

The Role of Feeling in the Workplace

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As the global village becomes smaller and organisations conduct daily business accross continents and cultures, the need for a language and a communication process that is effective across these vast and fast-growing differences is vital. This is also true for effective working teams where differences of race, gender, language, ethnic, and class backgrounds as well as levels in the organization are present.

The Changing Nature of the Diverse Workplace.

Corporations and other work environments once require that employees leave their personal identity at the door and become, while at the work place, undifferentiated workers, managers, or executives melting into the company culture. As international businesses increasingly target diverse populations, consumers, and clients, the need for products and services that are pertinent for these differences in the buying public is profitable.

This challenge has resulted in an even greater need for members of working teams and organizations to bring their own unique differences to the work environment. Learning to share, understand, appreciate, and utilize these differences effectively and creatively can result in environments and corporations that are truly multicultural (Batts, 1990, 1998) and that develop products that are competitive in meeting the dynamic nature of the buying public globally and locally.

Cooperating in Competitive Environments

In many corporations and other work settings, competition is an integral aspect of the organizational culture. Employees are advanced based on accomplishments and job performance. Since there are only so many positions to advance to; employees often are competing against one another for the positions instead of concentrating on

personal excellence. Externally, the business competes with other products and services developed and offered by other companies.

Competition is about products and personal excellence in performance, not about human relations. Team members competing against each other impedes the effectiveness of the group work. Cooperation is about working together to meet mutual goals: better products, improved work environments, and relationships. The responsive process (Garcia, 1991) is useful in enhancing cooperative relationships and teamwork in environments where relational competition is counterproductive.

The Internal Responsive Process.

Feelings as indicators of a personal need. There are a variety of tools that are useful in making the shift from a monocultural work environment to a multicultural one. (Batts, 1990, 1998) We will be looking at only one of these tools in this paper. This tool focuses on the effective use of feelings in the workplace and other places where people interact. This tool can result in solutions, conclusions, and products that have wide attraction and application or that satisfy specific needs in the world of differences.

Feelings and opinions are what make each of us unique. Feelings are important indicators of our wants, likes, dislikes, and survival needs. Learning to use our feelings effectively and learning to listen and respond to other people's feelings in a multicultural world is crucial.

Feelings are a surge of energy produced by our body in response to a stimulus that encourage fight, flight or freeze. Myth has it that feelings are always volatile and always result in chaos and uproar. While this can be true in certain situations, where feelings are not being thought about and used effectively, this does not have to be so if feelings are responded to with thinking before action to identify the most effective use of the energy and to respond to the stimulus in the most productive

manner. Feelings are messages about what we are needing or wanting in order to take care of ourselves in our relationships with others. (Fig. 1) When responded to with thinking and appropriate action, feelings play an important role in bringing our uniqueness into the workplace and into all other relationships that are important to us.

Feeling scared, for example, indicates a real or imagined threat to our safety and well being. If the threat is real, as in the fear that emerges when a car is speeding toward us, the solution is to quickly get out of the way and seek safety.

Sometimes the fear might be imagined, based on our interpretation of someone else's behavior (Steiner, 2003), as when we are fearful that we might get fired or reprimanded by our supervisor because we notice our supervisor being distant or distracted. In such situations, it is helpful to check out our conclusion about the other's behavior. We will cover this more in detail when we look at the external responsive process.

Sadness results from a loss. When we feel sad, it indicates a loss of some type, as when we realize that a co-worker is leaving or when we are aware that we did not get the raise in pay or promotion we had anticipated. The ultimate example of sadness is when we lose a loved one. In any of these cases, what we need is emotional support, often in the form of compassion and understanding from others and/or space to grieve.

Internal Responsive Process¹

1. Awareness of feeling.

Joyful, powerful, peaceful, sad, angry, scared.

2. Think about the feeling and identify the need, want.

Sad, natural response to loss. Healthy response provides support, understanding, compassion, empathy and space.

Scared, natural response to real or imagined threat. Healthy response provides protection, support, encouragement and reality testing and confirmation of what is true and what is imagined.

Angry, natural response to boundary intrusion. Healthy response can include establishing or reestablishing boundaries, confrontation of the intrusion, verbalize resentment.

Peaceful, joyful, powerful, indicates homeostasis: enjoy, keep on keeping on.

3. **Act to get need met** (See external responsive process - Fig. 2).

4. **Experience relief or recycle process.**

Note: Be aware of substitute feelings which cover up real feelings.

Figure 1

Anger often threatens others, who then become angry back and the real problem, the fear and need for reassurance and safety, does not get addressed or solved. If fear is the favorite substitution, hours of obsessive scaring oneself with “what if’s” can ensue.

The External Responsive Process

As we go outside ourselves to let others know of our likes, dislikes, comforts and discomforts, preferences and prejudices as indicated by our feelings and as respond to the same in others, we are practicing the external responsive process. Using our feelings as guides, we respond to our internal needs by letting others know what works better for us, what we want and or our resentments about their behaviors. Awareness of our feelings leads us to check out our interpretations about other people’s behaviors, recognize and appreciate each other, AND inform each other about pertinent data and account for our mistakes. (Fig. 2)

The external responsive process is based on several assumptions. One assumption is that everyone is valuable and worthy of dignified treatment. This leads to the assumption that cooperative relationships are desirable and possible. Cooperative relationships are also based on the value and the importance of the input and contributions of everyone. Also important in practicing the external responsive process

cooperatively is that one initiation (Fig. 2) must be responded to before another one is introduced.

If someone tells you that they resent the fashion in which you give them feedback and or “help,” you must at least say, “I hear you,” or “tell me more about that” *before* you say, “And I resent the sloppy way you do your work.” Such a response is competitive and results in resentments and breakdown in the collaborative process.

