



# DSP Roles in Culturally Competent Organizations

After completing this lesson you will be able to:

- 🌐 Describe the importance of cultural competence in organizations.
- 🌐 Describe how the five elements of cultural competence apply to organizations.
- 🌐 Describe key components of effective assessments of cultural competence within organizations.
- 🌐 Place examples of organizational or employer practice and policy on the cultural competence continuum.
- 🌐 Identify DSP roles in increasing cultural competence at the organization in which you work.





## The Importance of Cultural Competence in Organizations

Having culturally competent direct support professionals is important. The DSP is the person who spends time on a daily basis with people who receive support services. If DSPs cannot work well with others, organizations cannot succeed. It is important, too, that organizations as a whole become culturally competent.

Organizations need to be culturally competent, otherwise:

- 🌐 They will not attract and support diverse employees.
- 🌐 They will not attract and support diverse persons who need or direct their own supports.
- 🌐 They will lose trust with diverse persons who need or direct their own supports
- 🌐 They may lose their most capable employees.

In many ways the cultural journey that an organization takes is like the one that each employee takes. Later you will look at how the five elements of cultural competence apply to organizations. However, there are some differences between organizations and individuals. Organizations must develop systems to make sure that competence is achieved. They must develop systems that help them retain what they have learned.

Organizations need to take an orderly approach to change. They must look carefully at:

- 🌐 Environments
- 🌐 Policies
- 🌐 Procedures
- 🌐 Systems
- 🌐 Practices

When the focus on developing cultural competence is only on the individual Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and not the organization as a whole, there can be problems. At times people will receive supports that meet their needs. At other times they may be offended or confused by a variety of interactions.

If this ineffective approach continues, there may be a serious loss of trust. People may look for other support organizations or seek other DSPs. They may avoid sharing important information with the direct support professionals. At this point, even the most culturally competent DSP may find strong barriers in place.

## Applying the Five Elements to Organizations

### *The Five Elements of Cultural Competence-A Review*

The following five abilities are considered necessary to achieving cultural competence.

1. Valuing diversity.
2. Being able to assess the culture of the organization or family employer.
3. Being aware how culture may be influencing situations.
4. Being able to learn about other cultures. Finding ways to share and build on that knowledge.
5. Being able to change systems to meet the needs of other cultures.

As with individuals, organizations cannot even start the journey to cultural competence without first valuing diversity. Take some time now to reflect on how valuing diversity may be demonstrated in an organization. Review the questions on this page and write your responses.

1) How can an organization demonstrate that it values diversity? (Think about environments, systems, policies, practices, procedures, attitudes, language, etc..)

2) Do you think your organization sends a message to employees and people being supported that diversity is valued? Why, or why not? What things do they do well? What things could be improved?

### *Valuing Diversity*

Does your organization value diversity? What ways did you identify for an organization to demonstrate a value of diversity? On this page are some examples of ways in which organizations can demonstrate their diverse views and values. Review the ideas listed on this page.



These are some of the ways that an organization can demonstrate how they value diversity:

- 🌐 Artwork in corporate space or agency-owned home represents multiple cultures and views.
- 🌐 Food prepared for groups is appealing to people with different preferences.
- 🌐 Statements of the value of diversity appear in policies and a mission statement.
- 🌐 Dress codes allow for cultural dress.
- 🌐 Holidays and time off match the needs of individuals and employees.
- 🌐 The living space reflects the needs of people being supported.
- 🌐 Scheduling of meetings meets needs of people being supported.
- 🌐 Resources are developed in native languages.
- 🌐 Competent translators are available.
- 🌐 Staff is educated in cross-cultural communication.

What others did you think of?

### *Cultural Inattention*

Cultural Inattention is the point on the continuum where people are aware of the visible differences between cultures. People and organizations/employers at this level accept diversity. They may enjoy learning about new foods and customs. However; they do not understand that culture runs deeper. They believe that some values apply to everyone in the same way. When problems occur, they are not likely to understand that culture may be the cause or part of the cause. In direct support, some of the most likely problems include perspectives of time; methods of respectful communication; and beliefs about family and disability.

Cultural Inattention is a natural step in the development of cultural competence. But it is an easy place to get stalled. Organizations and employers that have moved from cultural incapacity may feel proud of their accomplishments to date. However; employees may find that it is difficult to work with each other. They may begin to feel some resentment. When an employee complains about problems, organizations and employers may dismiss them as people who lack understanding. They may think they are bigots. If this is left unchecked, relationships can quickly fall apart. Employees may begin to believe that people of certain cultures are more difficult or lack certain values.



## Basic Cultural Competence

Organizations may find the progress from cultural inattention to basic cultural competence to be challenging. It requires a lot of awareness on the part of each employee. It also requires that the organization have many types of systems in place.

Achieving basic cultural competence in an organization can be difficult. To do so, the organization must ensure that:

- 🌐 Each employee has an awareness of his or her own culture.
- 🌐 Each employee has an awareness of the culture of the organization or family employer.
- 🌐 Each employee has the ability to recognize different cultures. They must be able to ask the right questions. They must ask them in the right way. They must seek more information as needed.
- 🌐 Each employee can balance the needs of the individual with the goals of the organization.

The organization must support employees to do these things. They must have good training for employees. They must be sure that policies and mission statements provide a vision for cultural competence. They must provide practical information regarding how to achieve the goals of cultural competence. They must provide resources such as access to cultural guides.

