Is Your Department in Need of a Cultural Shift? A Stage Model for Change

Session Description

Changing the culture of an academic unit can be treacherous territory even for the most seasoned and intrepid leaders, and yet, affecting cultural change is often foremost on a new leader's agenda (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). New academic department chairs frequently inherit academic units that are at the very least complacent and at the very worst toxic; and the challenges they face in changing these cultural attitudes can vary dramatically depending on several factors. Regardless, the cultural change leader should expect a wide range of obstacles and they should develop an intentional plan to confront these challenges. Thus it is critical that leaders who wish to affect culture change approach the task using a systematic and structured framework. One such framework is Tuckman's model of group formation (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This highly popular model postulates that group formation occurs in five discrete stages including forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Considerable research indicates these stages are characterized by specific group and individual member behaviors and attitudes, and that, over time, carefully planned activities can facilitate matriculation through these developmental stages. Understanding this process of group formation can be an essential element in effecting cultural change as it enables leaders to anticipate potential future situations, define mission and values, clarify roles, and develop problem-solving processes. Thus, the purpose of this workshop is to assist new (and even seasoned) chairs in identifying cultural elements in need of change in their own units and to develop systematic approaches to change based on Tuckman's model. The presenters will share concrete examples of purposeful activities that have enabled their unit to experience a change in culture over a three year period including (a) focused faculty retreats, (b) the development of a formalized mentoring program, (c) the engagement of all faculty in policy development regarding differentiated workload and performance expectations related to the yearly evaluation and RPT expectations, (d) an internal grant funding program that promotes and rewards interprofessional collaboration, (e) leadership reading circles, and (f) the creation of a faculty "fun" committee with designated "Co-ministers" of fun. Throughout this interactive session, participants will learn the stages of group formation, identify a cultural destination for their units, and engage in moderated small group activities that will help them develop their own specific stage-appropriate action strategies designed to achieve the desired cultural transformation.