

MODULE 1

FACTORS GIVING RISE TO THE DEMAND FOR DIVERSITY-COMPETENCE WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

SUMMARY OF MODULE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to help participants understand why diversity-competence represents a serious challenge for human service agencies. More specifically, the purpose of the module is to show participants that the demand for diversity-competence is coming from many different areas of society, including government and the courts. The module also re-frames the demand for diversity-competence as a major civic and entrepreneurial opportunity for Canadian human service agencies in a global economy.

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SYNOPSIS OF CONTENT

- ☑ The demand for diversity-competence is not a passing “fad” but a permanent fixture and feature of Canadian society in a global capitalist economy. Organizations who neglect to develop their capacity to serve diverse groups in society run the risk of becoming obsolete or even being sued in a court of law.

- ☑ It is not just the influx of immigrants into Canada that is giving rise to the demand for diversity-competent organizations. Other distinct social groups are also demanding that organizations take their particular social characteristics and needs into consideration when delivering services (for example, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, the rapidly growing elderly population, etc.).

- ☑ Compounding and supporting these group demands for socially and culturally appropriate services are some specific characteristics of Canada’s economic, political and legal systems, including the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

- ☑ The demand for diversity-competence can be viewed as an opportunity for Canadian human service agencies to develop organizations and services that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of diverse groups in society. The knowledge and skills gained from pursuing this opportunity can be sold in Canada and in the rest of the world.

Background

Human service organizations exist in several social contexts at the same time and are subject to the values and pressures in those contexts. The demographic context of human service agencies in Canada, especially those in Ontario, is a multiracial, multicultural, multilingual, and multi-faith context. In this scenario of complexity and diversity, “one size will not fit all.” People’s needs, based on their diverse characteristics, have to be accommodated (*albeit within the boundaries of the law*).

The political and legal contexts in which human service organizations exist give individuals the right to advocate for the accommodation of their cultural and other social needs by service providers. These rights are supported by different pieces of Canadian legislation, including the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Human service agencies should be knowledgeable about these legislative documents and their implications for the delivery of services to the public.

The economic context in which Canadian human services exist is both a domestic and an international context. Domestically, there is a demand for services for people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Internationally, there is a demand for workers who know how to work with people of different cultural and linguistic groups. Internationally, especially in countries burdened by ethnic strife, there is a demand for the creation of social policies and programs (social infrastructure) that promote respect for diversity among people and the equal provision of services and opportunities to citizens. Herein lie entrepreneurial opportunities for Canadian human service organizations.

Human service organizations have a lot to gain by valuing diversity and providing services to people from diverse social and cultural groups in ways that are respectful of those groups and accommodative of their diverse characteristics and needs.

1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Canada is recognized as one of the most racially and culturally diverse countries in the world. Diversity, however, is not limited to racial and cultural characteristics. Characteristics such as economic class, gender, age, disabilities, sexual orientation (and so on) are also part of the diversity mix in Canadian society.

In the Regions of Peel and Halton, the population is not only diverse but also rapidly growing.

Some of the Diverse Groups in the Halton Population: 1996-2001

| Groups | 1996 Population | | 2001 Population | | % Change between 1996 & 2001 |
|---|---|-------|-----------------|-------|------------------------------|
| | # | % | # | % | |
| Total Population | 339,875 | 100.0 | 375,229 | 100.0 | 10.4 |
| Immigrants | 76,290 | 22.6 | 83,245 | 22.4 | 9.1 |
| Visible Minorities | 22,660 | 6.7 | 32,550 | 8.7 | 43.6 |
| Older Adults (55 years +) | 68,025 | 20.0 | 81,385 | 21.7 | 19.6 |
| Persons with Non-English/ Non-French First Language | 48,970 | 14.4 | 57,705 | 15.5 | 17.8 |
| People (adults) with Disabilities {1999 statistics} | 25,182 (estimated) | | | | |
| Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgendered Persons (2001)* | 37,523 (estimated) (10% of total population) | | | | |

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1996 & 2001; Halton-Peel District Health Council, 2000.

* Gay people are estimated to comprise around 10% of the general population. (<http://sano.camh.net/resource/gay.htm>).

