DIVERSITY NEWS
March 2008

Thomas: If you could create the perfect work environment, how would it be different from the one you find yourself in now?

Would people be happier? Friendlier? More cooperative? More collaborative? More communicative? More productive?

Yvonne: No doubt you are already familiar with the concept of "emotional intelligence"—that is, the ability to recognize and regulate emotions, in yourself and in others.

But did you know that organizations can also exhibit varying degrees of emotional intelligence?

Thomas: It's true! Organizational emotional intelligence refers to an organization's ability to successfully and efficiently cope with change and accomplish its goals, while being responsible and sensitive to its people, its customers, its suppliers, its networks, and society in general.

Yvonne: This concept of organizational emotional intelligence fits neatly into the concept of diversity management—that is, the process of creating a workplace environment in which all employees—all employees—can contribute to the maximum extent possible to the success of their organization.

Thomas: In this edition of Diversity News, we'll be looking at emotional intelligence, from the perspective of individuals and organizations.

AND we'll offer some suggestions for increasing levels of personal and organizational emotional intelligence.

Thomas: In their book, "The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace," Cary Cherniss and Daniel Goleman present a framework of competencies that reflect emotional intelligence.

For Cherniss and Goleman, emotional competence can be divided into two parts: personal competence and social competence.

Personal competence, that is, how we manage ourselves, can be divided into three sub-parts:

Self-awareness refers to knowing our internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.

Self-regulation refers to managing our internal states, impulses, and resources.

And motivation refers to our emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate our reaching our goals.

Social competence, that is, how we handle relationships, can be divided into two sub-parts:

Empathy refers to our awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns.

And social skills refer to our adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others.

Yvonne: Multi-Health Systems Incorporated has developed a survey to measure the level of emotional intelligence in an organization as a whole, as well as among its departments, divisions, and teams.

The Benchmark of Organizational Emotional Intelligence includes items in seven categories:

Job happiness measures the degree to which people are challenged and fulfilled by their job.

It includes job satisfaction, enthusiasm, and enjoyment of the workplace. It also looks at whether people feel there are opportunities for career advancement.

Compensation measures the degree to which people are satisfied with their basic pay, bonuses, commissions, vacations, and benefits, and the degree to which they perceive wages in the organization to be fair.

Work/life stress management measures the degree to which the workplace is stable, people are managing stress, and feel their work and home life is balanced.

Organizational cohesiveness measures the ability of co-workers to get along with each other and to work together as a team.

Supervisory leadership measures the effectiveness of supervisors, in terms of sharing information, involving others in decision making, providing feedback, mediating conflicts, and being trustworthy.

Diversity and anger management measures the degree to which the organization is open to employee diversity, and the organization's effectiveness in managing employee anger and frustration.

Organizational responsiveness measures the degree to which the organization meets the needs of its people through offering training, encouraging innovation, and demonstrating optimism, honesty, and integrity.

It also explores how well the organization deals with difficult issues, solves problems, and takes appropriate risks.

Thomas: In his book, “Make Your Workplace Great: The 7 Keys to an Emotionally Intelligent Organization,” Steven J. Stein provides strategies for transforming any workplace into a happy, productive, and healthy one.

Dr. Stein identifies seven “keys” that will energize employees, make them feel a sense of pride in their work, and improve performance.

First, hire capable people who love the work they do and show them how they contribute to the bigger picture.

Second, compensate people fairly.

Third, don’t over-work (or under-work) people. And pay attention to work/life balance.

Fourth, build strong teams, with shared purpose and viable goals.

Fifth, make sure managers can manage, by selecting them on the basis of their management potential and then helping them acquire and improve their management skills.

Sixth, treat people with respect and leverage their unique talents.

And seventh, win the hearts and minds of your employees by providing training, encouraging innovation, nurturing optimism, promoting honesty and integrity, and demonstrating the courage to adapt and make changes.

Yvonne: How do you select the right people for the right jobs? As Dr. Stein points out, first you need to find people who are capable; that is, who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to actually perform the work.

In addition, you want people with the right attitude, the right emotional skills, and the right FIT with the organization’s culture.

One of the best and most objective ways of selecting people, according to Dr. Stein, is through proper job profiling and testing.

Dr. Stein recommends profiling positions using a standardized measure of emotional intelligence, and examining the differences between the scores of high-performing and low-performing people in each position.

Dr. Stein describes one model of emotional and social intelligence, developed by psychologist Reuven Bar-On.

The Bar-On model includes five general areas of measurement:

Intra-personal items measure your ability to be aware of, manage, and express your emotions.

Inter-personal items measure your ability to initiate and maintain relationships with others.

Adaptability items measure your ability to be flexible, solve problems, and be realistic.

Stress management items measure your ability to tolerate stress and control impulses.

And general mood items measure your happiness and optimism.

Thomas: Does it really matter if people are satisfied with their pay and benefits?

According to Dr. Stein, studies have found that employee satisfaction with their level of compensation has an important effect on their behavior.

For example, employees who are unhappy with their level of pay have lower levels of job commitment, often have less faith in management, are more likely to seek work elsewhere, and will be late for, or absent from, work more often.

On the other hand, employee satisfaction with pay has been linked to greater JOB satisfaction, lower turnover rates, less absenteeism, fewer work stoppages, and better overall employee performance.

