Regional Culture Analysis Blog

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Cultural Competence has many different definitions based upon the perspective of the industry or discipline utilizing the term. In General it means the ability of people, organizations and systems to honor, respect, apply empathy, capitalize on and develop effective relationships with different cultures they enter act with. Unfortunately at times, the term appears to be used as another catch phrase instead a discipline of substance.

Of all the definitions found, one stood out as the most logical. From the National Center for Culture Competence:

> Cultural competence requires that organizations:
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> - Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.
> - Have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of communities they serve.
> - Incorporate the above in all aspects of policy-making, administration, practice and service delivery, systematically involve consumers, families and communities.
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> Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum. (n.d.)

Working across cultural lines can be difficult. Certain attitudes and characteristics exacerbate the problems: inflexibility, arrogance, change resistances, or refusal to acknowledge the importance or existence of cultural differences. "Failure to consider the cultural context in the…organization can lead and has led to misunderstandings, miscommunications, costly

marketing blunders, Lawsuits and generally undermining of organizational goals." (Ferraro & Briody, 2013, p 9) Cultural Competence begins with acknowledgement.

The Community Tool Box web site, *Building Cultural Competent Organizations,* identified four levels of development behind their version of Cultural Competence.

Cultural knowledge: means that you know about some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group.

Cultural awareness: is the next stage of understanding other groups -- being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes.

Cultural sensitivity: is knowing that differences exist between cultures, but not assigning values to the differences (better or worse, right or wrong). Clashes on this point can easily occur, especially if a custom or belief in question goes against the idea of multiculturalism. Internal conflict (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational) is likely to occur at times over this issue. Conflict won't always be easy to manage, but it can be made easier if everyone is mindful of the organizational goals.

- **Cultural competence:** brings together the previous stages -- and adds operational effectiveness. A culturally competent organization has the capacity to bring into its system many different behaviors, attitudes, and policies and work effectively in cross-cultural settings to produce better outcomes. (Building Culturally Competent Organizations, n.d.)

Understanding the concepts above is foundational to the steps for creating a culturally competent organization which are:

- Recognizing the power and influence of culture
- Understanding how each of our backgrounds affects our responses to others

- Not assuming that all members of cultural groups share the same beliefs and practices
- Acknowledging how past experiences affect present interactions
- Building on the strengths and resources of each culture in an organization
- Allocating resources for leadership and staff development in the area of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding
- Actively eliminating prejudice in policies and practices
- Willing to share power among leaders of different cultural backgrounds
- Evaluating the organization's cultural competence on a regular basis. (Building Culturally Competent Organizations, n.d.)

Much like developing Quality in an organization developing Cultural Competence is a continual process. Organizations develop this competence at the pace required for good business; but as it develops, their ability to succeed business is greater.

Conclusion

Cultural Competence is more than just a fancy word for sensitivity. It means developing an attitude to honor, respect and capitalize on cultural differences. It takes an organization or person willing to change or see things from a different perspective to succeed. Once the existence cultural differences are understood and accepted they can strengthen the organization.

References

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