## Key Components of Organizational Assessment

In order to create a consistent approach to culturally competent services, it is important for an organization to actively assess its level of cultural competence. Assessment is used as a way to learn more about things that are going well. Assessments can also show what areas need improvement. Organizations that want to get better at cultural competence need to take part in assessment. On this page some important aspects of assessments are listed. Organizations should include these components in assessment.

Assessments take time to complete. Resources have to be found to incorporate the completion of assessments as a high priority.

Effective assessment completion...

- 🌐 Is ongoing and uses organized approaches.
- 🌐 Gathers information from families and consumers.
- 🌐 Gathers information from all types of employees.
- 🌐 Gathers information from community members and cultural guides.
- 🌐 Is completed in a positive, supportive atmosphere.
- 🌐 Leads to specific action steps and goals.
- 🌐 Is used as a way to demonstrate growth.



Assessment is not something that is done once and then finished. The work will take ongoing commitment. It is important to be realistic about the journey to cultural competence. Learning and growing in this area must touch every part of the organization. Resources need to be available to continue this work.

To be successful, the central importance of cultural competence needs to be clear at all levels of an organization. For instance, the mission and vision should describe the commitment to cultural competence. If not, the organization may not have enough commitment and desire to complete this journey. Each person who works for the organization needs to describe how being culturally competent is part of its purpose, vision, and core values.





Being able to gather good information is not easy. It must come from different types of employees in different positions. Families and consumers who use services must be invited to participate. Sometimes an organization or employer is interested in working with new groups. In these cases, information needs to be gathered from people of that culture. Cultural guides can be very helpful. Other community groups interested in cultural competence are often good resources.

Reaching out to different groups and seeking information can be tricky. This process will be most effective if there is a high level of trust among the people who are working together. Trust is something that is built over time. If problems have occurred in the past, it may take even more time to rebuild trust. Trust can be rebuilt through steady and courageous efforts. It can be built through a strong and ongoing commitment to act ethically toward people.

### *Methods of Gathering Information*

There are many different methods for gathering and working with information. Listed on this page are some of the most common ways of gathering information. When planning to use these approaches, it would be important to check with cultural guides about their effectiveness. It may be that certain methods are better for certain groups. It may be that certain accommodations need to be made. An accommodation might include translation to another language. It might also include having a person from the culture you are trying to reach available to facilitate the process.

Four of the most popular methods for gathering information are listed here. Many organizations use these methods already. Often they need to be adjusted to meet the needs of diverse groups.

-  Collecting a group of people who are willing to plan and work together over a period of time. (Committees)
-  Asking people to respond to questions. (Surveys)
-  Gathering groups of people to talk about issues. (Focus groups)
-  Group review of situations that seem to be important. (Critical incidents)



### *Using Assessment Results to Improve Employee Trust and Growth*

One of the most important assets that an organization has is trust of employees and the people being supported. When done effectively and efficiently, assessment can improve that level of trust. On this page are listed some common areas where trust can be lost.

- 🌐 Use assessment only in a positive, strengths-based way. Never use honest feedback from an employee as an excuse to punish the employee.
- 🌐 Use assessment as a way of understanding growth. Do not use it as a way to “score” the organization for comparison to other organizations.
- 🌐 Follow-up with people who provide information. They want to know that the effort is paying off. Many people complain about spending time responding to surveys or attending focus groups, without ever seeing the results or program outcomes. A monthly update in the organization’s newsletter not only keeps people informed, it keeps the organization accountable for progress.

### **The Cultural Competence Continuum in Organizations**

Organizations that want to improve their cultural competence need to use an assessment process. You just learned about several key components of organizational assessment. Watch the videos on screens, 19, 20, 21 and 22 in Lesson 7, and answer the questions below.

#### *Screen 19*

1) What level of cultural competence is demonstrated by the receptionist in this story?

#### *Screen 20*

1) What level of cultural competence is demonstrated by the male manager in this story?

#### *Screen 21*

1) What level of cultural competence is demonstrated by the three women in this story?

#### *Screen 22*

1) What level of cultural competence is demonstrated by the two women in this story?



## The DSP Roles in Culturally Competent Organizations

### *What DSPs Bring to an Organization*

As you can see, the journey to cultural competence is complicated for organizations. As a direct support professional, you can be an important part of this journey. Developing your own cultural competence is very important. But you will have other roles as well.

Direct Support Professionals bring a lot to organizations. They bring a variety of experiences, different levels of knowledge and understanding, and a variety of skills. These efforts may help others to understand different views.

Listen to the story on screen 23 in Lesson 7. Think about what you bring to your workplace. Write your reflections below:

### *What DSPs Bring to an Organization*

Besides serving as cultural guides, direct support professionals will participate in organizational growth in many other ways. On this page are several ideas of how DSPs could play a part in the organizational journey.

There are many things that you can do as a DSP. Your organization needs you, in order to succeed. Some things you could try are listed here.

- 🌐 Continue your personal journey to cultural competence.
- 🌐 Identify good resources for learning about culture.
- 🌐 Develop relationships with cultural guides.
- 🌐 Serve as a cultural guide.
- 🌐 Participate in assessment activities at the organizational level.
- 🌐 Participate in an assessment at your site level.
- 🌐 Mentor new staff.
- 🌐 Serve on committees at your work place.
- 🌐 Serve on committees in the community.
- 🌐 Learn about the cultures of the people you support.
- 🌐 Be creative.

