

DIVERSITY NEWS

August 2006

Thomas: Do you feel that you can be yourself at work? Or are there aspects of your life, your personality, your SELF that you have to leave at home—or even DISGUISE—when you are on the job?

Yvonne: “Diversity management” involves creating and maintaining a work environment in which the similarities and DIFFERENCES of employees are understood, appreciated, accommodated, and EMPLOYED to STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE... an environment in which employees are able to contribute fully to their organization’s success.... Such an environment must be FLEXIBLE and INCLUSIVE.

Thomas: INCLUSIVE means that employees feel like they BELONG, like they are WELCOME...Inclusive organizations SHARE information, ENCOURAGE collaboration, SUPPORT problem solving, and PROMOTE creativity, flexibility, and responsiveness to change. They DO this by creating structures, policies, and practices that acknowledge the VALUE of employee diversity... in order to FULLY UTILIZE the distinctive skills, experiences, perspectives, and POTENTIAL of their workforce.

Yvonne: The Workplace Diversity Network has identified a dozen qualities that inclusive organizations possess. In this edition of Diversity News, we’ll take a look at those qualities and talk about methods of cultivating them.

Yvonne: The first attribute of inclusive organizations is a demonstrated commitment to diversity. In an inclusive organization, visible and invisible diversity is present throughout all departments and at all levels of responsibility. Employee differences and similarities are welcomed, valued, and utilized at all levels across all formal and informal organizational systems.

This commitment to diversity can be expressed through...

Mission, vision, and value statements that articulate the meaning and value of employee diversity to the organization...

Strategic plans that specifically address establishing, maintaining, and benefiting from a diverse workforce...

Recruitment and outreach activities that ensure contact and engagement with diverse communities, constituencies, and stakeholders...

Diversity councils, employee networks, and affinity groups that inform, support, monitor, and evaluate formal and informal policy making and problem solving...

Diversity training for employees at all levels of responsibility...

And the analysis of employee surveys (including exit surveys) to identify organizational gaps, challenges, and weaknesses.

Thomas: Another attribute of inclusive organizations is their holistic view of employees. In an inclusive organization, all employees are viewed and respected as whole persons, with identities and family lives which extend beyond the organization. To the greatest extent possible, employees feel free to behave truthfully in the work environment: that is, they can “be themselves.”

This holistic view of employees may be expressed through...

Explicit statements of organizational values and code of conduct...

Well-defined, effectively enforced non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies...

Flexible work arrangements (like flex time, telecommuting, compressed work weeks, job sharing, part-time work options, and flexible leave policies) ...

Comprehensive benefits (such as domestic partner benefits, childcare resources, elder care resources, employee assistance programs, on-site concierge services, and health care options.) ...

And formal and informal training that addresses issues of diversity and non-discrimination. For example, cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, and team building.

Yvonne: Inclusive organizations provide employees with equitable access to opportunity. An inclusive organization creates a professionally nurturing environment in which ALL employees have equitable access to opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Equitable access to opportunity may be expressed through...

The availability of continuing education and training opportunities to ALL employees at ALL levels...

The existence of formal coaching and mentoring programs (and the evaluation of their effectiveness) ...

The inclusion of professional development objectives in performance evaluation plans—for employees, their supervisors, AND their organization...

The organization's support of cross training for employees...

And advertising and communicating ALL job openings and promotion opportunities throughout the organization.

Thomas: Inclusive organizations accommodate diverse physical and developmental abilities. To eliminate barriers to work performance and workplace participation, an inclusive organization opens opportunities to employees with diverse physical and developmental abilities by offering effective adaptations of the workplace.

Accommodation of diverse abilities may be expressed through...

An anti-discrimination policy that includes specific reference to discrimination on the basis of physical or developmental abilities...

Providing information to employees and the public in ALTERNATE forms, such as in Braille or in large print...

Encouraging employees who are physically challenged to form support groups...

Providing educational programs that promote better understanding ...

Actively recruiting physically challenged persons for all vacant positions...

And removing physical barriers and providing communication devices in order to enable employees to interact with one another.

Yvonne: An inclusive organization is one in which communication and information sharing flow FROM all directions, IN all directions, and ACROSS all levels of responsibility.

An inclusive organization fosters a work environment in which employees at all levels share knowledge, solicit and receive constructive feedback, and employ active listening techniques.

Examples of three-hundred-sixty-degree communication and information sharing include:

To the extent possible, all employees are encouraged to provide input into decisions that affect them...

Employees are kept informed of organizational goals, operating environments, and performance outcomes...

Employees have equitable access to e-mail and other forms of electronic communication...

And the organization maintains on-going training and skill development in communication—for employees at all levels.

Thomas: An inclusive organization establishes equitable systems to recognize and reward the diverse contributions and achievements of employees at all levels of responsibility.

Inclusive organizations establish systems to assess, recognize, and reward diverse forms of excellence and achievement. And these systems emphasize ACCOUNTABILITY on the part of those who ASSESS achievement.

