



DESIGNING AND FACILITATING PERFORMANCE-BASED DIVERSITY TRAINING

by Tyrone A. Holmes

As we enter the 21st century, America continues to transform itself into one of the most culturally diverse societies on earth. Whether it is based on race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, you are more likely than ever to find yourself in a culturally diverse organizational setting (Carnevale & Stone, 1995; Tsui & Gutek, 1999).

The assorted talents of a diverse array of individuals can provide many benefits for organizations, such as improved individual and organizational performance, enhanced internal and external customer service, and an improved bottom line (Cox, 1994; Cox & Beale, 1997; Hayles & Russell, 1997; Kossek, Zonia, & Young, 1997; Society for Human Resource Management & *Fortune*, 2001). However, to realize these benefits, we must actively work to create inclusive environments geared toward the success of a diverse array of members. Such organizational states, referred to here as culturally empowered environments, recognize the benefits of diversity, include culturally diverse members as full participants, reflect the contributions and interests of its diverse membership, and act to eliminate forms of cultural bias.

To create culturally empowered environments, organization members must develop a core set of attitudes, behaviors, and skills that allow them to communicate, resolve conflicts, and solve problems with a diverse array of individuals. These culturally empowered professionals possess the ability to create and support environments that improve performance and maximize the likelihood of success for a diverse range of organizational members. This article describes these competencies and introduces a diversity intervention model that can be used to facilitate activities that will improve performance in each of these competency areas.

The Diversity Competencies

According to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management and *Fortune* (2001), more than 75% of surveyed organizations have engaged in diversity activities of some fashion. Of these organizations, two-thirds report that diversity training and education was an area of emphasis in their diversity initiative.

Unfortunately, fairly few initiatives have had a significant impact on overall performance (Hayles & Russell, 1997). One reason for this is a lack of systematic analysis and intervention, which can lead to a positive impact on individual and organizational performance. Specifically, many organizations have failed to achieve success because the interventions they use lack a coherent framework designed to facilitate development and behavior change in specific areas. The diversity competencies that follow offer such

a framework by identifying the specific skills and abilities needed to perform effectively in culturally diverse settings. The competencies include self-awareness, diversity knowledge, multicultural communication, conflict management, empowering environments, professional development, recruitment and selection, and coaching and mentoring.

Self-Awareness

Perhaps the greatest knowledge one can possess is knowledge of self. To be in touch with our feelings, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses is a cognitive, psychological, and spiritual state relatively few of us ever attain. However, to self-actualize in the realm of multicultural communication and human interaction, we must be in close connection with who we are as human beings and how we affect others.

The culturally empowered professional values diversity, respects differences, and attempts to learn about the culturally different. Such individuals are keenly aware of their biases and prejudices and are committed to reducing them (Pedersen, 1994). Self-aware individuals—

- Are aware of their values, beliefs, communication styles, and work style preferences, and how these can impact interactions with others.
- Value diversity and respect cultural differences as assets in the group, team, organization, and community.
- Respect and learn from what others have to say, even when it goes against their values, beliefs, or ideas.
- Accept that not everyone has to think, act, or look a certain way to be valuable or successful in the organization.
- Regularly evaluate their strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the diversity competencies and create plans for self-improvement.

Diversity Knowledge

Culturally empowered professionals possess knowledge of diverse cultures and groups, including information about communication and learning styles. They understand how various issues of diversity affect the workplace, the work environment, and interactions between culturally different people. This is of particular importance because many of the cross-cultural communication problems we find in organizational life occur because of a simple lack of cultural understanding (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Gudykunst, 1998). Individuals with significant diversity knowledge—

- Are able to describe the specific benefits and positive outcomes of creating culturally empowered environments.
- Are able to define concepts such as diversity, diversity empowerment, and diversity management.
- Understand concepts such as racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and sexual harassment and the impact of these forces within an organization.
- Understand how the various dimensions of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion,

nationality, and socioeconomic status) affect individuals and their experiences.

