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Measuring the Effectiveness of a Workplace Diversity Training Program: A Field Study

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	Editor's Preface	1
PAPERS	Pointing the Finger at Leadership Richard A. Barker	3
	Measuring the Effectiveness of a Workplace Diversity Training Program: A Field Study Kenneth P. De Meuse, Todd J. Hostager, and Kathryn S. O'Neill	10
	Where Have All the Leaders Gone? A Holistic Leadership Model for These Uncertain Times Jann E. Freed	17
	Promoting Ethical Corporate Behavior in a Global Context Jonathan R. B. Halbesleben, M. Ronald Buckley, Michael G. Harvey, and Milorad M. Novicevic	31
	Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Workplace Attire on Workplace Outcomes Katherine Karl and Joy V. Peluchette	40
END NOTES	Guidelines for Contributors	47



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Abstract: *Although workplace diversity training has been a common practice in American companies for the past 15 years, little systematic assessment has been conducted. It appears that many organizational leaders and human resource professionals simply assume that the training activities had a positive effect. In the current study, a large manufacturing organization was interested in implementing a diversity program company-wide. However, before doing so, a pilot study was conducted with a critical layer of senior management to determine whether the training would be effective. The Workplace Diversity Survey was administered: (a) one week prior to the training, (b) the week immediately after the training was completed, and (c) three months later. The instrument measured the overall efficacy of the diversity training as well as five specific dimensions of participant perceptions. The results demonstrated that the program participants significantly increased both their overall and dimensional scores. This improvement was maintained throughout the period of study. Implications for the evaluation of diversity training and the use of executive management as a pilot group were discussed.*

Diversity in the workplace is one of the most critical challenges facing American organizations today. Nearly every issue of *Fortune*, *Business Week*, or *The Wall Street Journal* addresses some problem related to workplace diversity. Numerous articles, books, workshops, training programs, and college courses provide an abundance of information on understanding and managing diversity (cf. Bendick, Egan, & Lofhjelm, 2001; Cox, 2001; Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, 2003; Miller & Katz, 2002; Thiederman, 2003). The scholarly literature on diversity contains two main bodies of work. One area focuses on the development of conceptual frameworks for understanding diversity and its impact on organizational behavior and performance (e.g., De Meuse & Hostager, 2001; Mandell & Kohler-Gray, 1990; Thomas, 1990). The other area presents generalized prescriptions for effectively managing diversity (e.g., Cox, 1993; Piturro & Mahoney, 1992; Rynes & Rosen, 1994).

Despite the number of publications addressing diversity, relatively little research attention has been devoted to systematically measuring the effectiveness of diversity training activities (Comer & Solinman, 1996; Robertson, Kulick, & Pepper, 2001; Stockdale & Crosby, 2004). How do managers, training facilitators, and consultants know that the time and effort spent on diversity programs have made a positive impact on employees? How do administrators, teachers, and employers know that students completing a diversity course have gained an enhanced understanding and appreciation for diversity?

One of the few studies to present an instrument to scientifically measure the effectiveness of diversity training was published by De Meuse and Hostager (2001). Their *Workplace Diversity Survey* assesses diversity perceptions on the following five dimensions:

1. *Emotional Reactions* – initial, visceral responses to workplace diversity; an individual’s “gut feelings” about diversity in general;
2. *Behavioral Reactions* – what an individual does (or intends to do) in response to diversity; verbal and nonverbal actions;
3. *Judgments* – an individual’s normative evaluation of diversity; one’s value judgments regarding diversity in principle (e.g., is diversity good or bad);
4. *Personal Consequences* – beliefs regarding perceived outcomes on an individual level; an individual’s views on how diversity will affect them personally; and
5. *Organizational Outcomes* – beliefs regarding perceived outcomes on an organizational level; an individual’s views on how diversity will affect the company as a whole.

In addition, an overall effectiveness score is computed by summing the employee’s scores on those five dimensions.

