Diversity training: How can we make it more effective?

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Introduction

Organisations have become increasingly aware of the importance of managing diversity effectively, not only in terms of meeting legal requirements but also for the variety of other benefits they can accrue. For example, reducing bullying and harassment has financial benefits (e.g. fewer grievances, less litigations, reduced recruitment and training costs etc.) as well as improving the morale and well being of employees. Having a workforce that reflects the diversity of its clients increases the likelihood that the organisation will recognise and meet their clients' needs. Diverse employees will generate new and different ideas and perspectives that allow the company to redefine markets, products and values and challenge the status quo. Indeed, a US study in 1994 found that the average annualised return for the 100 companies that rated highest in diversity management was 10.4% higher than the 100 lowest companies (cited in Bagshaw, 2004).

Diversity Training

The definition of diversity training varies from organisation to organisation and depends on how the concept of diversity is understood. In general, most organisations providing training offer awareness and/or skill-based training (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1999).

- *Awareness* training is a classroom-based method, where information is presented in an off-the-job setting. In general, this form of training may be useful to impart knowledge, provide a wider perspective and help participants to new ways of thinking (Hollenbeck, 1991). More specifically in terms of diversity training, it can be used to correct myths and stereotypes, and increase employee sensitivity to diversity issues. For example, Smith, Hornsby and Kite (2000) found that students were more positive toward international issues after a 3-hour presentation on cultural diversity. However, although this type of training heightens awareness, it does little in the way of providing skills to behave or manage more effectively (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). In addition, due to awareness training's ability to reach a large number of participants at once, it lacks the capacity to meet the needs of each individual. Nemetz and Christensen (1996) criticised this lecturing form of diversity training, showing how it can in fact create negative reactions, further polarising the diverse groups. Moreover, it is possible that other, more dominant sources of influence (such as group norms) may override the organisationally driven awareness workshop, thus having no impact.
- *Skill-based* training builds on awareness training by adding a behavioural aspect and providing individuals with the tools to promote effective interaction in a heterogeneous work setting (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). The quality of skill-based training is supported by Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, which proposes that participants will learn more through behaviour role modelling. In terms of diversity training, this form of

participative engagement in the role play encourages rehearsal and practice of managing diversity-related issues. In addition, it offers tailored and individualised feedback or reinforcement from a coach to further facilitate the development of the behaviour required.

The number of organisations providing diversity training has increased significantly over the years. For example, in a survey conducted by Harris (1991) (cited in Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 1999), it was found that two-thirds of the companies conducted diversity training for managers and almost 40 percent provided training for all employees. It is often presumed that diversity training programmes will have a positive outcome, however there is a risk that they can also have negative consequences. A lack of knowledge of what the components of effective diversity programmes are can be counterproductive, creating more segregation and becoming damaging to individuals and the organisation (Day, 1995). As Noe and Ford (1992) stated, "while training for diversity has increased in popularity, no systematic empirical research regarding the effectiveness of diversity programmes has been published". Although the problem is not quite as extreme today, it remains that diversity training programmes are rarely subjected to systematic evaluation.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the research was to conduct a full evaluation of a diversity training programme, assessing the difference in impact between awareness and skill-based training initiatives for senior managers within a large UK public sector service organisation.

The programme was evaluated on four levels, based on Kirkpatrick's (1959) taxonomy of training evaluation, including participants' initial reactions to both the Awareness Workshop and DDC, and change in attitude over the one year since training implementation. The focus of the current paper, however, is the findings regarding participants' change in behaviour towards diversity. In addition, it looks at the organisational impact of the training programme, measured by how direct reports' perception of their manager's behaviour change affected their job satisfaction, organisational commitment and their perceptions of how much equality and fairness exists within the organisation. Levels 3 and 4 will now be discussed in turn.

Behaviour Change *(Level 3)*
An ultimate goal of a diversity training programme is to create a change in employee behaviour towards accepting diversity at work. This means being able to challenge inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, utilising individuals' differences and abilities with regard to the allocation of jobs and providing support to all who need it. If the diversity training programme is successful, it follows that delegates participating in the awareness training should have a greater positive change in their behaviour than employees who have not been through the course. Furthermore, delegates participating in the skill-based training should show a greater positive change in their behaviour than employees who have only participated in the awareness training.

