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COMMENTARY

Reframing diversity training: Investigating the challenges of aligning moral foundations for long-term inclusivity

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Maneethai et al. (2025) explored how using moral frameworks to package diversity training can help maximize its effectiveness and employee receptiveness. Along the way, the authors acknowledged recent political polarization and concerns over the value of diversity training, which, they suggest, can be partially addressed by implementing proper moral framing. Although we applaud the call for an industrial and organizational psychology focus to analyze ways to better the delivery of such training, we raise questions on the applicability of these suggestions. Specifically, the purpose of this commentary is to first expand on key observations made by Maneethai et al. before giving space to consider how the suggestions given would translate and where further factors need to be accounted for.

Building off the moral foundations framework, Maneethai et al. state that liberals use care and fairness foundations whereas conservatives rely on all five foundations, which leads them to ultimately suggest that messaging should be in terms of all five moral frames instead of the tendency to focus on just care and fairness. Here, we want to emphasize how the authors highlight the importance of utilizing all moral frameworks. They never discredit the importance of care and fairness, which are the moral frames that have been used most for diversity training. However, they recognize that different approaches might need to be used for different contexts. For example, with several companies, including Walmart, recently announcing roll backs of DEI policies (D'Innocenzio, 2024), a focused approach to imbue authority and respect into the framing of these DEI policies might be considered as the best way forward. Because these decisions are coming from the top of the organization and down, it sends a message to employees, one that the authors warned about, which leads to employees perceiving that their leaders do not support or value such initiatives. Furthermore, the sudden shift to rolling back such initiatives could be a sign that the only reason they were in place from the beginning was to try and maintain a positive public image.

However, if companies adopt an approach emphasizing authority in thepackaging, what happens to the other foundations? Here, questions about the adaptability and amount of packaging needed to come to light. Although conservatives rely on all five moral foundations equally, liberals are more perceptive to the fairness and care foundations, so in this scenario where authority seems like the most viable technique for these circumstances, liberals might feel a disconnect from the policies or believe that they do not adequately have the interests of certain groups in mind. The logical solution seems to be to include fairness and/or care elements in the packaging of this speculative initiative, which should help increase buy-in across the political spectrum. But what would this look like exactly? Additionally, how would this mix of foundations minimize the potential for certain nonmajority groups to feel tokenized or devalued, as has been pointed out by the authors? Despite agreeing that using moral reframing could be effective and is

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built on a solid theory that has held up, there needs to be work mapping how this would be applied in an organizational landscape that is divided on the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and that seems to be shifting in response to social and political factors.

To further this discussion, it is essential to examine the broader implications and challenges of implementing moral reframing in diversity training. Moral reframing presents a compelling strategy to navigate the challenges of diversity training by aligning messages with diverse moral foundations. However, its potential to reconcile conflicting values and achieve long-term cultural competence warrants deeper investigation. By empirically testing these approaches and addressing their ethical implications, researchers and practitioners can better understand the opportunities and limitations of moral reframing, paving the way for more inclusive and effective diversity initiatives. Specifically, the reconciliation of values such as fairness and authority poses a significant challenge, particularly in contexts where these principles are perceived as oppositional. When prompted to explore how fairness and authority could be balanced, ChatGPT suggested that "addressing these tensions requires careful consideration to ensure that the core objectives of diversity training remain intact" (OpenAI, 2024). Additionally, exploring whether moral reframing inadvertently reinforces biases tied to loyalty, authority, and purity is critical. Researchers should investigate how these values interact with care and fairness within the context of diversity initiatives and whether they can be harmonized without undermining the core principles of equity and inclusion.

To fully assess the potential of moral reframing in diversity initiatives, several areas warrant further investigation. Empirical research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach in achieving meaningful outcomes, such as improved attitudes toward diversity and enhanced organizational inclusivity. Comparative studies could provide valuable insights into how moral reframing performs relative to traditional diversity training methods.

Finally, empirical testing should address whether moral reframing can reconcile conflicting moral frameworks effectively. For example, experiments could examine how fairness and authority can coexist in diversity training without creating cognitive dissonance or diminishing the program's impact. These insights will be essential for refining the approach and ensuring its ethical and practical viability.

This commentary has expanded the discussion of using moral reframing to increase the effectiveness of diversity training and policies by asking what synthesizing the moral foundations would look like and how best to go about this considering the potential issues we raised given not only recent trends but the variable factors shaping the workplace.

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