

WHOI CommuniTea: Workplace Climate At Sea / In The Field October 22, 2021

The WHOI Workplace Climate Committee held a CommuniTea on October 22th, 2021 with a 60+ members of the WHOI community in attendance, including personnel from the WHOI ships (R/V *Atlantis* and R/V *Neil Armstrong* were both in-port a the time of the event) , WHOI Marine Operations and NDSF. The focus of the discussion was workplace climate at sea and in the field. The CommuniTea consisted of 8 break-out groups which discussed the topic for ~40 minutes, then re-joined as a large group for 10-15 minutes to report back. Below are some of the thoughts and recommendations that came out of those discussions.

- I. In general, groups agreed the ‘bar’ of acceptable behavior has significantly improved, and ship’s crew have demonstrated more and more ‘buy-in’. However, the culture of field research still has far to go.
- II. Most groups noted a tension surrounding **crossing ceremonies, post-cruise parties, etc.** between those who experience anxiety surrounding anticipation and feeling safe, and also wanting to participate in a tradition.
 - a. Groups suggested that the Chief Sci is responsible for making the events a ritual, not a hazing event, as well as making the ritual optional. It was noted multiple times this is tricky to do and not make anyone feel like an outsider simultaneously.
 - b. One suggested method was to set up the rituals in the fashion of a birthday party solution, and replacing any hazing with celebrations (e.g., making up a skit for Neptune, shooting potato guns over the equator).
- III. Groups discussed many themes that they wish a Chief Sci to know going into the field.
 - a. Participants hope a Chief Sci recognizes that **mistakes happen**, and being prepared to help remedy mistakes by acknowledging and correcting them without derailing the environment/culture onboard. This kind of **leadership training and experience** requires more than what is currently provided by WHOI/UNOLS.
 - b. The mobilization phase is very hectic, making time **to set clear expectations** from the outset though will help define the culture onboard.
 - c. A Chief Sci should know that everyone experiences field work differently, when a participant needs a **break** (for water, bathroom, etc.), they should feel comfortable to do so. In addition, **new participants** should be welcomed with as much information as possible. For example, providing a document that describes specific practices onboard (e.g., how to deal with sleep schedules), and packing list.

- IV. Overall, there was a consensus that **training** provided by WHOI/UNOLS isn't sufficient, and also it was unclear what training is actually mandatory (for scientists? for crew?).
- a. Most groups felt the UNOLS videos are an improvement, but could be more practical. Some also find the videos feel like they are designed with liability in mind, not for protecting people. Additionally, the variability in training between ships is problematic.
 - b. Many groups are looking for **more practical training** opportunities, particularly for leadership training, communication skills, de-escalation skills, and bystander training.
 - c. WHOI could adapt the new **mentoring** program to pair up mentees with mentors that have field experience to ask questions you might be afraid to ask of others.
- V. At least one group noted that **accessibility in the field** has a long way to go. The R/V *Neil Armstrong* has an accessible suite on the lab floor, but this is not UNOLS wide yet. Increasing the strength of telecommunication access would make remote participation more readily available.
- VI. Participants highlighted the need for more **feedback systems** at the Institution for field work.
- a. The traditional method is to talk to your supervisor or the Chief Sci, who will directly communicate with the Captain. Many wondered whether having an elected **ombuds person onboard** would make participants feel safer, specifically having someone to talk to who doesn't have mandatory reporter status.
 - b. Most groups wondered what the methods are for **anonymous reporting**, suggesting that current methods need to be highlighted better to participants. There is often an '**anonymous box**' placed onboard for the captain to receive feedback, and has demonstrated usefulness for de-escalating certain situations. Additionally, there is an **anonymous reporting phone line** accessible via sat phone (though unclear if this is WHOI only or UNOLS-wide?).
 - c. There are no methods for providing **Chief Sci feedback**. Even a well-intentioned chief scientist who is singularly focused on achieving science goals may ultimately behave in an overbearing manner and create an unpleasant work environment. An anonymous survey could be implemented by the Institution for each cruise to provide feedback, leading to chief scientists having more awareness of the needs of others and the importance of fostering a respectful and inclusive environment. UW already has a similar system in place that WHOI could use to model.

Here are some specific actions that could be implemented:

- Hold once or twice a year Chief Scientist discussions
 - Provides a forum for discussion of best practices; opportunity for both new Chief Scientists to hear from others with more experience
- Feedback mechanism for cruises and field work (e.g., PCAR-type form for everyone in the science party). Provides a mechanism for individual feedback on:
 - Chief Scientist
 - Conditions aboard the ship (accommodations, safety, support)
 - Ways to improve the at-sea experience
- Create a working group to discuss crossing-ceremonies, post-cruise parties, etc.
 - Discuss how to make these activities safer and more inclusive
 - Output would be a set of suggested guidelines posted on the WHOI Cruise Planning website or pushed up to UNOLS
- Leadership training for Chief Scientists
- Improved and/or more practical training de-escalation, active bystander, communication, etc.
- Orientation or mentorship program focused on sea-going experiences

Note: the recent paper “Safe working environments are key to improving inclusion in open-ocean, deep-ocean and high-seas science,” Amon, et al., Marine Policy, 2020 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104947>) notes this importance of improving at-sea environments in increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in ocean sciences.