

Using Needs Assessment to Resolve Controversies in Diversity Training Design

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Needs assessment is an important element in training design, and organizational diversity training programs are frequently criticized for their lack of attention to the needs assessment process. This paper explores the link between needs assessment and diversity training design. First, a review of the needs assessment literature reveals that an emphasis on organizational analysis has led to the neglect of other kinds of assessment data. Second, a review of the diversity training literature identifies five areas of controversy. We describe the needs assessment questions that organizations can ask to resolve each controversy and better tailor diversity training to their own needs. Finally, based on the design controversies and needs assessment questions, we provide an agenda for future research on the effectiveness of various kinds of diversity training interventions

Keywords: diversity training; needs assessment; training effectiveness

The popularity of diversity training in corporate America has soared over the past decade, with 36% of firms of all sizes offering some form of diversity training (Lippman, 1999). *Forbes* magazine reports that half of U.S. companies with over 100 employees have implemented diversity training at an estimated annual cost of \$10 billion (Lubove, 1997). But are these training dollars being put to good use? Critics point out that during the same period that

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organizational diversity training has become more popular, discrimination grievances and lawsuits have increased dramatically (Flynn, 1998; Zhu & Kleiner, 2000). In some cases, diversity training appears to heighten differences and tensions among groups (D'souza, 1997). This suggests that organizational diversity training programs are not always being designed in ways that will maximize their effectiveness in affecting outcomes of interest to organizations.

In this article, we explore how needs assessment can enhance the effectiveness of diversity training design. First, we describe the type of needs assessment that is typically advocated for diversity training: What do experts say are the kinds of information that should be collected, and how should that information be used? Second, we examine five controversies regarding diversity training design. We find that needs assessment, as usually conceptualized and promoted in the diversity training literature, does not address these controversies. Third, we explore how needs assessment could be used to address these issues. That is, what kinds of information should be gathered through a needs assessment to provide answers to common questions about training design?

Our goals in this process are twofold: We hope to make the needs assessment process more directly useful for human resource practitioners as they design and implement diversity training. However, along the way, we also identify some areas in which organizational research fails to address the concerns of practitioners. These research "holes" can be used to develop a research agenda that will be of simultaneous value to diversity researchers and human resource practitioners.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR DIVERSITY TRAINING

The instructional systems design model, which advocates a systematic approach to training design, implementation, and evaluation, views needs assessment as the critical first step in training design (I. L. Goldstein, 1991). Needs assessment addresses three interrelated components, or areas of analysis: organizational, operations, and person analyses (Ostroff & Ford, 1989). An organizational analysis involves a systemwide examination of organizational goals, resources, and constraints on training. This typically involves first the clarification of organizational goals and strategy and then the examination of a variety of variables (such as productivity or efficiency) to determine the extent to which organizational objectives are being met (Ostroff & Ford, 1989). Organizational analysis may also include investigation of the internal environment (e.g., structures, policies and procedures, climate) for

its congruence with organizational goals and the extent to which it facilitates goal attainment (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999). Operations analysis identifies tasks for particular jobs, and the associated knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to perform job tasks. Job analytic techniques are the major methods proposed for this analysis. Finally, person analysis determines how well individual employees are performing their tasks and the extent to which they possess needed KSAs and competencies. The major methods advocated for person analysis are performance appraisal techniques and self-assessments. In combination, a needs assessment focused on these three components can identify where in the organization training is needed, what training is needed, and who needs training. It also provides criteria and baseline measurements for evaluation of training outcomes (Thayer, 1997).

Academic researchers have frequently criticized diversity trainers for their lack of attention to needs assessment. According to Thayer (1997), most diversity training programs appear to be instituted “without even a person analysis to determine existing attitudes” (p. 21). In a recent review of the diversity training literature, Gilbert and Ivancevich (2000) reached an even more alarming conclusion when they reported that no diversity programs are preceded by a thorough analysis of organization, tasks, and people. This lack of attention to needs assessment is surprising because needs assessment is strongly advocated in the diversity training literature by both academics and practitioners (Tan, Morris, & Romero, 1996). We reviewed the literature on needs assessment in diversity training to see if we could identify the source of this disconnect between recommendations and practice.

Our review suggests that most recommendations emphasize the organizational component of needs assessment (Tan et al., 1996). Regardless of the particular methodology proposed, the emphasis of authors is on organizational level analyses with the purpose to determine the extent of organizational goal attainment. For example, the culture audit proposed by Cox (1994) is one of the most widely recommended methods for needs assessment before diversity training. This audit involves “a comprehensive assessment of organizational culture and human resource systems” (p. 237), including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation. The objectives of the audit are to uncover subtle sources of bias and identify ways in which organizational culture is inconsistent with diversity goals (Cox, 1994; Zhu & Kleiner, 2000). Methods recommended to accomplish the audit include attitude surveys, task forces and focus groups, Equal Employment Opportunity statistics, and employee career experiences (Cox, 1994; Pollar, 1998). Surveys and task forces are additionally recommended to assess the attitudes and perceptions of various identity groups (e.g., women, Hispanics, African Americans, gays, and

lesbians) and identify their particular needs or differing perceptions and experiences across groups (Ford & Fisher, 1996; Hayles, 1996).

