



# BEYOND THE BUSINESS CASE: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

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*Extant literature on diversity training programs continues to yield little evidence of their overall effectiveness. Whereas the most common approach to diversity training entails justifying the value of diversity on the basis of its contribution to the organization's bottom line, we argue that approaching diversity training from an ethical perspective may bolster the effectiveness of traditional approaches. Specifically, to the degree that traditional bottom-line justifications are enhanced with social justice arguments, training effectiveness will increase. In the following article, we discuss traditional approaches to diversity training, provide a general overview of ethics, discuss how theory and research from behavioral ethics literature might help to address some of the challenges faced in diversity training, and draw from ethics literature to make specific, novel suggestions about the implementation and presentation of diversity training.*

*Keywords:* diversity, ethics, justice, training and development

**T**oday's increasingly diverse workplace requires employees to possess the relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes to effectively interact with colleagues, customers, and clients who are different from themselves. Diversity within a team or organization can facilitate success by fostering creativity and enabling the organization to connect with a wider number of stakeholders. However, this success is only attainable if the resulting obstacles are overcome through effective

management of diversity (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). For this reason, an increasing number of organizations have begun to invest in diversity programs such as diversity training to facilitate successful interpersonal interactions (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). In fact, 67 percent of US organizations and 74 percent of Fortune 500 companies utilize diversity training programs (Esen, 2005; Kimley, 1997).

On average, diversity training costs for a single large organization exceed \$1 million per year (Esty, 2007). Despite the apparent

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popularity of diversity training and its costliness in terms of time and money, there is little evidence of its effectiveness (Bendick, Egan, & Lofhjelm, 2001). In fact, research indicates that some diversity training may have only a small, or even negative, effect on outcomes desired by the organizations that implement it (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2001). A recent review of 74 studies examining diversity training programs between 1970 and 2008 found that almost a third of the studies showed null or negative effects of diversity training (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). The review further highlighted that despite the fact that diversity training evaluations

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often show a global positive effect on trainees' perceived importance of diversity, several studies found that diversity training may elicit less positive attitudes toward specific demographic groups (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). For example, white men reported less positive attitudes toward women after receiving diversity training (Hood, Muller, & Seitz, 2001) and in some instances (i.e., under conditions of high cognitive load), participants who received diversity training were less inclined to hire an older job applicant than those who did not receive training (Kulik, Perry, & Bourhis, 2000). Thus, it appears organizations may be designating valuable resources to diversity training programs that have no effect, or worse, are producing negative effects (for a review, see Appendix of Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

While it may be troubling that diversity training does not always provide substantial improvement given its widespread use, this finding is not particularly surprising given that many training programs have traditionally been faddish in nature (Campbell, 1971) and do not always appear to carefully apply what has been learned from training research (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

Diversity training faces a number of unique challenges, including backlash, a negative response to diversity training that other training programs may not encounter, further complicating efforts to provide effective diversity training. Indeed, participant resistance has been documented as a potential negative outcome associated with diversity training (Hemphill & Haines, 1998; Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004). The prevalence of backlash in response to diversity training programs suggests that researchers and practitioners need to better understand why this is happening and how to address it in order to improve the effectiveness of diversity training programs.

One explanation for resistance to diversity training is that the training is typically based on "the business case" for diversity, where diversity is justified on the basis of its contribution to the organization's bottom line (e.g., Avery & Thomas, 2004; Kaplan, 2006; Kidder et al., 2004; K. Weaver & Gingrich, 2005). Given the prevalence of diversity training programs and the lack of empirical research demonstrating their effectiveness, however, it is imperative that practitioners begin to search for new, innovative ways to reinvent and revive diversity training. Recently, management scholars have begun to recognize that focusing on economic justifications alone may make it difficult to achieve optimal understanding and integration of individuals from a wide range of social identity groups (Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Konrad & Linnehan, 1999; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). For example, it is argued that sole reliance on the business case for diversity can minimize or ignore the historical experience of disadvantaged people and the genuine intergroup tensions that persist, thereby limiting intergroup understanding and perspective taking that could be critical elements of achieving the benefits of diverse groups. We extend this argument and propose that diversity management programs in general, and diversity training programs in particular, may be strengthened by building not only a "business case" but also a "moral case" for diversity in organizations.

Here, we acknowledge that the “business case” is indeed important and that executives often do focus solely on the bottom line. However, research on utility analyses has shown that economic indicators can create backlash and resistance in managers (Whyte & Latham, 1997), and the way these indicators are presented to managers does indeed influence their reception of the intended message (Carson, Becker, & Henderson, 1998; Huint & Saks, 2003). That being said, we are not arguing that bottom-line arguments should be eliminated; instead, we propose that appealing to both bottom-line, economic motives and fairness/social justice motives may be the most effective approach to diversity management programs. Thus, organizations should strive to provide diversity training that reflects a blend of the “business case” and the “moral case” for diversity.

In arguing that diversity training should be presented in part as a moral imperative, we propose that a closer examination of the behavioral ethics literature might help to avoid or overcome some of the challenges that accompany diversity training. In the current article, we discuss traditional approaches to diversity training and various challenges associated with those approaches. Then, we provide a general overview of ethics and discuss how theory and research from behavioral ethics literature might help to address some of the challenges faced in diversity training by drawing upon research from this domain. We draw from ethics literature to make specific, novel suggestions about the implementation and presentation of diversity training. As such, we integrate two previously disconnected bodies of literature and provide guidance for human resource professionals regarding the design of effective diversity training programs.

