PREVENTION
OUTREACH &
EDUCATION

CLIMATE ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT
A Guide For Cultivating Healthy Work & Learning Environments

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Welcome to the Climate Assessment Toolkit: A Guide For Cultivating Healthy Work & Learning Environments

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Use this resource to cultivate positive change in your academic or organizational environment.

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Introduction

The Climate Assessment Toolkit was developed in 2020 as a collaboration between Michigan State University's Prevention, Outreach and Education Department and Human Resources as part of the Creating and Sustaining a Respectful Work Environment Series. This toolkit serves as a valuable resource for leaders within Michigan State University, assisting them in understanding and exploring the climate and culture in their work and learning environments.

By gaining insights into the climate and culture of their unit's workplace and learning environment, leaders can develop practical strategies to support their teams and achieve the unit's objectives.

The toolkit facilitates reflection on and the development of a plan for enhancing interpersonal leadership skills while providing guidance for the assessment and improvement of climate and culture. It is designed as a workbook that leaders can revisit regularly on their leadership journey, serving as a tool for conducting self-guided climate assessments. The toolkit is organized into three sections:

- Self-Assessment: Beliefs and Behaviors as a Leader
- Understanding the Current Climate of Your Team
- Understanding the Surrounding Climate

Within each of the three sections, leaders will find activities and opportunities for self-reflection. It is encouraged that leaders go through the entire toolkit once and then return to the tools, exercises, and worksheets as needed throughout their career. This approach allows for ongoing growth and development of leadership skills while maintaining a focus on assessing and enhancing climate and culture within their unit's workplace and learning environment.

Glossary

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of terms relevant to reflections and activities within the Climate Assessment Toolkit.

Active-Listening	Belonging	Cultural-Competence
A way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding.	The feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group.	The ability to understand and interact with people from various cultures or belief systems.

Positional-Power	Leadership	Self-Reflection
The authority one has based on one's position in an organization's structure and hierarchy.	The action of leading a group of people or an organization.	Taking the time to think about, meditate on, evaluate, and give serious thought to your behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, motivations, and desires.

Team	Trauma-Informed (TI)	Unit
A group of individuals who collaborate and work together to achieve common goals, solve problems, and contribute to the success of the organization.	Being aware of trauma's many personal and societal consequences and being responsive to the many ways trauma survivors may respond to our words and actions.	An all-encompassing term to indicate the work team. This could be a department, support unit, college, etc.

Values	Work Climate	Work Culture
A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life.	The overall atmosphere or environment of a workplace. It encompasses the attitudes and behaviors of employees, as well as the physical and social aspects of a workplace.	The sum of the values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviors, and attitudes within an organization.

Basics of Leadership

As a leader, starting with a self-assessment of your beliefs and behaviors can help inform your goals, motivations, and ways that you can support your team. Whether you are a seasoned leader, executive/senior leader, or new to a leadership position, administering regular and intentional self-assessments can help you continue to develop and improve in your leadership efforts.

Leadership consists of many different and connecting elements. Leadership is not about power or a title. It is not just a position, but it is action - the action of inspiring and encouraging others to be their best selves. Leadership is the ability to inspire and empower others to reach their full potential and acknowledge their strengths and contributions to the team. This will ultimately create a culture and climate of belonging, accountability, productivity, positive change, and trust.

One of the most important aspects of leadership is that you cannot and should not do it alone. Leadership is a team sport, requiring the active involvement and contributions of all team members toward a common goal.

What distinguishes successful leaders is their openness, role modeling, and ability to lead while welcoming constructive feedback. It's crucial to acknowledge that leaders play a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining the climate and culture of their unit, and they are not neutral in this process.

"A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus, but a molder of consensus."
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Leader Self-Assessment: Beliefs & Behaviors

How to Use: Self-Assessment

The purpose of this self-assessment tool is to encourage reflection on the wide range of skills and attributes of leadership, both those you already possess and those you aspire to develop. It also aims to delve into individual cultural competence.

Engaging in this self-assessment allows for an honest evaluation of your attitudes, beliefs, strengths, and potential challenges and examining areas for further exploration. While self-assessment can be a challenging process, it is a vital step in uncovering your existing leadership qualities and nurturing the attributes that are significant to you as a leader.

During this self-assessment, it's essential to be candid with yourself, acknowledging your strengths and being honest about your areas for growth. It's worth noting that, even in areas where you rate yourself highly, exploring the available resources in those sections can further enhance your leadership journey. Prioritizing your learning in various areas is a valuable approach to self-improvement.

The self-assessment questions are presented, accompanied by space for journaling your reflections.

You may also find it beneficial to seek input from trusted mentors and colleagues to aid in your self-reflection process, especially in identifying areas where you may need assistance in expanding your awareness. It's essential to approach the self-assessment process with honesty in your responses.

Consider thoughtfully the situations you've encountered in the past and your corresponding reactions. Reflect on the leadership qualities you currently possess and those you aspire to develop or enhance.

Leadership is a multifaceted endeavor with numerous moving parts, skills, talents, and abilities, both within yourself and your team. It is not without its challenges. As a leader, having the awareness to balance the needs of others with the need for results is crucial, enabling you to recognize and overcome obstacles. The most effective leaders are also dedicated learners, continuously evolving and growing.

> **"A great leader is someone who says I see you.
> I hear you. I don't have all of the answers, but I'm going to keep listening and asking questions."
> -Brené Brown**

Self-Assessment

During this section of the leadership self-assessment, focus on the skills in which you are not proficient and consider potential strategies for improving them.

	AREA OF IMPROVEMENT	DO SOMEWHAT WELL	DO WELL
My communication style is clear and easily understood by the employees in my unit.	○	○	○
I understand the underlying concepts of leadership.	○	○	○
I adapt my leadership approach based on the circumstances.	○	○	○
I maintain transparency with the employees in my unit.	○	○	○
I understand the ethical responsibilities of leadership.	○	○	○
I am skilled at resolving conflicts and promoting collaboration within my team.	○	○	○
I align my actions with my values.	○	○	○
I provide beneficial feedback to both staff and faculty, with the intention of fostering improvement.	○	○	○
I facilitate opportunities for others to take on leadership positions.	○	○	○
I excel at establishing a welcoming atmosphere within my unit.	○	○	○

Self-Assessment

Now it's time for some self-reflection journaling. This activity will help you process and prioritize your thoughts and take focused action by clarifying your goals and intentions. This activity also provides an opportunity for affirming your leadership mindset and to identify areas of growth.

What is my personal definition of leadership and what does it mean to me?

What are my strengths as a leader?

What are my areas of growth as a leader?

What are my skills/areas of growth for empowering team members to put forth their best work?

Values Into Actions

Understanding your core values as a leader can help you know what drives you. By being aware of your leadership values, it will assist you in connecting with your team, working towards the goals of the unit, and becoming a more effective leader.