Ford and Fisher (1996) argue that the crucial needs assessment issues regarding diversity training involve organizational analysis because diversity training is often viewed as a vehicle for changing organizational culture. Information from organizational analyses can uncover sources of bias and identify ways in which the organizational structures and climate are not meeting the needs of a diverse workforce (Cox, 1994). Such information also ensures that training efforts fit into overall organizational goals and provides a valuable means for evaluating change efforts. Yet, however critical, this kind of needs assessment data alone provides little guidance for the actual design of diversity training programs. A culture audit may reveal issues or concerns to address in training, providing broad clues about the kind of training needed (Cox, 1994). But the design of a training program involves answering many specific questions regarding training content and participants. The typical results of an organizational analysis alone cannot answer these questions, nor were they intended to do so. Thus, we argue that the current emphasis of needs assessment for diversity training on organizational analysis for baseline data and issue identification has led to the neglect of other kinds of needs assessment data that can be used to address common design questions. We address this gap by identifying common controversies involving decisions of training design and showing how needs assessment can be used to answer these questions. We go beyond the typical broadband organizational analysis advocated to suggest different kinds of needs assessment information that can be collected and different uses of needs assessment information that will better answer questions of diversity training design.

CONTROVERSIES IN THE DESIGN OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

Our review of the diversity training literature identified five areas of controversy regarding the design of diversity training programs. For each area of controversy, we review the relevant literature. Because few of these issues have been addressed empirically within the diversity training literature, our literature review frequently takes us into related areas of research (e.g., therapeutic counseling, behavior modeling, social cognition). Our goals in each case are to link these areas back to needs assessment, show how a needs assessment can provide guidance and direction to human resource practitioners, and define important questions to be addressed in future research.

TRAINING CONTROVERSY 1: AWARENESS TRAINING, SKILL TRAINING, OR BOTH

Diversity trainers typically distinguish between two broad types of diversity training, which can be classified by their objectives for trainees (Ferdman & Brody, 1996). One type of training is awareness training. Awareness programs include heightening awareness of diversity issues and revealing unexamined assumptions, biases, and tendencies to stereotype (Kerka, 1998; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). As a result, awareness training primarily targets trainee attitudes toward diversity. An alternative type of training seeks to develop skills. Skill-based training targets behaviors rather than attitudes, focusing on communication skills and conflict management or resolution strategies (Kerka, 1998) across diverse group identities.

Most organizational diversity training emphasizes the awareness component (Wheeler, 1994), and many experts believe that raising trainee awareness is more critical than skill building. For example, Rynes and Rosen (1995) surveyed over 700 human resource professionals and found that respondents viewed awareness training as the most important component of diversity training content. This preference for awareness training may reflect, in part, the greater availability of these programs in the marketplace. Professional trainers tend to emphasize awareness training because it is inexpensive, relatively easy to conduct (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996), and can be used in a wide variety of organizational contexts (Flynn, 1998). For example, in one survey of professional trainers, 83% of respondents identified heightened awareness as their primary objective in designing and administering diversity training programs (Mouton-Allen & Rockwell, 1999).

However, there are others who believe that awareness training is a needless waste of time and resources and may even be detrimental to change efforts. A 1993 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management and Commerce Clearing House found that line managers were unconvinced of the benefits of awareness training ("The Evolution," 1997). Awareness programs may perpetuate stereotypes and thus heighten tensions among groups rather than reduce them (D'souza, 1997; Flynn, 1998). As a result of these concerns, some practitioners advocate replacing awareness training with a greater emphasis on skill-based training. For example, Zhu and Kleiner (2000) recommend organizational diversity training focusing on behavior modification. A similar view is endorsed by Lubove (1997), who argues that training should focus only on behavior, not beliefs or awareness.

A third position in the controversy is expressed by trainers and human resource practitioners who believe that the two types of training should be sequenced, with awareness training presented first and skill training second

(Cox & Beale, 1997; Raths, 1999). This training sequence appears to have wide support (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000). First, awareness training helps trainees to understand what diversity means and why it is important. Then skill training provides the specific information needed for behavior changes. Loudin (2000) presents a similar view, suggesting that at least half of a training program should be dedicated to making people aware of their thoughts about different others. This increased awareness is seen as necessary for behavior changes to occur (Loudin, 2000).

Thus, a controversy in the diversity training literature involves the usefulness of awareness training: Is it necessary? It would seem that a well-designed needs assessment could answer the question of whether a focus on awareness or skill, or some combination of the two, would be most appropriate. However, our review found that writers in this literature rarely, if ever, invoke needs assessment as a basis for their recommendations regarding training type.

One question that should be asked and answered during the needs assessment phase to guide the skills versus awareness decision is the organization's motivation for initiating change efforts. Those organizations that initiate diversity training from a reactive standpoint (due to lawsuits or pressures from groups in or outside of the organization) may be most likely to benefit from an emphasis on skill training. Employees who lack the critical behavioral skills needed to avoid unlawful discrimination may learn little from a training program with an awareness focus. Those unhappy with the current organizational climate for diversity are likely to view awareness training as window dressing, for appearance's sake only, leading to resentment. Indeed, those writers who seem most disenchanted with awareness training assume a reactive stance on the part of the organization. Zhu and Kleiner (2000) criticize awareness training when used as the primary method to reduce discrimination and harassment. Lubove (1997) discusses the limitations of awareness training as a court-ordered remedy for discrimination.

