

Chapter 5

CULTURALLY COMPETENT PRACTICE

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Human service organizations are increasingly clear that their success in large measure depends on the extent to which they are in tune with and appropriately respond to the internal and external environments of which they are a part. Sowers and Ellis (2001) indicate that diversity of local populations is one of the major issues that will affect the internal operations and external relations of human service organizations. The widening racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse population in the United States presents unique challenges to human service practitioners, agencies, and organizations as well as professional educators in the human services. The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau of the Census, 1995) projects that by the year 2050, the white, non-Latino population will shrink from its current 72% to approximately 50% of the total population. The Latino population is expected to double, from 11.3% to 22.5%, during this period, exceeding the percentage of African Americans, who currently make up 12.3% of the U.S. population.

The expanding diversity in the workforce has been met with a myriad of responses. Businesses and corporations have responded to the increased multicultural nature of the population by developing aggressive diversity strategies in the workplace. Human service organizations have likewise made strides by acknowledging the implications of the widening multicultural landscape. For example, for well over two decades, accreditation standards for social work education have required curriculum content on diversity and have

continued to monitor the extent to which social work schools and programs prepare students to practice with culturally diverse client systems. Other disciplines, such as psychology, nursing, and counseling, also are addressing the issues of diversity and multicultural practice through their education programs (American Psychological Association, 1992; Kavanagh & Kennedy, 1992; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Practice specialties within social work, such as child welfare, have made significant steps in furthering the vision of culturally competent practice (Dana, Behn, & Gonwa, 1992; Malik & Velazquez, 2002). The Child Welfare League of America (Nash, 1999), in an effort they called the Advancing Cultural Competence in Child Welfare Initiative, delineated the following set of values, which makes explicit the importance of culturally competent practice to the human service organization fulfilling a mission.

- ◆ Cultural competence is for everyone.
- ◆ Cultural competence is integral to best practice.
- ◆ Cultural competence is an ongoing process.
- ◆ Cultural competence is part of the overall organizational goal of excellence.
- ◆ Culturally competent organizations must be customer driven.
- ◆ Cultural competence is a key factor to continued financial survival.
- ◆ Culturally competent organizations should foster leadership throughout the organization.

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Midlevel managers and supervisors play a vital role in developing culturally competent organizations and subsequent culturally competent practice. They are essential role models who demonstrate at multiple levels effective organizational change processes that move the organization and workers toward cultural competence goals. Supervisors must have essential knowledge, personal and professional attributes, and skills to fulfill the role of transforming organizations into culturally effective entities.

This chapter is based on the premise that to successfully meet the challenges of a diverse labor force and a diverse consumer base, human service organizations need to place the goal of cultural competence high up on their organizational and practice agenda of priorities. Achieving cultural competence is all about learning, and this achievement therefore represents one of the important ingredients of the vision of transforming human service organizations into learning organizations. The following key elements of a learning organization are directly related to the process of conceptualizing *culturally competent* supervision: (a) an organization that is *skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights*; (b) an organization that incorporates *systems thinking, shared vision, and team learning*; (c) an organization in which organizational learning is viewed as a *process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding*; and (d) an organization that engages in “enlightened experimentation,” which involves a *system for sharing diverse ideas and creating incentives for experimentation*.

This chapter is organized into the following major components: (a) an evolving definition of cultural competence, (b) a description of a culturally competent organization, (c) a framework for achieving culturally competent supervision in human services organizations, and (d) strategies for modeling culturally competent supervision. A case vignette is also provided at the end of the chapter to practice applying the concepts of culturally competent supervision.

DEFINING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence is defined by Cross (in Rounds, Weil, & Bishop, 1994) as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in

cross-cultural situations” (pp. 5-6). Green (1995) asserts that competent practitioners are able to conduct their “professional work in a way that is congruent with the behavior and expectations that members of a distinctive culture recognize as appropriate among themselves” (p. 52). Weaver (1998) indicates that the human services provider must be knowledgeable about the group in question; must be able to be self-reflective, recognizing biases within self and the profession; and must be able to integrate knowledge and self-reflection into practice. McPhatter (1997) describes cultural competence as the ability to transform knowledge and cultural awareness into health or psychosocial interventions that support and sustain healthy client-system functioning within the appropriate cultural context. McPhatter (1997) developed the following components as part of a cultural competence attainment model for achieving cultural competence.