The purpose of the present study was to measure the efficacy of a training diversity pilot program in a large manufacturing company using the *Workplace Diversity Survey*. The instrument was administered at three different times: (a) one week before the training occurred, (b) the week immediately after the course was completed, and (c) 90 days later. Depending upon the success of the pilot program, the diversity training would be implemented company-wide.

This research was designed to provide more meaningful data regarding program evaluation than earlier research. In one of the few studies that measured diversity program success, Rynes and Rosen (1994) simply polled human resource managers’ opinions. In their research, these authors asked 785 human resource managers to report how effective they perceived the diversity training. They found that 50% perceived their “programs as having either a mixed effect or a neutral or negligible effect.” Whereas, they observed another 18% reported them either “largely ineffective or extremely ineffective” (pp. 68; 70). While such opinions of managers may help identify broad problem areas, concrete measures of participant attitudes and perceptions are needed to more accurately measure the effectiveness of diversity training efforts. Further, concrete measures can improve understanding of various areas where diversity training may need to be corrected.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Workshop participants consisted of 43 General Managers and 14 other management professionals at a manufacturing company based in the southeastern United States. Fifty participants were men; seven were women. To ensure anonymity, no other demographic data were collected. At the time of the research project, the company had \$1.5 billion in sales and 8,500 employees located at 70 facilities throughout North and South America. Locations in Canada, Mexico, and Chile were not included in the project. In addition, several executive-level managers and a pilot group had previously experienced the workshop and were not included in the data collection. Individuals who attended the workshop had titles such as Vice President, Six Sigma Director, Manufacturing Information Technology Manager, and Senior Human Resources Manager.

Training Intervention

Workshops were conducted at four regional locations in the United States to economize travel costs. All workshops were delivered by the same two-person facilitation team, consisting of a white woman and a black man. The facilitators were employed by an outside consulting firm hired by the company to assist in setting direction for the diversity effort. The two facilitators

had previously conducted the same workshop for the senior management and pilot groups, and had assisted in defining the strategic positioning for the effort.

Workshop content included the company definition for diversity, exploration of stereotypes, identification of hidden forces that inhibit the progression of diverse employees within the organization, case studies, roleplays, and personal action planning. Skills practice focused on orientation for new staff members and on performance feedback and development skills. Length of the workshop was a day and a half; group sizes ranged from six to 18 attendees. The workshop was intended as the primary strategy to support the stated objectives of the organization which were to (a) integrate and embed diversity into the company culture, (b) reflect the diverse nature of the country and the community at all levels, and (c) provide career growth opportunities at all levels.

Survey Instrument

The *Workplace Diversity Survey (WDS)* was administered to measure diversity training effectiveness (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). The 20-item *WDS* assesses overall effectiveness, as well effectiveness on the following five dimensions: (a) emotional reactions, (b) judgments, (c) behavioral reactions, (d) personal consequences, and (e) organizational outcomes. Four items measure each dimension, using two positive and two negative statements for each one (see Table 1). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). For example, individuals responded to such positive statements as “I feel enthusiastic about diversity,” “I support diversity efforts in organizations,” and “Diversity is an asset for organizations.” Negative statements include items such as “Diversity is expensive for organizations,” “I feel frustrated with diversity,” and “I resist organizational diversity efforts.”

Procedure

The survey was distributed via email at three different times: (a) one week prior to the workshop, (b) the week immediately following the workshop, and (c) 90 days after the workshop. Since participants responded through an electronic link, it was possible to identify respondents. Overall, 33 of the 57 workshop attendees responded for all three periods, for a response rate of 58%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents the mean scores for each of the five *WDS* dimensions and the overall summary score for each of the three time periods. A series of one-way ANOVAs was performed to test the statistical significance of the differences in means. As can be observed, workshop participants had a statistically significant higher Overall Score following the training $F(2,112) = 7.17, p < .001$. The mean score increased from 18.15 for Time 1 to 26.03 and 26.83 for Times 2 and 3, respectively. In addition, participants reported a significantly higher score after the diversity training on the following four dimensions: (a) Emotional Reactions $F(2,112) = 6.52, p < .01$, (b) Judgments, $F(2,112) = 3.92, p < .05$, (c) Behavioral Reactions, $F(2,112) = 11.24, p < .001$, and (d) Organizational Outcomes, $F(2,112) = 3.98, p < .05$. The only dimension where diversity training had no appreciable effect was on Personal Consequences, $F(2,112) = 2.65, n.s.$

