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Making the most of cultural competency planning in your organization

By Reneé Bibby and Garrett A. Holm

Most of us go to work, come home, visit with friends and family members, and feel entirely comfortable in those contexts of our daily lives. We are at home in our own culture, yet how many of us can define exactly what culture is? Culture is not something that is easily counted and, consequently, might seem a daunting challenge to measure, much less improve.

Understanding key elements of group identity might help meet that challenge. In this article, we will provide a workable definition of culture and a framework for cultural competency planning. We will offer a new model that can serve as the foundation for evaluating an organization’s cultural competency and for setting relevant organizational objectives for improvement. Since the model can apply to all settings in an organization, it could be easily aligned to an organization’s unique mission, vision, and purpose.

EMBRACING THE CONCEPT OF PEOPLEHOOD

The success of an organizational model depends heavily upon its ability to effectively define the parameters of the topic itself. This model uses the concept of “peoplehood,” or group identity, to construct the parameters for the topic of cultural competency within organizations. In *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era* (University of Texas Press, 2005), author Tom Holm identifies four elements as the basis of “peoplehood.” Although shared space is not an element identified in Holm’s book, we include it here because it must be considered in understanding cross-cultural exchanges.

Shared History: How did we get to be who we are?

The shared history of a particular group is the unique history of the origin and nature of that group, which might include its political, religious, economic, and social stories. Through written or oral narratives, these stories can explain the reasons behind cultural practices, beliefs, and behaviors, and they can serve to establish the boundaries of culturally appropriate behavior.

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Defining organizational cultural competency

The concept of organizational cultural competency can be defined by the series of phases in Figure 1.

1. Dysfunctional

The organization has no understanding of its own culture, the varied identities and cultures within it, cultures of the person served, and the impact of varied identities and cultures on the larger organizational culture. Typically, the organization lacks a method to evaluate its cultural competency and therefore cannot set a direction for change.

2. Functional

- a. **Motivation:** The organization, through internal or external stimulus, gains a direction or mandate to evaluate the impact of varied cultural structures within the organization.
- b. **Evaluation:** The organization develops or adopts a methodology to assess the impact of varied cultural structures within the organization, implements evaluative processes, and collects data.

3. Competent

- a. **Collaboration:** The organization identifies a diverse group of stakeholders to analyze and interpret the information yielded during the evaluation phase and then sets improvement objectives and benchmarks.
- b. **Education:** Based on the information yielded from the evaluation phase and the objectives set during the collaboration phase, the organization designs, develops, and implements education and training programs to address identified areas of need.
- c. **Re-evaluation:** The organization sets an evaluation cycle that effectively assesses the impact of educational programs relative to meeting the objectives and benchmarks.

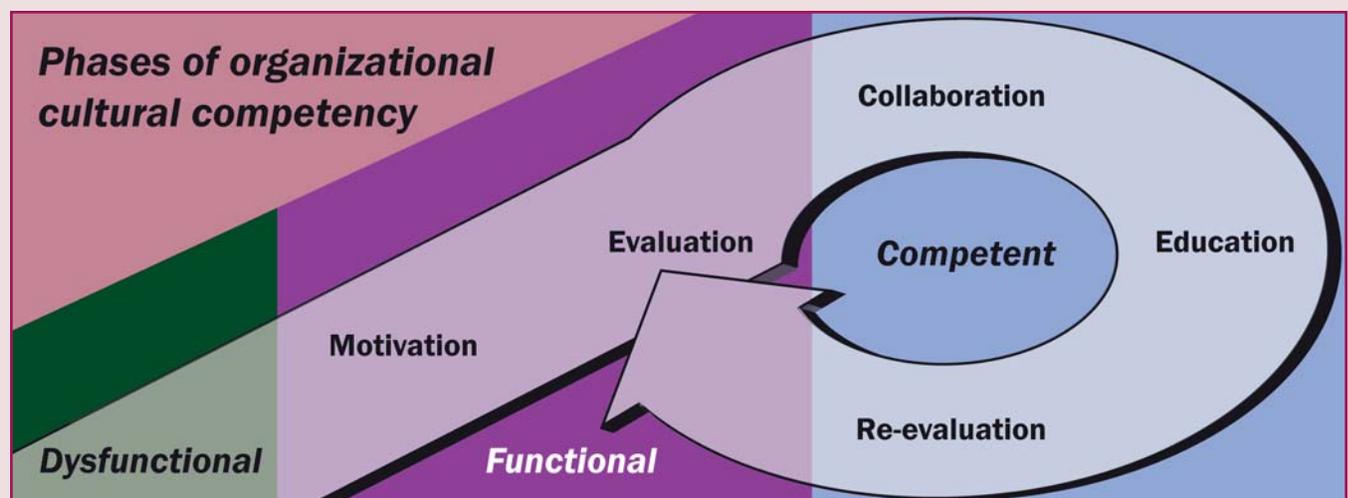


Figure 1.