- ◆ *Enlightened consciousness*: A deeply self-reflective process that challenges entrenched values and belief systems about cultural differences and how one perceives self in relation to culturally diverse others.
- ◆ *Grounded knowledge base*: Acknowledges the legitimacy of nontraditional modes of inquiry and education; embraces a consistent process of critical analysis of mainstream theories and constructs for appropriateness to guide cross-cultural practice.
- ◆ *Cumulative skill proficiency*: Application of cognitive and affective learning that enhances one’s ability to effectively enter the world of culturally different clients and communities. Cross-cultural communication skills, multidimensional assessment, micro and macro intervention skills, and evaluation skills are essential dimensions of the cumulative skill proficiency mandate.

Cultural competence, whether viewed from a client-centered or organizational perspective, ultimately must address the extent to which client or consumer needs and, subsequently, organizational mandates are met for the targeted population. Cultural competence is developed and put into practice within the context of the agency or organization. The culturally competent supervisor must be knowledgeable about and have a clear vision of the culturally competent organization to effectively carry out his or her role toward that goal. Although not exhaustive, the following aspects of a culturally competent organization represent essential components without which only minimal progress can be expected.

COMPONENTS OF CULTURALLY COMPETENT ORGANIZATIONS

Achieving cultural competence is a dynamic, protracted, and developmental change process that requires genuine commitment on the part of chief executive staff, midlevel managers, direct service workers, and support staff. A culturally competent organization is one that is actively pursuing identifiable and measurable outcomes reflected in the following goals:

- ◆ Employment of a racially, culturally, ethnically diverse work force that appropriately reflects the diverse makeup of the organization's consumer or client population
- ◆ Operation within a well-developed strategic plan for achieving culturally competent practice and service provision with accountable managers assigned to implement the plan
- ◆ The mission, goals, objectives, policies, and procedures of the organization reflect a commitment to providing culturally effective services
- ◆ The organization demonstrates a commitment to allocating the fiscal and human resources needed to reach the goal of a culturally competent work force and service provision
- ◆ Identification of diverse communities and active collaboration with them in mutually defining and solving problems
- ◆ Provision of a sustainable structure (training, consultation, technical assistance) for facilitating interprofessional attainment of cultural competence goals
- ◆ Ongoing evaluation of the organization's efforts to achieve culturally competent practice and service
- ◆ Incorporation of ongoing assessment of cultural competence goals in employee performance evaluations as well as in agency's overall service evaluations
- ◆ Assurance that all employees are knowledgeable about and equally committed to cultural competence goals

It is important to acknowledge that cultural competence is not a finite endpoint at which one eventually arrives but an evolving ideal state designed to significantly enhance the ability of the organization to successfully carry out its mission.

Culturally competent supervision is most likely to be achieved by organizations that view learning, growth, and change as a central feature of the organization's

culture. The nature of cross-cultural practice demands a flexible organizational climate that can anticipate and respond to the complexities of interpersonal dynamics. An environment of openness, support, and risk taking promotes creative, solution-focused goal attainment. Managers, supervisors, and workers must believe that organizational norms and structures support the development and implementation of culturally legitimate practice and service. When diversity issues are initially addressed, it is typical for human service organizations to be stymied by an organizational culture that is resistant to change. Major changes are best introduced within a culture that promotes creative planning and problem solving "outside of the box."

ATTRIBUTES OF THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SUPERVISOR

Although professional education within the field of human services (i.e., social work, counseling, health care) introduces students to information on diverse populations and variably endeavors to increase cultural sensitivity, competence in this practice arena remains elusive. Helping the organization to manage a diverse workforce and a diverse client population effectively requires an organizational culture that is open and supportive to experimentation and an ongoing change process. Supervisors as middle managers are uniquely positioned to model the ideals and principles critical to achieving culturally competent practice. They must have an expansive knowledge base that is responsive to organizational and management workforce issues as well as client system interventions. Moreover, they must be skilled at balancing multiple roles associated with human service management and clinical supervision simultaneously. Cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural conflict resolution are essential skills that enhance the supervisor's ability to move practitioners and the organization toward cultural competence goals. The following are some of the key attributes of culturally competent supervision.