- Possess knowledge of diverse cultures and groups, including information about communication styles and work style preferences.
- Continuously attempt to increase their knowledge of diverse cultures and groups.

Multicultural Communication

Culturally empowered professionals communicate effectively with people who are culturally different and actively attempt to interact with people who are different from themselves. They are able to apply a wide range of communication strategies and skills (e.g., reflective listening, probing, clarification, and nonverbal attending skills) to effectively interact with a diverse range of people (Beebe et al., 1999). Individuals who are effective at cross-cultural communication—

- Work willingly, cooperatively, and effectively with people who are culturally different.
- Have friends who are culturally different in terms of race, ethnicity, religion etc.
- Actively attempt to interact with and learn from people who are culturally different.
- Understand stereotyping and how it can negatively affect communication with people who are culturally different.
- Consciously avoid using stereotypical language in their interactions with all people.
- Are consistently able to communicate effectively with, and gain the trust of, people who are culturally different.

Conflict Management

Conflict occurs in almost all organizations. It is inevitable whenever human beings work together with limited resources and varying perspectives on how things should be done. Because of its inevitability, organizational members must be able to manage and resolve conflicts that can decrease work efficiency and effectiveness. It is also important to recognize the positive aspects of conflict, such as the fact that diverse perspectives can be freely expressed, and performance can improve as a result of the conflict management process (Jadzinski, 2003).

Culturally empowered professionals can effectively resolve conflicts between themselves and others, particularly those who are culturally different. They also have the ability to apply various conflict-management techniques to resolve typical organizational conflicts. In addition, such individuals—

- Are comfortable dealing with the conflicts that typically arise within the organization, including diversity-based conflict.
- Are successful at mediating conflicts between other individuals and groups, including those that are diversity based.

- Understand the difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict.
- Are aware of their personal conflict-resolution style and the impact it has on others.

Empowering Environments

At the heart of the culturally empowered environment is a critical mass of participants who actively engage in behaviors designed to make the organization more open and inclusive. These professionals actively work to create an environment where all individuals are treated respectfully and fairly, and have the opportunity to excel (Miller & Katz, 1995). In other words, in both conscious and unconscious ways, these individuals are continuously working to create culturally empowered environments. Such individuals—

- Consistently follow all policies and laws prohibiting racism, sexism, harassment, and discrimination.
- Challenge biased, harassing, and discriminatory behavior in whatever form they may take.
- Challenge racially and sexually derogatory comments and jokes.
- Encourage developing support groups and systems for under-represented group members (e.g., women, people of color, religious minorities).
- Have made a personal commitment to reducing the incidence of discrimination and harassment within the organization.

Professional Development

The culturally empowered professional takes part in continuing education and development activities, including those that are diversity based and those that are designed to improve job-related skills and competencies. Such individuals are keenly aware of the role self-development plays in creating inclusive environments and in improving both individual and organizational performance (Cox & Beale, 1997). Employees that are committed to professional development—

- Can readily identify both diversity-based and job-specific professional development opportunities.
- Take part in both diversity-based and job-specific professional development activities.
- Seek out both positive and constructive feedback from others about their competencies.
- Have at least one person who serves as a coach or mentor.
- Are aware of their reputation within the organization, and are effectively managing that reputation.
- Can effectively network with individuals at all levels of the organization.
- Create personal/career development plans, and update them regularly.

Recruitment and Selection

Whereas the aforementioned competencies apply to all organizational members, the final two apply more to those

in leadership or managerial roles. The culturally empowered leader is effective at consistently recruiting from high-quality, culturally diverse candidate pools, making valid selection decisions, and creating environments that retain high-performance workers (Hayles & Russell, 1997). A person who is effective in this area—

- Actively recruits qualified women and people of color (or other under-represented group members) for positions at all levels of the organization.
- Is familiar with nontraditional recruitment methods that can be used to increase the number of qualified members of under-represented groups in candidate pools.
- Has identified high-potential employees within the organization, including those from under-represented groups, who are prime candidates for future leadership positions.
- Consistently considers qualified minorities for open positions.
- Consistently uses valid selection tools and criteria to ensure hiring the best candidates possible.
- Is aware of the systems, processes, and activities needed to ensure the retention of a diverse array of professionals.
- Evaluates the quality of the recruitment, selection, and retention system regularly.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are among the most effective developmental tools available to managers today, particularly in the area of employee retention. Coaching consists of a conversation or a series of conversations between a leader and an employee that is designed to enhance the employee's development, and to improve overall job performance.

