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COMMENTARY

Looking beyond training as a solution to workplace sexual harassment and discrimination

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To concur with Hayes et al. (2020), industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologists have more to offer to reduce workplace sexual harassment (SH) and discrimination than "stale training programs and free coffee" (p. 131). The focal article provided an extensive outline of the lack of evidence for training as an intervention for workplace SH and racial discrimination. It was, therefore, surprising that the authors' concluding advice for applied psychologists was to "approach these issues with energy and optimism" and "act as if . . . 'training works'" (p. 131). Based on the available evidence, it is difficult to assent to the authors' proposal that training is "a natural starting point" (p. 120) and "the most obvious intervention option" (p. 125) for I-O and applied psychologists addressing SH or unlawful racial discrimination. Why is training assumed to be the preferred solution despite evidence of its inefficacy? Are we as I-O psychologists overly narrow in our focus of "revitalizing" training at the expense of other, potentially more effective interventions?

The perspective through which problems are framed impacts the subsequent intervention in terms of the content (intervention focus) and level of intervention (individual versus organizational). SH and discrimination are best conceptualized as systemic rather than individual level problems (McDonald et al., 2015; Quick & McFadyen, 2017; Roehling & Huang, 2018; Vinkenburg, 2017). Where I-O psychologists frame these issues at the individual level, training will continue to be espoused as a preferred resolution. In the absence of an organization-wide intervention, such an approach is, at best, incomplete and limits our capacity to impact substantive change. Moreover, we risk complicity in perpetuating the status quo of organizational dynamics that maintain harassment and discrimination (McDonald et al., 2015).

Lowman (2012) reasoned that when science is limited, science–practitioners should proceed in a disciplined manner based on theory or conceptual models, integrating what is known in the scientific literature. The contemporary practice of diversity and inclusion audits may provide a useful starting point to address workplace SH and discrimination.

Diversity and inclusion audits

In the Australian consulting sphere, practitioners have introduced organizational diversity and inclusion (D&I) audits. A D&I audit evaluates the organizational structures, processes, systems, and practices identified in research to impact diversity and inclusion outcomes (Chun & Evans, 2019). It should be noted that discrimination in the workforce is not unique to race or sex and can be targeted toward minority groups of various diversity dimensions, for example, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion, and so forth.

Employing an action-research methodology, the D&I audit is process-oriented and seeks to identify gaps between current approaches and best practices in industry and research. Careful data-based problem identification avoids "solutioneering" by implementing an intervention

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(e.g., training) misaligned to the organizational context and root causes (Kaiser et al., 2013; Vinkenburg, 2017). Table 1 illustrates the focus, sources of data, and process of the D&I audit. The D&I audit takes a typical consulting process: data gathering, data analysis, data interpretation, and feedback. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected to identify themes and areas of strength and improvement. The audit process, data sources, and depth of analysis vary according to the organizational context and structure, available time, and resources. Regardless of the context, successful implementation requires the following:

- *Visible senior leadership commitment*. The audit is typically sponsored by the organization's CEO, Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), or diversity committee.
- *Planned communication*. Audit implementation requires input and feedback from leaders and employee representatives throughout the organization. An organization-wide, multichannel communication plan should be developed to encourage stakeholder engagement and reduce any unease. Communication should emphasize executive commitment and provide transparent information regarding the purpose, process, and expected outcomes of the audit, linking to the organization's values and objectives.

Findings are typically delivered in a report and presentation to the executive. This is often a platform for further discussion and an opportunity to further engage the executive with D&I.

D&I audit findings provide organizational leadership with a holistic view of the systems and processes contributing to SH and discrimination at their organization. This is an important step in shifting the focus from individuals to the broader organizational culture and systems (McDonald et al., 2015). Findings provide leadership with a rationale for prioritization of focus areas and inform D&I strategy development. Ongoing measurement commonly occurs through the development of D&I scorecards. Based on Kaplan and Norton's (1992) Balanced Scorecard, a D&I scorecard translates areas of improvement found in the D&I audit into a set of critical performance measures with audit data as a baseline. Measures may relate to workforce profile, recruitment and selection outcomes, employee awareness and education, parental leave and flexible work participation, investigations, and legal costs. Like the D&I audit, the D&I scorecard should be customized and cannot be implemented wholesale to organizations. The performance indicators will vary based on audit findings, the organization's strategic priorities, country, and industry context.

I-O practitioners conducting D&I audits require comprehensive knowledge of organizational systems, D&I research, and practice (Madera et al., 2019). Poorly implemented diversity initiatives risk a number of negative outcomes such as the following:

- Backfire: Poor D&I could result in decreased representation of minority groups and backlash through increased discrimination against targets.
- Negative spillover: Outcomes other than those targeted are impacted in a negative direction, for example decreased employee engagement.
- False progress: An intervention results in metric improvement without true change, for example metric improvement in the percentage of women in management through reclassification of role titles (Dover et al., 2020; Leslie, 2019).

Training cannot be completely abandoned. However, the need for training intervention should be dictated by the D&I audit findings and focus on cognitive learning rather than attitudinal outcomes (see meta-analysis by Bezrukova et al., 2016). For training interventions to be effective, they should be implemented as part of a more holistic intervention (Hamilton et al., 2019; Magley et al, 2013).