Some of the Diverse Groups in the Peel Population: 1996-2001

| Groups | 1996 Population | | 2001 Population | | % Change between 1996 & 2001 |
|---|---|-------|-----------------|-------|------------------------------|
| | # | % | # | % | |
| Total Population | 852,526 | 100.0 | 988,948 | 100.0 | 16.0 |
| Immigrants | 339,370 | 40.0 | 424,820 | 43.1 | 25.2 |
| Visible Minorities | 265,280 | 31.2 | 397,105 | 38.5 | 42.9 |
| Older Adults (55 years +) | 126,260 | 14.8 | 162,440 | 16.4 | 28.7 |
| Persons with Non-English/ Non-French First Language | 291,100 | 34.1 | 389,525 | 39.5 | 33.8 |
| People with Disabilities (Ontario Health Survey 1996/97) | 7% of total Population | | | | |
| Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgendered Persons (2001)* | 98,895 (estimated) (10% of total population) | | | | |

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1996 & 2001; Ontario Health Survey 1996/97.

* Gay people are estimated to comprise around 10% of the general population.
(<http://sano.camh.net/resource/gay.htm>).

1.2 POLITICAL FACTORS

There are at least two characteristics of the political culture of Canada that support the demand for organizations to have the capacity to serve diverse groups in ways that are acceptable to those groups. The first characteristic is the legitimacy of interest groups in the public policy-making process of government. The second characteristic is related to the first: the tradition of accommodation of group interests by governments in Canada.

- The Political Legitimacy of Interest Groups in Canada (ethno-cultural, income-related, gender-related, age-related, etc.)**
- The Canadian Political Tradition of Interest-Accommodation by Government**

☑ The Political Legitimacy of Interest Groups in Canada (ethno-cultural, income-related, gender-related, age-related, etc.)

- Canada's political culture is one in which citizens can legitimately demand that their government, public institutions, and other organizations serving the public take the needs of specific groups into consideration. They can organize themselves into citizen-based groups or formal organizations and advocate to government, public institutions, service organizations, the business sector, etc. Each group advocates for the needs of its members to be met and in a manner that is acceptable to the members of the group. Examples of interest groups in Canada are: The National Action Committee on the Status of Women, The Canadian Alliance on Race Relations, and the Ontario Poverty Action Group.
- A basic demand of an organization representing the interests of a particular group is that the needs of the group be taken into consideration in the development of social policies and programs. Emphasis is usually placed on such values as equal opportunity, fair treatment, inclusion in all areas of society, special consideration for the unique needs and characteristics of the group, and so on. For example, people who are visually impaired advocate that restaurants exempt them from the rule of "no dogs allowed" in the restaurants in order to accommodate the need of visually disabled people to have the assistance of their guide dogs.
- Two major tools of interest groups are their own organizations and the media (mainstream as well as group-specific media). They use these resources to articulate and communicate the interests of their members and to influence public policy and social change. For example, the visually impaired woman who is not allowed to enter a restaurant with her guide dog may choose to go to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind for assistance. The CNIB can then choose to advocate for the woman's interest, an interest that would be common to many visually impaired people. The CNIB can also choose to advocate at the level of the restaurant industry, government, or even the courts.
- There are thousands of interest groups across Canada. Each one wants the unique needs and interests of its members to be accommodated by government, public institutions, service organizations, and businesses. The challenge of government and other organizations serving the public is to have the capacity to listen to the voices of diverse groups, and to be able to respond in ways that are socially and culturally acceptable to those groups, while staying within the boundaries of Canadian law and Canadian public policies.

☑ The Canadian Political Tradition of Interest-Accommodation by Government

- Each member of the Canadian Parliament is elected to represent the interests of citizens in a particular geographic area of Canada. Hence, the Parliament of Canada is expected to act in a manner that would accommodate as many of the interests and needs of Canadians as possible, insofar as those interests and needs do not necessitate violation of Canadian laws and the infliction of harm on other people, the physical environment, etc. In principle, if not always in practice, citizens are expected to communicate their interests to government, and government is expected to listen to citizens and accommodate as many of their interests as is feasible. More specifically, the government is expected to develop policies and programs that would address the needs of different groups in society. Citizen-based groups tend to judge government policies in relation to how well those policies address the needs of diverse groups in society, with emphasis on the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- This political culture of interest-accommodation pervades all aspects of public life in Canada. For example, in a local school, the principal and teachers have to take into consideration the issues raised by members of the Student Council or the Parent Council. In a business corporation, the management staff is expected to listen to the demands of the union and to negotiate on how to meet the interests articulated by the union.
- In the human services sector, the managers and other staff, just like government representatives and school officials, are expected to listen to the different groups in society and be responsive to the needs of each group in a manner that is acceptable to the members of that group. For example, if a group says that it wants services for its elderly to be provided in the first language of the elderly, then the human service agencies are expected, out of principle, to accommodate that request. The question of whether or not they are actually able to accommodate the request to serve the elderly in their first languages becomes a technical question, a question of capacity.
- In other words, the demand for diversity-competence on the part of organizations is occurring in a society whose political culture already demands that the different needs or interests of citizens be taken into consideration by government and all those serving the public. In such a society, the ability to provide services to diverse groups in a manner that is appropriate for those groups is, therefore, an essential requirement for social and political stability.