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Place: Where do we live? How do we survive?

Although often underestimated, the physical environment is a large factor in how cultural groups developed and how they continue to thrive. A rural versus an urban environment will affect the interaction within a cultural group. The opportunities in an industrial/manufacturing versus a service-based economy depend on the environment and become relevant in the way cultures play out. Environmental differences will be reflected as groups harmonize cultural practices with the most efficient ways to interact and survive in their particular environments.

Language is one of the more obvious and easily measured differences among groups. Language is the vehicle that carries culture between members and between generations.

Rituals: How do we spend time?

Rituals can range from religious observances to daily or common occurrences such as rituals centered around the preparation and consumption of food. They are the nonverbal means of reinforcing group membership and delineating group norms.

Language: How do we speak?

Language is one of the more obvious and easily measured differences among groups. Language is the vehicle that carries culture between members and between generations. Practices within the language can reveal what beliefs and assumptions the culture holds. Rules about who is allowed to speak and under what circumstances are also reflections of a culture's beliefs.

Space: How do we share space?

Cultures navigate proximity differently. Members of certain cultures are comfortable sharing small spaces, while members of other cultures are expected to keep a distance. Standing close, touching, or keeping distance are practices that can cause friction when different cultures interact.

These five elements of “peoplehood” are often inextricably linked and not easily divided into discrete categories. However, they are starting points to identify cultural competency goals for your organization.

TAKING WORDS BEYOND PAPER

The elements of culture are meaningful only if they are applied in some evaluative way to your organization. Organizations might use the five elements of group identity to support the formulation of performance objectives and benchmarks relative to organizational cultural competency.

Data such as these might be more qualitative than quantitative, which could frustrate benchmarking but could also illuminate some easily remedied discrepancies between the service delivery and the needs of the populations served. Whether you choose to conduct focus groups, provide feedback forms, or participate in one-on-one discussions, the questions you ask should determine if stakeholders feel that your service

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approach is appropriate relative to the five elements of culture listed above. Within each of the five elements, you might ask:

1. Do our services align with the beliefs and practices of the people we serve? Of the people within our organization?
2. Do the languages we speak, write, and sign within our organization include or exclude stakeholders?
3. Do we understand the unspoken pressures, issues, and cultural group norms that might affect how the person responds to our services?
4. Do we respond to regional differences or rural versus urban environments in which we operate?

Although the responses to these questions do not necessarily facilitate quantitative data measures, they could be used as the foundation for or to supplement such measures.

Organizations that choose to use the five elements of group identity as the basis for all or part of the evaluation to assess the impact of varied identities and cultures within the larger organizational context are well ahead of the curve. Although this type of information is often more difficult to collect and interpret due to its qualitative nature, it provides a truly systemic picture of an organization's cultural competency from the stakeholders' perspectives.

With increasing demands on limited organizational training resources, it is critical to align such training programs and activities with the mission, vision, and purpose of the organization.

The implementation of a model that addresses the concepts of "peoplehood" fosters an environment that embraces the concept of diversity and supports collaborative relationships among the many stakeholders within an organization. ■■

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

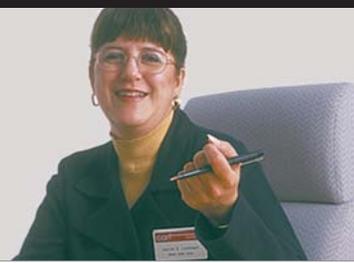
Reneé Bibby has been CARF's marketing and research coordinator for Employment and Community Services since 2004. With a degree in psychology that focused on cross-cultural research, Reneé worked in a refugee resettlement in Kansas City, Missouri, and as a youth employment and education specialist in Tucson.



Garett A. Holm has been CARF's instructional design specialist since 2005. With a M.Ed. from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Garett had extensive experience in the field of education and training before joining CARF, most recently serving as the policy analyst/adviser for the Arizona State Department of Education. His interests include cultural competency, diversity training, and the development of healthy organizational cultures.



