THE ROLE OF FEELING IN THE WORKPLACE
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As the world village becomes smaller and corporations do daily business across continents and cultures, the need for a language and a communication process that is effective across these differences is vital. This is also true for effective working teams where differences of race, gender, 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 used to 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 satisfy diverse populations, customers, and clients, the need for products and services that are pertinent for these differences in the buying public is profitable.

This has resulted in a need for members of working teams 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 produce products that are competitive in meeting the changing 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 culture within the organization. Employees are advanced based on accomplishments and job performance. Since there are only so many positions to advance to, employees often are competing against each other 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 for excellence and does not have to result in members of the work team competing against each other. Competition is about products and personal excellence in performance, not about human relations. 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 competition is counterproductive.

The Internal Responsive Process.

Feelings as messengers.   There are a variety of tools in the Visions Model[1] which are useful in making the shift from a monocultural work environment to a multicultural one. We will be looking at only one of these tools in this paper. This is the tool that focuses on the effective use of feelings in the workplace and other places where people interact. This tool can result in

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[1]VISIONS - **V**igorous **I**ntervention**S** **I**n **O**ngoing **N**atural **S**ettings, Inc. is a non-profit organization which offers training and consultation on recognizing, understanding, appreciating, and utilizing differences to corporations, mental health agencies, community organizations, government, universities, churches and other organizations. The focus is on changing personal and institutional oppression and barriers to equal access to power and resources. http://www.visions-inc.com

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.

Feeling are a surge of energy produced by our body in response to a stimulus encouraging fight or flight. Myth has it that feelings are always volatile and always result in chaos and uproar. While this can be true in situations where feelings are not being thought about and used effectively, this does not have to be so if feedings are responded to with thinking before action so as to identify the most effective use of the energy to respond to the stimulus or situation. Feelings are messages about what we are needing or wanting to take care of ourselves in our relationships with others (Fig. 1) When responded to with thinking and appropriate action 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.

Anger is a feeling we get when either our physical or psychological boundaries have been crossed upon in some way, as when the work we have done is credited to someone else or a promise or contract (agreement) is not kept. In such situations, we need to re-establish our boundaries—first, by being clear about our boundaries, by stating our resentment and noticing that the other has heard our resentment and plans to respect it. We also establish boundaries by re-negotiating our agreements. Anger is an important indicator of a need to protect ourselves and to let the other know our limits and/or expectations. Sometime we become angry when our superiors treat our ideas and feelings as unimportant or ignore our contributions. Speaking up effectively about such resentments can result in better relations.

Joy is an indicator that all is working for us, and we respond by continuing to do what we are doing. "Powerful" is a feeling that indicates that we can do what is necessary to accomplis what we want It indicates that we are succeeding in our endeavors. Power is about energy to proceed with and follow our dreams, our aspirations, and our convictions. We continue following our journey and convictions, and doing our work.

"Peaceful" is a wonderful feeling of accomplishment and contentment. We feel right with ourselves and the world. It is good time to rest and enjoy. Peaceful is about seeing ourselves as part of the all, an integration into a larger whole.

While there are many words that describe our feeling states, it is very useful to distill the feeling to one of those mentioned above. They are the basic core feelings that children feel and are the clear messengers of what our needs are. Words like *frustrated, cranky, jealous, upset, nervous, embarrassed*, and *worried* usually have at the base one or more of the core feelings described above. "I'm feeling quite upset about this" does not convey whether you are angry, sad, scared, or all of these, which would indicate what you need in order to return to feeling peaceful.

With time and practice, we can increase our skill in identifying our feelings, getting our needs met, and being important contributors to a multicultural environment. Using our feelings to let others know more about who we are is vital to maintaining effective and productive work groups and for making contact in relationships.

Because many cultures and/or families are uncomfortable with some or all of these feelings, we learn early to substitute an acceptable feeling or behavior in such cultures or families instead of letting ourselves experience our true feeling (Berne, 1959; English, 1971, 1972). It is through thinking about the feeling and giving ourselves permission to feel our feelings that we can begin to identify our needs and our uniqueness. Listening to and responding to our feelings puts our cognitive self in charge of our emotions rather than the other way around.

The substitution factor may mean that we feel angry when we are scared. This is sometimes true of men in our Western culture where men are supposed to be strong and not show their vulnerable side. Women who grew up believing that feelings mean being weak may fall victim to the same outcome.

Internal Responsive Process[2]

(Feelings as Messengers)

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 protections, space, support, encouragement and reality testing or confrontation.
       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

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[2]© Responsivity. (1991). Felipe N. Garcia. Transactional Analysis Journal, 21:4.

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 messages 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, 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 level 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
1 **Asking for Wants**	• 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?	• 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?
2 **Verbalizing Feelings**	• I have a resentment to share with you, are you willing to hear it? If yes; • I resented (other's specific behaviors).	• I hear you. • I'll take your feelings into account. • What would you want me to do instead?
3 **Setting Limits**	• 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).	• I hear you. and will respect that. • I'll respect you and your boundaries.
4 **Checking out interpretation of others behavior.**	• 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?	• Yes, (state resentment). • What is true and what is not true about interpretation? Share seed of truth.. • Yes. I am angry at you for not including me in the meeting about this project..
5 **Sharing Information**	• 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. • I appreciate your work very much. • You are vital to this organization/work team.	• Thank you. • How wonderful! (Mirror the feeling of joy, excitement, sadness, fear.) • I'm so sorry, Let me know how I can support you. • I like hearing that. • Thank you. • You are welcome. My pleasure.
6 **Stroking**	• Thank you for getting the reports done on time.	
7 **Accounting** (Lewis, 1998)	• 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.	• 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 Agreement[3]

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

I will:	Response
○ **Ask for what I want.** (Will you...)	Yes, no, other
○ **Check out realities.** (I have something to check out with you; are you willing to respond?)	Seed of truth about your interpretation of my behavior.
○ **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?)	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. 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 your are available,)
○ **Stroke self and others positively.** (I would like to give you some compliments, are you willing to hear them? Or I'd like to share with you something that I feel good about are you willing to hear me?)	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.

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[3]©Garcia, Felipe N. (1991). Responsivity. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, *21*:4. Updated May 2003.

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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