

Profiles in Diversity Journal®

Sharing Workforce Experiences

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The Winters Group
SPECIAL EDITION

Philip Morris

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a Core Commitment

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The Winters Group, Inc.

LET'S STOP TRAINING AND start educating

Whether the training is for one day or one week, a single event is not likely to yield the desired result. There are a myriad of controversial subjects that can only get surface coverage. How do you move your diversity program from a training event to an ongoing learning approach?

Diversity training gets a bad rap. Why? Because we treat a complex, controversial, values-driven topic in the same way that we approach neutral training subjects like communication skills or new employee orientation. No matter how much an organization maintains that they are not trying to change beliefs, the very subject of diversity training—even if approached from a strictly cognitive perspective of company policies and behavior expectations—challenges values, assumptions, morals, and even character.

Designing a diversity training “event” around quick “sound bytes” naturally leads to the common complaints we hear about much of the diversity training being conducted today. The typical complaints include:

- We spent a lot of money and see very little difference in behavior.
- It resulted in increased alienation and animosity among diverse groups.
- We see increased claims of unfair treatment.

Whether the training is for one day or one week, a single event is not likely to yield the desired result. There are a myriad of controversial subjects that can only get surface coverage. Without opportunity to fully examine your own beliefs and values, then continue to learn and apply the concepts, little sustained change will occur. When the training event is over, employees go back to their work environments either positively or negatively charged, with incomplete knowledge and little understanding about what will be different. Soon it is business as usual and the diversity training is forgotten as just another program-of-the-month.

How can we move from a program-of-the-month training event to an ongoing learning approach to diversity? First, we have to go through a fundamental mindshift about the principles of a successful process:

- A comprehensive educational approach is required
- That diversity is values-based and deeply rooted in one’s worldview must be acknowledged
- Building blocks need to be established that allow the process to take shape over time
- Diversity needs to be connected to business initiatives and other personal development programs
- Diversity learning needs to be brought directly into the work environment
- Varied learning styles must be accommodated.

This fundamental shift in thinking will naturally lead to a very different approach and long-term outcomes. *It is possible to change attitudes.* We change as a result of personal transformation that happens through significant life experiences over a sustained period of time—experiences that call into question old beliefs and assumptions.

Diversity must be treated as ongoing education, not training. Training can build awareness and skills. Education changes mindsets.

Adopt a “Matriculation” Education Model

The “matriculation” model provides a whole new way of viewing diversity education. It incorporates diversity and related interpersonal education, moving employees from the entry level to progressively more difficult concepts. It’s complete with credits, prerequisites, core curriculum, and the ability to place out of



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courses based on previous experience. The idea is to develop a structured learning continuum, over a period of at least three years, that leads to matriculation and certification. Certification gives employees an incentive to complete the curriculum as credits count towards mandated training hours.

The Pre-Requisite of "Self Awareness"

The notion of *prerequisites* is key. Often, employees are not ready for the complex topics addressed in diversity training that "require" that employees value and respect others. Individuals who do not have a high self-concept are less capable of valuing others. So even before Diversity 101, self-awareness education is needed. This includes a deep exploration of self, starting with non-threatening instruments like the Myers Briggs personality type inventory. It continues through increasingly more challenging exercises that deal with personal biases and stereotypes, awakening new insights about who we are, how we are different from others, and what our personal "blind spots" might be.

The desired outcome is more whole, self-sufficient, highly-motivated, and engaged employees. Diversity mandates aside, organizations want employees who are highly self-developed. They are more productive, creative, and more committed to the business objectives.

Building Blocks to Long-Term Success

Personal development education is often approached as if you can "enter" at any point with any intervention. The "matriculation" approach is successful because its foundation is set on progressive "building blocks" implemented over several years, like any good education model. An ideal three-year plan includes education in: Self-Awareness, Awareness of Others, Environmental/Business Awareness, Self-Management Skills, Interpersonal Management Skills, Community Building, Business Skills, and Leadership Development.

Make the Connection to Major Business and Educational Initiatives

Even though we talk about the business case for diversity, the training is usually stand-alone, with very little connection to other business initiatives, processes and even other personal development training.

The Theory in Action: Kodak Blends Diversity with Lean Manufacturing Initiative

Eastman Kodak's Rochester, New York manufacturing organization has embarked upon a lean manufacturing initiative. Initially, it was difficult for many employees to see how this connected in any way with their ongoing diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Dan Meek, Director, Worldwide Color Film Manufacturing says that "lean is a way of thinking that includes everyone in eliminating waste...non-value added steps in the manufacturing process. It is about empowerment, innovation, and involvement and therefore it directly connects to our diversity initiatives, which are also about including everyone in making the business a success. Our teams are diverse and inclusive to insure that we do not miss any opportunity to eliminate waste."

Leadership learning communities also have been initiated at Kodak's Rochester manufacturing plant. First line supervisors within various departments meet for one hour per week to talk about their role as a leader in a diverse workplace. The topics range from white privilege, favoritism, communication styles, to backlash.

Any topic is acceptable and may be generated from a book, newspaper article, or some current diversity issue on the shop floor. Structured, pre-developed one-hour lessons in e-learning format are also made available for discussion topics. "The implicit learning that comes from the open conversation among peers facing similar issues is not possible in a classroom setting," says Colleen McVeigh, department manager of Film Components Manufacturing at Kodak. "This is one of our most valuable learning tools."

In addition to the learning communities, one-on-one professional coaching for selected leaders and individual contributors who want to further develop themselves is made available. Coaching supports individual self-discovery and growth. "Working with my coach has provided me with an unbiased listener—a sounding board. With coaching, I've been able to put a framework around my challenges that has helped me see the bigger picture. The value I've gotten from coaching has been an overall better perspective on challenges and opportunities in general. It's been a great resource for me," offers Ron Dony, a supervisor in Entertainment Imaging.