TABLE 1
WORKPLACE DIVERSITY SURVEY

Directions. Please circle the number which best reflects your view of diversity in the workplace for each of the following 20 items.

	1 Disagree	2 Disagree Somewhat	3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4 Agree Somewhat	5 Agree
1. I believe that diversity is fair.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Diversity is stressful for me.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel enthusiastic about diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Diversity is expensive for organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Diversity leads to harmony in organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel frustrated with diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel hopeful about diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I believe that diversity is worthless.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I support diversity efforts in organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I withdraw from organizational diversity efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Diversity is rewarding for me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel resentful about diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Diversity is an asset for organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Diversity leads me to make personal sacrifices.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I participate in organizational diversity efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I resist organizational diversity efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I believe that diversity is good.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Diversity is unprofitable for organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Diversity is enriching for me.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I believe that diversity is unjustified.	1	2	3	4	5

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When one examines the five dimensional scores more closely, it becomes apparent that the diversity training continued to positively impact the participants 90 days after the workshop. In fact, ratings actually increased from Time 2 (taken one week after the training) to Time 3 (90 days later) on four of the five dimensions, as well as for the overall score. One of the concerns that organizational leaders and training facilitators have pertains to the sustained effects of learning efforts (Hedge & Pulakos, 2002; Studer, 2003). The findings here suggest that this diversity intervention not only improved participant attitudes after the workshop, but continued up to three months later.

Although the increase in participant perceptions was fairly uniform across all five dimensions, the initial (pre-workshop) views were substantially higher on two dimensions. Scores on the Judgment ($M = 5.03$) and Behavioral Reaction ($M = 5.05$)

TABLE 2
SUMMARY AND DIMENSIONAL MEAN SCORES ACROSS THREE TIME PERIODS

WDS Score	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	F-value
Emotional Reactions	2.73	4.65	4.91	6.52**
Judgments	5.03	6.50	6.29	3.92*
Behavioral Reactions	5.05	6.88	7.09	
11.24***				
Personal Consequences	2.73	3.65	4.26	2.65
Organizational Consequences	2.75	4.15	4.31	3.98*
OVERALL SCORE	18.15	26.03	26.83	
7.17***				

Note. Sample sizes are 40 (Time 1), 40 (Time 2), and 35 (Time 3).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

dimensions were more than two scale points higher than for Emotional Reactions ($M = 2.73$), Personal Consequences ($M = 2.73$), and Organizational Outcomes ($M = 2.75$). This disparity was maintained after the diversity workshop as well (see Figure 1). Perhaps, the personal and organizational consequences of diversity were perceived more in a negative light because of job experiences with diversity in their organization (e.g., employees getting hired or promoted based on skin color rather than merit). Likewise, emotionally, the participants may harbor some negative sentiments regarding diversity. On the other hand, the behavioral reactions and judgments the employees expressed are more inner-directed and self-oriented. Hence, they may be more likely to rate themselves more favorably with regard to diversity. Regardless of the reason, it is reassuring that the *behavior* of employees appears to be so positively inclined toward diversity.

The results of this pilot study are encouraging. Based on these results, top management can make a rational, well informed decision whether to expand this diversity training program throughout the company. Organizational leaders can be confident that this training will positively affect attending employees' emotional reactions, behavioral reactions, judgments, and organizational outcomes. Further, these findings persist well after the workshop ends. This conclusion is not simply based on employee testimonials or promotional material depicted in a consultant's brochure. Rather, it is gleaned from a systematic measure designed to assess how employees perceived and react to diversity training. It suggests that the time and money spent on this intervention will be worth the investment.

