



Employee Climate Survey Forum Thematic Analysis

The 2018 CSU Employee Climate Assessment is a biennial assessment conducted in the fall to assess employee perceptions related to their department/unit, division/college, and Colorado State University (CSU). The full assessment comprises four main components: the survey, focus groups, open forums, and open ended results. This report focuses on the qualitative results of the open forums component of the assessment. Please visit the 2018 Employee Climate Survey website for division/college reports, specialized reports, the focus group report, the open end analysis, links to past results, and presentations.

Two open forums were held in late fall 2018. At the forums, “placemats” were distributed at participant’s tables for them to answer the provided questions and capture their thoughts. Four questions were included, spanning topics of diversity, what “harmony over accountability” looks like (a qualitative theme from the 2016 survey), and desired actions to improve climate for employees. Twenty-nine placemats were analyzed. Recurring themes across the questions were

- Fear, specifically of retaliation and/or hardship to the participant for raising concerns regarding diversity
- Lack of accountability and
- Unwillingness of the institution to change.

A major theme that emerged from the data was Fear among participants. Mostly, participants were afraid of retaliation for speaking up, either because of professional retaliation or for being labeled as a person for whom diversity and inclusion issues are important. There was also fear of being identified for having unique identities and for being the “token” representative of their group. Participants spoke about fear of relation across all levels at the University, i.e. to themselves personally and professionally, within their departments or units, and at CSU as a whole, indicating that fear plays a significant and pervasive role in employees’ lives.

Accountability was another major theme that was expressed by many participants and spanned multiple questions. Participants wanted more accountability in job performance and when issues are raised, regardless of the employee’s position. Mostly, higher levels of leadership were highlighted; participants called for administration and supervisors to be held accountable for poor climate, fairness, and general behavior. Notably, faculty were explicitly highlighted often with participants claiming that faculty are “always protected,” particularly when issues such as money, power, and privilege are involved.

The last major theme to emerge was that participants felt that the institution cannot or is reluctant to change. In some cases, participants said that changes are not made, even when people have the appropriate training or when issues are disclosed to leadership. Participants claimed that the status quo is maintained and that changing habits, tradition, and management

styles of supervisors is difficult. A few directly called out power dynamics and people with privileged social identities and/or privileged positions not wanting to relinquish power. Again, this theme was expressed across all levels of the University, from the individual unit or department, leadership including supervisors and administration, and the University as a whole, indicating that participants felt that this issue is pervasive.

In addition to the major themes discussed above, other issues were brought up by participants that warrant discussion. Participants also identified a lack of importance given to diversity and inclusion issues or an ignorance to the subject from administration, supervisors, and colleagues. They also brought up the importance of hiring and retaining diverse staff, access to trainings and information regarding diversity and bias incidents, and protection in cases of bias or raising issues of concern.