Mentoring is also a series of conversations between a mentor and a protégé that is designed to enhance the protégé's overall development. However, unlike coaching, mentoring is not specifically geared toward improving performance (although effective mentoring will often lead to this), but rather facilitates the development of professional skills and networks. Mentoring also differs from coaching in that the interaction is not always between a supervisor and an employee. In fact, it often takes place between people with no reporting relationship and sometimes between people in separate organizations (McCauley & Douglas, 1998; Thomas & Douglas, 2004).

The culturally empowered leader consistently develops effective coaching and mentoring relationships with various staff members, including culturally different individuals. A person who is effective at coaching and mentoring—

- Consistently provides both positive and constructive feedback to staff members.
- Actively serves as a mentor for organizational members, including those who are culturally different.
- Shares the “written” and “unwritten” rules of the organization with staff members, including those from under-represented groups.

- Actively helps employees, including those who are culturally different, network effectively within the organization.
- Helps each staff member create and implement career-development plans.
- Actively encourages employees, particularly under-represented group members, to develop themselves and to apply for higher-level positions within the organization.

The Diversity Intervention Model

The diversity intervention model is offered as a way to identify specific activities and interventions that can be used to improve development in each of the eight diversity competency areas. It is based on the notion that all performance-based diversity training should be geared toward developing one or more of three primary learning domains: *awareness, knowledge, or skills* (Pedersen, 1994).

Awareness is the affective domain that involves learning about oneself and the impact that one's behavior, style, and values have on overall effectiveness. Knowledge consists of the cognitive domain that focuses on information, concepts, and theories that contribute to effective communication, human interaction, and performance. Skills, which is the most significant learning domain, consists of developing behaviors and abilities needed to effectively interact with others and to solve problems in culturally diverse environments (Pedersen, 1994).

An effective, performance-based diversity training system can incorporate various educational activities that will facilitate learning in these domains. These activities include skills-based training, feedback programs, developmental assignments, developmental relationships, and self-directed learning activities.

Skills-Based Training

Skills-based training includes classroom sessions and workshops that typically involve one or more of five basic methods: lecture, case study, role play, behavioral modeling, and simulations (McDonald-Mann, 1998). Lectures can be used to present content-specific information to a large group of people over a relatively short period. They can also incorporate two-way interaction using small group discussions.

Case studies present participants with a specific organizational situation or scenario. The participants review the situation, the outcome, and the behavior of the individuals involved to determine if alternative actions might have yielded a superior result. Case studies are effective in provoking thought, facilitating discussion, and improving overall knowledge (McDonald-Mann, 1998).

Role plays are participative exercises in which participants act out characters assigned to them in a specific scenario

(Thiagarajan, 1996). They provide each trainee with the opportunity to practice skills he or she has learned and are useful for developing interpersonal skills such as conflict management, communication, and coaching.

Behavioral modeling, which is based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), takes role playing one step further. It provides participants with an opportunity to observe behavioral models, to practice the desired behavior, and to receive feedback on their performance. Of all the skills-based training methods, behavioral modeling is the most important because it provides learners with an opportunity to observe the desired behavior and continuously practice the behavior in a relatively safe environment. The primary benefit of this form of development is enhanced skills and increased ability to employ specific behaviors as needed (McDonald-Mann, 1998).

Finally, simulations are also similar to role plays in that they apply a specific scenario and ask participants to act out identified roles. However, simulations provide information that is more detailed and structured for the learner. In practice, simulations are typically longer in duration and more complex than standard role plays.