On the following page is a short list of common core values. When considering your values as a leader, try circling all of the values that resonate with you. Then select your top 10. Once you have 10 identified, select the five (5) that feel the most foundational to you as a leader - think specifically about the role you are in, your responsibilities, and the leader you are striving to be.

Do your actions reflect your values? Choose three (3) of the five (5) values that you identified and listed on the opposite column. Answer the following questions to more deeply explore these three values.

Value 1:
How do I demonstrate this value through my actions?

Value 2:
How do I demonstrate this value through my actions?

What are my top 5 personal values that drive me as a leader? (*review values list on next page)*

1.   4.

2.   5.

3.

Value 3:
How do I demonstrate this value through my actions?

Values List

Accountability	Empathy	Optimism
Adaptability	Equity	Passion
Adventure	Excellence	Patience
Ambition	Family	Perseverance
Authenticity	Flexibility	Personal Development
Autonomy	Focus	Rationality
Balance	Fun	Reliability
Bravery	Growth	Respect
Caring	Hard work	Resilience
Commitment	Honesty	Responsibility
Community	Hope	Risk-Taking
Connection	Independence	Service
Consistency	Influence	Social Justice
Courage	Innovation	Sustainability
Creativity	Integrity	Teamwork
Curiosity	Leadership	Transparency
Dedication	Legacy	Trust
Dependability	Loyalty	Vision
Discovery	Mindfulness	Wisdom
Education	Motivation	_____
Efficiency	Openness	_____

Let's Talk About Conflict

What is conflict? Conflict is defined as a disagreement, argument, or dispute. Yes, people differ in opinions, desires, expectations, and even values, and conflict is a natural part of our interaction with others and will come to the forefront on any team, unit, organization and/or department. Addressing conflict and managing conflict is essential as a leader and is beneficial for the health of the climate and culture of your unit.

What comes to mind when you think about conflict? What emotions come up when you imagine being in a conflict with someone? Not all conflict is bad, but conflict is typically difficult, which is one of the reasons it is often avoided.

Avoiding conflict can have a damaging impact on the climate of your unit; it can cause division, resentment, escalation and dissatisfaction at work - this is why it is important to adopt conflict resolution strategies. Conflict resolution is the process of ending a dispute and reaching an agreement that attempts to satisfy all parties involved. Conflict resolution strategies are used to increase understanding and facilitate discussion. If we also resolve conflict through a trauma-informed lens it can create a climate and culture of open communication and psychological safety.

So, why does conflict happen in the workplace? There is not one, simple answer to this question. Conflict in the workplace happens for many reasons: differences in values, goals and interests, different personalities and beliefs, workplace trauma, inequitable treatment, harassment, significant changes to protocols and procedures, miscommunication, cultural differences, among many others. This is not an exhaustive list, but these are common examples that often create conflict and can impact climate and culture in both work and learning environments.

This next section of the self-assessment allows you to explore your conflict resolution style(s) and if you are underusing, or overusing one or more of the five conflict resolution strategies. You will review the different conflict resolution styles, and consider when it might be best to employ each of the styles.

The most common set of styles, known as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), identifies five different approaches to conflict resolution.

Review each of the styles of conflict resolution and consider which style(s) you may use, underuse, or overuse.

Thomas, Kenneth & Kilmann, Ralph. (1976). (Review Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE instrument, pg. 14)

Barriers to Conflict Resolution

As humans and as leaders, there are often barriers to effectively resolving conflicts. Sometimes those barriers are what cause us to avoid conflict. When we are in leadership positions, avoiding tough conflicts can have negative consequences on our work and learning environments. Below are some common barriers to conflict resolution to consider.

1 Fear

Many elements may contribute to fear when it comes to conflict. Fears may include making the problem worse, losing credibility, a previous conflict with the same person that didn't go well, etc. Fear can certainly be a barrier to addressing conflicts, so it can be helpful to talk to a mentor or trusted peer to help you move past this barrier.

2 Resentment and Disengagement

Bigger factors and the climate in the community may cause barriers to resolving conflicts. A lack of trust, people's lack of engagement in the unit, bitterness, or historical conflicts that have gone unresolved can all cause unique barriers when trying to resolve new or evolving conflicts.

3 Dismissing the Topic as Unimportant

By dismissing the topic as unimportant, the opportunity to address the underlying issues is missed, potentially allowing them to fester and lead to more significant conflicts in the future.

4 Denial

Sometimes when conflicts occur, we deny that it is really happening, or we deny the role that we play in the conflict. If conflicts go unacknowledged, then they cannot be resolved and are likely to escalate.

5 Past Experiences

There are times when past experiences can impact our ability to manage conflict. Even leaders are not immune to this. It is important to recognize when past experiences and trauma may be influencing our ability to manage the conflict and reach out for support.

Other barriers:

- Poor Communication
- Lack of Problem-Solving Skills
- Lack of Trust
- Power-Imbalance
- Unwillingness to Admit Problem
- Cultural Differences
- Lack of Empathy

By understanding our conflict resolution styles and the barriers we encounter, we will be better equipped to handle and resolve conflicts.

Conflict Resolution Styles

The TKI is based on the idea that people have different ways of responding to conflicts, and these responses can be categorized into five main conflict-handling modes or styles:

Avoiding

is unassertive and uncooperative—the person neither pursues [their] own concerns nor those of the other individual. Thus [they do] not deal with the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from an argument and/or threatening situation.

Accommodating

is unassertive and cooperative (the opposite of competing). When accommodating, the individual neglects [their] own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this style. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

Compromising

is moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. It falls intermediate between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. In some situations, compromising might mean splitting the difference between the two positions, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground solution.

Collaborating

is both assertive and cooperative. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns. It means digging into an issue to pinpoint the underlying needs and wants of the individuals involved. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights or trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

Competing

is assertive and uncooperative—an individual pursues [their] own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode in which a person uses whatever power seems appropriate to win their own position—the person's ability to argue, their rank, or economic sanctions. Competing means "standing up for your rights," defending a position which they believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

Thomas, Kenneth & Kilmann, Ralph. (1976). Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE instrument.

Conflict Style Assessment

Examining the five main conflict resolution styles can help you understand the choices you make when resolving and managing conflict within your work and learning environments. Knowing your own conflict resolution style can help you identify how you might want to approach conflict differently. As you go through the self-reflection, think about general instances or situations where you used different conflict styles. Use the questions below to explore your conflict style or tendency.

What is my most commonly used conflict style? (e.g. avoidance, accommodating, compromising, collaboration, competing)

In what situation(s) did this conflict resolution style typically work well? What was the outcome?

In what situation(s) did this conflict resolution style not work well? What was the outcome?

