

Impact of Diversity Training on Organizational Culture

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Ontario has long been a leader in diversity, possibly because of the way urban centers like Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, Kitchener, and Hamilton, attract racialized people. The congregation of racialized people to urban centers has an historic root in colonial policies which prevented racialized people from living in suburban areas (Jardine-Olade, 2020). According to the site WorldAtlas.com, Toronto, Ontario's capital, is often referenced as the most multicultural city in the world. Although many people regard multiculturalism as positive, increasing diversity in workplaces and in schools can bring about unforeseen challenges. People of different races, ethnicities, cultures, religions and spoken languages are required to work cooperatively, and successfully with each other. Therefore, are there ways to increase the likelihood of harmonious work and school relationships among people from different backgrounds? Will diversity training in schools or workplaces create a positive impact on individual attitudes and experiences in the workplace? Furthermore to what extent does a person's race impact their perceptions of discrimination in the workplace?

As the population of Ontario grows and is enhanced by programs such as the Express Entry and the Ontario Nominee Immigration Program (ONIP) which serve to help employers obtain workers from abroad, diversity in Ontario is likely to continue.

A challenge with diversity is ensuring that people from different backgrounds who speak different languages and have different cultural sensibilities find ways to bridge those differences and engage with each other successfully. The population in Ontario is currently just under 15 million as reported by the government of Ontario on their web page, Ontario.ca. Ontario has seen steady growth over the last decade and the population is projected to increase to 20 million by 2046 according to the projection values available at Ontario.ca. The World Atlas.com site suggests that immigration will account for more than 80% of Ontario's population growth in

the next 20 years. This type of population growth, migration from other countries, heralds the potential for incoming diversity in languages, cultures, races, and religions.

Racialized people might be hesitant to move to rural states that are typically characterized by low diversity, because of the anxiety produced from living in such environments (Long, 2012). Are these feelings justified? Would a racialized person fare better in a more diversified state or province?

In Ontario, the province known for diversity, is the environment kinder, gentler, and more welcoming than that of our American neighbor states? Many people would answer this question with a resounding “YES!” because we do not see Black men being killed by the police at the alarming rates witnessed in America. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey captured the prevailing reality in America when he commented, after viewing the death of George Floyd on video, that “Being Black in America should not be a death sentence” (Sanders,, 2020). Unfortunately, many Black people live in fear that their race predetermines their destiny. This fear is not isolated to America.

In Winnipeg, at a peaceful anti-racism rally a young Black man was seen carrying a sign that read simply, “Am I next?” (Sanders, 2020). While we don’t see the state sanctioned killing-spree levelled on Black men in Canada that is pervasive in the United States, it is important to debunk the Canadian mythology that race relations are better here. When you examine the statistics, it is evident that life for racialized people is not much better in the north. Blacks make up only about 10% of the population in Toronto but account for more than 70% of the police shootings ending in death (Yasin, 2020). It does not end there. Even in our schools and playgrounds students who are racialized very quickly come to realize one of the life rules in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*: *All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.*

Recently, (October 2021) research giant Angus Reid in partnership with the University of British Columbia, disclosed the results of a survey investigating diversity and education. Many people might be surprised to learn that in 2021, young students aged 12 - 17 experience bullying, exclusion and other negative actions based on race. In other words, the issues I faced in the 70s as a Black elementary student in Ottawa continue today. How is that possible? Worse still, the Angus Reid (2021) survey indicates that the more diverse the school the more likely it is that students have experienced these negative attacks based on racial differences. It is as if the advancements we made as a society have done nothing to further the aims of racial harmony, racial tolerance, and moments of acceptance. Our global society seems to be on the verge of something great and paradoxically it seems we are spinning our wheels in frustration at the lack of progress and the perplexing absence of change. How can race relations still be stuck in *That 70's Show*?

