongly hierarchal, having the leader be the facilitator may stifle open dialogue.

**5. When does a unit need mission and vision statements independent of institution/college? I’m getting push back from above, whereas folks below are enthusiastic.**

The key word is independent. There should never be a Department/Unit/College mission or vision that is separate from the overall direction of the University—it must be linked to the overall direction of the institution and the college. The reason the folks below are enthusiastic is likely because they are more involved with decisions on what to do, when to do it and have an active role in getting it done.

The key takeaway is that regardless of the level, leaders need to make it real for *all* employees. How will you achieve the vision? This is where goals, objectives, projects and key performance indicators (metrics) are important. Every employee should know how the work that they do connects with the overall goals and how those goals relate to the University. Further, the goals then become part of the performance management process.

Example: Strategic Goal is Student Success. Leadership needs to invite employees to offer ideas on what that means, how it will be measured and how they contribute to it. There is not a job on campus that is not important and connects to student success, the key is to illuminate it and ensure there is understanding.

As the University Strategic Planning process unfolds, look for information on how to make those connections.

**6. What if the issue is with a peer, your boss recognizes there’s a problem, but they admit they don’t know how to solve the issue.**

Having a conversation with your peer is the first step. This should be done from a place of caring and an assumption that they don’t recognize the impact of their behavior. Skills to have a productive conversation of this sort without damaging the relationship can be learned through the class or book Crucial Conversations. You might share those resources with your boss as well. Explain the impact of the problems and ideas you to resolve the situation.

It’s also not fair to your peer if both you and your boss are discussing the issues, but neither of you has addressed the issue directly with them. Conversations approached with respect are critical for creating a climate that is supportive of all.

**7. Any suggestions on navigating faculty treatment of support staff? Feels like a systemic issue for higher ed.**

Our strategic planning committee is outlining new organizational values, many of which reflect the importance of treating others with dignity and respect. There is also work being done to identify behavioral expectations for faculty. In the meantime, you can consider having a respectful conversation with that faculty member letting them know the impact of their behavior on the individuals in the unit and the overall culture. For a broader approach, you might raise the issue with the college/division leadership team to consider if you can gain some consensus on addressing this type of behavior. Be prepared with information on how this impacts productivity, engagement, turnover, etc.

The work of support staff is very different than faculty and these differences are often overlooked.

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|  | Faculty | Staff |
| **Thinking**      **Seek to understand** | Abstract, complex, creative, systems thinking    The theories, skills and knowledge of an academic field (arts, sciences, laws, engineering, etc.) | Practical, systems thinking      The real world; how to get things done given the procedures, the people and schedules; how decisions will impact the people involved |
| **Goals** | Contribute to the academic field through research, publishing and teaching; creative application of concepts and theories to make a difference in the world | Implementation: make concrete things happen in a complex, political university system; support the academic enterprise |
| **Time reference**    **Tune into** | Future, long-range, abstract    Own abstract thoughts, concepts and possibilities | Here and now; immediate future    How things get done; who is who; what’s going on |
| **Work style**            **What they manage** | Juggle multiple priorities; work many hours but not scheduled hours; task focused; may not be aware of university procedures or may find them to be a nuisance    Manage own research, publishing, teaching and career | Juggle multiple priorities; scheduled workday; know and follow university procedures; creatively “work” their network of relationships to create results    Manage implementation; manage people, projects, budgets, departmental/interdepartmental relationships and career |
| **Rewards** | Tenure; promotion; grants; reputation; publication; papers delivered; appreciation | Concrete results; participation in meaningful academic projects; appreciation; reputation; promotion (sometimes not available); campus awards |
| **Constituents** | Worldwide cohort of academics in their field; students at the university | Faculty, students and other staff within the department and university |
| **Orientation to one’s job** | Work is a way of life, often the central focus of life’s meaning and activity | Work is a valued occupation, much of life’s meaning is derived from having a meaningful life outside of work |
| **Background**  **(training)** | Specialized graduate education in an academic field, usually not trained or experienced in administration, communication or management | Well educated in a variety of fields; on-the-job training; some specialized training (administration, communication, customer service, management) |

Adapted from Christy, Susan. 2010. Table 2.2. (n.d.). In *Working effectively with faculty: Guidebook for higher education staff and managers*.