

Cultural Competence 101: Introduction and Discussion with Equity Officers of Canadian Bar Societies

Prepared by:

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Robert's Journey

- An African Nova Scotian who grew up in poverty
- Encountered the literature regarding socio-cultural models for understanding addiction 1988
- Co-Authored an Africentric Substance Abuse Prevention programme in 1993
- Served as Race Relations Coordinator of the Dartmouth District School System in 1994
- Served on the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee 2002 – 2006
- Served on Racial Equity Committee since . . . ??? . . .
- Authored monograph Judicial Appointments: Some Considerations for Applicants of African Descent
- Been a prolific cultural competence educator
- And here we are

Our Session Today

- Introduce the concept of Cultural Competence
- Explore a rationale for it
- Explore the structural conflict experienced by institutional Equity workers
- Engage in significant discussion and Q&A

Cultural Competence 101

- The following is a version of what I present when delivering cultural competence training to lawyers
- I will give you the whirlwind tour through these slides as my goal is to expose you to the material more than to actually deliver this presentation

Draw a “circle of safety”

- Agree to make this a “culturally safe” space:
 - Allow each other space to ask sincere questions without the fear of being judged and accused
 - Share from experience, but do not request that others do so
 - Ask about words or language you may not understand rather than avoid topics that may be sensitive
- What can we do to ensure that we conduct the day in a way that ensures your safety?

Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- As Racialized and Aboriginal Canadians gain increasing space in society, lawyers will need skill to represent competently their clients' interests in an increasing diversity of ways:

(Voyvodic's example of representing survivors of residential schools, working with immigrants and refugees and racialized clients in cases of discrimination and harassment)

Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- Principles of cultural competence are being recognized legally as foundational knowledge and reasoning that persons bring to the project of Justice seeking.

Consider :

The reasonable person is cognizant of the racial dynamics in the local community, and, as a member of the Canadian community, is supportive of the principles of equality (R.v.S. (R.D.), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 484-1997-09-26, Supreme Court of Canada – Federal: Reasonable apprehension of bias – dealing with non-white groups – impartiality – evidence – credibility cited by 67 cases).

Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- Cultural Competence has begun to be “read into” Canadian standards of competence for lawyers (Voyvodic)

Cultural Competence: Definition

- Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four essential capacities:
 - A. We must understand our own cultural positions and how they differ from and are similar to others
 - B. We must understand the social and cultural reality in which we live and work and in which our clients live and work
 - C. We must cultivate appropriate attitudes towards cultural difference
 - D. We must be able to generate and interpret a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal responses
 - E. We must understand structural oppression and demonstrate awareness and commitment to social justice**

Other Sectors Get It: Business

Tracking the CIBC Online Banking Home Page

A Cultural Competence Project by

Robert S. Wright

March, 2012 – Present

Other Sectors Get It: Education

- Black Learners Advisory Report: Redressing Inequity – Empowering Black Learners
- The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history. . . . This policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country
- Systemic discrimination in education has been acknowledged

Other Sectors Get It: Health

- Since the Lalonde report in 1994, social determinants have opened the gate to a broader understanding of socio-cultural foundations of health
- HMO's required to demonstrate cultural competence in order to qualify for state contracts
- NS Cultural Competence Guidelines in primary health care

A) Nichols' Model for Understanding Cultural Difference

Philosophical Perspective on Cultural Difference. Edwin Nichols (cf. work of Jung)

Different world cultures developed out of differing physical environments.

These world views have differing constructs:

- Axiology (values)
- Epistemology (way of knowing)
- Logic (principles of reason)
- Process (practice of reason)

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

DEVELOPED BY EDWIN J. NICHOLS, PH.D.