- ◆ *Capacity to achieve clarity about the supervisor's own values and belief systems, including (a) an understanding of the socialization process that formed the basis of their views about those who are culturally different from themselves, (b) spent considerable time*

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reflecting on their own ethnic group identification, (c) grappled with the superiority-inferiority dichotomy reflected in the broader society as well as in the organizational culture, and (d) come to an understanding of the benefits or costs of being in either position (superior or inferior).

- ◆ *Knowledge about the strengths of diversity* and ability to identify aspects of diverse cultures that present challenges for clinical practice and service provision.
- ◆ *Comfort with cultural differences* whether they are reflected in gender, race, age, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political ideology, geographical region, or other areas.
- ◆ *Commitment to an environment of equality, justice, and a sense of fairness*, principles not compromised by whatever employee's race, ethnicity, gender, lifestyle, or other diversity may be.
- ◆ *A nature that seeks, plans, and welcomes learning opportunities* without pressure, guilt, or fear by enhancing the learning of others about diversity and multicultural issues and practice.
- ◆ *Commitment to develop a culturally competent organization* that includes culturally competent practice and culturally competent service provision.

CORE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SUPERVISOR

Human service supervision, in its generic form, demands an extensive knowledge base that includes not only mastery in the field of practice but an understanding of principles, models, and techniques of management and supervision within the human services field. Managing a culturally diverse workforce requires additional skill due to the complexities inherent in multicultural differences. Although most education and training programs introduce students to content on diverse populations, rarely is this information sufficient to meet the standard of culturally effective practice. Continued education and training are a must and begin with an honest appraisal of knowledge gaps and skill deficits. Oftentimes, human service professionals, especially supervisors, are reluctant to acknowledge voids in their knowledge base. Knowledge deficits reframed as opportunities for growth serve as useful examples for both supervisors and supervisees; both can use them to begin their own knowledge-building process. The supervisor needs to model for workers the process of identifying knowledge gaps and different ways to address them.

The culturally competent supervisor willingly challenges widely accepted theoretical and practice constructs and critically analyzes practice interventions. It is commonplace in human service practice to use theoretical and practice models and methods that are patently ineffective with culturally diverse client populations simply because “we were trained to do so.” Challenging the status quo in an organization that is resistant to change requires knowledge of diplomacy, conflict resolution, problem solving, and considerable risk taking. Practice with diverse clients and communities at times demands exploration of cultural norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and lifestyles beyond empirically tested hypotheses regarding a given culture.

For culturally competent supervisors to become knowledgeable *over time* about the client population served by their human service agency, many different areas of inquiry need to be explored. The knowledge base for cultural competence includes many of the following: (a) the *culture*, history, traditions and customs, preferred language or primary dialect, value orientation, religious and spiritual orientation, art, music, and healing beliefs of the client population; (b) long-standing *social problems* that disproportionately affect minority group members and that have a profound effect on minority communities as well as on service provision (e.g., poverty, health risk factors, interpersonal and community violence, drug trafficking, disparate immigration policies)—this knowledge area includes the etiology of these social problems, the dynamics that sustain them, and best practices and strategies for responding to them; (c) the *agency's history of relationships* and interactions with the diverse communities it serves, including the perceptions held by client populations about the agency that can significantly affect service provision and clinical interventions; (d) intimate familiarity with the *communities and neighborhoods* where client populations live and work, including community resources, neighborhood needs assessments built on sociodemographic profiles, and critically important formal and informal community resources (e.g., religious institutions, fraternal organizations, social and civic clubs, and neighborhood associations) that provide a rich network of support for practice interventions.

Troubled racial and ethnic relations in this country have a long and well-established history, and the culturally competent supervisor is well informed about these realities; she or he understands the dynamics of oppression in its variable forms. Sexism; racism; classism; ageism; and the dynamics of skin color,

immigrant status, language, and dialects are real issues with which the supervisor must be intimately familiar. These issues are often at the center of dynamic interactions between and among workers as well as between and among workers and clients.