A second question that can be asked during needs assessment to facilitate the awareness versus skill decision is What are employee attitudes toward diversity and how strongly are those attitudes held? Nemetz and Christensen (1996) used social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) and the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to predict that individuals' commitment to their diversity beliefs would determine reactions to diversity training and the amount of attitudinal and behavioral change that would result. Those who are weakly committed to their ideas are more likely to elaborately process and learn from new information that can lead to attitude change. Such individuals may benefit most from awareness training. However, if individuals have negative attitudes along with a strong commitment

to those beliefs, they are likely to react negatively to awareness training. Instead, for such individuals, a focus on behaviors coupled with organizational rewards and sanctions may be the most productive approach for changing behavior. Thus, during needs assessment, organizations should measure not only the direction of attitudes (positive or negative) toward diversity but also their strength. Ford and Fisher (1996) suggest that attitude strength might be operationalized by asking individuals how concerned they are about the issues, how often they think about the issues, or how important their views on diversity are to their self-perception.

Our discussion of this controversy raises several research questions concerning awareness and skill training. One straightforward question concerns the relative effects of awareness and skill training. It is generally presumed that awareness training will affect trainee attitudes, whereas skill training will affect trainee behaviors (Frost, 1999), but these two training approaches are rarely assessed in a direct comparison with one another. When both attitude and behavioral change are measured, do awareness and skill training have differential effects? Research on the effects of desegregation (Clark & Jones, 1956) suggests that a focus on skill training and behavior change may result in later attitude change. Thus, over the long term the effects of the two approaches may converge. Additionally, although we know that awareness training is more prevalent in organizations (Wheeler, 1994), we don't know under what circumstances organizations are motivated to use skill training. Are organizations forced into a reactive mode (e.g., through lawsuits or other pressures) more likely to initiate skill-based diversity training? Finally, our suggestion that trainees' attitude strength may moderate the effectiveness of training interventions in changing subsequent attitudes and behavior remains untested in the diversity training context.

TRAINING CONTROVERSY 2: BROAD VERSUS NARROW DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY

Organizational diversity training may be narrowly focused on a limited number of demographic dimensions (e.g., race and gender) or broadly focused on a range of demographic dimensions (e.g., age, sex, race, ethnicity, disability) as well as other individual differences (e.g., educational level, parental status, learning styles). One of the biggest challenges for human resource professionals is how to define diversity for the purposes of organizational training, and the advice they receive is contradictory at best. For example, under the heading "What Companies Should Do," *Business Week* recommended that organizations "adopt a broad definition of diversity in the workplace covering all kinds of differences among employees, including

race, gender, age, work, and family issues” (Galen & Palmer, 1994, p. 54). In contrast, a publication targeted to human resource professionals described a broad diversity focus as the “worst practice” that organizations should avoid (Frost, 1999).

Most large organizations adopt a broad, highly inclusive definition of diversity when they design diversity training programs (Zhu & Kleiner, 2000). Advocates suggest that using a broad diversity definition acknowledges the many differences that affect human interaction at work (Mobley & Payne, 1992), creates training that is more palatable to participants (Mobley & Payne, 1992), and reduces employee backlash (“What if,” 2000). A broad definition gives participants greater latitude to discuss issues that are personally relevant (“What if,” 2000), whereas narrow diversity definitions can prompt participants to view the training as an affirmative action effort or serving only certain identity groups (Mobley & Payne, 1992). However, critics of broad diversity definitions are concerned that they dilute the effectiveness of diversity training to operate as a tool for improving work opportunities for women and minorities (Caudron & Hayes, 1997). With a broad definition, it is unlikely that every diversity dimension will receive sufficient attention during a brief training session (V. C. Thomas, 1994; Zhu & Kleiner, 2000). Focusing on race and gender can be a powerful way to introduce diversity issues (Geber, 1990) and the concerns associated with race and gender may overlap with those associated with other diversity dimensions (Mouton-Allen & Rockwell, 1999). These authors suggest limiting the focus of diversity training to address those dimensions that are of greatest interest to the organization (V. C. Thomas, 1994).

Our literature search identified only one study that provided an empirical contrast between broad and narrow approaches to diversity training. Kulik, Perry, and Bourhis (2000) compared the effects of participating in broad (age, sex, race, and ethnicity) and narrow (age only) diversity training programs on raters’ interest in hiring an older job applicant. Results suggest that neither program enhanced participants’ willingness to hire an older job applicant, but under some conditions, narrow training reduced participants’ interest in the older job applicant. Specifically, decision makers who had participated in the narrow training program and were “cognitively busy” (distracted by competing demands) during the hiring decision were less willing to hire the older job applicant. Kulik et al. (2000) explained this effect as resulting from “ironic processes” (Wegner, 1994). Because the rater’s attention is so narrowly focused on one demographic dimension, that dimension can influence decision-making processes—even in a direction opposite to the rater’s conscious intention. These results suggest that organizations adopting a narrow diversity definition may need to guard against ironic processes. This can

be done by providing trainees with additional practice time to develop skills during the training and by reducing distractions and allowing longer deadlines on decision tasks following the training. An organizational analysis can determine whether the organization has the resources available to provide these safeguards, and an operations analysis can identify the job tasks that require additional resources. Therefore, before adopting a narrow diversity definition, organizations need to engage in both an organizational analysis (to identify the primary outcomes of interest) and an operations analysis (to identify the jobholders most directly accountable for those outcomes and ensuring that they have sufficient resources to act on the diversity training they receive). If resources for reducing cognitive load (e.g., fewer competing tasks, longer deadlines) on relevant decision tasks are not available, the organization may be better off providing broad-focused training.

