Practice Tool

PSDP—Resources and Tools:

Developing cultural competence

Introduction

Recent children's workforce data (Department for Education, 2019) shows that while the initial social work workforce is moderately diverse, this gets less so as people progress into more senior roles, with an increasing presence of white staff and a decreasing presence of ethnic diversity.

Currently, within children's services in England, if you are a white male you are approximately six times as likely to be a manager as a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) female. This suggests that institutionalised racism and racial disparities persist within social work and that supervisors need to be proactive in their efforts to address the stereotyping, unconscious bias and subtle forms of exclusion that result in higher rates of disciplinary procedures being invoked, and poorer rates of career progression for BAME practitioners.

A uniting concept that can support vigilance in challenging Eurocentric ways of being, knowing and doing is 'cultural competence'. Spillett (2018) suggests that, when effectively applied, cultural competence can be a powerful tool for organisational and individual change, creating the context for increased equity in the workplace, ultimately leading to improvements in social work practice with diverse and changing communities.

Two key concepts underpin this learning tool:

Cultural competence

This is the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognises, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each (NASW, 2016).
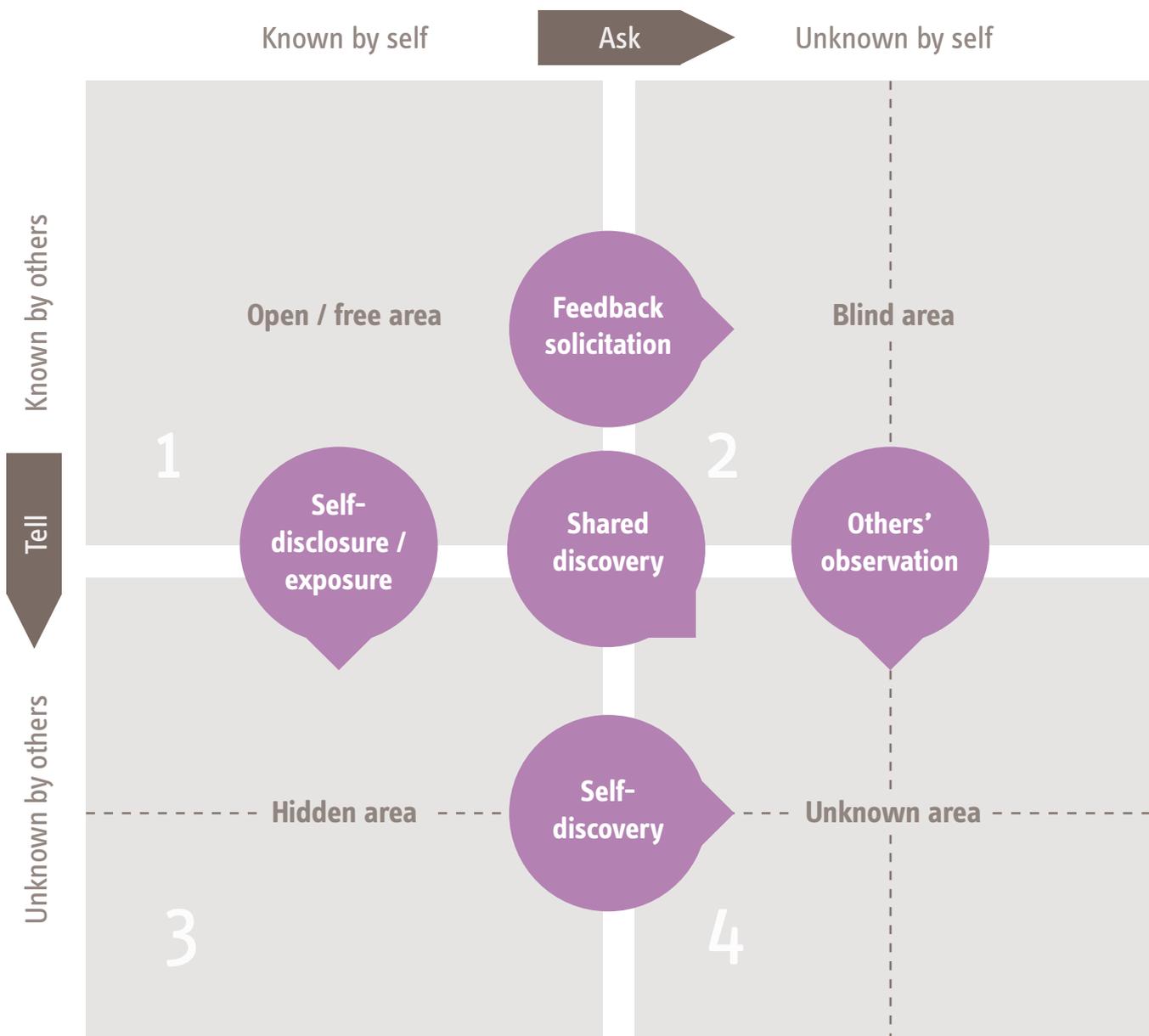
Intersectionality

This is a newly-emerging concept extending our understanding of cultural competence to include an appreciation of how one aspect of identity, such as 'race', can interact with other aspects of identity such as gender, sexual orientation or class. For example, a black woman may face discrimination due to both her ethnicity and her gender.