Managing or supervising a diverse workforce also requires knowledge and skill in conflict management and resolution. Cultural differences in work style and behavior present challenges for the supervisor. For example, informal and at times energetic verbal exchanges among African American and Latino workers may be perceived as “unprofessional” within an agency with an austere office protocol. When confronted with culturally dissonant situations, the supervisor must have a clear understanding about the context in which such events erupt and be able to facilitate their resolution in a way that strengthens interprofessional relationships.

CORE SKILLS FOR THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SUPERVISOR

The essential skills of human service supervision have been described in other chapters. There is an additional set of core skills needed to effectively engage with a diverse workforce. Chief among these skills is effective cross-cultural communication. The business of human services is inherently communicative, and the ability of the supervisee to carry out his or her work largely depends on the ability of the supervisor to communicate the organization’s mission, goals, and method of operating. The many barriers that exist in communication across cultures include different languages, verbal and nonverbal styles, emotional tones and inflections that affect intended meaning, and the potential for failed cross-cultural communication or real growth. The skilled supervisor needs to understand the cultural context that influences the development of the skills needed for effective cross-cultural communication.

It is not at all uncommon for a simple glance, slur, or tone, whether intentional or otherwise, to escalate into friction and an untenable work environment. A seemingly insignificant incident can successfully be addressed if the supervisor is able to correctly interpret the cultural context and assist workers in understanding and resolving such nuances expeditiously. Cross-cultural communication skills include clarity about differing styles (i.e., tone, intensity, level,

nonverbal messages), but it is also essential to accept differing styles of communication without negative valuation of them.

The supervisor must be aware of negative stereotypes, behavior, and verbal epithets directed at a particular cultural group that generally solicit an immediate negative reaction. For example, people of color often are bilingual and use languages interchangeably depending on the social context in which they find themselves. Again, witnessing African American coworkers engaged in colloquial bantering or “teasing” is often viewed as “inappropriate” behavior within organizations with strictly formal communication norms. African Americans in turn often interpret as unfriendly an environment in which coworkers are unable to engage in informal interactions. In addition, they view coworkers who adhere to the more formal tone as arrogant and impersonal. Neither position may be accurate, but the skilled supervisor is able to guide the communication process toward an accurate assessment of meaning and intent, resulting in more positive interprofessional relationships.

All human service supervisors need conflict management and resolution skills. These skills are used in almost every dimension of the supervision role. In organizations that have not successfully addressed issues of diversity, the supervisor will often be faced with situations that demand skill in identifying cross-cultural conflict. Supervisors must be able to problem solve and to initiate strategies that sustain positive change. A culturally diverse workforce and client population require a substantial change in mindset, policies, and ways of functioning from those approaches that may have operated in agencies serving a homogeneous population. Business as usual will inevitably frustrate workers and clients alike and ultimately prevent the organization from effectively achieving its goals. The ability to manage conflict and resolve tensions at multiple levels of the organization is a core expectation of the culturally competent supervisor.

Helping the organization to understand and commit to cultural competence can be a real challenge for organizations resistant to change even in the face of pressure to do so. Negotiating with upper level managers and key decision makers and helping clinical or direct service staff understand the change process will test even the most skilled and experienced supervisor. The supervisor must also be skilled at approaching clinical staff not yet aware of the need to explore alternative and more culturally appropriate interventions

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when these are unfamiliar to them. Tact and delicate diplomacy are required when encouraging workers to move outside their “comfort zone” so that an organizational culture may be created that is open to learning, change, and growth. These overtures may be quickly interpreted by workers as superiors overstepping boundaries and pushing a hidden agenda. Supervisors with a comprehensive grasp of the organizational, interprofessional, and individual change process are usually able to assess their supervisees’ levels of motivation and initiate strategies that are congruent with the staff’s capacity for change.

MODELING CULTURALLY COMPETENT SUPERVISION

Human service organizations need to actively engage in sustained and systematic activities that lead to culturally competent service. Without these activities, the implicit message sent is that cultural competence is not a priority. All constituents of the organization pay the price for this lack of commitment, including the organization itself. Supervisors, as middle managers, can play a vital role as change agents within the organization by using their considerable influence in convincing chief executive officers and key decision makers to understand the organizational value of a culturally competent workforce.

Modeling cultural competence can take many different forms as the supervisor carries out organizational mandates and tasks. These can be viewed through the lens of the organization as a broader entity, interprofessionally, or in individual supervisory roles. The following strategies for modeling culturally competent practice are based on building culturally competent practice within the context of a culturally competent human service agency.