1.3 LEGAL FACTORS

Support for the demand that human service organizations in Canada should provide services to diverse groups in a manner that is socially and culturally appropriate for each of those groups is provided by major Canadian legislative documents on diversity and equity issues.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1970)

The Canadian Human Rights Act (1981)

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)

☑ The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1970)

<http://www.solon.org/Statutes/Canada/English/C/CMA.html>

- The Canadian Multiculturalism Act sets the stage for different ethnic and linguistic groups to publicly advocate that public service organizations – at all levels of Canadian society - provide services in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for diverse ethnic and cultural groups in Canada. The provision of socially and culturally appropriate services by human service agencies would be an activity that is in compliance with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.
- This Act obliges the Government of Canada to recognize and promote cultural, linguistic and racial diversity within the Canadian population.

Section 3.1 of the Act states:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to:

- *recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage.*

In the same section above, it is also stated that it is the policy of the Government of Canada to:

- *ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity;*
- *encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character.*

☑ **The Canadian Human Rights Act (1981)**

http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications/chra_guide_lcdp.asp?l=e

- Section 2 of the Canadian Human Rights Act clearly states that all individuals in Canada should have equal opportunity and “**to have their needs accommodated.**” (within the law).

*All individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have **and to have their needs accommodated,** consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society.* Section 2 of the Act

- From this perspective, individuals can demand that their needs, based on their particular characteristics, (race, gender, age, culture, disability, etc.) be accommodated by service providers. For example, service brochures should be written in large print to accommodate the needs of elderly persons with failing vision. Services should be provided in different languages to accommodate the needs of people who do not speak English or French.
- The Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits systemic discrimination. The Act defines systemic discrimination as “a seemingly neutral policy or practice, which in fact is discriminatory.”
- Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, it is against the law for any employer or service provider to discriminate against anyone on the basis of:
 - race
 - sex (including pregnancy and childbirth)
 - sexual orientation
 - age
 - national or ethnic origin
 - marital status
 - colour
 - family status
 - religion
 - mental or physical disability (including previous dependence on drugs or alcohol)
 - pardoned conviction

☑ The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)

<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/>

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines in law the rights and freedoms of all people in Canada. Three sections of the Charter (15, 26, and 27) are of particular relevance to citizens' demands that services for the public should be delivered in an egalitarian manner while respecting and valuing diversity among citizens.

Section 15 of the Charter focuses on "Equality Rights" of Canadians:

- *(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.*
- *(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.*

Section 26 of the Charter guarantees equal rights and freedoms to both men and women:

- *Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.*

Section 27 directs Canadians to value, preserve and maintain cultural diversity in the exercise of their rights and freedoms:

- *This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.*

1.4 ECONOMIC FACTORS

There are economic rewards for the organization that decides to develop its capacity to serve diverse groups in the community. there are also some penalties for not doing so. (This is the economic carrot and stick argument for taking diversity-competence seriously.)

- Diverse Groups Represent Markets for Goods and Services**
- The Need for Racially, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Workers in a Global Economy**
- The High Cost of Litigation in Cases of Discrimination**
- Contract Compliance (Fundlers' conditions for provision of money to human service agencies)**

☑ Diverse Groups Represent Markets for Goods and Services

The demand for providing goods and services to diverse groups in culturally appropriate ways is often hitched to the idea that these groups have purchasing power in the market place and will favour those establishments who take their unique social and cultural needs into consideration when providing services to them. In other words, failing to meet the needs of specific groups in the community is detrimental to an organization's financial bottom line.

☑ The Need for Racially, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Workers in a Global Economy

A global economy is, by definition, a diverse economy. Businesses locate their organizations in different parts of the world and sell to people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this kind of economy, people who understand different cultures, who can speak several languages and who can customize services for people of different cultural backgrounds, will be in high demand. Global employers want to hire them. These "global" employees can be developed at the local level - the domestic market - where they can be trained to provide services to people of different social and cultural backgrounds.