This tool is designed to help you reflect on existing levels of cultural competence to consider the barriers that inhibit diversity-related discussions and prevent a culturally-diverse staff group from being represented at all tiers within an organisation. It can be used to think about individual behaviours and attitudes, and to reflect on wider team and organisational dynamics, policies and structures, with an emphasis on action planning to advance cultural competence.

While this tool will focus on cultural competence as it relates to race, ethnicity and racism, it can be adapted to address other aspects of identity that form the basis of discrimination. Further, the questions raised in the example window on the next page are written from the perspective of white practitioners considering the experience of BAME colleagues. If you are a BAME practitioner, or intend to use this tool within a culturally-diverse group, these example questions may need to be adapted (e.g. 'What efforts have I made to understand the lived experience of BAME team members, as well as the barriers and enablers to their career progression?' could become 'What efforts have been made on the part of non-BAME team members to understand my lived experience, as well as barriers and enablers to my progression?').

The Johari window model

The Johari window is a model of communication and human relationships which encompasses intrapersonal (how we communicate with ourselves) and interpersonal (how we communicate with others) dimensions (Luft, 1969).

Known by self   **Ask**   Unknown by self

Known by others

Open / free area

Feedback solicitation

Blind area

1

Tell

Self-disclosure / exposure

Shared discovery

Others' observation

2

Unknown by others

Hidden area

Self-discovery

Unknown area

3

4

The four quadrants represent the self that is known and unknown to the individual and the self that is known and unknown to others. The model can be used to gain insight into levels of cultural competence, including strengths and blind spots (such as unconscious bias and beliefs).

Within the model, the hallmark of a healthy relationship between two or more people is the existence of an expanded 'open quadrant'. The model can therefore be used to consider ways of encouraging self-disclosure and feedback to expand shared understanding, thereby building a climate of openness and trust where issues related to difference, diversity and cultural competence can be discussed openly.

The open quadrant

The open quadrant represents what is open to self and others e.g. visible diversity as it relates to race, culture and religion within the team.

The blind quadrant

The blind quadrant represents information that is unconscious or beyond our awareness which can be brought from the blind into the open by requesting feedback from supervisees. An example might be to ask supervisees a direct question such as, 'What have you picked up about my views on transracial fostering and adoption?'

The hidden quadrant

The hidden quadrant represents what we choose not to disclose. We can increase the size of the open quadrant through the process of self-disclosure. For example, sharing with team members that we have a child who is bi-racial might encourage them to similarly locate themselves in terms of race, leading to a more in-depth discussion about the over-representation of bi-racial children within the care system and how their needs can be more effectively met.

The unknown quadrant

The unknown quadrant relates to information that is not known to self or others. An example would be, 'What impact would the appointment of a BAME Head of Service have on the career progression rates for BAME staff within the service?'

Please reflect on the questions within each of the Johari window quadrants below, considering the implications of each set of questions for practice and / or BAME staff progression. You are then invited to outline a plan of action to address any areas of concern identified.

While you are initially being asked for your personal response to each of the questions posed, it is important to remember the concept of cultural competence and how it needs to be addressed at the individual, team and organisational level.

The overall aim is, therefore, to increase awareness of cultural bias, understanding of different world views and cultural competence (e.g. the size of the open quadrant) across the service. This can only be achieved through a process of individual, interpersonal and organisational reflection which surfaces and openly explores problematic assumptions, routines and outcomes for BAME staff and children / families.

See some example responses and action plan suggestions in the first section of the open quadrant table on the next page.