### **Traditional Approaches to Diversity Training**

Diversity training is one intervention that aims to decrease the prejudice trainees may display toward others by increasing their positive and decreasing their negative intergroup

behaviors (Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007). Primarily, diversity training programs seek to create an awareness of bias and discrimination, to help employees acknowledge their biases and develop skills to address those biases, and to help capitalize on diversity as an asset for organizational performance (Holladay & Quiñones, 2005). In other words, although diversity training programs can vary widely with regard to many characteristics depending on the organization (e.g., specific content, trainer characteristics), they share one common goal—“to increase knowledge about diversity, to improve attitudes about diversity, and to develop diversity skills” (Kulik & Roberson, 2008, p. 310).

A wide variety of delivery methods are used in diversity training, including classroom-based training, videos, discussions, role plays, simulations, and exercises (Bendick et al., 2001; Pendry et al., 2007). Methods of delivery often take an informative approach wherein the goal is to increase trainees’ awareness of the pervasiveness of workplace bias, sometimes even highlighting historical transgressions by one particular group (e.g., white males; Pendry et al., 2007). Here, trainers may convey information to participants detailing their legal responsibility under the latest anti-discrimination laws. Other training content areas may include how to deal with discrimination, the role of stereotypes, diversity awareness, and the value of diversity in the workplace (Bendick et al., 2001; Rynes & Rosen, 1995).

### *The Importance of Ethics for Diversity Training*

In this section, we explain two key reasons why taking an ethical approach to diversity training might enhance the training’s effectiveness. First, people generally appreciate fairness and justice. Employees care about

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ethics and the commitment of their organizations to the greater community (Ethics Resource Center, 2007). Research suggests that justice norms have evolved into individuals' expectations of fair treatment both for themselves as well as for others and an inclination to punish those who act unjustly (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). According to the principle of the universality of justice norms, an interest in fairness is a distinctive characteristic of humankind that gives rise to intrinsic

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expectations about the way people should be treated (Rupp & Aquino, 2009). The deontic model (see Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003) argues that people automatically respond with moral outrage when they observe unfair treatment or injustice. Moreover, empirical research suggests that people are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest in order to punish someone who has engaged in unfair treatment of another (Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002).

This concern for fairness and justice further extends into the workplace. For instance, it appears that an organization's treatment of its employees, local communities, the environment, and other external units is important to employees and applicants not only for reasons associated with an improved bottom line

(i.e., more money), but also because people want to work for organizations that genuinely care about people (Greening & Turban, 2000; Turban & Greening, 1997). Finally, empirical research has shown to the degree applicants perceive discrimination (arguably a form of unfair treatment) in an organization, their attraction to that organization decreases (Stanton & Lin, 2003), further supporting the notion that potential applicants care about how people are treated within the organization and are repelled if they perceive there may be unfair treatment. Together, this evidence suggests that people have an innate desire for fairness and justice, including in

their work lives. Thus, diversity training grounded in consideration of morals and ethics will likely convey to employees that their organization's values are congruent with their own values and that their organization cares about their well-being.

Second, making a moral case for diversity is likely to increase perceived organizational sincerity, which has been shown to increase the effectiveness of organizational programs. According to Cox's (1993) conceptualization of the varying types of understanding and awareness of diversity in organizations, the ideal organization should not only reflect diverse numerical representation, but should also convey a sincere commitment to multiculturalism in their approach to diversity management. Research on organizational diversity supports the notion that solely providing individuals with numbers and statistics about the demographic heterogeneity of an organization is not sufficient to prompt positive perceptions about that organization's commitment to diversity. Along with demographic heterogeneity, organizations must portray an authentic commitment to diversity within the organization as well as genuine dedication for the inclusion and incorporation of various diverse groups that exceeds superficial attempts (Smith, Botsford, King, Knight, & Hebl, 2010). Drawing from these findings, we argue that organizations that discuss diversity in bottom-line terms or who "sell" diversity solely as a competitive advantage for the organization may not be reflecting an authentic commitment to diversity programs.

Although the ethics and diversity literatures have generally been separate, they share a common feature: like diversity training, ethics programs are often justified from a "business case" perspective. An important lesson can be gleaned from reactions to the financial motives for ethics programs—the effectiveness of ethics programs decreases as employees perceive the organizations' motives for holding training as self-serving and initiated to protect top management (Treviño, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999); when such perceptions do occur, considerable trainee backlash is likely to follow. This

suggests that bottom-line arguments can backfire if organizational members do not believe that the organization is implementing programs for the right reasons. Thus, a sincere commitment to ethical behavior is important to the success of ethics programs (Treviño et al., 1999).

This sincere commitment may best be communicated by making a “moral case” for organizational efforts. Justifying the value of diversity on the basis of its potential to yield positive financial outcomes for the organization (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998) may cause organizations to appear disingenuous and unfeeling toward their employees. If, on the other hand, organizations also argued that engaging in inclusive and fair behavior is the right thing to do, perhaps employees would view their organization’s motives for diversity training as sincere and wholehearted, reducing potential backlash and increasing overall training effectiveness.