☑ The High Cost of Litigation in Cases of Discrimination

If a citizen feels that his or her rights have been violated or ignored by an organization, he or she can launch a formal complaint against the organization in a court of law. This kind of action is more likely if the citizen or customer feels that his or her rights under Canada's human rights legislation or under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have been violated or ignored by the organization. An example of this is the case of a blind woman who was not allowed to enter a restaurant with her guide dog. She was refused service by the restaurant because of their "no dogs" in the restaurant rule. In this case, the business establishment failed to take her unique needs as a blind person into consideration and discriminated against her on the basis of her disability. Lawsuits are costly to organizations not only financially but also socially. The public perception of the organizations is affected in a negative manner. Financially, the amount of the settlement awarded to the victim/plaintiff could be in the hundreds of thousands. In the U.S.A., it is not unusual for millions to be awarded to victims of discrimination.

☑ Contract Compliance (Funders' conditions for provision of money to human service agencies)

Funders of human service agencies could, and often do, require that the agencies demonstrate an egalitarian and inclusive approach to service delivery in order to receive funds for their projects. Funders could even specify what they mean by “egalitarian and inclusive.” For example, funders may specify that the agencies should demonstrate that they do serve people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, people of different ages, and people of different social classes, in a manner that is respectful of and responsive to the needs of those groups. Funders may also require “evidence” of diversity within the organization (Board, staff, and volunteers of different social and cultural backgrounds). Another requirement may be that the services should be provided in different languages. Yet another requirement could be that the agencies provide training in anti-oppression to their Board, staff and volunteers.

If funders attach these kinds of conditions to the grants and contracts they award to human service agencies, then the agencies have a choice to make. They can choose to develop their capacity to serve diverse groups in egalitarian, inclusive, and culturally appropriate ways or go without financial resources. This boils down to “adapt or die.” Since organizational death is not really an option, the challenge for organizations is to acquire the necessary resources, including money, to develop their “diversity-competence.”

1.5 PROFESSIONAL/ACCREDITATION FACTORS

Human service organizations benefit from being recognized by the accreditation bodies responsible for ensuring high standards in specific service sectors. Indeed, for some human service organizations, especially those providing clinical counselling services, services to people with disabilities, etc., accreditation from the appropriate licensing bodies is a requirement for funding. When accreditation bodies start to place emphasis on an organization's capacity to appropriately serve diverse groups in the community, especially racially and culturally diverse groups, then human service organizations will have little choice but to develop their capacity to serve diverse groups.

In this scenario, the question for human service agencies is not one of will they or will they not develop their capacity to appropriately serve diverse groups in the community. Rather, the question will be one of technicalities and money. What should human service agencies be doing to develop their capacity to serve diverse groups? How much will this organizational development process cost? Where will the money come from?

1.6 CIVIC ENTREPRENEURIAL FACTORS

The factors giving rise to the demand for organizations to be capable of serving diverse groups in the community present both challenges and opportunities for non-profit, human service agencies. These agencies can become “civic entrepreneurs” sharing and selling their knowledge of diverse groups and how to provide socially and culturally appropriate services to those groups.

Challenges for Human Service Agencies

- To identify best practices for “diversity-competence.” (*What does the organization need to do in order to appropriately serve diverse groups in the community?*)
- To make time to get the job done. (*How much time is required?*)
- To acquire the necessary financial resources. (*How much will it cost?*)

Opportunities

- To make a positive contribution to social unity and social justice at the local level and in Canada as a whole.
- To acquire knowledge about diverse groups and their needs for services.
- To develop skills in how to provide services to diverse groups in ways that are appropriate and acceptable for those groups.
- To sell knowledge and skills about how to provide services to diverse groups.
- To acquire knowledge and skills about how to help organizations go through the change process to develop their capacity to appropriately serve diverse groups.
- To sell knowledge and skills about how to help organizations go through the change process to develop their capacity to serve diverse groups.
- To partner with educational and training institutions for the purpose of developing training courses in a) how to provide services to diverse groups and b) how to help organizations develop their organizational capacity to serve diverse groups.
- To position Canada as a world leader in the development of socially and culturally appropriate services for diverse groups.

Questions for Review and Discussion

- How relevant is the information presented in this module for:
 - You/your position in your organization?
 - Your organization?

- Is there anything in the module that you disagree with? Why?

- What issues were not made clear/need further clarification?

- What else should have been included in the information presented?

- What insights do you have after studying this module?

- How do you think you can apply the information presented in this module to your organization or agency?