ETHNIC GROUPS ETHNIC WORLDVIEW	AXIOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY			LOGIC	PROCESS
		APPLIED	PEDAGOGY	METHODOLOGY		
EUROPEAN EURO-AMERICAN	Member-Object The highest value lies in the object or the acquisition of the object	One knows through Counting and Measuring	Parts to Whole	Linear and Sequential <i>-Assembly line-</i>	Dichotomous <i>Either/Or</i> <i>-Newtonian theory-</i>	All sets are repeatable and reproducible <i>-Technology-</i>
AFRICAN AFRICAN AMERICAN LATINO/A ARAB	Member-Member The highest value lies in the relationships between persons	One knows through Symbolic Imagery and Rhythm (function) <i>-Gladwell <u>Blink</u>-</i>	Whole Holistic Thinking <i>-The BIG picture-</i>	Critical Path analysis <i>-Cut to the chase-</i>	Diunital <i>Union of opposites</i> Difrasismo <i>-Aztec thought-</i> The In Between <i>Ibn 'Arabi</i> <i>-Quantum theory-</i>	All sets are interrelated through human and spiritual networks <i>-Black church-</i>
ASIAN ASIAN AMERICAN POLYNESIAN	Member-Group The highest value lies in the cohesiveness of the group	One knows through Transcendental Striving <i>-Tree the forest-</i>	Whole and parts are seen simultaneously <i>-To read a Chinese word-</i>	Cyclical and Repetitive <i>-Stroke order in writing a Chinese word-</i>	Nyaya <i>-The objective world is conceived independent of thought and mind-</i> <i>-Chaos theory-</i>	All sets are independently interrelated in the harmony of the universe <i>-Keiretsu-</i>
NATIVE AMERICAN	Member-Great Spirit The highest value lies in oneness with the Great Spirit	One knows through Reflection and Spiritual Receptivity <i>-Purification rites-</i>	Whole is seen in cyclic movement <i>-Seasons-</i> <i>-Medicine Wheel-</i>	Environmentally experiential reflection <i>-Rites of Passage-</i>	Great Mystery <i>-A set of 4 and a set of 3 form the whole-</i> <i>-Super string theory-</i>	All sets are interrelated through the elements, plant, animal, and spiritual networks <i>-White Buffalo-</i>

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Nichol's Model is consistent with a growing understanding and articulation of Aboriginal Traditional Ecological Knowledge: an Ancient and yet ever evolving body of knowledge, practice and belief which concerns itself with the inter relationship of all living things with and within their environment.

Africentricity

There is also a growing global and local understanding of the fundamental elements of African thought, culture and philosophy. Somewhat controversial, certainly not standardized, nevertheless its growing legitimacy has been established. Its hallmark is the assertion of a worldview that places all people of African descent at its centre, asserts a common culture, philosophy and history and critiques and perhaps even rewrites global history from this perspective

This does not suggest pigeon-holing

Just because a person is identifiably a member of a particular ethno-cultural, racial or aboriginal group does not mean they will ascribe to a pre-set notion of that groups culture.

The model does give us some understanding of how people can differ in themes related to values, worldview, etc.

Bottom Line

People are different and
we can not treat different
peoples as if we were all
the same

B) Social, Cultural and Historical Context

North American Diversity is fraught with complicated and tragic history. In addition to understanding cultural difference we need to understand historical location of peoples, historical oppressions

- **Enslavement of Africans, Genocide of First Nations, Global strife resulting in trans-global immigration, historical and institutionalized homophobia and patriarchy**

A local knowledge of how our racist and discriminatory history is a living legacy is necessary: Africville, Cornwallis, homophobia, poverty, rape culture

(Aylward talks of the need for this knowledge to aid in our ability to “spot issues”)

C) Appropriate Attitudes

Cultural competence requires that practitioners actually *value* diversity, not just tolerate it. In a nation that acknowledges multiple founding peoples, that was built up on the foundation of ethnic/immigrant labour and whose future depends on immigration any other attitude should reasonably be seen as unacceptable.