How do you usually manage interactions with individuals when you encounter challenges related to situations or decisions?

Conflict Resolution Styles

Self-Reflection:

Consider a workplace scenario or conflict. How might you apply these styles, and what are the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing each style in such situation(s)?

Use this worksheet as a resource for examining conflicts that might arise in the future.

Avoiding	
Accommodating	
Compromising	
Collaborating	
Competing	

Understanding the Current Climate on Your Team

Understanding the Current Climate on Your Team

After conducting a self-assessment and personal reflection, it's time to get to know your team members and to intentionally commit to understanding each of them as professionals in your unit.

Concurrently, you will want to assess the climate within the unit to determine what is working well and what areas may require additional attention.

Understanding the current climate of your team is crucial to effective leadership, communication, and successful collaboration. It creates a positive work and learning environment.

The terms "climate" and "team climate" will be used interchangeably in this section, but what exactly do these terms mean?

How would you define "climate"?
Climate (as it pertains to work and learning environments) refers to the overall atmosphere, mood, and prevailing attitudes within a group.

Several factors emphasize the importance of understanding your team's current climate, such as:

Communication and Collaboration:
A positive team climate fosters open communication and encourages collaboration among team members. By understanding the current climate, you can identify any communication barriers, conflicts, or lack of cooperation that may hinder the team's progress.

Employee Well-being:
A leader who understands the team climate can actively promote a healthy work environment that supports the well-being of team members. Addressing issues that impact mental and emotional health can contribute to higher job satisfaction and employee retention.

Conflict Resolution:
Conflicts are inevitable in any team, but a leader who is aware of the team climate can effectively mediate conflicts by considering the underlying dynamics and emotions that contribute to the disagreement.

Trust and Credibility:
Demonstrating an understanding of the team's climate enhances your credibility as a leader. Team members are more likely to trust a leader who acknowledges their feelings and concerns and takes steps to acknowledge and address them.

Current Climate Assessment

After completing your self-assessment and engaging in personal reflection, it's essential to familiarize yourself with your team members and make a deliberate effort to understand each of them as professionals within your unit. Simultaneously, you should evaluate the unit's climate to identify areas of strength and areas that may need improvement. When assessing the current climate in your unit, consider all the methods through which you have gathered information about it, such as observations, personal assumptions, the unit's reputation, feedback from colleagues, and your personal experiences.

What is my current sense of the climate within this unit?

What would I like the climate and culture to be in the unit?

In what ways do my attitude and actions reflect the type of climate and culture I want in this unit?

Who can I rely on to provide me with honest feedback about my actions? (*Support Map, pg. 48*)

Stay Interviews

Stay interviews are a type of employee retention strategy that involves having structured conversations with current employees to understand their needs, concerns, and motivations, with the goal of retaining them and improving their job satisfaction. Stay interviews are typically conducted to proactively address any potential issues or reasons an employee might consider leaving the job. Rather than waiting for employees to leave their jobs and conducting exit interviews, supervisors are better served by asking "stay interview" questions to current employees.

There are many reasons why stay interviews are important and beneficial to your employees and to you as the leader:

▶ Employee Development:

Conducting stay interviews can reveal opportunities for skill improvement and career advancement. When employees perceive a clear path for growth within their department, they are more likely to remain engaged and dedicate their time, effort, and creativity to their roles.

▶ Enhanced Employee Experience:

By addressing concerns and implementing changes based on stay interview feedback, units can enhance the overall employee experience which can lead to increased job satisfaction, higher morale, and a positive workplace culture.

▶ Tailored Solutions:

Stay interviews offer the opportunity to understand each employee's unique needs and preferences. This allows organizations to tailor their strategies to retain individual employees based on their motivations and goals.

▶ Improved Communication:

Taking part in stay interviews encourages a culture of open communication between employees and their supervisors. When employees feel that their opinions are valued and appreciated, they are more likely to be engaged in their work and invested in the work community.

Stay Interview Questions

Stay interview questions are essential for enhancing employee engagement and retention. It's advisable to select a subset of these questions from various sections to pose during check-ins and one-on-one meetings with your team members.

Avoid asking all of these questions simultaneously, as it can be overwhelming. Instead, incorporate them into your regular and frequent interactions with your individual team members. Relying solely on annual reviews to ask stay interview questions may create missed opportunities for development and retention.

STRUCTURAL
- If you could create your own schedule, what would it be?
- If resources were unlimited, what would you want to do or propose to do in your role?
- Is there something you need to do your job more effectively?

CONNECTION TO WORK
- What skills are you using that you enjoy?
- What is one thing you like that we are currently doing?
- What is one thing you would add to what we are currently doing?
- Is there another position in this unit/office you would rather be doing? If so, what elements of that job do you like?
- If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
- What is your favorite part of your job?
- What do you say when your loved ones or friends ask you, "How do you feel about your job?"
- What causes you to disengage at work?
- If you had the best job at the university, what would you tell your friends it was like?
- What do you value most about working with our organization?
- What do you look forward to each day when you come to work?
- What is the most frustrating aspect of your job?
- Are there any specific changes or improvements you would like to see in your work environment?
- If you had to get rid of one component of your job, which would it be?
- If you had to give away all components of your job except one, which would you keep?
- What is one thing in the last month that you're proud of?
- What three words would you use to describe the work environment?
- What do you tell other people about your job?

Stay Interview Questions continued

INTERPERSONAL & LEADERSHIP
- What could I do better as your leader?
- What is one thing I do that is frustrating for you or makes your job harder?
- What is one thing about the way I manage that you would change?
- What can I do to make your job/experience better?
- What makes you feel appreciated?
- What is the best way for me to give you feedback?
- Who do you respect and why?
- If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing opinions with me? With the team?
- What helps you feel like an integral part of the team?

CAREER
- What is the most valued skill that you've learned here?
- What do you need from this position to help prepare you for your next position?
- What is your 5-year plan, and what are we doing to get you closer to your goals?
- What can I do to help you accomplish your goals?
- What attracted you to this job (why did you choose this job)? Does it still apply?
- What do your colleagues do that you'd like to learn?
- How is this job benefitting you?
- What other experience do you want to gain?
- Are you interested in advancement? Leadership?

Self-Reflection:
Write your plan for conducting stay interview with the individuals on your team *(ex. Scheduling: How will you schedule the interviews to ensure they are convenient for both you and the team members? What tools or scheduling methods will you use?)*.

Unit Analysis

Once you've spent time understanding the individuals on your team, some general analysis of the unit may also be helpful. There are many elements to creating a strong work team and productive organization. Here are some categories that you can consider and tools (*review Unit Analysis: SWOT & SOAR on pgs. 25-28*) for assessing your unit.

