Framing, Awareness, and Communication Satisfaction of Safety Concerns at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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ABSTRACT
As an institution, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire has demonstrated concern for the safety of students. One way it has done this is through the Bias Incident Report Team (BIRT) reports, a specific process available to students that allows them to report safety concerns. Such processes are important because of the rising number of incidents on campuses across the nation. While safety and reporting efforts are important, if students are unaware of these processes then they are ineffective. Furthermore, whether students choose to report may be aligned with other factors such as general perceived campus culture and students’ satisfaction with communication from campus administrators. Using a survey that includes an adapted version of Downs and Hazen’s (1977) communication satisfaction questionnaire and an adapted Organizational Culture Survey from Gläser, Zammuto, and Hacker (1987), this study examines whether students’ perceptions of perceived campus culture and administrative communication are associated with awareness of safety resources, and analyzes the way that formal organizational messaging is framed. It relates to reporting sensitive safety concerns. Findings should generate discussion surrounding safety resources, while improving awareness and use of safety processes.

METHODS

RQ1: Are students’ perceptions of perceived campus culture associated with awareness of safety resources?

Perceived campus culture is significantly and positively correlated with awareness of safety concerns, r = .34, p < .001.

RQ2: Is perceived campus culture associated with student satisfaction with administrative communication?

Perceived campus culture is significantly and positively correlated with student satisfaction with administrative communication, r = .43, p < .001.

RQ3: Is satisfaction with administrative communication associated with personal, institutional, or combination messages regarding bias incident reports?

Communication satisfaction and combination rhetoric were significantly and positively correlated, r = .28, p < .001. Message satisfaction and personal rhetoric were significantly and positively correlated, r = .22, p < .05. Communication satisfaction and institutional rhetoric were significantly and positively correlated, r = .30, p < .001.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Content analysis: Researchers selected four actual messages following real bias incidents on campus. Each message was separated into individual thought units, defined as “the minimum meaningful utterance having a beginning and an end.” (Hatfill & Winder, 1978, p.46). Researchers coded messages as framed as personal, institutional, and a combination of both.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS
While these reports show that awareness is generally high, the awareness of one specific safety process, BIRT, is low. This suggests that the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire could benefit from outreach to further explain what this reporting process looks like.

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS
Based on findings for RQ1, researchers concluded that the University is succeeding overall in creating a positive culture that makes students aware of safety resources available to them. The resources are essential to understanding and maintaining a positive perceived culture that is highly aware of available resources. Based on findings for RQ2, researchers conclude that the perceived culture is associated with student satisfaction with administrative communication. Despite this, the research shows that the communication between administrators and students could still be improved upon. Based on findings for RQ3, researchers conclude that students were more satisfied with institutional rhetoric, with regard to safety concerns; students were least satisfied with personal rhetoric from the University when regarding bias incidents. This may be because students feel safer when administrators take an authoritative stance, as has been shown in organizations (Diezmann, Dornelles, Hayek & Landry, 2013). Additionally, our content analysis found that UWEC is utilizing a majority of institutional messages with students, which suggests that administrators are effectively managing the dialectic of personal versus institutional views.