Beyond the opportunity to glean data to examine the merits of diversity training, the initial involvement of senior management in diversity training has an additional benefit. It visibly demonstrates to employees throughout the company that this training is important. It nurtures an organizational culture that asserts diversity is a worthwhile pursuit for everyone there. One can develop the most stimulating and creative workshop content, select qualified trainers, and deliver the message in an inspiring manner. However, without the perceived support of executive management, such efforts are likely to fail (Studer, 2003).

This study provides support that the *Workplace Diversity Survey* can help ascertain the efficacy of diversity training. Ultimately, the effects of training need to endure much longer than 90 days. Nevertheless, this instrument represents a significant step in the systematic evaluation of diversity programs. Organizations should not simply assume that such training programs are successful (Bendick et al., 2001; Hostager & De Meuse, 2002; Hedge & Pulakos, 2002). An instrument such as the *Workplace Diversity Survey* also can provide academicians and researchers a scientific approach to investigate the effects of various diversity training techniques. The period of assuming that any type of diversity intervention is worthwhile is over. Both

practitioners and scholars have a useful tool to measure and monitor the effectiveness of diversity efforts.

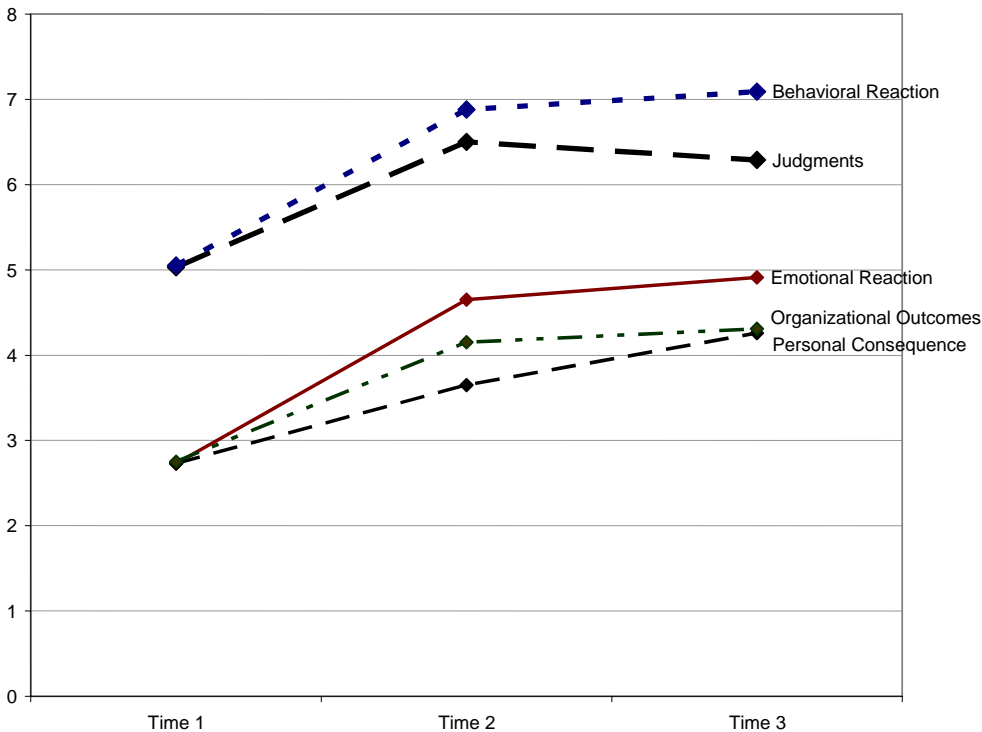


FIGURE 1. DIMENSIONAL MEAN SCORES ACROSS THREE TIME PERIODS

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