Mission Statement: This involves analyzing the clarity and relevance of the unit's mission statement. Having a clear, effective, and relevant mission statement helps people make decisions and provides consistent focus and purpose. What is your unit's mission statement; how does it align with the university's priorities?

Vision Statement: A clear and measurable image of the preferred future. An image/view of how we imagine the purpose (mission) of the unit unfolding.

Organizational Values: Characteristics or qualities that guide behavior. What is necessary to accomplish the mission/vision. Reminder that these are organizational values, not personal values. Ground the conversation in the mission and vision of the unit.

Behaviors: Once values are identified, what are the behaviors that you can observe that tell you the values are being enacted in the unit? Consider ways for incorporating conversations about these behaviors in one-on-one meetings with team members and during unit meetings.

Inclusive Environment: Evaluating the level of diversity and inclusion within the workplace unit. How does the unit reflect diversity and inclusion? Are employees from various backgrounds valued and included?

Communication Styles/Transparency: Examining how information flows within the unit. Effective communication is crucial for smooth operations.

Team Dynamics: Analyzing how teams within the workplace unit collaborate, communicate, and work together. This could involve evaluating communication patterns, conflicts, and cooperation.

Workplace Culture: Understanding the prevailing workplace culture, values, and norms within the unit. This can impact employee morale and overall unit performance. Is there a culture of flexibility and support for employees' well-being?

Unit Analysis: SWOT

SWOT and SOAR analyses are two commonly used tools for the assessment of a unit. These tools provide valuable insights into different aspects of an organization's performance and strategic planning and can be facilitated at any level of the unit. A leader might want to consider having an external facilitator help guide these discussions so the leader can participate alongside team members.

1 **SWOT Analysis:** SWOT is an acronym that stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. A SWOT analysis is a framework used to evaluate the internal and external factors that can impact a department's/unit's performance and success.

A SWOT analysis provides a structured way to identify and evaluate these factors in order to make informed decisions and develop effective strategies.

Here's a breakdown of each component of a SWOT analysis:

☑ **Strengths:** The internal attributes and characteristics that give a department/unit or individual a competitive advantage. Strengths can include things like specialized expertise, strong brand reputation, efficient processes, valuable resources, etc.

☑ **Weaknesses:** What are the internal factors that, if left unchallenged, will cause harm (e.g., outdated technology, inefficient policies and procedures, any other internal limitations, etc.)?

☑ **Opportunities:** What are the opportunities for improvement of the current environment? These could include technological advancements, changes in procedures, etc.

☑ **Threats:** What are the external factors that could negatively impact the unit and individuals in that unit. These could come from rapid changes in the department, merging units into one department/unit, changes in leadership, or other external factors.

Through the implementation of a SWOT analysis, organizations can attain a thorough comprehension of their current climate and can use this insight to develop strategies that align strengths with opportunities and values, address weaknesses, and mitigate threats.

Unit Analysis: SWOT Activity

Unsure of how to initiate your SWOT analysis? Print this sheet for use with your unit as you collectively analyze the SWOT.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

Unit Analysis: SOAR

2 **SOAR Analysis:** SOAR is an acronym representing Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results. Unlike SWOT, SOAR takes a more aspirational and appreciative inquiry approach, focusing on where the organization aims to go in the future. The introduction of accountability comes through the Results component, which addresses how the desired outcomes will be measured.

SOAR is particularly useful in situations where organizations want to build upon their strengths and cultivate a positive organizational culture.

Here's a breakdown of each component of a SOAR analysis:

☑ **Strengths:** This involves identifying and understanding the essential strengths, capabilities, and unique attributes that a unit possesses. These strengths can be used as building blocks for future success.

☑ **Opportunities:** This refers to the external possibilities and likelihood that a department/unit can capitalize on to achieve its objectives; recognizing and capturing these opportunities contribute to the department's/unit's growth.

☑ **Aspirations:** This involves the vision, values, and goals that the department/unit aims to achieve and put into action. Aspirations are the desired outcomes that guide an organization's efforts and equitable decisions.

☑ **Results:** These are measurable outcomes and achievements that are sought after through strategic planning and initiatives.

SOAR has significant advantages, such as fostering engagement and collaboration, enabling departments/units to make well-informed strategic decisions, and harnessing the strengths within teams. When employees' strengths are acknowledged and applied, they experience empowerment, resulting in heightened job satisfaction and a stronger sense of ownership in the organization's accomplishments.

Unit Analysis: SOAR Activity

Unsure of how to initiate your SOAR analysis? Print this sheet for use with your unit as you collectively analyze the SOAR.

STRENGTHS

OPPORTUNITIES

ASPIRATIONS

RESULTS

Unit Values

Core values are one important aspect of creating a strong culture. Along with behaviors, core values define who we are (mission) and who we want to become (vision). How do we ensure our core values align with the unit's future vision?

Values and behaviors are personal and represent everyday living. Values and behaviors describe how an individual actively contributes in a meaningful way to culture. Organizations function best when there is an identified set of shared values, clarity as to their meaning, accountability for upholding them, and humbleness when there is misalignment.

Team Values Activity:

1. Individually, have employees review the list of values (Values List, pg. 11) and select their top five values for the unit.
2. Gather everyone's identified values and incorporate them so that the organization can begin to notice the shared values.
3. Invite discussion on all of the values, particularly the shared ones—you don't want to discard a value without talking about what it means—what are the behaviors associated with this value? Capture this information. There is not a "set" number of values for a unit, but you want few enough that they are easy to remember.
4. Gather what the top values are and their associated behaviors and put these back out to the team for feedback and questions.
5. Formally adopt the values and behaviors by incorporating them into individual performance and evaluation goals as well as using them to evaluate completion of organizational goals.

As a team, reflect on and revisit these team values regularly and discuss how they are supporting the mission and vision of the organization.

What are the values of my unit/department?	
	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____
	5. _____

Warning Signs

Recognizing and dealing with warning signs in a work team is crucial to sustaining a positive and effective climate. Warning signs refer to emerging problems or inappropriate behaviors that could harm the work team's well-being and functionality.

Ignoring these signs can lead to larger problems down the road. Here are some reasons why it is crucial to pay attention to warning signs on a work team:

Preventing Escalation

Addressing warning signs early and promptly allows leaders to intervene to prevent minor concerns from escalating into more serious issues and major conflicts that will negatively impact the climate and team dynamics.

Effective Communication

Recognizing and discussing warning signs encourages open and honest communication, and active listening among team members because concerns are shared openly and solutions are identified collaboratively.

Leadership Credibility

Leaders who take warning signs seriously and address them show that they are attentive to the well-being and effectiveness of their teams. This enhances leadership credibility and trust among team members.

Addressing Root Causes

Warning signs often hint at deeper issues. By addressing the signs, you can uncover the underlying causes and work on addressing them effectively.