Considering the targeted attacks on Black men and women (Breonna Taylor!) Where is the America Martin Luther King Junior dreamt about? Where is the America Malcolm X fought for? Where is the racial harmony James Baldwin conceptualized in his essays? If we are still fighting the old battles we thought were won through the civil rights movement, perhaps we need to take a more direct approach to combating racial disharmony inequities and racism. Perhaps our society needs focused training that will teach us how to embrace diversity, engage in equitable actions and foster a community culture of inclusion. If we are to see a difference in the lived experience of our students and members of society in general, will targeted training in diversity help us reach our goals of systemic equity, inclusive work environments and greater social harmony between and among groups?

The goal of this literature review is to explore research which investigates the effectiveness of diversity training in school or workplace settings. Does diversity training help

reduce prejudice, discrimination, and racism? If yes, in what ways does diversity training impact on the organizational structure? If not, what are the barriers to successfully producing organizational change?

Definitions

Diversity

Diversity in the work and school environments can be defined as all the dimensions of difference that impact how we experience our lives (Gillard, 2008; Howe, 2001). For the purposes of this literature review, diversity will refer primarily to race, gender, religion, and ethnicity, but it can also include age, social class, education levels, sexual orientation, and language (Howe, 2001).

Diversity Training

Diversity training in its most basic form is any training that is designed to highlight the diversity issues facing society (Crews, 2016). The training might involve games, role playing, and case studies to explore social dynamics of race and gender in workplaces. The goal of diversity training is to facilitate positive interactions, reduce prejudice and discrimination and enable individuals to interact with others from diverse backgrounds (Bezrukova, et.al., 2016).

Organizational Culture

Culture can be defined as the pattern of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 1986). Similarly, culture can be viewed as a shared framework for belonging within which group members produce meanings, beliefs, assumptions, understandings, norms, and knowledge that create and maintain their social order (Hatch, 2018).

Diversity Management

Diversity in organizations, schools and neighborhoods is universally thought to be beneficial. In fact, diversity is increasingly considered as an essential success factor in the workforce, (Crews 2016; Gillard 2008). Diversity also enhances an organization's ability to obtain its goals and objectives (Crews, 2016). Unfortunately, however, studies like the Angus Reid survey indicate rather conclusively that when people get together their diversity becomes a focus and that focus often results in racist or insensitive comments, or worse discriminatory actions and race-based crime.

Halloween seems to be a time for accentuating those differences. A Toronto District School Board (TDSB) teacher was recently sent home (October 29, 2021) for arriving at school and teaching at least one class in “blackface” (Raza, 2021). The teacher was immediately suspended by the school board, but his actions beg the question, “Why did he think that was acceptable behavior?” Could it be because Canada’s own Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wore brownface makeup to an Arabian Nights-themed party back in 2001? At the time Justin Trudeau was working as a teacher for a private school in Vancouver and was a mere 29 years of age (Frias & Panetta, 2019). He nevertheless should have known better. If anyone should have been sensitive to the impact of brownface, it should have been Justin, the son of one of Canada’s most well-loved Prime Ministers, Pierre Trudeau. The senior Trudeau was a champion of diversity, tolerance, and respect for human rights (O’Neil, 2007).

Another example of racially motivated insensitivity comes from a report by Sandy Meindersma (2013), which appeared in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, a local Massachusetts newspaper. Meindersma’s report describes in detail the ordeal of Mrs. Silva, a mother who migrated to the United States from India. Mrs. Silva requested diversity training

(DT) be conducted at her daughter's high school after he daughter Maimoona, heard her grade 12 chemistry teacher say, "She should move to India and become a Muslim." Mrs. Silva wanted action to be taken to demonstrate to the school community how inappropriate and hurtful the comment was. Silva suggested that diversity training could be conducted by the Islamic Networks Group, (ING). The California based ING has a two-hour training program specifically for school leaders. Although the school initially showed some interest in the training, they later declined citing that the focus of the training was too narrow (Meindeserma, 2013). Clearly, not everyone will see value in diversity training, but without it racial harmony, tolerance and respect will not happen organically. It does not matter who your father was, you do not inherit an appreciation for equity, diversity, and human rights, you learn it.