Other questions that organizations might consider when deciding between broad- versus narrow-focused training are Why is the organization initiating diversity training, and what does the organization hope to achieve? Organizations sometimes initiate diversity training in response to pressure from either internal (e.g., current employees) or external (e.g., customers, suppliers, or regulatory agencies) constituencies (Dass & Parker, 1999), and these constituency groups may be interested in very specific outcomes (e.g., increasing the hiring rate of women and racial minorities, improving the quality of customer service). In these reactive situations, a narrow definition may demonstrate to constituencies that their concerns are being addressed, and the diversity training can be linked to specific outcomes. In contrast, organizations adopting a proactive stance toward diversity are likely to view diversity issues as having long-term as well as short-term ramifications and be concerned about a broad range of training objectives (e.g., efficiency, innovation, and social responsibility) (Dass & Parker, 1999). These broad objectives are likely to be best addressed under a broad diversity umbrella.

This discussion identifies research questions that would describe existing training and extend diversity training research. Descriptive research could examine the reasons why organizations choose to adopt a broad or narrow training focus and examine constituencies' perceptions of the value of each training type. Additionally, research on broad versus narrow training should examine which training focus is most likely to influence trainee behavior. Also, do the effects of narrow diversity training on one demographic dimension have a spillover effect on other dimensions? For example, if an organization focuses training on racial issues, will trainee attitude change and skill development generalize to gender issues?

There also are several opportunities to extend the Kulik et al. (2000) study, which focused on age in a laboratory context. These findings could be repli-

cated in a field setting. Future research could also examine whether the ironic processes effect demonstrated for age operates with respect to other demographic dimensions such as gender or race.

TRAINING CONTROVERSY 3: CONFRONTATION OR NOT?

Most authors agree that experiential learning, which occurs through active participation, is important in the context of diversity training (Ferdman & Brody, 1996; Mobley & Payne, 1992). As a result, many diversity training programs include simulation and role-play activities, as well as group discussions of individual and collective experiences. However, some trainers have adopted a fairly extreme position by advising that experiential diversity training incorporate a “confrontational element.” For example, Lunt (1994) describes a diversity training program that encourages employees to directly confront one another on issues surrounding race, gender, and sexual orientation. Other programs deliberately create “unsafe” situations in which trainees are “picked on” because of their gender, race, or religion; afterward, trainees explore their feelings and reactions (Lippman, 1999). Advocates argue that these confrontational techniques are needed because people are unaware of their own prejudices (Raths, 1999) and resistant to information that suggests their attitudes and beliefs are wrong (Hennessy, 1994). As a result, trainees need to be “jolted” into changing their attitudes and subsequent behavior. Confrontational diversity training provides this jolt, provoking participants into examining the causes of their own behavior (Hennessy, 1994).

Of course, these confrontational approaches may backfire. Employees can become defensive or feel that they are being judged too quickly when they are challenged in a public setting (Raths, 1999), and some authors worry that confrontational techniques cause participants to leave with even stronger biases (Morrison, 1992). However, advocates of confrontational training techniques argue that confrontation is an essential part of the learning process and that some degree of conflict in the training process is inevitable (Lunt, 1994). Confrontational strategies permit the trainer to directly address employee resistance to the training; ignoring trainee resistance can sabotage training effectiveness (Mobley & Payne, 1992).

Our literature review did not identify any diversity training research that directly assessed the effectiveness of confrontational approaches. However, confrontational techniques are part of a long tradition in psychotherapy. When using a confrontation strategy, a therapist calls the client’s attention to observed discrepancies among attitudes, thoughts, or behaviors to make the

client aware of his or her psychological defenses or resistance to the therapy (Klein, 1989). The therapist might accomplish this through silence (as a way of getting the client to accept responsibility for the therapeutic work) or through probing questions that encourage the client to engage in introspection of his or her own behavior (Klein, 1989).

Orlinsky and Howard (1986) reviewed the research on confrontation in the clinical literature and concluded that the results were strikingly consistent in demonstrating that confrontation was positively associated with patient outcomes. The evidence suggests that confrontation is most effective when implemented in the context of a long-term therapeutic relationship (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997), after the therapist has gathered sufficient data to make firm statements about inconsistencies in the client's thoughts, behaviors, or attitudes (Strean & Strean, 1998). In short-term relationships, confrontations elicit more defensive behavior from the client (Salerno, Farber, McCullough, Winston, & Trujillo, 1992). If confrontation is used prematurely, the end results may be wasted time, client anxiety, and intensified client resistance (Greenson, 1967).

These research results provide direction to human resource practitioners about the kind of needs assessment information needed to decide when confrontational techniques are best used in diversity training. First, the results suggest that the practitioner needs to consider the existing relationship between the trainees and the trainer and the resources that the organization is willing to devote to the training. Confrontational strategies are most effective in the context of long-term relationships (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997). Confrontation may be most effectively applied by trusted insiders who are highly familiar with the trainees' attitudes and behavior and who will be able to conduct follow-up sessions with the same training group. If the organization is hiring an outside trainer to conduct a short-term, single-shot diversity training program, confrontation may be not only inappropriate but problematic.

Second, research suggests that confrontation in therapeutic contexts is most effective when the therapist can provide illustrative examples of inconsistencies from the client's life (Strean & Strean, 1998). In the training context, this may require a thorough pretraining person analysis to identify inconsistencies in the trainee's thoughts, behaviors, or attitudes. A person analysis might identify inconsistencies between the trainee's expressed attitudes (e.g., "I am interested in hiring nontraditional job applicants") and his or her behavior (e.g., actual hiring record) that can be explored during the training process. An organizational-level analysis will not provide the kinds of specifics needed to support a confrontation strategy.

