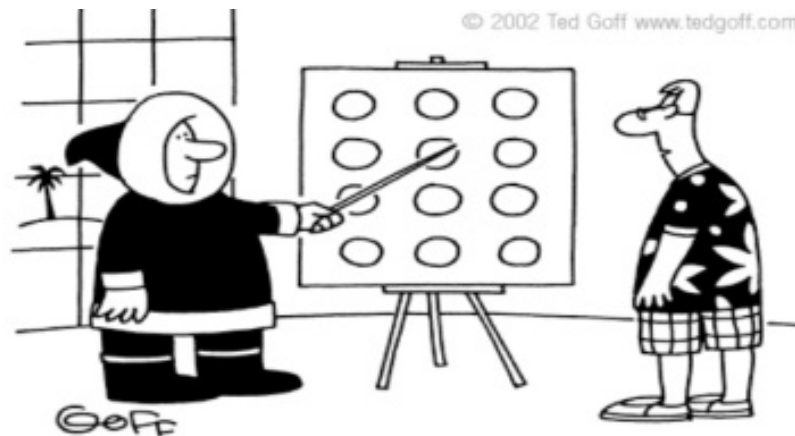


Examining Cultural Competency in the Nonprofit Organization

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"Snowballs? I thought we were discussing coconuts."

The value of cultural competency in the nonprofit sector is not supported by robust research and analysis on the topic. The lack of evidence around the way high-performing organizations remove cultural barriers stems largely from a lack of effort to see culture as a serious and measurable factor in service delivery. Research suggests however, that cultural identity is shaping the way people participate in and engage with their community and the organizations that shape them.

To be truly responsive to the needs of a changing population, nonprofit organizations need to focus on addressing cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, and

gaps in multicultural representation in organizational leadership and program design.

Cultural Incapacity

Who needs our help? How do we know for sure? Cultural incapacity refers to a nonprofit or individual's lack of capacity to help minority clients or communities due to biases and a paternal attitude toward cultural behaviors and values that are not characteristic of the mainstream.

To examine cultural incapacity, organizations must explore the biases that existed in identifying who is most in need of their services, and what if any cultural barriers exist in accessing those services. That means that the culturally competent organization uses data to assess the outcomes and evaluation methods to ensure that not only is program design culturally relevant and appropriate, but that program outreach and execution are as well.

Organizations can work toward cultural proficiency by making cultural competency a priority in staff training and onboarding, and staying aware of changes in the political and social environment that could have an impact on cultural values and behaviors among their target population.

Cultural Blindness

Are our interventions effective? For whom? Cultural blindness can occur when nonprofit organizations and

fundere give priority to approaches and practices used by the dominant culture and ignore approaches that are less mainstream. As fundere move to include more evidence-based requirements in program delivery it is important still to consider those approaches that have not yet received mainstream support or research funding to be considered evidence-based. For many organizations, an evidence-informed approach allows for flexibility in program design and a customizable approach to service delivery that recognizes and honors cultural differences.

Cultural Diversity is Not Cultural Competency

Organizations sometimes make the mistake of confusing cultural diversity and cultural competency. Cultural diversity is the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups in an organization but does not equate to competency in serving groups. To achieve cultural competency and ultimately cultural proficiency, organizations must have a set of principles, beliefs, and attitudes about cultural differences and experiences and apply those principles, beliefs and attitudes to operations as policy. The culturally competent nonprofit organization is culturally aware and deliberate in its inclusiveness in hiring, training, day-to-day operations, program outreach, design, and delivery and regularly assesses its responsiveness to the cultural needs of its staff and the people it serves.

Inclusive Leadership

BoardSource released its 2017 survey of 1,378 nonprofit executives and 381 board chairs.

- 65 percent of Executives and 41 percent of board chairs report that they are dissatisfied with their board's racial and ethnic diversity
- 79 percent of EDs/CEOs say that expanding racial and ethnic diversity is important or very important to advancing mission.

While the intentions sound good, we need to look at the historic context. According to BoardSource studies, boards were 86 percent white in 1994, 91 percent white in 2004, 86 percent white in 2007, 84 percent white in 2010, and 82 percent white in 2012, 89 percent white in 2015, and 84 percent white in 2016.

Back to the 2017 study:

- 27 percent of all orgs that responded have zero people of color on their board.
- Only 24 percent of executives and 25 percent of board chairs say demographics are a high priority for board recruitment.
- Only 21 percent of executives and 23 percent of chairs report "change or strengthen recruitment practices," when asked what they needed to do to improve their boards.

- About 25 percent of respondents indicate that they are somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with their board's racial or ethnic diversity while simultaneously indicating that demographics is not a high priority in board recruitment.

Even well-meaning organizations struggle with putting diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency into practice. What stifles their progress is not their attitude about inclusion, but the systems they have in place that impede inclusion. For example, vehicle requirements for job applicants or financial requirements for board participation could prove to be barriers for low income individuals residing in the inner city. A requirement that job applicants must have "X" years managerial experience in a sector where less than five percent of people of color have been granted leadership positions means that many people of color will be ineligible for this position even if they have a track record of high performance in direct service positions. Inclusive leadership comes from a commitment to nurturing leadership skills and competency in diverse populations.

The culturally competent nonprofit organization engages in strategic human resources that looks at the hard skills needed to perform the job well, but also at the soft skills and cultural competencies that ensure that program participants receive services where they feel most comfortable and in a way that is responsive and reflective of their needs.

Steps to Building a Culturally Competent Organization

1. Cultural Humility -- Confronting your bias
2. Cultural curiosity -- Activating your cultural education
3. Collecting Data -- Getting all the facts
(internal/external, objective/subjective)
4. Program Outreach Design Implementation --
Knowing who to serve, how to find them, and giving them what they need
5. Program Measurement Considerations -- Learning how to analyze data with cultural considerations
6. Workforce Diversity and Competency -- Diversity without competency is not enough
7. Cost -- Part of a commitment to cultural competency is allocating resource to building cultural capacity