Team Unity

Addressing these warning signs helps in restoring and enhancing teamwork and creating an environment where everyone works together harmoniously.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict between individuals can often spill into the larger climate, therefore helping the individuals manage the conflict can prevent further or widespread harm on the team.

Warning Signs: Taking Action

Being a trauma-informed leader when addressing warning signs on a work team involves approaching concerns and conflicts with empathy, understanding and cultural awareness of the potential impact of trauma on individuals.

As the leader of your unit, you have a responsibility to address warning signs that may be actively present. Here are several signs that require action:

Harassment/Hostile Environment
- Bullying
- Incivility - low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect
- Talking over each other in meetings
- Grudges
- Emails with vulgar or suggestive language
- Asking questions about colleague's intimate relations/relationships
- Displaying offensive or graphic material
- Unwelcome physical contact
- Talking about TV shows or movies in a graphic way
- Flirtatious texts or notes
- Ogling
- "Whisper networks" that warn people away from serial harassers

Structural Concerns
- Lack of diversity in the group, which may result in team members feeling isolated
- Seating that isolates specific people
- Unfair hiring practices
- Identity-based divisions
- Insults based on a person's identity (particularly protected categories as outlined in the MSU Anti-Discrimination Policy)
- Verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, exclusion, or second-class status about members of a particular group
- Microaggressions
- Refusal to use a person's correct pronouns

Team Dynamics
- Gossip/Rumors
- People being intentionally left off projects, particularly ones that could potentially advance the person's career
- Sabotage/Competition
- Cliques (with intentional exclusion)
- "Gut feeling/something feels a little off"

Warning Signs:
Taking Action continued

Leadership Style
- Appears to favor certain employees
- Rigid hierarchy that advantages some, while disadvantaging others
- Pushes to keep harms that have occurred a secret
- Requests or tolerates unethical or illegal behavior
- Unrealistic demands leading to high stress and burnout
- Failure to hold others accountable
- Limited or inconsistent communication
- Does not provide meaningful feedback

While problematic behavior and structures can occur anywhere, here are some situations that may increase risk:

1   **Homogenous workforce –** Homogeneity can result in a reduction in creativity and innovation. This can also lead to some team members feeling isolated and they may be vulnerable to pressures from others.

2   **Workplaces where some employees do not conform to workplace norms –** In scenarios where an employee, or small groups of employees that do not conform to the majority, or have unique identities or beliefs, these employees may face perceptions of vulnerability and/or be susceptible to abuse. Managers can address this by promoting a culture of respect and civility.

3   **Culture and language differences in the workplace –** Employees from varied cultural backgrounds may unintentionally find themselves isolated within the workforce. This can result in reduced awareness of workplace norms, particularly among those who do not speak the predominant language spoken in the work environment, potentially making them vulnerable to exploitation. To prevent this, it is crucial to provide all employees with comprehensive training and information in an understandable format (e.g. American Sign Language, or other languages), ensuring they fully comprehend and adhere to laws, policies, and workplace norms.

4   **Coarsened social discourse outside the workplace –** This can happen when current events outside of work are discussed passionately, especially during significant events like elections. Such outside discourse can impact workplace relationships. Be proactive in addressing this and reminding employees of expected conduct appropriate at work.

Warning Signs:
Taking Action continued

5 **Workplaces with "high value" employees** – This pertains to executives and senior managers who may avoid addressing problematic employees, particularly if they're considered valuable to the organization. They might also assume they're above the rules. Ensure consistent rule enforcement and make it clear to senior team members that they aren't exempt from consequences for misconduct.

6 **Isolated workplaces** – Employees working in isolation or small groups with limited interaction can become easy targets for harassment due to the absence of witnesses. Consider reorganizing work environments to mitigate this risk and make sure employees in isolated settings are well-informed about complaint procedures.

7 **Power imbalances** – The presence of power imbalances can create tension and increased risk of harm. This can also cause some individuals who have less power to face barriers to advancement, discrimination, and harassment. Focus on promoting and fostering a respectful environment and implementing policies that support the career development of all team members.

8 **Lack of communication** – The organization does not communicate well (or often) with employees. Especially if there are any rumors of problems, layoffs, or reorganizations, a regular cadence of communication is a must. Speculation can breed fear and resentment.

9 **Employee-employer dynamics** – Some leaders promote the idea that employees should be grateful to work there, even without work/life balance and appropriate benefits. However, if the working conditions do not genuinely make employees feel fortunate to be part of the organization, this sentiment can lead to resentment among employees.

10 **Retaining problem employees too long** – This issue arises when a problematic employee leads to missed deadlines, frustrated customers, and safety concerns, while also diminishing the morale of other employees who feel unheard and undervalued regarding their safety.

Warning Signs:
Self-Reflection

Noticing warning signs in the workplace as a leader is a critical aspect of maintaining a healthy and productive work climate. Below are a few questions to help guide your self-reflection.

What, if any, warning signs have you noticed in your workplace?

What action have you already taken to address the issues?

What actions do you plan to take around these issues?

Who else may need to be involved and/or notified? (Consider reporting requirements, safety concerns, etc.)

Responding to Concerns

Responding to concerns as a leader is a crucial skill that fosters trust, open communication, and a healthy work environment. Here are tips for responding to concerns.

1 Stay Calm and Objective
Approach the situation with a calm and composed demeanor. Objectively assess the concern or behavior without reacting emotionally, as this helps in making fair judgments.

2 Immediate Response
Address concerns and behaviors in a timely manner to prevent issues from escalating. Prompt action demonstrates your commitment to resolving matters and maintaining a healthy work environment.

3 Avoid Blame and Judgement
Focus on the behavior or concern rather than attributing blame to the individual. Use "I" statements to express your observations and concerns instead of accusatory language.

4 Empathetic Listening and Understanding
Show empathy by acknowledging the person's feelings and viewpoint. Even if you don't agree, understanding their perspective can help defuse tension. Listen empathically and attentively to the person's perspective.

5 Set Expectations
Clearly communicate your expectations for behavior and performance. If the concern is related to behavior, discuss the specific behavior that needs to change and why it's important.

6 Bystander Intervention
Concerns may need to be addressed in the moment and bystander intervention skills can help intervene in those situations (review Bystander Intervention pg. 36)

7 Collaborative Problem-Solving
Involve the individual in finding a solution. Encourage them to suggest ways to address the concern or improve their behavior. This empowers them and increases ownership of the solution.

Additional Tips:
- Document and Report
- Be Consistent
- Lead by Example
- Positive Reinforcements
- Offer Support
- Provide Feedback
- Follow-up
- Seek Mentorship

Bystander Intervention

Setting expectations is one of the many responsibilities of a leader. Expectations can be set formally, such as through bylaws, policies and protocols, and informally, such as through role-modeling behavior, group discussions, and bystander intervention.

