

# Chapter 16

## Diversity Training in Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

*Diversity training is an area of growing interest within organizations. As organizations and society become more culturally diverse, there is a need to provide training across all hierarchical levels to make individuals more aware of and sensitized to elements of difference. Managing and valuing diversity is becoming increasingly important to delivering higher levels of performance and creativity, enhancing problem solving and decision-making, and gaining cultural insights into domestic and overseas markets. As facilitators of diversity training, line managers are increasingly tasked with the important role of equipping employees with the skills and competencies to work effectively in diverse multicultural teams. Consequently, this chapter looks at the mechanics of how diversity is discussed and delivered in organizations. It explores the necessity of diversity training in safeguarding and respecting individual identity and in fostering more welcoming inclusive workplaces.*

### INTRODUCTION

Diversity is an increasingly important issue within organizations, with diversity management in particular positioned as an effective managerial response to the challenges posed by globalization and an increasingly heterogeneous workforce

(Groschl, 2011). Recent special issues of the *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management*, and *Advances in Developing Human Resources* have focused on diversity and equal opportunities, signaling that the Human Resource Development (HRD) field is finally beginning to address diversity training in earnest.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1812-1.ch016

For too long, diversity has been missing from university curricula, programmes, textbooks and research, despite the field of HRD claiming diversity as a vital responsibility and key competency (Bierema, 2010). For his part, Gibb (2008) highlights the changing nature of the workforce as a key factor underpinning HRD's newfound commitment to diversity. He identifies six factors for the greater visibility and attention to diversity:

- Higher levels of employment participation by women
- A significant percentage of the workforce with dependent children or "carer" responsibilities
- Increased number of dual income families
- Changes in the family structures of employees—sole parents, fewer men and women in traditional family roles
- An ageing workforce
- Higher levels of cultural diversity with substantial labour migration

Multiculturalism has become an important facet of modern society and global organizations. As Scullion and Collings (2011) point out, organizations are increasingly sourcing, developing, and retaining key employees on a global scale. In such contexts, they argue that the effectiveness of global talent systems is increasingly being recognized as a major source of success or failure in international business. Cultural competencies have become critical to successful operations at a national, regional, and global level, and McDonnell and Collings (2011) report that many organizations are looking for leaders who possess a global mindset and who can communicate and work with different cultures, manage uncertainty and global complexity.

With widening diversity, organizations are increasingly becoming aware of the need to develop and run diversity training programmes to prepare and equip employees with the skills to meet the needs of other employees and customers

from linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds (Vielba & Edelshain, 1997). Moreover, organizations are also realising that the benefits of running diversity programmes go beyond legal compliance towards the attainment of sustainable competitive advantages, whereby diversity insights can lead to enhanced creativity, innovation and products and services more directly aligned to customer needs (Page, 2007; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). As Keogh (2005, p. 261) points out: "Customers are increasingly looking through the front door of companies they buy from. If they do not like what they see in terms of social response, they will not go in." Subsequently, diversity management can be utilised as a mechanism to help organizations model themselves as attractive, progressive employers who embrace difference (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011).

However, diversity management programmes are not without their critics. Within organizations, there are many opponents of diversity training programmes who see diversity training as a form of "political correctness" leading to a nervousness and guilt being placed at the door of the majority group. Such individuals see diversity training as an attempt to blame the majority group for historical segregation and an attempt to force minority values and beliefs onto those of the majority (Stewart, et al., 2008; Holladay & Quinones, 2008). A second criticism leveled is that diversity advocates often engage in "distant cheerleading," heralding new diversity initiatives, without involving themselves in practical day-to-day workplace issues (Dick & Cassell, 2002). Furthermore, Dickens and Hall (2006) posit that organizations are only interested in diversity issues to the degree to which they coincide with business needs and are easy and straightforward to tackle. Such views suggest that many organizations adopt a contingent, cost-based approach to diversity, rather than a deeper commitment to underlying diversity values and principles. A final criticism comes from Rees *et al.* (2007) who argue that emphasizing differences between employees rather than unity can

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