

Diversity training in the workplace

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Noe, 2010; Hughes & Byrd, 2017 defined diversity training as an intentional exercise designed to develop skills needed to facilitate working and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. A diversity training program aims to boost participants' awareness about different types of diversity, appreciate differences among co-workers, and provide knowledge and strategies to enhance employees' interpersonal and communication skills across diversity to help build a positive work environment. (Hughes & Byrd, 2017).

Workplace diversity refers to the differences between employees and the acceptance and celebration of these differences at work. Elements of diversity include, but are not limited to, ability, age, class, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, immigration status, intellectual differences, language, national origin, race, religion, socio-economic status, sex, and sexual orientation.

In a worldwide survey of three million employees on diversity, employee satisfaction, and organizational performance, it was found that creating an inclusive and harmonious environment was a key driver in employee engagement and commitment.

The ultimate goal of diversity training is to make employees understand that even if there are differences amongst the team members that they are working with, a little adjustment in one's attitude will make for an extraordinary team. Employees who undergo diversity training move from simply tolerating the differences to understanding and valuing the differences. When, an effective diversity and inclusion program, is deployed within an organization, it sets off a chain reaction of positive results for the organization and the people working within it.

Importance of Diversity in the Workplace

Diversity in the workplace is important because:

- Human capital increases with a more diverse workforce
- Problems are solved from different perspectives and experiences.
- Hostile work environments are eliminated because the workplace is more pleasant
- With more diverse thinkers and doers, innovation and action can take place from a variety of angles. More creative ideas can be brought to the surface, honed, and built upon.

- **There's a better understanding of consumers:** Businesses have better insight into targeting consumers if they have employees representing consumers' perspectives.

Case Studies

Companies That Needed Diversity Training

In 2018, Starbucks found itself in the middle of a public relations crisis when an employee called the police on two black men who were waiting for a friend in a Philadelphia cafe without ordering anything. The men were arrested, despite doing nothing wrong, and the incident went viral. Many activists used the incident to highlight bias against Black people and protesters began to hold demonstrations inside stores.

In 2019, High-end cosmetics store Sephora found itself in a similar situation when rapper and musician SZA reported being racially profiled at a Los Angeles store. After major news outlets around the world picked up the story, linking it back to the incident in Starbucks the year before, Sephora announced that it would be closing all US stores for an hour for diversity training. However, they clarified that this was planned before the incident with SZA happened.

The city government of Seattle created a controversy when an anonymous city employee revealed that they were racially segregating the diversity training of city employees. White employees received training separately, and of different content, than employees who identify as people of color.

Companies That Embraced the Importance of Diversity

Johnson & Johnson has pumped a lot of resources into ensuring that all employees help to create an inclusive environment. The organization's Global Diversity and Inclusion vision are "to maximize the global power of diversity and inclusion, to drive superior business results and sustainable competitive advantage." They have done this through employee resource groups, mentoring programs, and 'Diversity University, which is a dynamic website that helps employees to understand the benefits of working collaboratively.

Mastercard consistently makes it into the Top 10 of DiversityInc's 50 Best Companies for Diversity list. They believe that "diversity is what drives better insights, better decisions, and better products. It is the

backbone of innovation". A particularly unique project that Mastercard has executed over the past few years involves getting older employees in the company more active when it comes to social media.

Ernest and Young believe that "only the highest-performing teams, which maximize the power of different opinions, perspectives, and cultural references, will succeed in the global marketplace." The organization was the first of the Big Four to assign full-time, partner-level leadership to diversity recruiting. Since then, the number of women in top executive management positions has increased by more than 20%. Programs such as EY Launch have begun, which is for ethnically diverse college freshmen, sophomores, and transfer students, and builds awareness of accounting as a significant profession.

At Coca-Cola, diversity is seen "as more than just policies and practices. It is an integral part of who we are as a company, how we operate, and how we see our future." Diversity education programs include Diversity Training, a Diversity Speaker Series, and a Diversity Library. In 2017, a new parental benefits policy was implemented, whereby 6 weeks of paid leave is extended to all new mothers and fathers.

Statistics on the Need for Diversity Training

In the E-Book, [How to Increase Diversity Through Improved Hiring and Recruitment Processes](#), the following insights were uncovered:

- Most studies surrounding diversity in the workplace have found that for every 1% increase in gender diversity, company revenue increases by 3%.
- Higher levels of ethnic diversity increase revenue by a whopping 15%.
- According to Glassdoor, 67% of active and passive job seekers say that when evaluating companies and job offers, it is essential to them that the company has a diverse workforce.

What are the approaches to diversity training?

Diversity training is effective when it:

- Lays out a company culture that is inclusive, not divisive
- Respects, seek out and embraces different approaches that are a result of diverse employees instead of merely "tolerating" them
- Goes beyond a list of dos and don'ts to try to build a true understanding

To determine which training method is most effective over time, the researchers (Lindsey, King, Hebl, & Levine, 2015) tested three diversity training strategies: perspective taking, goal setting, and stereotype discrediting.

The perspective-taking strategy asks individuals to "step into someone else's shoes" by imagining what it's like to be a member of a different group. In other words, participants are asked to consider the experiences of dissimilar individuals as a way of understanding how those experiences may be different from their own.

Goal setting can be applied to diversity training programs by asking individuals to set personal goals that aim to improve diversity values and intergroup relations within their organization. For example, a diversity goal may be to use more inclusive language or to confront an individual who makes jokes about marginalized groups.

Stereotype discrediting aims to reduce prejudice and stereotyping of marginalized groups by confronting commonly held stereotypes. For example, a common stereotype will be presented to trainees, which will then be followed up with information that disproves the stereotype.

Diversity training aims to create a more harmonious workplace by increasing employee's knowledge and awareness of cultural, religious, or racial differences while delivering information about how a person can change their behavior to be more inclusive.

Here are some common goals that organizations have identified:

- Create a healthy working environment where people of different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and talents can productively work together.
- Increase the number of women, people of colour, or otherwise underrepresented people within the organization.
- Increase the use of inclusive language within job postings, internal communications, and external communications.
- Increase the amount of time and money spent on diversity and inclusion training within the organization.

- Create an environment that nurtures and promotes diversity.

Diversity training should focus on long-term strategies to build an understanding of the differences between people and how to navigate those differences most respectfully and productively possible. This includes highlighting bias, presenting strategies for reducing bias within your employees, setting SMART goals for increasing diversity and inclusion within your organization and frequently checking in on how your organization is performing.

Conclusion

Although diversity training cannot altogether change individuals' beliefs, it can increase awareness, impart knowledge and educate employees further on how to accept differences among fellow employees. The main goal of a successful diversity training program is to create a positive work environment by helping employees recognize, be tolerant of, and accept differences among co-workers.

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