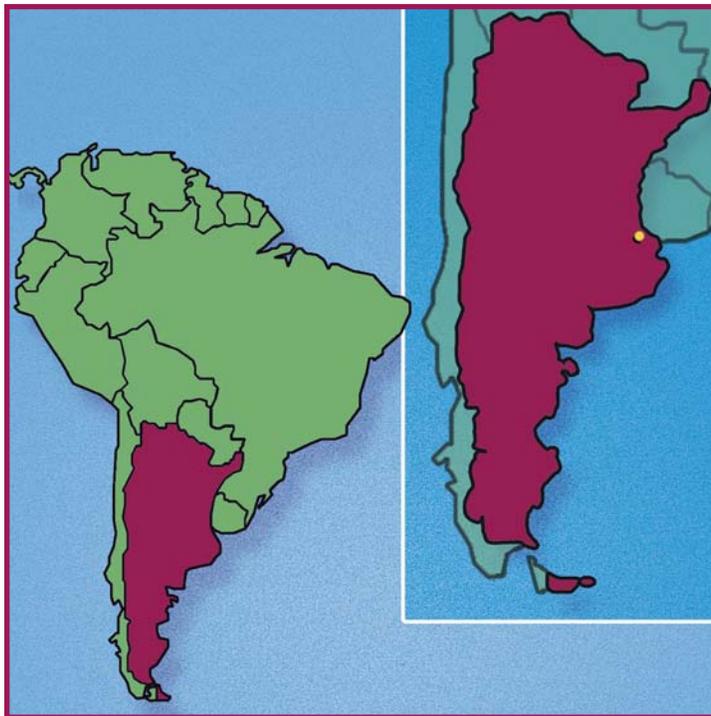
NEWS FROM CARF



FIRST CARF ACCREDITATION IN SOUTH AMERICA AWARDED TO ARGENTINA PROVIDER'S INPATIENT AND OUTPATIENT PROGRAMS

CARF has awarded accreditation to the medical rehabilitation programs at the Instituto de Rehabilitacion y Educacion Terapeutica, the rehabilitation and therapeutic education center of FLENI, in Escobar, Argentina. The center's outpatient interdisciplinary pain program serving adults and its comprehensive integrated inpatient rehabilitation program serving adults, children, and adolescents in a hospital setting earned a three-year accreditation, the highest level available from CARE.

FLENI, or Fundación para la Lucha contra las Enfermedades Neurológicas de la Infancia, is the first organization to earn CARF accreditation in South America. CARF also accredits human services in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.



“Recognition of CARF accreditation is increasing globally,” said Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., president/CEO of CARE. “Although funding and service delivery models may vary from country to country, the value of accreditation transcends borders because the CARF standards center on enhancing the lives of the persons receiving services.”

Observing the benefits of CARF accreditation, Paola Valyi, coordinator of the office of quality at FLENI, said, “The accreditation process has not only changed the way we deliver services, it has also provided us with a broad spectrum of tools that makes the quality improvement process a part of everyday service delivery. The CARF standards help us to identify problem areas and establish plans to deal with them.

Accreditation has taught our rehabilitation center the value of gathering data, planning, and using both of these to focus on areas where we should consider improvements to benefit both patients and staff.”

FLENI is a nonprofit organization providing preventive medicine, diagnostics, neurological and medical healthcare services, and research activities for children, adolescents, and adults. FLENI's rehabilitation and therapeutic education center was opened in 2001 to serve patients with acquired brain injury, stroke and spinal cord, orthopedic, cardiovascular, and respiratory diseases. The center is located in the city of Escobar, 52.5 kilometers north of Buenos Aires. ❏

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CARF LAUNCHES USPEQ® TO GATHER CONSUMER FEEDBACK ABOUT HUMAN SERVICE PROVIDERS

On April 3, 2006, CARF introduced uSPEQ (pronounced *You Speak*), a confidential, anonymous, and scientifically tested consumer reporting system.

uSPEQ gathers consumer opinions on experiences and satisfaction with programs, services, and providers via an online or paper questionnaire. This consumer survey can be used by any health, human service, employment, aging services, or residential provider for quality improvement, outcomes management, performance measurement, strategic planning, and marketing. uSPEQ's crosscutting nature makes it valid in any setting or program. CARF accreditation is not necessary.

“uSPEQ raises a powerful voice for consumers and provides valuable information to providers serving them,” said Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., CARF president/CEO. “uSPEQ provides an opportunity for consumers to voice their satisfaction and experiences as well as their needs for advocacy. In turn, uSPEQ presents an opportunity for providers to improve their services by hearing from the persons they serve. The reporting system also provides data for future benchmarking and comparative analysis of the consumer experience.”

uSPEQ grew out of a decade of CARF's extensive work on performance indicators. In developing uSPEQ, CARF was guided by feedback from providers, service payers, public agency representatives, researchers, and persons served by human service providers. The uSPEQ data set covers consumer experiences with service responsiveness, informed choice, respect, participation, and overall value.