This discussion also raises several research questions concerning confrontation in diversity training. Our suggestions regarding needs assessment

are based on results of studies in clinical settings that typically involve one-on-one interactions between a client and therapist. The extent to which these results generalize to organizational settings where trainers confront a group of trainees needs to be determined in future research. The findings from the therapeutic literature also suggest variables that may moderate the effectiveness of confrontation. For example, is confrontation more effective in later stages of training, once a relationship between the trainer and the training group has been established? Is it more likely to result in negative effects when used in short-term programs or those conducted by outsiders? The lack of available literature highlights the need for research on this controversial technique.

TRAINING CONTROVERSY 4: HOMOGENEOUS VERSUS HETEROGENEOUS TRAINING GROUPS

Another commonly occurring question regarding the conduct of diversity training concerns the composition of training groups. The diversity literature frequently advises organizations to assemble groups of trainees who are demographically heterogeneous, particularly with respect to visible dimensions of diversity such as gender, racioethnicity, and age. For example, Ellis and Sonnenfeld (1994) recommend that organizations “try to recruit a mix of participants that minimizes the likelihood that individual participants will be obligated to assume token roles as unwilling representatives of their racial, gender, or other such group” (p. 101). Kirkland and Regan (1997) and Baytos (1995) advocate the use of mixed groups for diversity training not to protect individuals with token status but for the educational benefits. The quality of discussion regarding diversity issues is believed to be enhanced by heterogeneity, and homogeneous groups may limit the value of learning. Such suggestions for diverse training groups have sometimes been taken quite seriously. In some organizations employing limited numbers of racioethnic minority employees, the few employees of color have been asked to attend multiple training sessions so that group heterogeneity could be achieved (Baytos, 1995; Caudron & Hayes, 1997).

There is another side to this debate, which advances the superiority of homogeneous training groups. Some diversity trainers argue that racially mixed groups are more likely to reinforce prejudiced attitudes among trainees (Gordon, 1995) and advocate racially homogeneous training groups instead. Groups homogeneous with respect to gender or racioethnicity may reduce complaints of White males who say that they sometimes feel threatened or attacked in diverse training groups (Galen & Palmer, 1993). Homogeneous groups may enable trainees to engage in frank discussions about the

training content, without feeling distracted by impression management concerns or pressures to behave in a “politically correct” fashion (Kitfield, 1998). Additionally, the use of homogeneous groups avoids placing minority participants in the “hot seat” of educating the majority group (Katz, 1978) and facilitates the process of learning about one’s own group membership (Alderfer, Alderfer, Bell, & Jones, 1992; Kirkland & Regan, 1997). Although many writers addressing this issue have focused on race/ethnicity, Burkart (1999) suggests that homogeneous training groups provide a safe setting in which members of any subordinated subgroup can better examine the within-group dynamics resulting from power differences.

Although both sides of the heterogeneous/homogeneous controversy have passionate supporters, there is little research that systematically evaluates the effect of training group composition on diversity training outcomes. Roberson, Kulik, and Pepper (2001) created diversity training groups homogeneous or heterogeneous in race/ethnicity and nationality and found that the effects of training group composition on measures of knowledge and skill depended on the experience level of the trainee. Specifically, high-experience trainees (those with prior diversity training) were more knowledgeable about skills and strategies for dealing with diversity issues, generated more, and more specific, strategies for applying the training content to their work assignments, and demonstrated greater cultural competence in response to diversity incidents, when they had been trained in homogeneous groups. For low-experience trainees (those without prior diversity training), group composition had no significant impact on outcomes. Thus, greater experience with diversity issues resulted in greater sensitivity to group composition when learning skills and behavioral strategies. However, neither group composition nor trainee experience had a significant impact on attitudes toward diversity.

These findings may be due to the different training needs of those with varying experience. As trainees gain experience with diversity issues through training, the learning of behavioral skills gains importance (Gudykunst, Guzley, & Hammer, 1996). Trainees may use each other as models, and behavioral modeling is more likely to occur if the model is perceived as similar to the trainee (Decker & Nathan, 1985). Behavioral learning also causes anxiety (Landis & Bhagat, 1996), and a safe environment in which to rehearse new behaviors is needed. Feelings of safety are likely to be enhanced with similar others. Paige and Martin (1996) further suggest that trainees are likely to be resistant to behavioral learning unless they have formed relationships among themselves. Because of the greater attraction

and rapport among similar others (Millikin & Martins, 1996), relationships may form more quickly in a demographically homogeneous group, facilitating learning.

These findings suggest how needs assessment can be used to guide the decision regarding training group composition. If the organization wants to change employee attitudes, or if trainees have not previously been exposed to diversity training, then heterogeneous and homogeneous training groups are likely to be equally beneficial. Thus, the critical questions to include in the needs assessment are (a) Is the intention to change attitudes or behavior? This can be determined through organizational analysis. (b) If changing behavior is important, how can groups be formed to increase behavioral learning? A person analysis can identify the diversity training experience of each individual. If trainees have prior experience with diversity training, use existing work groups or homogeneous groups. If trainees have little experience with diversity training, group composition may not matter.