Organisational Outcomes *(Level 4)*
Diversity training for senior managers is a top-down way of changing the organisational culture of embracing diversity at work and managing it positively. Under this premise, a measure of the effectiveness of the programme at Level 4 would be measures of direct reports' perceptions of the organisational culture and policy support in relation to their job

satisfaction and organisational commitment. The current research aims to measure this through a new concept known as Climate for Opportunity (Hayes, Bartle & Major, 2002).

Climate for Opportunity
Climate is 'the atmosphere that employees perceive is created in their organisations by practices, procedures, and rewards' (Schneider, Gunnarson, & Niles-Jolly, 1994). It is through organisational experiences and events, such as the priorities set by management, that climate is understood and interpreted by employees (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000). Climate for diversity is influenced by the amount of power and access to resources that each group has and how the individuals view those policies. For example, Kossek and Zonia (1993) argue that minorities and women are often more aware of restrictions on their advancement than are white men.

Hayes et al (2002) label this perception of advancement and equality within the organisation as 'climate for opportunity'. This incorporates three concepts: equal opportunities, Justice Theory and Climate Theory. Equal opportunities refer to the legal perspective recognised as the appropriate basis for the allocation of opportunities. Justice Theory focuses on how individuals evaluate the fairness of an outcome and whether the process to achieve that outcome was fair. Climate Theory, as discussed before, provides an understanding of how individuals make sense of their environment (Hayes et al (2002) focus on individual level climate known as psychological climate). In combination, they conceptualise how individuals' perceptions, experiences and values translate into judgments about the fairness of an organisation's treatment of its workforce. Opportunities include such things as selection, pay, promotion, authority and training. For example, regardless of strict organisational policies protecting against discrimination, a female employee may believe that she was turned down for a promotion because all of the senior managers in the organisation are male. As a result, she would have a low Climate for Opportunity.

Hayes et al (2002) suggest that Climate for Opportunity acts as an antecedent and an outcome of individual, group and organisational factors. As an antecedent, an individual's Climate for Opportunity affects their job satisfaction, motivation, trust and organisational commitment. As an outcome, it can be affected by organisational procedures, demographic distribution, personal experience or supervisor behaviour. For example, if an employee feels their manager is treating them unfairly, their Climate for Opportunity will decrease. Thus it is suggested that direct reports' perception of a change in their managers' diversity-relate behaviour will lead to changes in their Climate for Opportunity. In addition, their Climate for Opportunity should have an impact on their level of job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Method

Occupational psychologists at Pearn Kandola designed and introduced a diversity management programme one year prior to the evaluation. This consisted of a half-day Awareness Workshop offered to senior management, covering a range of diversity-related issues e.g. the business case for diversity, equal opportunities legislation, stereotyping. The skill-based training or Diversity Development Centre (DDC) was a full day for the most senior managers only consisting of a series of observed meetings where delegates had to address and resolve issues surrounding the themes of equality, bullying and harassment, and inclusivity. Each DDC delegate then had a one-to-one session with their coach to discuss their Personal Development Plan and was provided with guidance on how to take it forward.

Two surveys were designed and delivered via an online service, one for managers and another for direct reports. A random sample of managers was gathered across the organisation, ensuring sufficient numbers within each category. From the 692 potential respondents, 289 participants (42%) returned the Managers Survey, within which 45% had been through the awareness training, 32% had been through the Diversity Development Centre and 23% had had no training. This gave a sample of 81 females (28%) and 208 males (72%) aged from 22 to 57 (mean 42.1 years).