D) Communicating Across Cultures

Cross cultural communication is a complex study in cultural hermeneutics. In sociology: the context of a person's world view is necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of behaviour and rhetoric.

Before meaningless, unnatural, non-human or immature behaviour and corresponding values are attributed to people of another culture, it is better to begin by doubting the adequacy of one's own judgment and knowledge.

- **Elmar Holenstein**

E) Social Justice Intervention

- Anti-oppressive practice challenges us to see the structural issues affecting clients
- Requires affirmation of and participation in movements that highlight and address structural issues
 - Solidarity Halifax
 - Canada Without Poverty
 - Ujamaa
 - Occupy movement

Cultural Competence: How?

- Pre service training/clinical Law programmes
- Conduct organizational assessment of Cultural Competence
- Develop organizational plan to increase Cultural Competence
- Employ and support culturally competent practitioners as agents of change.
- Make available systematic coaching/consulting
- Provide and support continuing education in Cultural Competence

Questions

- How do persons who differ from you and experience complexity assess within first meeting you that you can understand them?
- What social justice initiatives are underway in your area that would be natural partners for you or your agency?
- When would you be aware that location of your client is creating a barrier which needs focussed attention to resolve?
- How and when would you raise the issue?

End of CC 101

- Now I'd like to share some thoughts on keeping sane in this work

Keeping Sane as an African Canadian Working in White Institutions: Tips for Surviving in Hostile Environments

Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW

Health and Wellness Panel

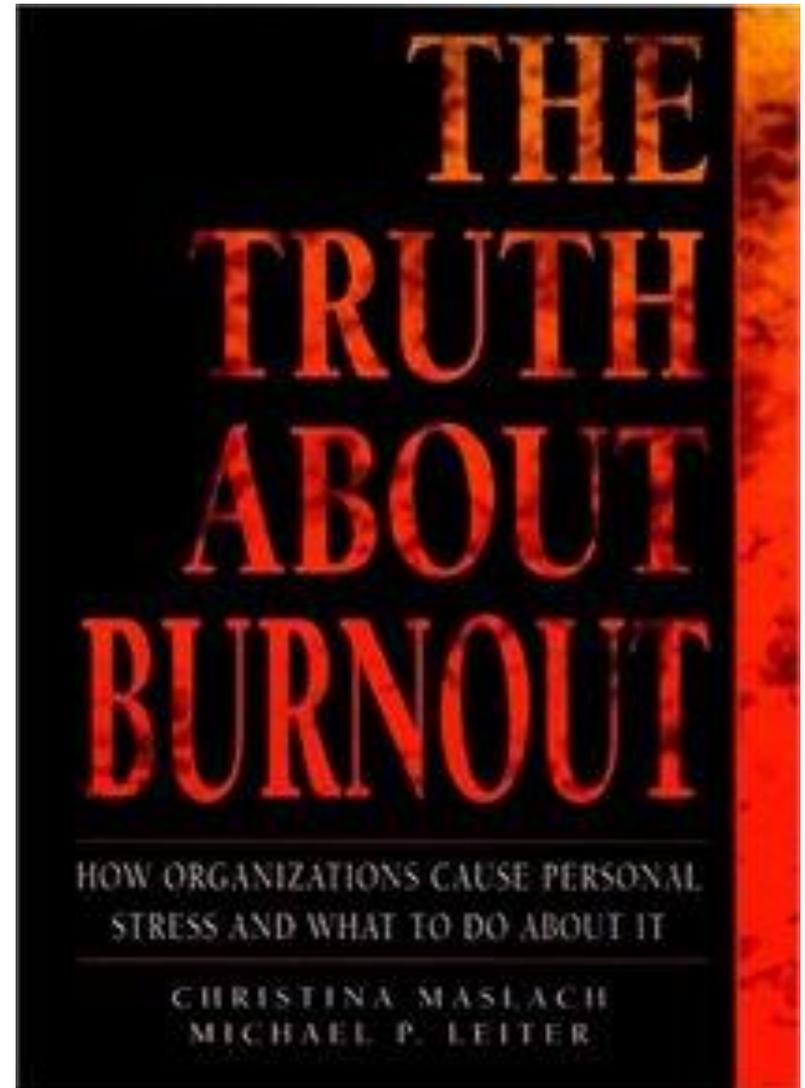
Stronger Together: BLSAC's 21st National Conference

