

Indigenous Workways Cultural Safety Scale Manual



Indigenous Workways



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While psychological safety benefits both organizations and individual employees, diversity in the workplace means that employees may have unique requirements for feeling psychologically safe. For example, Indigenous people have been subject to racism, discrimination, and stigma. Therefore, it is vital to be aware of the needs of the Indigenous employees to foster an inclusive and safe work environment. Cultural safety (creating an environment where Indigenous employees feel respected, valued, and free to express their cultural selves) ensures that Indigenous cultural identities are acknowledged and supported in interactions and practices. Psychological safety (the belief that an employee can take risks and make mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation within a group or workplace) develops open communication and trust among team members and is a vital aspect of cultural safety for Indigenous employees.

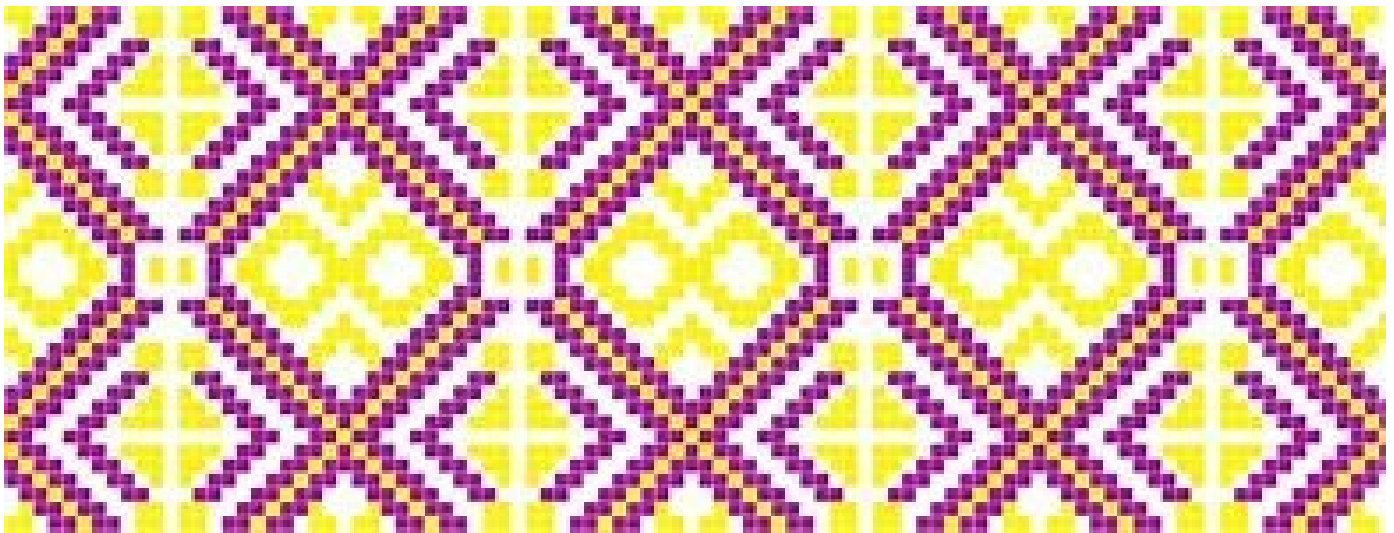
The Indigenous Workways Cultural Safety Scale (IWCSS) can be used to assess the effects of organizational efforts to provide an inclusive environment for its Indigenous employees and is not a tool to compare across organizations. By assessing the average scores across the dimensions of Cultural Safety (Management Approach, Authenticity, Communication, Discretion, Positive Affect, and Cultural Expression), management can direct attention to dimensions that are lower than the others to target efforts towards fostering a more culturally safe workplace for Indigenous employees

The scale has 36 questions and takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. More information is included in this manual about the measure itself and how to analyze the scores, as well as how to interpret the measure once employees have filled them out.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples have been dramatically impacted by colonization over the past few centuries. Residential schools and other policies and practices have suffocated the heritage of Indigenous Canadians in their home life, community, workplace, and place in society. Therefore, it is vital that Indigenous employees feel the ability to express their cultural heritage not only in their personal lives but at work as well. This way there is less of a phenomenon called, “walking in two worlds,” where Indigenous employees feel that they must live as a separate self when they are at work, rather than a self that fits their own culture.

The purpose of this manual is to provide guidelines for understanding, implementing, and measuring cultural safety in the workplace. It offers practical strategies to create an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and safe.



Background

Psychological Safety

At the organizational level, psychological safety has been defined as the belief that people within a team can take risks and make mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation within a group or workplace. It develops open communication and trust among team members.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety involves creating an environment where Indigenous employees feel respected, valued, and free from discrimination or prejudice. It ensures that Indigenous cultural identities are acknowledged and supported in interactions and practices.

Relevance of Psychological and Cultural Safety

The workplace is a significant source of daily stress for many people. Psychological safety is essential because it helps counteract negative work experiences and alleviate work-related stress. This need for psychological safety is even greater for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Minorities in the workplace may feel disconnected if they don't fit into the majority culture. In interviews about cultural safety, Indigenous employees told us that cultural safety is an integral part of psychological safety for Indigenous employees in Canada. When individuals feel safe to express their cultural identity, there is less pressure to assimilate, and this helps to create an inclusive and safe workplace for everyone.

Cultural safety is important for Indigenous employees. Indigenous cultures have been dramatically impacted by colonization over the past few centuries. Residential schools and other colonialist efforts have suffocated the heritage of Indigenous individuals in many ways; it is therefore vital that Indigenous employees are free to express their cultural heritage not only in their personal lives but at work as well. This reduces the phenomenon of “walking in two worlds,” where the Indigenous employee feels that they must adapt to fit the dominant culture as expressed in the workplace and are not free to bring their complete self to work.