Understanding the Change Process

Strategic planning is an excellent tool for helping an organization incorporate culturally competent practice using organizational, interprofessional, and individual change processes. Understanding a continuum of change for either the organization or the staff can be useful for locating the starting point of the change process. Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992), in studying theories of change, developed the following five-stage model, which is applicable to the process of becoming culturally competent.

Stage 1: Precontemplation

This is a stage in which the individual or organization lacks awareness of a problem or need for change. Approaching individual staff or the agency as a whole requires the supervisor to engage in an education process that focuses on raising awareness of the issues of cultural diversity, how these affect the organization’s ability to fulfill its mission, and the role individual workers play in addressing the issues.

Stage 2: Contemplation

At this stage, individuals or organizations are aware that a problem or need exists and may be giving serious consideration to a response but have not yet made a commitment to do so. Ongoing education and open dialogue in an environment of safety are essential at this stage. Helping the organization and staff understand the costs and benefits of a culturally competent organization and workforce are appropriate foci in this stage.

Stage 3: Preparation

This is the stage at which clear intentions to change are expressed and plans are developed to initiate change. The supervisor participates in developing the direction, structure, and process of the cultural competence activities that will be undertaken.

Stage 4: Action

At this stage, commitment to the change process moves into observable activities. These include multiple initiatives such as education, training, consultation, community building, and other activities.

Stage 5: Maintenance

At this stage, actions and behavioral indicators of change are integrated into practice modalities and organizational policies and procedures. The supervisor engages in culturally competent practice, encourages and supports others to do so, and holds direct service staff, as well as administrators, accountable in achieving ongoing culturally effective practice.

The change model provides a useful tool for accurately assessing and implementing culturally competent practice and service. Assisting staff and administrators with an understanding about the nature of change in both clinical and organizational processes is helpful in eliminating inappropriate or premature expectations. Accurately assessing whether

the organization or client system is in *precontemplation* or at the *action* stage of change helps to define and sharpen intervention methods that lead to goal accomplishment.

Modeling Openness and Safety

The culturally competent supervisor can foster the creation of a safe environment in which sharing, mutuality, respect, and collective problem identification and resolution are the norm. The supervisor can use sensitive gender or racial issues to model receptivity to divergent views and solutions. A structure is developed for ongoing opportunities to address diversity issues and culturally competent practice. The following vignette illustrates how the supervisor may intervene in a manner that models and reinforces openness and safety in the face of difficult issues.

Cheryl Brown is a case manager in the Gateway Community Service Agency. During her weekly supervision session with Bob White, she shared a concern that had been raised by her African American and Latino families. The clients indicated that they feel uncomfortable coming to the agency to meet with the counselors. They expressed their feeling that the security staff members were abrasive and oftentimes rude, that the clerical staff members were hostile and condescending, and that they did not believe the counselors understood or cared about them or their problems.

Responses that model openness and an environment of safety include the following.

- a. Mr. White expresses appreciation to Ms. Brown for feeling comfortable enough to share this sensitive issue.
- b. Mr. White solicits Ms. Brown's views and perceptions on the issues raised.
- c. Mr. White tries to determine if Ms. Brown is aware that other workers share these or similar views or have experienced the incidents described by clients.
- d. Mr. White places the issue on the agenda for the next scheduled staff meeting but also considers

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- e. scheduling a special meeting to specifically address the issues identified.
- e. With staff, Mr. White explores divergent views, perceptions, and opinions without judging the "rightness or wrongness" of these.
- f. Staff brainstorm solutions that include the involvement of clients in further clarifying issues and resolutions.
- g. Mr. White ensures that an ongoing process is in place for resolving issues.
- h. The staff agree to establish a work or task group to assess the physical environment and social tone of the organization (e.g., diverse and bilingual security, clerical, and professional staff; multicultural art, music, colors, magazines; need for training at all levels of agency).
- i. Staff, along with Mr. White, publicly support Ms. Brown for raising the issue.