One way to further promote this moral perspective is by shifting the type of language used during diversity training to discuss these sensitive issues. This is particularly important given trainees’ perceptions of organizational motives may in part be shaped by the type of language that is used throughout training. Thus, a shift in language may cultivate perceptions of sincerity. Sonenshein (2006) describes two types of language individuals use to give meaning and legitimacy to social issues: (1) normative language, which focuses on personal beliefs, values, and commitments and is applied in arguments emphasizing an ethical perspective, fairness, and the right thing to do, and (2) economic language, which focuses on objectives and manifests in business-oriented arguments such as appeals to bottom-line issues like profitability or performance. In organizational settings, economic language is often believed to legitimize issues in a more compelling way relative to normative language (Jackall, 1988; Miller, 1999). Consistent with this notion, Sonenshein (2006) found that even when individuals’ private understanding of an issue was shaped in more normative terms, they tended to use more economic language

when describing issues in a business setting. Furthermore, one vignette-based survey study found that business managers remembered and recognized strategy-related issues more than moral-related issues and found that as compared to academic professors, business managers rated moral-related issues as generally less important (Jordan, 2009). Given this trend, workplace conversations centered on diversity are likely shaped in more economic than normative terms. Indeed, research suggests that diversity training is frequently justified in economic terms (e.g., Avery & Thomas, 2004; Kaplan, 2006; Kidder et al., 2004; K. Weaver & Gingrich, 2005).

Justifying diversity solely in economic terms could have serious negative implications. Drawing from Tenbrunsel and Messick’s (2004) work on language euphemisms, it is clear that the way in which actions or ideas are worded can facilitate a process whereby individuals justify morally unacceptable behavior into socially appropriate behavior, and the workplace is no exception. Indeed, business schools tend to advocate “cold language” (e.g., using the word “rightsizing” instead of “layoffs”), which has been argued to influence the way business students think such that this type of language substitution largely masks the ethical implications of decisions made in the workplace (Browning, 2003). Furthermore, empirical research has shown that the use of economic or “cold” language not only influences the way individuals think, but also the way individuals behave. For instance, participants were more willing to cooperate when a social dilemma was described in non-economic terms than when it was described using economic language (Pillutla & Chen, 1999).

Our contention is that diversity training should be framed in moral language to reduce potential backlash and ultimately

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increase overall training effectiveness. If diversity training is discussed in normative (i.e., ethical) language and framed from the perspective that being inclusive is simply the right, just, and fair thing to do, skeptical trainee perceptions of organizational motives may be eliminated. If the organization comes across as holding a sincere concern for the well-being of all employees and emphasizes points of justice and fairness in addition to bottom-line arguments, we believe the training will be better received by employees. This means diversity programs should be framed with normative language in addition to economic language, making the argument that inclusion is not only good for the bottom line, but also the right and fair thing to do.

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### **Design Strategies for Effective Diversity Training**

We argue that considering diversity training as a moral imperative can reduce backlash and thus improve the effectiveness of diversity training. Specifically, we propose the effectiveness of diversity training will depend on the degree to which diversity is framed as an ethical issue. As such, the remainder of this article will draw from ethics literature to propose strategies for designing and implementing effective diversity programs that address the unique challenges of diversity training through an ethical lens, with a specific consideration of issues related to fairness, morality, and social justice. We highlight how an ethical lens influences various decisions made in developing diversity training.

Specifically, we consider how each aspect of the training process may be influenced from this perspective. The components

of instructional systems are discussed in three phases: the needs assessment phase, the training and development phase, and

the evaluation phase (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Implications for diversity training will be considered separately for each component, but it should be recognized that each component in the system is closely related, and, as such, components within the system will exert influence on other components.

### ***Diversity Training Needs Assessment***

The purpose of the needs assessment phase is to determine what the focus of training will be, or in other words, the training objectives. The needs assessment can also be used to determine how training should be done. While needs assessments are often not formally conducted (Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988), they are essential in order to properly identify and frame the instructional objectives for training. A full needs assessment includes consideration of a number of components, including organizational support; organizational analysis; requirements analysis; task and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) analysis; and person analysis (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Ostroff & Ford, 1989).

While a formal needs assessment has been largely neglected as a part of diversity training, a needs assessment can potentially yield a number of benefits that can aid in the effective implementation of diversity training (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003). A needs assessment can help to inform whether training should focus on skills or awareness, whether to use a broad versus narrow definition of diversity, the inclusion of confrontation in the training, and whether training should occur in homogenous or heterogeneous groups. By holding interviews or focus groups with current employees and communicating with upper-level management, it may become clear what the organization really needs. Things like support from leadership, organizational culture, current diversity tension within the organization, and the reason the organization is holding the diversity training (i.e., proactive or reactive) can help to inform some of the aforementioned decisions.