Further research on the effects of homogeneity/heterogeneity could examine the differences between administering training to intact workgroups and to groups formed on an ad hoc basis. Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, and Neale (1996) found that familiarity influences group processes. Therefore, do intact heterogeneous groups have a different training experience than ad hoc ones? Furthermore, Roberson et al. (2001) suggested that group composition might interact with the training focus (skills vs. awareness training). The suggestion that group homogeneity enhances trainee skill development whereas group heterogeneity enhances attitude change should be examined empirically. Another possible extension of that study could involve finding alternative methods of making trainees comfortable enough for modeling effects to occur. For example, an early success experience might enhance the cohesiveness of newly formed training groups (Sherif & Sherif, 1969), making participants more likely to accept fellow trainees as models. Triandis, Kurowski, and Gelfand (1994) suggest additional variables such as establishing superordinate goals and downplaying the history of intergroup conflicts that should enhance perceived similarity. These interventions may also function to facilitate modeling among heterogeneous trainees.

Because there is so little research on group composition in the diversity training literature, some descriptive research also is needed. For example, how do organizations choose groups for diversity training and what is the basis for these decisions? When organizations deliberately create heterogeneous training groups, what dimensions (race, gender, departmental membership) do they emphasize?

**TRAINING CONTROVERSY 5:
TRAINER DEMOGRAPHICS**

One of the biggest challenges for organizations conducting diversity training is deciding who the trainers should be. Organizations often struggle with the question of whether trainers' own demographics influence their training effectiveness. Karp and Sutton (1993) suggest that "the current tendency is to avoid having white males do diversity training" (p. 30). Many human resource professionals believe that women or members of racial minority groups are particularly well suited to present diversity material (Flynn, 1999), even when the training group is composed primarily of Whites or men. Female and non-White trainers are likely to have firsthand experience with discrimination (Karp & Sutton, 1993) and may have a stronger stake in the issues (Mobley & Payne, 1992).

However, not everyone in the diversity literature agrees that female and non-White trainers are always the most desirable choices. Some authors suggest that the trainer's demographics should be matched to those of trainees so that trainees are able to "see themselves" in the trainers (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1997). This suggestion is consistent with research findings in the relational demography literature suggesting that demographic similarity is often associated with positive outcomes. For example, Tsui and O'Reilly (1989) found that similarity within organizational dyads was associated with greater personal attraction between dyad members. Likewise, similarity between trainer and trainee on demographic variables can enhance the trainer's credibility by suggesting that the trainer has experienced situations similar to the trainee's own reality (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1997).

As the controversy over trainer demographics has grown, recommendations in the business literature have grown more complex. Karp and Sutton (1993) describe the "ideal" diversity trainers as a two-person team, with one trainer presenting a minority point of view and the other reflecting the majority participant group. Diverse trainer teams can model interactions across different identity groups, providing an opportunity for participants to observe how differences can complement and benefit a team (Pollar, 1998).

Our review of the diversity training literature identified only one study that addressed the effects of trainer demographics. Hayles (1996) reports that in unpublished research conducted within the Department of Navy and the U.S. government, pairs of diversity trainers that were diverse in terms of ethnicity or gender produced significantly more learning among participants than homogeneous trainer pairs. This finding suggests that trainees may learn from the interactions modeled by diverse trainer teams. However, it is unclear whether the trainers were similar or dissimilar to the people they

were training. As a result, there is little guidance available in deciding whether a particular mix of trainer demographics will enhance or attenuate training effectiveness. In contrast to the diversity training literature, two other literatures (the counseling literature and the behavioral modeling literature) have addressed related questions.

In the counseling literature, researchers have wondered whether demographic similarity or dissimilarity between a counselor and a client will influence counseling effectiveness. The empirical research finds limited effects based on client-counselor gender similarity (e.g., Campbell & Johnson, 1991), but finds consistent effects based on racioethnic similarity (e.g., Ricker, Nystul, & Waldo, 1999; Terrell & Terrell, 1984; Watkins & Terrell, 1988). In general, racioethnic similarity between a counselor and a client is associated with positive outcomes such as greater symptom relief (Ricker et al., 1999), whereas racioethnic dissimilarity is associated with negative outcomes, especially in relationships characterized by distrust (Terrell & Terrell, 1984; Watkins & Terrell, 1988). Most frequently, this literature has examined the effects of Black clients' being assigned to either White or Black counselors. Black clients who are distrustful of Whites are less optimistic about the success of counseling received from White counselors (Watkins & Terrell, 1988; Watkins, Terrell, Miller, & Terrell, 1989), expect White counselors to be less accepting, less trustworthy, and have less expertise (Watkins & Terrell, 1988) and are less likely to return for subsequent counseling sessions when their intake interview is conducted by a White counselor (Terrell & Terrell, 1984).

In the behavioral modeling literature, empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of models in improving a variety of trainee skills including interpersonal skills, assertiveness skills, and communication skills (Burke & Day, 1986; Latham & Saari, 1979; Smith, 1976). These skills are similar to those addressed in diversity training, and the trainer may in effect be operating as a behavioral model. Research suggests that two factors are especially critical in determining whether trainees will adopt the modeled behavior. First, models who are demographically similar to trainees may be more effective in eliciting the desired behavior (Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968), in part because trainees find it easier to visualize themselves engaging in the modeled behavior. Imitative behavior is more likely to occur if trainees judge the model to be an appropriate comparison other for their own behavior (Brockner et al., 1984), and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that similar, rather than dissimilar, others are appropriate models. In fact, some authors suggest that optimal identification results when the behavioral model is of the same sex and race as the trainee (Goldstein & Sorcher, 1974).

Second, imitative behavior is more likely to occur when the model is perceived as credible and is rewarded for engaging in the desired behavior, especially if the trainees desire similar reinforcement (A. P. Goldstein & Sorcher, 1974). As a result, organizational training programs may be more successful when they involve models who have high organizational or social status (Manz & Sims, 1981).