Diversity Training and Organizational Change

To address concerns and to promote a positive work environment many companies are turning to diversity training to equip staff with the skills they will need to get along. Diversity consulting is a new industry that is emerging to support companies with diversity training (Gillard, 2008). In the last few decades companies in the United States have spent billions (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2017; Gillard, 2008) on diversity training and recently the figure has reached as much as 8 billion per annum (White, 2021). What are companies getting for this hefty investment? At the end of training, which usually only lasts one day, participants are expected to leave with appreciation and understanding for other cultures (Gillard, 2008). Early diversity training programs focused on employee interaction, bias awareness, and inclusionary behavior (Crews, 2016).

Diversity training is believed to bring about a number of significant benefits from higher productivity to increased job satisfaction resulting in less worker turnover, enhanced innovation

and greater creativity among employees (Crews, 2016). Surprisingly there is little empirical research to support these claims (Crews, 2016; Gillard, 2008; Howe, 2001). Does DT have an impact on measurable outcomes? Those who are staunch supporters of DT would suggest that some of the positive changes brought about by training might be unmeasurable. For example, the organizational culture and the overall tone in the work environment are difficult to measure, although many modernists make consistent efforts to measure culture objectively (Hatch, 2018). Hatch (2018) offers two options for measuring culture, the Organizational Culture Inventory, and the Power distance. Both strategies require an examination of multiple dimensions to determine the status of organizational culture.

For researchers looking at the impacts of DT on organizational culture, the challenge then becomes how to design a program that has key performance indicators so that success can be measured easily based on objectively observable outcomes. Such a focus might cause a shift in how diversity programs are delivered and the expectations for implementation that would be established once the training is completed. Concrete expectations might result in more measurable outcomes from the training. Far too often diversity training is used as an exercise in public relations rather than for any real benefit it might have on how people get along (Gillard, 2008). Training that is implemented to appease members, who may have filed a complaint or to satisfy shareholders or pacify the general public is not sincere and is not likely to have any lasting impact. Of all the Fortune 500 companies that have implemented some type of diversity initiative, 75% believe DT programs are ineffective (Crews, 2016).

Another drawback with some diversity training is the lack of focus on ensuring that the principles learned become best practices in the work environment. Some diversity training is only concerned with increasing awareness (Crews, 2016; Gillard, 2008) and does not move into action nor advocacy. Worse still, there are companies that do not seem to be engaged in any

follow-up work. Once the training has been completed it is as if the company yells, “Next!” and moves purposefully toward the next agenda item. If there is no follow-up, and no accountability, can DT have a positive impact on organizational culture? The answer to this question is a resounding maybe.

Discussion

The purpose of DT is to provide possible solutions to past or present problems of racism, discrimination and prejudice. If an organization engages in training, it is possible that the members will embrace some of the principles even if no measurable change in behaviors occur. Feelings in the workplace for racialized staff might improve, (Crews, 2016).

One use of DT is as a lever to facilitate upward mobility. For example, African American women often experience stalled careers with invisible barriers to higher leadership positions (Crews, 2016; Gillard 2008). This is due in part to the many stereotypes and negative misconceptions about Black women (Crews, 2016). Have you ever heard of the “Angry Black woman”? Does she exist? Yes, she does, but doesn’t the “Angry White woman” also exist? Black women experience double jeopardy in the workplace because of their race and gender. Although white women must contend with the glass ceiling, Black women must deal with the impenetrable concrete ceiling (Crews, 2016).

The success of diversity training programs in increasing sensitivity and diminishing racist and sexist attitudes has practical implications for educational advancement, work productivity, economic growth, and human relations (Howe, 2001). Diversity training can help dispel some of

the mythology and stereotypes about minority people that can serve as an impediment to leadership advancement, positive experiences at school and a general sense of belonging and inclusion, something everyone craves. But does DI always work? Several studies that date back to the 30s indicated that diversity training doesn't have a positive impact in the work environment, nor does it improve upper employment for women and minorities (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Therefore, the short answer to the question posed above is, No. Perhaps a better question might be *What are the key conditions to ensure DI is successfully implemented and has lasting positive results?*

Limitations to Diversity Training

There has been some research which suggests that DI has limited long term success and could in fact be reinforcing stereotypes and differences instead of promoting acceptance and improving working relationships (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2017). Furthermore, one study that looked at over 700 organizations found that those which had extensive DI programs, saw the presence of visible minorities in leadership positions diminish over a 30-year period (Kalev, et.al., 2006). Much of the research on DI suggests that it has not eliminated workplace discrimination and prejudice (Bezrukova, et.al., 2016; Combs, 2002).