## Person Analysis

Diversity training with the intent of portraying diversity as an “ethical” imperative should start with awareness; specifically, moral awareness, or an awareness of diversity management as a moral issue. Moral awareness involves “interpretation of the particular situation in terms of what actions (are) possible, who (including oneself) would be affected by each course of action, and how the interested parties would regard such effects on their welfare” (Rest, 1986, p. 5). Furthermore, moral awareness is the ability to recognize that a situation requiring one to make a decision contains ethical content (Sparks & Hunt, 1998), recognition of the moral nature of a situation (Butterfield, Treviño, & Weaver, 2000), and moral issue identification (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006).

From a theoretical perspective, an individual will not be able to consider a moral issue during judgment processes if that person does not recognize the moral issue itself (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gioia, 1992), reducing the likelihood of subsequent moral behavior (Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986, 1994). Butterfield et al. (2000) drew on the social cognitive notion of scripts, or frameworks encompassing specific guidelines for understanding situationally appropriate behaviors, to explain the emergence of moral awareness (Abelson, 1981). They argue that moral awareness reflects the degree to which individuals pay attention to incoming moral-related stimuli and perceive stimuli as ethical in nature. In an ambiguous situation, the individual who possesses a moral, as opposed to an amoral, script will be more likely to activate moral judgment processes (Butterfield et al., 2000). The authors found that the use of moral-related language influenced the degree to which individuals recognized moral issues, supporting the view that priming a moral schema will lead to greater moral awareness.

Others have approached the relationship between moral schemas and moral awareness from a neurocognitive framework. For instance, Reynolds (2006) argued that the initial stages of moral judgment (i.e., moral awareness) can be explained by a process

called reflexive pattern matching, whereby the stimuli from the environment produce electrochemical signals that are then compared to existing prototypes in the brain, allowing the individual to respond to the environmental stimuli accordingly. For instance, when an individual perceives ethical stimuli from the environment, the neural system searches for ethical prototypes to “match” the situation. If a match is found, the individual is made conscious of the situation and can then use ethical “rules” to reach the appropriate decision in the given situation (Jordan, 2009). In this sense, finding a “match” between incoming stimuli and existing prototypes depends on prior experiences that shape current prototypes. Thus, social experiences with ethical situations discussed in ethical terms should increase the likelihood that the brain will find an existing “match” and that the individual will ultimately recognize an ethical situation. Supporting the notion that non-conscious social cognitions have an influence on deliberative ethical behavior, one experimental study instructed participants to read scenarios embedded with ethical and economic dilemmas. The results generally illustrated a stronger effect of implicit moral attitudes as compared to explicit moral attitudes on selective attention, moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral intention, and moral behavior (Marquardt, 2010).

In a similar vein, Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe (2008) argue that moral awareness is cued by decision frames, which refer to the type of decision (e.g., ethical, business, legal) one perceives to be making—in other words, how a decision has been categorized or coded in the individual’s mind (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). A decision that is coded as ethical cues the individual to factor ethical considerations into the decision-making process that follows, whereas if a decision is coded as a business decision or a legal decision, business or legal considerations become the focus of the subsequent decision-making process (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Supporting this are empirical findings indicating that issues framed with moral

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language positively influenced an individual's level of moral awareness (Butterfield et al., 2000). Based on this idea, we argue that diversity training should focus on awareness of diversity as a moral issue (before broaching diversity-related skills or other topics), because doing so will make employees more likely to code diversity-related decisions as ethical decisions. Furthermore, research has shown evidence of a positive association between moral awareness and ethical decision outcomes (Fleischman & Valentine, 2003), and several studies have illustrated a positive relationship between moral awareness and ethical intentions as well as a negative relationship between moral awareness and unethical intentions (Singhapakdi, 1999; Singhapakdi, Salyachivin, Viraku, & Veerayangkur, 2000; Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, 1999). Assuming diversity-related behavior can be considered as a type of moral behavior, we argue that increasing moral awareness (of diversity) would then contribute to improved diversity-related behavior. If a primary goal of diversity training is to increase moral awareness of diversity, trainees' initial level of moral awareness must be examined during the needs assessment phase.

Moral awareness influences the degree to which individuals perceive decisions as moral in nature, but that does not ensure that they can then determine which decision options are morally appropriate (Rest, 1986). Individuals must also possess a sufficient degree of moral judgment. Just as individuals differ in the degree to which they recognize issues as moral ones (Reynolds, 2006), they also differ in their ability to make ethical decisions once they recognize a decision as a moral one.

Research on moral judgment stems from Kohlberg's (1969) six stages of cognitive moral development, which are grouped into

three different categories. According to the theory, ethical reasoning evolves over time, becoming more advanced and of a higher quality. Kohlberg (1969) identified the first two stages as pre-conventional, which represent the lowest level of moral development. At this level of moral reasoning, individuals make moral decisions with regard to obedience to authority, fear of punishment, and/or rules of social exchange. For instance, one might deem it "right" to be courteous to others of different backgrounds because failure to do so might get them in trouble with management. At the middle stages of moral reasoning (conventional levels), individuals employ rules or laws to determine their decisions and courses of action. At this level, an individual might choose not to discriminate in workplace decisions based upon another's gender or race because they know it is against the law. The post-conventional levels of moral reasoning represent the highest stages of moral development (stages 5 and 6) for which moral judgment is mainly based upon universal principles of justice and rights. An individual at the post-conventional level might reason that it is wrong to discriminate against others based upon gender or race because every person deserves an equal chance at opportunities for successful work and life.