From the 275 direct reports approached, 203 participants (74%) returned the survey. This gave a sample of 66 females (33%) and 137 males (67%) aged from 24 to 58 (mean 40.8 years).
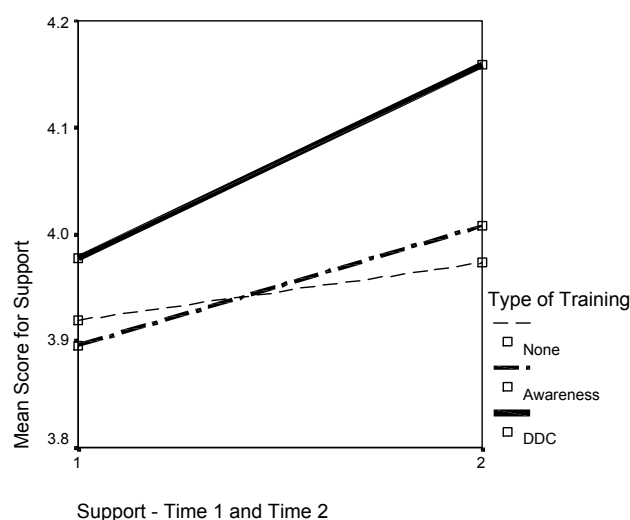
Results

Although a multi-dimensional evaluation was carried out, this paper will only outline the findings of behavioural (Level 3) and organisational outcomes (Level 4).

Behavioural outcomes:
Managers who had participated in the DDC had a significantly higher level of behaviour change compared to those who had only been through the Awareness Workshop. However, there was no significant difference between managers who had participated in the Awareness Workshop and those who had not received any training. Figure 1 illustrates this behaviour change across the three groups.

Figure 1: Change in behaviour over one year for the three training groups

The questionnaire also allowed managers to comment on how their behaviours have changed over the past year. One particular manager, who had participated in the DDC commented:

"I am a better manager than I was a year ago. While I understand that I will always have a tendency to favour people who are broadly similar to me, I consciously fight against it".

This supports results displayed above that skill-based training is successful in changing managers' behaviour towards diversity according to self-report data. However, analyses

conducted on direct report's perceptions of change in their manager's behaviour were not related to the amount of training the manager had received. Thus, conflicting results were found using direct report data.
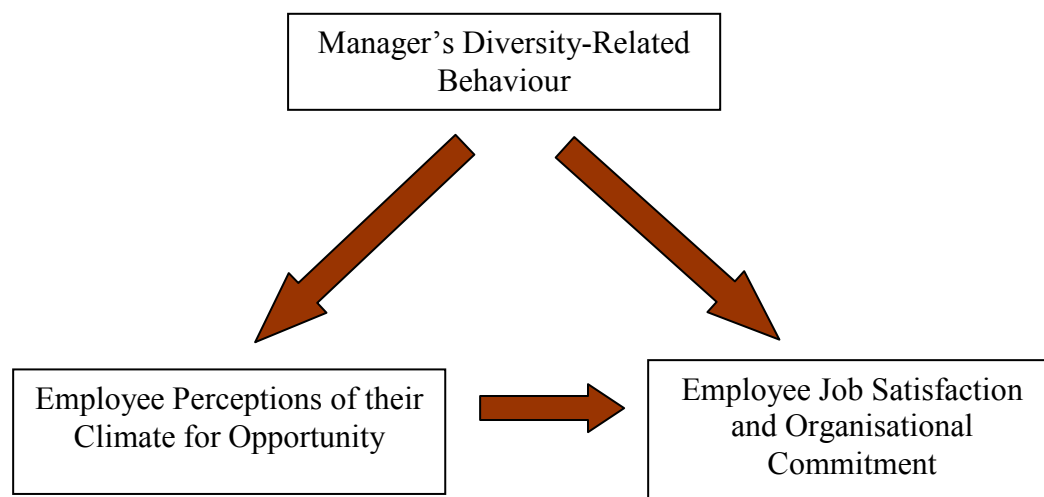
Organisational outcomes:
Organisational impact was assessed in terms of direct reports' job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and their perceptions of equality and fairness (their Climate for Opportunity) within the organisation. The main findings from this were that:
- Direct reports' perceptions of their managers' diversity-related behaviour impacts those employees' job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation.
- Direct reports' perceptions of their managers' diversity-related behaviour affects those employees' general perceptions of diversity and equality the organisation.
- Direct reports' perceptions of equality and fairness within the organisation affect their job satisfaction and commitment, in addition to the impact of their line manager.

Thus, a three way relationship exists between managers' diversity-related behaviour, employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and their perceptions of their Climate for Opportunity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The three-way relationship

(1)   Direct reports' perception of change in their manager's behaviour towards diversity was a significant predictor of change in their job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

(2)   Perceptions of change in managers' behaviour towards diversity significantly predicted perceptions of the level of organisational equality and fairness.