Feedback Programs

Feedback programs are specifically designed to enhance participants' self-awareness through the use of various assessment inventories and feedback sources. Trainees have the opportunity to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses in a particular area (e.g., communication skills) by systematically receiving both positive and constructive input from relevant sources such as customers, employees, colleagues, and supervisors.

One of the most popular types of feedback programs is 360° feedback. This consists of systematically collecting opinions about an employee's performance from superiors, subordinates, and colleagues. The main purpose of this process is to give the people receiving the feedback a clear understanding of how others view them and how their behavior impacts those around them (Chappelow, 1998).

Another type of feedback is delivered through feedback-intensive programs. Guthrie and Kelly-Radford (1998) describe feedback-intensive programs as a comprehensive approach to assessment and feedback that focuses not only on skills and behaviors, but also on the values and personality-based preferences that influence our behavior. An intense classroom-based learning experience typically takes place away from work and offers participants feedback from multiple perspectives through various instruments and experiences. Feedback-intensive programs differ from 360° feedback in that there is greater depth about underlying personality aspects and how they affect the individual's behavior. Whereas 360° feedback provides the person with

a broad picture of strengths and weaknesses in several work-related areas, feedback-intensive programs look deeper into personality traits and concomitant needs, preferences, and values.

Developmental Assignments

Developmental assignments such as on-the-job training are among the oldest forms of employee development. They give participants the opportunity to learn by doing since they are working on real problems and concerns related to the desired areas of development. Indeed, research indicates that many individuals, especially those in leadership positions, have reported that job experiences are their primary source of learning (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987; Wick, 1989).

Developmental assignments include both structured and unstructured on-the-job learning experiences. Structured experiences are far more effective than unstructured activities in terms of efficiency and overall learning results (Jacobs, Jones, & Neil, 1992). Structured activities incorporate a systems approach that includes planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning experience. Training goals are identified beforehand, and an on-the-job intervention is created to achieve those specific goals (Jacobs, 2002).

Developmental assignments can take various forms. They can consist of an entire job, a particular piece of a job, a new job, or duties added to a current job. They can be short-term projects, or activities that last for a longer period (Ohlott, 1998). Whatever the form, the most important aspect of the assignment is that it provides the learner with a chance to learn new information or develop specific skills in a predetermined area that will positively impact individual performance.

Developmental Relationships

Developmental relationships are another common form of management and employee development. Most people can articulate a specific instance in which they benefited from the guidance and advice of another person, whether it was a boss, colleague, friend, or relative. What these situations have in common is development of a relationship with someone who takes a personal and professional interest in the individual's success.

Developmental relationships can take various forms, but two of the most popular are coaching and mentoring. Both are designed to provide interactions that allow individuals to improve their personal and professional development. As discussed earlier, coaching and mentoring have some differences, but they share three common elements: assessment, challenge, and support—roles played by the coach or mentor (McCauley & Douglas, 1998).

Assessment is the process, both formal and informal, of providing feedback. In a developmental relationship, one of the key roles the coach or mentor plays is that of feedback provider. The person serving in this role observes the protégé and provides proper feedback. This person also serves as a sounding board to provide feedback on strategies and ideas, and as a feedback interpreter to help the protégé make sense out of input received from others.

Challenge refers to pushing the protégé beyond his or her comfort zone to achieve higher levels of performance. This includes offering different points of view, providing challenging assignments, and being a good role model by showing examples of both high and low performance in the areas being developed.

Finally, support refers to the socioemotional support that is needed to help protégés deal with difficult developmental experiences. Coaches and mentors provide encouragement, allow individuals to vent frustrations, and listen during difficult situations without being judgmental. Support also includes helping protégés feel that they are not alone in their struggles and helping them understand that success is possible, even in the most difficult of times.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning refers to training and development interventions that are primarily managed by the learner. The learner takes full responsibility for his or her development by determining educational needs, identifying self-managed interventions that will meet those needs, and creating a schedule to use those interventions. This can result in a more cost-effective, flexible way to meet training requirements (London, 1989). Self-directed learning activities include, but are not limited to, books and periodicals, audiotapes and videotapes, e-learning, and distance learning.