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Table 1. Diversity and inclusion audit: Focus, data sources, and process

Review element	Data source	Process
Structure and governance (Troiano, 2020)	• Governance structure, D&I council, committees, subcommittees, and working groups • Terms of reference and meeting minutes • Membership and resourcing	• Review D&I governance, accountability, and roles across the organization • Identify areas with potential for alignment • Identify areas for improved governance or increased diversity of employee membership or senior leadership sponsorship
Business case (Bagdasarov et al., 2019)	• Organization's vision, mission, values, strategy, and policies • Interviews and/or focus groups with HR, leadership, and a cross-section of employees	• Review documents to determine how the business case for D&I is referenced and whether a common definition of D&I exists • Establish how this is communicated to customers/stakeholders • Identify documents to include or strengthen references to D&I • Determine employee familiarity with the business case for D&I at the organization • Identify any need to strengthen employee and/or leadership awareness of the business case for D&I
Workforce composition and outcomes (Kalysh et al., 2016; Quick & McFadyen, 2017)	• Workforce composition data • D&I strategy/action plans • Remuneration including non-salary payments • Gender and cultural pay gaps in like-for-like roles • Interviews with HR, leadership and a cross-section of employees • Existing survey data if available	• Extract data from HR system in a format that enables comparison across organizational units and demographics • Analyze workforce outcomes of women and minority groups (e.g. turnover, performance, promotion, tenure, seniority, compensation) • Review strategies and action plans with demographic targets • Compare with industry, competitor, or other benchmark data if available • Compare with graduate rates • Review like-for-like role pay-gap data if available, identifying gaps outside expected bands • Examine employees' perceived opportunities for progression via interviews or survey data, note any discrepancies between demographic groups, seniority, and business units • Identify specific groups/units where greater diversity should be targeted or where significant gaps in workforce outcomes exist
Leadership (Buengeler et al., 2018; Kalev et al., 2006)	• Leadership training • Existing employee surveys • Interviews and/or focus groups with HR, leadership, and a cross-section of employees	• Review leadership training topics and alignment to evidence-based content • Review available employee surveys with a focus on leadership • Examine leader perspectives of D&I progress at the organization • Examine employee perspectives of leadership commitment to D&I and any responses to inappropriate behavior observed • Determine areas of strength and improvement for leadership behavior, training alignment, focus, and content

(*Continued*)

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Table 1. (*Continued*)

Review element	Data source	Process
Organizational norms and practices (Dobbin et al., 2011)	• Existing education programs • D&I communication • Interviews and/or focus groups with HR, leadership, and a cross-section of employees	• Review employee awareness training and communication • Determine consistency of messages and clarity of expected behavior standards • Examine employee and leadership observations of the day-to-day behaviors occurring that foster and prevent diversity and inclusion at the organization
Presence, quality, and compliance with specific D&I policies (AHRC, 2018; Quick & McFadyen, 2017; WGEA, 2019)	• Relevant policies, including sexual harassment, bullying, flexible work, and parental leave • Data on productivity if available, turnover, exit-interviews • Reports and investigation documentation (understanding numbers are likely under-representative) • Interviews with HR and a cross-section of employees	• Review parental leave and flexible work policies and take up • Compare with benchmark industry data if available • Examine the career pathways of employees who have returned from parental leave • Interview returned parents to understand the level of support provided throughout their leave and return to work • Identify areas of strength and improvements to leave benefits and procedures • Review SH and bullying policies to examine ease of understanding, method of communication, accessibility, referral pathways, accessibility of informal advice, victim protection, confidentiality, follow up and provision of support, feedback mechanisms, frequency of review, and update and reporting channels • Review policies and investigation reports to identify the prevalence and nature of SH and bullying, responses to perpetrators, and enforcement of consequences • Where appropriate examine the employee experience as victims or bystanders and perspective of how these incidents were managed • Identify the support and training for HR and legal practitioners conducting investigations • Identify policy and compliance areas of strength and improvements considering country legal requirements
Potential for bias in people, processes, and systems (Bohnet, 2016; Castilla, 2015; Heilman & Caleo, 2018; Vinkenburg, 2017)	• Recruitment and selection, performance and talent management documents, systems, and policies • Advertisements • Organization's website • Interviews with hiring managers, talent acquisition team, HR, and recently hired employees	• Review the job classification process for objectivity, consistency in application, and training of those involved • Review advertisements identifying themes in the demographics of those who are featured or omitted • Review job advertisement wording and methods of advertisement • Identify any wording that may discourage diverse candidates from applying or methods that limit the pool of candidates • Review policies and process of shortlisting, interview, reference checking, candidate evaluation, interview participation, and training • Review performance evaluation and promotion criteria and processes and training for evaluators • Review composition of talent programs, selection criteria and process, and any processes to intentionally progress diverse talent • Examine employee perspectives of routine practices that occur • Identify features of the end-to-end process that deviate from policy or best-practice or introduce subjectivity

Conclusion

Workplace sexual harassment and discrimination are complex phenomena that are best addressed with multilevel, systemic interventions. As I-O psychologists and researchers, we are well placed to deliver increased benefit to individuals and organizations by expanding our focus beyond training. Diversity and inclusion audits offer a data-driven approach to problem diagnosis and effective intervention design. To advance the maturity of I-O practice in diversity and inclusion, this approach requires further research and evaluation.

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