Finally, once an individual perceives an issue (such as diversity) as moral in nature and has the requisite level of moral judgment to determine an ethical course of action, he or she must also be motivated to take action (Rest, 1986, 1999). Moral motivation refers to the degree of commitment an individual has to carrying out an ethical course of action (Rest, 1999). Recent research on moral motivation has focused on differences in the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as moral (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). In this view, individuals are committed to moral action because they are moral people and that is what moral people do (Treviño et al., 2006).

Given that individuals are likely to differ with regard to their moral awareness, moral reasoning, and moral motivation in



general (and with regard to diversity issues in particular), an important part of the needs assessment phase should focus on assessing where potential trainees currently stand with regard to these dimensions. In addition to examining these constructs at the individual level, it would be beneficial to examine moral constructs at the organizational level.

### *Organization Analysis*

Some organizations may be more inclined to conceptualize diversity as a moral imperative than others. In other words, organizations that are further along in their moral development are more likely to have leaders who discuss diversity in moral terms, use ethical language to describe diversity programs in handbooks, vision statements, and mission statements, and have employees who feel more comfortable voicing moral concerns with regard to diversity. Therefore, it is important to assess the “moral development” of the organization in addition to the moral development of individual employees during the needs assessment phase in order to establish reasonable expectations for progress attained by the conclusion of the training. Trainers can measure constructs such as ethical climate and/or culture to tap into the “moral development” of the organization.

### *Diversity Training and Development Phase*

Two key components comprise the training and development phase: the selection and design of instructional programs and the delivery of training. Furthermore, training should meet organizational and trainee needs, both of which first need to be gauged through a needs assessment. As we discussed in the preceding section, conducting the needs assessment with a moral lens suggests that awareness of diversity as an ethical issue should be emphasized in addition to bottom-line arguments.

Diversity training today employs a host of training design elements, including advanced organizers, a broad versus narrow definition of diversity, lecture and discussion, role playing, and case studies

(Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Each of these elements should be employed based upon their relationship to the training outcome that is desired (Gagné, 1995/1996; Gagné, Briggs, & Wager, 1992). One of these elements that may be particularly pertinent to diversity training is advanced organizers.

### *Advanced Organizers*

Advanced organizers introduce the material to be covered at the beginning of training in order to provide trainees with an initial organizing framework for training (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). This framework allows the trainer to clearly outline trainee expectations (Gagné, 1995/1996). Thus, the main role of advanced organizers is to inform trainees of the instructional objectives, or what they can expect from training, and to aid trainees in organizing and retaining the material to be presented by linking it to their pre-existing knowledge and frameworks. Such an approach is supported by adult learning theory that posits that adults need to understand why they are learning presented material. Advanced organizers also can facilitate the transfer of training (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997).

Advanced organizers have already proven useful for diversity training. Advanced organizers in diversity training have typically focused on how training is framed. For instance, Kidder et al. (2004) observed less backlash from trainees when diversity was presented as a means of competitive advantage rather than being associated with topics such as affirmative action. Likewise, presenting training as something other than remedial can decrease the likelihood of backlash (Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quiñones, 2003). Finally, advanced organizers could be used to help trainees realize their own biases, thereby reducing bias blind spots (Pronin & Kugler, 2007).

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To maximize the effectiveness of diversity training programs that encourage an ethical view of diversity, advanced organizers can be presented to participants at the onset of training to outline the training, construct diversity as an ethical issue, establish ethical language to cue moral decision frames, and connect the training to previous knowledge such as the importance of fairness, social justice, and equality. For example, trainers can provide outlines including what is meant by diversity and an overview of the basic principles of social justice. After trainees finish reviewing the outline, trainers could ask all trainees to discuss a time when they had

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been angered by an instance of injustice and to describe how they felt. This exercise might help in facilitating connections from trainees' previous experiences to the current material. Asking everyone to speak to the issue sets an inclusive tone and validates the notion that everyone (even white males) can be the victim of injustice, which might prevent certain identity groups from feeling attacked.

### Broad Versus Narrow Definition of Diversity

Conceptually, "diversity" can have a variety of meanings. Trainers must establish their conceptualization of the construct early in the training. Whereas some diversity training programs define diversity broadly to encompass a variety of demographic dimensions (e.g., race, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation) as well as individual dimensions (e.g., parental status, learning styles, education level, personality), others adhere to a much more narrow definition of diversity that may only consider a few demographic dimensions (e.g., race, sex; Roberson et al., 2003).

Proponents of a broad definition of diversity reason that a more inclusive meaning of diversity can lead to a reduction in trainee backlash (Mobley & Payne, 1992). From a fairness perspective, if trainees feel represented and included on myriad

dimensions that are personally relevant (e.g., sexual orientation, mental/physical illness), they will be able to more strongly relate to the training and take more away from it. If diversity is to be viewed as an ethical issue under which every human deserves fair and ethical treatment, then it would naturally follow that every group should have the "right" to be represented as diverse; therefore, every group would then perceive that the principles emphasized in diversity training apply to the spectrum of diverse groups, including their own. Moreover, training programs that utilize a more narrow definition of diversity might yield lesser outcomes than those employing a more broad definition. For example, research has found that the former are less likely (when under cognitive load) to hire older job applicants following the training (Kulik et al., 2000), suggesting that individuals who undergo diversity training that emphasizes a broad definition of diversity may leave the training with less biased attitudes than those who receive training that promotes a narrow definition of diversity. Thus, from an ethical perspective, a broader definition of diversity will likely increase receptivity of diversity training among participants.