Managing Sensitive Issues

The culturally competent supervisors are able and willing to confront traditionally ignored or taboo issues. They do not avoid difficult diversity issues related to overt or covert racism, sexism, or homophobia. Ignoring or denying emerging issues can send a message to staff that the supervisor is either uncomfortable in addressing these issues or does not view them as important. Neither message reflects culturally competent supervision. Individual or interprofessional conflict must be handled in a forthright, responsible, and nondefensive manner. The following vignette is an example in which the supervisor must demonstrate skill in conflict management and problem resolution.

Green Meadows is a community-based human service agency in which the professional clinical staff is predominantly female. Each key administrator, however, is male. There is a long-standing history of conflict about this "glass ceiling." Female staff members have expressed a concern that they do the bulk of the work and that whenever there is an opportunity for promotion to the administrative level, males are promoted even though women staff are equally qualified. Female staff are especially angered that they often are required to train male staff who are promoted over them.

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The culturally competent supervisor:

- a. Evaluates the legitimacy of the claims by conducting an objective assessment of promotion trends and work assignments.
- b. Develops structure that provides opportunity for women staff to express their concerns without fear of intimidation or retaliation.
- c. Engages staff in a process of “clearing the air” about the concerns raised; this oftentimes requires several opportunities that would allow staff to express and process views and feelings. The supervisor may separate the problem-solving session from the ventilation sessions and avoid the tendency to prematurely and superficially “fix” the problem. It is critical that norms be established that permit all staff to be heard. It is equally important to avoid efforts that trivialize feelings or to offer alternative explanations to the speaker’s perception. Oftentimes, perceptions of events by multicultural staff are responded to with attempts to obfuscate the issue by making it personal or by diverting the focus from the most critical issue. Statements such as “that happens to everybody” or “you’re making more out of it than is really there” are responses that should be avoided. Remember, the goal is to provide an opportunity to express views and feelings that are linked to cultural differences. The supervisor needs to model acceptance of divergent perceptions and demonstrate respect for and the legitimacy of each staff member’s views.
- d. Develops committee or task group that monitors and targets solutions to the issues of sexism and gender discrimination.
- e. Addresses concerns with key decision makers and seeks commitment to respond in a tangible way. The supervisor follows up with administrators to avoid the tendency in organizations to raise important issues and then allow them to fester, mistakenly believing that they will disappear.

Promoting Culturally Competent Training

The culturally competent supervisor assesses the training needs of staff related to culturally competent practice, develops short- and long-term plans for professional development, and creates an internal structure that supports education and training (meaning that it is possible for staff to attend training without the burden of being overwhelmed with work

responsibilities that accrue in the worker’s absence). Much of the resistance to training in cultural competence comes from workers feeling that they cannot afford the time to participate in training. The supervisor must address this issue by setting up a structure that relieves the worker of the responsibility of day-to-day work while training is taking place. In addition, the supervisor must do all of the following.

- ◆ Approach training as an integral component of the organization’s strategic plan for achieving cultural competence goals.
- ◆ Require staff to complete individual assessment of their own professional development needs by identifying knowledge and skill gaps, including recommended plans for meeting their needs.
- ◆ Complete an assessment of training needs and determine whether training expertise exists within the agency or whether expertise should be obtained outside the agency. The supervisor should thoughtfully use the expertise of diverse staff but take care not to impose on staff or pressure them to be so used. Multicultural staff members often are asked to be “spokespersons” or representatives for their racial or ethnic group, and at times they will harbor great resentment for this.
- ◆ Monitor individual workers’ training goals and engage in an ongoing assessment with the worker about whether goals are being met in a timely fashion.
- ◆ Integrate new learning on cultural competence into individual and group supervision and organizational goals. The supervisor should ask workers to demonstrate through simulations, discussion, and case presentations how the new learning enhances their ability to provide culturally competent services.
- ◆ Prepare a budget for cultural competence training needs and solicit commitment from key administrators.
- ◆ Use consultants, external experts, and appropriate community cultural guides, for example, an expert on immigration issues regarding newly immigrated families.
- ◆ Include chief executive officers and key administrators in training on cultural competence. One of the most frequent complaints about cultural competence training in human service agencies is that upper level managers and administrators do not participate in the training. Staff correctly perceive this practice as a lukewarm commitment to the goal of culturally competent service provision.