Active bystander leadership is being aware of what is happening in your climate and making an intentional choice through actions that prevent harmful or potentially harmful behaviors in real-time such as harassment, inappropriate language, inappropriate jokes, gossip, witnessing microaggressions, bullying, etc.

Bystander intervention is a tool that can be used to address problems or harm occurring in the moment or shortly thereafter; it aims to empower individuals to take a proactive role in promoting safety, well-being, and positive outcomes.

These are skills that you can use when situations arise. As the leader of the unit, you could also encourage the use of these skills among your team.

It is important that as a leader you know how to interrupt and intervene in a safe and effective way; doing this can help create a healthy climate.

There are five effective styles to bystander intervention:

- Direct
- Distract
- Delegate
- Delay
- Document

The style that is used may be determined by your leadership style, the context and severity of the situation, among other considerations.

The effectiveness of bystander intervention depends on various factors, including the willingness of bystanders to get involved, their knowledge of appropriate actions, and the overall culture of the community or environment. It can play a crucial role in fostering positive social change and reducing harm by encouraging people to take a proactive stance against negative and harmful behaviors.

5Ds of Bystander Intervention

The "Five Ds of Bystander Intervention" is a framework designed to provide guidance on how individuals can effectively intervene in situations where someone might be at risk or in need of help. These five Ds stand for different strategies that bystanders can employ:

Direct

Intervene directly by addressing the situation and confronting the potential harm. This can involve speaking up, asserting boundaries, or diffusing a conflict.

Distract

Divert attention away from a potentially harmful situation. This can help de-escalate tension and give the person at risk an opportunity to remove themselves from the situation.

Delegate

Seek help from someone with more authority or expertise, such as a manager, a friend of the person being impacted, or law enforcement. Delegating responsibility to those who are knowledgeable about how to handle the situation can ensure a safer outcome.

Delay

Wait until the situation has de-escalated, and then approach the person at risk to offer assistance. This can be useful if intervening in the height of the moment might exacerbate the situation.

Document

If it is safe to do so and someone is already helping the person impacted, write notes of the situation. This documentation can serve as evidence and support for any actions that might need to be taken later.

As an MSU employee, Document may also include your obligations to report prohibited conduct as outlined in MSU's policies. Review policies to stay up-to-date on these requirements.

Bystander Intervention Scenario

For each intervention style, we will use the following scenario in order to help provide context for how each style might be used to intervene in a situation.

Scenario:

Picture yourself as a leader in a department meeting. One employee consistently interrupts another and makes rude "side comments" when they try to contribute ideas. The interrupted employee appears visibly uncomfortable.

Direct:
As the leader, you are likely to be the one who is hosting the full department meeting. In this situation you might say directly to the employee who is interrupting, "[Name], I am noticing that you have repeatedly interrupted [other employee] and I'd like to understand why this is happening."

Distract:
Sometimes, it does not feel appropriate to directly address a situation. For instance, if there is a risk that a direct method would escalate the situation. In this scenario, a distract method might be to say, "I know we all have a lot to contribute around this topic, I want to make sure we are staying on track with our agenda." This could bring attention to the situation without addressing it directly.

Delegate:
Although this situation may appear to be a simple scenario, delegation might be required in instances where verbal threats are being made, comments are in violation of MSU's policies, or if you are not the one leading the meeting. Delegation may be required to involve other necessary units and/or supervisors.

Delay:
Consider scheduling a private meeting with the interrupting employee. Frame the conversation as an opportunity for education and growth, rather than as a form of punishment. You could say, "I'd like to discuss the comment made during the meeting. It's crucial to uphold a respectful environment within our team." Additionally, check in with the person who was interrupted to see if they require any support.

Document:
Document the incident by taking notes. This documentation can be useful if further action needs to be taken.

Bystander Intervention

Consider the common types of situations you encounter in your role as a leader. List below the types of situations that would best be served by each of the bystander intervention methods.

Direct	
Distract	
Delegate	
Delay	
Document	

Remember, your goal as a leader is to create a safe and respectful environment where everyone feels valued. By addressing inappropriate comments promptly and effectively, you can reinforce the importance of respectful communication within your team.

Climate Survey

What is a Climate Survey?

There are various ways to understand and assess the climate of your team, unit, and/or college. One way to do this is to use climate surveys. Climate surveys can provide valuable insights into employees' perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about the workplace and learning environment and culture of those environments.

Climate surveys are often designed to gauge the sense of belonging, and overall well-being and satisfaction of the department/unit or college. The primary goals of climate surveys are to identify any existing issues, biases, or disparities, and to inform evidence-based strategies for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment.

When to:

Regularly assessing the climate of your department/unit through climate surveys can contribute to a more engaged and satisfied work and learning environment.

The timing of administering a climate survey should align with goals, resources, and commitment of your department/unit to improving the work or learning environment based on employee and student feedback.

Administering a climate survey annually or bi-annually allows for consistent tracking of changes in employee and student perceptions and attitudes over time and provides a basis for comparing results from one year to the next.

How to:

To have an accurate gauge/snapshot of the climate in your work and learning environments, here are a few things to keep in mind when administering a climate survey:

- Be clear about the purpose and objectives of the climate survey. Determine what you want to assess (i.e., safety, sense of belonging, equity, leadership, etc.)?
- Know the target audience (i.e., all employees; specific departments; students.)
- Choose or create a survey instrument that aligns with your objectives. Ensure questions are clear and unbiased.
- Have a plan for sharing the results with the audience.

Understanding Power, Privilege, & Identity

For a thorough unit inclusivity assessment as found on the next page, it's essential to grasp the interplay of power, privilege, and identity and how they collectively impact climate and culture. This understanding is crucial for promoting a welcoming environment and a sense of belonging within an organization, unit, or department.

Let's establish clear definitions for these concepts to enhance our comprehension of their intersections and impact in the workplace.

Power

Positional power is the authority derived from one's position in an organization's hierarchy. Academic leaders like university presidents, deans, department chairs, and administrators hold significant authority in their institutions based on their positions.

Historically, within academia, leadership roles have been primarily held by individuals from privileged groups.

Centralized power can create a climate of fear, inequality, and distrust. Conversely, a more evenly distributed power structure promotes cooperation, transparency, and empowerment.

Privilege

Privilege is the result of systemic defaults that advantage some while disadvantaging others.

In academia, individuals who possess privileges, such as racial, gender, or socioeconomic privilege, may have advantages in regard to accessing leadership roles, resources, and receiving support and recognition.

Privilege can indeed contribute to disparities in the workplace climate. Those who have privilege may not fully grasp the challenges faced by their colleagues who do not have the same systemic advantages, which can lead to a lack of empathy and understanding.

Identity

Identity includes an individual's diverse attributes like race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion. It profoundly shapes their experiences and viewpoints.