Windsor, Ontario February 16 - 19 2012

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The Truth About Burnout

- Maslach and Leiter in their 1997 text make a convincing argument that burnout is not a function of personal attributes of the sufferer, but rather a function of workplace dysfunction.



Burnout and other conditions

- Burnout is characterized by fatigue and diminished interest in work and life in general
- The work place can also be the source of other mental health conditions caused by extended exposures to stressful environments, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder

Beyond Dysfunctional

- A hostile work environment is beyond dysfunctional. It exists when:
 - Discriminatory behaviour against a protected class exists in the environment
 - The behaviour constitutes a persistent pattern
 - The behaviour must be severe enough to disrupt the work of the targeted employee(s)
 - It is expected that the behaviour will continue if uninterrupted.

Hostile Environment: Another Consideration

- A hostile environment may also be created structurally when a position exists within an institution that has an antagonistic role within the organization. Consider:
 - A quality control officer working in a mine
 - An SEC officer working within a security firm
 - An officer in an institution responsible for investigating claims of harassment or discrimination
 - **An Equity Officer in an historically exclusive institution**

Are Legal Environments Hostile?

- The Marshall Inquiry established that “structural and systemic” racism is at work within the criminal justice system
- It follows then that Aboriginal persons and those of African descent within the legal profession are, by their very presence, change agents within a racist system and are in environments that are structurally hostile to them
- What does that mean?

The Meaning of it All

- Being a Black law student and, later, being a black lawyer is a crazy making proposition!
- **Similarly, being an Equity Officer is also a crazy making proposition!**

How Do You Stay Sane in a Hostile Environment?

- I have developed a 6 point plan for my personal sanity preservation (you can be the judge of my success):

Identity

Competence/Excellence

Analysis

Independence

Process

Action

Identity

Develop and maintain a strong sense of Identity.

- Dysfunctional and hostile environments erode one's sense of self on all levels. You begin to hate what you thought you loved and question your perspective on work and life.
- A strong professional, **ethical**, and racial identity must be gained and maintained as a tonic against this effect.

Competence/Excellence

Work to be Competent

- Competitive academic and workplace environments constantly undermine ones sense of confidence and ability.
- One must have a strong, positive sense of one's abilities to survive such settings.
- To do this you actually have to be competent. I actually argue for excellence.

(Gardner and the necessity of task competence)

Analysis

Work within a theoretical analysis of the larger, structural issues - depersonalize conflict

- If Maslach and Leiter are right, much of the craziness you will encounter at work and school is a result of the dysfunction of the institution.
- Racism is real and is almost certainly at work in the difficulties you are experiencing – understand its complexities.
- Own your piece. But understand the context.

Independence

It is critical to live with a strong sense of independence. Feeling trapped undermines your wellness.

- Keep your professional options open. Keep debt to a minimum. Don't become a slave to any particular pay check.

Process

Staying sane and healthy is a work in progress.

Everybody needs help with this.

- Maintain a group of like minded colleagues who “get it” with whom you can share and vent.
- Sometimes counselling is helpful. As a student (and later as an employee) you have access to a health care plan . . . Use it!

Action

Remain connected to those activities and engagements that support and preserve your identity, even when those activities are antagonistic to the work or learning environment.

- One tonic against the onset of PTSD is active engagement with the identified “threat”. The establishment of MADD is an example of people turning their victimization into activism.

Conclusion

- Those are the six points. I hope that this brief introduction to the topic adds to our conversation today.

End

Keeping Sane

Q & A

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