Open

Critical reflection questions and implications	Action plan to enhance cultural competence
What is the cultural make-up of the team and does it reflect the diversity of the communities served? What are the implications? *The team is reflective of the communities served in a way that promotes practice excellence by enabling us to meet the needs of our culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse and changing communities. The team make-up also contributes to (though doesn't guarantee) a climate of safety where diversity-related issues are openly discussed in supervision and in meetings.* What is the make-up of the different tiers within the service team, particularly the senior leadership group? Does each tier reflect the diversity of the communities served? What are the implications? *Unfortunately, there are only a handful of BAME staff in senior leadership roles. This undermines the local authority's stated commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion, inhibiting the transformational change required to become a culturally competent organisation where staff are welcomed, respected and thrive, whatever their 'race' or background.*	*Seek out professional development opportunities and join forums that promote cultural competence, diversity and inclusion – lead by example.* *Actively promote culturally competent practice amongst team members – ensure that issues related to race, ethnicity, culture and other aspects of diversity (including intersectionality) are addressed in supervision and team meetings. Ensure that service evaluation and planning take account of the demographic make-up of the communities served. Feed this information up to senior management.* *Let senior leadership know the impact poor BAME progression is having on morale and job satisfaction levels within the team and how this is likely to impact on rates of BAME retention.* *Press for a more proactive 'whole system' engagement with diversity, equality and progression emphasising how individual, team and organisational levels of cultural competence are interlinked and interdependent.* *Lobby for accurate monitoring of BAME recruitment, progression and involvement in disciplinary and capability procedures so that any emerging patterns of disparity can be effectively addressed.* *Advocate for 'cultural competence' to feature in job descriptions, performance evaluations, promotions and training / CPD programmes.* *Encourage BAME supervisees and colleagues to access relevant courses and support networks e.g. The Staff College Black & Asian Leadership Initiative*

Open

Critical reflection questions and implications	Action plan to enhance cultural competence
What is the team culture? Do people mix? What might get in the way of BAME members socialising? Is there an inclusive culture in terms of the team atmosphere and dynamic? Who holds power within the team and why? Who dominates and who speaks less frequently in meetings and does this relate to aspects of diversity? What are the implications?	....
What efforts have I made to understand the lived experience of BAME team members, as well as the barriers and enablers to their career progression? What are the implications? What support is available to assist me in improving my understanding of diverse world views, my cultural sensitivity and my overall cultural competence?	....

Hidden

Critical reflection questions and implications	Action plan to enhance cultural competence
How open am I about the different dimensions of my identity in terms of age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability etc.? What are the implications? What aspects of my identity do I choose not to share? How come and what are the advantages and disadvantages?	....
What issues do I struggle with (avoid discussing) in relation to cultural competence, diversity, equality and inclusion? What are the implications?	....
Discussions related to race, privilege and power (within a profession that prides itself on its social justice foundations) can elicit primal feelings of fear, shame, anger and despair. Which of these emotions do I find most challenging in myself and others? Are there particular individuals with whom I avoid such discussions e.g. peers or senior managers? What are the implications? What support could I ask for and from whom?	....

Blind

How can you prepare team members to provide feedback and foster a climate of safety where discussions related to cultural competence, diversity and inclusion are possible?

Critical reflection questions and implications	Action plan to enhance cultural competence
What do team members see as my strengths in relation to cultural competence, diversity, equality and inclusion? Is this the same for BAME and white staff? What are the implications?	....
Do team members see me, the team and the wider organisation as congruent with the values espoused? Do BAME team members see me as proactive in initiating discussions related to diversity and supporting them in their career progression? What are the implications?	....
Do BAME team members feel welcome and that they can thrive within the team and organisation? What are the barriers to a sense of belonging and progression within the organisation for BAME staff, particularly those affected by intersectional disadvantage e.g. black women? What are the implications?	....

Unknown

Critical reflection questions and implications	Action plan to enhance cultural competence
To what extent does socioeconomic and structural inequality related to race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality, poverty etc. feature in social workers' assessment and planning? How far are these issues routinely addressed in terms of direct work with children and their families? What are the implications?	....
How responsive is the team / service to the cultural needs of the locality and are we adapting to meet changing needs? How much do we consult with BAME families, groups and organisations when evaluating and planning service delivery? What are the implications?	....
What 'additional' expectations and perceptions do BAME staff encounter from colleagues, delivery partners, children and families, the public and politicians? What are the implications?	....

Having addressed the questions in the four areas of the Johari window, what have you learned about yourself and the practitioners you supervise? What three actions would you prioritise in terms of enhancing your own and your team's cultural competence?

Other ways you can use this tool

The questions can be adapted for use as a self-reflection exercise, as the basis for a one-to-one supervision meeting, or for a team discussion. For example, you could ask a supervisee to work through all the questions in preparation for an individual supervision session focused on cultural competence.

Alternatively, you could ask a supervisee to provide you with feedback in relation to the questions in the 'blind' and 'unknown' quadrants and discuss this in supervision, comparing their answers with yours and noting areas of agreement and difference.

The tool can also be used as a basis for a wider team discussion, with an emphasis on actions that can be taken to enhance cultural competence at the personal, team and organisational level.

We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

References

Department for Education (2019) *Experimental statistics: Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2018.* Sheffield: Department for Education. Available online: www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childrens-social-care-workforce

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