The lack of effectiveness of DI may be because DI training like other workplace professional development is often mandatory instead of voluntary and implemented as a one-time seminar or a short-lived workshop series. Some DI training is self-administered, such as the Indigenous Cultural Competency Training (ICCT) that all members of the Ontario Public Service (OPS) must take. The 7 hours of training is divided into modules that cover everything from residential schools to how Indigenous peoples are portrayed in the media. Many OPS staff find the training both meaningful and transformative while others reference the experience as

“Popcorn”. A dismissive term that attacks the training format which is video-based learning.

Another requirement placed on the OPS staff was that the training had to be completed in a specified time frame. To organizers, these built-in parameters make sense, but according to the research on what makes a successful DI program, these approaches are counter intuitive.

Bezrukova and colleagues conducted a meta analysis of 260 studies and concluded from the analysis of data that effective diversity training would be

- Interactive rather than passive;
- Face-to-face rather than video based
- Job embedded rather than the laboratory based.

Further research is required to identify additional key conditions for success, such as voluntary training versus mandated participation. Additionally, rather than rely on anecdotal accounts, empirical research can establish the specific positive actions that can be attributed to effective DT and how this impacts organizational cultures in both the short term and long term.

Conclusion

Diversified schools and workplaces have been trending for years because of the many benefits gained from acquiring talented workers regardless of race, cultural heritage, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Additionally, in diversified work environments employees report higher job satisfaction, a higher sense of well-being and are less likely to leave due to job dissatisfaction (Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2017).

As societies become increasingly pluralistic there is a growing need for Diversity intelligence (DQ) to ensure that organizational cultures function successfully and foster inclusive environments where workers feel they belong and benefit from that belonging.

DQ is the capability of individuals, particularly leaders, to recognize and value diversity in the workplace without engaging in biased behavior, (Hughes, 2018). DQ encourages leaders to reflect on their actions towards all employees, and engage in new strategies for inclusion (Hughes, 2018). Diversity training (DT) is one way to support leaders in developing their DQ and creating more inclusive environments. Other research suggests that organizational accountability will promote a more inclusive work environment (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2016).

This literature review uncovered several research papers which indicated that leaders and workers benefit from having diversity training in much the same way as they benefit from emotional intelligence (EQ) training and cultural competence training. These skills have become foundational to successful leadership in today's global corporations. The hope is that as leaders become more culturally competent because of DT, there will be greater diversity in the workplace and at management levels. Additionally, if DT or other approaches to improve racial awareness and accountability at the leadership level can foster acceptance and esteem

for diversity, we can look forward to fewer incidents of inappropriate behaviors targeted at minority groups.

Currently there is no conclusive research demonstrating a link between DT and improvements in the school environment or organizational cultures. There is a need for empirical research in this area that conclusively identifies the benefits of DT. Additionally, while there has been a significant amount of research on inequity, and DT there is relatively little information on the most efficacious approaches to combat school and workplace discrimination and racial intolerance. DT is part of the solution, but only part. It is important to uncover how we create organizational change that supports DT and creates the ideal conditions for a harmonious, respectful, and equitable world. We have a clear understanding of how the disease of racism impacts and corrupts organizational culture, now we need to find a cure (Kalev, 2002).

Perhaps we will reach the point where focused DT and leadership accountability will create the conditions in which Black women are empowered to break through the concrete ceiling and find opportunities that lead to better jobs and brighter futures. This is the clear and present call for continued empirical research on how to improve upon diversity training. Unfortunately, as a society we are not quite there yet, and so equity remains just a dream.

Journal Article for Publication

There are a few professional peer reviewed journals where this literature review might be submitted for publication:

1. Journal of Organizational Behavior
2. European Journal of Training and Development
3. Training and Development Journal
4. Advances in Human Resource Development
5. Journal of Leadership Studies

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