Using Community Resources

Knowledge about and involvement with culturally diverse communities is essential to providing culturally effective human services. The culturally competent supervisor provides leadership and serves as an important link with upper level administrators and staff in developing key networks with communities. Racial, ethnic, and cultural minority groups in general place a great deal of value on neighborhood and community affiliations. The historic importance of religious institutions, neighborhood associations, and social and civic clubs is readily obvious when one spends time getting to know families and the communities in which they live. Provision of culturally competent services falls considerably short when this is attempted without a thorough understanding and response to broader community needs. Supervisors can effectively model the building of equal partnerships with key community members and organizations.

These partnerships can significantly inform the delivery of culturally competent services as they relate to family behaviors and community norms. For example, in the field of child welfare, child-rearing practices are clearly influenced by cultural norms and may be misunderstood if not seen in their cultural context. The supervisor may engage in a number of actions that model effective strategies for building community ties with the agency. Some of these include the following.

- ◆ Solicitation of feedback from the client population regarding identified community leaders and social support networks.
- ◆ Use of staff in identifying and compiling a community resource bank.
- ◆ Community meetings that are scheduled at accessible times and locations and that acquaint the community with the agency's mission, services, and staff as well as soliciting concerns, needs, suggestions, and recommendations.
- ◆ Establishment of a community advocate or ombudsperson who is easily accessible and able to provide quick responses to requests for assistance. One of the most often-cited complaints from communities of color is the difficulty of making contact when a need arises and getting a credible response. An agency's ability to provide this service will go a long way in convincing distrustful community members that the agency is genuinely attempting to respond to their needs.

- ◆ Identification of community needs and solutions that address major and ancillary issues, (e.g., housing, job training, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families eligibility, substance abuse treatment, child and adolescent behavior problems, domestic violence, intra- and intercultural conflicts). Human service agencies that do not comprehensively address such issues limit service effectiveness. As a result, diverse clients are left in a quandary as to how to access vital services. The culturally competent supervisor is knowledgeable about these issues and the resources needed to meet them and is able to assist the agency and staff in broadening their sphere of concern about the issues' impact on multicultural clients.

Infusing Culturally Competent Concepts Into Current Practice Models

In many human service agencies, clinical supervision is the primary focus of the supervisor. This function may occupy the bulk of the supervisor's time. The supervisor sets the tone and provides guided direction for practitioners as they increase their ability to competently serve culturally diverse clients. The supervisor models this role by meeting the following challenges.

Facilitating a Comprehensive and Ongoing Exploration of Theoretical and Practice Models and Interventions for Their Relevance to Culturally Diverse Client Populations. The supervisor needs to create a learning environment in which staff members are encouraged to challenge assumptions and approaches that severely conflict with or compromise the values, norms, traditions, and customs of culturally diverse clients. For example, a theoretical approach that defines a belief in a higher power as an "irrational" solution to problems presents challenges to clients whose belief in a higher power is central both to their culture and to a sense of self. The supervisor needs to be willing to pose hard questions and engage in a reflective process about the predominant service model adopted by the agency when such models are incongruent with the core cultural values, norms, and behavior of the clients. This analysis needs to include a process for determining the effectiveness of the predominant intervention approaches, including the client's perceptions about their usefulness. Therapeutic approaches that are intimidating to clients can be counterproductive and lead to various forms of resistance. Unfortunately, practitioners respond to this resistance by blaming

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clients or describing them as “resistant” or “not amenable to services.”

Utilization of Culturally Diverse Staff as Team Members to Test the Accuracy of Assessment and Intervention Modalities. In agencies where this is not currently possible, the supervisor needs to seek out external consultants who can provide the expertise needed to assist staff with culturally appropriate assessment and clinical intervention. Diversity practice consultants can be effectively used to develop the knowledge and skills of supervisors who can then transfer new learning to other staff.

In Agencies Where There Is a Critical Mass of Diverse Clients, Service Teams Must Be Put Into Place That Allow for Consistently Scheduled Reviews That Address Cultural Differences in Service Interventions. These teams provide a valuable support mechanism for workers who have not yet developed sufficient comfort with cultural diversity. Over time, teams will become more skilled at developing effective intervention strategies that can be further integrated into the practice repertoire of the practitioner. The service team becomes an important avenue for further “socialization” of clinical staff so that they desire to meet the cultural competence goals of the organization. When supervisors acknowledge the collective and collaborative nature of becoming culturally competent, this helps to minimize supervisees’ feelings of fear and isolation. Multicultural staff’s openness to learning sends a powerful message about the supervisor’s commitment to a shared process in which all members are valued.