Several of the seven initiations on the external responsive process may be going on simultaneously. Listen to a conversation in which you are not involved emotionally. Be aware of the lack of clarity of what is wanted or whether anyone is responding. For example, often we hear “dialogues” that go something like this:

A says, “You are never in the office. You are spending too much time away from...”

Interrupted by *B* saying “I’m here all the time; I’m here more than...”

Interrupted by *A*: “...and yesterday you said you were going to talk to me about...”

Interrupted by *B* with, “What’s the use of talking? You never listen...”

Nothing is resolved and the requests are never made. Using the responsive process this might go something like this:

A initiates asking for a want, “I want your help with this project. When will you be around so that we can work on it?”

B responds, “I’ll be happy to help you. I have some time in the morning. Will that work for you? While we are at this, could we also make some time to talk about the project that seems to be having difficulties?”

A responds, “Certainly.”

External Responsive Process

Operations	Initiations	Responses
<p>1 Asking for Wants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will you make some time for us to discuss this project? ● Will you tell me what you like and don't like about my work? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certainly. How about now? ● Yes, I'd love to, OR No, I don't want to right now.. ● No, not now, how about tomorrow morning?
<p>2 Verbalizing Feelings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I have a resentment to share with you, are you willing to hear it? If yes; ● When you (describe specific behaviors), I felt (impact on you). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I apologize, I am very sorry about that.. Please tell me more. ● I'll take your feelings into account. ● What would you want me to do instead?
<p>3 Setting Limits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This area is off limits to you. ● Please stop interrupting me. Can we set up another time? ● I have too much work to do and cannot take that on right now. ● I choose not to (with or without explanation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I hear you and will respect that. ● I'll respect you and your boundaries. ● I understand.

<p>4 Checking out interpretation of others behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I notice that you may be avoiding me. Did I do something to offend you? ● Am I in jeopardy of losing my job? ● I sense you are resenting something about me. Is that true? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, (state resentment). ● What is true and what is not true about interpretation? Share seed of truth..(Steiner 2003) ● Yes. I am angry at you for not including me in the meeting about this project..
<p>5 Sharing Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mr. Jones is looking for you. ● I will have this data for you by tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. ● I just got a promotion. ● I won't be here tomorrow. I have a doctor's appointment. ● I'm grieving the death of my brother. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thank you. ● How wonderful! (Mirror the feeling of joy, excitement, sadness, fear.) ● I'm so sorry, Let me know how I can support you.
<p>6 Stroking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I appreciate your work very much. ● You are vital to this organization/work team. ● Thank you for getting the reports done on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I like hearing that. ● Thank you. ● You are welcome. My pleasure.
<p>7 Accounting (Lewis, 1998)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Includes feelings, thoughts and plan. ● I want to account for not inviting you to the meeting. I was feeling scared and thought that you were too busy to come any way. Next time, I'll ask you first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I accept your apology. ● I appreciate your explanation and look forward to your checking things out with me.

The internal and external responsive process can be quite positive in using feelings in the workplace to stay true to ourselves and honest and direct with others. It takes practice as does any other tool or skill that we learn to use. It is helpful if there are opportunities to practice the skills in a structured training environment with supervision and coaching. At first, it may seem contrived and artificial but with time it becomes more comfortable and natural. The responsive process can work when others are not also using it; however, it is most effective when everyone has agreed to practice the process of thinking about feelings and communicating them with each other. The following Responsive Agreement (Fig. 3) is effective for people who want to practice the responsive process.

Responsive Agreementⁱⁱ

Initiations need a response before another is introduced. Two initiations in a row create conflict.

I will:

- **Ask for what I want.**
(Will you...)
- **Check out realities.**
(I have something to check out with you; are you willing to respond?)
- **Verbalize resentments and other feelings, sad, scared, joyful etc.**
(I have a resentment to share with you; are you open to hearing it? Or, I'd like to share some feelings with you, are you available?)

Response

- Yes, no, other
- Seed of truth about your interpretation of my behavior.
- I hear and accept your resentment, feeling.
(This is an opportunity to learn something about the other and/or yourself. Blame and shame are not useful. (Notice and avoid defending)

- **Set boundaries.**
(Will you please stop.... Or, I don't have time for that now or I'm not available for that now.)
I will respect your boundary.
(Certainly, I will stop...or Would you like to balance your workload? .. I would appreciate your letting me know when you are available.)
- **Stroke self and others positively.**
(I would like to give you some compliments, are you willing to hear them? Or, give compliments and appreciations freely and often.
Thank you, congratulations.
(Yes, I would..... Will you say more about that? I am learning to take in compliments.....I am happy about your successes.
- **Share pertinent information.**
(I have some information which is relevant, is this a good time to share it with you?)
Acknowledge. Thank you.
- **Accounting**
(I have some accounting to do, are you willing to hear it? State accountable behavior, what you were thinking and feeling, and how you plan to be different in the future.)
Expect change, accept, reject.

I will respond to others when they initiate any of the above.

Summary

As the workplace becomes more diverse and as our clients and relationships demand authenticity, learning to use our feelings to let others know who we are and what we want becomes essential for successful work relationships as well as personal relationships. The internal and external responsive processes are useful tools that help us think about our feelings and do something effective to take care of ourselves and respond to others.

Practicing the responsive process with others who are willing to be responsive with us is helpful in becoming more adept at the skills. Old,

ineffective communication or non-communication habits are difficult to unlearn and to let go of since they were often useful and survival-oriented when we learned them. Experiencing successes in our relationships will encourage us to continue the lifelong process of becoming once again authentic with ourselves and with others.

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Updated May 2003.