The research results observed in the counseling and behavioral modeling literatures suggest that matching trainer and trainee demographics may be most critical when (a) the trainees are likely to be mistrustful of demographically dissimilar trainers or (b) the training focuses on behavioral skills. In both of these situations, demographic similarity between the trainer and the trainees may enhance training effectiveness. These results suggest that during needs assessment the human resource practitioner needs to collect person analysis information concerning the trainees' level of cultural mistrust. For example, the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (Terrell & Terrell, 1981) was developed in the counseling literature to assess the extent to which Blacks mistrust Whites and may be a useful pretraining assessment tool for diversity trainers. If the results indicate a high level of mistrust, demographic dissimilarity between the trainer and trainees may not evoke frank discussion or sufficient self-disclosure from the trainees.

Additionally, the human resource practitioner should consider whether the training will primarily focus on raising awareness or developing behavioral skills. If the training is primarily intended to raise awareness, trainer-trainee dissimilarity may be effective. However, if the training is designed to develop behavioral skills, modeling may be facilitated by using trainers who are demographically similar to trainees.

Finally, the human resource practitioner also needs to consider whether the trainer's demographics will enhance or detract from the trainer's credibility in the particular training environment. Female and racial minority trainers may have a great deal of expertise within the topic areas of diversity and discrimination (Flynn, 1999; Karp & Sutton, 1993). However, if the organizational context is one in which women and members of racial minorities primarily occupy low-level positions, group membership is negatively correlated with power and authority, which affects its organizational meaning. Work by D. A. Thomas (1999) and Ely (1995) has shown that under these conditions, societal stereotypes are more likely to go unexamined, affecting between and within group relations. In such contexts, female and minority trainers are more likely to lack credibility for trainees, and positive organizational consequences of modeling their behavior will be less apparent or believable. Instead, the audience may be more likely to view female or racial minority trainers as "having an ax to grind" (Flynn, 1999). In these

cases, more attention may need to be devoted to developing the trainer as an effective model (e.g., by emphasizing the trainers' credentials or identifying non-demographic dimensions on which trainer and trainee are similar) or by including trainers from the dominant powerful group.

The challenges of deciding who should do the training lead to many research questions. For example, descriptive research could examine the demographics of diversity trainers. Anecdotally, it appears that organizations prefer minority trainers (Flynn, 1999). However, we did not find any studies that describe the demographics of diversity trainers. Furthermore, descriptive research could examine whether organizations consider trainer/trainee similarities and differences when assigning trainers to training groups.

Future research also could extend Hayles's (1996) study of diversity trainers. Hayles looked at the demographics of trainers but did not report how similar or different trainers were to trainees. An extension of this study could examine the demographics of everyone involved in training. Also, because trainees learn skills by modeling the behavior displayed by trainers (Pollar, 1998), future research could examine how trainer demographics interact with skills versus awareness training.

CONCLUSIONS

We have identified five controversies regarding diversity training that organizations often wrestle with when designing training programs. As our review has shown, all sides of these controversies have strong proponents, and it is likely that each position has validity and is warranted under certain conditions. We discussed relevant research in psychology and management that would shed light on when each choice might be most appropriate. From this application of research, we were able to identify needs assessment information that would help human resource practitioners and trainers make design decisions for their organizations. The results of our review are summarized in Table 1, which lists the needs assessment questions that can be used to address and resolve training design controversies. Needs assessment can indeed help trainers and human resource practitioners resolve common controversies in training design, but it must be more broadly conceived than in the past. Although needs assessment is generally viewed as having three interrelated components (organizational analysis, task/operations analysis, and person analysis), needs assessment in the diversity training context has traditionally been dominated by organizational analysis. In contrast, the questions in Table 1 cover all three facets of needs assessment.

TABLE 1
Needs Assessment Questions to
Resolve Training Design Controversies

<i>Controversy</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Person</i>	<i>Operations</i>
Awareness vs. skill	Is training proactive or reactive?	What are trainees' current attitudes toward diversity (strength and direction)?	
Broad vs. narrow	Is training proactive or reactive?		Are resources available to provide sufficient practice time and reduce cognitive load on critical tasks?
Confrontation or not?	Are sufficient resources available to develop and maintain a long-term relationship between trainer and trainees? Will the training be conducted by organizational insiders or outsiders?	Are there inconsistencies in trainee attitudes and behaviors?	
Homogeneous vs. heterogeneous training groups	Does the organization want to change attitudes or behaviors?	How much previous exposure to diversity issues have trainees had? How familiar are trainees with one another?	
Trainer demographics	Does the organization want to change attitudes or behaviors? Is demographic group membership strongly correlated with status and power in the organization?	What is the trainees' current level of trust?	

Organizational analysis. In the past, organizational analysis has been used primarily to identify broad issues with implications for training content and the criteria used to assess change. Table 1 shows additional questions to be addressed in an organizational analysis to answer design questions. These questions cannot be answered via the typically recommended culture audit but can be addressed by top management (Ford & Fisher, 1996). This means that organizations have the knowledge and information to answer many

design controversies by themselves. They need not rely on consultant preferences or lists of “best practices” for training design decisions. Using an internal organizational analysis rather than these outside sources to answer design questions will lead to more tailored training, which is likely to be more effective.

