

Group Exercise: Handling Sensitive Open-Text Comments

Institutional Profile

Story Street University is a large public research university in the northeast. This is the first time that SSU has participated in the Faculty Job Satisfaction Study. There have been other surveys of faculty including an internal instrument administered by the Office of Institutional Research. The results of those previous surveys were not widely distributed. This created a sense of weariness amongst faculty about joining COACHE. To the credit of the administration, the Provost and Associate Provost convened an inclusive team of faculty and administrators to establish trust and assure faculty that engagement in COACHE would be transparent. Members of the team included:

- Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Two representatives from the Faculty Senate
- Two representatives from the Faculty Collective Bargaining Unit
- The Director of Institutional Research
- The Chief Diversity Officer
- Two at large faculty members with expertise in survey research and analysis
- The Director for the Center of Teaching and Learning
- The Deans of the Schools of Engineering, Arts and Sciences, and Business

Current Status

The report was delivered to the Team Leader but has not been shared with the entire team. The Associate Provost began reviewing the report, including the open-text comments. She became concerned about the tenor of some of the comments. Some comments reference a Title IX complaint which is currently in litigation. Other comments refer to two of the three deans on the team as incompetent. Many of the comments refer to a Black Lives Matter protest that occurred on campus earlier in the spring semester. Many of the comments about the Black Lives Matter protest were inflammatory and, in some cases, overtly racist.

The Associate Provost has convened the team to discuss the parameters for the sharing these comments. She wants to be transparent but is concerned that some of the comments will be a distraction from the overall report.

Your task

Assign one person to serve as the Meeting Leader who will moderate the discussion and one person to serve as the note taker. The remaining members of the group will role play as members of the team.

Discuss amongst the team:

- What factors are most important in the decision to share the qualitative data?
- What are the political, social, and symbolic issues that you face?
- Are there other players, beyond your core team, that need to be involved in this decision?

Consider the range of possible responses to sharing the open-text responses. Some possibilities include:

- Not sharing the open-text responses in any format with anyone (including the team)
- Sharing the responses with the team but not sharing the comments with the broader university community
- Asking the Institutional Research Office or faculty with experience in qualitative analysis to analyze the comments for trends. The comments are not shared but the analysis is.
- Developing a protocol for requesting the comments so that community can see comments within certain parameters
- Sharing the comments fully without further redaction