### Lecture and Discussion Content

One of the most prevalent methods of training delivery remains the lecture and discussion format (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Despite its popularity, this method does not acknowledge individual differences of the trainees and cannot provide much specialized feedback. Furthermore, the lecture and discussion format may unintentionally encourage passive learning. Empirical evidence suggests this method may be most appropriate for knowledge acquisition as opposed to attitude change or acquisition of skills. Despite these potential drawbacks, the lecture and discussion format holds large utility for many training interventions that need to address a large number of people while using fewer resources than other delivery formats (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). The lecture method of delivery can be blended with a variety of additional

training elements such as audiovisual techniques or role playing to enhance its effectiveness. One study that examined training outcomes among medical school students found that following two years of cultural competency training including a lecture component, students expressed an intention to adapt some of their clinical and teaching practices as a result of the training (Ferguson, Keller, Haley, & Quirk, 2003). Given the prevalence of lecture-based training, it is important to consider how the ethical aspects of diversity issues can be effectively incorporated into a lecture format.

To successfully frame diversity from an ethical perspective, lectures should emphasize principles of social justice and fairness and avoid focusing on any one particular identity group. In addition, lectures should acknowledge the potential for every individual to incur discrimination and exclusion (despite their membership in a certain racial, ethnic, or gender identity group). Furthermore, lectures should focus on increasing moral awareness and furthering individual moral development by taking a positive tone and emphasizing what *to do*, rather than what *not to do*. Hopefully, reinforcing positive behaviors of inclusion (instead of focusing on negative behaviors to avoid) will increase motivation to engage in such behavior. Consistent with this idea, regulatory focus theory posits that promotion-focused efforts will lead to preference for change, whereas prevention-focused efforts will lead to preference for stability (Higgins, 1997, 1998). Lastly, lectures must allow adequate time for discussion where trainees can express their thoughts, ask questions, and clarify the material.

### Role Playing

As a component of training, role-playing techniques are primarily used to promote attitude change and facilitate interpersonal relations among employees (Baldwin, 1997). Role playing presents trainees with real on-the-job situations, asks them to approach the situation using a variety of techniques or solutions, and provides them an opportunity

to reflect on and discuss the success of various methods (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). One role-playing technique called *reverse roles* instructs trainees to put themselves in another person's position and is intended to heighten the trainees' awareness of others' feelings and attitudes. Viewing the world from another's perspective will likely result in increased empathy, which may be particularly relevant in diversity training. *Self-confrontation*, another role-playing technique, requires the participant to watch a videotape of his or her "performance" in a previous role-playing exercise while simultaneously receiving verbal critique from the trainer. An early study of this technique showed that those who participated in a self-confrontation exercise during a cross-cultural training outperformed those receiving only knowledge training on the same material (King, 1966). Furthermore, Remer and Remer (2000) found evidence for the effectiveness of a role-playing exercise in raising awareness about stereotypes and motivating change in attitudes and behaviors toward stigmatized individuals. Perhaps the effectiveness of role playing lies in its ability to provide trainees with accurate and detailed feedback. Indeed, other studies have provided evidence to support the notion that role playing, videotape, and feedback sessions do produce intended changes in behavior (Triandis, 1994). However, one study that examined role-playing effects on racial attitudes held by black and white police officers illustrated the potential for unintentional outcomes of diversity training (Teahan, 1975). Following the training, black officers expressed more positive views of white officers; however, white officers expressed more negative attitudes regarding black officers. The authors reasoned that white officers had perceived the

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*Lectures should focus on increasing moral awareness and furthering individual moral development by taking a positive tone and emphasizing what to do, rather than what not to do. Hopefully, reinforcing positive behaviors of inclusion (instead of focusing on negative behaviors to avoid) will increase motivation to engage in such behavior.*

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training as benefitting blacks and not benefitting whites. These results underscore the importance of framing these training exercises in such a way that highlights each individual's right to fair treatment, inclusiveness, and equality as opposed to only a select group of participants.

To enhance the ethical argument for diversity, if training includes self-confrontation methods, the trainer should be sure to provide feedback that focuses on inclusive attitudes and acceptance as the right and fair thing to do (not because inclusiveness acts as a means to some bottom-line end for the organization). Feedback should be delivered in a constructive way as opposed to in a condescending or attacking manner. Role-playing instructions should highlight the importance of *both* sides, not only the historically victimized side. As previously noted, role playing enacted in diversity training should place a special emphasis on perspective taking, which has been investigated previously as a prejudice-reduction tool (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). Additionally, from an ethical standpoint, perspective-taking exercises should encourage trainees not only to "put themselves in someone else's shoes," but should urge them to go one step further and consider the hardships others have faced—to ask themselves: Is that fair?