In Individual Supervision Sessions, the Supervisor Creates an Environment of Safety in Which the Practitioner Is Able to Express Openly Any Issue, Concern, Fear, or Lack of Expertise Relative to Multicultural Clients. Individual supervision may be the context for exploring deeply held views and stereotypes that, if manifested, become problematic for work with clients. The supervisor can discuss these issues in confidence, using a nonjudgmental approach that focuses on assisting staff members in their efforts to work through issues in a manner that leads toward culturally effective practice. The supervisor needs to know that a culturally competent practitioner is not only knowledgeable about and skilled with culturally diverse clients but that the practitioner also demonstrates an ongoing self-reflective process about his or

her own perceptions and beliefs about racial and ethnic differences. It is the role of the supervisor to engage and assist workers with this work and to be an objective and supportive sounding board as workers explore the relationship between different cultural worldviews and their own belief systems. Most practitioners are unaccustomed to exposing aspects of themselves to supervisors that may be interpreted by others as racist or sexist or homophobic. Nonetheless, if these issues cannot be addressed with the supervisor without fear of negative consequences, the work of culturally competent practice is thwarted. The culturally competent supervisor needs to incorporate this type of supervision within the context of the developmental efforts needed to assist staff in becoming culturally proficient.

CONCLUSION

The human service organizations that are most successful in achieving their mission are those that adopt the key elements of the learning organization. Openness to new knowledge, an awareness of how the external environment affects the organization, and the flexibility to respond to these influences are essential organizational tools. Human services supervision is a specialized practice arena that is uniquely poised to operationalize the elements of the learning organization. Modeling is an effective method for applying supervision knowledge, values, and skills.

Cultural competence is as critical to human services supervision as any of the other core competencies introduced in this book. Cultural competence is a protracted endeavor that must be undertaken at all levels of the human service organization. The supervisor can play a major role in helping upper level managers to understand relevant cultural competence issues and how to achieve the organization’s cultural competence goals. At the same time, the supervisor models culturally competent practice by incorporating the activities heretofore delineated into her or his day-to-day work. Facilitating the development of culturally relevant knowledge and skills for supervisees establishes the context for the work individual practitioners must do to further the goal of cultural competence.

This chapter began with an evolving definition of cultural competence, described critical elements of culturally competent organizations, presented a framework for achieving culturally competent

supervision, and delineated a number of specific strategies that the human services supervisor may use to model culturally competent supervision. The

reader is encouraged to use the case vignettes as an opportunity to further explore practice issues inherent in culturally competent human service.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Barbara Reynolds was hired 3 months ago as Director of Clinical Services at the Patuxent Multi-Service Agency. The agency provides individual, family, and group counseling services. It also has a diversion program for youth, an adult protective services program, and home-based services for the elderly. The agency serves a diverse urban client population: Approximately 40% of the clients are African American, 30% Latino, 25% white, and a very small percentage are recently relocated Vietnamese families. The agency is 25 years old, and although in the beginning it predominantly served an upper income white population, it now serves a predominantly minority client population.

The CEO, Deputy Director, Director of Adult Services, and Director of Community Services are of European American descent. Ms. Reynolds and two of the ten counseling staff members are African American, and one of the counselors is Latino. In a staff meeting to discuss the declining client population at the agency, an African American counselor indicated that she did not believe the agency effectively served their diverse client population. Other counselors agreed and added that the therapeutic approach that they were trained and encouraged to use was largely ineffective in meeting the needs of their minority clients. The counselors felt that their efforts to raise these issues with the upper level managers and former clinical supervisor had been futile. Several of the counseling staff expressed a need for additional training to better understand the culture of their clients, although several others did not feel this was necessary.

1. What are the primary concerns of the supervisor in this agency?
2. What should her response be to the feedback she received in the staff meeting?
3. What strategies are essential to modeling culturally competent practice in this agency?
4. How would you resolve the differences in perception among the staff about the effectiveness of the service provided to multicultural clients?
5. How might the supervisor address these issues with upper level management within the organization?

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