Failure to understand or be sensitive to employees' identities can lead to exclusion, discrimination, and hostility, creating a negative workplace atmosphere with disengaged and dissatisfied employees.

Alternatively, a workplace that values and celebrates all identities can create an atmosphere of belonging, where employees feel free to be their authentic selves.

Unit Inclusivity Assessment

These questions can aid leaders in assessing the current level of inclusivity in the workplace and identifying areas for improvement within their work team.

	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY
I have witnessed exclusionary behavior.	●	●	●
I have noticed occasions when certain individuals were excluded from significant meetings or conversations.	●	●	●
My unit/department actively fosters a sense of belonging.	●	●	●
I am aware of the presence of transparent and equitable policies designed to prevent discrimination and harassment in my unit.	●	●	●
I believe my unit/department values and embraces employees from diverse backgrounds.	●	●	●
My team equitably encourages opportunities for leadership or decision-making.	●	●	●
My team feels comfortable sharing their viewpoints and ideas without fear of discrimination.	●	●	●
Individuals in my unit/department feel valued and respected.	●	●	●
Opportunities are offered fairly regardless of backgrounds or social identities.	●	●	●
The importance of belonging and community is communicated to all faculty and staff in my unit/department.	●	●	●

Understanding the Surrounding Climate

Surrounding Climate
What affects the unit externally and internally?

Understanding the surrounding climate of your work team involves recognizing the overall atmosphere, attitudes, and dynamics within the team. The climate and culture within the larger context may also influence the climate and culture within your unit; external factors also play a significant role in shaping the team's environment and dynamics.

Understanding these outside factors are critical to understanding some of the dynamics that may be present within your unit that can influence the climate of a work team.

For instance, the leadership team you are part of, the university's goals and priorities, and the support of your peers can all affect how you approach the climate in your unit.

Here are some other key external factors to consider that can influence a work team:

University Culture:
The culture of the university, including its values, traditions, and norms, can have a profound impact on how work teams within the university function. For example, the alignment between your team's values and the values of the broader institution can have an impact on team dynamics, motivation, and overall effectiveness.

Changes in Leadership:
Different leaders have distinct leadership styles. A new leader might restructure the team, change reporting lines, or adjust roles. These changes can affect team dynamics, relationships, and the distribution of responsibilities.

Research 1 (R1) University:
R1 institutions place a strong emphasis on research, leading to high expectations of research productivity. This emphasis can have a significant impact on work teams involved in research, influencing factors like workload, publication pressure, unit and institution reputation, and availability of resources, all of which contribute to the team's overall climate.

Strategic Vision of the University:
The university's strategic vision and your unit's alignment with it are external factors that profoundly shape the team's working environment. These elements encompass facets such as clarity of the vision, distribution of resources, backing from leadership, shared values, and the consequences for students, faculty, and staff.

By considering both internal and external influences, units can better support their teams and create environments that foster team cohesiveness, well-being, trust, and collaboration.

Surrounding Climate:
Self-Reflection

Your Leaders and Peers:

How intentional are the leaders above you about culture and climate and how intentional are your peers about culture and climate?

Do your leaders and peers model what you are striving for? If so, how? If not, why not?

How does the behavior of the leader(s) above you and peers impact you and your team?

What steps can you take if you notice warning signs across the leadership structure?

What resources and factors are at my disposal to instigate a change?

Influence Up & Across

Below are action steps to consider not only with your leadership team, but other groups or committees you participate in across the university.

Learn skills to engage in necessary crucial conversations:
- Explore professional development opportunities through MSU Human Resources.

Illuminate hidden victims and unconscious impacts:
- Help team members understand the impacts of behavior.
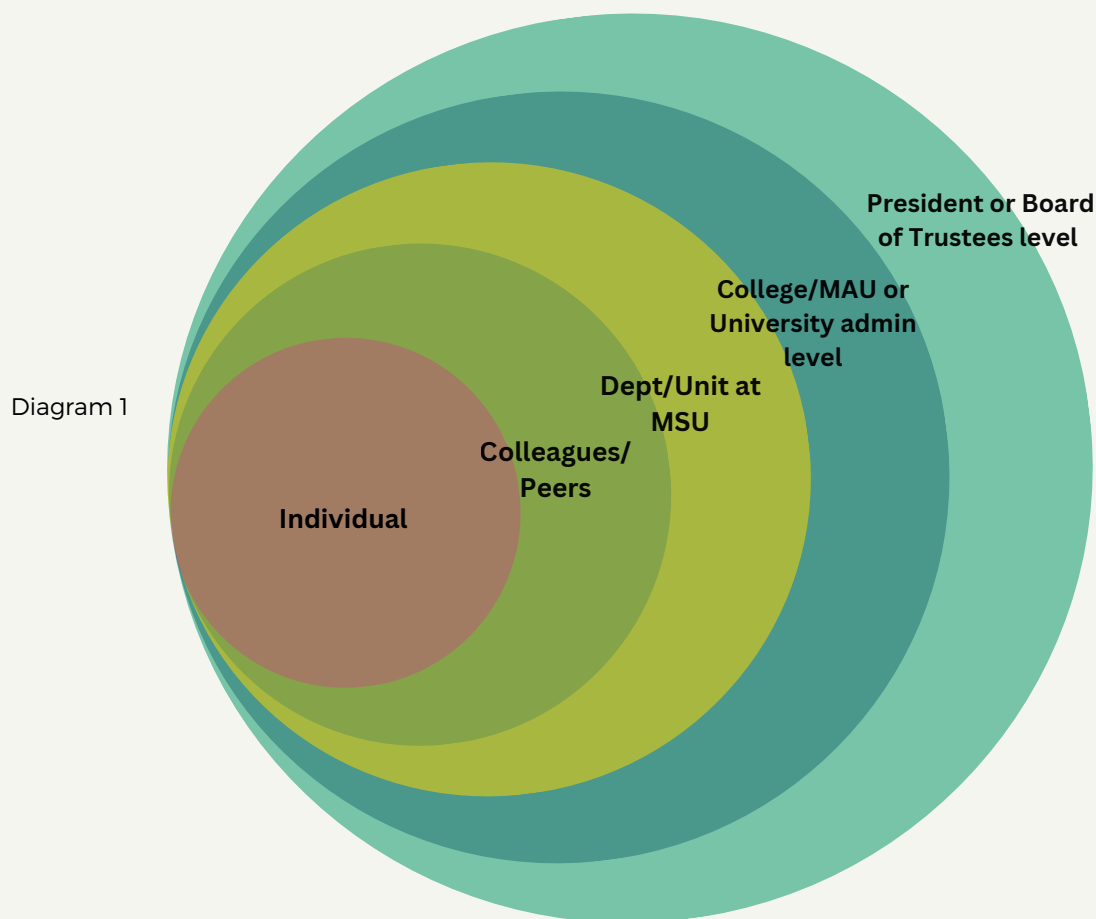- Use "I noticed…" language to bring attention to negative impacts.