There is a clear, direct connection to other personal development training that is often overlooked. Conflict resolution, communication skills, and team building are examples of areas that overlap. In a college curriculum there are core, required courses and related electives to round out the "major." By linking other personal development training, employees gain a breadth and depth of how to apply diversity concepts more broadly. Learning credits towards certification can be given for the completion of related educational experiences.

Perhaps not so obvious links are business initiatives and processes. Many organizations have some type of total quality management process. The concepts of continuous improvement, empowered workers, problem solving, and creativity can all be easily linked to diversity concepts. Creativity will be maximized to the extent that everyone's views are valued and respected. When training is developed for key

business processes, the curriculum should include clear and demonstrable connections to diversity.

Take the Classroom to the Work Room

Structured classroom work is needed to present theory and concepts, but workplace venues provide the best environment to apply the concepts and generate real learning. It is like any professional education that requires both course work and practical work experience—for example, internships or field work.

Learning communities within natural work team settings provide an opportunity to put theory into practice. The first step to effectively implementing a learning community model is to change the perception that this is not legitimate work. There is guilt associated with spending time on "soft skills," as diversity and personal development are viewed, when there is "real work" to be done. But the work team

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in my view

Roosevelt Thomas

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community. The goal would be to broaden the external environment's perspective on equal opportunity and inclusion issues.

Illustrative Benefits

As discussed, the likelihood of sustainable progress with equal opportunity and inclusion will be increased, primarily because the combination of the traditional model and Diversity Management generates less backlash. Because Diversity Management does not position differences as implicitly bad, and because it encompasses all differences and similarities, minorities and women are likely to feel less "targeted" and, therefore, less susceptible to stigmatization. White males are included *in the definition* of diversity. This is how Diversity Management works to create an environment that accesses the talent of all employees.

Corporations effectively implementing Diversity Management also gain an enhanced capability to address *all* diversity mixtures. Workforce mixtures are not the only ones requiring attention in corporate America. As corporations progress in acquiring Diversity Management capability, they equip themselves to deal with any diversity issue.

Challenges

Without a doubt, time and the magnitude of the implementation process are the two greatest challenges. Implementation will demand enormous time for education and training,

application practice sessions, and the modification of corporate culture. In today's competitive and dynamic economic culture, managers are reluctant to allow themselves or associates to be away from "work" for major chunks of time. Similarly, the short-term focus of many executives makes it unlikely that a corporation can stay focused for the five or ten years required to institutionalize real cultural change.

For me, the challenge becomes not whether to proceed, but how to get around barriers to implementation. For example, electronic learning offers promise for more efficient and effective education and training. Enhanced skills within the core of a business might strengthen the time period a company can stay focused on one issue like cultural change. Clearly, innovation and creativity will be crucial for successful implementation.

The irony is that Diversity Management capability (the ability to address a mixture characterized by differences and similarities) is required to develop and implement a process comprised of the "traditional" and "strategic." But regardless of implementation challenges, organizations desiring success with diversity will have to master the diversification of their approaches. Otherwise, they risk being in a frustrating cycle indefinitely. ■

let's stop training

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will not be as productive or creative in the absence of an inclusive, respectful work environment.

Given that premise, departments should be asked to commit at least one hour weekly for learning at the work team level. These sessions explore a myriad of topics that relate to diversity and personal development within the team. Broad concepts that may have been presented in a structured training program are "chunked" into a single topic and groups discuss the issue from the perspective of how it relates to their work group.

Learning Styles are Diverse, Too

We criticize public education for taking a "one size fits all" approach to teaching our children. We fall into the same trap in the corporate learning arena. Knowledge workers likely respond differently than production workers. Production workers who are more accustomed to mechanical tasks than conceptual thinking may be turned off by a training design that is mostly lecture, video, and a few interactive exercises.

The "matriculation" approach allows for the design of different course options that can consider preferred learning styles. Production

myths

British Civil Service

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diversity, with a selection of exercises/activities for managers and their teams to undertake to improve their understanding of diversity in the workplace.

Conclusions and Lessons

There is no room for complacency. Our latest research, which looked at staff perceptions on diversity, tells us that we have a long way to go. We may well compare favourably against other employers on key questions of diversity and equality, but we still have as few as 39 percent of our own employees believing that we "value diversity." There are concerns, too, amongst disabled and ethnic minority employees in particular about fairness and equity.

Good management of diversity is just about good management! Experience has taught me that for most organisations, including our own, the fault lines exposed by concerns for equality and diversity in the workplace are often deeper and wider than the apparently obvious. Hence the need to frame solutions around "deficiencies" of a more *fundamental* organisational nature. The breadth of the Wilson reforms is a helpful support to diversity in critical ways: giving us competency frameworks, performance management systems, recruitment and selection processes, the graduate fast-stream, and talent spotting and succession planning arrangements; all from the perspective of diversity and fairness. The alternative is what I refer to as the "tendency to bolt-on"—having your diversity and equality considerations operate with only marginal impact on organisational diversity objectives and targets, achieved more through hope than expectation. ■

workers, for example, respond well to theater-based training that is entertaining as well as educational. Workplace situations that they can relate to and see acted out are more memorable, realistic, and personally relevant. This approach is also less threatening and provides a safe space for discussing "undiscussables."

The need for diversity education is not going to go away given our increasingly diverse population spanning racial, gender, age, and generational differences, just to name a few. We need to get smarter about how we approach it and spend the time to develop rich, meaningful, related educational experiences that are transformative and build towards proficiency. ■