#### Case Studies

In addition to role-playing exercises that are characteristic of traditional diversity training programs, diversity training should incorporate case studies of diversity-related ethical dilemmas. In the ethics literature, case studies usually incorporate some combination of three approaches: consequentialist, deontological, and/or virtue ethics approaches

(AACSB International, 2004). The consequentialist approach asks trainees to come to a decision that results in the greatest overall good for everyone involved after weighing the benefits and consequences to multiple stakeholders. The deontological perspective stresses considerations of social justice, equality, and rights and asks trainees to arrive at the most ethical decision by using moral guides and principles. Finally, the virtue ethics perspective stresses the moral integrity of the actor and seeks guidance from moral communities (e.g., professional communities) to help identify and inform ethical decision making and behavior. One particularly useful activity requires trainees to reflect on personal ethical experiences and to consider and analyze them from multiple perspectives. It has been found that ethical decision-making exercises incorporated into ethics training can reap substantial gains in ethical decision making that are maintained over time (Mumford et al., 2008).

An extension of this method involves cueing learning about ethical role models through case studies that illustrate ethical leadership within the organization (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Additionally, these case studies should exemplify positive role models that show trainees what they *should* do, as several positive role models are likely necessary to offset negative information from other sources (e.g., media; Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

#### Diversity Training Evaluation Phase

Given the unique challenges related to diversity training, and the potential for unintended and negative consequences of diversity training (i.e., backlash, increased discrimination, confirmation of stereotypes), it is particularly important that diversity training programs are properly evaluated (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998, 2000). Although this was not a traditional focus in diversity training research (Rynes & Rosen, 1995), there appears to be growing efforts to more carefully evaluate diversity training effectiveness (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000).

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## Evaluation Criteria

Kirkpatrick's (1976) model of training outcomes provides the most widely cited framework for training evaluation. In this framework, four primary training criteria are often considered: reactions, learning, behavior, and results. This framework was later refined to reflect the multidimensional nature of learning wherein learning outcomes were classified as cognitive, skill-based, or affective (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993). Affectively based learning outcomes may be particularly applicable in the evaluation of diversity training (Kraiger et al., 1993). This should involve attitude measurement related to diversity, including the strength of those attitudes. These may be particularly difficult to measure in this context, however, since it is often not considered appropriate to admit to biased attitudes.

Attention should also be given to behavioral change (Kraiger et al., 1993) for the evaluation of diversity training (Pendry et al., 2007; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998, 2000). One way of accomplishing this in organizational settings may be through linking diversity training with multisource feedback that may be included as part of wider organizational programs. Including such content in feedback instruments could help to enforce the importance of diversity to the organization as well as provide feedback that could foster such behavior (Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005).

## Evaluation Materials

Conducting an evaluation of diversity training that has been framed as an ethical issue requires adapting evaluation materials to match the content of the training. If, in the past, most organizations have presented diversity as a "business" imperative, their training materials most likely contain respective content, including economic language. Evaluation materials should be adapted to remain consistent with the aim of the training; that is, evaluation materials should aim to evaluate the learning outcomes consistent with the advanced organizer set forth before the

commencement of training. In addition, the focus of the evaluation should be on diversity learning outcomes that would result from viewing diversity as an ethical imperative. Accordingly, the evaluation materials should include more normative as opposed to economic language in keeping with the initial goals of the training. For instance, instead of following a heading entitled "Why Is Diversity Important?" with a phrase like "A diverse workforce helps the organization remain competitive and financially successful," replace it with a phrase like "A diverse workforce promotes equality and justice and contributes to the overall goals of fairness and inclusion for all."

## Methods of Measurement

If the focus of diversity training shifts to the ethical perspective, it follows that we should be concerned with measuring ethical behavior relevant to diversity issues (e.g., moral awareness of diversity issues, ethical behavior in diversity-related situations). One method for measuring ethical behavior that has been used extensively in the ethics literature is the dictator game, which gives the participant complete control over the distribution of wealth while benefitting from anonymity (Hoffman, McCabe, & Smith, 1996, in Cherry, Frykblom, & Shogren, 2002). Several studies have employed the dictator game to investigate altruism, generosity, fairness, and other-regarding behaviors (Bohnet & Frey, 1999; Burnham, 2003; Charness, 2000; Cherry et al., 2002; Diekmann, 2004; Fetschenhauer & Huang, 2004; Frey & Bohnet, 1997; Haselhuhn & Mellers, 2005; van Dijk & Vermunt, 2000; Whitt & Wilson, 2007). In the dictator game, participants are instructed to distribute their wealth between themselves and an anonymous other participant. In the context of diversity training, the dictator game could be adapted to reflect anonymous decisions regarding the distribution of a pay raise between themselves and the rest of their team, including team members who belonged to various social identity groups.

Similarly, one study used the prevalence of ethics-related terms in a 10-K business report

as a proxy for ethical behavior of the manager who wrote the report (Loughran, McDonald, & Yun, 2009). Applied to a diversity training context, evaluations of training could include a section instructing trainees to describe in words what diversity means to them. Using a similar method, the number of ethics-related or “normative” words used in the description could serve as an alternative measure of ethical attitudes/behavior toward diversity.

Another option for evaluating ethical attitudes/behavior with regard to diversity might include presenting trainees with a series of vignettes (diversity-related and non-diversity-related) and instructing them to identify situations that present ethical concerns.