Pilot survey data from 14 diverse provider organizations were analyzed to assess the survey instrument's psychometric properties. Correlational analysis, exploratory factor analysis, item response theory (Rasch modeling), and reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), among other statistical procedures, were used to assess uSPEQ's validity and reliability, refine the instrument item set, and ensure representation of the important constructs uSPEQ measures.

Originally named the Uniform Service Participant Experience Questionnaire, the questionnaire is only one part of the uSPEQ system. A basic subscription also includes customization, training, consultation, and periodic reports. Customization allows tailoring of uSPEQ services to subscribers' unique needs. Training and consultation provide support, and periodic reports provide statistical summaries of consumer feedback. Additional services, such as advanced technical consultation and reporting, are also available.

For more information or to subscribe, call uSPEQ toll free at 888.877.3788 voice/TTY, write to info@uspeq.org, or visit the uSPEQ web site at www.uspeq.org. ■■



BUILDING BRIDGES AWARDS NAMES CARF EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

CARF was honored as Employer of the Year at the First Annual Building Bridges Awards ceremonies and luncheon February 21 at the Viscount Suite Hotel. Hosted by LINKAGES, the award is given to a Tucson-area employer for progressive practices in employing persons with disabilities.

CARF was saluted for actively recruiting persons with disabilities for staff positions, including collaborating with job developers from community agencies to match CARF's needs with the skills of persons with disabilities. CARF was also commended for conducting ongoing programs to eliminate physical and attitudinal barriers in its offices, including annual disability education for staff members and other activities to raise disability awareness. The organization continually invests in technology to ensure that its web site, publications, and other materials are accessible and fairly represent individuals with disabilities as both caregivers and persons served. In addition, CARF contracts with companies that employ persons with disabilities and makes community contributions to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities.

Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., CARF president/CEO, said, "Persons with disabilities have proven to be vital, productive, and dedicated workers. We at CARF have already realized benefits from hiring persons with disabilities and supporting diversity awareness in our workforce, yet we must remain vigilant about accessing the many job skills available in the disability community."

Boon added, "For CARF, our commitment to diversity in the workplace and our partnering with the disability community are not just sound business practices; as a community-focused organization, these are our moral obligations."

LINKAGES connects service providers in the Tucson business community with qualified persons with disabilities who want to work. The nonprofit organization was developed by philanthropist and business leader Jim Click, Jr. ■■

CARF INTERNATIONAL ENTERS TWO-TIME ACHIEVEMENT WINNERS' CIRCLE IN ANNUAL WORKPLACE EXCELLENCE AWARDS

As a winner in the Workplace Excellence Awards of Greater Tucson for two consecutive years, CARF International received the prestigious Two-Time Achievement Winners' Circle award February 15 for its contributions to a progressive workplace.

In 2005, CARF won the Best Practice award in the Workplace Excellence Awards, which is presented to a local company that best demonstrates how its organizational culture and operational processes contribute to its ability to provide excellent services/products and overall quality to customers. In 2004, CARF was the Grand Prize winner for its exemplary human resource practices in the Small Business category of companies with 100 or fewer full-time employees.

The annual Workplace Excellence Awards of Greater Tucson is presented by the Society for Human Resource Management of Greater Tucson, the Arizona Society for Human Resource Management State Council, and Tucson's Newspapers. ■■

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MAR./APR. 2006

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Al Whiteburst, EDITOR

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DI SHEN NAMED CARF'S CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER

Di Shen, Ph.D., has accepted a position as CARF's chief research officer. In this position, Shen oversees the accrediting body's Research and Quality Improvement unit and its performance indicator work. He also spearheads CARF's internal performance improvement systems and research data infrastructure.

In announcing the appointment, Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., CARF president/CEO, said, "Di's demonstrated expertise and his understanding of the fields that CARF serve will enable him to position CARF accreditation products and services to improve provider performance, which ultimately benefits the recipients of accredited services."

From 1997 to 2005, Shen worked as a senior researcher for CARE. Most recently, he served as the executive director of Research and Planning for Pima Community College in Tucson.



Shen has taught courses in psychological measurements and statistics, research methods, and cognitive psychology at the University of Arizona. He has also published in areas of psycholinguistics, psychological measurement, linguistics, applied linguistics, and teaching methodology.

Before coming to the United States, Shen was a faculty member at Yangzhou University in China. ■■

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