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COMMENTARY

Expanding how we think about diversity training

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In their focal article, Hayes et al. (2020) outline several training approaches to mitigate racial discrimination and sexual harassment, noting the importance of training as the most obvious intervention for addressing these common workplace problems. Hayes and colleagues suggest the potential influence of several training approaches for sexual harassment and racial discrimination; however, diversity training as it stands may not be effective in creating long-term change in diversity-related attitudes and behaviors. Although training can yield positive benefits (Arredondo, 1996; Kalinoski et al., 2013), its effects are ephemeral (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Salas et al., 2012) and do not always shape attitudes and behaviors as intended. Thus, focusing on training as the solitary solution to workplace discrimination without considering broader initiatives for diversity can bind organizations from truly preventing and reducing such behavior. In this commentary, we assert that diversity training should be viewed from a different lens. Specifically, we argue that we should not refer to the effectiveness of individual training programs and instead focus on broader initiatives as specific activities aimed at developing attitudes and behaviors toward diversity to mitigate and eliminate discriminatory behaviors.

As noted by Hayes et al. (2020), we contend that organizations often use diversity training to check a box with regard to compliance or reactions toward incidents; however, the focus and intended effects are generally not clearly well-defined. This often happens because many diversity trainings do not include a needs assessment or other pretraining assessment to determine the areas of strengths and weaknesses of trainees who are slated to attend (Kalinoski et al., 2013). In such cases, diversity training may be attempting to do too much without a clear focus on the realistic needs and goals of the organization or a proper assessment of whether the organization has the appropriate resources in place to meet these needs and goals. One way to increase the strength and longevity of the effectiveness of diversity training is to build it into broader diversity initiatives and organization goals. Therefore, we focus on socialization, frequency, module building, and structural changes to shape attitudes and behaviors toward diversity as manners of supplementing and reinforcing how organizations approach diversity training and initiatives. Throughout this commentary, we argue that the way we think about diversity training needs an overhaul. To begin, organizations should consider socialized behaviors and biases that may be difficult to quickly "train away." We then discuss evidenced-based ways to reduce prejudice expression through diversity training and discuss three strategies to improve the effectiveness of diversity training: frequent attempts to drive attitudes and behaviors toward diversity, inclusive module content, and organizational structures.

Socialization: "Undoing" bias in the workplace

An important first step to expanding how we think about diversity in the workplace is acknowledging that socialized bias behaviors may be difficult to "train away." Odenweller and Harris

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(2018) show that socialization in childhood and formative years influences behavior in adulthood. In line with Odenweller and Harris (2018), we suggest that socialized bias behaviors acquired over a period of time may be difficult to reverse through diversity training, especially if training is conducted in a single session. Particularly, attitudes and behaviors that are formed through primary and secondary socialization often become ingrained and can in part explain why individuals hold biases in the first place (Lubbers et al., 2009). Primary socialization refers to socialization during childhood from one's parents and family, whereas secondary socialization suggests individuals are later socialized outside of their homes with their peers and through formal institutions (i.e., church, school; Jarvis, 2007; Lubbers et al., 2009). If biases are introduced in one context (i.e., at home), individuals are more likely to adopt biases as their own and commit such behavior in other environments (i.e., at work; Taylor & McKeown, 2019). As such, developed schemas and predispositions about certain groups may remain strong and may be difficult to reverse through traditional diversity trainings.

Effective trainings may "undo" bias temporarily; however, long-term change may involve time and a *socialization* process involving contact with a diverse group of people, including dissimilar others. Indeed, more interactions with dissimilar others has been shown to help reduce such biases, especially when those dissimilar others disconfirm negative stereotypical beliefs associated with their group (e.g., Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). One reason that intergroup contact is effective is that it often reduces prejudice (i.e., negative attitudes about groups of people; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The positive effects of intergroup contact are most effective when individuals (a) come in contact with individuals of equal status; (b) share common goals with others; (c) have intergroup cooperation; and (d) support authorities, laws, or customs (Allport, 1954). When these conditions are bundled together, intergroup contact can help frame how individuals categorize one another, which is optimal for ameliorating prejudices (Kenworthy et al., 2005). That is, intergroup contact can be effective for lessening discriminatory attitudes and behaviors when individuals avoid categorization and interact with one another (*decategorization*; Brewer & Miller, 1984), support inclusion over group categorization (*recategorization*; Gaertner et al., 2000), and promote their salient differences in a nonthreatening manner (*mutual differentiation*; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Organizations that allow opportunities for intergroup contact can help facilitate such conditions.

From diversity training to diversity education

Typically, organizations offer diversity training during the onboarding process or in a single session during the employee's tenure. The downside to one-shot diversity trainings is that they do not often meet general goals of diversity training, which often include increasing knowledge about diversity issues, changing attitudes toward diversity, and developing behavioral skills and goal-setting with regard to diversity (Roberson et al., 2001), nor do they significantly contribute to meeting broader organizational goals such as attracting and retaining employees, and maintaining employee morale (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1999).

To provide greater opportunity to positively shape attitudes and behaviors related to diversity, organizations should increase the frequency in which it attempts to drive attitudinal and behavioral change towards diversity, as evidence suggests that the positive effects of training may wane over time (Bezrukova et al., 2016). This frequency may come in the form of continuing diversity education rather than sporadic diversity trainings—motivating employees to consider diversity as continuous as compared to static. Although these terms are often used simultaneously, King et al. (2010) noted there are often differences in structure and implementation of diversity training versus diversity education programs. Some best practices seen in diversity education that do not always translate to short-form diversity trainings are frequent and structured feedback, required performance metrics, and greater exploration of cognitive and affective processes

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(King et al., 2010). Transforming organizational diversity training to include continuing education can provide opportunities for feedback and can foster a deeper understanding of information related to cognitive and affective processes. Additionally, this model would help organizations cement diversity training into broader diversity initiatives by allowing companies to create realistic performance metrics that can be linked not only to the diversity program but also to broader employee performance appraisal systems.