Framework: Principles & Measure Description

Key Dimensions of the Measure

Management Approach – The way management treats and trusts employees.

Communication – How efficient and direct communication procedures are.

Authenticity – The extent to which employees feel they can be themselves at work.

Discretion – The extent to which employees feel free to make decisions at work.

Positive Affect – How positively employees feel about their job and organization.

Cultural Expression – The extent to which employees feel they can express their cultural heritage at work.

These dimensions represent the ways in which the organization, through policies and management, can impact employees' level of psychological safety and cultural safety.

Measure Parameters

Number of Questions: 36

Time to Complete: 10-20 minutes

Guidelines

How to Administer

To respect and maintain the anonymity of individual employees, and to increase the validity of the results, no names or personally identifying information should be collected. The purpose of collecting these data is to assess group behaviour and beliefs in the workplace, rather than those of individual employees. Therefore, calculate the average scores for each dimension and interpret the results cumulatively.

Application: Assessment

Employees should be provided with the opportunity to take this survey in a place that allows privacy.

Application: Evaluation

The data should be collected to produce an average score across all employees who have completed the survey. Two statistics are important in understanding and evaluating the results: the average and the standard deviation.

A high overall score on the measure indicates employees generally view the organization as providing higher levels Cultural Safety for Indigenous employees; lower scores indicate lower levels of Cultural Safety for Indigenous employees are perceived.

The standard deviation provides insight into the degree of variation among employees' perceptions. Understanding the standard deviation helps identify how responses vary around the average score. A higher standard deviation indicates greater variability in perceptions among employees, while a lower standard deviation suggests more consistency in their responses.

In addition to the total score, it is important to look at each dimension separately, as each assesses specific areas related to Cultural Safety perceptions. For example, if average scores are high on the Discretion dimension (the organization is perceived as making employees feel safe to make their own decisions at work), but lower on the Management Approach dimension (the organization is not perceived as trusting and treating employees well) then it is clear which area needs improvement.

This measure can be used monthly, quarterly, yearly, or whatever frequency is helpful. A profile can be created using each factor (Management Approach, Communication, Authenticity, Discretion, Positive Affect, Cultural Expression) to monitor if the average change over time and in response to organizational efforts towards greater inclusivity for Indigenous employees.

Recommendations

This measure assesses the current state of psychological and cultural safety in the workplace. To truly work on fostering psychological and cultural safety within your workplace, this tool can be used as a guide, but engaging in the following actions can aid in fostering or bettering Cultural Safety in your workplace:

Education and Awareness

- Respect and embrace diversity and learn about Indigenous cultures.
- Self-reflect and address biases through training.
- Celebrate Indigenous cultural diversity.

Empowerment and Inclusion

- Encourage Indigenous voices and participation.
- Support Indigenous employee networks.
- Be an ally and offer support.

Advocacy and Accountability

- Stand against discrimination in any form.
- Advocate for leadership accountability.
- Share feedback to improve Cultural Safety.
- Engage with the broader Indigenous community.

Appendix A: Indigenous Workways Cultural Safety Scale (IWCSS)

Management Approach Subscale:

1. Supervisors in this organization communicate promptly.
2. My supervisor provides open support when I encounter challenges with someone.
3. My organization fosters positive relationships between supervisors and subordinates.
4. Employees feel comfortable discussing their work concerns with their supervisors here.
5. The organization's management demonstrates trust in its employees.
6. Our supervisor ensures to recognize our accomplishments.
7. When I make errors at work, I receive constructive feedback in a positive manner.
8. Upper management values input from employees.
9. People in this organization feel their needs are being addressed.

Communication Subscale:

10. This organization effectively communicates workplace regulations.
11. Clear training is offered on job tasks in this organization.
12. Employees understand their roles and responsibilities.
13. Sufficient resources are available to employees to perform their tasks effectively.
14. There are clear procedures to communicate with upper management.

Authenticity Subscale:

15. Employees feel comfortable expressing their true selves at work.
16. I can express my true self at work.
17. I feel comfortable around my colleagues.
18. This organization respects and embraces individual differences.

Discretion Subscale:

19. This organization accepts taking reasonable risks.
20. Within my team, I feel comfortable taking risks.
21. Employees are free to choose work methods that suit them.

Positive Affect Subscale:

22. I am a valuable asset in my role.
23. The work I perform is essential to the team's success.
24. I feel confident in my abilities at work.
25. My contributions to our collective work are acknowledged by my team.

Cultural Expression Subscale:

26. In this organization, employees are asked to indicate whether they identify as Indigenous.
27. In this organization, people are receptive to the idea of participating in an Indigenous training program.
28. This organization provides training on Indigenous peoples' culture and values.
29. In this organization, attention is given to policies related to Indigenous peoples.

30. In this organization, Indigenous employees are encouraged to embrace their cultural traditions (e.g. wearing their traditional clothes).
31. In this organization, Indigenous employees have the freedom to express or withhold their cultural background.
32. This organization acknowledges the traditional lands and history of the Indigenous peoples upon which it is situated.
33. Indigenous art is displayed in my workplace.
34. In this organization, special days for Indigenous communities (e.g. Orange Shirt Day) are recognized.
35. In this organization, there are spaces provided for diverse cultural practices/celebrations.
36. Cultural backgrounds are considered and inquired about in the organization's hiring and promotional materials.