

Cultural Competence and Public Management

Paris, 23/24/26/27 July 2012
16 contact hours / 2 ECTS credits

The future for public organizations is one composed of a multicultural and diverse work force (Rice & White, 2005, Rice, 2007). Immigration and high birthrates of minorities are changing the demographic landscape and are increasing the demand for culturally competent public managers (Johnson & Borrego, 2009; Bailey, 2005). Johnson and Rivera (2007) also see a need for diversity competencies in human resource management (HRM). Vidu (2004) sees increasing diversity at all levels of government and contractors with little effort given to developing diversity competence for managers and employees. Organizations that do not have adequate diversity initiatives are likely to experience problems with employee relations, employee attitudes, increased employee turnover, and lower employee retention (Rice & Arekere, 2005). Further, the absence of cultural competencies can create various degrees of “racialized workplaces,” which can generate feelings of anger, depression, and demoralization (McClelland, 2006).

The initial concern was the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities into organizations. Dolan and Rosenbloom (2003), see many scholars concerned with the extent to which women and racial minorities were integrated into the public bureaucracies. Frederickson (2005) in discussing the state of social equity in American public administration sees the early development of social equity as focused on race and gender in employment, democratic representation, and service delivery. He also describes multiculturalism and diversity as suggesting a broader definition of social equity. Diversity has many aspects such as race, differences in ethnic norms and behavior, gender identity, sexual orientation, and technology and that diversity brings its own challenges (White & Rice, 2005; Johnson, Reyes & Smith, 2009). Being culturally competent assumes an understanding and respect of different ethnic and cultural systems (Bush 2000). Sue (2006) sees cultural competence as being the knowledge and skills of a particular culture and describes the conceptual framework of Sue, Ivey, and Petersen (1996) which included: cultural awareness and beliefs, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. The Tilford Group (2004) at Kansas State University developed a model of diversity competencies to prepare students to live and work in a diverse world.

Most of the research literature on cultural competence is on delivering services to minority and immigrant communities, (Rouson, Applegate, Asakura, Moss, St. Onge, Vergara-Lobo, 2009, Dana & Allen , 2008; Reimann, Talavera, Salmon, Nunez, Velasquez, 2004; Assemi, Mutha, & Hudmon, 2007; Carpenter-Song, Schwallie, Longhofer, 2007; Lecca, 1998; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997). The National Association of Social Workers has developed standards for cultural competence in social work practice (2001). The Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development contains the National Center for Cultural Competence, which has conceptual frameworks, models, guiding values, and principles for cultural competence.

In the business community, cultural competence is also framed as cultural intelligence and is associated with international business (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). The impetus for developing cultural competence or cultural intelligence in international business was the failure of U.S. expatriates working overseas and headquarter managers not understanding the challenges of working with other cultures (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006, Thomas & Inkson, 2004; Farley & Ang, 2003). These are the same underlying dynamics as those in the public sector, which are effectively working with people of other cultures. They see globalization as increasing international business opportunities and collaborations. The definitions are similar to those in public administration (Cross et al. 1980, Tan & Chua, 2003; Hofstede, 2001). Black and Mendenhall (1990) also found positive correlations for performance and cross-cultural training. Johnson et al. also found broad coverage in the literature on workplace diversity in the U.S. that they see as being triggered by U.S. federal regulations for delivering public health and educational services to minority communities. This literature broadly defines cultural competence as being the respect for and understanding of other cultures as well as other diversity factors similar to definitions of cultural competence in public administration.

In the U.S. race and ethnicity are classified in broad categories. African Americans who include people who have been in the U.S. for many years and recent immigrants from many different countries in Africa. Asian and Pacific Islanders, come from countries as diverse as China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, India, and many other countries. Hispanics or Latinos/as, who can be of any race, have origins in countries from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Whites also come from many different countries. The broad classifications mask the many different countries each with its own and different culture that are included within each broad classification. This issue is further complicated when gender, social class, and sexual orientation are included as part of cultural competence. Can we really understand all cultures and diversity in contemporary public organizations or do we need to develop cultural competencies that do not require an in-depth knowledge of each culture and diversity?

COURSE STRUCTURE

The class will exam the value of cultural competence for all managers with special attention given to mangers that manage public agencies in European and Asian countries. The course will invite critical thinking around the topic of cultural competence and organizational diversity. Additionally, there will be group participation, readings and lectures. Students completing the course will have a general understanding of how important it is for all managers to be culturally competent in the 21st century regardless of their specific field of study.

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