There is evidence that supports this shift in training. Indeed, one meta-analysis found that diversity education had a stronger positive effect on attitudinal outcomes than did diversity training (Kalinoski et al., 2013). Further, other meta-analytic research has shown that diversity training integrated with other diversity initiatives is positively related to attitudinal and behavior changes to a greater extent than stand-alone diversity trainings (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

Furthermore, allowing organizational members to choose from a variety of diversity topics that are of interest to them on an ongoing basis versus corporate-wide mandatory trainings may help reduce discriminatory behaviors. Employees may be more engaged and able to regulate their own training, which will likely positively affect their attitudes and behaviors toward diversity. For example, evidence has shown that more controlling "compliance" training was more likely to receive a backlash reaction; but training that appealed to people's motivations to be egalitarian and "do the right thing" was more effective (Legault et al., 2011). Additionally, continuing education may serve to avoid reactive organizational trainings. An example of reactive training is the widely publicized Starbucks racial antibias training given to many Starbucks employees nationwide in May 2018 in response to a racially biased incident against two African American men in a Philadelphia store. Reactive trainings may signal punishment to organizational members for someone else's infraction rather than reinforcing the importance of attitudes and behaviors towards diversity (e.g., Fink et al., 2003; Roberson et al., 2003). A curriculum for continuing education on diversity may have the ability to prevent reactive trainings and curb instances of discriminatory behaviors.

A path forward: Diversity module building and dissemination

Once organizations determine their diversity-related goals, modules should be developed to align with the organizational strategy and the demographic breakdown of the organization's human capital (e.g., Richard et al., 2000). Module content overload and underload may present problems when organizations do not carefully consider their participants and diversity initiatives (Cross, 2004). We note that some module content inclusion may be transferable across organizations. For instance, recognizing the similarities and differences between nested groups (e.g., race and sexual orientation), differentiating between different experiences among groups, considering empathy and perspective taking of individual experiences (Madera et al., 2011; Shukla, 2019), and recognizing subtle and implicit bias forms of discrimination in the workplace.

Additionally, organizations should consider more interactive and high-fidelity ways for disseminating diversity content. Routine platforms of trainer to trainee may be supplemented by, or substituted for, innovative mediums that target ways individuals think about diversity and behave in less biased ways. For example, fictional readings (e.g., Gomez, 2015), videos (Moss-Racusin et al., 2018; Pietri et al., 2017), and simulations (Hatch, 2017) are reasonable alternatives found to lessen bias and improve attitudes and behaviors. Thus, multiple media for module building may actually decrease discriminatory behaviors when participants can learn in multiple forms.

Organizations must also consider approaches for addressing discriminatory behaviors in their modules. Modules that provide new content or reinforce existing content, without a way forward to combat discriminatory behaviors, are likely to cause diversity initiatives to suffer (e.g., Leslie, 2019). Thus, diversity initiatives intended to change attitudes and behaviors toward diversity are likely to fail. Therefore, building in clear approaches with guidelines and rules into modules that

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address discriminatory behaviors may be an effective way to drive attitudinal and behavioral change towards diversity and limit discriminatory instances.

Organizational structure and leadership

Importantly, organizational leadership may be the best way to ensure effectiveness and appropriate assessment of organizational responses that drive attitudes and behaviors toward diversity. Leadership teams or a designated chief diversity officer can make impactful decisions regarding diversity initiatives that flow from the executive suite to lower level employees (Langevoort, 2004). Such decisions, when aimed at shaping attitudes and behaviors in positive ways toward diversity, have the ability to not only reduce prejudice and intergroup bias but target distal outcomes of recruiting and hiring prospective employees (Kulik & Roberson, 2008) and retaining incumbent employees (Leslie, 2019). Thus, structural changes to the organization that may include leadership members' active involvement in diversity initiatives or a chief diversity officer's focus on cultivating diversity may bolster attitudinal and behavioral change when high level executives provide their support.

Leadership involvement in diversity initiatives is crucial for emphasizing why diversity is important, why diversity training is offered, how diversity initiatives may be linked to organizational objectives, recognizing and addressing diversity issues, and modeling behavior toward diversity (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1999). Additionally, visible commitment to diversity initiatives by management can serve as a model to employees for what acceptable behavior at the organization entails (Ruggs et al., 2011).

We also note that demographic diversity in top management is important for diversity initiatives. Diversity in top management, such as management ethnic representativeness (i.e., the extent to which the ethnic composition of managers in an organization aligns with the ethnic composition of employees in that organization), is a visible signal and signals perceptions of equity and fairness in the workplace (Lindsey et al., 2017). In line with Lindsey et al. (2017), we suggest that organizations should focus on creating an ethnically representative environment to attempt to reduce biased attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Because leaders set the tone for the organization and make decisions, these high-status members have the power to shape important attitudes and behaviors when they represent the demographic makeup of the organization (Banerji & Krishnan, 2000).

Conclusion

In this commentary, we emphasize that employees are disadvantaged with traditional training methods and argue that diversity training can benefit from understanding socialized bias behaviors, implementing frequent attempts to drive attitudes and behaviors toward diversity, engaging organizational members through inclusive content modules, and reshaping organizational structures. The idea of training sets forth incremental development of knowledge and skills. However, we argue that organizations should expand the training framework and target prejudicial attitudes in order to reduce workplace discriminatory behaviors. Therefore, we assert that continued cycles of discriminatory behaviors will continue if we do not reframe the very way we think about diversity initiatives in the workplace.

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