Discussion

The present study goes beyond previous work in this field in two ways. Firstly, it achieves a comprehensive training evaluation including all four levels of Kirkpatrick's (1959) taxonomy. Secondly, it is the first time that such an evaluation has been carried out on a diversity training programme, the result of which has many implications for the future development and success of diversity management initiatives in all organisations.

Impact of training on behaviour

Results found a significant change in behaviour between those who had been through the DDC and those who had been to the Awareness Workshop. In contrast, no change in behaviour was found for managers participating in the Awareness Workshop. This finding is not unexpected considering the aims and approaches of each of the interventions. The Awareness Workshop was oriented towards gaining knowledge of diversity issues rather than developing skills. The Diversity Development Centre was designed to place managers in realistic scenarios, where they are required to manage diversity-related issues and are provided with feedback on how to improve their skills. Consequently, a change in behaviour would be expected for managers completing the skill-based training.

Since all managers participating in the DDC must undergo the Awareness Workshop first, it is impossible to say how much the latter is contributing to managers' change in behaviour. However, it is suggested that before managers are open to developing their skills for diversity, they must understand the reasons why it is necessary, which the awareness training provides. Therefore, the effects of the Awareness Workshop should not be underestimated since it appears to be an important foundation as to 'why' managers should manage diversity and inclusion effectively. The DDC then adds to this by providing skills of 'how' managers should manage diversity and inclusion effectively. The findings of the present study highlight that in order for behaviour change to take place, awareness training needs to be supplemented by skill-based training. They also highlight the importance of skills development for managers in managing diversity. This extends beyond training to the need to provide support and coaching for managers back in the workplace, such as through the network of diversity advisors.

However, the contradictory findings of change in managerial behaviour should also be discussed. One reason for this could be that manager's self-report of their behaviour was self-inflated because they were expecting their behaviour to be positive having been through the training programme. Thus, the training programme may not have been as effective as reflected by managers' report. Alternatively, it could be that direct reports did not have enough contact with their manager in order to view their manager dealing effectively (or ineffectively as the case may be) with diversity issues. Thus, definitive conclusions could not be made that the DDC had a clear impact on changing manager's behaviour compared to the Awareness Workshop, and in turn compared to those who had not received any training.

Impact of training on organisational factors

The findings highlight that as long as direct reports perceive their managers' behaviour to be positive it will relate to an increased perception of personal advancement, equality and policy support within the organisation (as measured by Climate for Opportunity), how satisfied they were in their work and their organisational commitment. Managers' self-perception of their behaviour towards diversity however, had no impact on direct reports' Climate for Opportunity, job satisfaction or organisational commitment. This highlights the necessity of gathering information from direct reports' when evaluating a diversity training programme.

These findings have significant implications for the business case for diversity since strong links have been found between high levels of job satisfaction and enhanced employee performance, reduced turnover and absenteeism (Benkhoff, 1997) and organisation citizenship behaviour (Colquitt, 2001). In addition to managers' behaviour towards diversity,

employees' job satisfaction and commitment was also influenced by how positively they perceived the general climate of equality and fairness in the company. Consequently these findings suggest that the more positively diversity is managed, the more employees are likely to contribute to business performance.

The results also found that direct reports' Climate for Opportunity is influenced by their managers' behaviour towards diversity. This is not surprising given that managers are responsible for the practical implementation of many of the diversity related policies. Together with the above findings, this suggests that line managers play a central role to implementing a positive approach to diversity, and achieving the business benefits from this. Consequently it could be implied that organisations should focus their support and encouragement to develop the skills to manage diversity effectively on all managers with supervisory responsibilities, rather than just senior managers.

Limitations of the Study

Since the area of diversity and inclusion covers a vast array of issues such as dealing with minority groups, differences in abilities, bullying and harassment, discrimination etc. it is possible that these behavioural measures did not capture everything. Are there other dimensions to attitude/behaviour towards diversity, which were not measured in the present investigation? Would other measures contest the findings presented here? These are questions that need further investigation.