Rewards may be in the form of intrinsic or extrinsic benefits: for example, public recognition in the form of certificates or commendations... private recognition (at-a-boys and pats on the back)... increased benefits (like educational opportunities), promotion possibilities, and, of course, extra money.

In addition, inclusive organizations consult with employees in the design and evaluation of recognition and reward systems.

Yvonne: Employees in an inclusive organization share accountability and responsibility for upholding organizational values and for achieving clear organizational goals and objectives.

Examples of shared accountability and responsibility include:

The orientation for all new employees to organizational goals and values... and to the concepts of a “respectful work environment” and “respectful working relationships”...

The continual review of—and employee alignment with—organizational values, goals, and objectives...

The use of formal and informal coaching and mentoring programs to support employee alignment with organizational values, goals, and objectives...

Employee performance review processes that reflect the expectation of accountability for achieving OBJECTIVES while upholding VALUES...

And employee recognition and rewards for achieving organizational goals and objectives while upholding organizational values.

Thomas: Inclusive organizations are committed to continuous learning. An inclusive organization acknowledges that every employee is a learner AND a teacher. An inclusive organization creates a flexible organizational culture that promotes continuous, collaborative, cross-organizational learning.

The commitment to continuous learning may be exhibited through...

Providing professional training and development for employees at ALL levels...

Establishing systems for succession planning and career development, and continually assessing the EFFECTIVENESS of these systems...

Providing cross-functional training opportunities, so employees may learn with—and FROM—one another...

Developing connected learning; that is, the ability to translate, transfer, and build upon learning from one work group to another, in all directions—up, down, and sideways...

And taking time to reflect on (and learn from) experience—both failure and success—and translating learning into action.

Yvonne: An inclusive organization RECOGNIZES the traditional and non-traditional knowledge, skills, aptitudes, education, experience, and potential of each employee, and STRUCTURES work organization and work processes to take advantage of employee diversity.

Examples of participatory work organization and processes include:

Establishing systems for hiring, development, assessment, promotion, and re-assignment that recognize and value non-traditional as well as traditional employee qualifications and assets...

Welcoming, valuing, and supporting employee-driven initiatives...

Establishing avenues of communication and involvement through which ALL employees can recommend improvements and enhancements to existing work processes...

Holding managers accountable for collaborating with employees to review work process recommendations...

And encouraging and empowering employees to participate in solving their own problems.

Thomas: An inclusive organization acknowledges the existence of an IMPLICIT, as well as an EXPLICIT, organizational culture... and continuously seeks to align this culture with the organization's values.

Examples of the ways in which inclusive organizations align their culture with their values include:

Explicitly stating organizational values and identifying the policies, practices, and behaviors that SUPPORT those values...

Continually examining and evaluating the processes and procedures for decision-making, problem-solving, information-sharing, work organization, and employee interaction... to ensure their consistency with organizational goals...

Establishing the expectation that ALL employees will respect and uphold organizational values through their behavior and their work practices...

And providing networking opportunities that enable employees to engage in mutually beneficial activities... regarding their own identities, world views, and life experiences, and the impact of these qualities on the culture of the organization.

Yvonne: An inclusive organization uses conflict resolution procedures that empower employees at all levels and across all departments.... Employees work collaboratively to solve problems, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and achieve mutually satisfying results.

Examples of the ways that an inclusive organization may support collaborative conflict resolution include:

Providing effective, periodic training in collaborative conflict resolution techniques to ALL employees at ALL levels...

Establishing a system of progressive conflict resolution procedures... that BEGIN with collaborative problem-solving, ENCOURAGE the exploration of issues from multiple points of view, and CULMINATE in a clear and assessable grievance process...

And empowering employees at all levels to use collaborative conflict resolution techniques... to solve inter-personal and inter-group problems in their work environment BEFORE resorting to formalized grievance procedures or third party mediation.

Thomas: An inclusive organization demonstrates its commitment to cultivating community relationships by forging alliances with local governments, schools, community-based organizations, and professional associations.... The purpose of these relationships is to expand outreach, widen opportunity, enhance access, promote understanding, and to overcome prejudice and bias.

Examples of the ways that an inclusive organization can demonstrate commitment to community relations include:

Developing a policy statement about responsibility to the community, detailing arenas for community outreach and involvement...

Developing community initiatives in partnership with the communities addressed...

Assessing organizational IMPACT on the local environment and the local community... in order to identify strategies that enhance POSITIVE impacts and diminish NEGATIVE impacts...

And supporting employee involvement in the communities...

Yvonne: The Workplace Diversity Network has more information about organizational inclusion on their Web site. Check it out at the address below.

Thomas: Also, the VA Learning University offers a course entitled... "Changing the Corporate Culture"... which includes suggestions on how to LEVERAGE diversity and BUILD inclusion.

Yvonne: But that's all we have time for in this edition of Diversity News. Be sure to check back with us next month when we'll be looking at FLEXIBILITY in the workplace.

Thomas: 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.

Yvonne: 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!