Work with allies to help address concerns:
- Who else on your leadership team shares your concerns? How can you work together to address the issue or behavior?

Share victories and progress:
- In leadership meetings, share the work that your team is doing to improve the culture and increase engagement.

Spheres of Influence

Diagram 1

President or Board of Trustees level

College/MAU or University admin level

Dept/Unit at MSU

Colleagues/ Peers

Individual

Individual: Actions that can deepen personal understanding about a particular issue, deepen learning, and/or shifting personal beliefs and behaviors.

Close colleagues & peers: Actions that engage those closest to us, fostering dialogue that may lead to shifts in their beliefs/behaviors.

Dept. or Unit at MSU: Actions you can take or conversations that may affect change within the department or unit you are part of at Michigan State.

College/Major Admin Unit or University Admin: Actions you take that impact your institutional community. Recognizing the influence you might have in the larger units you are part of, for example college-level committees, etc.

President or Board of Trustees: Actions that affect change on a university-wide level, such as reaching out to the university president or board of trustees, or other ways of influencing decisions made at broader levels of the university.
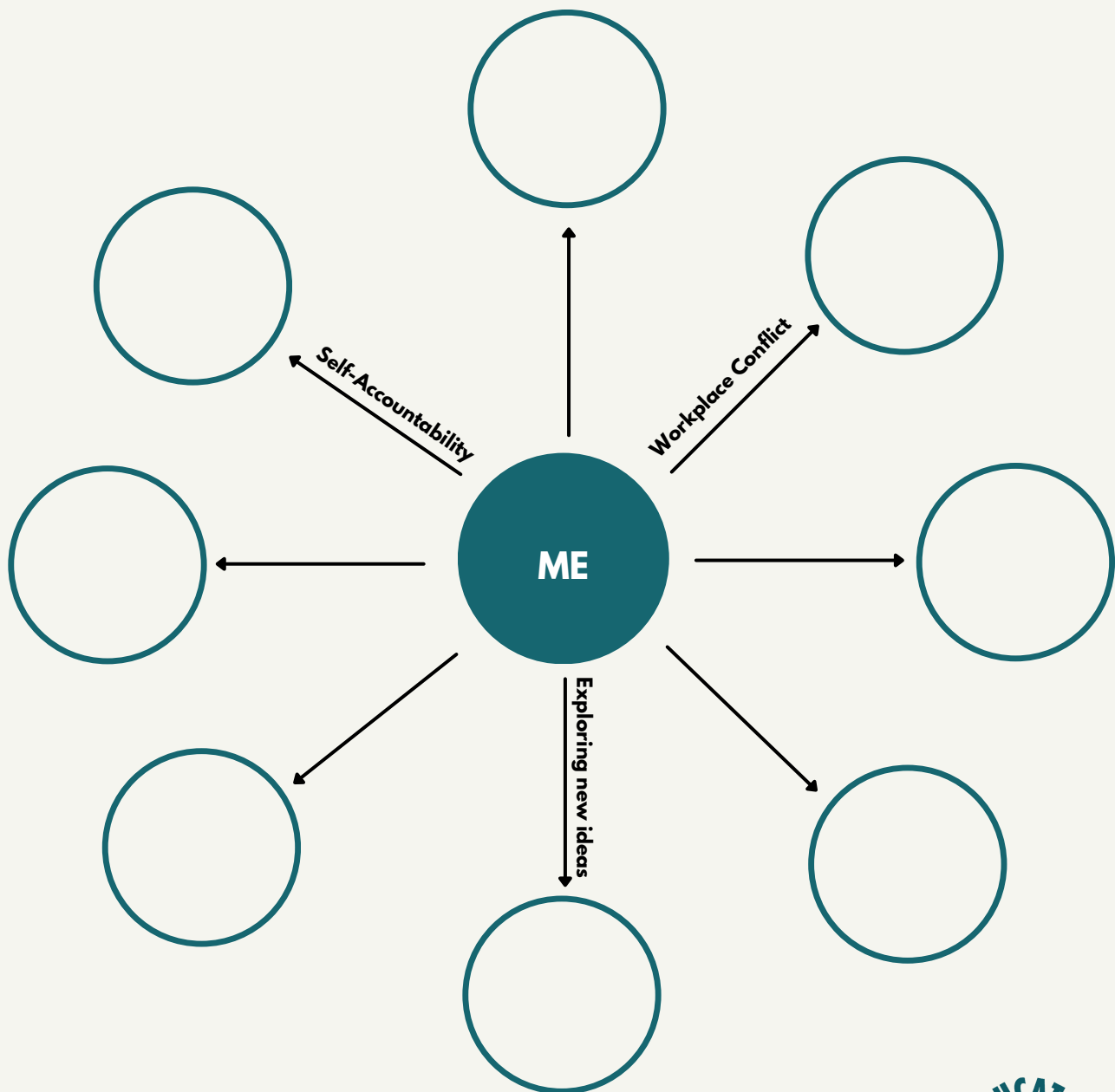
Spheres of Influence Actions

When considering the spheres of influence, identify one or more actions you can implement at each level to make a positive impact on the climate and culture of your unit and the broader university. Consider how you can contribute to the prevention and reduction of harm, increase education, or engage with other issues that align with your leadership priorities:

Individual	
Close Colleagues & Peers	
Department/Unit at MSU	
College/Major Admin Unit or University Admin Level	
President or Board of Trustees Level	

Support Map

In each of the circles, write the names of people in your network who you can go to for particular areas of support. Write the areas of support on the arrow line (examples provided). Then notify the people whose names you've added to make sure they are comfortable offering support in those areas.

ME

Self-Accountability

Workplace Conflict

Exploring new ideas

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Next Steps

Utilize the Toolkit

Read the toolkit and complete self-reflection activities.

Network

Networks provide a means of communication, connectivity, resource sharing and support (*complete the Support Map*).

Continue Learning

This is a pathway to personal and professional development and success. It empowers you to navigate change and lead with confidence. Stay up on these through reading, workshops, etc.

Model Behavior

Intentions only matter if behavior matches. Actively seek feedback.

Stay Vigilant and Consistent

Reassess frequently in order to become aware of any potential risks or harm. Address concerns and behaviors consistently across all team members.

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Notes:

This section is intended for you to jot down thoughts, key takeaways, questions and/or next steps as you explore the Climate Assessment Toolkit.

Takeaways: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questions/Next
Steps: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Resources I
Want to Explore: _____

_____

_____

For additional MSU and community resources and references related to the content found in the Climate Assessment Toolkit, visit poe.msu.edu/climate-and-response

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