Attention must also be drawn to the validity of the behavioural self-report measures. As discussed, differences were found between how manager's rated their behaviour and how their direct reports rated them. The problem with asking questions regarding diversity in general is that it is highly liable to social desirability i.e. it is very easy for a participant to know what the socially accepted answer would be. Alternatively, direct reports may not always be present to see or notice when their manager/colleague challenges inappropriate behaviour for example, so the self-report measure may be more reliable. Regardless, the level of disagreement was such that one should remain cautious about making broad, general conclusions from this research alone.

Implications for HR professionals & their organisations

This research should alert HR professionals to several practical considerations regarding designing and implementing a diversity training programme. Primarily, attention should be drawn to the findings of the substantial added value that skill-based training provides above awareness training. This has considerable implications for how organisations invest their time and money in diversity training.

Since all managers participating in the DDC must undergo the Awareness Workshop first, it is impossible to say how much awareness training is contributing to managers' change in behaviour. However, it is suggested that before managers are open to developing their skills for diversity, they must understand the reasons why it is necessary, which awareness training provides. Therefore, the effects of awareness training should not be underestimated since it appears to be an important foundation as to 'why' managers should manage diversity and inclusion effectively. Skill-based training then adds to this by providing skills of 'how' managers should manage diversity and inclusion effectively. The findings of the present study highlight that in order for behaviour change to take place, awareness training needs to

be supplemented by skill-based training. They also highlight the importance of skills development for managers in managing diversity. This extends beyond training to the need to provide support and coaching for managers back in the workplace, such as through a network of diversity advisors.

The results concerning organisational outcomes provide evidence that diversity training programmes have a positive impact on changing the organisational culture towards embracing diversity. As mentioned previously, successful diversity management can accrue a number of benefits, from increased annualised return to the generation of more innovative ideas (Bagshaw, 2004). Therefore, the findings of the present research have major implications for verification that organisational investment in diversity training programmes is helping to achieve these bottom-line effects.

With reference to the findings surrounding dispositional empathy, one must highlight the necessity to consider that diversity training programmes will be effective for some more than others (supporting Noe and Ford, 1992). The present research found empathy to have an impact on the amount of attitude and behaviour change. Thus, one should stress the importance of empathy to the outcomes of diversity training. Since previous studies have found it possible to induce empathy by urging participants to take the perspective of another person (Rouhana and Kelman, 1993; Waterman, Reid, Garfield and Hoy, 2001 cited in Avery and Thomas, 2004), it is suggested this is taken into consideration and integrated into the design of future diversity training programs.

Conclusions

This research aimed to take the first step to building a comprehensive multi-dimensional diversity evaluation framework. In doing so, it examined several outcomes of both awareness and skill-based diversity training and the relationships between them. The findings have many implications for the development of diversity training programme designs. It indicates that the supplementary gains of skill-based training for behaviour change are impressive.

The results also have implications at an organisational level since it was revealed that direct reports' perception of their manager's behaviour towards diversity was directly related to their level of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, thus indicating possible vertical transfer effects of the training programme. In addition, it was found that the more positive employees perceived their manager's behaviour to be, the more opportunities they felt they had to progress within the company and how fair and just they perceived the organisation to be. Although no causal attribution can be made that the diversity training affects employees Climate for Opportunity, job satisfaction or organisational commitment, the findings are of great interest with regards to discovering potential alternative outcomes that have not yet been considered.

This also highlights that managers' ability to manage diversity is critical to achieving the business benefits. Managers' behaviour towards diversity was found to have a significant impact on employees' level of satisfaction and commitment, as well as employees' general perceptions of organisational diversity climate. Consequently, this suggests that managers play a critical role both in creating a climate where diversity is perceived positively within the organisation, and in realising the benefits of a motivated and engaged workforce.

Throughout the last few years, an increasing number of companies have realised the advantages of successful diversity management and thus introduced training programmes, which they believe will help them accomplish this goal. The findings from the present research suggest that organisations should not take it for granted that all their objectives are being achieved. The current study is an evaluation of one diversity training programme in one type of organisation, and yet it uncovers a number of valuable findings that should be considered in the design of any diversity training intervention. It therefore highlights how crucial diversity training evaluations are, not only for organisations but also to further the much-needed research in this new field.

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