Person analysis. Our review identifies person analysis as another key area for addressing design controversies. Person analysis has been largely neglected by diversity trainers, even though attitude survey data, commonly advocated, could be used for this purpose. This neglect may be due to the traditional use of person analysis as a way to determine which individual employees are performing at acceptable levels (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999). In the diversity domain, the pinpointing of individuals who are “low performers” is likely to be a threatening assessment. Thus, people talk of using aggregate survey results. Two of our person analysis questions, regarding current attitudes toward diversity and inconsistencies in attitudes and behavior, might indeed be threatening to individuals. Although some organizations do use assessment tools to identify job applicants or employees with problematic attitudes (e.g., Rice, 1996), the fact that more and more organizations are evaluating managers on their effectiveness in managing diversity (Garcia, 2000; Rice, 2000) may motivate employees to voluntarily self-assess their skills and seek out resources appropriate to their needs. For example, Rossett and Bickham (1994) describe self-assessment tools that were used to encourage law enforcement officers to probe their attitudes toward diversity. The officers were motivated to develop their skills in dealing with a diverse community because those skills were directly related to their job performance. Other person analysis questions identified in Table 1 do not focus on singling out individuals whose attitudes need repair but identifying additional person-level variables that can influence the effectiveness of different training choices. Trust in the trainer, familiarity with other trainees, and previous diversity training experience can all be assessed at training group levels.

Operations analysis. Operations analysis, the third facet of needs assessment, was not identified as critical for resolving most of the design controversies reviewed here. Yet this area may be very relevant for some other training decisions. For example, another decision faced by trainers and human resource professionals is whether diversity training should be conducted top-down or bottom-up. In a top-down training strategy, top-level management and executives receive training first, followed by lower levels. This approach is endorsed by many experts as a way of demonstrating top management

support for the diversity initiative (Hayles, 1996; Lunt, 1994). However, a bottom-up strategy may be appropriate in some situations. When Denny's embarked on a large-scale diversity initiative designed to change its public image as a racist organization, diversity training was initially directed toward employees in customer service positions and addressed the right and wrong ways to seat and serve customers (Rice, 1996). By focusing first on the employees with the most direct customer contact, Denny's hoped to make faster inroads in changing the public's perception of the organization. In this situation, operations or task analysis would be critical to determine which jobs to focus on and, within each job, to identify the particular behaviors that need immediate change. Similarly, as indicated in Table 1, operations analysis is useful in addressing the broad versus narrow training controversy by identifying tasks that may require additional resources. In general, when particular behaviors are targeted by diversity training, operations analysis is warranted.

RESEARCH AGENDA

This review also identified critical areas for future research on diversity training. In our review, we were unable to locate more than one study (if even that) that had directly addressed a given design controversy. Clearly, research that examines these design controversies and tests the opposing positions is needed. For each controversy, we have identified both descriptive and conceptual research questions. Descriptive research is useful for increasing our knowledge and awareness of organizational practices regarding diversity training and allows examination of factors associated with effectiveness (for example, see Rynes & Rosen, 1995). Conceptual research allows an exploration of the process of diversity training and the organizational, job, and person variables that influence training effectiveness. For example, consider the awareness versus skills controversy. We have identified conditions that would influence when each training focus might be more or less effective: whether the organization is in a reactive or proactive mode regarding its diversity effort; and the strength of employee attitudes toward diversity issues. Testing these propositions may sometimes require manipulating diversity training across a variety of organizational contexts. This kind of multiorganization field research is rarely seen in the diversity literature but is clearly warranted. However, our research questions do not always require experimental field designs. Many of the descriptive questions can be addressed through organizational surveys, and many of the conceptual questions could be addressed in a laboratory context.

Even the empty cells in Table 1 suggest an agenda for future research. For example, Table 1 currently contains no person analysis questions relevant for resolving the broad versus narrow training controversy. However, there may be person variables that would influence the relative effectiveness of broad versus narrow training, such as degree of trainee experience with different types of diversity or trainee cognitive learning styles. Future research could examine the influence of such person variables on the effectiveness of broad versus narrow diversity training. Thus, we argue for a greatly expanded view of appropriate research questions regarding diversity training. Many authors have called for evaluation of diversity training (Rynes & Rosen, 1995; Thayer, 1997), and some studies have now been published (Mausehund, Timm, & King, 1995; Parker, Moore, & Neimeyer, 1998; Tan et al., 1996). These studies have attempted to provide an overall assessment of the effectiveness of diversity training either by using a pretest/posttest training design or by contrasting trained participants with a no-training control group. However, our review argues that the decisions made regarding training design on *each* of the controversies will affect the results of the training program. As noted by Thayer (1997), evaluation studies must not merely determine if training programs achieve their objectives but also need to determine what *kinds* of training programs are effective. This requires that empirical research contrast different types of training programs against one another. At the very least, evaluation studies should specify the decisions made regarding the five design controversies discussed here. Our review has also identified relevant literature that provides the basis for theoretical predictions regarding the effects of each side of the controversy. Thus, research on the controversies in diversity training design can integrate theoretical and applied issues and be of interest to academics and practitioners.

Finally, our review points to the need to measure multiple dependent variables in training evaluations. In the diversity training literature, the recommendations of trainers and consultants on each side of the training controversies are often made based on trainee reactions. This reflects a focus on trainee reactions as the primary criterion of interest, and training has often been designed to influence this criterion alone. However, our recommendations regarding design choices have been made based on criteria of learning and behavioral or attitudinal change. Although trainee reactions are useful, they do not equal learning or change in behaviors and attitudes (Salas, Cannon-Bowers, Rhodenizer, & Bowers, 1999). This points to the need to examine several levels of criteria and their relationships when evaluating diversity training.

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