Books, periodicals, audiotapes, and videotapes can be an efficient means of collecting information on a particular topic. E-learning, which has grown significantly in popularity, includes a wide range of educational activities such as computer-based training, web-based training, electronic performance support systems, webcasts, listservs, and other Internet discussions. E-learning can include anything from off-the-shelf CD-ROM training to accessing course materials and instructors through the World Wide Web (Broadbent, 2001). Distance learning involves physical and/or temporal separation between the learner and instructor. In this instance, some application of technology is typically used to bridge the gap and to facilitate the learning process.

Applying the Diversity Intervention Model

The diversity intervention model outlined in Figure 1 describes specific activities and interventions that can be

DIVERSITY COMPETENCY	KEY ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS	PRIMARY LEARNING DIMENSION	PRIMARY INTERVENTIONS
Self-Awareness	Aware of own communication style, work style preferences and biases, and impact on interactions with others	Awareness	Feedback programs Skills-based training with a self-assessment component
Diversity Knowledge	Knowledge of diverse cultures and how various diversity issues affect the workplace	Knowledge	Skills-based training Self-directed learning
Multicultural Communication	Communicates effectively with people who are culturally different and possesses a wide variety of interpersonal communication skills	Skills	Skills-based training Developmental assignments
Conflict Resolution	Resolves conflicts, particularly those that are diversity based, and can apply various conflict-management techniques	Skills	Skills-based training Developmental assignments
Empowering Environments	Knows and follows all policies and laws about harassment and discrimination, and challenges biased and discriminatory behavior	Knowledge	Self-directed learning Skills-based training
Professional Development	Involves self in continuing, diversity-based development activities; receives both positive and constructive feedback and seeks mentoring	Knowledge	Developmental relationships (protégé) Skills-based training
Recruitment and Selection	Applies various tools and techniques to recruit high-quality, culturally diverse candidate pools and makes valid selection decisions	Skills	Skills-based training Developmental assignments
Coaching and Mentoring	Develops effective mentoring and coaching relationships with a diverse array of individuals; provides both positive and constructive feedback, and helps employees effectively network	Skills	Skills-based training Developmental relationships (coach or mentor)

Figure 1. The Diversity Intervention Model.

used to improve development in each of the eight diversity competency areas. Most importantly, it helps identify the learning interventions that will be most effective given a trainee's diversity development needs. For instance, self-awareness is most closely tied to the awareness learning dimension. To improve this competency, it is best to provide learners with feedback-oriented interventions such as the 360° feedback or feedback-intensive programs discussed earlier. Skills-based training with a self-assessment component can also be effective at helping participants gain a better understanding of their behavior and its potential impact on others.

Multicultural communication, conflict resolution, recruitment and selection, and coaching and mentoring are most directly linked to the skills learning dimension because the primary focus is on developing the ability to employ specific behaviors. Therefore, skills-based training—where learners can observe behavioral models, continuously practice the behavior in a safe environment, and receive feedback on their performance—is ideal. To facilitate training transfer and provide the greatest opportunity for proficiency in the desired skills, it is important to provide complementary job experiences where learners can use their newly developed skills (McDonald-Mann, 1998). This can be done through structured on-the-job experiences or, in the case of the coaching and mentoring competency, developmental relationships with the learner serving as a coach or mentor.

Diversity knowledge, empowering environments, and professional development are most closely tied to the knowledge learning dimension because the educational focus is on learning specific information and concepts. Self-directed learning and content-focused skills-based training (e.g., case studies and discussion activities) can be effective at facilitating the cognitive development necessary to perform well in these competency areas, especially the diversity knowledge and empowering environment competencies. Improving the professional development competency can also be facilitated through content-focused skills-based training and creating developmental relationships where the learner serves as the protégé. 🏠

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