Having pay systems that are clear, fair, and well understood can be more important than simply “how much” people are paid.

Employees also need to feel that performance incentives (for example, bonuses and awards) are fair—not just in terms of their size, but also in terms how they are distributed.

Yvonne: Having a reasonable workload is an important aspect of employee satisfaction.

Having too much to do, not enough time to do it, or not enough resources to do it well, can be extremely stressful.

And high levels of stress can have a profound effect on how employees interact with others.

Overworked employees are more likely to make mistakes at work, are more likely to feel angry at their employers for expecting them to do so much, and are more likely to resent their co-workers who don’t work as hard as they do.

Many studies have identified relationships between workplace stress, employee burnout, increased healthcare costs, lower productivity, dissatisfaction with work, and more work/life conflict.

Thoughtful planning of workflow and workloads can reduce stress and increase efficiency.

Reducing or eliminating low-value work, that is, work that does not add value or help accomplish the organization's business goals, is also important.

Increasing flexibility with respect to when, where, and how work gets done can also reduce work overload and work/life conflict.

Thomas: Organizations have become more "team focused," since work requirements are often more complex than one person can handle without assistance.

Still, work processes, work environments, and management styles can result in employees feeling isolated.

Group cohesiveness, or the sense of unity and loyalty among co-workers or teams, can be a powerful antidote to occupational stress.

And group cooperation is higher when group members are more emotionally competent—that is, they have greater ability to express their emotions and to empathize with others.

But being empathetic doesn't mean simply agreeing with what others say. It means being able to understand where their beliefs are coming from.

Yvonne: What's the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective management practices?

Most people who leave their jobs, either voluntarily or involuntarily, do so because they are not getting along with their boss.

People resent being told what to do. They want to be involved in making plans, as well as in implementing them. And they want to feel like they have control over their own work.

Participative management, the practice of empowering employees to participate in organizational decision making, can enhance employees' job satisfaction.

In addition to involvement in decision making, other measures of supervisor effectiveness related to emotional intelligence include sharing information, providing feedback, and mediating conflicts.

Thomas: An organization's "diversity climate" is determined by the degree to which people feel they are treated fairly, regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, physical or mental abilities, sexual orientation, religion, veteran status, education, or any other dimension of diversity.

Being sensitive to employee differences is only the first step toward being able to leverage employee differences to benefit the organization.

Great organizations are respectful of their people, who are appreciated for their unique talents and contributions.

And dealing effectively with diversity helps build co-worker relationships, teamwork, and organizational trust.

Yvonne: Organizational responsiveness gets right to the heart of Dr. Stein's definition of organizational emotional intelligence.

Being responsive means showing you care, by providing things that matter:

For example, offering opportunities for training and advancement, providing an optimistic work environment, embracing innovation, demonstrating integrity and honesty, showing the courage to make needed changes, and in other ways being supportive and socially responsible.

Thomas: As pointed out in Cherniss' and Goleman's book, "The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace," there is a growing body of research that suggests it is possible to help people become more emotionally intelligent at work.

However, the process usually requires more sustained effort than many people seem to realize.

Cherniss and Goleman present a model for designing effective programs, based on research on social and emotional learning in a variety of contexts.

First, create an encouraging environment. The motivation of learners is strongly influenced by the social environment of the organization.

Second, gauge the motivational level of learners. Many people who participate in social and emotional learning programs are not yet ready to change.

Those people will require interventions designed to increase their motivation for change.

Third, help learners set clear, meaningful, manageable goals. Setting specific, manageable goals can greatly enhance and sustain motivation.

Fourth, model desired skills. That is, make sure that learners are clear about what the competencies are and how to do them.

In behavior modeling, learners view and discuss a model that uses the skills in a simulation. Then, the learners practice using the skills themselves (for example, in role play exercises), and receive feedback on their performance. Finally, they try out the skills on the job and then return to discuss their experiences and get help in dealing with any problems they encountered.

Fifth, encourage practice of new skills. Emotional competence cannot be increased simply by participating in brief seminars or workshops—or by meeting with a coach for two or three sessions.

Those types of activities can be helpful if they are part of a larger development effort, one that stretches out over a period of months, involves active practice of new behaviors in a variety of situations, and includes feedback on performance.

Sixth, inoculate learners against setbacks. For example, by having learners anticipate setbacks and then consider effective ways of responding to them.

And finally, build in follow-up support.

Even relapse prevention training will not be enough to help people maintain the skills they have learned if their environment does not encourage and support their efforts.

Support groups can be particularly effective as a source of follow-up encouragement.

Yvonne: Research has shown that Emotional intelligence can be increased, but it takes more than a half-day workshop…

Thomas: …or a 15-minute video.

Yvonne: It takes sustained effort, distributed practice, repetition, and elaboration.

Thomas: But that's all we have for in this edition of Diversity News. We appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

Yvonne: Until then, for more frequent updates of diversity news, sign up for our free weekly e-mail news service, NewsLink.

Just send an e-mail message to the address shown below, with the words Subscribe News in the subject line.

Thomas: And check out our bimonthly newsletter, Diversity@Work, available as a download on our Web site or by e-mail from our office.

Also, we want to hear from you! If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at dmeeo@va.gov with the words Diversity News in the subject line.

Until next time…

Both: Have a great month!