

OSC 12
Ohio Safety Congress & Expo

WELL AT HOME. SAFE AT WORK.

531 Worrying About Being PC = Diversity Stress

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Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation

Worrying About Being PC = Diversity Stress!!!

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Examples

Deciding whom to appoint to a challenging new position in Europe, a manager passes over an Asian employee and gives the job to a more qualified white male. He worries that people may perceive some prejudice in his decision.

Because there is a push to see more minorities in visible positions, a manager promotes a slightly less qualified minority candidate over a majority candidate, all the while feeling guilty

A male manager hesitates to hug a longtime employee who has just lost her mother. His human reaction is to give her a hug but he stops because he worries what the "correct" and acceptable reaction would be

A person is not certain whether to use the term "African American" or "Black." She worries about being considered a racist if she uses the wrong term, so she avoids conversations with people from that race.

Diversity Stress

- Discomfort people feel when they face a multicultural situation and their usual modes of coping and decision making are insufficient
- Involves multicultural situations with ambiguous, changing rules or conflicting rules/moral principles
- Can exist wherever cultures interact
- Can exist where there is a fear of negative judgement for making the "wrong" decision
 - Being labeled an "ist"
- Can exist when there is a strong desire to make the "right" moral decision, or do the "right" thing
- Can be fleeting and mild or chronic and severe
- Symptoms = worry, guilt, fear, indecision, procrastination, detachment, disengagement

Diversity Stress	Morality Stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newer Topic • Little Research • Managerial decision-making under multicultural conditions involving ambiguous rules, conflicting moral principles, • People uncertain how to behave • Fearful of consequences of decisions • No clear path to right answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older Topic • Lots of Research! • Managerial decisions are made in a setting where rules are ambiguous and moral principles conflict with organization rules • People uncertain how to behave • Fearful of consequences of decisions • No clear path to right answer

Diversity Stress is a Type of Morality Stress

Diversity Stress
Why this new issue?

Previous Climate

- Little diversity in workplace
- Little awareness that "issues of difference" exists
- Everyone is like the majority

Current Climate

- Multicultural issues are in the foreground of many business decisions
- New climate is in constant change
- Numerous uncertainties – ambiguous rules
- No clear right/wrong
- Fear of job loss, lawsuits, punishment

Issues Exist for Managers and Employees

- Diversity issues exist in daily business and interpersonal decisions
- People uncertain about which behaviors are appropriate under what circumstances
- People feel an obligation to act in accord with some moral standard, yet not clear on what the standard is
 - Unknown standard, business standard, moral standard
- Afraid to discuss multicultural delimas or problems
- Afraid to acknowledge not knowing what to do
- Fear of being labeled as an “ist”
- Fear of punishment, job loss, lawsuits,

Diversity as a Stressor

- Diversity arrives daily in new types of bosses, employees, co-workers and customers
- Diversity arrives through numerous cultures – not just one
- Not just an issue between majority and minority cultures
- Making a right/wrong multicultural decision is different from making a “go” or “no go” decision
- In American society, the moral standard of what is “right” derives in large part from a collective view and is always in flux
- One can be punished socially for making the wrong cultural decision

Diversity as a Stressor

Led to New Paradigms

- Individual human differences based on diversity characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation should be recognized and valued in the workplace
 - Old paradigm - only differences of skills and abilities should be recognized
- People should be treated equitably but not uniformly
 - How do you do this?
- Rewards for leadership should be reconsidered, given that there are many cultural ways to lead a team and contribute to a team –all of which should be valued
 - Multiculturalism is challenging traditional ideas of leadership and teamwork
 - Transformational leadership theories

Counterproductive Reactions to Diversity Stress

- Send people to diversity training, but don't talk about diversity back at the workplace
 - Don't set up processes for discussing real issues
- Adhere only to narrow directives and rules
 - Point out sexual harassment policy while ignoring confusion, emotions and ambiguities that exist in business and interpersonal interactions
- Avoidance
- Disengagement
- Hostile work environment
- “Darned if I do. Darned if I don't” attitude

Productive Reactions to Diversity Stress

- Expanding self-knowledge opportunities
 - Knowledge of ones own culture
 - Examination of life experiences
 - Understanding personal reactions when feeling “attacked”
- People have tolerance for those who do not understand their culture - and work to educate them
- Develop common understandings of paradigms and ambiguous rules
- Understand difference between intentional harm/violations and unintentional/confused behaviors – and develop policy
- Create a safe environment where people can talk and ask questions without fear of being labeled
- Acknowledge the fears of being wrong and work to create a positive climate “We all have good intentions”
- Greater understanding and use of individual strengths

Take Aways

- Diversity stress exists
- It is not an issue of majority vs. minority
- It can lead to problems in the workplace
- We need work environments where people from different cultures can feel free to talk, question, and process appropriate decisions and behaviors without fear of being labeled or punished
- There is a difference between intentional harmful behaviors and unintentional confused behaviors – and they need to be treated accordingly

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