For example, one vignette might involve the decision to select two equally qualified job candidates, one of which is a racial minority (ethical and diversity-related), whereas another vignette might describe changing a policy on teleworking (not ethical and not diversity-related). Additionally, companies could simply ask employees to indicate how fairly they feel they were treated relative to other trainees in a post-training survey. Finally, evaluations could measure the degree to which employees actually conceptualize diversity as a moral issue pre- and post-training.

Evaluation should not cease after immediate post-training measures are complete; additional measures must be collected in order to assess long-term changes. It is imperative to gather measures at follow-up points (e.g., six months after training, one year after training) to assess the long-term effectiveness of the aforementioned measures of ethical attitudes and behavior with regard to diversity.

Rest (1986) argued that moral awareness is the first of four steps in the ethical decision-making process. According to his four-component analysis of ethical decision making, after moral awareness follows moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral behavior. To gauge the progress trainees have

made with regard to conceptualizing diversity as a moral issue, it is imperative to evaluate each of these four components before training as part of the needs analysis and after training as part of the evaluation phase. These four components will be evaluated as individual-level outcomes; however, organizational-level outcomes should be documented as well.

These organizational outcomes could include things like ethical and diversity climate/culture and top-level indicators such as changes in language used to describe diversity by top leaders or language used in vision and mission statements. In the ethics literature, the difference (or lack thereof) between ethical climate and culture is unclear (Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998). While similar in nature, ethical climate has been conceptualized as characterizing “the organization in terms of broad normative characteristics and qualities that tell people what kind of organization this is—essentially what the organization values,” whereas ethical culture has been described as “characterizing the organization in terms of formal and informal control systems (e.g., rules, reward systems, and norms) that are aimed more specifically at influencing behavior” (Treviño et al., 1998, p. 453).

Kaptein (2008) developed and tested a measure of ethical culture with eight unidimensional subscales: clarity, congruency of supervisors, congruency of management, feasibility, supportability, transparency, discussability, and sanctionability. For our purposes, measures of supportability and discussability are particularly relevant. Supportability refers to “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with, involvement in and commitment to the normative expectations of the organization and the extent to which the organization stimulates this” (Kaptein, 2008, p. 925). The idea behind this construct is that employees who feel they are not treated fairly and justly by the organization will be more apt to behave in an unethical manner at work to “balance the scales of justice” (Kaptein, 2008, p. 926). Therefore, a lack of supportability will precipitate unethical behavior. Discussability

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refers to the extent to which employees feel safe and comfortable raising and discussing issues relating to ethics in the workplace. If moral issues are not openly discussed but rather are often disregarded and ignored, an amoral organizational culture may emerge. From an ethical perspective, diversity training evaluation could benefit from using these two dimensions of ethical culture to measure the progression of moral development at the organizational level over the course of the training.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore various ways of designing and implementing diversity training programs from an ethical perspective, in combination with the typical "business" perspective. To summarize, we reiterate three take-away messages. First, focusing on the bottom line alone may not be enough. The most widely cited reason among diversity experts for holding diversity training programs is to improve productivity and remain competitive by reducing discrimination (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). Given the goal of diversity training and individuals' tendency to use economic language to give meaning to social issues in workplace settings (Sonenshein, 2006), diversity training sessions are likely characterized in large part by economic, bottom-line-type language. Ethics literature has shown trainee backlash in ethics training can occur as a function of trainee perceptions that the organization is only holding the training for self-protecting reasons (Treviño et al., 1999; G. Weaver, 2004). We argue that solely selling the bottom line for diversity may result in a similar phenomenon among participants in diversity training. Bottom-line arguments alone may create backlash as well as cue a business decision frame from which business considerations become the main focus in subsequent decision making. We recognize the bottom line for diversity is important; however, we suggest the effectiveness of the bottom-line argument for diversity depends on the extent to which a moral imperative is emphasized. In other words, we expect the moral imperative

of diversity to moderate the effects of traditional bottom-line arguments for diversity.

Second, focusing on the moral imperative should occur at all three stages of diversity training: needs assessment, training and development, and training evaluation. Considering the moral imperative beyond the business case for diversity changes what happens at all three stages of diversity training. Thus, to enhance the effectiveness of diversity training to its fullest potential, trainers must recognize how this shifting perspective changes each piece of diversity training.

Third and lastly, the implication of considering diversity training from the moral perspective makes diversity a moral *imperative*, meaning organizations should do everything they can to make diversity training available to everyone. Though training is expensive and resources are limited, it is critical that all employees have access to diversity training if diversity training is indeed a moral imperative. One possible solution would be for organizations to offer more self-directed learning programs or programmed instruction methods in order to cut costs and reach more employees. With a recent trend toward placing responsibility for self-development on the employee, self-directed learning programs have become increasingly prevalent (Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010; Goldstein & Ford, 2002).

To conclude, diversity training that solely emphasizes economic justifications for diversity may be limited in its effectiveness. Approaching diversity training from a fairness and justice perspective could help to reduce backlash to traditional bottom-line reasoning for inclusion. The degree to which diversity training stresses the moral case for diversity may enhance the effectiveness of traditional business-case arguments by communicating sincere commitment to inclusion.

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